
From: Patrick Bourke[/O=MMS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=PATRICK BOURKBE7DB8D6-53EC-4534-922B-495877001727E11]
Sent: Tue 23/06/2015 7:35:22 AM (UTC)
To: Tom Wechsler; GRO
Subject: RE: Letter from PV to minister

Thanks T – Mark U and Mel have been stars, and the rest of the team for keeping everything else going. We're keeping an eye on resource and think we're at capacity but ok for the mo. P

From: Tom Wechsler
Sent: 23 June 2015 08:34
To: Patrick Bourke
Subject: RE: Letter from PV to minister

I'm sure. PV knows it and is grateful. She's asked to see the team at the right moment.

Please let me know if you need an injection of resource and I'll do what I can to unlock it if there are any barriers Jane can't move (at all or quickly enough).

Tom Wechsler
Chief of Staff

GRO

From: Patrick Bourke
Sent: 23 June 2015 08:31
To: Tom Wechsler
Subject: RE: Letter from PV to minister

Yes, it is a bit of a rant (and I don't!). But important that we get right and he can be a bit trigger happy !

Will do best on it, together with Mel. Am just trying to draft the statement for Panorama to carry in lieu of an interview at the moment. There's a lot of work down here again..

P

From: Tom Wechsler
Sent: 23 June 2015 08:26
To: Patrick Bourke
Subject: RE: Letter from PV to minister

It does. Bit of a rant (can't blame him). Do you want to have a go and send me a revised version?

For what it's worth, I don't like the list at the end. I'd also be more specific about eg the allegations ie theft vs false accounting; call out the BBC as a prosecutor; highlight JFSA's reckless behaviour in the WG and more generally; highlight this is an extortion exercise; be clearer on the intent for brand damage; nobody has appealed; many pleaded guilty. Of course, all needs to be more eloquently put.

PV will want to offer a meeting if helpful.

I'll need it by 12

T

Tom Wechsler
Chief of Staff

GRO

From: Patrick Bourke
Sent: 23 June 2015 08:19
To: Tom Wechsler
Subject: RE: Letter from PV to minister

Tom

Entre nous, M's draft needs work...

P

From: Tom Wechsler
Sent: 23 June 2015 08:18
To: Mark R Davies
Cc: Jane Hill; Patrick Bourke; Melanie Corfield; Jane MacLeod
Subject: RE: Letter from PV to minister

Mark

Thanks – I think it is a good idea; and I am sure Paula will be content to send something (cc BNR I'd suggest).

I have some minor comments which I will send through as soon as I can

Tom

Tom Wechsler
Chief of Staff

GRO

From: Mark R Davies
Sent: 23 June 2015 08:07
To: Tom Wechsler
Cc: Jane Hill; Patrick Bourke; Melanie Corfield; Jane MacLeod
Subject: Letter from PV to minister

Tom

We feel a letter from Paula to the minister ahead of the Horizon debate would help him in having a script to draw from - he can also place the issue firmly as a PO matter by quoting from it. A draft is below. Grateful for views - if we agree with this it would be good to get it out today.

Mark

Dear minister

Ahead of the adjournment debate on the Post Office and Horizon on Monday I thought it might be helpful to write to you setting out the Post Office's position on this issue.

As you may know the BBC plans a Panorama programme on the issue on the same day.

We expect both the programme and debate to include damaging and unsubstantiated allegations about Horizon and the Post Office's approach to prosecutions in those rare cases where there is evidence of branch accounts being deliberately falsified to cover up losses.

In short we expect allegations to be made which suggest that we pressure people to plead guilty to criminal charges, have not provided appropriate information to investigators, have the ability to remotely access and alter branch accounts and have not investigated whether Horizon could be to blame for losses in branch accounts.

For the record, we categorically reject these very damaging allegations, which are made without evidence to support them other than vague assertions and unsubstantiated claims.

We take our obligations to our people very seriously. The allegations have the potential to damage our business and all the hard work and dedication which the vast majority of postmasters and Crown branch teams put into serving customers day in, day out across the UK.

I wanted to reassure you on a number of fronts in relation to this issue.

First and foremost, it is important to set out very clearly that:

- contrary to the allegations we expect to be made, **there is absolutely no evidence that Horizon does not work as it should:**
- indeed it is a robust and successful system. The former postmasters who are complaining represent a tiny proportion of the 500,000 people who have used Horizon, which processes more than 6 million transactions every day, 2 billion every year, since it was introduced
- **the Post Office only prosecutes when it is in the public interest to do so: and we only do so rarely – and we cannot prosecute people for making innocent mistakes: we only prosecute where there is clear evidence which supports a criminal prosecution**

Some time ago, and along with the people involved and their representatives, we agreed to respect the confidentiality of individuals involved in this issue. While we would like to comment freely on individual cases, we are not prepared to break agreements we entered in good faith. We recognise that this places us in a weaker position than we would like.

It is also the case that some of the people involved in making allegations against the Post Office have asked the Criminal Cases Review Commission, an independent body, to examine their prosecution case. That is their right and we will co-operate fully with any requests made of us: what we won't do is indulge in a public debate about individual cases while that review is being conducted.

We have, however, provided the Panorama programme and its journalists with huge amounts of information which we hope will be reflected fairly and accurately, as it should to comply with its Editorial Guidelines and the Broadcasting Code.

We have also repeatedly offered to meet MPs with cases to discuss them in confidence. This has not been widely taken up.

The background to this issue is as follows:

In 2012, the Post Office commissioned Second Sight Support Services Limited to carry out an independent review of its Horizon computer system, which is supplied to the Post Office by Fujitsu Services Limited, in response to allegations by a small number of former Postmasters about the integrity of that system. Second Sight reported on their investigation in July 2013.

The investigation found no evidence of system-wide issues with Horizon and its associated processes. However, it did point to areas where the Post Office could have done more to support Postmasters, for instance in the support they received. In response, the Post Office set up a Branch Support Programme which led to the introduction of a number of important new measures.

Following publication of Second Sight's conclusions in 2013, the Post Office also set up a Complaint Review and Mediation Scheme to examine individual cases and, where appropriate, provide a forum to assist their resolution through mediation. The Scheme was set up in consultation with Members of Parliament (MPs), the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance (JFSA) and Second Sight and overseen by a Working Group chaired by Sir Anthony Hooper, a former Court of Appeal Judge.

136 cases were admitted into the Scheme. A minority had involved criminal proceedings. The Post Office has completed thorough investigations into each case. Nothing was found in any of the cases to suggest Horizon has not worked as it should or any evidence to suggest a conviction is unsafe.

Where the facts indicate genuine grievances capable of resolution, for example that the support provided in a particular instance fell short of the desired standards, those issues are being discussed with Applicants and a number of complaints have been resolved.

However, many cases are based on allegations which, following investigation, are not supported by evidence, or cannot be resolved through mediation.

Having completed all its investigations, the Post Office has now put forward for mediation all cases remaining in the Scheme except those that have been subject to a previous court ruling. This is aimed at accelerating the resolution of individual complaints and the conclusion of the Scheme.

The mediation process is overseen by the independent Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR). The Post Office also seeks to continue to make available to Applicants an independent review of their specific case by forensic accountants Second Sight, where this has not already been provided.

For those Applicants who have been the subject of court rulings, two important points need to be drawn out. Firstly, we continue to consider each of these cases carefully, on a case by case basis, even though mediation cannot overturn a court's ruling.

Secondly, as prosecutor, Post Office has a continuing duty after a prosecution has concluded to disclose any information that subsequently comes to light which might undermine its prosecution case or support the case of the defendant.

Applicants remain able to pursue the normal legal avenues open to them, such as appealing court rulings, with any further material disclosed to them, including that produced through the Scheme. None has yet done so, but we are prepared to meet these challenges in the courts if they do.

We believe we have acted appropriately. We have taken the complaints from a tiny number of largely ex-postmasters and handled them very seriously and very sensitively.

We have published a detailed report on the issue as well as full responses to the select committee and following the Westminster Hall debate in December.

I hope this is helpful and I do of course stand ready to provide you with a full briefing should this be helpful.

Of course as a publicly owned business we are open to scrutiny. Where we fall below the standards we set ourselves, we should be held accountable. But this works both ways. Where we are unfairly accused we have a right to expect fair assessment: and it does not feel this is being given by the BBC in this case.

The clear position we have reached after three years of investigation is that there is absolutely no evidence at all that Horizon does not work as it should. Indeed it is robust and reliable. While we have differences with the independent forensic accountants we engaged on this, it is worth stressing that they have also found nothing that contradicts our view about Horizon. Indeed their view is that losses in branch most likely come down to human action.

The Post Office has handled this issue in the right way.

We have appointed independent investigators and set up a mediation scheme.

We have provided funding to those making claims so they can seek independent advice.

We have re-investigated in detail every case put to us.

Where it's clear that things could be better, like training and support, we have acted.

We have said we will put all those cases without court rulings forward for mediation.

We will consider the others on a case by case basis.

We have offered to meet MPs representing people with cases and agreed to take them through each case, confidentially.

I hope this is helpful.

Mark Davies
Communications and Corporate Affairs Director
Post Office Ltd

Mobile: **GRO**