

16 April 2013

Mr Alan Bates

GRO

Thank you for your letter of 1 April. Parliament has been in Recess and I have only just returned to Westminster, so have not had the opportunity to read your thoughts about the meeting last month.

I am very sorry indeed that you are clearly discontent with how the investigations are proceeding. In my discussions with both Second Sight and the Post Office, I understood that firm evidence of any failures inherent in Horizon is yet to be found in any case the investigators have thus far undertaken. In my last discussion with the Post Office, the Chairman made it very clear to me that no such evidence had been offered to her. Until it is, the Post Office has no reason to admit that systemic failures exist. I do not believe that the Post Office is being afforded any special or sensitive treatment; it is simply legally untenable that such an admission ought to be made until such evidence is produced.

I shall ask the investigators again if they have such evidence, but I would also be grateful if you might let me know what it is you believe has been found that can be regarded as such. I should then put this to Second Sight and ask for their opinion.

The explanation that Second Sight offered me as to why they offer only thematic conclusions to their investigations thus far rings true to me: the volume and complexity of background data relevant to every case is making analysis and investigation an extraordinarily time-consuming process. What I have suggested to the investigators is that they take the two cases which are most likely, in their opinion, to yield a result which does unearth the kind of systemic failures you claim, and pursue these first, giving MPs a result, perhaps even only a preliminary one, by Summer.

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I would point out that the Post Office is being helpful in continuing to fund these investigations, their initial budget already exceeded without demur. No matter what one's feelings toward it, this is a fact that ought to be acknowledged.

I agree with you that the result of every case is extremely important to every individual, and as an MP of one of these, I too am looking forward to the process we have undertaken to flow through to a result specific to her.

Finally, Janet tells me you called this morning about two matters. The first, that Second Sight be offered a copy of your letter to me, is absolutely fine. In fact, it would be extremely helpful to me to have their comments on what you say, and I am asking them for that. The second, regarding the request to extend the budget to allow Kay to continue her work is a matter you will need to discuss with the Post Office.

I hope this is all helpful, and thank you for letting me know your thoughts.