

Witness Name: Sir Sajid Javid
Statement No.: WITN10880100
Dated: 12 November 2024

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF SIR SAJID JAVID

I, Sir Sajid Javid, formerly Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, will say as follows.

Introduction

1. I make this statement in response to the Inquiry's request for evidence dated 23 September 2024 ("the Rule 9 request"). I have prepared it with the support of the Government Legal Department and counsel. I served as the Secretary of State for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills ("BIS") from 11 May 2015 until 14 July 2016.
2. Given the passage of time I have been dependent on others putting documents before me to assist with the exact chronology of events. Nevertheless, any views expressed in this statement are my own. I would be willing to clarify or expand upon the evidence set out in this statement should that assist the Inquiry.

Background

3. I first became an MP in May 2010. Prior to this, I studied Economics and Politics at the University of Exeter and had a career in investment banking for over 18 years in various roles in Chase Manhattan Bank and Deutsche Bank, including working in New York from 1992 – 1996 and Singapore from 2007 – 2009.

4. In November 2010, I was appointed a Parliamentary Private Secretary ("PPS") to the Minister of State for Further Education in BIS. This was my first government post. I then became PPS to George Osborne, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in October 2011. In September 2012 I became Economic Secretary to the Treasury and then in October 2013 I became Financial Secretary to the Treasury. My first Cabinet position was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, which I held along with the role of Minister for Equalities from 9 April 2013. I was made a Privy Counsellor in April 2013.
5. Following the General Election of 2015, I was appointed Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills within David Cameron's second administration. I held this position from 12 May 2015 until 13 July 2016.
6. After my tenure at BIS, I served as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (from July 2016 to January 2018), Home Secretary (from April 2018 to July 2019) and then as Chancellor of the Exchequer (from July 2019 until I resigned from government on 13 February 2020). I returned to the backbenches until 26 June 2021, when I was appointed as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. I resigned from this role on 5 July 2022, and returned to the backbenches for a second time. I stood down as an MP at the 2024 general election.
7. I have now returned to working in the financial sector. I am currently a partner at Centricus, a UK-based asset management and corporate advisory firm.

Method of working

8. At this point, it is worth setting out my method of working as a Secretary of State. During my time at BIS (and in other Departments), my general rule was to try and see all submissions that were directly addressed to me. However, there was a system in place so that I may not have had sight of all submissions sent to me, as I authorised my special advisers and private office to exercise their discretion to ask that documents be resubmitted if they considered that they did not meet the brief or where there were gaps which needed to be answered before I could make a decision.

9. There was a system devised so that all submissions would first be considered by my special advisers, who would be able to make comments or notes to me about them, then they would go to my private office who would do the same, and finally come to me. My private office had discretion as to when submissions would be put into my ministerial box for me to consider. My box was generally split into three sections: (1) a decision file containing submissions for my consideration; (2) a correspondence file containing letters for signing; and (3) a file for 'information only' which was for matters which included studies and reports. I may therefore not have seen all submissions made on all topics during my time as Secretary of State at BIS but sought to read all submissions meant for me.

Oversight of POL

10. I am asked by the Inquiry to explain my involvement as the Secretary of State in matters relating to the Post Office. I would firstly highlight that BIS was a very large, sprawling Department, with oversight of a large number of arm's-lengths bodies of various kinds, amongst them the Post Office. Arm's length bodies are not under the day-to-day control of Ministers; and the Post Office was even further removed because it essentially functioned as an arm's length body of an arm's length body, namely UK Government Investments ("UKGI") (My tenure as Secretary of State saw the formation of UKGI through the merging of the Shareholder Executive (ShEx) and UK Financial Investments).
11. The Inquiry has asked me about my priorities at BIS. Secretaries of State generally have the capacity to focus on three to four key priorities during their time in office. Post Office matters did not rank amongst my core areas of focus. There was no particular reason why they would, save where specific issues were brought to my attention. Post Office issues had not featured prominently in our election manifesto, and were not central to the goals of the Government as a whole.
12. Instead, my primary focus as Secretary of State was on issues surrounding the EU referendum, which required that I frequently meet with representatives of the business community to allay their concerns. I also had to spend considerable effort finding significant real terms savings across my department, following the public

sector spending review. Boosting apprenticeship opportunities for young people (culminating in the Apprenticeship Levy) was another main focus. In addition to these ongoing priorities, my capacity as Secretary of State would also be taken-up by grappling with critical events as they arose. The most time-consuming of these was the threatened closure of the Port Talbot steelworks. I recall that I was on a trade mission to Australia in March 2016 when Tata Steel suddenly announced that it may pull out of its UK operations, including Port Talbot, and resolving this crisis took up a huge amount of time and energy. I recall having many meetings with Mark Russell, the then CEO of UKGI, about how to respond to the steel issue, including consideration of various financing options.

13. So far as the Post Office was concerned, my priorities related to the wider imperative to find savings in the context of the spending review. POL was losing money every year. I understood that POL was a Government-owned company because it served a very important social purpose, but within that overarching purpose we wanted it to be as financially sustainable as it could be and therefore have maximum commercial freedom to be as effective as possible.
14. From my perspective as Secretary of State, POL appeared to exist within an unusual context, being a private company with one shareholder in the form of the UK government. My view was that BIS had a positive duty not to become involved in the day-to-day running of the Post Office. If there were issues which properly concerned Government, they were firstly for ShEx to deal with and, if ShEx felt that there needed to be some notification to (or direction from) Government, then their officials would liaise with the private offices of the relevant Ministers. Only in extreme circumstances would Post Office matters be communicated up to my private office and onto myself personally. This is all to say that there are inevitably many administrative layers between the Secretary of State and the leadership of the Post Office.
15. To the best of my knowledge and recollection, BIS monitored ShEx's performance generally, but did not specifically monitor ShEx's oversight of each individual 'asset' or organisation within its portfolio, such as POL. I did have regular meetings with Mark Russell, and also saw him more often in early 2016 because of the steel

crisis, but I do not recall Horizon issues ever being on the agenda for these meetings. I ensured there was time at the end of our meetings for Mark to raise 'any other business', especially anything not on the agenda that was troubling him, but I cannot recall him ever raising POL or Horizon issues in that way either.

Delegation

16. I delegated responsibility for Post Office matters to Baroness Neville-Rolfe, formally adding postal affairs to her Ministerial portfolio on 18 May 2015 (Email from Harriet Smith to Hannah Wiskin Re: Portfolio (**WITN10200101**)); (BIS Portfolio - Baroness Neville-Rolfe - Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Intellectual Property (**BEIS0001221**)). Therefore, Baroness Neville-Rolfe was the primary point of contact between BIS, ShEx and the Post Office during my tenure as Secretary of State. I have no hesitation in stating that I found Baroness Neville-Rolfe to be a competent and hard-working junior Minister, who was in command of her brief.
17. George Freeman MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Life Sciences at BIS, was tasked with responding to Post Office related questions within the House of Commons because Baroness Neville-Rolfe, as a peer, could not do so.
18. In general terms, I was content to allow my Ministers to get on with the job. However, I retained high-level oversight of all key matters within my Department. I held a weekly meeting with all BIS Ministers together in addition to weekly one-to-one meetings in order to keep on top of developments. As I mentioned above in relation to Mark Russell, I always tried to give those I was meeting with the space to raise any other business during our meetings, to give them the opportunity to voice important issues not on the agenda for discussion. I do not recall Horizon issues being raised.

Meetings with POL Officials / Briefings

19. As Secretary of State, I met with officials from the Post Office relatively infrequently, I think only annually. The postal affairs Minister met with them slightly

more frequently, in the order of 2-3 times each year (Briefing notes for the Meeting with Paula Vennells on the 15 June (UKGI00004506)).

20. When I was first appointed to BIS, I received a formal introductory letter from Paula Vennells (the then POL CEO), dated 11 May 2015. In this correspondence, she stated that the Post Office was "at a critical point in [its] path towards commercial sustainability," and that "the prize is a modern, more accessible Post Office, successful in commercial markets while retaining a strong social purpose, which is less dependent on taxpayer subsidy" (Letter from Paula Vennells to Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP RE: strategy (POL00117712)). There was no mention of any issues relating to the Horizon system.
21. I had my first meeting with senior Post Office officials, including Paula Vennells, on 15 June 2015. Ahead of that meeting, I received a formal briefing note, which provided high-level information about the Post Office generally (Email from Tim McInnes to Javid MPST, Richard Callard, Laura Thompson and others re: Briefing for SoS Meeting with Post Office CEO on Monday (UKGI00004505); Post Office Limited Meeting with Paula Vennells - Briefing Annexes and Supporting Information by Shex (UKGI00004507); and UKGI00004506. Topics covered included an overview of POL, POL's financial performance, POL funding, long-term strategy, network transformation, and the Horizon system and mediation scheme. On this latter point, the briefing note stated: -

"Following complaints from a small number of (mostly former) sub-postmasters about Horizon IT system, in 2012 the Post Office commissioned an independent firm, Second Sight, to examine the system for systemic flaws that could cause accounting discrepancies. Second Sight's interim report, published in July 2013, and final report, published in April 2015, both make clear that there is no evidence of system-wide problems with Horizon".

22. Following our meeting, Paula Vennells wrote to me to provide further information about a number of matters. She emphasised the point that: "Post Office is undergoing significant change and making good progress towards its aim of achieving a commercial sustainability with less reliance on the taxpayer".

23. I also met with Tim Parker, then chairman of POL, on 24 November 2015. Again, this was largely an introductory meeting, with the objective being to understand Mr Parker's first impressions of the business, its challenges and his ideas on its future direction. The briefing note provided by Annette Rusling (ShEx) set out what the key topics would likely be (Email from Annette Rusling to Javid MPST cc Neville-Rolfe MPST, SpAd Javid MPST and others Re: Briefing for SoS/Tim Parker meeting (UKGI00006275); Briefing Notes for the Meeting with Tim Parker, Chair of POL, 24th November 2015 (UKGI00006276)). These included POL's freedom to operate commercially, banking framework and negotiations with the major banks, and apprenticeships. Within the 'background and other notes' section of the briefing were some comments on Horizon:

"Tim Parker agreed with Baroness Neville-Rolfe that he would undertake a review into the Post Office 'Horizon' IT system and various claims that sub-postmasters have been wrongly prosecuted as a result of faults in the system. Tim has appointed a QC to assist him in that review and expects to report back to baroness Neville-Rolfe early in the New Year.

We do not expect Tim will want to discuss this matter in detail. The government's position is that, while Tim is undertaking his review, whilst Post Office continue to work through mediation of individual cases, and while the Criminal Cases Review Commission considers that c. 20 applications on this matters, it would not be appropriate for government to intervene".

24. I do not think I would have second-guessed Tim Parker's apparent reluctance to discuss Horizon issues in detail. I was provided with plenty of other briefings which said 'we do not think x will want to discuss y, but you should probe further'. The lack of any such comment meant that my officials must have agreed that this was not a matter to be covered in detail and I relied on my officials' advice in this regard. If it was appropriate to probe more deeply, I would have expected this to be noted in the briefing from ShEx. On the broader points, I viewed the appointment of a QC positively. It was appropriate that these matters were investigated thoroughly by an independent party, and that Government did not become involved whilst the

CCRC was undertaking its work. The reference to the CCRC would have made me cautious; anything which engages the courts or judiciary is something which Ministers are very wary of getting involved with, in order not to prejudice the legal process.

Knowledge of the Horizon IT System

25. As to my knowledge of issues with the Horizon IT system, the above briefings are characteristic of the information my private office was receiving from officials at the Post Office and ShEx. By way of illustrative example, the POL Overview provided by ShEx in May 2015 as part of the ministerial day one briefing pack stated as follows (Post Office Limited (POL) Overview - May 2015 - Prepared by ShEx (UKGI00004416)):

"A small but vocal number of mostly former sub-postmasters have raised concerns about POL's Horizon IT system, which they claim has caused their businesses losses. Over two years' worth of independent investigation has found no systemic faults in Horizon and there is a mediation scheme to consider individual cases, but campaigning and media interests persists, and BBC's Panorama is due to broadcast a programme on this on 22 June."

26. I am not confident of whether or not I would have seen this particular document, but it is consistent with the information I recall being provided with about the Horizon issues.
27. I was aware that the sub-postmasters were being prosecuted for alleged theft / false accounting in connection with the Horizon IT system. However, I was not aware of the detail that these prosecutions were being brought privately by POL; I think I assumed that the police and CPS handled the investigations and prosecutions.
28. From the documents provided to me as part of the Inquiry process, I can see that colleagues in Parliament wrote to me in relation to Horizon and the prosecution of SPMs. For example, there is such correspondence from Alok Sharma MP

(UKGI00004460), Jim Cunningham MP (UKGI00004509), Steve Baker MP (UKGI00006768), raising specific concerns relating to their constituents.

29. Junior Ministers dealt with most correspondence, even if it was addressed to me as Secretary of State. This included responding to back-bench MPs (which all of those parliamentary colleagues were at the time). As Secretary of State, I would generally only have sight of correspondence from and to more senior politicians, such as Privy Councillors, other Ministers and Chairs of Select Committees. I might also see correspondence from senior stakeholders, such as trade union leaders or significant CEOs, if it were addressed directly to me. I would generally only see correspondence once a response had already been drafted, and then sign it off if I approved. In October 2015, for example, I approved a draft letter to Jeremy Wright MP, then Attorney General: *"I understand the concerns that your constituent has raised, and I hope you will appreciate that the Government does not influence the day-to-day operation of the Post Office, but allows it to operate independently as a commercial business"* (UKGI00006152).
30. As set out above, Baroness Neville-Rolfe kept me up-to-date with Post Office matters, but I do not recall her ever highlighting Horizon issues in the sense of alerting me to a major crisis which required my input as Secretary of State. Similarly, Mark Russell never made a point of drawing my attention to issues with the Horizon system and the prosecution of SPMs.
31. I am asked by the Inquiry to comment on a number of specific documents: -
- a. Simon Clarke's Advice, 15 July 2013 (POL00006357)
 - b. Simon Clarke's advice, 2 August 2013 (POL00129453)
 - c. Deloitte's Project Zebra reports (POL00028069)
 - d. The Swift Review (POL00006355)
 - e. Deloitte's Bramble reports (POL00029984; POL00030009; POL00031502)
32. I can confirm that I never had sight of the above documents, and so cannot meaningfully comment. Likewise, I never had sight of the Second Sight interim or final reports.

Debates in Parliament and calls for a public inquiry

33. Andrew Bridgen MP called an adjournment day debate in relation to Horizon. I am afraid I have no memory of this, but this is unsurprising as there were three or four of these such debates a week that were relevant to my Department. These debates are routinely dealt with by Junior Ministers, and so George Freeman was tasked with responding in the House of Commons on behalf of BIS (Email chain from Parly Unit Written PQs to SpAd Javid MPST, cc: Richard Callard, Laura Thompson and others re: Named Day PQ 2015/12263 - answer date 23/6 - Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South – Labour) about the Post Office Horizon IT system (UKGI00004586)).

34. In connection with the above, a question was submitted to BIS by Jim Cunningham MP: *"To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Post Office's sub-postmaster mediation scheme; and if he will make a statement"*. A response (to be delivered by George Freeman) was drafted by Laura Thompson and approved by Richard Callard in the following terms (UKGI00004587):

"Post Office Limited's Complaint Review and mediation Scheme was set up on 2013 to consider cases from current and former sub-postmasters relating to the Post Office Horizon IT system. This is an operational matter for Post Office Limited and the Scheme has been set up to be independent of Government".

35. What was actually said in Parliament was as follows:

"It is important to understand that the mediation scheme is independent of the Government. That is the right approach for something that is a contractual matter between two independent businesses, and we should remember that sub-postmasters are independent businesspeople who have contracts with Post Office Ltd." (House of Commons Hansard re Post Office Horizon scandal) (POL00232158)

36. Andrew Bridgen MP repeated his complaints with the Horizon system and the mediation scheme at Prime Minister's Questions on 1 July 2015, ultimately calling for a public inquiry. As a Government MP he would have informed No 10 of his question in advance of PMQs and given an opportunity to draft a response, which would have had BIS input. The Prime Minister responded as follows: -

"My honourable friend has done a real service in campaigning tirelessly on this issue, and I know that he has led a debate in the House on it as well. The Post Office's answer is to say that it set up an independent inquiry which has not found evidence of wrongdoing, but clearly that has not satisfied many Members on both sides of the House who have seen individual constituency cases and want better answers. What I think needs to happen next is for the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, my honourable friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), to convene a meeting involving Members of the House, the Post Office and representatives of sub-postmasters to discuss their concerns and see what should happen next. I would hope that it would not be necessary to have a full independent judicial inquiry to get to the bottom of this issue, but get to the bottom of it we must". (House of Commons Oral Answers to Questions debated on 1 July 2015 (RLIT0000431))

37. I agreed with the Prime Minister's endorsement of a meeting between concerned MPs and the Post Office to be facilitated by BIS. Following George Freeman's offer in Parliament, Baroness Neville-Rolfe wrote to Andrew Bridgen and the Post Office on 2 July to formally arrange such a meeting, which was later held on 15 July 2015. The specifics of this meeting are dealt with in the statement of Baroness Neville-Rolfe.
38. Eleven MPs had spoken in the adjournment debate and one of the key points made then also was to call for a public inquiry into Horizon. The advice from ShEx officials was squarely opposed to this. On 7 July 2015, my private office received a briefing from Laura Thompson (Email from Laura Thompson to Javid MPST, cc: Javid SpAd, Neville-Rolfe MPST and others RE Update for SoS on Post Office Horizon (UKGI00004896); OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: COMMERCIAL, POST

OFFICE HORIZON: UPDATE FOR SECRETARY OF STATE by Laura Thompson, Shareholder Executive (UKGI00004897):

"We recommend strongly that a judicial inquiry is neither necessary nor appropriate. The matter is independent of Government, there is no evidence of systemic flaws in the system or of miscarriages of justice, and legal avenues (the Criminal Cases Review Commission) exist if individuals feel their convictions are unsafe. Twenty people have applied to the CCRC".

39. This line of reasoning was repeated and expanded upon in an official document to ministers from civil servants entitled 'Overview of Post Office Horizon Scheme Issues,' dated August 2015 (BEIS0001220): -

"Government faces calls to launch an independent inquiry into Post Office's Horizon IT system and the way that Post Office has handled cases where money has gone missing from branches. We recommend that Government resist these calls for the following reasons:

- a. Despite three years of independent scrutiny, no systemic issues with IT have been found.*
- b. Many of the allegations raised against Post Office have been mischaracterised by campaigners and the media, and indeed in Parliament.*
- c. Post Office have gone further than most commercial organisations would in attempting to resolve this issue – however, they cannot respond publicly to the most serious allegations while they still respect individuals' confidentiality.*
- d. Existing routes to resolution, including mediation, appeal or litigation, remain available to individuals – it would be wrong to create a new quasi-judicial process while these options have not been exhausted (or even attempted, in the cases of appeal or litigation).*
- e. Absent any evidence of wrongdoing by Post Office, there is no need for a judicial inquiry.*

By maintaining that Government seen no need for an inquiry ambiguity is removed and applicants can be clear on the options available: mediation and/or legal action. This would help bring cases to resolution as swiftly as possible."

40. On the basis of this advice, I approved draft letters to be sent by Baroness Neville-Rolfe to Andrew Bridgen MP, Oliver Letwin MP and Kevan Jones MP. I advised Baroness Neville Rolfe's office that it would be prudent to call Oliver Letwin MP in order to 'neutralise' him. By this I meant simply addressing any potential concerns he may have prior to sending the correspondence and satisfying him that BIS was taking the issues seriously (**UKGI00000962**). I would have singled him out because he was a Cabinet Minister who I would see regularly, at least once a week. It was therefore courtesy to let him know about this response ahead of receiving it. I do not recall him bringing the matter up with me in person at any point.

41. In essence, these letters highlighted that Tim Parker, the new POL chair, would give the Horizon issues fresh attention; and re-iterated the position that the correct route for resolving individual concerns was either through mediation or through legal channels (Letter from Laura Thompson to Baroness Neville-Rolfe re: Post Office Horizon: next steps (**UKGI00005771**)).

42. I was content for BIS to take the position of not actively calling for an inquiry, given the other forms of investigation or review taking place. However, even at this stage I had some concerns about the Government taking an overly defensive stance on the issue, and so did not feel it was appropriate to reject such potential investigations outright either (Email from Neville-Rolfe MPST to Javid MPST, CCing Richard Callard and Laura Thompson re Quick update on Post Office Horizon issues (**UKGI00005093**)). Dan Yorke-Smith confirmed that the Prime Minister was content that there be no public inquiry at that stage (**UKGI00004781**). The Prime Minister's office was involved because the matter had been raised in PMQs and also because the Prime Minister is routinely required to agree any decision to set up a public inquiry.

The Group Litigation Order

43. I am asked by the Inquiry to describe my understanding of matters relating to the group action brought against the Post Office in relation to Horizon.
44. On 18 April 2015, my private office was notified that the campaign group 'Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance ("JFSA") were reported to have lodged proceedings with the High Court regarding claims against the Post Office in relation to the Horizon IT system (Email from Javid MPST to Laura Thompson, Neville-Rolfe MPST, cc'ing SpAd Javid MPST and others, re Submission to Ministers on Post Office Horizon (**UKGI00006660**)).
45. The briefing from Laura Thompson stated that: "*POL have informed us that they are unaware of any new developments in the underlying disputes which might lead them to believe they are any more exposed on the substance of these allegations now than previously*" (Briefing e-mail from Laura Thompson to Baroness Neville Rolfe dated 14 April 2015 with an update on JFSA group action (**UKGI00006649**)). The official advice was that this was "*a matter for POL, particularly when legal action is being proposed*" (**UKGI00006649**).
46. This advice was passed on by my private office to that of the Prime Minister. This correspondence re-emphasised that "*officials here advise we maintain the position that this is a matter for the Post Office – particularly given there could be legal proceedings underway*" (Email from George Thomson to Will MacFarlane Re: LEgal action against Post Office on Horizon IT issue (**WITN10200134**)).
47. I was not involved in any way in POL's litigation strategy within the GLO proceedings (which, in any event, were at an early stage during my tenure at BIS). As noted above, it was the Government's long-held position that operational matters, including legal matters, were for POL to handle. The JFSA was seeking to bring proceedings against the Post Office, not against the Government so it was for the Post Office to decide how best to navigate this situation.
48. I have been asked for my views on the Common Issues judgment, but with respect, I am not well placed to comment on it as this was handed down in March 2019, almost three years after my time as Secretary of State came to an end. For similar

reasons, I cannot assist in commenting on the POL Board's decision to seek recusal of the trial judge and to appeal the judgment.

49. I did not have anything to do with POL or the Horizon issues after I left BIS, nor did I follow the story until much more recently. As a result of the Inquiry and the ITV drama I asked my constituency staff to check whether anyone wrote to me in my capacity as a constituency MP about these matters, and there is no record of any such correspondence. I also cannot recall any constituent contacting me about Horizon or prosecutions of SPMs.

Mediation Scheme

50. I am asked by the Inquiry to comment on the mediation scheme.

51. In July 2015, my private office was informed by Laura Thompson that the mediation scheme was still in operation, but many affected sub-postmasters were requesting to delay their mediation until a 'new government inquiry' had been established'. At this point, the information provided was that there were twenty applications to the Criminal Complaints Review Commission ("CCRC"), and that the CCRC was unlikely to make any decisions that year (Email chain from Laura Thompson to avid MPST, Cc'd Richard Callard re: Post Office: submissions to Baroness Neville-Rolfe on Network Transformation and on Horizon / BBC Panorama (UKGI00019966)).

52. In essence, my position on these issues was to follow the advice I was being given that they were "a matter of law," and that therefore it was not appropriate for me, as Secretary of State, to become directly involved (UKGI00019966).

Conclusion

53. I am asked by the Inquiry to reflect on my time as Secretary of State. Looking at the bigger picture, I consider that there are two key factors as to why BIS perhaps did not grasp the full nature and significance of the Horizon issues during this period, and really at all until the Common Issues judgment was handed down.

54. Firstly, due to the intense demands upon the time and attention of Ministers, they are generally reliant upon the advice that they receive from officials. If that advice is lacking for whatever reason, the ability to make effective decisions is hampered. There has to be an extremely compelling reason to disregard official advice and act independently or contrary to it. It is, of course, Ministers prerogative to do so. They generally will do so if it is a key priority for them and/or the Government, if they have their own personal expertise or experience which gives them confidence to push back on the advice, or if a significant external source of information is available to them which suggests the advice is wrong.
55. However, the downside if Ministers reject advice and get it wrong is much greater than if they accept the advice and it turns out to be wrong. If the Minister goes against advice and is right to do so, they rarely get much thanks or praise, nor is there generally a 'lessons learned' process whereby the Civil Service looks at why the advice was wrong and the Minister was right, and seeks to improve from it. On the other hand, if the Minister goes against advice and they are wrong to do so, they usually face significant criticism both from the media and Opposition but also internally, with it being held against them in relation to future decisions.
56. This in turn generates a risk adverse character to Government. All of the official advice during my time as Secretary of State, at least as far as I was aware, essentially painted the picture that there was nothing to be concerned about as far as the Horizon system was concerned and to the extent there were concerns these were being appropriately investigated by independent people. In circumstances where the Post Office was not a major priority for the Government, it was very hard for Ministers to push back on this advice or go behind it.
57. Secondly, Ministers are loathe to be accused of becoming involved in the judicial process, and there is a deep-seated understanding in Government that, if something is before the courts, we should say nothing and take no action. Ministers are very cautious indeed about prejudicing legal proceedings.
58. It is difficult to see how these issues can practically be addressed from the Government's perspective. To some extent, the risk aversion is a feature of a democratic system with lots of checks and balances.

59. My general view of this appalling scandal is that every organisation has bad apples (either due to incompetence or wilful wrongdoing) and the aim is always to remove them as much as possible and do what you can to ensure that the best people possible are put into key leadership positions. For Government, in relation to its arms-length bodies or public corporations, the main responsibility is to ensure an effective Board is in place, who recruit an effective CEO, with Government input via ShEx/UKGI. That is what should have happened with POL but clearly it did not. Other than that, I am not sure what more can be done in terms of scrutiny over operational matters. It is simply not realistic to have a system where complaints about any Government-owned organisation go straight to Government. They cannot realistically go directly to the Minister, so they will be looked at by officials, who inevitably have to ask the organisation for information to respond as they cannot do otherwise.

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed:

GRO

Dated: 12 November 2024

S. JAVID.

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No.	Document Description	URN	Control Number
1.	Email from Harriet Smith to Hannah Wiskin Re: Portfolio	WITN10200101	WITN10200101
2.	BIS Portfolio - Baroness Neville-Rolfe - Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Intellectual Property	BEIS0001221	BEIS0001221
3.	Briefing notes for the Meeting with Paula Vennells on the 15 June	UKGI00004506	UKGI015320-001
4.	Letter from Paula Vennells to Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP RE: strategy	POL00117712	POL-0118344
5.	Email from Tim McInnes to Javid MPST, Richard Callard, Laura Thompson and others re: Briefing for SoS Meeting with Post Office CEO on Monday	UKGI00004505	UKGI015319-001
6.	Post Office Limited Meeting with Paula Vennells - Briefing Annexes and Supporting Information by ShEx	UKGI00004507	UKGI015321-001
7.	Email from Annette Rusling to Javid MPST cc Neville-Rolfe MPST, SpAd Javid MPST and others Re: Briefing for SoS/Tim Parker meeting	UKGI00006275	UKGI017089-001
8.	Briefing Notes for the Meeting with Tim Parker, Chair of POL, 24th November 2015	UKGI00006276	UKGI017090-001
9.	Post Office Limited (POL) Overview - May 2015 - Prepared by ShEx	UKGI00004416	UKGI015230-001
10.	Letter from Alok Sharma MP to Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP re his constituent's, Michael A Wilson, concerns about the Horizon computer system used by subpostmasters	UKGI00004460	UKGI015274-001
11.	Letter from Jim Cunningham MP to Sajid Javid MP Re: Ref: JC/EC/9217 - clarification re subpostmistress alleged debt through faulty accounting	UKGI00004509	UKGI015323-001
12.	Letter from Steve Baker MP to The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP re Post Office Horizon Scandal	UKGI00006768	UKGI017582-001
13.	Letter from Sajid Javid to Jenny Wright re: Post Office's Horizon IT System and Mediation Scheme and Early Day Motion	UKGI00006152	UKGI016966-001

No.	Document Description	URN	Control Number
14.	Advice on the use of expert evidence relating to the integrity of the Fujitsu Services Ltd Horizon System	POL00006357	POL-0017625
15.	Simon Clarke's Advice re: Disclosure - The Duty to record and retain material - Post Office LTD	POL00129453	POL-0134937
16.	Deloitte Draft Board Briefing document further to report on Horizon desktop review of assurance sources and key control features	POL00028069	POL-0023072
17.	Review on behalf of the Chairman of Post Office Ltd concerning the steps taken in response to various complaints made by sub-postmasters	POL00006355	POL-0017623
18.	POL Sparrow - Interim Report: Draft for Discussion	POL00029984	POL-0026466
19.	Deloitte Draft "Bramble" - Interim Report	POL00030009	POL-0026491
20.	'Bramble' – Draft Report	POL00031502	POL-0028404
21.	Email chain from Parly Unit Written PQs to SpAd Javid MPST, cc: Richard Callard, Laura Thompson and others re: Named Day PQ 2015/12263 - answer date 23/6 - Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South – Labour) about the Post Office Horizon IT system	UKGI00004586	UKGI015400-001
22.	House of Commons Parliamentary Question and Draft answer for Post Office SPM Mediation Scheme and if the SOS will make a statement on this	UKGI00004587	UKGI015401-001
23.	House of Commons Hansard re Post Office Horizon scandal	POL00232158	POL-BSFF-0070221
24.	House of Commons Oral Answers to Questions debated on 1 July 2015	RLIT0000431	RLIT0000431
25.	Email from Laura Thompson to Javid MPST, cc: Javid SpAd, Neville-Rolfe MPST and others RE Update for SoS on Post Office Horizon	UKGI00004896	UKGI015710-001
26.	OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: COMMERCIAL, POST OFFICE HORIZON: UPDATE FOR SECRETARY OF STATE by Laura Thompson, Shareholder Executive	UKGI00004897	UKGI015711-001
27.	Overview of the Post Office Horizon Scheme Issues: August 2015	BEIS0001220	BEIS0001220

No.	Document Description	URN	Control Number
28.	Email from Baroness Neville Rolfe to Sajid Javid office, Laura Thompson, Richard Callard dated 11 September 2015 regarding update re response to Ministers	UKGI00000962	VIS00009100
29.	Letter from Laura Thompson to Baroness Neville-Rolfe re: Post Office Horizon: next steps	UKGI00005771	UKGI016585-001
30.	Email from Neville-Rolfe MPST to Javid MPST, CCing Richard Callard and Laura Thompson re Quick update on Post Office Horizon issues	UKGI00005093	UKGI015907-001
31.	Email chain from MPST Javid to Laura Thompson cc SpAd Javid MPST, MPST Nick King and others re: Post office Horizon Issue	UKGI00004781	UKGI015595-001
32.	Email from Javid MPST to Laura Thompson, Neville-Rolfe MPST, cc'ing SpAd Javid MPST and others, re Submission to Ministers on Post Office Horizon	UKGI00006660	UKGI017474-001
33.	Briefing e-mail from Laura Thompson to Baroness Neville Rolfe dated 14 April 2015 with an update on JFSA group action	UKGI00006649	UKGI017463-001
34.	Email from George Thomson to Will MacFarlane Re: LEgal action against Post Office on Horizon IT issue	WITN10200134	WITN10200134
35.	Email chain from Laura Thompson to Javid MPST, Cc'd Richard Callard re: Post Office: submissions to Baroness Neville-Rolfe on Network Transformation and on Horizon / BBC Panorama	UKGI00019966	UKGI028861-001