

Press Release: 27 August 2013

POST OFFICE ANNOUNCES INDEPENDENT MEDIATION SCHEME FOR SUBPOSTMASTERS

- **Introduction of scheme part of Post Office's commitments following findings of interim report into Horizon system**
- **Post Office committed to addressing concerns raised by subpostmasters by reviewing their cases**

The Post Office has today announced the introduction of an independent mediation scheme to address the concerns raised by some subpostmasters regarding cases which they feel require further resolution.

This follows the publication of the interim report into the Horizon system produced by Second Sight in July. The report stated that so far no evidence of system wide (systemic) problems with the Horizon software had been found. However, it noted that improvements could be made in the training and support processes provided to subpostmasters. In response to the report the Post Office has made a number of commitments, one of which is to create this independent mediation scheme for subpostmasters and the Post Office to investigate and try to resolve a subpostmaster's concerns.

The Post Office, JFSA (Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance), and Second Sight, the independent investigators, have formed a working group to collaboratively develop and monitor this scheme which is available to current and former subpostmasters from 27 August 2013.

Commenting on the launch of the Scheme, Angela van den Bogerd Post Office Head of Partnerships said: "The Post Office is committed to addressing any outstanding concerns among subpostmasters swiftly and transparently.

"As part of this commitment we set up an independent review which recently published an interim report which found that so far there was no evidence of any systemic issues with Horizon but did identify some further improvements we could make to our training and support arrangements, which we are taking forward.

"In addition, the independent mediation scheme we are announcing today will provide an effective way to assess and address any outstanding cases where subpostmasters feel they have been unfairly treated.

"Subpostmasters are the lifeblood of our business and we take their concerns extremely seriously. We hope the package of measures we are announcing will demonstrate our commitment to working closely with them to further improve our network."

Commenting on the announcement, James Arbuthnot MP, who is spearheading interest in the matter at Parliament, said: "I am very pleased indeed with the working group's proposed process. To my mind, it represents the very best chance all parties – individual subpostmasters and mistresses, and the Post Office have of ensuring the best outcome for everyone. It is fair, thorough, and independent."

Subpostmasters wishing to submit an application should visit www.jfsa.org.uk for further information.

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Notes to Editors:

The Post Office is responding to the Second Sight report with three new initiatives aimed at addressing concerns raised, improving future processes, and examining potential structural changes to support sub-postmasters:

In addition to establishing the independent mediation scheme, a working group has been created to build on the work started by Second Sight last year and to develop it into this mediation scheme.

A new Branch User Forum is also being established to provide a way for sub-postmasters and others to raise concerns and insights around business processes, training and support, directly feeding into the organisation's thinking at the highest level. A key task for this forum will be to review support processes and training to ensure they meet the standards expected of the Post Office.

The Horizon system has around 68,000 users and processes more than six million transactions every day. The total number of cases put forward by users to Second Sight as part of its external review was 47, less than 0.1 per cent of the total number of users of the Horizon system.

The mediation process will be open both to subpostmasters who raised concerns through the Second Sight review, and also any who feel they have a dispute with the Horizon system (or an associated issue) which requires resolution. The scheme will involve cases being independently investigated by Second Sight followed, where appropriate, by a face-to-face discussion between the Post Office and the subpostmaster chaired by a neutral mediator.

The scheme is being supervised by a working group comprising representatives from Post Office, JFSA, and Second Sight. Any subpostmaster wishing to take part in the scheme must submit an application through Second Sight which will review each case for eligibility.