

Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP
House of Commons

March 2015

I am writing to you further to your question to the Prime Minister regarding the
1, 2 Post Office mediation scheme yesterday on Wednesday last week, and your
subsequent letter.

Firstly, I would like to reiterate that the mediation scheme is independent of Government, and decisions relating to the scheme or its operation are matters for the parties involved and not for the Government.

As you are aware, Post Office announced on 10 March that they would put forward for mediation all cases remaining in the scheme except those that have been subject to a previous court ruling. Post Office will consider cases which have been the subject of court rulings carefully on a case by case basis. More information is contained in the announcement and detailed scheme report from Post Office, which is available on the Post Office's website.

These changes do not equate to Post Office closing the scheme. Cases which remain in the scheme will progress to mediation as set out above, and more swiftly than under the previous situation where cases would be discussed by the Working Group before proceeding to mediation. Given that all parties involved have expressed concern at the length of time which has been taken to review cases, and you yourself have expressed concern that Post Office was reluctant to mediate all cases as their default position, these changes should be welcome in accelerating the process while ensuring that Post Office meet the commitments they have made to applicants.

As a result of Post Office's decision to mediate remaining cases, I understand that they have indeed given notice of termination of contract to Second Sight. However, I would disagree with the characterisation that they have been "sacked". Post Office remain committed to working with Second Sight through the remaining period of their contract, and have stated that they will seek to continue to make available to scheme applicants an independent review by Second Sight (where one has not already been provided), and provide funding accordingly. Furthermore, Post Office have also stated they will work with

Second Sight to support the completion of their further thematic report in order that it is available to inform the ongoing mediation process. I would add that all parties involved in the mediation scheme are bound by confidentiality

- 3 | agreements and these ~~would~~ include the requirement to appropriately store information and dispose of it when it is no longer needed (such as at the
- 4 | termination of a contract) or return it to the information owner. Post Office have confirmed repeatedly that they will not destroy documentation relating to the
- 5 | scheme, including information provided to (and returned by) Second Sight.

As to the assertion that this report and other data is being “supressed”, I would respond that Post Office has offered to take any MP with a constituent in the scheme through the details of each case, with the relevant applicant’s permission. I understand that very few MPs have taken up this offer from Post Office.

- 6 | Regarding the case of your constituent Ms Hamilton, I must again reiterate that details of individual cases in the scheme are confidential and the Government is not privy to the details of Ms Hamilton’s case. Post Office’s detailed scheme report states that it has made all appropriate documentation from its prosecution files available to Second Sight for their investigations. This information is, I understand, also available to each applicant in the scheme as part of the re-investigation by Post Office into their case. Post Office has not and should not provide legally privileged material – it is standard practice that such information is not shared with anyone else, even the Courts.

The Working Group, consisting of Post Office, JFSA and Second Sight, has been in existence for some 18 months now, with an independent Chair in Sir Anthony Hooper, and has been fully involved in developing the mediation scheme, overseeing its operation and making decisions on whether particular cases should progress to mediation. Regarding its closure, given that it no longer has a role in determining whether cases are suitable to go to mediation or not, there is no need for its continued operation.

As I know you are aware, details of the Working Group and its business are confidential to members of the Working Group. The Government is not privy to information about this. I am aware from the evidence provided in public to the BIS Select Committee that Second Sight have been working on a further thematic report. It is important to add that this report was not designed to be published, on grounds of confidentiality, but would instead be issued to the Working Group in due course and later available to applicants involved in

mediation. The details of when the report is due to issue, what it might contain, and when it might be discussed, were confidential to the Working Group. As I have said, Post Office have stated they will work with Second Sight to support the completion of this further report, so that it can be provided to applicants in the scheme and used to inform the ongoing mediation progress. The Government cannot compel its publication and nor would we do so given the confidential nature of details within it. Indeed, testimony at the BIS Select Committee hearing emphasised the very sensitive and personal nature of some of the issues that may or may not have caused the problems that applicants have raised through the scheme.

7, 8 To conclude, I am pleased~~note~~ that, through Second Sight's report and the
9 subsequent investigations, ~~we can remain confident~~ that there is no evidence
10 of system system-wide problems with Horizon. This conclusion has stood firm
through nearly two years of investigation. As such, the priority must be to
ensure that those applicants remaining in the scheme can have their cases
considered swiftly and fairly, and I am hopeful that all parties involved will
continue to work constructively to ensure this can happen.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and the Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee.

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Track Changes

1	Delete	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 01:10 PM</i>
2	Change	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 01:14 PM</i>
3	Delete	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 12:52 PM</i>
4	Insert	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 01:09 PM</i>
5	Insert	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 01:09 PM</i>
6	Insert	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 01:09 PM</i>
7	Change	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 12:54 PM</i>
8	Insert	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 12:54 PM</i>
9	Change	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 12:54 PM</i>
10	Change	<i>Thompson Laura (ShEx), 16/03/2015 12:54 PM</i>