



Participant Media Summary

The following media clippings are being shared with Inquiry participants as part of the regular media summary. The clippings will only be available on a temporary basis.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

ALTERNATIVE HONOURS

The controversial lists of two former PMs came out this year. But here are the unsung heroes — campaigners, whistleblowers and forward-thinkers — we feel are truly worthy of recognition

Tom Calver

In January 1917, after 30 months of war, George V broke with the practice of dishing out knighthoods to the most loyal subjects and instead rewarded military personnel only. A Times editorial called it a “welcome change”, condemning the “personal and party manoeuvres” behind the honours. “[They] seem indescribably repellent in these days of national strain,” it said. A new class of awards for non-combatants was established that year – the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, split into five grades from Member to Knight/Dame Grand Cross – and the modern honours system was born.

Our view of it is still shaped by the most famous recipients, even though 60 per cent of the 1,107 people appointed OBE, MBE, CBE, knight or dame last year were recognised for work in the community.

Two controversial resignation honours lists have now been published in the past 12 months. Never mind that Liz Truss was prime minister for 49 days: after half of Boris Johnson’s suggestions were rejected, a House of Lords report said the list called into question the entire system.

Sunday Times journalists have again

put forward their alternative suggestions for services to the Post Office. I was offered mine for services to justice. But what justice is there with her many of our nominees have shown enormous bravery in spite of the state, or even because they stood up to it. Some are victims or whistleblowers who sought justice. Others are campaigners or business owners who made Britain a cleaner, safer place. And finally, we have chosen some more well-known figures who gave us something to cheer about.

ALAN BATES

Bates, 69, has campaigned to win justice for the hundreds of sub-postmasters who suffered under the Post Office Horizon IT scandal, described as the one of the biggest miscarriages of justice in British legal history. Loyal Post Office workers were sacked and prosecuted, accused of theft, fraud and false accounting that was actually the result of computer errors. In the last new year honours Bates – who used to run a Post Office in Craig-y-Don, north Wales – turned down an OBE because Paula Vennells, the Post Office chief executive in post when the company prosecuted innocent sub-postmasters, still had her CBE. “What an insult to people if I accepted that,” he said. “Paula Vennells

ESTHER GHEY

In February Brianna Ghey, a 16-year-old transgender girl, was murdered in a park near Warrington. Her two 16-year-old killers will be sentenced, and named, next year. Standing up in court this month, Brianna’s mother, praised by the judge for her “fortitude and humanity”, used her victim statement to call for “empathy and passion” towards the killers’ families. “They too have lost a child,” Ghey told the court. She has also started the Peace in Mind campaign, which is raising money to teach mindfulness in schools and support young people with mental health issues, including teacher training. “Senseless acts of violence are happening far too often,” Ghey said. “I believe, to prevent this from recurring, we need to weave empathy, compassion

and resilience throughout our society.”

LINDSEY BURROW

Each day, Burrow lifts her husband out of bed, carries him to a chair, feeds him liquidised food and, if they go out, lifts him into their car. A former rugby league star, Rob Burrow – who has just been awarded a CBE – was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2019, and the couple, both 40, have raised millions of pounds for research into the condition, which affects about 5,000 adults in the UK. This year the Burrows, who have three young children, let film crews into their home as part of an ITV documentary, and in doing so revealed the lengths to which Burrow will go to care for her husband. “You just want to do what you can, while you can, for as long as you can,” she said. “He’s my husband – I want to care for him.” The last census revealed more than five million people in England and Wales provide unpaid care for a friend or family member.

EMILY BOLTON

It took 17 years for Andrew Malkinson to secure justice after his wrongful rape conviction, but without Emily Bolton it could have been much longer. She is the lead solicitor at Appeal, a charity that fights to overturn wrongful convictions, and had to challenge the police’s refusal to provide information that eventually proved vital to his release. Bolton campaigns for reform of the Criminal Cases Review Commission, which decides whether alleged miscarriages of justice are heard by the Court of Appeal. After that court overturned Malkinson’s conviction in July, she personally helped him temporarily relocate to the Netherlands so that he could finally feel free.

HANNAH BARNES

More than 20 book proposal rejections would put off most prospective authors, but not Hannah Barnes. In 2019, when the former BBC *Newsnight* journalist began investigating the NHS Gender Identity Development Service (Gids) at the Tavistock Centre – the country’s only specialist clinic for transgender children – she had no idea of the strength of oppo-

sition she would face. Although many publishers refused to touch it, when *Time to Think* was finally released in February, it revealed more than 1,000 children had been referred for puberty-blockers at the clinic, while concerns were ignored to preserve a “gold dust” NHS contract. “Freedom of speech is vital across society, perhaps nowhere more so than in our healthcare system,” Barnes said.

SHARON HENDERSON AND STACEY ALLAN

When seven-year-old Nikki Allan was lured to a derelict building in Sunderland in 1992 and murdered, police bungled the investigation and arrested the wrong person. Yet Nikki’s mother, Sharon Henderson, along with her daughter, Nikki’s sister Stacey, never gave up hope that justice could be served. Despite battling addiction, Henderson worked constantly to raise awareness of her daughter’s case, tracking down people who had lived on their estate, and even moving to find out more about David Boyd, Nikki’s babysitter’s partner at the time of her murder. In 2017, after starting a petition, she secured a new investigation of the case, which resulted in the arrest of Boyd. In May he was jailed for life. “My life has been on hold for 30 years until someone was finally brought to justice,” Henderson said.

PENNY LANCASTER

Those watching the coronation were spoilt for famous faces in the ceremony, but only the most eagle-eyed will have spotted one policing the streets. The former model and *Loose Women* presenter Penny Lancaster, 52, first volunteered with the City of London police in 2019 as part of Channel 4’s documentary *Famous and Fighting Crime*, and went on to become a special constable in April 2021. Alongside her coronation duties, she and her husband, Sir Rod Stewart, have been filling potholes and buying NHS scanners for local hospitals near their Essex home.

DAN NEIDLE

The tax lawyer turned campaigner has had a busy few months. After exposing Nadhim Zahawi’s use of an offshore trust

in 2022 – when Zahawi was chancellor – this year he stood up for victims of the Horizon Post Office scandal, who were set to lose nearly half of their compensation through taxation. The former Clifford Chance lawyer, 50, has also been a prominent voice against so-called Slapp legal letters, which are used by the powerful to intimidate journalists and others.

NICOLA NUTTALL

When her daughter Laura was diagnosed with a brain tumour, Nicola Nuttall began researching her condition, glioblastoma multiforme. Laura died in May aged 23, close to five years after her diagnosis, and Nicola, 53, has since led a campaign by the charity OurBrainBank to demand better NHS care for glioblastoma. It is the most common brain tumour among adults, with about 3,200 diagnoses each year. Nicola has continued her daughter’s work as an ambassador for The Brain Tumour Charity, setting up the Be More Laura Foundation and raising money for clinical trials to treat the disease.

MATT STANIEK

Every Monday at 9am, Matt Staniek has been protesting against dumping raw sewage into Windermere by sitting on a lavatory outside United Utilities’ nearby information centre until they stop. The 27-year-old zoologist, who grew up in the Lake District, started his Save Windermere campaign three years ago, initially using his savings to fund it. He now runs his campaign full-time, and was inspired by Greta Thunberg’s climate protests to send the message that he is “here to stay” until water pollution stops. A video of his “sewage strike” has been viewed more than a million times online.

THE WOMAN WHO SPOKE OUT FOR OLIVIA

When nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbel was murdered by Thomas Cashman in her home in Liverpool in August 2022, prosecutors worried that fear of reprisals would stop witnesses from coming forward. But two days later a woman, to whom Cashman spoke after murdering Pratt-Korbel, bravely came forward. An

ex-partner of Cashman, she was given lifelong anonymity and faced the prospect of years in witness protection. Her testimony at his trial in March was pivotal in securing his life sentence. “There’s no such thing as a grass when it involves a nine-year-old girl,” the woman told the jury. Detective Superintendent Mark Baker, of Merseyside police, said: “In my 30 years as a police officer, I’ve never seen such bravery.”

SU GORMAN

When she died of heart failure this year, the Tainted Blood pressure group lost one of its most vocal members. Gorman, 65, had been a leading campaigner for victims of the infected blood scandal, in which 4,689 people became infected with hepatitis C and HIV after being treated with contaminated blood, since her husband Steve was diagnosed with the former in 1997. She was instrumental in establishing the Infected Blood Inquiry in 2018. When Steve died of total organ failure in December of that year, aged 62, she continued to attend inquiry hearings, give testimonies and make media appearances despite being increasingly ill herself. This month MPs backed a scheme to speed up compensation for victims.

CRAIG HENDERSON

For children with autism, getting a haircut can be a challenging sensory experience. Craig Henderson began his career aged 17 at a unisex salon in Boston, Lincolnshire, but since 2018 has run Craig’s Barber Shop, a specialist, safe space for neurodivergent children. Due to demand, this year Craig, 36, moved to a bigger shop. He runs mental health training in the community, going into schools to help children with special needs understand and feel comfortable with the experience of getting their hair cut.

TRACY-ANN OBERMAN

The former *EastEnders* and *Doctor Who* actress has been one of the most strident voices against antisemitism in the UK for years. Oberman, 57, has spent much of the past year playing a female version of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* 1936, a reimagining of Shakespeare’s play set

during tensions with fascists in London. Since the October 7 attacks by Hamas in Israel, and the spike in antisemitism in the UK, Oberman has spoken out against prejudice, even though it meant her play needed extra security when it toured.

SAM EVANS

In March the BBC announced plans to disband the BBC Singers, the UK’s only full-time professional chamber choir, ending nearly 100 years of history. Fortunately Evans, a choirmaster from Battersea, organised a video campaign which recorded thousands of amateur singers from choirs around the country saying: “Don’t scrap the BBC Singers”. The montage, which went viral, helped to save the choir from the scrapheap – and they received the loudest, longest applause of all at this year’s Proms.

HANNAH MCLAUGHLAN,
JENNIFER MCCANN AND
HANNAH REID

These three Scottish women in their twenties were attacked by the serial rapist Logan Doig, who was jailed this year for 12 offences. They waived their right to anonymity to campaign, alongside two other women, for better treatment of rape victims in the legal system. They are due to give evidence to parliament in January, and have been working with Scotland’s lord advocate to amend the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform Bill. “Two and a half years ago we reported our abuser as victims – today we stand in solidarity as survivors,” they said after Doig’s sentencing.

JOHN READ

Britain is the most littered country in the western world. One man looking to change that is Read, founder of the Clean Up Britain campaign. He has poured hundreds of thousands of pounds of his own money into the venture, and regularly drives up and down motorways, taking photos to highlight the problem. This year Mishcon de Reya, the law firm, issued a pre-action letter on his behalf accusing National Highways of breaching

its duty to keep the roads clear of litter.

STEPHEN CRESSWELL

An analyst on the HS2 rail project, Cresswell, 51, became concerned that cost estimates were being kept artificially low to cover up budget overruns. An experienced project risk manager who had worked on Heathrow, Thameslink and the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset, Cresswell felt uniquely placed to blow the whistle. He suffered for speaking up, initially struggling to find construction work. But he said: “You have to live by your values.”

JOSH KERR

In August, Josh Kerr proved himself to be one of our most exciting, talented athletes. The 26-year-old Scot stunned the Olympic champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen to win 1,500m gold at the World Championships in Budapest, and now has Olympic glory in his sights next year. Kerr’s triumphs were not enough to secure him a nomination for BBC Sports Personality of the Year, however, to the outrage of many, including the World Athletics president, Lord Coe, who tweeted: “Are you having a laugh?” Kerr’s exclusion left him “massively disappointed” but he attended the ceremony anyway to support Katarina Johnson-Thompson.

THE ASCENSION CHOIR

This group of eight singers from the gospel group Kingdom Choir, led by Abimbola Amoako-Gyampah, made history in May by becoming the first gospel choir to perform at a coronation. For many watching at home, their performance of *Alleluia* was the ceremony’s stand-out moment. Amoako-Gyampah, 30, who also performed at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex in 2018, later admitted: “There was a little bit of nerves, but we tried to channel it into excitement about doing the piece.”

ANDREW PATEN

About 5,000 people die of asbestos-related disease every year, but there is still no national database of where the asbestos in public buildings actually is. Seeking

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to change that is Andrew Paten, who is campaigning for a national asbestos register. The 64-year-old has built a model register himself, using software to compile data that building managers are already required to hold. His idea was debated in parliament in September and has gained the backing of a number of MPs.

MARK DAVYD

Two grassroots music venues are closing every week, thanks to high energy bills and debts incurred from the pandemic. Of the 366 venues Ed Sheeran played while learning his trade, at least 150 are now closed. One man working tirelessly to save them is Mark Davyd, chief executive of the Music Venue Trust. A former band manager, he founded the charity in 2014 to protect independent venues, fundraise and acquire freeholds. Recently he has campaigned for an arena and stadium tax, which would put a small proportion of every ticket fee for big concerts into grassroots music.

VISHAL KARIA

At the age of 17, Vishal Karia was expelled from school for being disruptive in class. He did not realise it, but Karia had undiagnosed ADHD. Now aged 33, and worth £98 million thanks to his wholesaler business Affinity Fragrances, which distributes products from Hugo Boss and Gucci, he calls ADHD his “superpower” – and has used his wealth and profile to help raise awareness of the condition.

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Top, the Ascension Choir. Below, from top, Dan Neidle, Tracy-Ann Oberman and Vishal Karia. Bottom row, left to right, Esther Ghey and her late daughter Brianna, Nicola Nuttall, Penny Lancaster and Matt Staniek

If scandal strikes, Britain leaps into inaction

The Post Office outrage reveals a deeply dysfunctional state whose default mode is stonewalling and obfuscation



@CITYSAMUEL

An inquiry, as the dictionary has it, is a question. But in Westminster, as we know, an inquiry is not a question. It is an answer to a question. Questions like “Why did this happen?”, “Who is to blame?” or “What are you going to do about it?”. Yet in the arsenal of inertia wielded by officialdom, the inquiry is just one tool. The handling of the appalling Post Office Horizon IT scandal has involved the full array of delaying tactics and evasion. This makes it an instructive example of dysfunction in the British state.

The injustice, so far as we know, began about 25 years ago, when a faulty new IT system began generating “shortfalls” in individual post office accounts for which sub-postmasters were held responsible, ultimately leading to 900 prosecutions and affecting more than 3,000 innocent people. Four of those accused went on to commit suicide, thousands of others lost their homes, savings and good names.

For at least a decade there have been dossiers of verified evidence on file at the Post Office and parliament suggesting that the accusations, let alone the prosecutions, were deeply unsound. Yet as of this month, less than 15 per cent of convictions had been overturned, and it was not until last month that significant amounts of compensation reached most victims. Every step has taken years of campaigning to make progress.

The cover-up at the Post Office and the ruthless incompetence of Fujitsu, the IT supplier, were bad enough. But both were enabled year after year by the civil servants who

were meant to be supervising them, who stonewalled MPs and ministers, using every trick in the book.

Their first tool was the “arm’s length body” excuse. As Sir Ed Davey, now Lib Dem leader, wrote to the leading postmaster campaigner, Alan Bates, in 2010 when he was the relevant minister, the Post Office must be allowed “commercial freedom to run its business operations without interference” — a classic civil service response.

The fiction of “arm’s length” independence is a rampant disease of modern government. From the DVLA to the Arts Council, there are about 300 of these bodies, responsible for more than £200 billion of government spending. Of course, activities such as setting interest rates, policing and scientific research should take place without day-to-day political meddling. But all state-owned entities are ultimately part of government and, when they fail or run amok, must be held accountable as such. Instead, their supposedly sacrosanct independence is used as an excuse to do nothing about rogue behaviour.

If absolutely forced to take responsibility, the government machine has another strategy for cleaving to inaction: the public inquiry. This becomes a kind of “arm’s length” shield to put off debate or action. “We must wait for the inquiry,” the mandarins say and the politicians repeat, like a sacred mantra, to hold off the reckoning.

Can we strip the former Post Office boss Paula Vennells of her CBE, the business minister, Kevin Hollinrake, was asked last month. “Sir Tom Scholar [the honours forfeiture chief] has said that we need to wait until the end of the inquiry,” he said. Can anyone be made to repay bonuses? “We should wait for the results of the inquiry.” Or as Lord Callanan, another business minister, was asked 18 months ago, can we make Fujitsu pay up? “We need to wait for the inquiry.”

Chilcot, Windrush, Grenfell, the infected blood inquiry, the child sex abuse inquiry; on the list goes, up to the latest boondoggle, the Covid inquiry. These vast operations supply valuable time for outrage to be neutered, blunders nullified and villainy sterilised. As years pass, legal fees mount and the media storms ebb and flow, the characters in the drama — victims, perpetrators, mandarins and politicians — come and go, leaving the stage before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Occasionally, the exercise serves a real cathartic or informational purpose (Hillsborough, the Casey report into the Metropolitan Police, the Ockenden report into maternity services), but the primary function is to disperse accountability over time and paragraphs.

Even better than the inquiry for stymying change is an appeal to the importance of judicial independence. This always carries the implicit threat that meddling ministers can be accused of breaking the ministerial code, making it an especially powerful tonic against action. It is precisely for this reason that so few postmasters have had their criminal records expunged, despite the blazingly obvious unsoundness of their convictions. For years, ministers have been told that exonerating them en masse is impossible without compromising the rule of law. We must wait for the courts. Indeed, that fanatical defender of civil service sacred cows, Dominic Grieve, was on the radio only this week reiterating the point. Yet now we know, miraculously, that a way will be found, after 20 years, to unwind this injustice speedily. I predict the legal system will not collapse as a result.

If all else fails, of course, one can always rely upon the implacable senselessness of the Treasury. The amounts stolen from the postmasters and the wrongs done are so great that compensation requires its approval. A business case must be made, a proposal submitted and documentation supplied across

departments, from one bureaucratic fiefdom to another, before the long wait for assessment and permission. It takes time, minister.

Faced with all these impressive reasons not to do anything, ministers tend to react in one of two ways. By far the majority behave as Ed Davey did, and as Sir Keir Starmer no doubt would, and decide not to rock the boat. Accept official advice and at least your own department will not take against you (until or unless it becomes expedient).

A difficult minority, however, behave differently. When the bureaucracy tries to thwart them or they receive advice that smells wrong, they fight. Often, they are incompetent (Boris Johnson, Suella Braverman, Liz Truss). Sometimes they aren't (Michael Gove, Margaret Thatcher). They are wilful, risk-taking and controversial, creating a phalanx of enemies who eventually fell them one way or another. But if you want to see what government looks like without enough of these figures, just browse through Britain's migration, procurement, defence, energy, health and regulatory policies over the last few decades.

The sub-postmasters scandal is a glaring example of official obfuscation over action. It is not the exception. This is the default mode of government. It generates disaster after disaster. Usually, however, by the time we actually work out what's gone wrong, the culprits are long gone. After all, it was only fair to wait for the inquiry.

Inquiries allow time for outrage to be neutered and villainy sterilised



Ministers used the cover of an inquiry to avoid revoking Paula Vennells's CBE

MPs: blood scandal victims deserve cash too

Caroline Wheeler
Political Editor

More than 100 MPs and peers have called on the prime minister to speed up compensation for the victims of the contaminated blood scandal after Rishi Sunak announced emergency laws to compensate sub-postmasters caught up in the Horizon IT scandal.

Parliamentarians from ten political parties have written to Sunak asking him to show the “same determination” to compensate the victims of the infected blood scandal, who have been waiting 40 years for justice.

The letter, written by the Labour MP Dame Diana Johnson, has also been signed by members of the sub-postmasters’ campaign, including the Labour MP Kevan Jones and Conservative MP Sir David Davis.

About 30,000 people in Britain are believed to have contracted hepatitis C and HIV from contaminated blood in the 1970s and 1980s, including about 5,000 haemophiliacs. A public inquiry into the circumstances has been running since 2017. A report by Sir Brian Langstaff, chairman of the inquiry, is expected in March.

Last week Johnson, who has been honoured for her role in the campaign, asked Penny Mordaunt, the leader of the Commons, whether she thought it would take a television drama for the government to act – a reference to ITV’s *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*, which brought the Horizon scandal to a huge, appalled audience.

In response, Mordaunt said that John Glenn, the paymaster-general, was working through “some very difficult issues. He has the final shift in this particular story, and I am confident he will deliver on it.”

A government spokeswoman said: “This was an appalling tragedy, and our thoughts remain with all those affected. We are clear that justice needs to be delivered for the victims and have already accepted the moral case for compensation.”



**Will it
take a TV
drama
before
action
is taken?**

JUSTICE DELAYED

PRIME minister Rishi Sunak has pledged that sub-postmasters wrongly convicted in the Horizon scandal will be “swiftly” exonerated and compensated. But payouts are rarely easily extracted from government. The first in a series...

Contaminated blood scandal

1970s and 80s: Up to 30,000 patients in the UK are infected with HIV and hepatitis C via contaminated blood products.

May 1987: Paul Foot’s first article on the scandal appears in *Private Eye*.

2018-23: Infected Blood Inquiry hears evidence while victims continue to die.

Cost of inquiry: £130m so far.

Compensation: Interim payments of £100,000 each to 4,000 surviving victims and bereaved partners. Government is still resisting a final decision on full payouts, despite legislation last year obliging it to get a move on.

Opinion Post Office scandal

The UK has an accountability problem — just look at the Post Office

Groupthink, malice and inability to join the dots has been a common feature with other failings in public bodies

CAMILLA CAVENDISH



© Jonathan McHugh

Camilla Cavendish JANUARY 13 2024

The Post Office scandal was uncovered not by officialdom but by dogged, independent-minded heroes. These included journalists at the BBC, Computer Weekly and Private Eye; an engineer who blew the whistle at Fujitsu; several MPs; and Alan Bates, the sub-postmaster whose determination to get justice is now legendary. These people, now celebrated in an ITV drama that has pushed the issue to the top of the nation's agenda, were up against a self-serving apparatchik class which despises the little people, is adept at covering its tracks and is an increasing feature of modern Britain.

The number of postmasters affected, and the vindictive way in which the Post Office pursued them, makes it especially shocking. But we have seen the same pattern in other tragedies where public or quasi-public bodies either fail to join the dots or actively conspire in cover-ups. The deaths of babies at Morecambe Bay hospital were uncovered by a father, James Titcombe, who was repeatedly fobbed off in getting answers about why his baby died. The sexual abuse of girls in Rotherham was revealed by The Times, despite extensive obfuscation by Rotherham council. Failings in the care of Baby Peter Connelly, who died under the noses of social workers, were brought to light by Kim Holt, a paediatrician who was suspended for her pains by Great Ormond Street.

One of the reasons the Post Office saga took so long is that it was a state-owned entity which was also independent. It wasn't accountable to anyone, and even part-funded the postmasters' representative body, effectively muzzling it. The management culture assumed that many sub-postmasters, who were self-employed, were on the take — a view executives felt was confirmed when the Horizon software appeared to show high levels of fraud. It was protected by Whitehall, whose officials encouraged a succession of ministers not to meet Bates.

The UK landscape is littered with similar hybrid bodies which are fundamentally unaccountable. Universities that pay top management like businesses, but don't run like businesses. Privatised water monopolies that have spent years illegally dumping sewage into our water, killing fish and making people sick. Their executives are part of the apparatchik class and so is the regulator, Ofwat.

A striking feature of this cadre is how they move from job to job around the system despite, in some cases, egregious failings. The NHS is littered with overpromoted managers who get recycled from one hospital trust to another. Paula Vennells, Post Office chief executive between 2012 and 2019, was in post when failings in the Horizon software became unavoidably evident, yet she continued to preside over prosecutions until 2015. The MP James Arbuthnot, who forced Vennells to agree to the external review of Horizon that helped to break the scandal open, has described an appalling level of management groupthink — and malice. Yet in 2019 Vennells went on to another job on the circuit, chairing a large NHS trust. And Fujitsu, the technology company behind Horizon, which has so far been untouchable, has won £5bn more in government contracts since its software was found not to be robust by the High Court in 2019.

This is how the system operates. Individuals may occasionally be caught out, but the machine just rolls on. Indeed, any government that is minded to abolish arms-length bodies discovers that it can't — they are often statutory. The level of effort and political capital you would need to expend trying to get rid of any of them is too much for the average minister.

This serves no one, including the brilliant young people who are recruited into the civil service. They arrive with great hopes of serving the nation, and are then trapped in meetings where no one knows much about the people they are supposed to serve. I have met health department officials who have never been inside a hospital or care home. I've met quango heads who hire management consultants rather than talk to customers. It's not surprising we are so bad at procurement: the Fujitsu contract being an example.

What can we learn from the Post Office heroes? First, that momentum depends on spotting patterns. Bates's determination to find others in similar trouble was a stroke of genius. Second, the importance of meticulous record-keeping. Arbuthnot, who became involved 15 years ago because one of his constituents was a sub-postmaster, has an office overflowing with paper relating to this fight. Third, that investigative journalists like Nick Wallis can crystallise a complex story, hard to understand. Fourth, that tenacity is essential because the system aims to wear you down and tire you out.

For all those on the other "side", all the good officials, this saga shows the importance of keeping an open mind. Not everyone who claims to be a victim is genuine: I learnt this in years of campaigning on the family courts. But many real victims can also be initially hard to believe. They can be crazed with anxiety, or have a frustratingly vague handle on the chronology of events. Listening to them and extracting their stories takes time — something MPs are rather good at. True whistleblowers are also marked out by the fact that they rarely want fame or honours: what they want is justice. The contrast could not be greater with the senior executives who will spend any amount of taxpayers' money, and condemn any number of ordinary people to misery, to avoid admitting mistakes.

The postmasters will be exonerated. But Fujitsu should be paying the compensation. And future ministers should consider meeting a few "troublemakers": they might learn something.

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UK politics

UK government accused of delaying infected blood payouts to make room for tax cuts

Officials defend decision to wait for report recommendations as campaigners demand ministers speed up compensation payments



Infected blood victims and supporters protest outside parliament on Wednesday © Aaron Chown/PA

Anna Gross, George Parker and Rafe Uddin in London YESTERDAY

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MPs and campaigners have accused the government of a “shameful” attempt to delay payments to victims of the infected blood scandal to give itself “fiscal wriggle room” for tax cuts in the Budget.

Dame Diana Johnson, Labour MP for Kingston upon Hull North, who has fought for justice for victims of the scandal, accused officials of “dragging their feet” over compensation.

Ministers have privately said they expect the compensation bill could be between £10bn-£20bn, a cost that could have further limited chancellor Jeremy Hunt’s scope for tax cuts had it crystallised before the March 6 [Budget](#).

Johnson called on Hunt to make a provision in the Budget for payments to the thousands of bereaved family members of victims who have not yet received money, adding that it was “shameful” he had not committed to doing so.

“I just don’t think the political will is there,” Johnson said.

Contaminated blood left tens of thousands of people — many suffering from haemophilia, a rare blood disorder — infected with HIV and hepatitis C in the 1970s and 1980s. About 1,250 people are thought to have contracted HIV, of whom three-quarters had died by 2020, according to the inquiry.

The government has committed to making a statement in response to the findings of the final report on the scandal, expected in May, within 25 sitting days of parliament.

Government officials have privately expressed relief that the compensation bill will not become a problem until after the Budget, when Hunt is hoping to deliver pre-election tax cuts.

Johnson’s criticism comes after the government was accused by a former Post Office chair of delaying payments to victims of the Horizon IT scandal. Henry Staunton [said earlier this month](#) that he had been told by an official to halt requests for funding, which the government has strenuously denied.

Treasury officials acknowledged that the cost of compensation will be reflected in the Office for Budget Responsibility’s forecasts at the time of the next Autumn Statement — creating a headache for whoever is chancellor at the time.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has yet to set a date for the general election but Hunt has prepared his Budget as if it is the last fiscal event before polling day, according to Treasury insiders.

One Conservative official said the prospect of a Tory chancellor having to confront the bill for the blood compensation scheme was another reason for not holding another fiscal event before the election: “I don’t think we’ll be holding an Autumn Statement,” they said.

Dr Philippa Whitford, a Scottish National party MP who has lobbied for bereaved family members to receive compensation, said she believed “the government is trying to drag it out until after the general election and then it’s a problem for another party.

“The community often feel that the government is waiting for them to die,” she said.

Sir Brian Langstaff, chair of the public inquiry into the scandal, urged the government in April to establish an arms-length body to oversee compensation payments.

He recommended £100,000 be offered swiftly to bereaved family members and victims who had not yet received any payment. Eighty victims have died since he made his recommendations.

Jason Evans, founder of Factor 8, a campaign group, said that compensation to roughly 2,000 bereaved relatives “should be included in the spring Budget”, noting that it would cost the government no more than £200mn.

Evans accused the government of stalling on payments until “right before the summer recess” to “give themselves more fiscal wriggle room”, claiming that in the end it would become “Labour’s problem”.

Sunak on Wednesday reminded MPs that the government has accepted the “moral case” for compensation.

Some of the thousands of people who were infected and bereaved spouses have received £100,000 in interim payments, totalling about £440mn. But thousands of other relatives of deceased victims have received nothing.

Government officials said the final amount of compensation paid depended on how the scheme is set up and the number of “affected” people.

They denied that ministers had dragged their feet, arguing that they were right to wait until the final report is published.

The government said: “We are clear that justice needs to be delivered for the victims and have already accepted the moral case for compensation.

“The government intends to respond in full to Sir Brian’s recommendations for wider compensation following the publication of the inquiry’s final report,” it added.

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Cross-party plea made for infected blood victims to get Budget payout

ANNA GROSS

Nearly 120 MPs from all the major political parties have written to chancellor Jeremy Hunt urging him to allocate funding to compensate victims of the infected blood scandal in his Spring Budget.

In a letter sent yesterday, the MPs called on Hunt to “provide reassurance” that his statement on March 6 “will explicitly address the contaminated blood scandal and enable the urgent delivery of compensation”.

The move comes after politicians and campaigners this week accused government officials of “dragging their feet” over delivery of payments to the thousands of bereaved family members who have not yet received redress.

Contaminated blood left tens of thousands of people, many suffering from the rare condition of haemophilia, infected with HIV and hepatitis C in the 1970s and 1980s.

About 1,250 people are thought to have contracted HIV, of whom three-quarters had died by 2020, according to an official inquiry into the episode.

The letter was signed by 117 MPs from “The infected blood scandal [was] the biggest treatment disaster in the history of the NHS”

the Tory, Labour and Liberal Democrats, including prominent Conservatives Robin Walker, MP for Worcester, and Tim Loughton, MP for East Worthing and Shoreham.

The MPs said they “look forward” to Hunt “announcing on 6 March the allocation of funds to fully compensate victims of the infected blood scandal — the biggest treatment disaster in the history of the NHS”.

The letter was co-authored by Diana Johnson, Labour MP for Kingston upon Hull North, and Sir Peter Bottomley, Conservative MP for Worth West.

The FT revealed in December that ministers had timed some £10bn to £20bn in payouts to the victims to avoid jeopardising pre-election tax cuts this year.

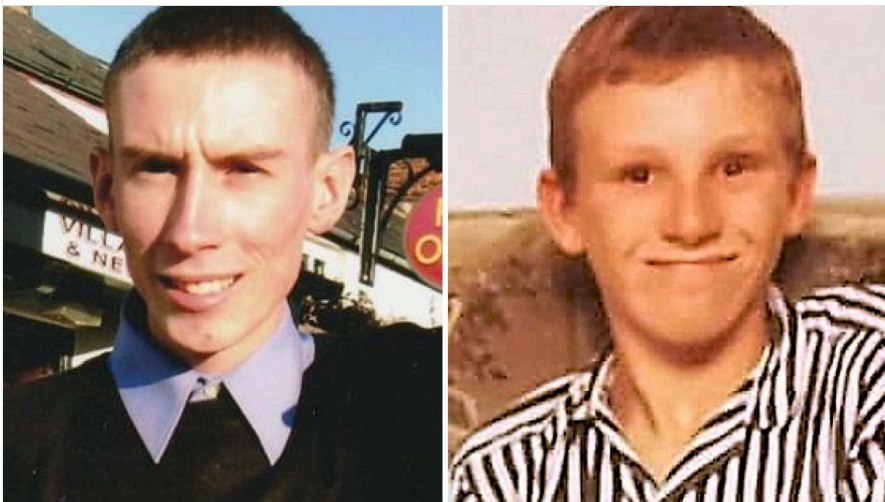
Privately, ministers noted that it was convenient for the government that the compensation bill would not be finalised until after the Budget, meaning the Office for Budget Responsibility cannot score the compensation payments in its economic forecasts.

Sir Brian Langstaff, chair of the public inquiry into the scandal, urged the government last April to establish an arm’s-length body to pay handle payouts.

This recommended that the government swiftly offer £100,000 to each of the bereaved family members of victims who had not yet received any payment.

The government, which has accepted the “moral case” for compensation, has said it will make a statement on the inquiry’s findings within 25 sitting days of the final report being published.

The report is expected in late May.



Christopher Head, left, started his career with the Post Office at the age of 18. Nicky Calder, right, died of HIV in his mid-twenties after being given infected blood as a child

Two scandals, one struggle: Post Office and blood families rage at Hunt

Keir Starmer has joined campaigners in accusing the government of dragging its feet over payouts to families destroyed by injustices with too many similarities

Caroline Wheeler, Hugo Daniel

Sunday March 10 2024, 12.01am, The Sunday Times

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Jeremy Hunt has infuriated campaigners after he failed to make any provision in his budget to compensate victims of scandals involving contaminated blood and the Post Office’s Horizon IT system.

In documents published by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), which provides independent analysis of the public

finances, the watchdog said it had not been able to take into account plans to pay compensation.

The blood contamination scandal has been called the worst treatment disaster in NHS history. People were infected after being given factor VIII blood products contaminated with HIV and hepatitis C imported from the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, or after being exposed to tainted blood. Up to 3,000 are estimated to have died.



Campaigners for compensation in the infected blood scandal protested in Westminster in January

VICTORIA JONES/PA

At the Post Office, sub-postmasters, who run the smaller branches around Britain, were [wrongly pursued for money](#) they were accused of stealing. In fact, the faults were because of the new IT system, Horizon, made by the Japanese technology giant Fujitsu.

The Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, accused the government of overseeing the “grotesque spectacle of ducking their responsibility to the victims of the infected blood and [Horizon scandals](#)”. He added: “Today, justice has been kicked beyond the general election.”

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Starmer assured a group of campaigners at a mass lobby outside parliament before the budget that a Labour government would make compensation payments to victims if the government failed to do so by the time of the election. It could cost up to £22 billion to compensate victims of the contaminated blood scandal.

It is understood the chancellor was worried about how the compensation payments might reduce the amount that could be spent before breaking the government’s fiscal rules.

The apparent [tactic of delaying](#) expensive decisions until after the general election comes only weeks after reports of claims made by Henry Staunton, the former Post Office chairman, who said he had been told to “stall” compensation for victims of the Horizon scandal and “limp” into the general election.

Although his claims were flatly denied by the government, it immediately brought questions about whether the same modus operandi had been adopted by ministers and civil servants in relation to payouts to the victims of the contaminated blood scandal.

Case study: Post Office

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If Christopher Head had not been suspended and wrongly accused of stealing in 2015 he would still own a post office and

be earning a wage of more than £50,000 a year by now.

Instead, like hundreds of other victims of the Horizon scandal, the former postmaster is embroiled in a Kafkaesque compensation battle with an institution he once loved.

Head, 36, became the UK’s youngest postmaster when he took over the branch in his local newsagent in West Boldon, Sunderland, in 2006 when he was 18. He had worked there as a paperboy from the age of 12.



Head continues to campaign for compensation after being wrongly accused of stealing in 2015

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He faced discrepancies from day one, with regular shortfalls of £50 to £200. Initially he challenged them, but started paying back the money himself after getting sick of spending hours speaking to the Horizon helpline. He recently found out — via documents disclosed to him by the Post Office in his compensation claim — that he paid back a total of £21,500.

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In 2015 he was suspended and put under criminal investigation wrongly accused of stealing £88,000, a loss that was nothing to do with him. It was Horizon's fault. The prosecution threat was dropped after six months but the Post Office then pursued him through the civil courts for the money.

He became an outcast in the local area with people gossiping about him being a thief, and negative articles being published about him.

Unable to find work in the UK, Head moved to Athens, Greece, where he had lived for some of his childhood. He moved back in 2019, getting a job in an Amazon warehouse, to fight his case in the High Court.

"I didn't go to college or university. I don't get responses to entry-level jobs I apply for because I have all this experience but I can't apply for other types of jobs because I don't have any other qualifications," said Head, who is presently unemployed.

"My post office was successful. Over the nine years that I was in business, my income was growing year on year."

Head has developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Post Office since his life was embroiled by the scandal and now spends his time campaigning for justice and helping more than 200 other postmasters with their compensation cases while also spending hours on his own.

"I'm a lot more clued up than most people, I've done a lot of research legally. I'm probably halfway to becoming a trained lawyer dealing with all this damn mess," he said.

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The battle for compensation has gone on for years — and continues to this day. He was finally able to submit his full claim in September last year and at the end of December received an offer of less than 15 per cent of the seven-figure sum he had asked for, which he feels is “insulting”.

He continues to campaign and help other postmasters while working on his case. “All this stuff, it takes so many hours of my day. Last Friday after my mediation meeting, I was still writing letters at 4am.”

Case study: Contaminated blood

Rosemary Calder, whose son Nicky became one of the victims of the contaminated blood scandal after being infected with HIV, fears she may never receive any compensation.

He was eight months old when he was diagnosed with severe haemophilia in 1975, the first of his family to suffer from the rare bleeding disorder. Initially, he was treated with a frozen blood product called cryoprecipitate, which was produced from a small number of donors and could only be administered in hospital.

When he was three, doctors at Northwick Park Hospital in Harrow convinced his parents to transfer him on to a cutting-edge treatment — an imported blood product called factor VIII. Calder, a retired school administrator, claims she and her husband were told the treatment was safer than cryoprecipitate despite the fact that a single batch would include blood from up to 20,000 donors.

“I never dreamt to question it because why would I? They were the doctors and they were telling me: “This is wonderful. This is the way to go. This is the best treatment for him,”” she said.



Nicky Calder with his mother, Rosemary
ROSEMARY CALDER/FACEBOOK

She heard nothing about the risks for many years until a newspaper ran a story about how blood imported from America could be [contaminated with HIV](#). “I remember sitting in the garden on a bright sunny day and reading the article,” said Calder. “My blood literally ran cold.”

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When Nicky was 11, his doctors confirmed the family’s worst nightmare as a letter arrived in the post confirming that he had tested positive for HIV. “It was just like the bottom dropped out of my world,” said Calder. The family kept it a secret until he

was 15, and had started to become interested in girls. He was taunted at school, and called “Aids boy”.

Nicky, who like other haemophiliacs infected with HIV was awarded an ex-gratia payment of £19,500 in 1991 as part of a court settlement, eventually married and settled in Milton Keynes.

Less than a year after the birth of his son, Nicky became gravely ill. He died just before Christmas in 1999 at 1.30am — exactly the same time as his birth — aged 25.

In the aftermath of his death, Nicky’s parents divorced, something his mother puts down to the different ways they dealt with their grief. “It was just a living nightmare,” said Calder. “It’s something you can’t even possibly imagine and something you wouldn’t wish on your worst enemy.”

Calder, who runs a support group for bereaved parents, is now doubtful she will ever see any compensation despite Sir Brian Langstaff, the chairman of the Infected Blood Inquiry, making recommendations last April. They state that parents and children who suffered bereavements as a result of the contaminated blood scandal should receive the same £100,000 interim [compensation payment](#) that was given to victims, or their spouses, the previous summer.

So far, only Calder’s daughter-in-law has received the interim payment. “I’d like to think that we as parents will get some kind of recognition in our own right for our children and also for what we suffered,” she said. “What we suffered by watching our children suffer. We had to nurse them, care for them, look after them and ultimately watch them die. No parents should have to do that.

“To be honest, there’s no amount of money in the world that can compensate for our losses and for our children.”

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