

23 October 2012

Albert Owen MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Thank you for your letter of 5 October, and I am sorry it has taken me a while to respond. This is with regard to your constituent, Mr Hugh Noel Thomas, of GRO about the Horizon system and the issue to do with SubPostmasters.

I recently hosted a meeting between Mr Alan Bates, who chairs the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance, and the Chief Executive of the Post Office, Paula Vennells, and her chief of staff. It appears that there has been some disconnect between the two parties as to the exact terms of investigations that will be brought to the forensic accountants directly from the JSFA. This has to do with a blanket guarantee of immunity, which the Post Office as a statutory body cannot offer, and the currency of cases that ought to be investigated. The result of this meeting is that the two parties are going to talk directly and come to an agreement, rather than having to deal with each other via my office.

I ought to let you know that I continue to pass on details – at the request of their constituency MP – of individuals who are happy for me to do so, to the forensic accountants. There are just over a dozen who have done so thus far in the full knowledge that their details will be passed first of all to the Post Office who are collating relevant data, who then pass details and data on to the accountants. No offer of immunity has been made to these people, and so if your constituent is concerned about this, he ought to stay in touch with the JSFA and await their negotiations with the Post Office before deciding whether or not to proceed. The JSFA will be best placed to advise him about this.

2...

Finally, I should like to add that there is nothing sinister about the investigations that are underway. My constituent, clearly those others who have been content for their details to be made known, the Post Office, and I are all extremely keen for this entire matter to be resolved. What I expect is that, beyond the results of individual investigations, the accountants will be able to extrapolate some general points from the investigations undertaken, which will point the way for further work to be done. I am awaiting the results with real interest.

Do come back to me if you need more detail as I am happy to help.