Meeting agenda

Attendees:

Keith Baines	Fujitsu Contract Manager	
Marie Cockett	Project Manager, Finance	
Mike Gallagher	Systems Architect	
Dave Hulbert	Service Manager, Ops Control	
John Legg	Agency Contracts Manager	
Jennifer Robson	Debt Recovery Manager	
Mandy Talbot	Litigation Team Leader, Legal Services	
Graham Ward	Investigation Team Casework Manager	
Alvin West	Risk & Internal Control Manager	

Location:
The Juniper Room
Coton House, Rugby

Date: 06.12.05

Horizon Integrity

Background:

There have been several recent cases where subpostmasters have cited errors in the Horizon system as explanations for discrepancies in their accounts – either as part of a challenge against termination of their contracts, or in challenging the Post Office's right to recover error notices / transaction corrections from their remuneration.

Recently, a letter was published in "The Subpostmaster" in November (see enclosure) asking readers to send in detail of incidents where they believed that Horizon has caused errors in their accounts. Lawyers acting on behalf of a subpostmaster currently in dispute with Post Office have written stating that they are contemplating a joint action on behalf of a number of current and former subpostmasters. This would challenge the accounting integrity of the Horizon system and Post Office's right to make transaction corrections and recover resulting debts based on Horizon data.

In one past case (Cleveleys branch), Post Office settled out of court following an adverse report on Horizon's potential to cause errors from an expert appointed by the court. Fujitsu advised that the report was

not well founded, but Post Office and Fujitsu were not able to persuade the expert to change it. This report was largely based on a review of Help Desk logs, since it related to events more than 18 months prior to the case, and Horizon transaction data was retained for 18 months only. (It is now retained indefinitely.)

There are well-defined (though costly) procedures for analysing Horizon data and getting evidence and witnesses from Fujitsu in support of investigations for potential criminal cases. This is not so for civil cases (unless there has been a related investigation) and external lawyers acting on Post Office's behalf have found it difficult to obtain information of sufficient quality from Post Office in timescales needed for these cases. No one seems to hold budget to fund provision of such information.

The above was discussed at a meeting called by Dave Smith on 25 November and as a result urgent actions have been taken to support current live cases, and this workshop was organised to recommend further actions to reduce this risk area in future.

Meeting purpose:

To review the above issues and recommend on the following:

1. Who manages dealings with subpostmasters and their lawyers relating to actual or potential civil cases? What processes are required to identify as early as possible those cases that with a Horizon aspect? Who needs to be involved in such cases, and how will they be co-ordinated?

2. Are any new processes required with Fujitsu to obtain data, analysis, reports or witness statements for civil cases?

3. Is there a need for an independent expert to be appointed in advance who could on request provide evidence to the court in such cases? If so what exactly would the expert's role be, what qualifications and qualities are needed in such an expert, and how would we go about appointing one? What preliminary work would be required by the expert to "get up to speed"?

4. Who will act as the client briefing external lawyers and facilitating their obtaining relevant information in these cases?

5. What are the budget implications of the above?

	Item:	Timing:
1.	Introduction Required Outputs: Shared understanding of the meeting objectives.	10:00 to 10:20
2.	Review current roles, responsibilities and processes in relevant cases or potential cases. Required Outputs: Common understanding of who currently does what	10:20 to 10:50
3.	Review recent and current cases. Required Outputs: Lessons learnt; process gaps and problems logged on flipcharts.	10:50 to 11:20
4.	Identify gaps in current roles and processes Required Outputs: Flipcharts with prioritised list of gaps and improvements in POL processes and Fujitsu processes	11:20 to 12:00
5.	Lunch	12:00 to 12:45
6.	Checkpoint Required Outputs: Confirm that we are on track to produce the required recommendations and agree corrections if not.	12:45 to 13:00
7.	Review possible Expert role. Required Outputs: Flipcharts with key points on approach to use of Expert.	13:00 to 13:30

8.	Review findings and develop recommendations on issues (1) to (5) Required Outputs: Flipcharts with recommended approach (and options if a single approach not agreed) on each issue	13:30 to 14:30
9.	Meeting Review and close	14:30 to 14:45