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Meeting with Postmasters in the GLO: Alan Bates, Ana Carter, Jenny O'Dell, Kamal Sandhu, Graham Ward, Ishfuk Chohan

Date: 07/12/2022

Time and venue: House of Commons (tbc), 11-11.30am

Private Secretary: Catherine Angus

Objective/s of the discussion

- Reassure the group that the Government continues to regard compensation for those in the GLO as a high priority and is working hard to ensure it is delivered quickly.
- [For the department] – seek feedback from the group ahead of the announcement of further funding by demonstrating sympathy for their suffering.

Point/s for Minister to raise

- I want us to get compensation out to your members as soon as possible. I know you and other Postmasters want us to get on with this as soon as possible.
- Later today I will be announcing the launch of the scheme. Following our informal consultation with GLO members in the summer we have incorporated their views in the design of the scheme. Minister Hollinrake has also consulted with senior Parliamentarians including Lord Arbuthnot and Kevan Jones MP.

Line/s to take (if required)

- **Independent Governance:** Later today I will be announcing an independent advisory board to keep me informed of progress on the scheme and advising me of any blockages in resolving issues.
- **Reasonable legal fees:** I know you are keen for reasonable legal fees to be resolved as quickly as possible; later today I will be announcing next steps on this.
- **[If asked] Bankrupt postmasters:** Officials are negotiating with Insolvency Practitioners with the aim of postmasters receiving as much of their interim payment as possible.

Background

- Bates founded and chairs the JFSA, and led their 555 postmasters (advised by Freeths LLP) in the Group Litigation Order against the Post Office. The group received a settlement of £42.75m plus legal costs. However, after paying their funder's fees, the postmasters only received c.£10.5m between them.
- Government subsequently announced in March 2022 that it would make further funding available for such compensation. In June, the Government announced interim compensation of £19.5m would be paid to the group. To date £16.1m has been paid.

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- Interim payments have been made to 421 of the 484 eligible postmasters. Of the remaining 63, eight have not yet provided enough information. The remainder relate to complex cases, notably bankrupt or recently-deceased claimants. Unless we resolve these before paying, postmasters might not get the maximum benefit of both the interim payment and the final compensation. Following a previous public complaint, Alan Bates now seems to accept that we are doing the right thing here.
- Officials have been meeting Bates and Freeths weekly to discuss delivery, including making interim payments.
- The JFSA has submitted a complaint of maladministration against BEIS & HMG to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman for failing to regulate and oversee POL during the period in which the Horizon scandal took place. This has not been progressed recently.

Biographies

Alan Bates, Leader and Founder of the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance (JFSA) and lead litigant in the Group Litigation Order (GLO)

Alan Bates is a former subpostmaster. He subsequently formed the JFSA campaign group in 2009 with the aim of exposing the failures of the Post Office and its computer system, Horizon.

In 2018, 555 subpostmasters, led by Bates, took the Post Office to court in a Group Litigation Action and won, paving the way for other subpostmasters to claim compensation and have their Horizon-related convictions quashed.

Jenny O'Dell, Member of the Group Litigation Order (GLO)

Jenny has lived in the village of Great Staughton, Cambridgeshire, for 50 years, where she operated her Post Office branch.

The branch was forced to close after her account began to show a shortfall of more than £9,600 in 2009.

Graham Ward, Member of the Group Litigation Order (GLO)

Graham ran the Rivenhall Post Office from 2002-2008 and the Feering Post Office from 2005-2008. He says he was forced to sell his shop, which was also his home, and the false claims also led to his marriage of 13 years breaking down.

Ana Carter, Member of the Group Litigation Order (GLO)

Ishfuk Chohan, Member of the Group Litigation Order (GLO)

Kamal Sandhu, Member of the Group Litigation Order (GLO)

Briefing coordinator – James Lovesey

Lead SCS – Carl Creswell

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