



House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

..... Jan 2024

Dear

Re: Mr Bates Vs The Post Office

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP), a professional not-for-profit trade association representing post office operators, responsible for approximately 8,500 post office branches throughout the UK.

The reason for this letter is regarding the televised ITV drama; Mr Bates Vs The Post Office.

The NFSP has long been calling for a different governance approach for the Post Office. Currently, the Government are part of the Post Office Board and as such are involved in strategy, policy and decision making. This was also the case during the period covering the Group Litigation Order (GLO).

Questions are rightly being asked such as; *How was the strategy for the GLO set, Who made the decision of how much PO were going to appeal, and how much Post Office was prepared to spend to defend their position?* When PO strategy was defeated in 2019, did the Government ensure those responsible for the decisions were removed from their posts?

There needs to be an urgent change in attitude by the Government, as both owner and operator of PO, in how it governs Post Office Ltd and how it acknowledges subpostmasters, as investors in the network.

In 2003, Betty Williams, the MP for Alan Bates, received a response from the then Postal Affairs Minister when trying to raise issues with the Horizon system. The response explained the Government's position as *"Post Office Ltd, which operates as a separate company within Royal Mail Group, is responsible for contracts with Sub-Postmasters. A Sub-Postmasters contract is a commercial arrangement between the individual Sub-Postmasters and Post office Ltd.....The Government's role in post office matters is confined to broad issues of general policy and overall financial control."*

This raises the question that if the Minister had taken a different, active position, could this whole scandal have been avoided?

This approach continues to the present day. When highlighting issues and concerns to MPs, Ministers and DBT. The NFSP are constantly informed that the Post Office is an "arm's length business". This was the same reason given previously when hundreds of colleagues were being falsely prosecuted via the Horizon scandal.

As postmasters, we are working together to prevent the possible collective loss of our investment and livelihood, and trying to avert future scandals, but how can we do that when, as Paul Marshall QC states *"When politicians run for the hills and disclaim responsibility for the Post Office, a wholly-owned creature of government, the problem becomes almost insuperable. If you can't look to Parliament, what can you do?"*

Governance of the PO has to change radically. The use of the phrase 'PO is an arm's length business of government' has enabled scandal after scandal, destroying the lives of many, and destroying PO as a trusted brand. This position also recently allowed PO executive bonuses to be linked to the Horizon Public Inquiry.

There has to be questions asked as to why there is a distinct lack of scrutiny from the Government.

As investors in the business, there is an insufficient ability for our voices to influence decisions that impact the security or return on our investment. There is an insufficient ability to raise our concerns. Governance of the Post Office has to change radically and urgently.

Yours sincerely,