

Rt Hon. Sir Robert Buckland KBE KC MP
Chair
Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

By email only

22 December 2023

Dear Sir Robert Buckland,

Victims' Payments Board

I thank you for your letter of 21 December and for the invitation to give evidence at the Committee on 4 December 2023.

In your letter you raised two questions and I am happy to deal with both issues. Firstly, I am happy to commit to the Victims' Payments Board publishing operational statistics on our website. The Senior Management Team will meet early in the New Year to consider and take this forward.

With regards to the calls to extend the current scheme deadline for applications beyond August 2026, I do consider it might be helpful to both victims and those groups who provide support to victims, if this date was extended. This would allow additional time to help ensure all eligible victims can make an application to the Scheme.

However, I consider the most important issue for the Board is to have a decision from the Secretary of State on whether or not the deadline to apply and receive the backdating element of victims' payments will be extended. You will be aware that I have recently written to the Secretary of State highlighting that there has been widespread interest in this issue, which continues to be raised with myself and my team on a regular basis. One of the main concerns for the Victims' Payments Board is the risk that applications with minimal content will be submitted to meet the current cutoff date for entitlement to backdating, mainly due to the demand for the scheme and the length of time it takes to submit a comprehensive application. This will obviously impact the wider Administration process with unnecessary additional work on evidence gathering and quality control leading to further delays in the process for victims.

Furthermore, as part of the Board's wider Communications and Engagement Strategy, we have given a commitment to increase awareness of the Scheme both within and outside of Northern Ireland. A key element of this work is our agreement to the distribution of a new information leaflet to over 840,000 households in Northern Ireland, Health Care facilities and throughout the Churches network. We also plan to work alongside partners in Government (both UK and Ireland) in order to advertise our scheme outside of the UK. The leaflet drop was scheduled to take place across a two week period in early January, however, this has now had to be delayed due to the uncertainty around the backdating element.

Officials from my team have met recently with NIO Officials and been advised that it is possible that a decision around the backdating element can be made separately from the Review of the Scheme to be carried out by the Secretary of State.

I trust this response will be helpful to the Committee and I would greatly appreciate any assistance you can provide in relation to the concerns raised.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Gerald McAlinden', written in a cursive style.

**Hon Justice G McAlinden
President to Victims' Payments Board**

cc:

Paul Bullick – Secretary to Victims' Payments Board
Steven Squire Law (NIO)
Martina McCann (NIO)
VPB Senior Management Team
David Lennox (DoJ)
Patrick Gallagher (TEO)
Gavin Lunny (TEO)