

From: Ben Maddison
Initial Complaint Review and Mediation
Scheme

04/02/2014

To: Programme Board

INDEPENDENT RESOLUTION OF FUTURE CASES POLICY – PROJECT BRIEF

Summary

This note sets out the project brief proposal for agreement to deliver an options paper to the Post Office on a future independent complaint resolution system for contractual-related unresolved complaints.

Recommendation

That the Programme Board comment on and agree the proposed scope of the project and note the timescales.

In particular the Board is asked to provide views on:

1. Should the system deal only with contractual breach complaints/disputes and no other types?
2. Is the system to be the last resort after all other internal channels have been exhausted?
3. Should it have a gate process to enter the system?
4. Should it to have an investigative capability?
5. Should it to pursue emerging thematic?
6. Should it to have a feedback/reporting mechanism into BIP?
7. Should it be taskable in the future if sanctioned by ExCo?

Background

In July 2013 the Post Office proposed to respond to the Second Sight report with three new initiatives aimed at 1) addressing the issues raised, 2) improving future processes and 3) examining potential structural changes to support sub-postmasters.

In terms of improving future processes, POL stated:

'A review chaired by an independent figure to determine how an independent safety net might be introduced to adjudicate in disputed cases in the future. Again the JFSA and other stakeholders will be invited to take part in this process.'

The driver underpinning this activity was captured by Post Office chief executive Paula Vennells when she said: "The people who work in the post office network in communities across the country are the lifeblood of our business and we take our responsibilities to them very seriously."

Project objective

Design and implement an independent complaint handling system for the network that will operate effectively within the future business operating model by 2015. The system is to be focused on the timely resolution of contractual-related complaints/disputes raised (directly or indirectly) by subpostmasters with POL after all other internal channels have been exhausted.

Phase 1: Scoping options (complete by 31st March) – (N.B. PA engaged to end of Phase 1)

Phase 2: Consultation and final option decision (complete by early June)

Phase 3: Detailed blueprint and implementation of system (complete by Q1 2015)

Scope

IN

1. Complaint types: contractual
2. Complaint source/channel:
 - Directly: Subpostmasters
 - Indirectly: Network Correspondence Unit, NBSC, Executive Correspondence Unit, Branch User Forum, SSM's
3. Process for entry into the system
4. Complaint lifecycle management in the system and reporting
5. Assurance of system
6. All best practice systems in settlement of disputes, complaints and issues to be considered (e.g. arbitration, early settlement, mediation, inspectorate)

OUT

1. Complaint type – financial, support, IT, training, criminal (fraud, theft), thematic
2. Complaint source/channel – Crown (292 branches), POL HQ staff, Subpostmaster's staff, contractors, Public, new local style Post Office branches (convenience stores – multiples & symbols)
3. Prosecution
4. Appeal

Constraints

1. System is independent and reports into POL Board
2. System will have an external independent assessor
3. System cost (implementation & maintenance) must not exceed £xxx
4. System needs to be operational by Q1 2015
5. Embody POL values – Care, challenge, commit
6. POL reputation positive and enhanced with stakeholders (e.g. JFSA, Unions)
7. Aligned with 2012-2017 business strategy
8. Needs to function within business operating model
9. Needs to be future proof

Assumptions

1. POL board support and endorsement of project
2. The system is the final and last resort after all other channels have been exhausted
3. A low volume of complaints/disputes
4. Network users support new system
5. No change in legislative position
6. System is for internal escalated contractual-related complaints/disputes only
7. Full collaboration and interaction with business improvement programme (BIP)

Resources

- Current (until 31st March) – 1 FTE plus *ad hoc* support from Programme team
- Future resource – being considered by Programme Board

Deliverables (2014)

Deliverables

1. Project brief agreed by 7th February
2. Key learnings and themes from mediation scheme captured and documented as input into design principles by mid-February
3. Benchmarking to capture best practice elements as input into design principles by late-February
4. Key design principles identified and documented by 7th March
5. Paper outlining no more than 3 options by 31st March
6. Consultation with targeted groups and feedback captured for determining final system design option by 1st May
7. Final option proposal paper by 1st June
8. Detailed system plan and implementation plan by mid-July
9. Post-launch review summary 6 months after Go Live in 2015.

Milestones

1. Project remit and scope agreed by 7th February
2. Data collection completed by end of February
3. Complaint handling system options defined by late March
4. Consultation launched by early April
5. Consultation close by end of April
6. Revised system design option completed by 1st June
7. Detailed design (blueprint) and implementation planned by mid-July
8. Implementation and Go Live by Q1 2015
9. Post-launch review 6 months afterwards (Q3 2015)

Key decision points

1. Programme Board approves project remit and scope by 7th February
2. ExCo approves project remit and scope by 14th February
3. Programme Board review and approval of Options paper for consultation by 31st March
4. ExCo review and approval of Options paper for consultation by early April

5. Programme Board approval of final system for submission to ExCo by 1st June
6. ExCo approval and endorsement of new proposed system and implementation plan
mid-June

Ben Maddison
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