



HOUSE OF LORDS

The Rt Hon the Baroness Stowell of Beeston MBE
Chair of the Select Committee on Communications and Digital
House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW

The Baroness Penn
Treasury Lords Minister
1 Horse Guards Road
Westminster
SW1A 2HQ

19 April 2023

Dear Baroness Penn,

I write regarding the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI).

As you are aware, this Committee takes a keen interest in tackling Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). On 26 January I wrote to the Chancellor about allegations that actions by HM Treasury resulted in the facilitation of a SLAPP case brought by a sanctioned individual, Yevgeny Prigozhin.¹ Your response on 23 February confirmed that Ministers were considering what changes should be made to OFSI's approach to granting waivers to sanctioned individuals.²

I am grateful to you for meeting me to discuss this issue and listen to the Committee's concerns. I was pleased to hear that HM Treasury's review subsequently concluded that:

"it is the Government's view that in most cases, the use of frozen funds for payment of legal professional fees for defamation cases is not an appropriate use of funds, and ... OFSI will, in future, take a presumption that legal fees relating to defamation and similar cases will be rejected."³

This change of approach is welcome. Access to justice remains a key principle. But this does not mean powerful individuals should be allowed to abuse our legal system to stifle legitimate investigations into wrongdoing.

More widely, I urge you to work with the Ministry of Justice to help bring forward legislative reforms to tackle SLAPPs as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

BARONESS STOWELL OF BEESTON

¹ Correspondence, [Chair to the Chancellor of the Exchequer](#), 26 January 2023

² Correspondence, [Baroness Penn to the Chair](#), 23 February 2023

³ Baroness Penn, [Written Ministerial Statement HLWS686](#), 30 March 2023