Dear Mr Farmer,

You will no doubt recall that, over a year ago, members and supporters of the Mental Health Resistance Network (MHRN) protested outside your offices in London to express our dismay at the secondment of your manager, Tom Pollard, to the DWP for one year. At the time you said that Mind was not bidding for any government contracts, but it later transpired that you had indeed been bidding for the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) contract, to be delivered to service users by some local Minds.

Our supporters, along with supporters of other disability campaign groups who share our concerns, are now keen to know what came out of the secondment, and how it might impact on us.

We would like to know if Mind has produced a report on what has been achieved by Mr Pollard’s work at the DWP and, in particular, what positive outcome has there been for people who rely on benefits and are unable to work. If there is such a report, how can we access it? Should no such report be available, please can you provide us with details of what has been achieved and how this secondment will have helped to alleviate the distress caused by cuts to disability benefits? We would be interested to know if Mr Pollard found any of the DWP plans potentially harmful to people in mental distress and, if so, how he has intervened on our behalf.

We are also interested in how the IPS contract is progressing. Has this begun in any local Minds and, if this is the case, when will information on the outcomes of this scheme be available to the public? Can you confirm once again that no one will be penalised by the DWP for choosing not to access IPS, and that you have found a way of ensuring that no one will choose to use the service out of fear of losing benefits? As you know, MHRN is opposed to bullying, coercion and the threat of forced destitution as a means of getting people into work; people who are not, and may never be ready, to return to work, due to mental distress.

We understand that Mind has been involved in supporting employers to deal with mental distress in the workplace. Where can we find the recommendations made by Mind on how to deal with mental distress experienced by workers, and any reports on what workplace practices Mind found to be causing mental distress?

We believe that any role as advocate for people in mental distress has been compromised by governmental outsourcing of public services to charities, which requires such charities to supress any negative comment on government ministers. Nonetheless we will expect Mind to speak up when the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Esther McVey, expresses views or takes actions that are harmful to us.

Now that the government has announced they will be pushing more people with mental health problems into work, can you please tell us to what extent Mind will be working further with the DWP to progress the government’s political agenda?

We are aware that you took part in a recent court case, initiated by a service user, regarding restrictions to people in mental distress accessing the mobility component of PIP. We recall that you were unwilling to pursue the outcome of the court case concerning the WCA, a case that was also initiated by mental health claimants; that in effect, you left us high and dry. We are aware that, as you are specifically interested in work related contracts, you might feel freer to pursue the outcome of a case relating to PIP - which is not an out of work benefit - and we are hopeful you will see this case through to its end.

We wonder if Mind only speaks on behalf of people with mental health issues who are well enough to work, or perhaps you are of the same view as the government; that no one is unable to work due to mental distress. Please can you clarify your position on this?

We think it is reasonable to expect a reply from you by the end of February 2018.

Yours sincerely,

Mental Health Resistance Network