

Post Office Horizon, Public Inquiry

What are we trying to do

We are investigating a number of solicitors working on behalf of the Post Office connected to the Public Inquiry into the Horizon system and criminal charges brought against sub-postmasters. Our investigations cover multiple, multi-faceted issues.

Who needs to know

We want the profession to know what we are doing, as well as the public and other stakeholders with an interest in the Public Inquiry.

What's going on

Post Office Limited sub-postmasters and mistresses (SPMs) were wrongly prosecuted for offences based on information from a faulty electronic accounting system, Horizon. Wrongful convictions, financial ruin and devastating personal consequences - the miscarriages of justice in this case have severely impacted the lives of hundreds of SPMs.

Solicitors must work to high professional and ethical standards. This includes upholding the rule of law, acting with integrity, and in a way that upholds public trust and confidence in the profession. As officers of the court, solicitors should never put other interests above the law and the proper administration of justice.

We have therefore been investigating for a number of years solicitors and law firms who were working on behalf of the Post Office/Royal Mail Group.

Gathering and using evidence

We aim to make sure we have access to – and have a comprehensive understanding of - all the available, relevant evidence. So far, our investigation has involved scrutinising tens-of-thousands of pages of information.

We have been gathering evidence through various means. New issues are coming to light on an ongoing basis, particularly from the Public Inquiry, and we expect further relevant evidence from the inquiry in the coming months.

Taking action

We expect to be in the best position to take any meaningful action after the full facts and all relevant issues have been aired through the inquiry. But we

keep our position under constant review and will continue to engage with the inquiry in case there are any issues that might require more immediate action.

We will take action where we find evidence that solicitors have fallen short of the standards the public expects. We have a range of powers to take action against solicitors and firms to protect the public and act as a deterrent. This includes being able to fine solicitors and traditional law firms up to £25,000 and put controls on how they practise.

In cases of serious misconduct where our view is that a more significant sanction is needed, we will take cases to the independent Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal. They have the power to issue unlimited fines and stop solicitors from practising – either for a limited period (a suspension) or indefinitely (striking off).

Open all [#]

Resources

- Find out more about the Public Inquiry [<https://www.postofficehorizoninquiry.org.uk/>] .
- Our Chair outlined discussions on the topic from our January Board [<https://www.sra.org.uk/link/8817cc44b58249eba578ff8ea1f08969.aspx>] .

What have we said

We have made two statements about our work.

- January 2024 statement [<https://www.sra.org.uk/link/85837e6d2656453dbcad109f5b722102.aspx>]
- October 2022 statement [<https://www.sra.org.uk/link/b4d500abd371442ba2f54896f461c013.aspx>]