

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