

Written evidence submitted by Mr Anthony Williams (WCS0021)

[Note: This evidence has been redacted by the Committee. ‘***’ represents redacted text.]

Transcript of Discussion with Mr Anthony Williams on the Windrush Compensation Scheme on Wednesday 25 November 2020

Interviewer 1: How did you find out about the Windrush Compensation Scheme and that it was available to you and you were able to apply?

Mr Williams: The only reason I actually found out - many years ago I used to avoid politics and stuff like that. It's only since the Windrush thing appeared that I have started to get into politics. So, I started doing more in politics, listening more going online. The only reason that I found out about this scheme was online. People talking about it online.

The Home Office didn't contact me. I then had to contact the Home office to get a compensation form sent out to me, which I think they should have done that automatically anyway. But I had to send out for it. It was online that I found out about the scheme really.

Interviewer 2: When you say online do you mean social media or...

Mr Williams: Social media, social media.

Interviewer 2: Chatting to people you know?

Mr Williams: That's the only way I found out about it. And the paper – some stuff did come out in the paper about it. I don't read the paper that often.

Interviewer 2: So, the next question we had was around using the Compensation Scheme application form. So, you said that you had to contact and ask them to send it out to you. Was it easy for you to use when you got it? Was the compensation application form easy, and what about the guidance as well? How did you find the guidance?

Mr Williams: The format itself is not too bad. They have broken it down, which is great. The guidelines, I wasn't impressed with the guidelines to tell you the honest truth. It was difficult to fill in as well. It is so evidence-based. It was difficult. Now, I was annoyed about that because we were not allowed any legal aid, to help to fill the forms out. Me being stupid – I took it from the government – they said the scheme would be easy, so I thought okay no problem I will fill the scheme out to the best of my ability and then I'll send it off to them. But after sending it off and then really sitting down and going through the guidelines, I realized that I needed some help and by that time it is too late. So, it was not that easy to fill in, not at all.

Interviewer 2: In terms of help with your application then, you did most of it yourself?

Mr Williams: I did all of it myself. As much evidence as I could possibly gather and sent it all in. And then I realized that I had made some mistakes, big ones.

Interviewer 2: What kind of help would you have needed do you think? Or would have been helpful for you?

Mr Williams: It would have been better off if it was something face-to-face. Just filling out request form does not do it justice. For instance, back in 2018, when I realised that I needed to go to the immigration centre in Solihull, because I am in Birmingham at the moment, the nearest is Solihull. I went up to Solihull and spent about three hours there and was dealing with a caseworker. We would have a conversation and then she would go and speak to someone else, come back to me, we'd have another conversation, and this went on for about three, four hours and at the end of time we resolved all of my issues. I had a biometric card given to me, I walked away, and I was happy.

With this scheme at the moment, because it's so complex, you need to sit down with someone, your caseworker, whoever and have a face-to-face conversation. Back and forth. I now have a lawyer/solicitor. Where everything is back and forth back and forth. Me to my solicitor, my solicitor to them, which now is time-consuming. When they had the call of evidence I did write in and I said to them I'm not interested if it's going to be a box ticking exercise, I want a face-to-face conversation with the person I am dealing with. I want a caseworker, but that didn't happen.

Interviewer 2: So, a bit like doing this form and send it out to whoever knows who and then...?

Mr Williams: Exactly. If I had the help of solicitors maybe it would have been easier. It was complex in the end. I would have preferred a face-to-face conversation with someone. A lot easier.

Interviewer 2: So, when you sent it off to the Home Office – what was the contact like with them once you sent it off? What has the contact been with them since you asked for it?

Mr Williams: I'm a very private person, I mean I live by myself put it this way, no one in my family, and this has gone on for years, no one in my family knows I am going through this. I have kept it from them because I am a proud person. I am ex-military. I'm in myself and I don't trust anyone outside my flat.

What actually happened when this when this came about with me, I went into what I call survival mode. Nothing mattered No one mattered to me because I didn't trust it and I didn't trust anyone. So, when I sent the form in, I sat around waited, watching paint dry and thinking that they are going to make it quick, because they know that we're desperate. I put my form in, in April. A week after it came out. I got my first

phone call in the September. And all they were asking for is checking if I had received a pay statement from my employer. And that's all they were interested in – nothing else.

Interviewer 2: So, from April to September, you didn't hear anything?

Mr Williams: Nothing at all. I got one phone call and all they are interested in is if I had a pay statement. To show what my salary was and nothing else. That's when my mind started working. And I started to get stressed out about it because I started thinking that they are going to start making it difficult for me if that's all they asked me. And then it must have been January or February, I had a second phone call. Same questions. Nothing else.

When I spoke to the guy on the phone, I said: I've had these same questions before, does this mean my case has been forwarded on and I'm going to get an offer soon. He said, yes don't worry, you'll get an offer in about three, four weeks. And that was the January, February. Come the April, I had nothing from them. And that's when I got really, really annoyed. That's when I got in touch with Yvette Cooper. It was starting to stress me out now – people don't care what's happened to me. Five years living in isolation, with no work, hardly no money coming in, nothing. And these people are still not contacting me.

Interviewer 2: So that was a whole year later from when you submitted it?

Mr Williams: Exactly. So that's why I got Yvette and other people involved in it. And then I received my first offer, middle of July. So, I've had two conversations and then an offer in July. So that's what... 15 months? It's disgusting. I did try on a couple of occasions to phone the helpline. Which I didn't find helpful at all. Because you have to go through a process where you phone them at the helpline, then they put a note on your case, for someone in Sheffield or Leeds to pick up on, then to contact me. Why am I doing all this running around? I've got to contact them, for them to go there, for them contact me. They weren't interested, no interest at all.

Interviewer 2: Alright. So, thinking back about everything that's happened with the Home Office then and all of the communications that you've had with them. If you were to say to them, this is all the things that you need to do to make it better in terms of communication. What would you tell them? What would you say? This is the way to make it better for me.

Mr Williams: They should have given me a caseworker at the beginning. No messing around. They should've assigned a caseworker to me at the beginning, no messing around. One person that I could email, text or whatever. Not to speak to them – I don't want a direct telephone to them because obviously they are busy people. So long as I knew there was a name, there was someone I could go to when I'm having problems. And that didn't happen. Caseworker that's all we needed. Nothing else.

Interviewer: And then in terms of the guidelines, that would have been helpful having just that one point of contact?

Mr Williams: Exactly. Because the guidelines that we got are to totally different to the guidelines the caseworkers have. And we know the guidelines the caseworkers have. In our group, we make it a point to read everything. Make sure we're up-to-date with everything and we know what's going on. The guidelines differ anyway. What's the point of having guidelines, they have separate guidelines which is totally different to the guidelines I'm working on or to?

The whole scheme to me is designed to confuse. It's just pure confusion. We're confused and I do believe the caseworkers are confused. They've got to be confused because some of the rubbish they come out with. They have to be confused. The communication is not right. They need to get the communications better and giving us a caseworker would be a lot easier. So much easier. Someone to talk to.

I'll give you a good example. I lost my job. I'd only been in the job about five weeks. I'd never been paid. So, when I applied for the compensation, I explained all of that in there. But what I did, I sent them an offer letter which I received when I took the job on, I don't know why but I kept it all that time. So, I said to them, I got this letter as proof. The offer letter had the hours I was to work but it didn't have my salaries on it. So then, when they phoned me up and asked me about my salary, that's when I started worrying things.

As far as I was concerned, and what I read, was the caseworkers were there to support us and help us find the evidence to support our claims. But that's not happening. Because, with the caseworker phoning me up and asking me my salary information, why waste the time phoning me? Because I didn't put it down. Why not contact my employer? My ex-employers to get the information from them. Instead of wasting time coming to me. So, because they are too lazy and they couldn't be bothered to do that, they put all the pressure back onto me. They then put me down for what they call a general award, which is only one year of salary. Because I couldn't provide them with... when they could find themselves. It would've been easier for them to phone my ex employer, because they have the clout, I don't, to find that information.

But them failing to do that, now had me worried. So, earlier on this year, I then contacted my own employer myself, okay. And I tried to explain the situation but the company I worked for, they're international. They have HR departments all around the world. When I personally contacted them, I sent all information to them, explained to them why I needed my salary information to support my claim. It took them a month to get back to me. And when they wrote back to me, it was so funny and so annoying as well. We searched all our systems; we cannot find any information of you on our system so as far as we're concerned you've never worked for us. Even though I sent them a copy of the letter. The reason they did that, which I've now found out, because I got annoyed, I just put it to my solicitor, she can do that. When my solicitors finally got in touch with them, what they actually said to her was: oh, we have found a reference to him on our system in Switzerland. What actually happened, when I first approached them, someone in the HR department thought, hang on, this guy is going to sue us sooner or later. So, let's get him off our system, out of the country.

If the Home Office had approached them in the first place – can you see the time that would have saved. So, my conclusion from all of that is what the Home Office are doing is they are looking for reasons not to increase our compensation payment. Even further to that as well, again, caseworkers are there to support us, help us find the evidence. When I did actually start working as well, I actually received two working tax credit payments. Now me as an individual, I can't go to the DWP and ask them for that information.

But the Home Office can. So, if the Home Office is really really there to help us solve the problems, what they would've done is contact DWP, see what my working tax credits were to work out what my income was, bang bang, they would've solved the problem. But they haven't done it. That leads to the conclusion, to me, that the scheme is designed so that we fail at every obstacle. And the obstacles keep getting higher, bigger, wider.

Interviewer 2: It doesn't sound like they are very joined up, are they?

Mr Williams: That's a problem we're all seeing within the group. We are starting to go back to claimants because what we have actually found as a group as well, what I actually found, because I used to go to Twitter all the time, and I rant on Twitter me, and that's how we formed. Different people ranting on Twitter and then we started DMing each other and then we thought, right, all claimants together. What we actually found, what we actually saw was happening out there, excuse what I say, what we actually found was that the Home Office were approaching black people that weren't affected by the scandal to represent us. Do you see where I'm coming from? They didn't know about us and what we went through. But the Home Office were approaching people like that. It doesn't work. You need to have people who are affected on these committees. ***

So, unfortunately, they are what I call token gestures. Sorry, but, it's harsh. You're probably going to find that coming from quite a few people today. They don't represent us because they've never experienced what we've been through at the end of the day. Because you then get the Home Office come out with stupid things like: we've paid £1.6 million in compensation or whatever. And that's all people like [name] repeat and they keep repeating it. To make it sound like the Home Office are doing a brilliant job: we've paid out all of this money, these people should be grateful. Wow. They haven't because when we start to dig deeper into the figures, how the figures work. The good one the Home Office keeps coming out with, there was that urgent question the other day in the House of Lords regarding Windrush. And the lady that was representing the Home Office, she turns round and says that multiple people have been paid well over £100,000. It's lies because when you dig down into the figures and the amount that people would've claimed to the amount they have paid out, it works out to about an average of £8000. We work it out.

But they want everyone out there in the public to think that they are doing a great job, when us the victims we don't see that. Because we're digging into the figures and working things out ourselves. And they know that.

Interviewer 1: You've already told us a bit about the difficulty with the employment and being given the general award because of the evidence that they were asking for and, on the offer that you received in in July, did you feel that that was an adequate or a fair offer? And if not, in what ways was it seemingly unfair or inadequate?

Mr Williams: Okay, okay. They offered me I think it was £18,700 something. That's not adequate at all. I was out of work for five years not my fault. I didn't create the problem. So, £18,000. Well, sorry. They offered me £13,700 for loss of employment. I mean, as far as I'm concerned, five years, that's what I was looking at five years. But because of the way the system works, and that I have to provide all the evidence, that's all they offered me. And then they offered me £5000 for impact on life.

And then they offered me I think it was £5000 impact on life. I just cannot work out how they come to that figure. Five years of not being able to do nothing. Things have happened to me over the last five years... I can't describe really. The problem is that what we've done as a group as well is, we spoke to about 10 people and regardless of how long you were in trouble or what we call lockdown. Everyone, even if you were affected for two years, three years, five years, 10 years, 12 years, everyone's figure comes to £7000. Just the impact on life alone. How do they work that out?

They don't know what I've been through over the last five years. And I've been through a lot of things over the last five years. I live in a, what they call a studio flat. I have a kitchen, a sort of living room which is my bedroom. So, I was living in that for five years and I had just moved in as well when this all started happening. So, I never had any furniture, I had no carpets on my floor, all I had was a concrete floor. I had no curtains covering up my windows so in the summer it was light all the time. In the winter, it got dark really quick.

Because I wouldn't put the light bulbs in, especially in winter, because I didn't want people to see straight in. I didn't buy a bed until 2017, back end of 2017. So, I was sleeping on the sofa. God, almighty. I used to get up... I was a physical training instructor when I was in the Army. And I used to get up 4, 4.30 in the morning and I'd go for a run. Because I couldn't sleep. So, I had to get rid of my aggression or whatever somehow. And that's all right in the summer but in the winter, it was a bit difficult, especially in the winter when it's dark in the morning.

I used to get stopped by the police all the time. I'd run at half past 4, 5 o'clock in the mornings. Because I didn't know what to do myself, with my time. So, most of my time was spent in physical activities and then, I ended up with a really really bad mouth infection at one point and I lost my teeth. The teeth I have now are implants. I've just spent about five grand or something like that to get everything sorted out. Because I started losing my teeth, my confidence started going. I wouldn't go out because I wouldn't speak to people. It was so embarrassing. When I used to go shopping, I'd go shopping early in the morning as soon as supermarkets opened because I didn't want people see my face.

I lived on sardines and pasta. I can laugh about it now because it is funny. I used to, what I call, play a game. I'd sit in a room and watch paint dry, do you see what I mean. Because I didn't know what to do with myself. No consideration to any of that. But then you come to now and you hear people on TV all the time... have you been through lockdown by any chance? Are you working from home?

Interviewers: Yeah, we are.

Mr Williams: How claustrophobic does it get? Not seeing people for a month, try that for five years. Do you see where I'm coming from? We hear this on TV all the time that people complain about them losing their jobs, they have been locked down for months, that people are committing suicide, or whatever. I did this for five years. And the only reason I did it is because of some of the training I had in the military. You do spend a lot of time isolated by yourself or whatever, so I relied on my military training to get me through that. So, for them to offer me £5000 for impact in life – that's disgusting.

And the impact of life they said there's no cap, but there is because it starts at about £250 and I think it is capped about £10,000. It is wrong. Even now, I'm still having problems. I still don't sleep. And it's because of the compensation scheme. In the back of my mind now, because I survived five years of virtually living on nothing, the money is secondary now. My sanity is top of the game now to me. If this is not resolved in time and properly, in the back of my mind, I will always have in the back of my mind, God these people really screwed me up. They really screwed me and got away with it.

Like the other day, I was really suffering the other day, and I decided to phone my medical centre and try to see someone to talk about it. Phoned the receptionist and said, look, I'm having some problems and need to speak to someone about it and she goes "you'll have to call back tomorrow at 8 o'clock". So, I said to her, I'm sorry, look I have bad reception in my flat with my mobile phone, I need to speak to someone. "You've got to phone back tomorrow 8 o'clock" and put the phone down on me. What's the point?

So as part of the compensation scheme, what the Home Office should be doing is actually getting us some kind of help or getting an assessment done. And the assessment could be part of the evidence for the compensation scheme. Make things a lot easier and identifying the treatment needed as well. None of that's been offered.

And when it comes to that as well... Because I couldn't register with the doctor either, anytime I bring anything up about mental health, they are asking for evidence, but I couldn't register for the doctor. "We still need the evidence", but I couldn't register with doctors. I didn't see a doctor for five years. The rules and policies they created; they are still using them now against us now.

An example again, I went to register with my medical centre back in 2014 or 2013 I think it was. Part of their process is that you need a letter or something confirming your address and the voter ID. Okay. And the Home Office told me when they turned me down... because when I applied for loss of access to NHS treatment, I was refused it because of these reasons. So, when I went to medical centre, I filled in my letter and I showed my driving license with my photo on it. The problem with British driver's licenses is it has on it place of birth. Mine's in Jamaica. As soon as the receptionist saw Jamaica, she asked me the further ID. The Home Office didn't take that into consideration. So, they won't pay me because as far as they are concerned, I didn't lose access. But they'd rather take the word of someone else than my word. So, the scheme is labored towards them not me. The scheme is not designed to help me.

We now look at it as a spreadsheet exercise. They've been given an amount to fall within and they're going to stick to that number. Because originally, when it was Amber Rudd, I think the figures they were talking about were between two and 500 million was put aside to compensate. All of a sudden, out of the blue, since Priti Patel's been in charge, it's gone from that to between 90 and 200 million. Why is that?

So, we're sat out here, scratching our heads, they are playing with our heads. Unfortunately, some people have accepted those low offers because they're desperate. In my case, I'm desperate, but I'm not that desperate. I'm a proud. I'm a proud person. I'm desperate but not to that level where I have to go, like "please sir can I have more" kind of thing. I can't do it. They've got to stop treating us like kids and be adults with us and that's all. None of us are asking for anything extraordinary, we are just asking for what we're owed and nothing else. It doesn't seem like the scheme's designed to do... The Scheme is probably designed to do that but the way the Home Office is running the scheme, it's not right.

And then finding out that most of the people that are in charge of enforcing the hostile environment are the same people managing the scheme. How does that work? There goes my mental health again, I'm thinking these people are actually playing with my mind here. There's something not quite right.

Interviewer 2: You've mentioned a few times about the department asking for evidence, and there's a very valid reason as to why that evidence doesn't exist or why it's not accessible. And when you explain that to caseworkers what's the response?

Mr Williams: I don't speak to caseworkers about things like that. They don't call me about things like that. After I had my first offer back in July, I found myself solicitor anyway and I said look you take care of it. I've done what I call fire and forget. I said you deal with it, I'm going to forget about it. Whenever you've sorted things out with them come back to me. I'm trying to put it out my mind because if you don't, it's the first thing you think about when you wake up and the last thing you think about before you go to sleep.

And that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to get that break really. But that break won't happen until the Home Office put their hands up and say okay, we're still getting it wrong and we're going to sort it. But they are doubling down, don't know why, they just keep doubling down, all the time. We're doing the right thing, we're making the right offers – I'm sorry £5000 for five years impact on life – how can that be doing the right thing?

Interviewer 1: Is there anything else you want to tell us about the impact applying to the scheme has had?

Mr Williams: There's so much I could add. I think the problem lies with middle management and senior management within the Home Office. That's where I see where the problem is. I tend to look at them as white, stale and grey. Sorry to put it that way. The way I see civil servants, it's like the Army. You get in. Most people stay in the Army for 22 years. Civil Service about the same time 22 years. You work your way up and you get comfortable and comfortable the higher you get. You get to that position; you're sitting around waiting for your golden handshake and nothing matters, nothing. And all you did there is to defend yourself and defend the people around you. They don't listen. They know it all because they've worked their way up. Seen it in the Army. Those people get nowhere, they get there, they are stuck in positions and now because they are on enforcement, they can do what they want. And no one's managing these people. I think they are racist full stop. No other words for it at all.

They could've resolved this problem from day one. But they haven't. They have dragged it on and dragged it on. And the longer they keep dragging it on, the worse it's going to get. They said it themselves the other day in the House of Lords - not many people have taken up the compensation scheme. They've got to ask themselves the questions why. But they're not. That's the problem. I think they'll blame it on COVID.

And the last thing, they send these people out they call ambassadors to do the programs to go out and tell people about the compensation scheme. Ambassadors? They are not victims; they are people the Home Office has trained to go out to deliver the compensation scheme. It's not real. They don't know what they are doing.

The last bit, the last, last bit, Citizens Advice... not many people talk about that do they? They put a contract out for a body or someone to give us advice. Only one body applied for it – apparently it was Citizens Advice. Only one group applied to do the job – Citizens Advice. For me to get advice through Citizens Advice, I have to personally contact the Windrush Help Team for them to put me in contact with Citizens Advice.

Interviewers: So you have to go through the Home Office? It's not direct?

Mr Williams: You cannot do that. That's micromanaging. That's micromanaging the situation. The Home Office will tell... and there's only selected Citizens Advice centres

you can go to... So, they are micro-managing all these people. Whatever information I give to Citizens Advice – how am I going to trust that they are not going to pass it straight back to the Government. Or the Government is giving Citizens Advice the wrong message because they want to delay things. That shouldn't happen.

The Home Office have got the hands in too many pies. Just like a lot of the groups we set-up around the country as well. A lot of them are getting funding from the Home Office because they have the Windrush names in them. But they are not really dealing with the victims. They just want the funding.

Interviewer 2: Following on from your point about the Home Office and Citizens Advice and that relationship, if you could make any changes to compensation scheme, what changes would you make?

Mr Williams: It would not be in the hands of the Home Office full stop. That's the only change I'd make. You cannot ask the arsonist to investigate its own fire. It just doesn't make any sense at all. I believe some of these people at the Home Office, they have a bee in their bonnet basically. Enforcement didn't work. So, let's give them another kicking. Kick us while we're down, that's what they are doing. That's the only change I'd make. It should not be in the Home Office. Full stop.

Interviewer 1: Have you experienced the review process of the scheme? And if so, how well is that process working would you say?

Mr Williams: I've left that with my solicitor to deal with. She's going to deal with that. Personally, I really don't want to be dealing with it because it would drive me insane. It really, really would. I don't want the phone calls from them. I really don't. I don't want to speak to any of them because, as far as I'm concerned, they are useless. They need to be retrained or whatever, because they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing. There is no real help. Well, personally I don't think... they might have changed over the last, say, eight months or so. But when I first applied for compensation, the caseworkers didn't... speaking to some of the guys in our group, they have started giving caseworkers now. But when it first started, they hadn't. I wouldn't want to speak to a caseworker now anyway. I just leave it to my solicitors to get on with.

Interviewer 2: I was just going to follow up as well on a question... You mentioned the House of Lords and how they said not that many people have even applied, what support or what would you do? What would you suggest to the Home Office to say, actually, this is what you need to do to make sure that people do apply?

Mr Williams: That one is so simple, it's unbelievable. People of the Windrush community are in their 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s. I don't mind being on Twitter or whatever but people in their 50s and 60s, black people are not interested in those kinds of platforms. Why the hell do they keep putting all this stupid stuff out on Twitter and Facebook. They are not interested.

Local radio, BBC. BBC, it should be on the BBC all the time. Stuff like that. People listen and watch programmes. But put them on social media, people in the 60s and 70s they ain't going to be looking at stuff like that. They said they are going out into local churches and stuff like that. Not all black people go to churches. I don't!

I know they always say it don't they - we spent X amount on doing outreach. And their outreach are those ambassadors. That's what those ambassadors are doing – their outreach. As I said before, they're not victims, they're idiots. And they're just Home Office waffle: "The scheme is good... the scheme is working... get people to apply for the scheme". In it's current form now, to completely go through everyone, if all 11,000 applied for compensation, it would probably take about 200 years. 15 months for mine – it'd take years to get it all done. They've got to start... definitely the BBC, the big TV channels, not Twitter, Facebook, those do not work. Trust me on that one.

Interviewer 2: Thank you.

Interviewer 1: Is there anything else you think the Committee should know or anything else that you'd like to tell us?

Mr Williams: I think that's all really. They can solve all of this – just pay everyone what they are supposed to get instead of trying to knock us down. Nothing else.

November 2020