



Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Paula Vennells

2 June 2020

Dear Paula,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I am writing in my capacity as the new BEIS Committee Chair, having taken over from Rachel Reeves on 5 May. The Committee's evidence session on 24 March on the Post Office and Horizon was postponed due to the Covid-19 lockdown. However, the Committee is keen to hear from the witnesses who were scheduled to appear and I would therefore be grateful if you could answer the following questions:

- You have said that it remains a source of great regret to you how sub-postmasters and postal workers caught up in the Horizon case were affected over so many years.
 - Can you explain what the source of your regret is and, if you are sorry, what you are sorry for?
- Do you accept that there were significant errors with Horizon and that the lack of a suspense account for sub-postmasters to park significant shortfalls for subsequent investigations within the system was a mistake?
- How would you answer those sub-postmasters and postal workers who said that the Post Office Investigation Branch was more interested in asset recovery than finding the source of errors in Horizon and that they felt they were treated as if they were guilty until proved innocent?
- Did the Post Office Ltd Board review the approach and attitude of Post Office investigators at any point during your tenure as CEO? If so, how many times and what was the outcome?
- Were you comfortable as Post Office Ltd CEO that your organisation was prosecuting sub-postmasters without recourse to the Crown Prosecution Service?
- What checks were in place to make sure prosecutions were based on sound evidence?
- Did Post Office Ltd track the impact that investigations and prosecutions were having on individual sub-postmasters and postal staff? What duty of care was exercised?
- During your time as CEO, was Post Office Ltd logging Horizon errors reported across the network and if so how many were logged and what actions were taken as a result?
- There were 550 claimants involved in Bates v Post Office Ltd and we were told by witnesses that many more did not take part for fear of the possible consequences.
 - How many cases were you aware of when you were CEO and did the number of cases raise alarm bells with you and your board?

- The Judge in Bates v Post Office Ltd said that Post Office Ltd had operated with a “culture of secrecy and excessive confidentiality generally with the Post Office, but particularly focused on Horizon”.
 - Did you as Post Office CEO oversee a culture of “secrecy and excessive confidentiality”?
 - Was Post Office Ltd, as the Judge stated, fearful of what it might find if it looked too closely at Horizon?
- Second Sight told us that Post Office Ltd obstructed their access to legal files to review cases as part of the Complaint Review and Mediation Scheme.
 - Did you as Post Office Ltd CEO actively stop files and information being released to Second Sight when requested?
 - Why were they refused access to files?
- Do you regret that following Bates v Post Office Ltd that Post Office Ltd had not been fully transparent and open?
- Second Sight also told us that they suspected that money paid in by sub-postmasters to cover shortfalls in Horizon may have ended up in Post Office Ltd central suspense accounts and ultimately its profit and loss account.
 - Did Post Office Ltd, as they contend, frustrate them in investigating this possibility and did you as CEO look into this?
 - Do you think this could have been a possibility?
- In 2015 you asked internally whether sub-postmasters’ transactions could be accessed and altered centrally without their knowledge. You were told that this was not possible.
 - Do you think with the benefit of hindsight that you might have been badly advised?
 - Were you provided with subsequent information that changed your understanding?
 - How do you explain the revelation during Bates v Post Office Ltd that local branch transactions could indeed be accessed and altered centrally?
- Why did you scrap the Complaints Review and Mediation Scheme and do you now regret scrapping it?
- How regularly did the Post Office Ltd Board discuss Horizon and what role did UK Government Investments play in these discussions?
- Lord Callanan has stated that on Horizon, Post Office Ltd “clearly misled” BEIS officials, while the Minister has told this Committee that the advice Post Office Ltd gave BEIS was “flawed”.
 - Did Post Office Ltd under your watch mislead BEIS officials with flawed advice and, if not, are Government Ministers wrong?

I would be very grateful if you could provide answers to these questions by 16 June.

With best wishes,



Darren Jones MP

Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee