

The Post Office prides itself as being the most trusted brand on the High Street. The verdicts issued by Justice Fraser in relation to the Common Issues Trial of 2018 and the Horizon trial of 2019 challenges that perception. Therefore, the NFSP is appalled by the sustained behaviour of Post Office Ltd (PO) in light of the verdict that the Horizon system was not fit for purpose until very recently. By implication of this verdict, PO has been systematically *misleading the* NFSP for years about the reliability of the Horizon system.

As someone who owned and operated a Post Office for almost a quarter of a century and have used Horizon since its inception in 1999, I am stunned that the Post Office placed my colleagues and I across the country into a position where we could have lost our businesses, our homes, our investment, our reputation and our liberty. However, for some of our colleagues this, the courts have decided is their reality.

*As mentioned by Justice Fraser in his verdict, the NFSP raised concerns to PO about problems our members have experienced with the system; and repeatedly we have been told that the system is robust and that user error is the primary cause of problems.*

The fact that Justice Fraser considers the current version of Horizon to be robust is welcome news – this will be a relief to serving subpostmasters. However, government must also ensure that, going forwards, the status of Horizon is monitored and reported on transparently. It is vital that every subpostmaster should feel confident that the investment they have made in their post office business is not reliant on a flawed system. This will engender trust in the system and also the Post Office.

The NFSP finds it incredulous that Justice Fraser comments on the evidence provided by Fujitsu in not only this trial but also in previous trials and how they have attempted to keep evidence out of court and possibly even from the Post Office, their client. Added to this, the assertion that the Judge is so concerned about the veracity of the evidence provided in previous court cases that he is referring them to the Director of Public Prosecution, begs serious questions over the involvement of Fujitsu and also their responsibility to the claimants as a result.

Above all, PO must change the way it deals with the subpostmaster network. The NFSP has long-argued that subpostmasters must not be treated as 'guilty until proven innocent' in the case of a loss or shortfall. Unfortunately, this was the mantra of several high-ranking PO officials for many years - something which was, ultimately, the root cause of the Group Litigation Order and the reason so many subpostmasters' lives have been disrupted and adversely affected.

However, we are pleased that that Nick Read has considered the case since joining the business in September and has moved swiftly to ensure that those impacted are treated with the respect they deserve. His desire to reset the relationship with Subpostmasters is welcomed along with how he sees us collectively as central to the business along with our customers.

To that end the PO must work more collaboratively with subpostmasters to help ensure that instances of loss or shortfall are minimised. This should be done through effective training, engagement, relationship-building and a clear and easy processes for flagging and escalating problems. And if losses are identified, the focus should be on resolution, not prosecution.