



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Margot James MP

Department for Business, Energy &
Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

T **GRO**
E enquiries **GRO**
W www.gov.uk

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Thank you for your correspondence of 12 December 2017 to the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, on behalf of your constituent, Ms Eleanor Shaikh of **GRO** regarding the suspension of Farncombe village's sub-postmaster following a Post Office audit in October 2017. I am replying as this matter falls within my Ministerial portfolio.

The Government recognises the important role that the Post Office plays in Farncombe and in communities across the UK. This is why the Government committed in its manifesto to safeguard the Post Office network. Since 2010, the number of branches in the network has been at its most stable for decades due to the significant investment that has been made to maintain and protect it. This investment has delivered the refreshed customer environments, increased opening hours and the efficiency of operation which is needed to succeed in the competitive and changing markets in which the Post Office operates.

I should explain that the Government sets the parameters in which Post Office operates – including its geographic reach and the key services it offers – and then allows the Post Office to operate as an independent commercial organisation within those parameters. As such, we do not play a direct role in day-to-day responsibilities of the company, and this will include matters concerning the investigation and suspension of subpostmasters.

I understand that the Post Office wrote to you on 14 December 2017 regarding this matter and that they are working hard to resolve the pending issue with the local subpostmaster and to restore Postal services for the Farncombe community. The Post Office have also assured me that they are confident that their Horizon system is robust and reliable. It is used by over 11,600 branches for numerous services every day, and has been for a number of years. It is right that the Post Office should investigate these sorts of instances thoroughly given it is charged with overseeing substantial amounts of public and third party funds. Whilst investigations are continuing in to this case it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further at this stage.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

MARGOT JAMES MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Corporate Responsibility