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Department
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Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
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Dear Mr Jones,

Thank you for attending the meeting on 14 July to discuss the Post Office and your concerns around the Horizon IT system. I said that I would write to you to follow up on our discussions at that meeting.

As the Prime Minister said, this is certainly an important issue. The Government, as the sole shareholder of Post Office Limited, wants to make sure that the Post Office network is successful and sustainable across the country. We recognise that the Post Office is a commercial business and we allow it to operate as such, but of course, we expect it to behave fairly and responsibly in doing so.

You raised a number of points in our meeting that I wanted to ensure I followed up before writing to you. I thought you may be interested to know that I am meeting with James Arbuthnot next month. You also emphasised the importance of Second Sight's work.

I have also spoken to Post Office and I am confident that they take very seriously their responsibilities to subpostmasters, and that they are committed to ensuring those individuals who have raised concerns can have their cases heard. You will be aware that Post Office Limited have a new Chairman, Tim Parker, who will take up his role formally in October. I have asked Mr Parker to ensure that when he takes up his role he gives this matter his earliest attention. I hope his fresh pair of eyes will provide some further reassurance to you.

The most important point is to ensure that those individuals who feel they have a grievance can have their case heard. Where an individual has a criminal conviction, they should consider whether they wish to appeal that conviction, or they can raise their case with the Criminal Cases Review Commission. I understand that a number of individuals with prosecutions have done so.

Post Office remain committed to the mediation scheme, and have offered to mediate in all cases not involving a criminal conviction. As you are aware, mediation can be a useful way for opposed parties to come to a resolution, and individuals in the scheme are being offered the chance to do so with costs (including their own legal advice) being met by Post Office. They can also be reassured that mediations are conducted by an independent mediator from the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR) who ensure it is conducted in line with best practice. The Government hopes that all individuals who have been offered mediation will give this opportunity full consideration. Of course, if an individual chooses not to mediate or if mediation is unsuccessful then the individual still has the chance to pursue other legal routes for resolution of their case.

I would add that Members of Parliament have a role to play in supporting their constituents and helping them to understand the situation and their options. Post Office have offered to meet any MP to discuss the details of their individual constituents' cases, and the Government encourages MPs to take the Post Office up on that offer. A number of MPs have already done so and have found the meeting useful in increasing their understanding of the issues at hand.

I hope you will be reassured that the Government has given this matter serious consideration, and moreover, that there are independently assured processes in place to enable individuals to resolve their differences with Post Office or seek redress. I would like to thank you for your efforts in raising the concerns of your constituents and others who have raised concerns, and I hope that you will continue to help ensure they are able to find resolution.

I am writing in similar terms to Andrew Bridgen.

GRO

BARONESS NEVILLE-ROLFE DBE CMG