



Date
19 December 2024

Post Office
100 Wood Street
London EC2V 9ER

Your Ref:

Classification:
Public

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information Request – FOI2024/00401

We are writing in response to your email received by Post Office Limited (**"Post Office"**) on 11 March, 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:

"As a currently serving Postmaster I've searched the external & internal sites I have access to & cannot find any mention of the "Hardship/Exceptional" payments referenced by Nick Read at the recent Select Committee evidence. Please can you supply all documentation relating to the Hardship/Exceptional Payments system? I.e. application forms, instructions, who can apply, where it is available, what are the criteria, how Postmasters access this information.

**Also could you, for the end of financial years ending 2013 to 2023:
Provide the number of new Hardship/Exceptional Payments started during the year?
How many ongoing exceptional payments for "temporary branches"?
How many ongoing monthly exceptional payments for non-temporary branches?"**

We can confirm that Post Office does hold some of the information you have requested. Please note, Exceptional Payments are an ongoing arrangement, whereas Hardship Payments were a one-off payment made during the Covid-19 pandemic and Post Office no longer offers this type of payments.

It is also worth noting that Hardship and Exceptional Payments are not a 'scheme' that can be 'applied' for by a postmaster and, therefore, we do not hold application forms or instructions for postmasters to either access or complete.

However, for postmasters to be considered for additional payments, they would first need to have a discussion with their Area Manager, who then discusses this with the Post Office Remuneration Team, before an assessment is carried out. The request will then be considered taking into account factors including business need, levels of staffing and branch profitability.

The documents we are providing include the Assessment Form and Fund Submission for the one-off Hardship Payments, and the Exceptional Payment Policy Document and the Profit/Loss spreadsheet. The titles are 'FOI2024_00401 Hardship Assessment Form', 'FOI2024_00401 Hardship Payments', 'FOI2024_00401 Exceptional Payments' and 'FOI2024_00401 Profit, Loss and Breakdown Assessment Form' and these can be found in the email accompanying this response letter. Please be aware that since you submitted your request for information, the "Exceptional Payment Policy Document" has been updated and so we have also provided this updated document, titled 'FOI2024_00401 Exceptional Payment Policy Document 2024'.

Post Office has withheld names and emails within these documents under sections 40(2) and 40(3A) of the FOIA as this information 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 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

We consider that disclosure of this information 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 would not constitute 'fair' processing of the personal data because their names and emails – both in Post Office and within third party organisations – would not be expected to be disclosed under this FOIA request.

Please see the below table showing the number of new Exceptional Payments granted each financial year from 2013 to 2023, split between Temporary and Permanent branches.

Year	Temporary Branches	Permanent Branches
2013-2014	16	6
2014-2015	20	6
2015-2016	23	5
2016-2017	16	1
2017-2018	17	3
2018-2019	21	10
2019-2020	26	15
2020-2021	35	49
2021-2022	24	13
2022-2023	20	18
2023-2024	10	26

Please see the below table showing the number of ongoing Exceptional Payments for Temporary and Permanent branches during the financial years 2013 to 2023.

Year	Temporary Branches	Permanent Branches
2013-2014	66	32
2014-2015	53	25
2015-2016	54	16
2016-2017	46	8
2017-2018	52	9
2018-2019	64	19
2019-2020	87	22
2020-2021	102	57
2021-2022	103	52
2022-2023	99	70
2023-2024	83	57

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