

Windrush Compensation Scheme Oral Statement

With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Windrush Compensation Scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, yesterday we celebrated Windrush Day which marks the 72nd anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks.

The ship carried hundreds of people who had left their homes to build a new life in the United Kingdom, and to help this country to rebuild following the destruction of Second World War.

These are the men and women who built their lives and went on to build their homes in the United Kingdom.

They, alongside many thousands of others who made similar journeys, along with their descendants, have made an immeasurable contribution to the social, economic, and cultural life of our country.

When Britain was in need, they answered the call.

Yet Mr Deputy Speaker, as we all know, they were the very people who went on to suffer unspeakable injustices and institutional failings spanning successive Governments over several decades.

I have apologised for the appalling treatment suffered.

And on the 19th March, Mr Deputy Speaker, I made a statement after I received the long awaited Windrush Lessons Learned Review from Wendy Williams.

I have apologised for the appalling treatment suffered by the Windrush generation.

The review itself was damning about the conduct of the Home Office and unequivocal about the 'ignorance and institutional thoughtlessness towards the race and history of the Windrush generation' by the department.

There are serious and significant lessons for the Home Office to learn in relation to the way the Department operates. I and the Permanent Secretary are currently reviewing its leadership, its culture, practices and the way it views and treats all parts of the community it serves.

These reforms, Mr Deputy Speaker, are only the start.

I was clear when Wendy Williams published her lessons learned review that I would listen and I would act.

I have heard what she has said. And I will be accepting the recommendations she has made in full.

I am committed to ensuring that the Home Office delivers for each part of the community it serves and I will come back to update the House on how we will be implementing the recommendations before the summer recess.

And I look forward to discussing the plans further with Wendy this week.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we have been working tirelessly to support the most urgent cases and those most in need.

In April 2018, the Home Office set up the Windrush Taskforce to ensure those who needed documentation immediately could get it. A month later, the Windrush Scheme was launched, providing free citizenship to those who are eligible for it.

The Home Office has a dedicated vulnerable persons team in place to provide immediate support to those people suffering with a range of vulnerabilities, including the financial hardship and destitution that had been well documented.

The team also administers the Urgent and Exceptional Payments scheme, which provides immediate financial payments. And to the end of March the team had made 35 payments totalling over £46,000.

And Mr Deputy Speaker, work is continuing unabated to ensure that those who suffered, receive the documentation and the compensation they need.

So far over 12,000 people have been granted documentation by the Windrush Taskforce, including over 5,900 grants of citizenship.

And the Windrush Compensation scheme continues to make payments to compensate the losses and the impacts individuals suffered as a result of not being able to demonstrate their lawful status.

The scheme was set up and designed with the backing of Martin Forde QC, in close consultation with those who were affected by the scandal. And in February I announced that I would extend the scheme until April 2023 to give those who need our help as much time as they need to apply.

We are continuing to process individual claims as quickly as possible. The first payment was made within four months of the scheme launching and many interim awards are being made where parts of the claim can be resolved more easily and quickly than others.

But let me clear, it is not a blanket one size fits all scheme. It was deliberately designed, with community leaders and Martin Forde QC, so that the claimant is at the heart of it.

Cases deserve to be processed individually, with the care and sensitivity they deserve, so that the maximum payment can be made to every single person.

I simply won't call for targets when it comes to dealing with claims. These are incredibly personal and individual cases that must be treated with the care, dignity and respect that they deserve.

I want everyone who has been wronged to get the maximum compensation to which they are entitled to, and through this bespoke scheme, we are working to achieve that.

This compensation covers a very wide range of categories, far more than any comparable compensation scheme. It covers immigration fees, it covers loss of earnings, it covers benefits, it covers homelessness, it covers destitution. Overall it covers thirteen separate categories.

Assessing claims in this way is ultimately beneficial to those who are making the claim, but it takes time to assess and takes time to get it right.

And while claims are being processed in full, many interim and exceptional payments have been made to make sure that people have access to money, to the funds they need now.

But clearly Mr Deputy Speaker, I share the desire to see more claims completed.

The rate of claims has already increased significantly in the last few months.

As of the end of March, more than three hundred and sixty thousand pounds had been awarded.

And further offers had been made of approximately two hundred and eighty thousand pounds.

And I can confirm today that over one million pounds has been offered in claims so far.

And more payments and offers are being made each week.

But Mr Deputy Speaker, we can and of course, must do more.

My determination to right the wrongs and injustices suffered by the Windrush Generation is undiminished, and I will do all I can to ensure more people are helped and compensated in full.

And if additional resources are needed, they will be provided.

Now is the time for more action and we all have a duty to do more to help those affected by this terrible injustice.

Individuals will only benefit from the compensation scheme if they are sought out and encouraged to apply.

We are working extensively with community groups and leaders to raise awareness of the Windrush Taskforce and the Compensation Scheme.

Including with vulnerable people through the vulnerable persons team.

Anyone who needs help or support to make a claim will receive it.

The Home Office has funded Citizens Advice to provide free independent advice and support.

And the Home Office has hosted or attended over 100 engagement and outreach events throughout the United Kingdom.

And as members will know, my door is always open.

I would urge members of the House to ensure that constituent cases or concerns are raised immediately with me and my team so that they are progressed and resolved.

And Mr Deputy Speaker, throughout the coronavirus pandemic I have made sure that no-one is left behind.

Working with community leaders I have launched a digital engagement programme so that outreach can continue despite the current social distancing measures. The first virtual support event was held on 21 May.

And on 19th March I announced a dedicated new communications campaign to promote the Windrush schemes.

As well as a five hundred-thousand-pound fund, for community organisations to run outreach, promotional and support activities to increase awareness.

But Mr Deputy Speaker, we know that there are a range of other issues and injustices affecting the Windrush generation and their families.

So yesterday, I announced a new Windrush Cross-Government Working Group, which I will co-chair with Bishop Derek Webley.

This group brings together community leaders with senior representatives from a number of government departments to address the challenges faced by the Windrush generation and their descendants, spanning programmes on education, work and health and much more.

The Prime Minister and I spoke to members of the group yesterday to discuss the actions needed to deliver solutions.

The first formal meeting of the group will take place this Thursday and I look forward to taking this work forward with the whole group, alongside working with the inspirational co-chair, Bishop Derek Webley.

Mr Deputy Speaker, nothing can ever undo the suffering experienced by members of the Windrush Generation.

No one should have suffered the uncertainty, complication and the hardship brought on by the mistakes of successive Governments.

Now, is the time for more action, yes across Government to repay that debt of gratitude, and to eliminate the challenges that still exist for them and their descendants.

Only then can we build a stronger, fairer and more successful country for the next generation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.