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RESPONDING TO COVID-19 AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

I wanted to say a huge thank you to Clinks staff and the charities working in criminal justice for their immediate and constructive response to the exceptional circumstances in which we find ourselves.

I know you and the charities that Clinks represents, like so many others, will be rapidly adjusting to the strictures that have necessarily been imposed on our lives and work, and you will all be experiencing differing problems and concerns.

I have very much valued our communications and yours to the sector. Communicating with the sector through these next few weeks and months is going to be important, and the reality is that we are not always going to be able to provide all the answers you need at a speed that you and I would wish. It might be useful, however, to set out my thinking and approach at this relatively early stage.

First, we share a common, fundamental mission to keep our staff and their families safe, and to carry on with the work that we can, making sure we reach those to whom we have a duty, specifically the most vulnerable or those at risk of reoffending. I know that Clinks is in frequent contact with officials in the Ministry but I am also very keen to hear from you directly where there are critical issues that require my attention.

Second, the decisive actions necessary to counter the very real threat to life presented by Covid-19 inevitably has a direct impact on the running of organisations, and potentially creates genuine concerns about the viability and survival of some voluntary organisations in their current form. I understand how critical maintaining cash-flow is for small organisations and I genuinely do not want to witness any otherwise viable organisations needlessly closing because of the current situation, if it can be avoided.

The Government has made very clear its intent to support all businesses, including the voluntary sector, and measures such as the key worker scheme and business support is there to be accessed. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is working closely with the Office for Civil Society (OCS) and Treasury to make sure this is working effectively and we are engaging with them to make sure the voluntary sector working with offenders and their families, and working for victims and on domestic abuse, are not disadvantaged.

Specifically, for those organisations who are members of Clinks, working closely with prisons and probation, we want to monitor what is happening to try to work through any problems as they arise. If there are valid issues that need to be escalated to OCS or Treasury, again, I will be happy to advocate on your behalf from my position in this department.

Finally, I want to underline that my ability to support the sector depends on understanding properly the reality of the situation brought on by this crisis, accurately identifying the problems as they happen and their scale. Both the Lord Chancellor and I are keen that Clinks continues its co-ordination between the relevant charities so that we ensure that their points are taken on board. I know that communication is taking place daily, and, of course, I am very happy to speak to you directly again whenever that would be useful.

The voluntary sector, and especially those working in our field, has a deserved reputation of resilience, ingenuity and focusing on those most in need. We will need that in the coming months, and still more so when we return to normal times.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Frazer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

LUCY FRAZER QC MP