POL00338392

Message

From: Mike Granville [/O=MMS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=MIKE.GRANVILLEF9CC547D-14F1-4BFB-AE89-5C28E92235C3]
Sent: 21/09/2011 13:29:48
To: Hayley Fowell [GRO]; Susan Crichton [GRO]; Rebekah Mantle [GRO]; David Simpson [GRO]
CC: Mike Young [GRO]; Kevin Gilliland [GRO]; Sue Huggins [GRO]; Rod Ismay [GRO]; Paula Vennells [GRO]; Chris M Day [GRO]
Subject: FW: Private Eye inquiry - Horizon

Importance: High

Hayley,

Further to our conversation, and having spoken about this with Susan Crichton – we think that, as the Private Eye journalist at this stage has not asked specific questions to which we can give a specific response, the best course of action may be to keep to a simple high level response. This would be rather than going through all the bullets used last time (which were put together with reference to the cases that were being then cited by the BBC – so for example we had a bullet about training because that was a point that had been raised).

So, pending any specific questions, we wonder whether we should just say;

'.The Post Office is fully confident in the Horizon computer system operating in its branches. This accounting system, and the processes around it, enable our branches to maintain accurate and reliable accounts in all respects'

I'm copying this note around to various parties here in POL – so that they can see that this issue is potentially being raised again in the media.

Thanks

Mike

From: Hayley Fowell
Sent: 20 September 2011 16:55
To: Susan Crichton; Rebekah Mantle
Cc: Mike Granville; David Simpson
Subject: Private Eye inquiry - Horizon
Importance: High

Susan/ Rebekah,
We've received a press inquiry from Private Eye about the Horizon system. The journalist has been doing quite a bit of research speaking to SPMs who have been accused of fraud and their claims that the system is faulty etc. He is now looking for the Post Office's side of the story.
I have pasted below the statement we have been using for inquiries – I need to check this is still relevant. I have pasted an additional line we could include to strengthen our position.
I'm sure you are aware of Private Eye as a satirical magazine, but we need to treat this carefully as they have a history of serious campaigning on behalf of individuals. It's also widely read by journalists so could provoke further interest in this issue.
Please can you review the statement and get back me ASAP. The deadline is tomorrow lunchtime.
Thanks,
Hayley

Hayley Fowell
Senior External Relations Manager
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EC4Y 0HQ
t:
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e: GRO

Post Office Statement

- The Post Office is fully confident that the Horizon computer system in its branches, and all the accounting processes around it, are absolutely accurate and reliable at all times.
- The Horizon system has been subjected to full, independently-assured, robust testing procedures. The Horizon information security processes meet the relevant industry standards which apply to such organisations as banks and building societies.
- Subpostmasters are given fully appropriate training, typically including classroom training and a further time on site under close supervision and guidance from a Post Office manager. Subpostmasters can also ring a dedicated helpline for advice.
- The Horizon system has operated successfully for over 10 years across the Post Office network, which currently stands at more than 11,500 branches.
- The National Federation of Subpostmasters, which vigorously represents the views and interests of subpostmasters around the entire country, has gone on record on a number of occasions to express its full confidence in the accuracy and robustness of the Horizon system.
- The Horizon system provides detailed records of every transaction, no matter how small or large, in any individual Post Office branch. Separate records of all key strokes in the system are stored in a tamper-proof way..
- The Post Office handles large sums of public money as well as the money entrusted to it by the 20 million people who visit our branches each week. The Post Office rightly makes every effort and takes all reasonable steps to protect the money in its care.

ADDITIONAL MESSAGE

There have been a number of court cases – involving a tiny fraction of the Post Office network - when claims and assertions against the integrity of the Horizon system have been made. We are not aware of a single instance of a court ruling or decision accepting such assertions or challenges.