

Compensation for Post Office victims must be speeded up

Edinburgh West MP Christine Jardine has called on the government to speed up delivery of compensation to victims of the Post Office Horizon scandal.

The UK Government has confirmed today that there are a number of routes to compensation available to affected sub-postmasters in England and Wales, with £163,000 for those whose fraud convictions have been overturned, advice available for those seeking to appeal, and support for those who were not convicted.

Many victims in England and Wales were prosecuted by the Post Office under their specific powers, and Ms Jardine has called upon the UK Government on Wednesday to remove the Post Office's "carte-blanche" ability to bring such cases south of the border.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is the only body able to prosecute in Scotland, fewer Scottish sub-postmasters were unfairly convicted of fraud with the exact number of Scottish victims still currently unknown.

Just two convictions were overturned by The Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC) last year, with a further four appeals currently under consideration. Further cases are due to be heard by courts this week.

The First Minister, Humza Yousaf said on Wednesday that

victims have already waited too long and The Scottish Government will look at introducing its own legislation – probably a legislative consent motion. Mr Yousaf has written to the Prime Minister and the Justice Secretary, Angela Constance, has already written to the UK Justice Secretary to advise that The Scottish Government would cooperate in ensuring payment of compensation and any overturning of convictions.

Mr Yousaf's letter to the Prime Minister is below.

But Ms Jardine is concerned that the low numbers in Scotland may lead to some sub-postmasters – including those who were not convicted – missing out. She urges anyone in Scotland who believes they were impacted to come forward, so the government can speed up the delivery of compensation they are entitled to.

Christine Jardine said: “The Horizon scandal is an appalling miscarriage of justice, and it is shocking that we still do not know how many people in Scotland fell victim to these errors.

“Although the Post Office could not prosecute in Scotland, this did not prevent postmasters having their careers thrown into jeopardy and their lives deeply affected by the major problems caused by Horizon.

“We know that, sadly, some sub-postmasters who were victims of the error passed away before they got compensation, and delays have caused more stress for victims. Whilst we also need answers from the Crown Office about when it first knew about the issue, the first priority must be ensuring government gets compensation to victims more quickly.

“We have seen the impact that the actions of the Post Office have had on innocent postmasters laid bare. I do not believe that this private company should have carte-blanche to bring such prosecutions, and it is time for the government to act

and prevent this happening again, by stripping the Post Office of this ability.

“As we do not know exactly how many people in Scotland were affected, I would also urge anyone who was affected or believes they may have been to come forward, so the government can provide the compensation that everyone impacted by this dreadful scandal deserves.”

The UK Government announced earlier that they will introduce legislation within weeks overturning the wrongful convictions of hundreds of postmasters. This will allow faster compensation from the government fund set up to pay out at least £600,000 to individuals to rebuild their lives.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said: “This is one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in this country’s history, with hundreds of people having their lives ruined and reputations dragged through mud.

“Too many still have wrongful convictions tied to their name, and we cannot continue to fail them.

“We must do everything we can to exonerate and compensate these innocent people, and make sure they finally get the justice they deserve.”

Mr Yousaf’s letter to the Prime Minister:

Dear Rishi

I am writing to you regarding the Post Office Minister, Kevin Hollinrake MP’s announcement in Parliament today that the UK Government intends to legislate to reverse the convictions of sub-postmasters convicted of criminal offences as a result of the Post Office Horizon IT system.

I welcome this announcement. The Post Office Horizon scandal requires urgent action to ensure those affected by unjust convictions can finally receive justice.

In the course of his statement, the Minister noted that the power to legislate to reverse convictions imposed by the Scottish courts is devolved to the Scottish Parliament but that he is keen to work with the devolved Governments to ensure that sub-postmasters in Scotland and Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged.

Scottish Ministers are keen to work with the UK Government to deal with the impact on sub-postmasters convicted in Scotland, ensuring that a UK-wide approach is taken to exonerate those wrongfully convicted in Scottish courts.

Given the unique circumstances arising from the Post Office Horizon scandal, it is right that normal processes for appeals are set aside to ensure that justice can now be delivered for those whose lives were greatly impacted by their wrongful conviction.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, Angela Constance MSP, will contact her counterpart, the Secretary of State for Justice, to discuss how best to progress work in this area, whether this is by ensuring that the UK legislation will either apply directly in Scotland or by developing separate Scottish legislation to deliver the same effect for Scotland.

I trust that we can work together to ensure that those affected are now able to have their convictions overturned and obtain compensation.

Humza Yousaf



Christine Jardine MP speaking in the House of Commons on 10 January 2024 PHOTO UK Parliament/Maria Unger