



Postmaster Guide to Policies

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this guide

Post Office is committed to working with, and supporting, postmasters. Post Office has policies in place that set out principles for our Post Office teams to follow. This guide has been written to share information about those principles, and how they are linked by the policies.

The policies detail how Post Office teams will support postmasters and their teams in running Post Office branches. They ensure that all of our people understand the importance of following policy principles when dealing with postmasters and their teams.

The policies have the objective of ensuring that we are treating postmasters and their staff fairly, transparently and professionally.

This guide is a non-contractual document provided for information. It does not form part of the contract between any postmaster and Post Office.

What areas do the policies cover?

Setting branches up for success

- Postmaster Onboarding
- Postmaster Training

We're listening...

- Postmaster Complaint Handling

Branch monitoring, cash and stock management and account support

- Network Monitoring and Audit Support
- Network Cash and Stock Management
- Network Transaction Correction
- Postmaster Account Support
- Postmaster Accounting Dispute Resolution

Our agreement with postmasters

- Postmaster Contract Performance
- Postmaster Contract Suspension
- Postmaster Contract Termination
- Postmaster Termination Decision Review

If we could do better...

If we are not getting it right, or a member of the Post Office team is not behaving in the right way, we want to know. We offer several channels to voice concerns, including a "We're listening" feature on Branch Hub, Area Managers and the Branch Support Centre. We'll take any complaint raised with us seriously.

2. Setting branches up for success

The Onboarding and Training teams will use these policies to help support branches during the early days of each postmaster appointment with a view to ensuring that branches have the best possible start. They'll reinforce and embed Post Office training, giving branch staff the knowledge they need to run a successful Post Office branch.

Principles set out in each policy

The Postmaster Onboarding Policy

The Postmaster Onboarding Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

Managing postmaster applications
Supporting new postmasters before and after branch opening

We're committed to working with postmasters in good faith and in a transparent and collaborative way to build a trusting relationship.

- We aim to ensure postmasters (and their directors/partners, as applicable) are satisfied with the on-boarding experience by keeping them informed and updated throughout all steps of the process.
- We'll provide early days support, via a dedicated Onboarding Support Manager.

The Postmaster Training Policy

The Postmaster Training Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

Organising onboarding operational training
Offering other operational training
Providing guides and work aids

We're committed to providing operational training and making sure branch teams feel confident when they conduct Post Office transactions and processes using Horizon.

- We'll ensure that onboarding training for branch staff is only considered to be complete if the postmaster, Business Support Manager and Area Manager all agree on this.
- We'll offer a variety of training opportunities, for example via e-Learning modules, in branch and/or face to face classroom sessions. We will also provide additional support in the form of operational guides and work aids, including via Branch Hub, Horizon On-line help and we will provide a Postmaster Operational Training Catalogue for ongoing training and support needs.
- We'll monitor and review any regulatory changes to products and services so we can provide regular up to date training to branch staff.
- We'll evaluate training feedback received from Postmasters and take any action that may be required to improve the training we provide.

3. We're listening...

If things go wrong, we really do want to hear about it. The Complaint Handling policy is used across Post Office teams that could receive and handle complaints.

Principles set out in this policy

Postmaster Complaint Handling Policy

The Postmaster Complaint Handling Policy sets our principles for these processes:

Providing channels for branch staff to use for raising complaints
Receiving and investigating complaints
Reaching resolution
Informing the branch of the outcome
Updating branches on key issues

We offer several channels for branch staff to voice concerns, including a "We're listening" feature on Branch Hub, Area Managers and the Branch Support Centre.

If we receive a complaint:

- we'll review the complaint and respond within 24 hours;
- we'll handle complaints using a fair process;
- we'll keep the person who raised the complaint updated on our progress in relation to investigating the complaint;
- we'll seek agreement before we close any complaints;
- on a monthly basis, we'll share issues that concern branches, explain how quickly we've been able to resolve them and what we are doing if they haven't been resolved; and
- our front-line teams, such as Area Managers or the Branch Support Centre, will triage any written or verbal complaints to identify any concerns that should be treated as whistleblowing and passed onto the Whistleblowing team;

Whistleblowing concerns can be raised anonymously, but we encourage the person raising the concern to provide their details. If we can't contact them to obtain additional information, due to there being insufficient details within the report, it can limit the effectiveness of any investigation and we won't be able to give them feedback on the outcome.

The Postmaster Support Guide sets out how postmasters and their teams can raise issues and concerns. In the first instance contact the relevant Area Manager or Grapevine on **GRO**. If this doesn't answer the concern, anyone can raise issues directly with the whistleblowing team via the e-mail

[whistleblowing](#)

GRO

4. Branch monitoring, cash and stock management and account support

Several teams, including Network Monitoring and Audit Support; Postmaster Account Support; Branch Support and Cash and Stock Management, ensure that any support branches need to manage cash and stock, or help with accounting practices and discrepancies, is available.

Collective principles

In relation to branch monitoring, cash and stock management and account support:

- we want branch staff to run branches without experiencing unforeseen issues, but if we discover an issue, we'll aim to let branches know about it;
- if branch staff discover an issue, we'll address it after they tell us about it;
- we'll offer support to branch staff, and work with them to resolve the issue and help them to avoid it happening again;
- if the issue isn't easily fixed, we may carry out an investigation to understand the root cause of the issue and come to a resolution; and
- we'll encourage questions and feedback about our support.

Principles set out in each policy

Network Cash and Stock Management Policy

The Network Cash and Stock Management Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

Forecasting and planning cash supplies
Receiving stock orders and requests to change cash levels
Offering emergency order options
Supporting branch staff with cash remittance and stock discrepancies
Dealing with disputed cash and stock remittances and transaction corrections

Postmasters have agreed to provide products and services on behalf of Post Office, and for clients of Post Office, under the agreement we have with them. The cash and stock used to carry out transactions is owned and funded by Post Office, unless the branch is one of a small number of branches which are self-funded.

It's important that branches have enough cash and stock to trade, but that they don't have excess cash and stock that will make accounting more complicated and increase security risk.

When we assist in managing cash and stock:

- through forecasting, we'll aim to ensure that each branch has enough cash, coin and foreign currency (where applicable) to trade and we'll aim to avoid situations where branches hold too much cash or stock;
- we'll provide free cash and stock deliveries and collections on scheduled days;
- we'll aim to get special stamps, such as First Day Covers and Christmas stamps, to branches in plenty of time;
- we'll give branches a method to place emergency orders;
- if we find a discrepancy in a cash or stock remittance that branches have sent us, we'll let branches know and support branches with the next steps; and
- when a branch lets us know about a discrepancy in a cash or stock remittance that we have sent, we'll follow a process to investigate.

Postmaster Transaction Correction Policy

The Postmaster Transaction Correction Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

**Issuing Transaction Corrections and Transaction Acknowledgements
Providing information and supporting evidence to the branch
Investigating disputed transaction corrections**

Following Post Office guidelines on branch accounting processes should help branches reduce the need for transaction corrections to be issued. However, sometimes branches will receive a transaction correction or transaction acknowledgement.

When we issue a transaction correction:

- it will have been identified by a discrepancy in the reconciliation we do between files received from our third-party clients and the data recorded in branch on Horizon, or from us being notified about a mis-keyed entry on Horizon;
- we'll send the branch an explanation of the reason for the transaction correction and make it clear that branch staff can contact us for further support e.g. by answering further questions; and
- branches can dispute the transaction correction, in which case we'll investigate it and aim to resolve a dispute within 10 days, keeping the branch updated if it takes longer.

We'll arrange for a transaction acknowledgement to be sent each morning for the transactions carried out during the previous day on the lottery terminal or Paystation¹, so cash and stock will be correctly adjusted on Horizon.

¹ For Paystation a transaction acknowledgement will only be sent on the following day if the Batch Control Summary has been produced by the cut off time, otherwise it will be sent on the subsequent day.

Network Monitoring and Audit Support Policy

The Network Monitoring and Audit Support Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

**Monitoring the network
Scheduling supportive visits and audits
Carrying out an audit
Involving the Contracts team
Performing closure audits
Performing post Security Incident audits
Assuring quality**

We carry out network monitoring and audit support activity to maintain the accuracy of branch's accounting records of cash and stock. We also monitor branches' compliance with accounting practices as it helps us to identify issues early and makes investigating the root cause of any issues easier.

In order to support branches:

- we'll monitor branch activity, particularly in relation to accounting of cash and stock, so we can identify branches who are experiencing issues and identify any potential concerns about accounting practices in a branch;
- if any potential issues are identified, we'll contact the branch to arrange support to help staff to maintain accurate records of cash and stock through branch accounting;
- on an occasion where we can't resolve an issue remotely, audit support will visit a branch to carry out a full count of cash and stock, supporting the branch staff throughout the process;
- if a branch is closing, we'll support the branch by preparing the staff for a closure audit; and
- we'll aim to keep branches fully engaged with any audit support provided and invite questions and give feedback.

Postmaster Account Support

The Postmaster Account Support Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

**Understanding contractual obligations
Monitoring accounts
Notifying about discrepancies in the centralised holding account
Supporting branches with discrepancy disputes
Arranging payments
Managing refusals to pay**

A centralised holding account holds details of: (i) any branch discrepancies that have been moved into it by selecting the "Review or Dispute" option on Horizon at the end of a trading period; (ii) transaction corrections that have been moved into it by selecting the "Review or Dispute" option; and (iii) any payments made to the Post Office.

When a branch moves a discrepancy into the centralised holding account at the end of a trading period:

- we'll aim to contact the branch by telephone, where we can, and follow up with a letter and account statement to see if we can help the branch understand the reason for the discrepancy;
- if the branch needs support to find the reason for any discrepancy, the Branch Support Centre will help to investigate it in the first instance – for transaction corrections, the issuing team can help to explain the reason for it;
- after a branch has contacted the Branch Support Centre, or the transaction correction issuing team and if, between us, we can't agree on the reason for the discrepancy or transaction correction, the branch can dispute it and request an investigation;
- if the branch understands and accepts the discrepancy, or transaction correction, knowing it's an error caused by the branch team, and the postmaster is contractually responsible for it, we'll help the postmaster to make payment arrangements; and
- if the discrepancy is a credit, we'll give the postmaster the choice to either have it paid back to the postmaster, as soon as reasonably possible, or wait to see if a corresponding debit is issued to the postmaster's account.

Postmaster Accounting Dispute Resolution

The Postmaster Accounting Dispute Resolution Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

Helping branches to find the reason for a discrepancy or transaction correction
Managing discrepancy and transaction correction disputes
Investigating the dispute
Escalating the dispute
Reaching a resolution to the dispute
Informing branches of the outcome

When branch discrepancies occur or transaction corrections are issued that the branch does not understand the reason for, the branch can report this to us, and we'll provide support. We'll work with the branch staff to find the reason for the discrepancy or provide the branch with evidence about why the transaction correction was issued. If, between us, we can't agree on the reason, the branch can raise a dispute and we'll investigate.

When a branch asks us for help with a discrepancy or transaction correction:

- we'll start by pointing the branch to the Branch Support Centre or the contact details listed on the transaction correction, if different. They'll talk through basic steps to explain the transaction correction or help the branch staff find the discrepancy;
- if there is no resolution of the matter at this point, it will be escalated to a Tier 2 team who can carry out more detailed investigation. We'll aim to reach a resolution within 2 weeks and keep the branch informed on progress;

- in the event that a branch discrepancy or transaction correction matter could not be resolved by the Tier 2 team, the issue will be escalated to a Tier 3 team for resolution; and
- when the dispute is resolved, we'll let the branch staff know the outcome and explain why we reached the conclusion we did.

5. Our agreement with the postmaster

The Contracts Team and Area Managers will use these policies to ensure that postmasters are treated fairly and professionally in relation to the agreements held with us.

Collective principles

During any investigation related to contractual performance, a postmaster (or person in charge, or the postmaster's directors or partners, as relevant) can:

- contact a Contract Advisor, by emailing [contractsteam](#) **GRO**
- request information and evidence from us about any contract performance issues identified and the investigation process;
- contact the National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP) representative for support; and
- at the postmaster's own expense, arrange legal or other representation for written correspondence or meetings with us.

If we have to carry out an investigation:

- it will be fair and unbiased and will provide the postmaster (or representative) with the opportunity to give us all relevant information;
- we'll complete any investigations as soon as we reasonably can, act on any information the postmaster (or representative) gives us and keep them updated;
- we'll share with the postmaster (or representative) the supporting records and information where possible;
- if a meeting is required, we'll be flexible, within reason, in relation to availability of the postmaster (or representative); and
- we'll always make the contractual basis, of any formal action taken, clear.

Principles set out in each policy

The Postmaster Contract Performance Policy

The Postmaster Contract Performance Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

**Defining contractual performance issues
Carrying out the investigation
Documenting the rationale behind a decision
Considering alternative contractual action
Applying monitoring periods**

Where reasonably possible, we will resolve any performance issues by supporting branches and working with branches and the relevant Area Manager.

The Postmaster Contract Suspension Policy

The Postmaster Contract Suspension Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

**Carrying out the investigation
Documenting the rationale behind a decision
Considering alternatives to suspension
Informing postmasters of the decision
Paying fees during suspension
Arranging a temporary operator during the suspension period**

In certain circumstances it will be necessary to suspend a postmaster's contract. If a postmaster's contract is suspended:

- we are suspending the contract in order to investigate the cause of a potential contractual breach issue and we are not implying there has been any breach of contract nor predetermining any outcome of the investigation;
- we will have carried out a preliminary investigation to establish relevant facts, in doing so liaising as appropriate with the postmaster (or its directors or partners if the postmaster is a company or partnership) or the person in charge, before making the decision to suspend;
- we'll inform the postmaster (or its directors or partners if the postmaster is a company or partnership) of the suspension by telephone and follow up by a letter;
- the postmaster will continue to receive fees (based on the previous six-month trading period, excluding Christmas trading);
- we'll offer to arrange a temporary operator to continue trading on the premises during the period of suspension, but will not do so without the postmaster's express agreement; and
- we'll keep the suspension period as short as reasonably possible and a dedicated Contract Advisor will keep the postmaster updated throughout the suspension period.

The Postmaster Contract Termination Policy

The Postmaster Contract Termination Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

**Understanding our termination rights
Carrying out the investigation
Documenting the rationale behind a decision
Checking that we've fulfilled our contractual obligations
Considering alternatives to termination
Applying notice periods
Informing postmasters of the decision**

There may be circumstances when termination of a postmaster's contract needs to be

considered and a decision to terminate made.

We'll consider the relevant facts before making any decision to terminate a contract.

We'll notify the postmaster and include the reason for the termination. If the postmaster disagrees with it, a request to have the decision reviewed can be submitted.

The Postmaster Termination Decision Review Policy

The Postmaster Termination Decision Review Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

Notifying postmasters of the right to have a termination decision reviewed
Carrying out the review and investigation
Documenting the rationale behind a decision
Choosing the right decision option
Informing postmasters of the decision

If a postmaster, or its directors or partners, believes we've failed in our obligations in relation to termination, the postmaster can ask for the decision we've made to be reviewed.

If we are asked to review a decision:

- we'll make sure there are suitable channels for the postmaster to let us know if a review of the decision is required and these will be detailed in the termination correspondence;
- we'll assign the review to a Review Panel, within 2 working days. The members of the Review Panel will have no prior knowledge of the circumstances which led up to the review being requested;
- we'll make sure the decision review request is fully understood and investigated, so we can establish whether we had the right to terminate the contract; and
- the Review Panel will make their decision and inform the postmaster what it is and the reason for it.