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## Post Office Horizon: Redress

### Volume 753: debated on Monday 9 September 2024

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 4.16pm

**The Secretary of State for Business and Trade** >

(Jonathan Reynolds)

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With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to update the House on the Government's response to the Horizon scandal. How appropriate it is to see you, a former Business and Trade Minister, in the Chair.

My priority as the new Secretary of State is to ensure that victims of the scandal receive the redress that they deserve. Over the past few weeks, I have begun meeting with some of the postmasters whose lives have been so badly damaged by those events. Their stories are harrowing, but their resilience and steadfastness in seeking justice are inspiring. I am also grateful for their candour in sharing insights on how the various compensation schemes can be improved.

May I make a personal point, Madam Deputy Speaker? I know I speak for hon. Members across the House when I say that it fills me with sadness to have to stand here today and address such a significant failure of the state. The role of Government must be to do right, seek justice and defend the oppressed, yet Governments have too often had to be forced into action by brave, tireless and resilient campaigning. Once again, I pay tribute to the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance, and to campaigners such as Jo Hamilton, Lee Castleton and Sir Alan Bates—incidentally, I add my personal congratulations to Sir Alan on his recent wedding. Without their tireless efforts, justice may well never have been done in this case. As we stand here today, in the shadow not just of this scandal but those of Grenfell, infected blood and several more, I know that it is the firm conviction of everyone in this House that we must do better. This is an issue not of politics but of justice.

In that spirit, I cannot speak of the new Government's work to address this wrong without again acknowledging and appreciating the work of Lord Arbuthnot and the new Lord Beamish—formerly the Member for North Durham—as well as that of my friend the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) as Minister. The announcements that we make today are built on their efforts to hasten redress payments and quash wrongful convictions.

Earlier in the summer, the new Government announced the launch of the Horizon conviction redress scheme. I am pleased to report that the first payments have been issued and good progress made on processing the claims received to date. As was the case for the group litigation order compensation scheme, the Department will be setting a target to make, within 40 working days, the first offer to 90% of those who have submitted a full claim. Additionally, the Post Office has now settled over 50% of cases on the overturned convictions scheme, with 57 out of 111 cases fully settled. The Department has also now received over 50% of GLO claims and settled over 200 of them.

Progress has also been made on implementing the £75,000 fixed-sum awards on the Horizon shortfall scheme. As of 30 August, over 1,350 claimants who had previously settled below the £75,000 threshold have been offered top-ups to bring them to that amount, and the Post Office will shortly begin making fixed-sum offers to new claimants. Those interventions will have a significant impact on ensuring that postmasters can access redress swiftly and simply. However, we recognise that this option will not suit everyone and does not address all the concerns raised by postmasters and their representatives. That is why we are taking further action today.

The Horizon compensation advisory board recommended last year that we introduce an independent appeals process for the Horizon shortfall scheme. Today I am pleased to announce that we have accepted that recommendation. That appeals process will enable claimants who have settled their claim under the HSS to have their case reassessed, with the benefit of any new information that they were not able to include in the original application. It will be delivered in-house by my Department, and we will apply the lessons learned from redress schemes to date to ensure that the process is easy for postmasters to engage with and that outcomes are delivered at pace. We will announce further details in the coming months.

There will be no obligation for postmasters to appeal their settlement, and no doubt many will be content that their claims have been resolved fairly. I know that financial redress will never fully compensate victims for their suffering, but we want to help bring some closure to postmasters as soon as we can, which is why we will establish the new appeals process as quickly as possible.

In summary, the new Government will do everything in our power to deliver justice for postmasters, to bring them closure and to ensure that such a national tragedy is never allowed to happen again. I commend this statement to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker** >

(Ms Nusrat Ghani)

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No doubt that statement will mean a lot to many constituents, including those in my constituency of Sussex Weald. I call the shadow Secretary of State.

 4.22pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** >

(Thirsk and Malton) (Con)

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I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement and for his kind words. I assure him that we will continue to work collaboratively to put the interests of postmasters first. I also associate myself with the congratulations offered by the Secretary of State to Sir Alan Bates and Lady Suzanne Bates, and the recognition of their contribution and that of others.

As the Opposition promised during the very first urgent question of this Parliament, Ministers know that they will receive our full support to deliver compensation swiftly and quash the convictions of those wronged by this terrible tragedy. In his statement, the Secretary of State has set out a new appeals process for those who have already settled their claim under the Horizon shortfall scheme. I welcome that step. I know that the Department is implementing the work of the Horizon compensation advisory board, which was instrumental during my time in office, and will no doubt be supporting the new Government.

However, I have some questions about the Secretary of State's statement. First, he confirmed that the appeals process will be open for claimants who have settled their claim under the HSS, but it is restricted to those who have new evidence to support their case. In the same breath, he recognised lessons learned from redress schemes to date, indicating that his Department is aware of the flaws in the scheme, which I also acknowledge. Crucially, will the appeals process also be available, as it should be, to all claimants, not just those with new information? Given the accepted flaws in the scheme, it would be wrong to leave individuals without the opportunity to appeal. If people choose the £75,000 top-up, will they be entitled to appeal? If so, there is a risk that for those wanting to go through the appeal process it will be a slower process because of the number of people seeking to appeal.

Secondly, the Secretary of State says that the appeals process will be up and running as soon as possible. Can he set out a specific timeline? Finally, on appeals, can he tell the House whether these individuals will be entitled to legal representation, as is the case in the GLO process?

Could I also ask the Secretary of State some questions about the broader compensation schemes? Some £289 million has been paid to over 2,800 claimants across four schemes. I was alarmed to find, however, that only six claims have been offered redress through the Horizon convictions redress scheme, and no full and final settlements have yet been made through that scheme. Can he explain those numbers?

I was also concerned to hear the Secretary of State say last week that only 130 letters have been written to postmasters who have had convictions quashed—I think there are 700 such postmasters—and that this was a matter for the Ministry of Justice, rather than his office. I am sure he realises that finger-pointing within Government will not wash with the people who have been through these

difficulties and this horrendous scandal, so I must therefore push him on what steps he has taken to mitigate the delays in sending out letters to those affected.

Finally, delay in all the schemes is at least partially the result of an adversarial process of lawyers arguing with lawyers. As a remedy, we were working very hard for Sir Gary Hickinbottom, scheme reviewer in the overturned convictions scheme, to be appointed across all three schemes to expedite claims. Can the Secretary of State confirm that that vital appointment has now been made?

### Jonathan Reynolds >

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I am grateful to the hon. Member for his response, and for the tone and collaboration that we tried to model when we were sitting in opposite places in this Chamber. I believe that helped advance what was a difficult piece of legislation to put on the statute book, particularly during a wash-up process, but was the only real vehicle for delivering what we all wanted to see. He has asked me a number of questions; all are absolutely reasonable, and I am happy to respond to them.

In a situation where someone has already received a top-up to £75,000, the hon. Member is right to say that the appeals scheme would not be available. It is a choice between the two best methods of redress and satisfaction for the postmaster. I recognise what the hon. Member has said—that, given the issues with the speed of delivering redress, having that system clogged up would not be satisfactory to anyone—but I think that both options represent reasonable ways forward for people who are in that position.

The hon. Member asked specifically about the remit of the appeals scheme, and I have listened to what he said. The reason we are announcing today that we will take this scheme forward, but will then consult with postmasters to make sure the eligibility criteria are correct—he asked about the timeline, which is just a matter of months—is to make sure that we do not have to revisit the scheme, and can all be satisfied that crucially, postmasters themselves have confidence in it. That is the intention, so I am grateful to the hon. Member for his comments about the remit of the scheme.

The hon. Member asked about legal representation. Yes, that is part of the scheme, again learning lessons from where we have been in the past. As he knows, most of the schemes have now been adjusted to reflect that, but I absolutely take his point about new announcements.

I want to be clear about the difficulty that has existed with the Horizon convictions redress scheme. To update the House, I will give the hon. Member the figures: so far, 180 letters have gone out from the Ministry of Justice. Including those letters and the people who have registered with the Government who perhaps have not all received a letter yet, there are now 276 claimants. I will make the appeal again: while we are doing everything we can with Ministry of Justice colleagues to make sure those letters go out, people can proactively register with the Government. To be frank, this has been a frustration. When the hon. Member and I were having our conversations when we sat in different places in the Chamber, neither of us perhaps knew the state of the database and the records, and—having passed the legislation—the frustrations we would face in getting to people. However, doing so is clearly integral to sorting this out.

Finally, the hon. Member asked about the scheme reviewer. If I may, I will come back to him on that; I will write to him to tell him the up-to-date situation.

In summary, I say again that we will work with all parties and all postmasters to get redress at pace, and to learn the lessons from where things have not gone well in the past, to make sure new announcements carry the confidence of the people who really need to have confidence in them.

### Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Ms Nusrat Ghani)

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Members should continue to bob if they want to be called. I am going to call everybody, as I know the Secretary of State also wants to respond to everybody. I call the previous Chair of the Business and Trade Committee.

### Liam Byrne >

(Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North) (Lab)

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I add my congratulations to Sir Alan Bates and Lady Suzanne on what looked like a very happy day.

I welcome what the Secretary of State has set out for the House this afternoon. When our Select Committee reported back in March, we said that trust in the Post Office was fundamentally broken and that the appeals scheme needed to be independent. This is an important step in that direction, but sub-postmasters have told me this morning that there is still a problem with the time it takes to get offers back when an offer is contested. The claimant's lawyers have a fixed amount of time to put in a claim; when that claim is contested, it is taking far too long for Addleshaws, in particular, to come back and provide a second offer. What comfort can sub-postmasters take from the Secretary of State's announcement today? This whole House agrees that justice delayed is justice denied.

### Jonathan Reynolds >

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I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who will, I hope, see his work as Chair of the Select Committee reflected in this announcement—specifically, that we are setting the target to issue initial offers to 90% of claims within 40 working days of receiving a full claim. On the point of how that is defined, a full claim is one where, following legal assessment, it is deemed that it does not require any further evidence to assess the claim further. Once that is in, the targets, which his Select Committee rightly called for to make sure redress is delivered at speed, are part of this process.

### Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Ms Nusrat Ghani)

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I call the Liberal Democrats spokesperson.

### Tim Farron >

(Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)

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I thank the Secretary of State for sight of the statement and, indeed, for his decision to come to the House at this early stage to update us on progress.

I think it is worth saying that we are dealing with a catastrophic injustice that has affected hundreds upon hundreds of families—people who have paid with their livelihoods and, in some cases, tragically, with their lives. There is a complete lack of trust in Government, of whatever political colour, over the last 20 or so years because of this. That is why his answer to the questions raised already about the number of sub-postmasters who have been paid interim payments—only six, on the last data available, under the Horizon convictions redress scheme—is such a key issue. Likewise, as we have heard, the latest data show that fewer than one in six wrongly accused sub-postmasters have received letters confirming the quashing of their convictions.

Given this lack of trust—this mistrust—in Governments of whatever kind and in the Post Office management as a whole, would the Secretary of State also turn his thoughts to rebuilding trust in the Post Office management and in the network in the long term? In the eyes of the public, the brand of the post office is solid, but in the eyes of those who work in the industry and those who may come in as sub-postmasters, it is far less so. We were delighted in my constituency recently to see the reopening of post offices in Shap and Kirby Stephen. It was wonderful to see those two reopenings, but in Grasmere, Hawkshead and Stavely we are without post offices. In all three of those cases, it is in part because the former sub-postmaster, while not always directly affected by the Horizon scandal, but with disgust at the Post Office management, has left the industry and left those villages without a post office.

What can the Secretary of State say to this House and to the current cadre of sub-postmasters, and those who may want to join that cadre, to encourage them? Will he focus on pastoral care, financial support and other things that will bring about a package of inducements and enticements, so that those people who have felt let down so badly by Post Office Ltd management over the last 20 years will feel that the Post Office is something they can commit their lives to for the good of our communities and country as a whole?

### Jonathan Reynolds >

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I am grateful to the hon. Member for that question. Specifically on the figures for the Horizon convictions redress scheme, he is right to say that there are only six claims where interim payments have been made so far, but I can assure him that I would expect that to rise rapidly following the announcement we have made, and I will keep the House informed as to all of that. I agree when he says that redress of this scandal has to link to the future of the Post Office itself. I think he is absolutely right. I mentioned in oral questions last week that I will appear before the inquiry. It is about not just an assurance on the lessons that will be learnt from the inquiry, but how that will affect decisions going forward.

Like the hon. Member, I have seen the post office network change a lot in my constituency. I was at the new banking hub in Stalybridge on Friday. I think the public support for the brand and for the people on the frontline is very strong, but the business model, as it stands, is not fit for purpose. Postmasters deliver essential services, but they do not make enough money from those essential services. I think too much of the money they make goes into the centre and does not return to the frontline in a way that is a viable business model for all of our constituencies. The issue of how the Post Office functions as an organisation has to be tied not just culturally to the reforms and redress we are all seeking to deliver, but to the business model.

**Kate Osborne** >

(Jarrow and Gateshead East) (Lab)

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I welcome today's statement on the appeals process, and thank Ministers for their engagement with me on this issue and in advance of the meetings we will have later this week. Horizon victims are understandably wary of Post Office involvement in the compensation schemes, so can the Secretary of State confirm that the appeals process he has announced today will be completely independent of the Post Office? As well as pushing for Horizon victims finally to get full compensation, what work is the Department undertaking to ensure that people are held to account for their roles in this scandal?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >[Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for her question and recognise her contribution on this issue over many years. She is right to say that the appeals process I am announcing today will be run in-house by the Department for Business and Trade. Obviously, information will need to be provided by the Post Office, but an in-house scheme will be delivered. On redress, we are all following Sir Wyn Williams's inquiry closely. We will need that to conclude and essential information will come out of it. After that, there will need to be a way to ensure that those findings, whatever they may be, are honoured in full and that we learn from them. In a number of cases, there is a need to hold people to account for their actions throughout the scandal.

**Liz Saville Roberts** >

(Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)

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Dewi Lewis of Penrhyndeudraeth is a former sub-postmaster who endured four months of imprisonment and had to wear a tag for another four months for a crime he never committed. He has not wanted me to raise his case in the Chamber before, because he said that to have his hopes raised and then dashed would destroy him: two weeks ago, he got a letter, I am glad to say, to say that his convictions were quashed. But the damage that has been done to the reputation of the Post Office in rural Wales is now so immense that people are no longer prepared to work in post offices. I welcome that the Secretary of State says that he believes the business model is no longer fit for purpose, but how can we be sure that we will have strategic planning to serve those communities that were once served so well by people like Dewi Lewis?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >[Share](#)

I recognise very much what the right hon. Member is saying. I have had personal friends who were directly affected by this issue. Even though I was their MP as well as their friend, they did not feel able to tell me about it because they were so concerned about the impact on their reputation—they could not even tell a friend who was a Member of Parliament, even though the issue was clearly affecting their lives very significantly. I am sure that, like me, she has had situations where there is one provider of postal services in a relatively rural area—I represent Greater Manchester as it gets out towards rural Derbyshire—and people want the service to

continue, but for various business reasons the provider is moving on. It is sometimes hard to find someone willing to take that business on, not just because of the scandal, but because of the business model. I assure her that the work we are already doing is about the future and recognising that, and making sure we have people in charge who recognise that that has to change. It is going to be a substantial piece of work for me and the Minister, but it is essential. We could not just provide redress for this scandal, without looking to the future and making sure we get this right.

**Grahame Morris** >

(Easington) (Lab)

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I thank the Secretary of State for this statement. I also have constituents who are affected and I am grateful for the information about the appeals system. What steps are Ministers in the Department taking to secure the future of the Post Office network, and to reassure people who are considering becoming postmasters that they will not face the same unacceptable culture pervading Post Office senior management that was highlighted by the Business and Trade Select Committee, and that led to the Horizon scandal happening in the first place?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >[Share](#)

As I have said in previous answers, we have to understand that that scepticism and concern is valid. The scale of this scandal is so large that people will challenge their Members of Parliament on how they feel about what they may be asked to do, and the risk that that poses to what is still an essential business and provider of services to all our constituents. That is key. I seek to reassure them by recognising the steps and commitment that we have to address, but also the future of a business model that delivers the kind of remuneration and operates in a way that recognises the scale of the failure in the past. If I was a postmaster, I would welcome those words, but I would want to see action. That is the only way we will be able to do that.

**Mims Davies** >

(East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con)

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I welcome the update to the House today. We saw through the ITV series that Lord Arbuthnot, like many, was an exemplary constituency MP and something for us to all aspire to. Many campaigned for so long in this place to recognise this scandal. I congratulate Sir Alan Bates and Lady Bates on their nuptials. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that full engagement is being undertaken with the MOJ, that the learnings are being understood and that those expecting their convictions to be quashed will hear imminently, as all our constituents will want to see justice?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >[Share](#)

I very much echo the hon. Lady's point that, if there is one bit where our political system operated well in this, it is the constituency link and the classic Member of Parliament's surgery, although the story as a whole is clearly unsatisfactory. I recognise her words on Lord Arbuthnot and the cross-party campaign that came about. The Ministry of Justice issue is paramount and frustrating. The state of the records has delayed the process, and that is a real frustration, but she will understand that, following so much failure, if a case emerged where a letter was sent out incorrectly after all that people have been through, that would clearly be outrageous. Given I am now accountable for the scheme, I absolutely cannot have that. I could talk about some of the things we have inherited, but I do not think that is particularly helpful. I will simply give the hon. Lady the assurance that she rightly seeks: this issue is of maximum importance and we are working at pace with Ministry of Justice colleagues and the devolved authorities in relation to justice systems around the United Kingdom.

**Clive Efford** >

(Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab)

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I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. I heard what he had to say about the involvement of the Post Office in the appeals process, but may I press him a little further? Given the mistrust in the Post Office that has built up over many years, even though the Post Office may only be providing information to the Department, is his Department satisfied with how the Post Office is providing that information? Have there been any occasions where the Secretary of State has had to challenge the Post Office? That is the degree to which people mistrust the Post Office in this process, and that has been the case for many years.

**Jonathan Reynolds** >

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I think my hon. Friend will have heard in my earlier answers that we have chosen to deliver this scheme in-house in the Department for Business and Trade, reflecting the concerns he is reasonably expressing. To command people's confidence, they want to see the schemes not only set up, but delivering. That is why the updates to the House on how we are progressing under each scheme are so important, and I commit to doing them regularly.

**Gregory Stafford** >

(Farnham and Bordon) (Con)

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I associate myself with the comments made on Lord Arbutnot, who is a predecessor but one for part of my constituency. The Secretary of State has spoken about the letters quashing convictions, but does he not understand how important it is that those waiting for the letters get them swiftly? Will the Lord Chancellor come to the House to give us an update on the progress being made with those letters?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >

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The hon. Gentleman will have heard my answers. He would surely agree that to get things wrong with these cases would be a terrible problem. Some of the errors and the problems that have been caused have been a frustration, but I want to assure him. I think it is better, in matters relating to this scandal, that it is the Department for Business and Trade, given the interests of Members, that provides the updates on these matters. However, I can assure him that work is proceeding at pace, and people can proactively register their credentials to ensure that there is no delay if they are in a position where they know they are one of the wronged parties.

**Natasha Irons** >

(Croydon East) (Lab)

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I thank the Secretary of State for the update today. My constituent Mahesh, who visited me at our surgery on Friday, told us that he had been assured that his conviction would be overturned—he was wrongfully convicted under the Horizon scandal—but he is frustrated by the length of time it has taken for it to be quashed. It is preventing him from moving on with his life. Can the Secretary of State update us on what work is going on to speed up the process to quash these convictions, so that people like Mahesh in my constituency can move on with their lives?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >

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I very much recognise the conversation that my hon. Friend has had with her constituent, and her need and desire to progress that claim. The issue is about ensuring that the records are accurate. Cross-referencing between Ministry of Justice databases and court documents is proceeding apace. If her constituent has not yet had a letter and needs to register their credentials, they can do so, but I assure my hon. Friend that this is of maximum priority.

**Graham Leadbitter** >

(Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP)

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I thank the Secretary of State for the statement. It is welcome that the appeals process has been set out. I pay tribute to my SNP colleague and former MP, Marion Fellows, who, as many Members will know, put considerable effort into the issue. She has provided me with wise counsel on it. How satisfied is the Secretary of State with take-up so far—there is obviously some helpful detail in the statement—and what awareness campaigns are planned? There may still be people out there who are not aware that they can claim compensation. It is important that as many methods as possible are used to get to them.

There have recently been complaints, even from legal experts, that the application form for redress is overly complex, and that even experts would struggle to fill it in. Can the Secretary of State look to simplify it, obviously without our getting away from the key points, and bearing in mind the data that need to be collected?

Finally, I associate myself with the comments made about the wider impact. It is only a week since the Grenfell report's publication, and mention was made during the previous statement about the covid contracts. These issues go right to the heart of trust in the Government, which is a really important point to address.

**Jonathan Reynolds** >[Share](#)

I echo the hon. Gentleman's comments about Marion Fellows and her contribution to the scheme. He asks how satisfied I am. I will not be satisfied until everyone has had redress; it is as straightforward as that. There was a group of about 2,417 claimants under the Horizon shortfall scheme, but following the television drama, a whole range of people who were not aware that they were eligible came forward, which was incredibly positive. I think that over 1,500 people came forward. Indeed, Members may still be finding people who are coming forward because of the awareness that raised. We should be thankful for the power of the arts to get a message out to people. Given the situation, none of us can be satisfied until we can be sure that we have got redress to everyone. That is what this Parliament collectively has to commit to.

**Markus Campbell-Savours** >

(Penrith and Solway) (Lab)

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Will the Secretary of State outline what the Government are doing to investigate the predecessor Capture system?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >[Share](#)

Members may know that Capture was the precursor to the Horizon software. It is of concern to us, and we are investigating. The forensic accountants appointed to look into the issue are due to report fairly soon, and as soon as we have their findings, we will be able to update the House on steps that may be necessary.

**Jim Shannon** >

(Strangford) (DUP)

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I thank the Secretary of State very much for the statement, and for the clear commitment to closure for all those affected. He said that the role of Government is to do right, to seek justice and to defend the oppressed. I say amen to that; that is exactly the Government's role. It is past time that our handling of the scheme came to an end, but that can happen only when every affected postmaster and postmistress has been restored reputationally and financially, and when lessons have been learned to ensure that our reliance on computers is never again the vehicle of persecution. Will the Secretary of State assure me and the House that that has been done, and is in place right now?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >[Share](#)

I thought that the hon. Member might recognise the words from Isaiah that I used in the statement. The failure that goes to the heart of what we are talking about today is not just about the reliance on computer systems over the testimony of people on the frontline; it is also about the culture of organisations and how government operates. We will definitely turn a page on all of that, but there are Members in the Chamber who, like me, have been here not just for infected blood and the Grenfell statement last week, but for Hillsborough and Bloody Sunday.

We must reflect on what has been a very difficult set of findings. I think that we can commit to making sure that we learn the lessons from them, and take them forward. That is the challenge for all of us who believe that we are here to do good, and to do as I said in the statement. There is more to do on that, but we can move in the right direction, and that is certainly what I and my Government Ministers will do.

**Ms Polly Billington >**

(East Thanet) (Lab)

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As my right hon. Friend will be aware, sub-postmasters such as my constituent have experienced an enormous amount of devastation without even having been convicted—30 years of reputation absolutely destroyed. Although he has had some compensation, he still does not know whether he has had the right amount of money, and whether he is paying the right amount of tax, and he still does not have an admission of responsibility and failings from the Post Office. How much of that will be dealt with by this redress scheme?

**Jonathan Reynolds >**

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I understand the situation, and the need to have different redress schemes to correct specific problems. I understand the constituent's sentiments, as described by my hon. Friend. I would like to make sure that we are doing everything we can to provide the answers in every case. If she writes to me about that case, I will look into it personally and advise her, so that she can advise her constituent to make sure that, as far as possible, we give the right advice.

**Rupert Lowe >**

(Great Yarmouth) (Reform)

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I am delighted to hear from the Secretary of State that progress is being made. Recompense, apology and all the things that should go with that cannot come too soon. This House needs to remember that but for the tenacity and the persistence of Sir Alan Bates, this issue may never have come to light. This is an issue of the state versus the individual. Given the loss of confidence in the state, it is essential that the House reassures individuals that the state will not bully them. That means a full investigation, and people who brought arguably malicious prosecutions must be brought to book. I would like his reassurance that that will happen.

**Jonathan Reynolds >**

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I very much agree. This is a major scandal, and we must ensure that the wider lessons and the wider lack of trust, which he correctly mentioned, are addressed in our response. That is fundamental. I have said many times that we might never have discovered the scale of this injustice were it not for the campaigners. That is shocking, and we must all reflect very deeply on that.

**Blair McDougall >**

(East Renfrewshire) (Lab)

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I thank the Secretary of State for his comments, and for his recognition that the issue is about more than redress; it is about the restoration of trust. It has cast a long shadow in constituencies across the country. In my constituency, after years of sub-postmasters desperately trying to keep post offices open in the face of programmes of closures, we now face a challenge to get

people to go into them. What is his message to those people, and those wondering whether the culture has changed? What lessons are the new Government drawing, across the public sector, to ensure candour, and to make sure that the culture that we saw in the Post Office is not replicated anywhere else?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >

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I recognise very much what my hon. Friend says. As I said in my earlier answers, there is an absolute need to not just provide redress but learn lessons for the future of the Post Office and all institutions of the state. Crucially, we must ensure that a business model is in place that rewards postmasters with a decent return for providing an essential service, in an organisation that supports their frontline activities and gives them the income and the prosperity that they deserve for that.

**Robin Swann** >

(South Antrim) (UUP)

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The Secretary of State knows that 26 postmasters in Northern Ireland were wrongly convicted. I thank him for his work with the Northern Ireland Executive to bring forward the necessary legislative process. I seek his reassurance that the redress scheme will be equally open to Northern Ireland postmasters who were wrongly convicted because of a UK-wide issue. Will the redress scheme apply to them as well?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >

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People are aware that it is fairly challenging to have a situation in which justice is devolved across the United Kingdom. At times that has very much affected the debate in this House. I believe that what the hon. Gentleman says is the case, but I will write to him about the Northern Irish situation to give him the information that he needs.

**Jim Allister** >

(North Antrim) (TUV)

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I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement and look forward to things proceeding to the necessary conclusion. Redress is about righting wrongs, but there was more than one wrongdoer—there was also Fujitsu. Last week, the Prime Minister told us that firms that had fallen short in relation to Grenfell would be removed from Government contracts. Bearing in mind Fujitsu's actions and that there was at least one suicide, will it be treated in the same way? Will there be redress against its unlawful actions as well?

**Jonathan Reynolds** >

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I agree with the hon. Member. That is a crucial and important question. I welcome Fujitsu acknowledging its moral responsibility in relation to these matters. I understand that it is participating fully with the Sir Wyn Williams inquiry. We will need that inquiry to conclude. We should not pre-empt that in any way and take any decisions before that process has been gone through properly, given that we all support it. Accountability will flow from the inquiry. It will be an important step and it will affect many, many organisations that have been part of this story. Fujitsu will clearly be one of them.

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