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Dear Richard

Thank you for your questions during the Private Notice Question about the NI Troubles-related victims payments scheme on Wednesday 3rd June. I undertook to write on two points of specific detail:

- Will Citizens Advice or a similar independent agency be set up to assist people in making applications and following through with the provision of medical evidence?; and
- Will the Government or the Northern Ireland Executive make legal aid available for applicants in Northern Ireland?

Advice and support to applicants

We were clear in the legislation that the needs of victims must be given a high priority. The Board who will administer the scheme is required to exercise its functions having regard to “the need to prioritise, and be responsive to, the needs of victims of Troubles-related incidents”. As part of this commitment to excellent support for applicants, the Board is under a legal obligation to make arrangements for facilitating access to;

(a) advice and support for any person making an application, or considering whether to make an application, under this Scheme, and;

(b) advice on the financial management of payments for a person entitled to payments under this Scheme. It is open to them to choose to engage the Citizens Advice Bureau as part of this.

I understand that NI Executive officials have already been exploring support through other established mechanisms in Northern Ireland, including but not limited to victims support specialists. The Board will support applicants in sourcing relevant evidence.

Legal aid

The Government did not amend the existing legal aid provisions in Northern Ireland to include this scheme on the basis that its expected victim-centred, non-adversarial approach would not seem to make this necessary. However, it would be open to the Executive to take a decision to grant legal aid in respect of applications and/or appeals in relation to the victims payments scheme.

I trust that these answers are helpful and officials would be very happy to discuss them further if that would be helpful.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library.

My best wishes
James

VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE