

'Hour by hour' talks to speed-up appeals of Post Office scandal victims to clear their names

The justice secretary is meeting with senior judges today to discuss ways to accelerate the appeals of those convicted in the Horizon scandal, with cabinet minister Mel Stride saying an announcement could come this week.

The government is facing fresh calls to act following the airing of ITV drama [Mr Bates vs The Post Office](#) which returned the spotlight to the scandal.

Between 1999 and 2015, more than 700 Post Office branch managers were convicted after the faulty Horizon software made it look like money was missing from their shops.

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Speaking to Sky News, Work and Pensions Secretary Mel Stride said his colleague, Justice Secretary Alex Chalk, is having discussions with “senior members within the justice system to see what can be done to expedite and accelerate” those appealing their convictions.

“This is something that is happening hour by hour. It’s not something that’s going to happen next week. It is happening right now. And we intend to move quickly,” said Mr Stride.

“It’s really important that we do this because a lot of people clearly have suffered not just financially, but in terms of their mental health and relationships and their standing in the local communities and so on.

“We are moving now at very considerable pace.”

Two former justice secretaries [have called for legislation to override the convictions](#), although other options mooted include a mass appeal, or removing the Post Office from the appeals process.

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Asked if it would be this week when the next steps would be announced, he added he could not say the exact day, but it would be in that “order of timescale”.

He added: “I think the important thing is that, albeit it’s just going to be a matter of a few days now, that those discussions are detailed and come to the best possible way of achieving this outcome.”

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Image:

Mr Bates vs the Post Office brought the scandal to the fore.
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Postal minister Kevin Hollinrake met with Mr Chalk yesterday to discuss the way forward. Speaking in the House of Commons, Mr Hollinrake said they had “devised some options for resolving the outstanding criminal convictions with much more pace”.

He said legislation to create a presumption of innocence had been considered.

Considerable compensation has already been paid out to some of those impacted by the scandal, and more money is expected to be released in the future.

Asked if Fujitsu, the company which developed the software, would be required to contribute to compensation rather than it all coming from taxpayer coffers, Mr Stride told Sky News this would be decided following the conclusion of the independent inquiry into the scandal.

Many of the sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses were jailed, bankrupted and in some cases, took their own lives – but so far only 93 convictions have been overturned.

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Mr Stride reiterated the government's position that it would support the Honours Forfeiture Committee if it decided to look at removing ex-Post Office boss Paula Vennells's CBE.

He also said Sir Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democrats

and who was postal minister during the coalition, [had questions to answer](#) about his actions at the time.

Sir Robert Buckland, the former justice secretary, told Sky News he wants to see convictions removed from those impacted so compensation can be paid.

With Sir Keir Starmer yesterday indicating he backed the idea of emergency legislation, Sir Robert said something could be passed “within a week or so”.