

From: The Rt. Hon. James Arbuthnot, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

7 March 2013

Alice Perkins
Chairman
Post Office Ltd
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Dear Alice

As you know, I am hosting a meeting on Monday 25 March at 5pm, in Room N at Portcullis House here at Westminster, about the SubPostmaster / mistress issue. The meeting is to take the form of an update from Ron Warmington and Ian Henderson of Second Sight on how their investigations are proceeding. I wonder if you might be free to attend, along with any of those of your colleagues you deem it is appropriate to invite? I have invited all MPs who have constituents who have raised this matter with them, Alan Bates, who heads the Alliance for Justice for SubPostmasters, and Kay Linnell, who is working with him. I do not propose inviting media.

Initially I thought that having representatives along from the Post Office might compromise the appearance of complete independence that MPs are looking for from the Second Sight investigations, but Ron and Ian have persuaded me that it is essential that the Post Office is represented, I would very much like you to be there.

They tell me that investigations are proceeding well, and that your ongoing support and willingness to continue funding their efforts is enormously appreciated. I am writing to MPs this week letting them know this, so that they are not under any illusion of your commitment to this process. It is very important that they see this, and I shall do my utmost to bring it to their attention.

2...

I would like to raise two matters here, and these are things that may need a conversation between you and me, either in person or by phone if that is easier, before the meeting. In my discussions with Ron and Ian, I gather that questions have been raised over the absolute integrity of Horizon, though without their being so fundamental as to say that the system is not fit for purpose. Since it is a system that remains in current use, there is the risk that existing SubPostmasters and mistresses may find themselves in exactly the same position as those whose cases are being investigated. I know that definitive results are not yet available, but I hope the Post Office would be ready to address this issue.

As I mentioned earlier, I am not inviting media to this meeting. Nevertheless, it would be expecting too much of MPs, if they were told that there were questions marks over Horizon, to demand that they keep their constituents in ignorance of a potentially promising outcome. It would damage the process we are all committed to if the Post Office were not well prepared with a ready solution to this problem, among others, that could be offered publicly in this meeting.

Finally, you know as well as I that MPs will want to voice strong defence of their constituents at this meeting. I will circulate a proposed agenda the week prior to the meeting, and chair the event, and would hope that this will keep things on track, but I would like to warn of the possibility that there will be very robust questioning of the Post Office by MPs on behalf of their constituents. I for my part will want to stress the points raised in the final paragraph of this letter.

I am more than happy to take this up with you before the meeting, and in fact it might be best if we could have a word. I am away during the week 11 March, but a meeting or phone call the next week might be a very good idea. My office knows your office may seek this, and will arrange.

I would like to say in conclusion that I am impressed beyond my expectations with not only how the investigations are proceeding, but of your continuing support. I cannot recall a more important campaign, nor one where the end result has been so consistently supported by all parties involved. You have my gratitude and admiration for how the Post Office is handling this.

Yours ever
GRO