
From: Karen Wightman [REDACTED] GRO
Sent: Fri 31/07/2015 1:44:32 PM (UTC)
To: Mark R Davies; [REDACTED] GRO
Cc: Matthew Bardo; [REDACTED] GRO
Subject: RE: BBC Panorama

Dear Mark,

I realise there was an error in the penultimate sentence of my previous email to you, it should have read – “If we do not hear from you by Monday, we will take it that you are happy for us to summarise your position from the material you have provided to date.”

Jim Gray’s email address is [REDACTED] GRO

He has been consulted during our recent correspondence and is across all of the issues raised by you and my responses to them.

In the meantime, as I have already said we would be grateful if you could let us know by Monday if you intend to respond to the allegations we have raised with you by way of a recorded interview or a written response.

Yours sincerely,
Karen Wightman.

From: Louise Chatfield [REDACTED] GRO **On Behalf Of** Mark R Davies
Sent: 31 July 2015 09:45
To: Karen Wightman
Cc: Matthew Bardo; Mark R Davies
Subject: RE: BBC Panorama

Dear Karen

Thank you for your response.

I would be very grateful for the email address for Jim Gray.

I am very disappointed at Panorama’s failure to provide any evidence for the serious and unfounded allegations it is making.

Yours sincerely

Mark



Mark Davies

Communications and Corporate Affairs Director

1st Floor
Finsbury Dials
20 Finsbury Street

London EC2Y 9AQ

GRO

From: Karen Wightman [GRO]
Sent: 31 July 2015 09:06
To: Mark R Davies
Cc: Matthew Bardo
Subject: BBC Panorama

30th July 2015

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your letter of 28th July, but I think we have already responded to the issues you have raised.

As I explained in my letter on Monday, we will take all the information you have provided into consideration when finishing the programme. I also explained that the BBC does not normally provide evidence in its right of reply process to support the allegations that it is reporting. Throughout our approach has been in accordance with BBC Editorial Guidelines. It is my job as Acting Editor of Panorama to ensure that those guidelines have been correctly interpreted and followed. Having reviewed the work of the programme team, I am satisfied that they have been.

Matt Bardo has already explained in his email of 23rd June why a demonstration of Horizon would not be appropriate. The fact that it is working well at a particular moment does not demonstrate that the system never makes mistakes. A similar point applies to your request that we interview postmasters suggested by you. While many postmasters are happy with Horizon, that does not mean the system always works perfectly.

Our programme is about the postmasters who have blamed the computer system for their convictions. We understand, and will make clear to our viewers, that most postmasters use Horizon without any problem, thereby fulfilling our obligations of impartiality.

I think the two comments you have highlighted from a contributor, about bullying and Paula Vennells, are worthy of consideration for inclusion in our programme. As I understand it, the context for the comments is as follows:

The Post Office set up a mediation scheme in part because MPs from across the country were unhappy about the way postmasters had been treated. One hundred and thirty six postmasters have been accepted into the mediation scheme and twenty have been accepted for review by the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC). The Post Office promised to get to the bottom of the allegations and employed its own independent experts to investigate. The experts have since criticised the Post Office in Parliament and accused it of withholding important documents from their investigation. They also concluded in their final report that there were cases where *“criminal charges have been brought which appear to have been motivated primarily by Post Office’s desire to recover losses.”* MPs are still unhappy – as evidenced by an adjournment debate in Parliament on 29th June – and have strongly criticised the Post Office for the way the mediation scheme has been operated. They say they have lost *“faith and trust in the Post Office’s willingness to investigate the issue properly and thoroughly”*. Even the Prime Minister has made it clear that the Post Office still has questions to answer. He told Parliament on 1st July that: *“I would hope that it would not be necessary to have a full independent judicial inquiry to get to the bottom of this issue, but get to the bottom of it we must.”*

In this context, I believe the two highlighted comments are relevant, but we will consider your response before making a final decision on their inclusion.

I do not accept that we are trying to pre-empt the CCRC’s decision or that our motive for commenting on these matters “*must be seriously questioned*”. It is a matter of significant public interest that twenty postmasters who claim they have been unfairly prosecuted by the Post Office have had their cases accepted for review by the CCRC. We are perfectly entitled to examine some of these cases on Panorama. I have reviewed the documentation that we are using in the programme and I am satisfied that it is not being taken out of context.

I can now tell you that a working title for the programme has been agreed. It is “Trouble at the Post Office”. I have also just been told that the programme has been rescheduled and will now go out on August 17th.

We didn’t receive a response from you by our deadline last night. However, in order to give you every opportunity to explain your position, I am willing to extend the deadline for your statement or interview until Monday 3rd August. We need to receive your response by that date because we will be completing the programme next week. If we do not hear from you by Friday, we will take it that you are happy for us to summarise your position from the material you have provided to date.

You asked for the name of a senior manager with responsibility for Panorama. For your information, the manager responsible is the deputy head of Current Affairs Jim Gray.

Yours sincerely

Karen Wightman
Acting Editor
BBC Panorama

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