

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: COMMERCIAL

**To:** Baroness Neville-Rolfe

**From:** Laura Thompson, Shareholder Executive GRO

**Date:** 17 July 2015

**Subject: Post Office Horizon: next steps**

**Purpose:** Next steps following your meeting on Wednesday with MPs (Andrew Bridgen and Kevan Jones) and Post Office to discuss the Horizon issue.

**Recommendation:** That you:

- A. Note that Post Office will write to Mr Bridgen and Mr Jones to reiterate the offer of a meeting and provide information relating to some of their concerns
- B. Agree that you would like to meet James Arbuthnot, as discussed in the meeting, and confirm whether you would like officials and/or Post Office to attend
- C. Decide whether you would like to write to Sir Anthony Hooper (former Court of Appeal judge), noting the points in paragraph 8
- D. Agree that you should write to the Prime Minister following your meeting with James Arbuthnot (and that officials will update Number 10 this week)

**Timing:**

**Background**

1. Andrew Bridgen MP (North West Leicestershire, Con) and Kevan Jones MP (North Durham, Lab) attended Wednesday's meeting, along with representatives from Post Office Limited, to discuss further the concerns raised by MPs in the adjournment debate of 29 June.
2. The MPs concerns were wide ranging, and in several cases were based on examples of unnamed individuals. However, their distrust of Post Office was clear and, despite the very frank discussion that took place, no side changed their position. This was not unexpected. The positive outcome of the meeting was that Mr Bridgen agreed to consult with his constituent about meeting Post Office to discuss the details of his case, which he has previously refused to do.

**Actions arising from the meeting**

3. Post Office agreed to write to both Mr Bridgen and Mr Jones to address some of the general points raised and to reiterate their offer to meet and discuss individual cases. As noted above, Mr Bridgen indicated he may accept the offer; Mr Jones was not minded to do so, but POL will offer anyway.
4. Post Office will also reiterate the offer of a meeting to the other MPs invited who did not attend the meeting (Ranil Jayawardena MP and Iain Wright MP).

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5. As you know, Mr Bridgen has emailed you to seek reassurance that Post Office will not destroy evidence. We are advising you respond robustly against this allegation, that Post Office have a legal duty of disclosure and furthermore have committed publicly they will not destroy documentation.
6. You agreed, at Mr Bridgen's suggestion, to meet former MP James Arbuthnot who originally raised this matter with Post Office. We recommend your office writes to Mr Arbuthnot to seek a meeting. You indicated you would like officials to be present; Post Office also said they would be happy to attend. On balance, we would recommend a short meeting between you and Mr Arbuthnot, accompanied by officials, to understand his views. **Do you agree?**
7. You indicated you would like to meet Sir Anthony Hooper, the former Court of Appeal judge who was appointed as the independent Chair of the working group which established the mediation scheme. The working group included Post Office, the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance (JFSA), and Second Sight (the forensic accountants). It was disbanded in March 2015 after all investigations by POL had been completed and POL had agreed to take all remaining non-criminal cases through to mediation, since previously the role of the working group had been to consider which cases merited mediation.
8. Sir Anthony has guarded his independence, and previously declined to meet with BIS Ministers as he felt it would be inappropriate given his role. He may therefore also do so again; or, given that the working group is now closed, he may agree to meet, but we expect he would steer clear of opining on the merits of any cases or party, and instead focus on how the working group functioned. If you would like to approach him for a meeting, we will be happy to provide a letter for you. **Would you like to write to Sir Anthony?**
9. Following your meeting with Mr Arbuthnot and, if appropriate, Sir Anthony, we recommend you should write to the Prime Minister, to set out your assessment of the situation and the Government's position, having "got to the bottom of the matter", to use his words. We strongly recommend that the Government comes to an agreed position, and ideally should communicate whether it will take any action. We advise that the priority should be to put this issue to bed – continued uncertainty and allegation does damage to Post Office's business and prevents those individuals with cases from reaching a resolution. We will provide further advice on this. In the meantime, we propose your office sends a short note of the meeting (and actions) to the Private Secretary at Number 10.

**Copied to:** Ministers' offices, SpAds, Permanent Secretary, Mark Russell, Anthony Odgers, ShEx Post Office team, Simon Creer, Claire French

**Advice received from:**

Finance	SpAds	Press	Legal	Analysts
No	No	No	No	No