

Post office: Compensation Payments for Postmasters with Overturned criminal convictions

I have received the enclosed update from Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Labour Markets about compensation Payments for Postmasters with Overturned criminal convictions.

Dear Colleagues,

I know members across the House are aware of the longstanding Horizon issues whereby postmasters were prosecuted and convicted on the basis of Horizon evidence that we now know to be unreliable. On 23 April 2021, the Court of Appeal handed down a landmark judgment which quashed the convictions of 39 postmasters. To date 72 postmasters have now had their historical convictions quashed.

I have been clear in Parliament that Government wants to see postmasters who were prosecuted and convicted on the basis of Horizon evidence fairly compensated as quickly as possible. I wrote to you in July 2021 to inform you that Government would be providing funding support to Post Office to make interim payments of up to £100,000 to eligible postmasters who have their convictions quashed. These payments are intended to provide postmasters with some financial relief in advance of full and final settlements being reached with them by Post Office.

As of 29 November, the Post Office has received 66 applications for interim payments. Of these, 62 offers have been made and 50 accepted and payments made. Payments made to date have all been for the maximum interim amount of £100,000.

I am also pleased to inform you of the steps Government is taking to facilitate the settlement of claims and the payment of compensation to the postmasters whose criminal convictions were based on Horizon data and have been quashed.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in his capacity as sole shareholder in the Post Office, has agreed to make funding available to provide Post Office with the necessary resources to enable it to reach full and final settlements of compensation claims in a timely manner.

We are now working with Post Office to finalise the arrangements that will enable the final settlement negotiations to begin as soon as possible. The final settlement of claims for compensation is for Post Office and individual postmasters or their representatives to agree. It will involve claims being evidenced and quantified so that fair payments can be made providing postmasters with the compensation that they deserve.

My department continues to engage regularly with Post Office regarding its settlement of compensation claims. I am committed to seeing these longstanding Horizon issues resolved, learning what went wrong through the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry, and ensuring something like this cannot happen again.

I have today notified the House of this decision in a Written Ministerial Statement, which you will find attached.

Yours ever,

PAUL SCULLY MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Labour Markets

Minister for London

Conservative principles

The government needs to reconsider its policies as we move away from emergency measures to handle the pandemic.

We need a growth policy based on cutting tax rates and backing individuals and small businesses as they innovate, serve customers and expand.

We need a levelling up policy based on making it easier for people to follow their personal journeys through better education and training, scope to work for yourself or build a business, the opportunity and freedom to turn your interests and hobbies into ways of sustaining your life

We need an ownership policy encouraging and helping more people to own their own home, to build their own business, to become shareholders in the company they work for, to accumulate savings for a rainy day and for their retirement.

We need a public sector policy to deliver great education, health and social care, with choice for the users, free at the point of need.

We need a strong policy for the UK as an important influence for the good in the world, protecting our borders, helping our allies and being proud of our country.

We need to defend everyone's right to democratic debate and challenge to government, preventing those who would stifle our national conversation by self serving wokery.

My Written Question asking the Minister for Vaccines and Public Health about the monthly cost of Test and Trace

The Department of Health and Social Care has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (56360):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the costs are of NHS Test and Trace each month. (56360)

Tabled on: 15 October 2021

Answer:

Maggie Throup (Minister for Vaccines and Public Health):

The costs for NHS Test and Trace vary each month according to the prevalence of COVID-19. The budget for NHS Test and Trace activities in 2021/22 is £15 billion. On average this equates to approximately £1.25 billion per month.

Why were there shouts of Resign to the Health Secretary?

I sat through the Health Secretary's latest statement in disappointed silence. I have heard a few Ministerial statements over the years that have bombed with the Ministers own side as this did, but do not recollect cries of Resign before from the government benches. Sajid Javed needs to ask himself why and start improving the way he does the job.

I guess the impatience with the Secretary of State reflects pent up anger about the way Ministers are constantly telling us the NHS cannot cope despite £64 bn more being spent on health this year than two years ago. Ministers are unable to answer basic questions about plans to recruit more, to increase beds, to improve air filtration in health settings, to improve infection control, and to find new treatments.

The PM and the Treasury both want the Health Secretary to get a grip on staffing budgets. They want him to turn the extra gold for the NHS into

extra capacity and lower waiting lists. They want the NHS through a combination of vaccines, better treatments and extra capacity to show it can handle a realistic volume of covid disease going forward.

I did not ask another question as so many of my questions recently have not produced informative answers. My advice to Secretary of State is simple. Go through all the main issues with the CEO of NHS England so you can tell us how the money is being spent, how you will increase capacity, how you will improve infection control, how you will expand the range of covid treatments, how you will bring down the waiting list and then come back to the Commons with a plan to get better results. If the CEO cannot supply you with decent answers you need to consider how this can be brought about.

The public regard you as responsible. The CEO is your chosen person to run the NHS under your supervision, so make sure you know what is happening and are able to defend it.

Questions to the advisers over the pandemic

The Chief Executive of the NHS was rarely present at the news conferences to present the actions being taken to handle the pandemic. That was a pity, as many of the most important matters were for those running the NHS. One of the main aims of the policy generally was to avoid placing too much strain on NHS capacity. We needed to know how staff were going to be protected and helped to tackle this big challenge. We needed to know how all the extra money and resource was going to be deployed, how the hospitals would cope and how the virus would gradually be brought under control.

The scientific and medical advisers usually present have a close working relationship with the NHS senior administrators. They did not however see fit to give us presentations about work on finding drugs that could abate symptoms or avert serious developments in a covid patient. They did not comment much on why the NHS put in substantial extra bed capacity for the pandemic, used it little and then closed it all down again before the pandemic was over. They did not comment on the underuse made of the private hospitals whose capacity the NHS bought up for the first year of the disease.

They were reluctant to be tempted to discuss improving infection control. We did not get regular reports on how they were changing and improving air extraction, UV filtration and better air management though they told us it was an airborne disease. They decided against creating isolation hospitals that just handled covid, living with cross infection dangers in all DG hospitals. They allowed early discharge of elderly patients to care homes in the first weeks of the pandemic which may have increased the wave of infection that visited those homes.

On the whole the news conferences stuck to a routine of presenting figures for cases, hospital admissions and deaths, and forecasts of grim news to come, followed by announcements and comments on various lockdown policies being followed. They did not do a good job bringing out the need for strong action on treatments, infection control and improving NHS capacity. They told us little about how the senior management of the NHS were using their staff and facilities, how they were managing the covid workload or how they were ensuring fairness and safety for their medical employees facing the pandemic dangers.