



Horizon Compensation Advisory Board

Report of twenty-eighth meeting held on 14 January 2026

Members present: Prof. Christopher Hodges (Chair); Lord Arbuthnot; Lord Beamish

Apologies: Prof. Richard Moorhead

Also present: Carl Creswell; Rob Brightwell; Charlotte Heyes; Eleri Wones (all Department for Business and Trade – “DBT”); Sir Gary Hickinbottom (Senior Independent Lawyer in HCRS and HSS schemes).

1. HCAB discussion with Minister McDougall

- The Minister noted that there had been good recent progress in settling long running cases. Post Office had been able to give a good report to the Select Committee and had set themselves helpful targets for the completion of remaining HSS cases. The Capture scheme had been launched and there had been progress in developing the scheme for members of postmasters’ families.
- In response, Board members agreed that significant progress had been made in 2025 both in the amount of redress issued and the launch of the Capture scheme. Of the 13,000 claims across all schemes, 11,500 had received offers and over 10,500 had been settled. So far as redress was concerned the Board’s main focus was on the HSS, which was to be discussed later in the meeting.
- The Board retained concerns that potentially unfair convictions related to Capture were not being overturned quickly enough, and that reviews of the reliability of Horizon and DWP cases seemed not be making progress. Lack of evidence was an even greater problem in Capture cases than in Horizon ones. There was a case for reversing the burden of proof: this would ensure that any further overturning of cases was done by the Courts, addressing the key constitutional concern. The Board discussed whether anything more could be done from a DBT perspective (noting that the ability to propose the overturning of convictions rested with the Criminal Cases Review Commission). Minister McDougall noted that the CCRC had indicated its intention to act quickly. The Board agreed to seek further discussions with CCRC.

- Board members also raised concerns about Fujitsu's ability to get further work from Government; the pace of the police investigation into Horizon; and the need to hold Post Office's auditors to account.
- Finally, the Board and the Minister agreed about the importance of current work on the future of redress and arrangements for reducing the likelihood of future scandals. Board members stressed the importance of taking a holistic approach to these issues.

2. Discussion with Sir Gary Hickinbottom (Chair of Assessment Panel HCRS/Senior Independent Lawyer HSS)

- In respect of the HCRS Scheme, Sir Gary explained that his role had purchase where claims had been submitted, but it was difficult for him to have impact where they had not. He was arranging case management meetings with some of the more substantial/challenging cases.
- His regular round-table meetings with claimants' lawyers help with identifying potential issues.
- DBT noted that there were also some cases, particularly those previously in the OC process, which had not progressed in some time. Many had received offers which they were either considering or had rejected. Sir Gary was playing a key role in helping to unlock some of these cases.
- Sir Gary said that in his view the Inquiry report could not lead to an improvement in postmasters' redress prospects because their claims were already being assessed on the basis of full liability. The Board agreed with this and urged all potential claimants to submit their claims promptly.
- Officials noted that despite encouragement and funding from DBT, some HCRS claimants were not engaging lawyers. The Board encouraged all claimants to seek legal support wherever funding was provided.
- The Board discussed with Sir Gary Hickinbottom his new role as the HSS Independent Senior Lawyer. This was different from his role in HCRS because it involved thousands rather than dozens of claims and most claimants were not legally represented. Dentons would be providing him with support.
- Sir Gary would also be looking at key issues for the scheme as a whole, including the treatment of unevidenced shortfalls in week commencing 2

February 2026. He was due to receive briefing from Dentons imminently to inform his review. The Board hoped that this would enable a significant number of cases to progress.

- The Board noted that scheme statistics suggested that some eligible cases had not come forward. DBT reported that claimants' lawyers had explained that there were several reasons for this, such as:
 - Claimant vulnerability and trauma;
 - Their claims being very complex and difficult to articulate;
 - Claimants waiting for the outcome of the final Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry report.
- DBT officials noted that the Department was signposting postmasters to the Information and Support Service and caseworkers were actively looking to engage with and support claimants who did not have legal representatives.
- DBT officials described their emerging proposals for implementing the Inquiry recommendation that people who had accepted HSS fixed sum offers should be able to seek permission to appeal to DBT's HSS Appeals process. DBT proposed that individuals should be permitted to appeal if their narrative showed a real prospect that their claim would be worth more than £75,000. Decisions would be independent of DBT and Post Office. The Board welcomed the proposals. They agreed that the period during which claims could be submitted should be limited.

2. HSS discussion with Post Office

- Joanne Hanley (Post Office) joined the meeting for this item.
- Joanne provided an update to the Board on progress made in the Horizon Shortfall Scheme (HSS) in 2025:
 - 8,000 claims had been concluded, a significant increase from the 900 concluded in 2024;
 - By the end of 2025 there were 18% claims outstanding, compared to 55% at the end of 2024;

- There were 2,500 claims still outstanding, a large proportion of which Post Office expected to opt for the fixed-sum offer (and were therefore likely to be progressed at a greater pace).
- Joanne reiterated the aim which she had set out at the Business and Trade Select Committee hearing on 6 January – Post Office wanted to have resolved the majority of fixed-sum claims by Summer 2026, and the majority of fully assessed claims (including those in the Dispute Resolution Process) by the end of the year (with an expectation that some may not be fully resolved until early 2027).
- Joanne explained that the progress made was in great part down to improvements in communication with claimants, providing more regular updates on claims progress, improving the experience of those in the Scheme. She noted that many claimants struggled to articulate their claim in full due to the associated trauma and the length of time since the events. She highlighted the introduction of the Post Office Claimant Support Function with single points of contact for claimants and welcomed Sir Gary's involvement in the HSS noting that this would further improve the experience for claimants and in turn help speed up claims processing.
- Joanne noted the Business and Trade's Select Committee's concerns regarding the difference in value of awards in the HSS vs the Scheme's DBT-run appeals process. While she recognised that this is not the case across the board, she noted that Post Office and DBT were actively working together to ensure that the right amount was offered as the earliest possible stage in the HSS.
- DBT noted that more than one hundred cases had moved from the HSS Dispute Resolution Process to DBT's HSS Appeals process. This was not reflected in the published figures, which therefore gave too pessimistic a picture of the number of HSS cases remaining.
- The Board queried some previous criticisms of Post Office-run schemes, including whether they were too adversarial, and asked for too much information. Joanne acknowledged these previous criticisms. She noted that improvements had been made to their process for requesting further information, ensuring that any such request was targeted and more straightforward to respond to. This had resulted in reductions in the time it has taken to conclude new fully assessed claims, from a year (or more) to 6-9 months. However, Post Office still wanted claims to be resolved more quickly than this.

- Joanne noted that despite their best efforts, Post Office had lost contact with some claimants who had submitted their claims at an early stage. The Board urged these people to re-engage with the process.
- Joanne noted that the HSS was due to close on 31st January and that Post Office had received an increased level of applications as that date approached.
- The Board encouraged postmasters who had not yet applied to submit their claim ahead of the deadline of 31st January.

3. AOB

- In light of the upcoming HSS closure date, the Board agreed that closure dates for all of the schemes should be considered to ensure that victims could move on from the scandal.
- The Board considered proposals for criteria and process for the HSS Appeals Fixed Sum Offer Permission to Appeal process, in the light of support from consultations with victims' lawyers and supported DBT's proposed approach.