

Agenda for meeting re Post Office cases

17.00, 25 March 2013

Room N, Portcullis House

17.00 Welcome – James Arbuthnot

17.05 Second Sight – Ian Henderson, Ron Warmington

Update on investigations – process followed, rationale for procedure, preliminary findings

17.35 MPs Q&A

18.00 Close

Note

Attending

MP's offices

James Arbuthnot

Kevin Barron

Jonathan Djanogly

George Freeman

Andrew George

David Jones

Oliver Letwin

Jonathan Lord

Andrew Tyrie

Mike Wood

John Woodcock

Second Sight – Ian Henderson, Ron Warmington

Alliance for Justice for SubPostmasters (JSFA) – Alan Bates, Kay Linnell

Shoosmiths solicitors – Tadge Channer, Rose Donoghue

1. James Arbuthnot welcome

- When issue arose last July, all hoped it would be concluded by Christmas. This clearly not the case.
- Meeting is update on progress
- Conducted under the Chatham House Rule – outcome must not be prejudiced, cases still live and issue extremely important
- Post Office role
 - investigations continue to be funded by the Post Office (PO)
 - Chairman, Alice Perkins, has been straightforward and open throughout

- Attached letter sets out the current Post Office position, which is that it has not been given the opportunity to offer any comment on investigations, which are in any case not concluded as yet
- We must not prejudice result
- Media – bad idea for any press releases to issue from the current meeting
 - Will be opportunity in future for media to be informed, but not yet
- Shoosmiths – kept the issue alive when there was little interest in it
- Alan Bates – from the Alliance, focal point for the population of SubPostmasters (SPM)
- Kay Linnell – forensic accountant, acting as second pair of eyes to Second Sight, on behalf of the Alliance
- Second Sight – seriously experienced investigators

2. **Second Sight briefing**

- 49 live cases being investigated: 29 come through MP's offices, 20 from the JSFA
- Each case
 - Investigators first seek file from the PO
 - can be up to 1500 documents per case
 - documents are indexed
 - SubPostmaster contacted and interviewed
 - Data combined with interview notes comprise the file
 - File goes to PO for verification
 - Conclusions reached
- Cases taking much longer than anticipated, as data is more complicated to compile and analyse than anticipated, and necessary agreement between PO and JSFA reached and published only in December 2012 – January 2013
- Cases still at evidence-gathering stage

- **Mike Wood MP**

- how many cases seem to indicate that there are Horizon glitches?
- how many cases have been put to the PO?

- **Second Sight**

- No cases put before the PO yet, as still at evidence-gathering stage
- No cases examined thus far appear to indicate theft
- Some cases from MP offices are too historically old to enable examination – can't go back more than 7 years and find meaningful data that would prove anything one way or another
- JSFA has presented very good, current cases, and particularly those which appear to have something to do with Horizon
- Investigators in continuing dialogue with PO

- Once a case reaches a point where all information and data has been assessed, then PO will receive the case file – this process is required by agreement between JSFA and PO, and is properly evidence-based
- **Kevin Barron MP**
 - How are relations with the PO?
- **Second Sight**
 - Everyone wants to reach conclusions swiftly – in no-one's interest to drag this out
 - Negotiated use of PO 'model office' so that investigators can replicate PO processes
 - Stories in many cases are largely identical, leading to common themes (NOT preliminary findings) that can be presented (see Second Sight briefing note)
 - Every document at the PO is potentially available to Second Sight
- **Alan Bates**
 - Worrying that PO modus operandi seems to be to move to prosecution first rather than investigate each case
 - Still many individuals who are genuinely frightened to return to work and highly sceptical of PO still – message from PO therefore is that it does not really care
- **Kay Linnell**
 - PO procedure should not be to sign off file for prosecution until cases have been investigated
 - False accounting charge is presented before individual can rebut it
- **Second Sight**
 - PO contract with SubPostmaster does state that the SPM is responsible for any losses, so some of the problem here is contractual
 - Current investigations are the best chance available to get to the bottom of the problem
- **James Arbuthnot MP**
 - There will be a process by which the funding for the investigations will end and where the PO can answer to the cases presented to it
 - MPs will eventually be able to see if a constituent has been disadvantaged
 - Chairman's letter – Ms Perkins has promised that the PO will respond to investigations
 - Have to support Second Sight's proposal to fast-track some cases and get a result
 - Looking towards summer for another meeting – is this feasible?
- **Second Sight**
 - Yes, but once again may only be an interim report
 - Have discussed funding with PO, and clear that PO wants to get this issue solved
 - Looking for glitches in Horizon very carefully
- **Mike Wood MP**

- Are we convinced that the response from the PO will not be 'minimal number of discovered glitches in Horizon doesn't tell us anything'?
- **Second Sight**
 - PO mantra 'nothing wrong with Horizon' therefore a single glitch found and proved will make the PO look at the system again
- **Kevin Barron MP**
 - If Horizon glitch proven, then surely this opens possibility of judicial appeal
- **Second Sight**
 - Each case assessed on own merits
 - Too dangerous to generalise about any
 - If evidence of glitches found, Second Sight presents this, and it is up to lawyers to decide what to do
- **James Arbuthnot MP**
 - Clear that if this is the result, then there will be lots of different cases to consider
 - Up to MPs to persuade PO not to dicker at the margins and confront what needs to be confronted
 - Look forward to a meeting in a few months' time
- **Meeting closed at 6pm**