

[REDACTED]

Date
2 August 2024

[REDACTED]

Post Office
100 Wood Street
London EC2V 9ER

Your Ref:

Classification:
Public

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information Request – FOI2024/00461

We are writing in response to your email received by Post Office Limited (“**Post Office**”) on 16 March 2024, which has been dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“**FOIA**”). We sincerely apologise for the delay in responding to your request.

In your email, you have requested the information shown verbatim in bold below:

“How many complaints/ disputes have been made from Post Office sub-postmasters about the Horizon software that was updated in 2017 (1) have been made, and (2) still need to be resolved, about discrepancies and cash shortfalls in individual post offices; and in what towns and cities these complaints were made.”

On 3 April 2024, we emailed you asking for clarification. On 4 April 2024, you replied to Post Office, saying:

“You seem not to understand your duties to me under section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act or section 45 Code of Practice that provides further guidance on how you can comply with your duty under section 16. I would ask in future correspondence with me you approach your duties within the Act in line with section 16.

My questions put to you on March 16 are as follows:

How many complaints/ disputes have been made from Post Office sub-postmasters about the Horizon software that was updated in 2017 (1) have been made, and (2) still need to be resolved, about discrepancies and cash shortfalls in individual post offices; and in what towns and cities these complaints were made.

So it's focused on the Horizon IT system that was updated in 2017. My question is clear.

It is clear from my questions that the focus is also on discrepancies and cash shortfalls in individual post offices; my question is clear. It is limited to this issue.

I now expect you to provide me with the information required and again remind you of section 16 of the Act”

We can confirm that Post Office does hold some information relevant to your request. Please note, we do not hold any information in the form that you have requested for any of your questions prior to 29 March 2021. Additionally, for the entire period that you have requested, we need to explain that the recording process in place does not directly categorise a complaint and/or discrepancy as being specifically related to the Horizon IT software. Therefore, in the spirit of transparency, we are providing the information we hold and have included more details below on how the information has been sourced against each part of your request.

To answer part 1 of your request: it may be useful if we explain that Post Office define as a complaint any contact which is received into our Branch Support and Issue Resolution Teams regarding an issue that the postmaster or their agent has experienced.

For the period of 29 March 2021 to 16 March 2024, a total of 13,298 complaints were reported to Post Office by postmasters or their agents. In the absence of a direct categorisation, which is not available on our system, we have searched the case notes of these complaints using a keyword search. We have found that 685 cases mention the word “Horizon”. However, it is not possible to know if any of these entries relate directly to a complaint about the Horizon software without manually reviewing them, which would take longer than the statutory cost limit available under section 12 of the FOIA. Out of the 685 cases returned using the keyword search, 1 case was still open as of 16 March 2024.

To answer part 2 of your request: it may be useful to first explain that Post Office defines a discrepancy as any difference between (i) the actual cash and stock position of a branch and (ii) the cash and stock position shown on Horizon as derived from transactions input by branch staff into the branch's terminals.

For the period of 29 March 2021 to 16 March 2024, a total of 12,579 cases of discrepancies were reported to Post Office by postmasters or their agents regardless of the reason behind the discrepancies.

Of this total figure, 490 were still open as of 16 March 2024. Please note that within the total figure of 12,579 discrepancies, there were 52 cases of discrepancies that were categorised as being due to technical or system issues. Unfortunately, there is no further categorisation available to understand if these relate specifically to Horizon or another system / technical issue encountered in branch. All of these 52 cases are closed.

To answer the last part of your request, which is asking for those towns and cities from where the complaints were made, we confirm that complaints and/or discrepancy reports were received from 1,320 different towns and cities.

Given the fluctuation in the number of Post Office branches that open and close from time to time in any given town or city, the number of open branches as of 29 July 2024 may not be an accurate reflection, in all cases, of the number that was continuously open in every relevant town or city for the duration of 29 March 2021 to 16 March 2024. The information we have provided reflects the position as of 29 July 2024.

In the Annex below, from the total of 1,320 towns and cities from which reports were received between 29 March 2021 and 16 March 2024, we have provided the names of only the 330 towns and cities, each of which had 10 or more Post Office branches open as of 29 July 2024.

The reason that we have been unable to provide all of the locations of the affected branches is because we have withheld the names of the towns and cities where there are fewer than 10 Post Office branches, under sections 40(2) and 40(3A) of the FOIA as this constitutes personal data relating to other persons. These sections exempt personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would breach any of the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the UK GDPR.

We consider that disclosure of the names of towns or cities with fewer than 10 Post Office branches is likely to breach the first data protection principle, which provides that personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly, and in a transparent manner. Disclosure of these names would not constitute 'fair' processing of the personal data, as it may lead to the identification of a postmaster where Post Office has received reports of complaints or discrepancies from their Post Office branch.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of this response, you do have a right to request an internal review. You can do this by writing to the address above within 40 working days of receipt of this response stating your reasons for your internal review request or alternatively, by emailing information.rights@postoffice.co.uk.

If, having requested an internal review by Post Office, you are still not satisfied with our response you also have a right of appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113
www.ico.org.uk/foicomplaints

Yours sincerely,

Information Rights Team
information.rights@postoffice.co.uk
<https://corporate.postoffice.co.uk/en/governance/access-to-information/access-to-information/>

Post Office Limited is committed to protecting your privacy, information about how we do this can be found on our website at www.postoffice.co.uk/privacy

Annex

Aberdeen	Bognor Regis	Chester-Le-Street	Dumfries	Harrogate	Lewes	Newark	Plymouth	Slough	Truro
Aberystwyth	Bolton	Chichester	Dundee	Harrow	Leyburn	Newcastle	Pontefract	Solihull	Tunbridge Wells
Abingdon	Boston	Chippenham	Dunfermline	Hartlepool	Lincoln	Newcastle Upon Tyne	Pontypridd	South Shields	Uxbridge
Alfreton	Bournemouth	Chipping Norton	Duncannon	Haverfordwest	Liskeard	Newport	Poole	Southampton	Ventnor
Alnwick	Bracknell	Chorley	Dunstable	Helston	Liverpool	Newquay	Port Talbot	Southend-on-Sea	Wakefield
Altrincham	Bradford	Christchurch	Durham	Hemel Hempstead	Livingston	Newry	Portsmouth	Southport	Wallingford
Andover	Braintree	Clacton-On-Sea	Eastbourne	Hereford	Llandrindod Wells	Newton Abbot	Preston	Spalding	Walsall
Armagh	Brecon	Coalville	Edinburgh	Hexham	Llandysul	Newton Stewart	Pulborough	St Albans	Wareham
Ashford	Brentwood	Colchester	Ely	High Wycombe	Llanelli	Newtownards	Pwllheli	St Austell	Warrington
Aylesbury	Bridgend	Coleraine	Enniskillen	Hitchin	London	Northallerton	Reading	St Helens	Warwick
Ayr	Bridgnorth	Cookstown	Epsom	Holyhead	Londonderry	Northampton	Redditch	Stafford	Waterlooville
Ballymena	Bridgwater	Corwen	Evesham	Horsham	Loughborough	Northwich	Retford	Stevenage	Watford
Ballymoney	Brighton	Coventry	Exeter	Hounslow	Lowestoft	Norwich	Richmond	Stirling	Wellingborough
Banbury	Bristol	Craigavon	Falkirk	Huddersfield	Luton	Nottingham	Ripon	Stockport	Welshpool
Bangor	Bude	Crawley	Fareham	Hull	Macclesfield	Nuneaton	Rochdale	Stockton-on-Tees	Weston-Super-Mare
Barnsley	Burnley	Crediton	Farnham	Huntingdon	Magherafelt	Oakham	Rochester	Stoke-on-Trent	Weymouth
Barnstaple	Burton-on-Trent	Crewe	Forces Post Office	Ilford	Maidenhead	Okehampton	Romford	Stourbridge	Whitby
Basildon	Bury	Croydon	Fraserburgh	Ilkeston	Maidstone	Oldbury	Rotherham	Stowmarket	Wigan
Basingstoke	Bury St Edmunds	Cupar	Frome	Inverness	Malton	Oldham	Rugby	Stratford-upon-Avon	Wigton
Bath	Caernarfon	Dagenham	Gainsborough	Ipswich	Malvern	Omagh	Rugeley	Stroud	Wimborne
Bathgate	Caerphilly	Darlington	Gateshead	Isle Of Lewis	Manchester	Orkney	Salford	Sudbury	Winchester
Bedale	Cambridge	Dartford	Gillingham	Keighley	Mansfield	Ormskirk	Salisbury	Sunderland	Wirral
Bedford	Cannock	Daventry	Glasgow	Kendal	Market Rasen	Orpington	Saltburn-by-the-Sea	Sutton Coldfield	Wisbech
Belfast	Canterbury	Deeside	Gloucester	Kettering	Marlborough	Oswestry	Scarborough	Swansea	Witney
Beverley	Cardiff	Derby	Goole	Kidderminster	Matlock	Oxford	Scunthorpe	Swindon	Woking
Bicester	Carlisle	Dereham	Grantham	Kilmarnock	Melton Mowbray	Paignton	Selby	Tamworth	Wolverhampton
Bideford	Carmarthen	Dewsbury	Gravesend	Kings Lynn	Merthyr Tydfil	Paisley	Sevenoaks	Taunton	Woodbridge
Birmingham	Carnforth	Doncaster	Grays	Kirkcaldy	Middlesbrough	Penrith	Sheffield	Telford	Worcester
Bishop Auckland	Castle Douglas	Dorchester	Great Yarmouth	Lancaster	Milton Keynes	Penzance	Sherborne	Thetford	Worksop

Bishops Stortford	Chelmsford	Dover	Grimsby	Leamington Spa	Mold	Perth	Shetland	Thirsk	Worthing
Blackburn	Cheltenham	Downpatrick	Guildford	Leeds	Montrose	Peterborough	Shrewsbury	Tonbridge	Wrexham
Blackpool	Chester	Driffield	Halifax	Leicester	Morpeth	Peterhead	Sittingbourne	Torquay	Yeovil
Blandford Forum	Chesterfield	Dudley	Halstead	Leven	Neath	Peterlee	Sleaford	Trowbridge	York