

## **DRAFT STATEMENT FOR PANORAMA**

The Post Office wholly rejects the extremely serious and unsubstantiated allegations that continue to be repeated by a small number of largely former postmasters.

Over the past 3 years, in the face of these allegations, we have launched an independent inquiry, re-investigated each case and set up a scheme for individual complaints, providing financial support for people to obtain independent professional advice.

This process has produced no evidence at all that our computer system or a third party is responsible for missing cash at the few Post Office branches involved.

We cannot share details about individual cases publicly. This is because, in a handful of cases, applications have been made to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, the independent public body to which anyone convicted of a criminal offence can apply.

But the clear evidence we have in these cases does not support the allegations being made.

Our computer system works well, and is robust and effective in dealing with six million transactions a day, with 70,000 people using it. The independent investigators acknowledge this fact.

The Post Office does not prosecute people for making innocent mistakes and never has.

However, where missing cash has been dishonestly and systematically covered up, or stolen, it is right that we may take action in line with our duty as custodians of both public and our customers money.

### **Prosecutions**

The Post Office does not prosecute people for making innocent mistakes and never has. Where missing cash has been dishonestly and systematically covered up, or stolen, we may take action. The Post Office and those working for it are entrusted with public money and that of our customers.

Criminal offences are not innocent mistakes - they are a deliberate and dishonest choice made by individuals at the time.

We do not control the legal process. Any decision to plead guilty is always one for the defendant only, having taken advice from his or her own lawyer, after considering the evidence. ***It is defence lawyers who may then may approach the Post Office, not the other way round.***

If the Post Office decides, as a result of an approach by the defence, to not offer evidence or to withdraw a charge it does not mean that it does not have sufficient evidence.

No appeal was ever made against conviction in any of these cases.

The Post Office takes seriously its continuing duty of disclosure in criminal law proceedings. Material generated by Second Sight and through the Mediation Scheme has been - and continues to be - provided to an external firm of specialist criminal law solicitors to review to enable the Post Office to continue to comply with that duty.

The Criminal Cases Review Commission will have access to all the evidence and other material in cases referred to them. It is therefore clearly the right place for these matters to be considered and we are co-operating fully with it.

### **Remote access**

This is about facts, not theories. There is no evidence whatsoever of remote tampering – malicious or otherwise – of branch transactions. The data integrity is verified by independent audits, industry accreditations and numerous other checks. There is no money held on Horizon, it simply records and balances transactions – sales of stamps for example. It is difficult to understand why anyone would want to maliciously manipulate these. There have been two versions of the system since it was introduced and everything that is done leaves an identifiable footprint, and is subject to rigorous security. Money is held in branches, not on the system, and branches are also required to hold certain paper records for up to six years. Most importantly, none of the theories advanced to us on this subject have been borne out by the facts about what actually happened in the cases involved.

### **Individual cases**

The clear evidence we have in these cases does not support the allegations being made. The original allegation – that flaws in the computer system might be responsible for cash going missing at some Post Office branches – has not been borne out by any evidence during more than three years of rigorous examination of the cases of the very small number of people who claimed this. Subsequent

allegations and theories are, simply, not borne out by the facts, which we have been and remain willing to discuss with the people involved.