Dear Lilian,

Thank you for your letter of 25 October 2018 asking for an update on the actions the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency is taking regarding Ford EcoBoost engines.

As I have expressed previously, I continue to take a close interest in recalls activity and remain committed to exploring how Government and industry can work more effectively together, including through a revised Code of Practice.

My officials have provided responses to the questions you raised in your letter in the attached annex.

Yours ever,

JESSE NORMAN
1. What steps has the DVSA taken to satisfy itself that Ford’s assessment of the fault with 1.0L EcoBoost engines, that there is always a warning before the failure occurs, is correct?

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has run a number of focus groups with vehicle owners/users who have had problems with vehicles with the 1.0L EcoBoost engine to understand their experience. In parallel, the Agency has continued to work closely with Ford to ensure it has a broad understanding of all the cases, given that the majority are being reported directly to Ford.

The findings of this work show there are generally warnings to indicate a problem. But when vehicles are being driven at higher speeds, those warnings can be followed closely by engine failure. This means the driver might not have time to react to the warning before the failure occurs. In cases where the driver has not reacted to the warnings, there is no evidence to suggest the defect causes any worse situation than, for example, running out of fuel – there is no loss of control of the vehicle, and the deceleration is not sudden. While the DVSA recognises this could be stressful for those in the vehicle in some situations, and could cause costly damage to the engine, the symptoms are not a fundamental safety issue (as they would be with a vehicle fire, or the failure of the braking system, for example).

2. Whether the DVSA is monitoring the service action by Ford to replace the degas pipe on EcoBoost engines?

The DVSA is monitoring the work Ford is doing to ensure it maintains a full understanding of the potential safety issues. This includes a close review of incident data to determine whether the Agency’s position needs to change.

The DVSA has no authority or ability to track the rectification work that Ford is undertaking. But it has secured Ford’s agreement that this issue now be managed as a non-code action (voluntary recall), which means it can monitor rectification rates more closely. This was not possible when the issue was being managed as a service action since service actions are wholly managed by manufacturers. Managing the approach as a non-code action also gives Ford the ability to access the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency data (it is the DVLA that holds vehicle keeper records) to contact owners directly.
3. What discussions the DVSA, ministers and officials have had with Ford about the company’s policy for offering compensation for engine failures?

The DVSA, Ministers and officials have not had any discussion with Ford about the company’s policy for offering compensation for engine failure. The DVSA would not usually enter into such discussions as they are outside of the remit of managing safety recall issues, and Ministers and officials would not typically enter into discussions with manufacturers about their compensation policy to their customers. But the DVSA has shared with Ford the level of correspondence it has received on the matter.

4. What reports the DVSA has received of fires in vehicles with EcoBoost engines, how these reports have been investigated and for what reason it agreed to a recall of these vehicles?

There are two unconnected issues with fires in Ford vehicles.

The first relates to clutch wear, when there is a risk a very worn clutch can fragment and cause an oil leak, and in turn a fire. The DVSA has not been notified of any such cases. But Ford has reported three cases of this within the UK market, which it reported to the DVSA at the time. This led to a safety recall being launched in July 2018 for a sub-set of EcoBoost-powered vehicles with this engine type, fitted with a six-speed manual gearbox. This gearbox could be used with either the 1.0L or 1.6L EcoBoost engines.

The second relates to 1.6L EcoBoost engine and involves a crack forming in the cylinder head that could enable oil to escape onto hot exhaust components, with resultant fire risk.

The DVSA has received two reports of this issue, both of which resulted in fires. Ford has confirmed three vehicle fires to the DVSA, making a total of five cases, which led to a safety recall being launched in January 2018. The DVSA is monitoring the progress of both of these safety recalls.

5. What steps the DVSA has taken to satisfy itself that the problems with overheating due to the degas pipe and those attributed to a failure of the cylinder head are not related?
The DVSA has conducted a number of technical reviews of this issue. The degas pipe defect has not been shown to cause engine fire or other serious safety defects itself. There are no examples where there has been cylinder head cracking and resulting oil loss onto hot components, on anything other than the 1.6L engines. The 1.6L engine issues expose a risk of fire, which is why it is subject to the recall referenced above.

There have been examples of some cylinder head gasket-related failures on 1.0L engines (likely as a result of coolant loss) but these have not, and do not, appear to present a risk of engine fire.

The DVSA keeps new cases across all engine types under review. This is so it can detect changes to trends easily and early and, if necessary, change the recall action should it be shown a fire risk does exist in other engine types.

6. **What assessment the DVSA and officials in the Department have made of communications with customers about the issues affecting cars with EcoBoost engines?**

Owing to the number of vehicles involved and some campaigning by those affected, the volume of incoming correspondence has been high. In response, the DVSA has explained clearly the separate issues that have affected the different types of vehicles.

While some motorists have looked to the DVSA to help them with compensation and other service issues, it is outside the Agency’s remit. But the DVSA has made clear to Ford the strength of customers’ feelings on this matter.