Frank Field MP
Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

26 June 2016

Dear Frank

Thank you for your letter of 10 June, about remarks Dominic Chappell made during his oral evidence session with the Work and Pensions Select Committee on 8 June. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Oversight of the scheme funding regime for defined benefit pension schemes is a matter for the Pensions Regulator. Parliament established the Regulator as an independent body. As such, it would have been inappropriate for Ministers to intervene in its investigations or decisions on individual cases. My handling of approaches by Dominic Chappell and Sir Philip Green respected this.

I met Sir Philip Green on 2 November 2015, for a general discussion about private sector pension schemes. During the meeting, Sir Philip criticised the frequency and valuation method for Defined Benefit schemes and proffered some alternatives. He also mentioned he had interacted with the Pensions Regulator on the issue of the BHS pension schemes.

On 7 January, Sir Philip sent an email asking if I would meet Mr Chappell, to discuss BHS. Initially, I agreed, and a meeting was scheduled for 4 February. However, prior to the meeting, my officials informed me that the independent Regulator was actively investigating the BHS pension schemes, and that it would be inappropriate for me to see representatives of the company until that investigation had been concluded. Accordingly, I asked for the meeting to be postponed, and a new date of 18 April was scheduled.
On 27 January, Sir Philip made contact with me by text message, asking to speak with me. I asked him what he wanted to discuss, but he declined to tell me. He continued to press me by text message, and was deliberately vague about the specific purposes. I replied and asked him to set out his concerns in writing, first. Suffice to say no letter came.

On 13 April, it was clear that the Regulator was still investigating the BHS pension schemes, so the meeting with Mr Chappell that had been scheduled for 18 April, was cancelled. No further dates were booked.

I do hope this information is helpful.

With best wishes

Ros

THE BARONESS ALTMANN, CBE
MINISTER OF STATE FOR PENSIONS