



Department for
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& Industrial Strategy

Kelly Tolhurst MP

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Our ref:

28 June 2019

Dear Mr Bates,

Thank you for your letters dated 30 April addressed to the Prime Minister and myself regarding the group litigation *Alan Bates and Others v Post Office Limited* and the first judgment handed down in the “Common Issues” trial. I am replying as this matter falls within my ministerial portfolio.

I agree with you on the crucial importance of post offices and the postmasters that run them. Postmasters are the backbone of the Post Office, and their branches are the backbone of communities across the country, which is why the Government committed to safeguarding the Post Office network and protecting existing rural services. The overall number of post offices across the UK remains at its most stable in decades thanks to significant Government investment of over £2 billion.

I can also reassure you that both the Government and the Post Office have taken seriously the judge’s criticisms of Post Office’s handling of the case and indeed its wider dealings with Postmasters, and Post Office has undertaken to take appropriate action where necessary. Post Office has said that it will continue its programme of improving how it works with postmasters and is considering how to accelerate this and address the criticisms about its operations raised in the judgment.

However, much of what you raise in your letter is relevant to ongoing legal proceedings and for that reason I am unable to comment on it. There are a further three trials scheduled until March 2020, and the overall outcome of this litigation will only become clear once the whole trial process has concluded. In addition, Post Office has announced its intention to appeal the judgment from the first “Common Issues” trial. While this dispute rests with the courts it is clearly not appropriate for Government to comment further on these legal proceedings or to intervene in any way in these proceedings, including seeking additional independent legal and IT expert advice in the way that you are advocating.

The courts remain the right place to hear and resolve these long-standing issues between some postmasters and the Post Office so that postmasters with claims can obtain a remedy if the court finds there is validity to those claims. It is important that the court process be allowed to run its course in order to finally resolve those issues.

The matters encompassed by this litigation fall under the operational responsibility of the Post Office and, as such, it is the Post Office that is handling the defence of this litigation and is responsible for appointing appropriate legal advisors to enable this defence. While publicly owned, Post Office Ltd operates as an independent, commercial business.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kelly', written over the printed name below.

KELLY TOLHURST MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Corporate Responsibility