

WITNESS: WILLIAM DAVID GRAHAM

STATEMENT NUMBER: WITN0190\_01

EXHIBITS: 0

DATED: Jan 12, 2022

**POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY**

**FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF WILLIAM DAVID GRAHAM**

THIS STATEMENT IS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO THE RULE 9 REQUEST OF  
THE PUBLIC INQUIRY DATED 29/10/2021 TO ADDRESS THE HUMAN IMPACT  
OF THE FAILINGS OF THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM

I, MR WILLIAM DAVID GRAHAM, Date of Birth: **GRO** of **GRO**  
**GRO** will say as follows:-

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

1. I had 'a normal, happy upbringing'.
2. I was popular at school, and I was sporty and enjoyed playing sports including cricket, football and rugby.
3. After school, I went to college to do a catering course.
4. I then moved to Jersey to work in a hotel.
5. I moved to Kent at the age of 21.

6. I then met my wife and started working for the post office.
7. We got married in 1996 and we have 2 daughters aged now 22 and 18 . I also have a sister who I have a close relationship with.
8. I would say that I am a very laid-back person and I have good social skills.
9. Before all of this, I was the 'life and soul of the party'.

## **POST OFFICE HISTORY**

10. I first joined the Post Office as a trainee in 1992.
11. I was employed as a Training manager. I would train incoming staff and /or new postmasters in how to operate and run the Horizon system. I subsequently left this role after taking redundancy on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002.
12. Following my redundancy, an area manager approached me about setting up a Post office counter in the local pharmacy which was called Dan Lewis chemist. This was owned by **GRO** and he asked if I would be interested in the position.
13. I considered the opportunity and I felt it was the right move as it would be a long term position. I thought it would see me through to my retirement, plus I would also be self-employed.
14. When I started the role I lived off-site, so the position gave me the right work/life balance.
15. As I was a trainer for the Post office it was assumed, I was competent in the role.
16. I was appointed branch manager of the Riverhead Branch, in Sevenoaks Kent, on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2002.

17. I attended a two-day classroom-based course which focused on the basics of Horizon. I was occasionally sent workbooks by the Post Office setting out changes to Horizon and new updates. I did not have any further training after that.

18. During the initial period I started to build up the business and I enjoyed working as branch manager. I enjoyed working with the local people, talking to customers, and generally building the business up.

19. I received training specifically in relation to the Horizon offline system. However I did not experience any issues with the offline system and it did not produce any unexplained discrepancies. The online version of Horizon was the issue, and I did not receive any training in respect of this system.

20. Around 2014 I first heard of the JFSA through my brother in law, who worked at a chambers in London and said he'd heard that other sub-postmasters had similar experiences to mine and gave me their email address.

## **CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS AND ANY PROCEEDINGS/CONVICTION**

21. Following an audit in January 2009 I was suspended from my position as Sub-Postmaster on the same day. I was told I would not be able to return or take anything from the office.

22. On the same evening in January 2009, the investigation team came to my home and spent some time looking in two of the downstairs rooms. I was asked to follow the investigation team to Bexleyheath Police Station to be interviewed. I heard nothing back from the Post Office until I received my summons.

23. On 27 April 2009 I was summoned to appear before the Magistrates Court at Sevenoaks on 16 June 2009. I was charged with theft.

24. My legal representative told me the Post Office offered me a plea deal whereby if I pleaded guilty to the charge of false accounting, the theft charges would be dropped. I was reluctant to do so, but was concerned about the possibility of being found guilty of theft and receiving a custodial sentence. My barrister told me that by agreeing to this there was less chance I would go to prison.

25. After reluctantly pleading guilty to the charge of false accounting, on 24 January 2011 at the Crown Court at Maidstone, I was given a 32-week suspended jail sentence and ordered to carry out 100 hours unpaid work.

26. I was also ordered to pay the prosecution's costs of £3,589.00.

27. My conviction was quashed by the Court of Appeal on 23 April 2021.

## **THE HUMAN IMPACT**

28. The human impact which the failings of the Horizon IT System have had and continue to have upon me and my family are set out in the remainder of this statement. The section headings follow the particular questions posed by the Inquiry.

## **WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING REQUIRED TO MAKE GOOD APPARENT SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

29. As the problems developed with Horizon, I estimate that I contacted the helpline once a month with regards to problems relating to alleged shortfalls and/or balancing.

30. I regularly experienced initial small shortfalls and excesses, but I am unable to put a figure to this, but they were all below £100.00.

31. On some occasions I could explain them as they were the result of human error. On other occasions, I was completely baffled by them.
32. The shortfalls then began to get bigger such that in 2004 for example, we had a shortfall of £5,000.
33. With any shortfall I was required by the Post Office to repay it in full. This was despite not having any explanation as to how the shortfall had occurred.
34. This repayment was deducted from my salary over the course of a year.
35. I had to accept the figures Horizon gave me and put the cash in to satisfy the Post Office.
36. There was then a shortfall of £50,000 in 2008, it was so large that I was scared to report it. I hoped that it would right itself, but it never did.
37. In January 2009, the auditors arrived at the Post Office. They were Jacqui Swinney, and Dave Roderick. They had come to check the accounts. The shortfall by this time had reached £65,521.
38. They called in the Post Office investigating team and they formally interviewed me about the shortfall. They told me that I was not allowed back into the Post Office. I never returned to the post office after that day.
39. The Post Office investigators attended my house and they looked in two rooms and left but nothing was searched as such.
40. I had to repay the initial large shortfall of £5,000 through my wages and I also had to repay the subsequent shortfall of £65,521. I borrowed £15,000 from my sister to help with this

**WHAT WERE THE COSTS OF MAKING GOOD ALLEGED SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY HORIZON?**

41. Initially I would report all shortfalls to the Post Office helpline. They advised me to pay the alleged shortfalls 'centrally', which meant that my salary would be deducted to take into account the alleged discrepancies. Alternatively I would pay the shortfalls out of my own pocket. The shortfalls would range between £50 and £5,000.
42. I continued to report the shortfalls and agree to deduct the discrepancies from my annual salary, despite the Post Office not wanting any explanation or feeling the need to investigate how this was happening.
43. Eventually the balancing issues deteriorated to the point where the discrepancy showing on Horizon was so large I was afraid to report it. There was no way I could pay this figure out of my salary, and I thought that the figure would eventually right itself. However that never happened.
44. Due to the costs I was experiencing, I had to borrow around £30,000 from my family to help pay for general housekeeping due to the drop in salary that this caused.

**HOW WERE YOU AFFECTED WHEN ALLEGED TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS OR DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

45. Before all of this, I was a confident and widely respected member of my community.
46. I suffered psychological effects from November 2009, when I was suspended and investigated, through the criminal proceedings and after my conviction.
47. These issues continued whilst I battled to prove my innocence.

48. I was already under the care of my GP due to anxiety symptoms before the allegations came to light, but my symptoms started gradually getting worse as I lost my job and through the investigation and conviction. I could not sleep, I was stressed and very worried about having to go to court and potentially even going to prison.

49. I was particularly worried about who would look after my family if I was in prison. I was prescribed Sertraline by my GP. I was in a very dark place. I felt useless and that I had let my family down.

**WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR  
SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

50. I was suspended on the day of the audit, and I received no further pay.

51. On the 11<sup>th</sup> February 2009, I was interviewed at Bexleyheath Police Station by Gary Thomas and Lisa Allen.

52. I had no legal representation; I was not advised to have a legal representative, and none was ever offered.

53. During the interview, I was scared stiff. My mind was racing out of control.

54. The interview was conversational. The investigators tried to get me to say I had taken the money, which I denied.

55. The house I lived in was mortgaged and the DWP helped to pay toward the mortgage. They only paid a proportion and this meant that we were in arrears. Court proceedings were issued and we only managed to agree a settlement the day before the hearing. The order for possession was suspended, but it was so stressful.

56. I had been faced with losing the family home, and with us having nowhere to go to.

**WHAT WERE YOUR FINANCIAL LOSSES CAUSED BY ACTION TAKEN AGAINST YOU IN RELIANCE UPON HORIZON DATA?**

57. Following my suspension, I had to rely on Job Seeker's allowance, and Employment Support allowance. My salary before I was dismissed was £54,000 per year and then afterwards I had to survive on £373.00 per month.

58. I lived on benefits until late 2014 when I was able to get a job as a medical courier. I earn approximately £25,000 per year.

59. I am still in that role now and earn slightly more having worked there for a significant period of time.

60. I had a pension at the time I worked at the Post Office, but as a result I have not been able to maintain this.

61. My family and I are still living the same house. I would have been mortgage free in the absence of the issues with the Post Office.

**WHAT EFFECT DID IT HAVE TO BE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING CRIMINAL OFFENCES AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

62. I lost contact with my friends and the people I used to work with after being suspended

63. To me, it appeared that people had already made up their minds that I was guilty.

64. I felt extremely anxious, I was unable to sleep and felt extremely distressed. I kept thinking back over my past and felt worthless and that I had brought shame on myself and my family.

65. I felt guilty, although I knew I had not done anything wrong. I blamed myself for not being able to financially provide for my family, I lost a lot of weight and at times I felt suicidal.

**WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING CONVICTED OF A CRIMINAL OFFENCE AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM**

66. I received my summons on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2009 requesting me to appear at Sevenoaks Magistrates Court on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2009.

67. As soon as I got the summons, I got representation, I appointed a solicitor who then instructed a barrister.

68. I had a short meeting with the barrister before the hearing, where he told me what was going to happen. I was told it was a primarily hearing where I confirmed my details, and it was then referred to Maidstone Crown Court.

69. Following this, I had a meeting with the barrister at his chambers. He went through the case with me. He advised that the courts go harder on the financial type of cases than they would with assault cases, but he would try to ensure that I did not get a custodial sentence.

70. At the next hearing, on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2011, I was advised, that if I pleaded guilty to false accounting, they would drop the theft charge.

71. I was advised that if I went down this route the chances of my receiving custodial sentence would be reduced. My barrister advised me that it was the way to go.
72. I discussed it with my father-in-law. We felt pushed into making a decision, but I did not want to go to prison and leave my wife and children. Therefore I agreed to plead guilty to the charge of false accounting.
73. The Post Office's barrister told the Judge that they would not be proceeding with the theft charge, as they would be receiving a guilty plea to the charge of false accounting.
74. The Judge went into Chambers and came back out and confirmed that he would accept this.
75. As explained above, Following reluctantly pleading guilty to the charge of false accounting, I was given a 32-week suspended jail sentence and ordered to carry out 100 hours unpaid work.
76. I was also ordered to pay the prosecution's costs of £3,589.00.
77. I completed the unpaid community work at a local charity shop. By choice I worked in the back sorting out clothes and books. This meant that I could avoid been seen and having to explain why I was there.
78. The people working in the shop, knew I was there for community service. This was embarrassing, but it was never discussed. I completed the unpaid work across around a 3 week period.
79. After losing my job at the Post Office, no-one would employ me because of my criminal conviction.
80. I lived on benefits until late 2014 when I was able to get a job as a medical courier.

81. Before then, I could not get a job because of my criminal conviction.
82. I earned approximately £38,000 per year as a courier.
83. I am still in the same role now and earn slightly more, having been there the length of time I have.
84. The substantial drop in income, first of all onto benefits and then earning less, was very hard and caused severe financial hardship.
85. I had a pension at the time I worked at the Post Office, but as a result of my conviction, I was unable to maintain it.
86. My family and I are still living the same house however I anticipate I would have been mortgage free by now but for this ordeal.
87. Following my conviction, my name and address were printed in the local newspapers
88. Following the sentence my feeling of worthlessness and low self-esteem worsened and I had suicidal thoughts at times.
89. I had high blood pressure and was under the GP for this also.
90. I was prescribed beta-blocker for the anxiety and blood pressure medication.
91. I stopped taking the beta- blockers as I did not want to get reliant on them but following the conviction, I started taking these again.
92. I did not have any counselling however I spoke to my friends and family a lot more for support. Even talking about it now is painful.
93. I still do not tell anyone, the people that need to know about it do, otherwise I keep it private.
94. The whole situation with the Post Office has had a significant impact on my well-being and self-confidence and has caused myself and my family so much hurt over the years.

95. I have just begun counselling, and my counsellor has diagnosed me with PTSD.

**WHAT EFFECT DID THESE ISSUES HAVE UPON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY?**

96. I lost family and friends and people unfollowed me on social media overnight.

They stopped talking to me straight away.

97. Even now when I go to Maidstone, people whisper as they recognise me from the papers. I live about half an hour from the Post Office, and I avoid going anywhere near it.

98. People in the local community did not want anything to do with me or my family.

99. I was not working, but I was unable to take my daughters to school, because I feared shame and humiliation at the school gates.

100. I was sleeping downstairs and was unable to have a normal intimate relationship with my wife. This was because of my feelings of worthlessness and my lack of libido.

**PLEASE DESCRIBE THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT WHICH THESE ISSUES HAD UPON THE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY?**

101. My children were young at the time, aged between 6 – 10 years old.

102. Thankfully, they knew nothing about process. We did not tell them and we felt this was the right thing to do.

103. I was just so grateful they had their mum and we just needed to get through it if I did end up with a custodial sentence.

104. My wife was also badly affected by what I was going through and what had happened to us. The financial issue took its toll on us and I had to borrow money from family members.

105. When my conviction was reported in the local newspapers, they mentioned that I had a daughter who suffers from GRO which really upset me as there was no need to mention my daughter.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

106. When the Court of Appeal quashed my conviction on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, it felt like a big weight had been taken from my shoulders.

107. The whole situation with the Post Office has had a significant impact on my well-being and self-confidence.

108. It has caused myself and my family so much hurt over the years.

109. Nothing can undo what I and my family have been subject to it will stay with us all for the rest of our lives.

**Statement Of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

**GRO**  
William Graham (Jan 12, 2022 16:02 GMT)

Position Or

Office Held:

Print Full

Date of signature: Jan 12, 2022

Name: WILLIAM DAVID GRAHAM

FILE REFERENCE: **GRO**

