

Subject matter – Post Office Mediation Scheme Adjournment Debate, 2:30, Wed 17th
Dec, Westminster Hall

Dear Colleague,

At 2:30pm on Wednesday 17th December (next week) there will be a 90 minute Adjournment Debate in Westminster Hall on the Post Office Mediation Scheme. The background to this, as contained in the attached letters and Press Release, is as follows.

A decade or so ago the Post Office introduced a new computer accounting system, Horizon, for its sub Post Offices. Shortly thereafter subPostmasters began to find discrepancies appearing in their accounts (which they were required to balance at the end of each day in order to trade the following day). Eventually these discrepancies led to subPostmasters being prosecuted by the Post Office for false accounting and theft, some of them going to prison. If you would like to listen to accounts of how this happened, they are to be found on Radio 5 Live at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/b04tcfw6> , about 1 hour 10 minutes from the start, and on the Today Programme, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/b04tjdlq> , about 1 hour and 32 minutes from the start.

Growing concern was felt about the dependability of the Horizon system, and MPs approached the Post Office asking for a resolution of these concerns. Following an independent interim report by forensic accountants Second Sight the Post Office set up a Mediation Scheme to deal with those cases which have given rise to concern.

In recent months MPs have discovered that the Post Office was using the procedures of that Mediation Scheme to argue that most of the cases giving rise to concern should not, despite what was agreed with MPs, be permitted to go through mediation. This was done without the Post Office's telling MPs they were doing it. I therefore have written to the Post Office to say that I no longer have faith in the Post Office Board's commitment to a fair resolution of this issue.

If you felt able to take part in the Adjournment Debate, I and the other MPs who have been pursuing this matter would be most appreciative.

Yours ever,

James (Arbuthnot)