



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2020-0051, 17 March 2020

# The Horizon Settlement and the future governance of the Post Office Ltd

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Lorna Booth

## Summary

A Backbench Business debate on the Horizon Settlement and the future governance of the Post Office Ltd is scheduled for Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The Member leading the debate is Kevan Jones MP.

This briefing contains background information, parliamentary and press material, as well as suggested further reading which Members may find useful when preparing for this debate.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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# 1. Horizon

The Post Office Horizon IT system issue has been a long, complicated and contested saga.

A number of subpostmasters have experienced difficulties relating to the Post Office computer system (“Horizon”) which is used to for transactions between Post Office Limited and its branch network.

The problems alleged led in some cases to claims of false accounting and fraud against subpostmasters.

Subpostmasters claimed that there were problems with the IT system and related training and support.

The campaigning group Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance (JFSA) – led by Alan Bates – was set up in 2009 “to represent the victims of the Post Office and its Horizon system”.

In 2012, the Post Office set up an independent inquiry and later a (controversial) Complaint Review and Mediation Scheme to examine cases raised in the inquiry report. The scheme was closed in 2015.

## 1.1 The civil action, Bates v Post Office

From late 2015, a group of claimants, coordinated by the JFSA, began to seriously explore legal action against the Post Office.<sup>1</sup> In January 2016, Alan Bates (from JFSA) secured the financial funding to take the Post Office to court from *Therium Group* in return for a proportion of any damages awarded.<sup>2</sup>

This High Court group litigation was between Alan Bates and other claimants (555 in total) and Post Office Limited. It was described in one judgement as a:

.. long-running legal dispute between the claimants, who are all either former or serving sub-post masters and sub-post mistresses (“SPMs”), and the Post Office. All the SPMs in the litigation had contracted with the Post Office at different times to run branch Post Offices in different locations across the country. The Post Office introduced a computer system called Horizon in 2000 across all its branches. That was changed in 2010 to an online version called Horizon Online or HNG-X, and the former version is now called Legacy Horizon. The claimants’ case is essentially that both Legacy Horizon and Horizon Online (which used many elements of the existing system) were or are unreliable, and this led to unexplained shortfalls and discrepancies in their branch accounts. The Post Office denies this, asserting that the systems were and are robust, and extremely unlikely to be the cause of such matters. There are numerous different causes of action

Post Office and Horizon software was the subject of a [Westminster Hall debate on 5 March 2020](#).

The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry on the Post Office and Horizon – [an evidence session was conducted on Tuesday 13 March 2020](#).

brought against the Post Office, and the Post Office counterclaims against the claimants, including seeking damages for fraud.<sup>3</sup>

The case was divided into a number of trials – the first was on Common Issues (judgement on 15 March 2019), the second on Horizon Issues, and there were expected to be more to follow.

### **The settlement**

On 11 December there was a settlement between the Post Office and the claimants, with the parties issuing a joint statement:

The Parties to the Group Litigation in *Bates v Post Office* are pleased to report that they have reached a comprehensive resolution to their long-running litigation in the High Court, following several days of respectful, challenging, and ultimately successful mediation during which the parties engaged with each other in good faith.

The Post Office would like to express its gratitude to claimants, and particularly those who attended the mediation in person to share their experiences with us, for holding us to account in circumstances where, in the past, we have fallen short and we apologise to those affected.

The Post Office is committed to applying the lessons it has learnt. Its new Chief Executive Officer, who joined in September and led this drive to a mediated resolution, is undertaking an ambitious and sustained programme of changes to the Post Office's relationship with postmasters whose role we recognise as being core to our future success. We look forward to working in genuine partnership with postmasters to seize the opportunities ahead of us and to continue to serve communities across the country.

Post Office Chairman, Tim Parker, said:

"We are grateful to the claimants for taking part in this mediation and agreeing a settlement, bringing the Group Litigation to a close. I am grateful to Nick Read for his important engagement in the mediation process. We accept that, in the past, we got things wrong in our dealings with a number of postmasters and we look forward to moving ahead now, with our new CEO currently leading a major overhaul of our engagement and relationship with postmasters."

Nick Read commented:

"I am very pleased we have been able to find a resolution to this longstanding dispute. Our business needs to take on board some important lessons about the way we work with postmasters, and I am determined that it will do so.

We are committed to a reset in our relationship with postmasters, placing them alongside our customers at the centre of our business. As we agree to close this difficult chapter, we look forward to continuing the hard work ahead of us in shaping a modern and dynamic Post Office, serving customers in a genuine commercial partnership with postmasters, for the benefit of communities across the UK."

Alan Bates commented:

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<sup>3</sup> Para 1 of [Judgment \(No.6\) "Horizon Issues" in \*Alan Bates and Others vs Post Office Ltd \(The Post Office Group Litigation\) in the High Court\*](#), 16 Dec 2019

“The Steering Committee would like to thank Nick Read, the new CEO of Post Office, for his leadership, engagement and determination in helping to reach a settlement of this long running dispute. During the mediation, it became clear that he intends to reset the relationship between the Post Office and its Subpostmasters and put in place new processes and support for them, as part of a wider programme of improvements. It would seem that from the positive discussions with Post Office’s new CEO, Nick Read, that there is a genuine desire to move on from these legacy issues and learn lessons from the past.”<sup>4</sup>

As part of the settlement, the Post Office agreed to pay the claimants £57.75m. However after costs – including to the funder of the case, Therium – it is expected that the claimants will see around £10 million, which is unlikely to cover their financial losses.<sup>5</sup>

### Judgement

On 16 December, there was a [judgement](#) in favour of the claimants at the High Court in the second (now to be the last) trial in the civil court case:

Hundreds of post office workers have won a key victory against the Post Office and the controversial accounting software they were forced to use [...]

In Monday's High Court judgment, Mr Justice Fraser said the Horizon IT system was not "remotely robust" and even when improved it had a significant number of bugs.

He said there was a "material risk" that shortfalls in Post Office branch accounts were caused by the system.

The Post Office workers blame the system for creating big shortfalls in their accounts, discrepancies which led to some being made bankrupt and others prosecuted and sent to prison.

Homes, businesses and reputations have been lost, as well as years spent in prison.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 New scheme?

The Post Office is also reported to be starting a new scheme to address shortfalls for subpostmasters not part of the civil high court case:

Last week, the Post Office said it was establishing a scheme, which the two subpostmaster settlements are part of, for current and former postmasters. “It is not yet launched but will be shortly,” said the Post Office

“We don’t comment on individual cases, but we’re continuing to directly address past events for postmasters affected,” it said. “A scheme will be announced in the near future with the aim of addressing historic shortfalls for current and former postmasters who were not part of the group litigation. The scheme is not therefore yet open to applicants, and we intend to ensure it is

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<sup>44</sup> [Joint Press Statement - Resolution to the Group Litigation proceedings \(Bates v Post Office Limited\)](#), 11 December

<sup>5</sup> Karl Flinders, *Computer Weekly*, [Subpostmasters got the best deal possible in legal battle with the Post Office, says lawyer](#), 13 December 2019; Karl Flinders, *Computer Weekly*, [Boris Johnson commits to 'getting to the bottom of' Post Office Horizon IT scandal](#), 26 February 2020

<sup>6</sup> BBC, [Workers secure fresh victory over Post Office](#), 16 December

widely publicised and accessible to all those who wish to make a claim.”

The Post Office has set up, but not announced, a complex cases review team to look into these claims.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 Criminal Cases Review Commission

The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) has been receiving applications from former sub-postmasters claiming to have been falsely convicted of offences as a result of Horizon failures since March 2015.

This review is separate to the high court case, and the claims are still being reviewed.

The Commission have said they will make a decision in March on whether cases can go to the Court of Appeal, as journalist Nick Wallis reports:

Last week the Criminal Cases Review Commission wrote to 34 former Subpostmasters and former Post Office workers to let them know they are planning to convene a meeting of CCRC commissioners in March 2020. This meeting will decide whether or not to recommend their cases be sent to the Court of Appeal.

[...] Either way there are now 56 Post Office cases before the CCRC, all of which will be considered in March.<sup>8</sup>

For more on this, see the Library debate pack [The Criminal Cases Review Commission's process for review of convictions relating to the Post Office and Horizon accounting system](#), 3 March 2020.

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<sup>7</sup> Computer Weekly, [Secret Post Office deals cause fury among Horizon IT scandal campaigners](#), 16 March 2020

<sup>8</sup> Nick Wallis, *Post Office Trial*, [The CCRC, Subpostmasters and the Court of Appeal](#), 4 February 2020

## 2. The governance of the Post Office

The Post Office is a limited company, owned by the government.

It has a board of directors, chaired by Tim Parker, “responsible for setting the business’ strategic aims, putting in place the leadership to deliver them, maintaining appropriate oversight of the management of the business, reporting to the Shareholder and determining the Company’s vision, values and organisational culture”.<sup>9</sup>

The Chief Executive of Post Office Ltd is Nick Read, who replaced Paula Vennells in September 2019.<sup>10</sup>

### Relationship with government

The government has an arms-length relationship with the Post Office. It provides funding, set certain requirements such as minimum access criteria for the spread of post offices across the country, and approve strategy. They are not involved in the day-to-day running of the Post Office.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) holds lead government responsibility for postal services, largely working through UK Government Investments (UKGI):

UKGI oversees government’s 100% shareholding in Post Office on behalf of BEIS, which involves a range of activities. UKGI holds a seat on the POL Board and Audit and Risk Committee, and oversees and participates in corporate governance activities such as the approval of the business’s longer term strategy, executive and non-executive recruitment, and director remuneration. The shareholder team monitors financial and operational performance of the business against that long term strategy, holding the business to account in delivering against its commercial and policy objectives. UKGI are also responsible for ensuring the business is provided with sufficient investment and subsidy funding to achieve its target of being commercially sustainable in the longer term, whilst meeting its social obligations, particularly around minimum network coverages requirements. Finally, UKGI advises ministers on both commercial and policy issues, supporting them in Parliament and with the wider set of stakeholders who have an interest in Post Office matters.<sup>11</sup>

BEIS has established a quarterly working group with Post Office Ltd and the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters. The government has said that “BEIS Ministers and officials will continue to raise these matters [relating to Horizon] and monitor these issues in their regular engagement with the Post Office”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [Post Office annual report and accounts 2018/19](#)

<sup>10</sup> Companies House, [Post Office Ltd – officers](#), accessed 16 March 2020

<sup>11</sup> UK Government Investments, [Governance](#), accessed 16 March 2020

<sup>12</sup> [PO 6034](#), answered 27 Jan 2020

## 3. Press articles and media

**Please note: The Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content**

### 3.1 Articles

[Secret Post Office deals cause fury among Horizon IT scandal campaigners](#)

Karl Flinders, *Computer Weekly*, 16 March 2020

This is the most recent in a long series of articles from *Computer Weekly*, which has been following this story closely. Scroll down to the bottom of this story to see a list of previous articles, including these from this month:

- [Secret Post Office deals cause fury among Horizon IT scandal campaigners](#)
- [MPs told to hold to account those responsible for Post Office Horizon IT scandal](#)
- [Those who did not play by the rules in Post Office Horizon scandal “should face prosecution”](#)
- [MPs call on PM to commit to full public inquiry into Post Office Horizon IT scandal](#)
- [Boris Johnson’s commitment to inquiry into Post Office scandal in doubt](#)
- [Boris Johnson commits to “getting to the bottom of” Post Office Horizon IT scandal](#)

[New Post Office Horizon scandal compensation payouts revealed](#)

Jack Courtez, Better Retailing, 14 March 2020

[‘Post Office false theft claim left me bankrupt’](#)

Hayley Hassall and Mick Tucker, BBC, 11 Feb 2020

[Victims of the Post Office’s sub-postmaster scandal on their decade of hell](#)

Katie Glass, *The Times*, 9 Feb 2020

[Former Post Office chief Paula Vennells told: quit public jobs](#)

Sabah Meddings, *The Times*, 29 December 2019

[Postmasters jailed and forced to pay millions after an IT glitch wrongly showed shortfalls should be repaid their money by the Post Office, forensic accountant claims](#)

Tom Witherow, *Daily Mail*, 26 Dec 2019

[Judge rules that Post Office It system was 'not remotely robust'](#)

Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan, *Financial Times*, 16 December 2019

[Post Office IT fiasco: 'Decade of hell' for accused](#)

Susie Rack, *BBC*, 15 December 2019

[Post Office Horizon: Postmistress wants conviction overturned](#)

*BBC*, 12 December 2019

[Post Office reaches £58m settlement with sub-postmasters](#)

Nikou Asgari, *Financial Times*, 11 December 2019

[What's this all about?](#)

Nick Wallis, *Post Office Trial*, 10 August 2019

The [Post Office Trial website](#), run by journalist Nick Wallis, has been reporting on the trial in detail. As well as news, the site includes a various summaries of earlier parts of the case. Nick Wallis also tweets: [@nickwallis](#).

[Forensic accountants appointed to pore over Post Office IT scandal](#)

Alexander J Martin, *The Register*, 24 April 2017

## 3.2 Other materials

### [Going Postal](#)

Richard Brooks and Nick Wallis, *Private Eye* podcast, 4 Feb 2020

### [Inside Out South](#)

BBC, First broadcast 20 Jan 2020

### [Second Class Citizens: The Post Office IT Scandal](#)

BBC *File on Four*, 11 February 2020

## 4. Press releases

Post Office, ['Joint Press Statement: Resolution to the Group Litigation Proceedings \(Bates v Post Office Limited\)'](#), 11 December 2019

*Joint statement on settlement between Post Office and claimants in the high court case.*

## 5. Parliamentary material

### 5.1 Select Committee evidence

The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry on the Post Office and Horizon – below is a link to a transcript of an oral evidence session conducted on Tuesday 13 March 2020

[Oral evidence: Post Office and Horizon, HC 143, Tuesday 10 March 2020](#)

### 5.2 Debates

[Post Office and Horizon Software](#)

5 March 2020 | House of Commons | 672 cc.358WH-380WH

[Post Office: Horizon Accounting System](#)

25 February 2020 | House of Lords | 802 cc.83GC-96GC

### 5.3 Written questions

[Post Office: Fraud](#)

27 February 2020 | 19768

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps Post Office Ltd is taking to identify former subpostmasters that repaid monies in relation to unproven allegations of financial discrepancies.

**Answered by: Paul Scully**

Post Office Limited will announce a scheme in the near future which will address historic shortfalls for postmasters who were not part of the Group Litigation. Post Office Limited are actively considering how best to reach all relevant postmasters both past and present as part of this process.

[Post Office: Written question](#)

12 February 2020 | 12841

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2020 to Question 6034 on the Post Office, if she will meet with representatives of the Communication Workers Union to discuss how that cultural change will be implemented.

**Answered by: Kelly Tolhurst**

The Government recognises that postmasters are the backbone of the Post Office network and it is committed to ensuring cultural change takes place regarding the Post Office's engagement and relationship with postmasters.

As such I am keen to hold discussions with representatives of the Communication Workers Union. My office has been in touch with the Communication Workers Union and are waiting for a response.

**Post Office: Written question**

**12 February 2020 | 12252**

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2020 to Question 6034 on Post Office, if she will hold discussions with representatives of the Communication Workers Union on how that cultural change will be implemented.

**Answered by: Kelly Tolhurst**

The Government recognises that postmasters are the backbone of the Post Office network and it is committed to ensuring cultural change takes place regarding the Post Office's engagement and relationship with postmasters.

As such, I am keen to hold discussions with representatives of the Communication Workers Union. My office has been in touch with the Communication Workers Union and are waiting for a response.

**Post Office: Written question**

**27 January 2020 | 6034**

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the Oral Contribution of the Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility on 21 January 2020, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that cultural change takes place in the Post Office; and if she will make a statement.

**Answered by: Kelly Tolhurst**

Postmasters are the backbone of the Post Office, and their branches are vital to communities across the country. That is why Government takes Post Office Limited's (POL) relationship with its postmasters very seriously.

The Post Office's Chair acknowledges the criticism received in the Horizon litigation and has committed to applying the lessons learnt. BEIS Ministers and officials will continue to raise these matters and monitor these issues in their regular engagement with the Post Office.

Progress on this work and other issues of mutual interest will also continue to be discussed at the quarterly working group between the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, Post Office and Government under my chairmanship.

**Post Offices: ICT: Written question**

**20 January 2020 | 3685**

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the settlement award of £57.75 million with sub-postmasters announced on 11 December 2019 will be subject to VAT.

**Answered by: Jesse Norman**

Payments resulting from legal settlements are normally VAT free as they are not made in return for goods or services.

Due to HMRC's statutory responsibilities I am unable to comment on the tax affairs of individuals or identifiable groups of individuals.

**Post Office: Compensation: Written question**

**20 January 2020 | 3684**

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether she plans to introduce additional mechanisms for Government oversight of Post Office Ltd as a result of the settlement with sub-postmasters announced on 11 December 2019.

**Answered by: Kelly Tolhurst**

Ministers and officials are in regular contact with the Post Office.

Government has robust mechanisms in place to maintain oversight of the Post Office that are regularly reviewed. UKGI acts as Shareholder Representative for BEIS, overseeing POL's corporate governance, strategy, and the stewardship of POL's financial and other resources on behalf of the shareholder, as well as holding a non-executive seat on POL's Board.

**Post Office: Compensation: Written question**

**20 January 2020 | 3682**

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions she has had with representatives from the Post Office following the settlement with sub-postmasters announced on 11 December 2019.

**Answered by: Kelly Tolhurst**

Ministers and officials are in regular contact with the Post Office.

Government has robust mechanisms in place to maintain oversight of the Post Office that are regularly reviewed. UKGI acts as Shareholder Representative for BEIS, overseeing POL's corporate governance, strategy, and the stewardship of POL's financial and other resources on behalf of the shareholder, as well as holding a non-executive seat on POL's Board.

**Post Office: Fraud: Written question**

**7 January 2020 | 156 | Grouped Questions: 155**

**Asked by: Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw)**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of the settlement reached in court on Post Office Ltd's Horizon accounting software will be paid by the Government.

**Answered by: Kelly Tolhurst**

The Government recognises the critical role that post offices play in communities and for small businesses across the UK. This is why the Government committed to safeguard the post office network and protect existing rural services. The overall number of post offices across the UK remains at its most stable in decades with over 11,600 branches thanks to significant Government investment of over £2 billion since 2010.

While the Post Office is publicly owned it operates as an independent, commercial business. As such, the legal defence of this litigation and the costs involved in doing so are being handled by Post Office Limited and the settlement is being funded by commercial revenue and not by taxpayers.

**Post Office: ICT: Written question - 242042**

**16 April 2020 | 242042**

**Asked by: Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps is he taking to ensure the Government is held accountable for the decisions and actions of Post Office Limited in the handling of postmasters' problems with Horizon.

**Answered by: Claire Perry**

The Government recognises the critical role that post offices play in communities and for small businesses across the UK. This is why the Government committed to safeguard the post office network and protect existing rural services. The overall number of post offices across the UK remains at its most stable in decades with over 11,500 branches thanks to significant Government investment of over £2 billion since 2010.

The courts are the right place to hear and resolve what are long-standing issues between some postmasters and the Post Office. While this matter rests with the courts it is inappropriate for the Government to comment further. The legal defence of this litigation and the costs involved in doing so are being handled by Post Office Ltd, which operates as an independent, commercial business within the strategic parameters set by Government.

## 5.4 Oral questions

### [Sub-postmasters: Compensation](#)

**5 March 2020 | HL 802 cc718-720**

### [Engagements](#)

**26 February 2020 | HC 672 cc315**

**Asked by: Kate Osborne | [900849]**

Q4. Like many other sub-postmasters, my constituent Chris Head was victim to the Post Office Horizon IT system scandal. These errors have resulted in bankruptcies, imprisonment and even suicide. Will the Prime Minister today assure Chris and others that he will commit to launching an independent inquiry?

**Answering member: Boris Johnson | The Prime Minister**

I am indeed aware of the scandal to which the hon. Lady alludes and the disaster that has befallen many Post Office workers—I have met some of them myself. I am happy to commit to getting to the bottom of the matter in the way that she recommends.

### [Business of the House](#)

**13 February 2020 | HC 671 cc999**

**Asked by: Lucy Allan**

Just before Christmas, the Post Office made a settlement with 550 post office workers, including my constituent Tracy Felstead, who was imprisoned at age 19 in Holloway prison after her till did not balance due to a technical glitch. May we have a debate in Government time to consider what is fast becoming a national scandal?

**Answering member: Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg | The Leader of the House of Commons**

I share my hon. Friend's concern that innocent people seem to have suffered because of IT flaws within the Post Office systems. That is entirely wrong and improper, and they ought to be compensated fairly. I think an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate would be very suitable.

### [Business of the House](#)

**13 February 2020 | HC 671 cc1000**

**Asked by: Jessica Morden**

Following on from the question asked by the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), I wish to draw attention to the hundreds of sub-postmasters across the country, including constituents of mine, who have lost their businesses and homes after paying out of their own pockets to make up for the failure of the Post Office's Horizon IT system. May I also ask for a debate on how we can help them to get recompense and justice?

**Answering member: Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg | The Leader of the House of Commons**

I reiterate the sympathy I have for these cases. Whether there is time for a debate in Government time, I cannot promise.

**[Post Office: Prosecution powers](#)**

**4 February 2020 | HL 801 cc1709-1710**

**Asked by: Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent assessment they have made of the Post Office's powers to conduct prosecutions

**Answering member: Lord Duncan of Springbank | The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Northern Ireland Office**

My Lords, the Post Office's powers to bring a private prosecution, which fall under Section 6(1) of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, are not specific to that company. It has the same right as any other person, whether an individual or a company, to bring a private prosecution.

**Asked by: Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom**

My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend for that Answer. Last year, the Post Office had to settle litigation brought by 555 sub-postmasters at a cost to it of nearly £60 million. The Court of Appeal described the Post Office as treating sub-postmasters

"in capricious or arbitrary ways which would not be unfamiliar to a mid-Victorian factory-owner."

The judge at first instance held that a Post Office director had set out to mislead him. How can such an organisation possibly conduct its own prosecutions when it cannot command the trust of the courts or, indeed, of the country?

**Answering member: Lord Duncan of Springbank**

My noble friend raises challenging points. I must stress that the leadership of the Post Office got it badly wrong and, as a consequence of those actions, people have experienced unfortunate situations. That has changed. There has been a change in culture, a new chief executive and a new recognition that the old ways of doing things cannot go on. That is why the Minister responsible in my department, Kelly Tolhurst,

now has quarterly meetings with the National Federation of SubPostmasters as a way of ensuring a better relationship with those who are at the sharp end of the Post Office.

**[Post Office: Prosecution powers](#)**

**4 February 2020 | HL 801 cc1710-1711**

**Asked by: Baroness Neville-Rolfe**

My Lords, as the Minister responsible at the time, I was uneasy because it involved claims of dishonesty by apparently honest citizens. I therefore advised the Post Office to take outside legal counsel to try and get at the truth. Now that we have reached the present stage, what arrangements for compensation have been, are still being or will be made for those affected?

**Answering member: Lord Duncan of Springbank | The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Northern Ireland Office**

My noble friend is right to draw attention to this. As my noble friend Lord Arbuthnot said at the outset, there will be a settlement of nearly £60 million for those who brought the class action itself. There will also need to be individual criminal examination for those who have experienced the sharpest end of the law. I cannot comment on these matters, but I recognise how important they are to bring about the justice required.

**[Topical questions](#)**

**21 January 2020 | HC 670 cc167-168**

**Asked by: Gill Furniss**

Sub-postmasters across the country offer valuable services to many of our communities. The case they brought against the Post Office has now concluded and the courts have found that the Post Office was at fault for its aggressive prosecutions of sub-postmasters for errors in the Horizon IT system. These prosecutions saw some sub-postmasters unlawfully jailed, and many losing their homes, livelihoods and reputations. What support are the Government giving to those affected? What has been done to ensure that a scandal such as this is never allowed to happen again? Will the Government launch a full inquiry into the circumstances that led to this tragedy, and a full review of the governance and management of the Post Office—the judge was highly critical of that—and of the impact this will have on the post office network?

**Answering member: Kelly Tolhurst | The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy**

The hon. Lady is correct; on 11 December, Post Office Ltd reached a settlement in the group litigation claim brought by 555 postmasters or former postmasters. This has culminated in a successful mediation, and

a settlement of £57.7 million was reached, funded by the Post Office. The Government welcome the agreement by the parties to settle this long-running litigation. It is true to say that many have suffered through litigation, and Post Office Ltd has apologised for that. One key point is that this mediation occurred under the new chief executive officer, who is making sure that the recommendations made by the judge, and culture change and changes within the Post Office, happen.

## 5.5 Early Day Motions

### **POST OFFICE HORIZON COMPUTER SYSTEM**

**EDM 427 (session 2015-16)**

**10 September 2015**

**Kate Hoey**

That this House notes with concern that a number of postmasters have been forced to pay back thousands of pounds, or have been prosecuted or imprisoned, solely on the basis of questionable data indicating cash shortfalls from the Post Office Horizon computer system introduced in 2000; further notes that the BBC Panorama investigation on 17 August 2015, entitled Trouble at the Post Office, demonstrated the damaging effect this has had on the lives of the postmasters involved; acknowledges that the report by forensic accountants Second Sight into claims many sub-postmasters were wrongly accused raises serious questions about the integrity of the Horizon system; expresses disappointment with the dismissive response from the Post Office to the findings of the Second Sight report; notes the concerns raised by the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee in the last Parliament in a letter to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, dated 17 March 2015, about the approach of the Post Office to the subsequent mediation scheme; notes the Prime Minister's comment on 1 July 2015, Official Report, column 1477, that the internal inquiry by the Post Office has not satisfied many hon. Members on both sides of the House; commends the work of the former hon. Member for North Hampshire, James Arbuthnot, for consistently raising this important issue in the last Parliament; and urges the Government to establish a full independent judicial inquiry.

## 6. Further reading

### 6.1 House of Commons Library

[The Post Office](#)

House of Commons Library, 12 April 2019

### 6.2 House of Lords Library

[Bates v Post Office: Horizon Accounting System](#)

House of Lords Library, 12 February 2020

### 6.3 Trial judgements

[Bates v Post Office \[2019\] EWHC 606](#)

*Judgement (No.3) "Common Issues"*

15 March 2019

[Bates v Post Office \[2019\] EWHC 3408](#)

*Judgement (No.6) "Horizon Issues"*

16 December 2019

### 6.4 Other material

[The Post Office Horizon system and Seema Misra](#)

Tim McCormack, Digital Evidence and Electronic Signature Law Review 13, *Hein Online*, 2016, page 133-138

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