



House of Commons  
Business and Trade Committee

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# Post Office and Horizon redress: Instruction to deliver

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**Third Report of Session 2023–24**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 5 March 2024*

## Business and Trade Committee

The Business and Trade Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Business and Trade.

### Current membership

[Liam Byrne MP](#) (*Labour, Birmingham, Hodge Hill*) (Chair)

[Douglas Chapman MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Dunfermline and West Fife*)

[Jonathan Gullis MP](#) (*Conservative, Stoke-on-Trent North*)

[Antony Higginbotham MP](#) (*Conservative, Burnley*)

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### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Nick Beech (Clerk), Matthew Chappell (Committee Operations Manager), Catherine Meredith (Second Clerk), Abigail Millis (Senior Economist, Scrutiny Unit), Jacob Moreton (Media Officer), Heather Nathoo (Committee Specialist), Lewis Pickett (Committee Specialist), Delfina Raka (Committee Support Apprentice), Adam Taylor (Committee Specialist on secondment from the National Audit Office), David Turner (Committee Specialist), Tim West (Senior Media Officer) and Sue Wrightman (Committee Operations Officer).

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# Report

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## Background

1. The Post Office Horizon scandal is one of the worst miscarriages of justice in British history. Between 1999 and 2015, the Post Office pursued sub-postmasters after errors in the Post Office’s IT system, Horizon, caused false shortfalls to show in financial accounts.<sup>1</sup> The Post Office demanded that sub-postmasters covered those shortfalls. Some sub-postmasters were suspended, usually without pay; some sub-postmasters were dismissed; and some sub-postmasters were prosecuted, convicted and imprisoned for false accounting and theft. Sub-postmasters experienced reputational damage, mental and physical health problems and financial ruin. Several of them took their own life.<sup>2</sup>

2. In 2016, a group of 555 sub-postmasters and employees (‘the 555’) took the Post Office to the High Court via a Group Litigation Order. The judge ruled in the 555’s favour, stating that even after improvement, the Horizon IT system was not “remotely” robust.<sup>3</sup> Following that ruling, the Group Litigation Order (GLO) compensation scheme, the Horizon Shortfall Scheme (HSS) and the Overturned Convictions scheme were established to compensate victims.

## Business and Trade Committee scrutiny

3. The Business and Trade Committee first scrutinised the Horizon scandal in March 2020 and published an interim Report on 17 February 2022.<sup>4</sup> We revisited the issue of financial redress for affected sub-postmasters in two evidence sessions on 16 January and 27 February 2024. In the January evidence session, we heard from affected sub-postmasters, campaigners, lawyers, the current CEO of Post Office Ltd, the Director of Fujitsu, Department for Business and Trade officials and the Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business, Kevin Hollinrake MP. At our February oral evidence session, we took evidence from sub-postmasters, Department for Business and Trade officials, legal representatives, Post Office Ltd executives and the former Chairman of Post Office Ltd, Henry Staunton.

## Role of Post Office in delivering redress

4. The Post Office runs two financial redress schemes, the Horizon Shortfall Scheme and the Overturned Convictions process. In addition, it plays a key role in the GLO scheme, because it discloses the evidence to sub-postmasters that sub-postmasters must provide when submitting a claim. We have consistently expressed concern about the Post Office’s involvement in financial redress, because at the height of the scandal the Post

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1 [“Post Office scandal explained: What the Horizon saga is all about”](#) BBC news, 20 February 2024.

2 [Explanatory Notes to The Post Office \(Horizon System\) Compensation Bill](#), Bill 16 of 2023–24, para 3.

3 For a detailed overview of the lead up to the Horizon trial in December 2019 and the settlement, see: House of Commons Library, [The Horizon Settlement and the future governance of the Post Office Ltd](#), (March 2020).

4 Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2021–22, [Post Office and Horizon – Compensation: interim report](#), HC 1129.

Office acted as “judge, jury and executioner” when convicting sub-postmasters.<sup>5</sup> In our February 2022 Report, we recommended that an independent intermediary body should be set up to assist sub-postmasters in seeking financial redress, including providing claimants with access to forensic accountants and legal experts who could advise on sub-postmasters’ claims. The Government rejected that recommendation, arguing that setting up such a body would take significant time.<sup>6</sup> We regret that the Government rejected that recommendation.

5. At the oral evidence session on 27 February 2024, we heard that the Post Office still suffers from a “toxic” culture and a complete lack of trust between the company and sub-postmasters. When we asked former sub-postmasters whether the culture of the Post Office had changed, they all replied “no” and were unable to identify any aspects of the Post Office that have changed positively.<sup>7</sup> Alan Bates observed:

Over the years that I have been dealing with Post Office, the culture has always been Post Office. It has not changed; it has been the same for donkey’s years. It will not change and you cannot change it.<sup>8</sup>

6. We also heard that the Post Office caused delays in financial redress sought by sub-postmasters. James Hartley, a lawyer representing GLO claimants, said that it was “inescapable” that there was a degree of incompetence and inefficiency when it came to disclosing evidence to sub-postmasters. Mr Hartley estimated that on average it took the Post Office six months to disclose records to allow claimants to submit a claim.<sup>9</sup> Dr Neil Hudgell, who represents claimants from the Horizon Shortfall Scheme and Overturned Convictions, identified similar disclosure delays by the Post Office. He cited a case in which he had been waiting for disclosure since July 2023, which amounts to a seven-month delay at the time of writing.<sup>10</sup> He added that in all cases with which he was familiar on the Horizon Shortfall Scheme, no postmasters had received full and fair redress:

I would love to sign off as many as I can and tell people, “Look: this is a decent outcome. Try to get on with the rest of your life”, but I cannot find them. In every case something is missing.<sup>11</sup>

**7. The Post Office ruined the lives of innocent sub-postmasters. It subsequently failed to facilitate redress. Unsurprisingly, sub-postmasters have no confidence in the Post Office. The Post Office’s leadership remains in disarray; its chairman has been dismissed; and its chief executive, Nick Read, is under internal investigation.<sup>12</sup> Mr Read concurred that reform of the Post Office’s culture is still a “work in progress,”**

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5 During the scandal, the Post Office used its own investigation branch to bring private prosecutions against its staff. It did this under the general right in English law for individuals and organisations to pursue private prosecutions without using the Crown Prosecution Service. For more information, please see [“Post Office scandal puts private prosecutions in dock,”](#) Financial Times, 11 January 2024.

6 Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2021–22, [Post Office and Horizon – Compensation: interim report](#), HC 1129, page 15, para 48.

7 [Q 401](#)

8 [Q 403](#)

9 [Q 437](#)

10 [Q 433](#)

11 [Q 430](#)

12 [Q 626](#)

and not “job done.”<sup>13</sup> In that context, we note that Mr Read has supplied misleading evidence to the Committee on at least two counts, relating to the Post Office’s use of, first, non-disclosure agreements and, secondly, public relations firms.<sup>14 15</sup> The Post Office is not fit for purpose to administer any of the schemes of redress required to make amends for one of the biggest miscarriages of justice in British history.

8. *The Government must immediately remove the Post Office from any involvement in delivering redress for sub-postmasters and the Government should set out to the Committee how it proposes to deliver swift and effective redress for sub-postmasters, and in what legally binding timeframes. We repeat the Committee’s recommendation that the Government set up a properly resourced independent intermediary to assist sub-postmasters seeking to overturn convictions and seek compensation across all redress schemes. This intermediary should provide claimants with access to forensic accountants and legal experts who can offer advice to help ensure that claims are robust as possible, that offers take account of all the losses suffered and that claimants do not suffer significant detriment because records have not been kept by the Post Office or other relevant organisations.*

## Instruction to deliver

9. We identified unacceptable delays to delivering redress across all schemes. As a result, only 20% of the budget set aside for redress has been paid out.<sup>16</sup> Nick Read stated that he neither received written instructions to accelerate payment of redress nor had a conversation with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, right hon. Kemi Badenoch MP, about the need to accelerate payments.<sup>17</sup> However, Mr Read also refuted the claims of former Post Office Chairman, Henry Staunton, that instructions had been received to slow the compensation process down, telling us “categorically” that neither he nor his team have received instruction from the Government to slow compensation payments.<sup>18</sup> The Director of Business Resilience, Carl Creswell, also denied that he received instruction to slow payments, stating that in recent conversations with Ministers he has been told to “definitely go faster”.<sup>19</sup> We note for the record that, under oath, Mr Staunton stood by his claims.<sup>20</sup>

10. The Director of Business Resilience, Department for Business and Trade, Carl Creswell, told us that 147 out of a possible 478 applications (30.75%) have been submitted to the GLO scheme and that only 55% of the necessary disclosure reports have been issued.<sup>21</sup> Alarming, the Government’s support team at Addleshaw Goddard is staffed by just 15 people, of whom only eight are qualified lawyers.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, when we asked

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13 [Q 541](#)

14 [Qq 565–571](#) & [Q 593](#)

15 [Qq 580–587](#)

16 [Q 467](#)

17 [Qq 468–469](#)

18 [Q 453](#)

19 [Qq 304–305](#)

20 [Qq 605–606](#)

21 [Q 283](#) & [Q 330](#)

22 [Q 329](#)

witnesses from Freeths and Hudgell solicitors how long they thought that it would take for their clients to see full and final redress under the current arrangements, both gave a ballpark figure of one to two years.<sup>23</sup>

11. Complicating the submission of claims is the Government and Post Office’s requirement for extensive medical and financial evidence, which in many cases is simply not available to former sub-postmasters. Furthermore, the claims forms are extremely complex. Simon Recaldin, Remediation Matters Director, Post Office, conceded that the claim form for the Horizon Shortfall Scheme was not simple enough, admitting that “there are a number of issues with this. First is the clumsiness, the bureaucracy and the legalese in that application form.”<sup>24</sup>

12. We welcome the Government’s commitment to introduce a Bill to deliver remedies for the wrongly convicted and tackle the unacceptable delays in delivering redress for sub-postmasters.<sup>25</sup> The Bill presents an opportunity for legislation to improve the certainty of delivering redress across all schemes. Our Chair, right hon. Liam Byrne MP, proposed on the Floor of the House including in that legislation a suggestion first made by Alan Bates to the Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business of “hard” timeframes for reaching first offer and final settlement, with financial penalties awarded to the claimant if these timeframes are missed. However, the Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business argued against setting a legally binding date, because the Government cannot control when claims are received to be processed.<sup>26</sup> None the less, the Minister told the House of Commons that the Government would examine “all the various suggestions that are made.”<sup>27</sup>

13. We acknowledge that setting legally binding timeframes to fix the total processing time by which compensation claims must be concluded risks some cases not being considered properly.<sup>28</sup> To manage that risk, witnesses at our February 2024 oral evidence session argued that it would be possible to set legally binding timeframes for each stage of a compensation claim, beginning with a legally binding timeframe under which the Post Office must issue the disclosure reports required for sub-postmasters to submit a claim, followed by legally binding deadlines with penalties where subsequent deadlines are not met.<sup>29</sup> Sir Ross Cranston, the Independent Reviewer for the GLO Scheme, while noting the risk that some cases may not be properly considered, nevertheless made it clear that there is well-established legal precedent for enforcing such time periods:

[Yo]u could certainly escalate cases if you reached a timeline—in the law, we often have deadlines, limitation periods and so on—so it could jump up to the next stage.<sup>30</sup>

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23 [Q 450](#)

24 [Qq 504–505](#)

25 HC Deb, 26 February 2024, [col 36](#) [Commons Chamber]

26 HC Deb, 26 February 2024, [col 42](#) [Commons Chamber]

27 HC Deb, 26 February 2024, [col 42](#) [Commons Chamber]

28 [Q 348](#)

29 [Q 424](#)

30 [Q 348](#)



Alan Bates commented:

I think there should be penalties involved where they are not met, and then those penalties should go to the victims [ ... ] That would then be compensation for having to wait and delay.<sup>31</sup>

**14. To correct the abject failure to deliver timely redress for sub-postmasters, the Government must include in its forthcoming legislation legal timeframes to deliver redress to sub-postmasters. Those targets should include binding timeframes for each stage of a compensation claim, with financial penalties awarded to the claimant for failure to meet those deadlines. To accelerate the submission of claims, the Government must review and radically simplify the evidential requirements of the claims process, especially in relation to medical impact, consequential loss and repetitional damage.**

### Fast and fair

15. The Committee was extremely concerned to hear that a significant number of initial offers made by the Post Office to sub-postmasters for redress were insultingly low.<sup>32</sup> The claims process currently requires sub-postmasters to submit claims without knowing the full extent of Post Office records regarding their personal situation or the range of case law precedents used to calculate heads of loss in initial offer letters issued by the Post Office. Former sub-postmasters do not have access to a standardised tariff to estimate such losses.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, there has been a wholesale lack of clarity about the availability of legal assistance, the cap on legal assistance and the ability to take an interim payment while continuing to contest a claim. The initial legal support made available to sub-postmasters was in no way commensurate to the legal firepower available to the Post Office. As such, contests to settle final claims have been unbalanced by a substantial inequality of arms.

**16. To ensure that offers of redress are fast and fair, the Government must:**

- a) **Require full disclosures by the Post Office of the information needed to submit full and fair claims within legally binding timeframes;**
- b) **publish a standardised tariff of damages to help sub-postmasters claim the full amount to which they are entitled;**
- c) **remove the cap on legal expenses for sub-postmasters to contest their claims;**
- d) **allow those who have already settled under the Horizon Shortfall Scheme to revisit their claims to ensure that they have received fair redress; and**
- e) **introduce a legally binding independent appeals mechanism.**

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31 [Q 424](#)

32 [Q 373](#)

33 [Q 517](#)

## Conclusions and recommendations

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1. The Post Office ruined the lives of innocent sub-postmasters. It subsequently failed to facilitate redress. Unsurprisingly, sub-postmasters have no confidence in the Post Office. The Post Office's leadership remains in disarray; its chairman has been dismissed; and its chief executive, Nick Read, is under internal investigation. Mr Read concurred that reform of the Post Office's culture is still a "work in progress," and not "job done." In that context, we note that Mr Read has supplied misleading evidence to the Committee on at least two counts, relating to the Post Office's use of, first, non-disclosure agreements and, secondly, public relations firms. The Post Office is not fit for purpose to administer any of the schemes of redress required to make amends for one of the biggest miscarriages of justice in British history. (Paragraph 7)
2. *The Government must immediately remove the Post Office from any involvement in delivering redress for sub-postmasters and the Government should set out to the Committee how it proposes to deliver swift and effective redress for sub-postmasters, and in what legally binding timeframes. We repeat the Committee's recommendation that the Government set up a properly resourced independent intermediary to assist sub-postmasters seeking to overturn convictions and seek compensation across all redress schemes. This intermediary should provide claimants with access to forensic accountants and legal experts who can offer advice to help ensure that claims are robust as possible, that offers take account of all the losses suffered and that claimants do not suffer significant detriment because records have not been kept by the Post Office or other relevant organisations.* (Paragraph 8)
3. *To correct the abject failure to deliver timely redress for sub-postmasters, the Government must include in its forthcoming legislation legal timeframes to deliver redress to sub-postmasters. Those targets should include binding timeframes for each stage of a compensation claim, with financial penalties awarded to the claimant for failure to meet those deadlines. To accelerate the submission of claims, the Government must review and radically simplify the evidential requirements of the claims process, especially in relation to medical impact, consequential loss and repetitional damage.* (Paragraph 14)
4. *To ensure that offers of redress are fast and fair, the Government must:* (Paragraph 16)
  - a) *Require full disclosures by the Post Office of the information needed to submit full and fair claims within legally binding timeframes;*
  - b) *publish a standardised tariff of damages to help sub-postmasters claim the full amount to which they are entitled;*
  - c) *remove the cap on legal expenses for sub-postmasters to contest their claims;*
  - d) *allow those who have already settled under the Horizon Shortfall Scheme to revisit their claims to ensure that they have received fair redress; and*
  - e) *introduce a legally binding independent appeals mechanism.* (Paragraph 16)

# Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 5 March 2024**

**Members present:**

Liam Byrne, in the Chair

Andy McDonald

Anthony Mangnall

Mark Pawsey

Draft Report (*Post Office and Horizon redress: Instruction to deliver*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 16 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 12 March at 9:45am.]

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Tuesday 16 January 2024

**Dr Neil Hudgell**, Executive Chairman, Hudgell Solicitors; **The Rt Hon. the Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom** [Q1–41](#)

**Alan Bates**, Founder, Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance; **Jo Hamilton**, former sub-postmistress [Q42–83](#)

**Nick Read**, Chief Executive, Post Office; **Paul Patterson**, Director, Fujitsu Services Ltd [Q84–225](#)

**Kevin Hollinrake MP**, Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business, Department for Business and Trade; **Carl Creswell**, Director, Business Resilience, Department for Business and Trade [Q226–266](#)

### Tuesday 27 February 2024

**Carl Creswell**, Director of Business Resilience, Department for Business and Trade; **Mark Cheshier**, Partner, Addleshaw Goddard; **Rob Francis**, Partner, Dentons Solicitors; **Sir Ross Cranston**, Independent Reviewer, Post Office GLO Scheme [Q267–372](#)

**Alan Bates**, former sub-postmaster and founder, Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance; **Tony Downey**, former sub-postmaster; **Tim Brentnall**, former sub-postmaster [Q373–424](#)

**Dr Neil Hudgell**, Executive Chairman, Hudgell Solicitors; **James Hartley**, Partner and National Head of Dispute Resolution, Freeths [Q425–451](#)

**Nick Read**, Chief Executive, Post Office; **Ben Tidswell**, Chair of the Remediation Committee, Post Office; **Simon Recaldin**, Remediation Matters Director, Post Office; **Simon Oldnall**, Horizon and GLO IT Director, Post Office [Q452–604](#)

**Henry Staunton**, former Chair at Post Office [Q605–667](#)

# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Session 2023–24

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Batteries for electric vehicle manufacturing	HC 196
2nd	UK accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership	HC 483
1st Joint Special	Scrutiny of Strategic Export Controls	HC 436
2nd Special	Batteries for electric vehicle manufacturing: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 547

## Session 2022–23

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1st	Pre-appointment hearing with the Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Competition and Markets Authority	HC 523
2nd	Draft Legislative Reform (Provision of Information etc. relating to disabilities) Order 2022	HC 522
3rd	Energy pricing and the future of the Energy Market	HC 236
4th	Post-pandemic economic growth: state aid and post-Brexit competition policy	HC 759
5th	The semiconductor industry in the UK	HC 291
6th	The semiconductor industry in the UK: Government response	HC 1115
7th	Royal Mail	HC 1045
8th	Memorandum of Understanding on scrutiny of the Investment Security Unit	HC 1235
9th	UK plc	HC 1120
10th	Post-pandemic economic growth: UK labour markets	HC 306
11th	Decarbonisation of the power sector	HC 283
1st Special	Decarbonising heat in homes: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of 2021–22	HC 208
2nd Special	Energy pricing and the future of the energy market: Responses to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2022–23	HC 761

Number	Title	Reference
3rd Special	Post pandemic economic growth: State aid and post-Brexit competition policy: Responses to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2022–23	HC 1078
4th Special	Revised (Draft) National Policy Statement for Energy: Government response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 1299
5th Special	State aid and post-Brexit competition policy: Office for the Internal Market response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1302
6th Special	The semiconductor industry in the UK: Further Government response to the BEIS Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2022–23	HC 1404
7th Special	Royal Mail: Responses to the BEIS Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2022–23	HC 1391
8th Special	UK trade negotiations: Agreement with India: Government response to the International Trade Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1584
9th Special	CPTPP: opportunities and challenges for the UK: Government response to the International Trade Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1614
10th Special	Free Trade Agreement Negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council: Government response to the International Trade Committee's Seventh Report	HC 1626

### Session 2021–22

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2nd	Climate Assembly UK: where are we now?	HC 546
3rd	Post-pandemic economic growth: Levelling up	HC 566
4th	Liberty Steel and the future of the UK steel Industry	HC 821
5th	Pre-legislative scrutiny: draft Downstream Oil Resilience Bill	HC 820
6th	Pre-appointment hearing of the Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Financial Reporting Council	HC 1079
7th	Decarbonising heat in homes	HC 1038
8th	Post Office and Horizon - Compensation: interim report	HC 1129
9th	Revised (Draft) National Policy Statement for Energy	HC 1151
10th	Draft Legislative Reform (Renewal of National Radio Multiplex Licences) Order 2022	HC 1199
1st Special	Decarbonising heat in homes: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of 2021–22	HC 208
2nd Special	Net Zero and UN Climate Summits: Scrutiny of Preparations for COP26—interim report: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2019–21	HC 120

Number	Title	Reference
3rd Special	Uyghur forced labour in Xinjiang and UK value chains: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 241
4th Special	Mineworkers' Pension Scheme: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 386
5th Special	Climate Assembly UK: where are we now?: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 680
6th Special	Post-pandemic economic growth: Industrial policy in the UK: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 71
7th Special	Post-pandemic economic growth: Levelling up: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 924
8th Special	Liberty Steel and the Future of the UK Steel Industry: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1123
9th Special	Pre-legislative scrutiny: draft Downstream Oil Resilience Bill. Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1177
10th Special	Post Office and Horizon – Compensation: interim report. Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report	HC 1267

### Session 2019–21

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1st	My BEIS inquiry: proposals from the public	HC 612
2nd	The impact of Coronavirus on businesses and workers: interim pre-Budget report	HC 1264
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4th	Pre-appointment hearing with the Government's preferred candidate for the Chair of the Regulatory Policy Committee	HC 1271
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6th	Mineworkers' Pension Scheme	HC 1346
1st Special	Automation and the future of work: Government Response to the Committee's Twenty-third Report of Session 2017–19	HC 240
2nd Special	Future of the Post Office Network: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 382
3rd Special	Safety of Electrical Goods in the UK: follow-up: Government Response to the Committee's second report of Session 2019	HC 494
4th Special	COP26: Principles and priorities—a POST survey of expert views	HC 1000