



Baroness Newlove of Warrington

Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

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Blair McDougall MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Business and Trade

Sent by email: DBTcorrespondence@businesstrade.gov.uk.

3 October 2025

Dear Mr McDougall

VICTIMS OF THE POST OFFICE SCANDAL

As Victims Commissioner, my statutory role is to advise the government on the treatment of victims of crime. In that capacity, I have been invited by the police to join the Platinum Board of "Operation Olympus", which is the police investigation into the Horizon Scandal, which has affected so many former sub-postmasters.

The police asked me to offer to meet with victims of the scandal (who are now regarded by the police as victims of crime) to listen to their concerns about the ongoing police investigation. I agreed to this request as I am committed to ensuring that all victims of crime have their voices heard.

I have now hosted five engagement sessions and have had the privilege to meet approximately 80-90 victims. I have listened to their accounts of how they have been treated and the impact the scandal has had on them and their families over a prolonged period of time. It will come as no surprise when I say their stories have been shocking, and in some cases, quite distressing. Their testimonies highlighted the long-term emotional and financial toll not only on those directly affected, but also the ripple effects on their loved ones.

Many of the victims I have spoken to continue to suffer ongoing trauma and distress. The impact of the false allegations, prosecutions, pursuit of assets and miscarriages of justice are likely to have a lifelong and lasting impact.

My own research into the treatment of victims of crime highlights the importance of society clearly acknowledging that a wrong has been done to them. This is all the more so with victims who have been the subject of false allegations and in some cases, wrongful convictions. Many have suffered alienation from their local communities and some report not being believed even by friends and family. It is important that at every opportunity, we acknowledge innocent people have been egregiously wronged by a state institution.

Although I was asked by the police to reach out to victims, very little of the feedback from the victims related to the police investigation. Most of the focus of the meetings was on the actions of the Post Office and the ongoing plethora of compensation schemes.

My officials have fed back to the police. They have also met with one of your officials and with two solicitors who have been working with victims in submitting claims.

Through my conversations, I have identified an extensive list of key issues that require urgent attention from the DBT. Before I share these, it goes without saying that the range of different compensation schemes in place is unfortunate and adds a further layer of complexity. It is also disappointing to learn that one of the schemes is being administered by the Post Office.

Communication:

One of the overriding issues raised by victims is the time in which it is taking to pursue justice and process claims. I understand both the complexities and the sheer scale of these tasks. My observation is that there needs to be clear and consistent communication with those affected. Your official referred to a platform victims can access but in all of my meetings to date, neither I nor my officials recall any of the attendees referring to this platform.

It might be helpful to have a continuous campaign to promote victim awareness of any sources of up-to-date information. One letter or email to victims will not suffice. It might also be helpful if the DBT and the police could meet to discuss having a joint platform so that victims can receive all their updates from a single source.

I appreciate that there will be times when there is nothing new to report. I hear this all the time from criminal justice agencies. For a victim who is anxious and distressed, long periods of silence can be debilitating. It is better to regularly feedback even if only to say that you have no new developments.

Compensation:

At every meeting, a constant theme from victims that the compensation process, far from offering catharsis, was seen to be as bad as or even worse an experience than the initial investigation, prosecution and injustice itself. Hearing this from victims, time and again, shocked me and I have tried to identify the reasons behind this.

The process, from the perspective of victims, is perceived to be adversarial. Victims talked about the stress of meeting deadlines, and given many are suffering trauma, this is no surprise. They referred to the Post Office and the DBT extending their own deadlines for issuing responses and how distressing this was. (I understand from your official that the DBT records show them meeting the 40-day deadline in 90% of cases, but it is not clear whether this has been the case from the outset). Victims build themselves up to receiving an offer, only to be told there would be further delay.

A frequent complaint was that the initial offer was insultingly low, causing both offence and distress. From the victim perspective, a low offer can be seen as an attempt to diminish their pain and suffering. When raising this with the solicitors, they too said there was a pattern of low initial offers. I recognise this is a frequently used tactic in insurance claims and commercial negotiations, but I feel it is not appropriate when dealing with traumatised victims. As a tactic, it should be avoided at all costs. It might be better to come back with a request for more information, rather than make an offer that is guaranteed to offend the victim.

Process:

Another cause of angst is the constant request for receipts and documents dating back over 20 years. Victims rightly feel this is not reasonable. In some cases, they say the documents they are being asked to provide were in the possession of the Post Office, having been seized during the original investigation. Victims feel they are coming under pressure to produce documents, and yet the Post Office is often found wanting in its retention of documentation.

When speaking to your official and solicitors, I sense DBT is often inclined to give the benefit of the doubt when historic documents cannot be found. Under the circumstances, this must be right thing to do. It would be helpful if this could be conveyed to the victims.

The solicitors have raised concern about the policy in making interim payments. An offer is made, it is rejected by the victim, knowing that any fresh offer cannot be below the existing offer. Whilst the dispute continues, the victim requests an interim payment and is only allowed 80% of the existing offer. I understand this is a tactic to encourage resolution and this is standard practice. Under the circumstances, I feel this tactic is inappropriate and I ask that it be reviewed.

I welcome that victims are able to access free legal advice to help them make a claim. This was not available for some of the earlier applicants, who might have been disadvantaged as a result. Is it possible these early cases can be reviewed to ensure everyone has been treated fairly and equally.

Duress:

At one of my meetings, an attendee raised concern that victims still employed by the Post Office were being placed under pressure by some managers not to make a claim. I do not know the extent to which this is happening. Can steps be taken to ensure this is not the case.

Family Impact:

Many victims share with me the impact of the scandal, not just on them, but also their families. Some of the most painful accounts related to the impact this had on children growing up at the time. Victims have said that they believe the compensation scheme should recognise the suffering of close family members. I understand the DBT is considering this and I would welcome any information you may have on your proposals to address this.

Mental Health Support:

I understand awards will include money to pay for mental health support if there is medical evidence to show this is required. Access to much needed mental health support is inconsistent, often depending on where the victim lives. Mental health support shouldn't feel like a postcode lottery, and we need to do more to ensure it is available to any victim who needs it. We were also told by victims that mental health workers lacked an understanding of the background of the Post Office scandal, leaving the victim having to try and explain. Clearly, this can be retraumatising. I suggest we provide a generic background brief designed mental health professionals, setting out what happened and how victims have been affected.

Redress should not just be financial. For example, we have been told of a victim who has lost his position as a magistrate because of false allegations made by the Post Office. He is keen to reapply. How can we help victims in these circumstances to rebuild their lives?

Equally, there are others who still cannot get credit because of the Post Office action. Again, this also needs to be addressed.

Accountability:

Understandably, accountability is a big factor for victims. Some told me they felt there has never been an admission of culpability, or an apology offered by the Post Office. Your official has advised there has been a scheme where victims can meet senior managers in the Post Office who will offer an apology. Have we understood this correctly and if so, how has this been advertised or communicated to victims?

Victims are concerned that Fujitsu continues to be allowed to work with the UK Government in some capacity despite serious questions about the company's integrity. Is this an issue the government is looking to address?

I understand that the DBT is working with Restorative Justice (RJ) charities to make an RJ offer to victims. I know from my work with victims that RJ can help some victims to recover and therefore I very much welcome this. I also know it is not for everyone. It is important victims are not placed under any pressure to participate in an RJ exercise.

Victims also raised the issue of whether action will be taken against directors of the Post Office at the time of the scandal to prevent them from taking up company directorships. Victims recognise some directors may not be criminally liable, but they feel very strongly that they were negligent in carrying out their responsibilities.

Conclusion:

I am sorry this is such a lengthy letter, but I hope it reflects most of the comments raised with me over the five online meetings. I intend to ask the MPS to share this letter with the attendees so that they can see I have followed up and voiced their concerns. It would be helpful to have a reply that can also be shared with them.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to your response and to working together to ensure justice and support for all victims of this scandal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Helen", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right and then curves back under the signature.

Baroness Newlove LLD (hc) DCL
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales