

Badenoch hits back at former Post Office boss in Horizon compensation row

Business Secretary Kemi Badenoch has hit out at the former Post Office chairman after he alleged he was told to “stall” spending on compensation for Horizon scandal victims ahead of the next general election.

Henry Staunton, [who was ousted by the business secretary last month](#), used an interview with The Sunday Times to suggest that the alleged request from a senior Whitehall civil servant was linked to concerns about the cost of the payouts.

He also told the paper that Ms Badenoch told him that “someone’s got to take the rap” for the Horizon scandal and that he discovered his sacking following a phone call from Sky News.

The claims prompted an immediate and strongly worded denial from the government, with Ms Badenoch also using social media to accuse the former chairman of “disgraceful misrepresentation” of the reasons he was ousted.

Mr Staunton, who took up the role in December 2022 following nine years as chairman of WH Smith, claimed he was told “by a fairly senior person to stall on spend on compensation and on the replacement of Horizon” and to “limp into the election”.

He added: “It was not an anti-postmaster thing, it was just straight financials.

“I didn’t ask, because I said ‘I’m having no part of it – I’m not here to limp into the election, it’s not the right thing to do by postmasters’.

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“The word ‘limp’ gives you a snapshot of where they were.”

Ms Badenoch, in a lengthy post on X, said the comments were a “disgraceful misrepresentation of my conversation with him and

the reasons for his dismissal”.

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She added: “Henry Staunton had a lack of grip getting justice for postmasters. The serious concerns over his conduct were the reasons I asked him to step down.

“That he chose to run to the media with made up anecdotes and a series of falsehoods, confirms I made the correct decision.”

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She said her call with Mr Staunton “was with officials” who took a “complete record”.

“He has given an interview full of lies about our conversation during his dismissal.”

“The details will emerge soon enough as I won’t let the matter rest here, but will be discussing with [government] lawyers,” she said.

Ms Badenoch is expected to make a Commons statement about the matter on Monday.

The Post Office scandal has been pushed into the public eye following the airing of ITV drama, [Mr Bates Vs The Post Office](#).

The series documented the long legal fight by hundreds of sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses who were wrongfully blamed for financial discrepancies caused by the Horizon IT system between 1999 and 2015.

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Compensation fight 'like a trial'

Many were financially ruined, some were jailed and others committed suicide after the errors made it seem like money was missing from their shops.

The government has announced plans to [exonerate those whose convictions have still not been overturned](#) and set aside £1bn

for compensation.

But many campaigners, including Alan Bates who the ITV drama was centred on, have complained about unnecessary delays to victims in receiving the money.

Shadow business secretary Jonathan Reynolds said: “The Horizon scandal is widely accepted to be one of the worst miscarriages of justice in British history.

“Under no circumstances should compensation to victims be delayed and to do so for party political purposes would be a further insult to sub-postmasters.

“The Labour Party has called for all sub-postmasters to be exonerated and compensation paid swiftly so that victims can begin to draw this awful chapter to a close.”

Read more from Sky News:

[£1bn set aside to fund compensation for victims](#)

[Former postmaster says compensation offer is ‘insulting’](#)



Image:
Henry Staunton

Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey said the claims were “deeply disturbing”.

He said that “ministers must come to parliament and explain exactly what has happened at the earliest opportunity”.

Ms Badenoch’s denial came after Home Office minister Michael Tomlinson told broadcasters he didn’t “accept or recognise” Mr Staunton’s claims.

Speaking on Sunday morning, he initially told Sky News he hadn’t read the story so he couldn’t comment.

But later he told Times Radio: “I don’t accept or recognise that.

“We are encouraging postmasters to come forward. We have brought legislation through the House of Commons which will enable those payments to be made, and that is something that we are encouraging rather than anything.”

A government spokesperson said: “We utterly refute these allegations.

“The government has sped up compensation to victims and consistently encouraged postmasters to come forward with their claims.

“To suggest any actions or conversations happened to the contrary is incorrect. In fact, upon appointment, Mr Staunton was set concrete objectives, in writing, to focus on reaching settlements with claimants – clear evidence of the government’s intent.

“The secretary of state asked Henry Staunton to step down as chairman of the Post Office because a change in leadership was needed.”