

Horizon Compensation Advisory Board
Secretariat: Department for Business and Trade
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

The Rt Hon Alex Chalk KC MP,
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
By email

14 December 2023

Dear Lord Chancellor,

Post Office Convictions

I am writing as Chair of the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board, on behalf of myself and colleagues: The Rt Hon Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom, The Rt Hon Kevan Jones MP, and Professor Richard Moorhead.

- Over 900 postmasters were prosecuted during the Horizon scandal. *There could not have been such a massive outbreak of criminality* amongst people who were, and remain, as a group of citizens, careful, law-abiding and trustworthy individuals.
- These convictions were the most egregious effect of the Horizon scandal: *until they are overturned we cannot put the scandal behind us*. Many victims remain traumatised and ostracised by their communities.
- The convictions are unsafe not only because they relied on the Horizon computer evidence, but also because of egregious systemic *Post Office behaviour* in interviews and pursuing prosecutions, vividly demonstrated in evidence to the Williams Inquiry. This led to *guilty pleas and false confessions*, driven by legal advice to victims to minimise sentences, and by the *psychological pressure* of dealing with an institution systematically disregarding the truth and fairness.
- Individuals can apply to the CCRC and Courts to have convictions overturned – but only 93 of the 900 have done so successfully. So *the current approach is not working*. This is because:
 - Over two decades, much of the *evidence has been lost* or destroyed by the Post Office.
 - Individuals' *unwillingness to appeal* given their understandable deep distrust of authority.
 - The Court of Appeal rules impose limitations on the *Post Office's ability to concede* cases.
 - The unreliability of evidence about *other Post Office-related systems* (and DWP payments), which has still not been adequately examined, and may never be.
 - In cases where Post Office concludes that a retrial would not be in the *public interest*, the conviction is overturned but the postmaster is *denied full compensation* and left with an implication of continued guilt.

For these reasons we believe the only viable approach is to *overturn all 900+ Post Office-driven convictions from the Horizon period*. A small minority of these people were doubtless genuinely guilty of something. However, we believe it would be worth acquitting a few guilty people (who have already been punished) in order to *deliver justice to the majority* – which would not otherwise happen.

I attach a detailed paper on some of the systemic inadequacies with the prosecution and appeals systems. We are developing a separate paper on the psychology and abuse issues.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hodges

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Chair, Horizon Compensation Advisory Board
cc Kevin Hollinrake MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Enterprise and Markets