Chapter 02 Performing a Branch Assurance Visit

Contents

Section 1 - Introduction

1.1 Branch Assurance Visit (BAV) activity takes place because we have stakeholder requirements to ensure that we protect, maintain and account for all our assets, both those we own and those we look after on behalf of our stakeholders. We are also responsible for ensuring that all our staff and postmasters, operate their Post Office® branches in accordance with legislative regulations as well as conforming to our operating license and branch standards.

1.2 We will attend all types of branches throughout the year to verify financial assets on hand and to test regulatory compliance and business conformance against standards set out in HOL help areas listed below:
- Post Office® PayStation
- Post Office® Outreach Services excluding Home Service
- Royal Mail Compliance
- Horizon Online™ Equipment & Administration
- Security Operations Guide
- Ordering Stores & Stocks

Section 2 – Types of Branch Assurance Visits

2.1 These are the types of Branch Assurance Visits
- Financial Visit
- Closure Visit
- Robbery and Burglary Visit
- Transfer Visit

2.2 The BAV is a comprehensive check to assess the current trading position of the branch in addition to the verification of cash, foreign currency (if applicable), all stock items and vouchers on hand. This will be carried out if requested by stakeholders or IRRELEVANT IRRELEVANT IRRELEVANT At least two BAAs will attend each BAV.

2.3 The current financial position of the branch is calculated and recorded by the completion of a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Template know as Branch Assurance Reporting Tool (BART) by comparing our findings with current office snapshot and settling any discrepancy to the Central Postmaster Account.

2.4 Included with the BAV is a compliance check which will check that business conformance and regulatory compliance controls are operating as intended: by checking evidence and gaining assurance that the required controls are in place. Compliance to business policies and procedures will be tested in conjunction with the BAV.

Section 3 – The Branch Assurance Advisor's Role & Responsibilities

3.1 The Branch Assurance Advisor's (BAA) role at the visit is completely objective and the reports they produce after the visit must be detailed, accurate and factual. The BAAs role is not to speculate on the cause of the outcome of the BAV.

3.2 BAAs should use the opening script and explain the reason for their attendance as outlined in the Rationale Document, provide a copy for the Postmaster.

3.3 If the BAV should end in the precautionary suspension of the Postmaster, any questions should be directed to the Contracts Advisor.

3.4 There will be circumstances where an BAV to a branch leads to an escalation or investigation, for example by Trading Standards, so it is necessary for the BAAs to be conscious of this from the outset.

3.5 The lead BAA must take a detailed note of all timings and the course of all events: BAV Information Summary. This can be used in conjunction with the (Temporary) Branch Closure Summary (Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 04 Closures). The actions of those on site and conversations held may become relevant. The lead BAA is responsible for reporting these details.

3.6 For full information about the support available from the Contract Advisor see Irregularities (section 9).

3.7 All BAAs must always wear their security passes and keep them visible whilst on site in branches.

3.8 All BAAs (Lead and Support) must take their laptops to a BAV, so the activity is not jeopardised by laptop failure. It is the Lead BAV's responsibility to confirm which BAAs should bring their laptops into the branch, and travel method will be considered. General security rules apply.

3.9 All BAAs working on BAV activity must carry with them a supply of the following items to be used at branches where they are found to be lacking:
  ➢ Note, coin, rem bags, HOL bar code stickers for non CViT rem.

3.10 In addition to the aforementioned items the BAA must have the following paperwork:
  ▪ A workplace Risk Assessment. Download the latest version from the Knowledge Centre
  ▪ **IRRELEVANT**
    Please ensure you have the current/updated documents.

3.11 The BAA must carry notices informing the public of temporary closure or closure, to include the nearest Motor Vehicle Licence issuing branch if applicable (Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 02 BAV Activity – Closure Notices).

3.12 The BAA must endeavour to have the branch open as soon as operationally possible unless there are valid circumstances to prevent this. The Compliance element of the BAV can be carried out whilst the branch is open.

Section 4 – The Lead BAA Role

4.1 The Branch Assurance Support Team (BAST) will indicate via the BAV Workplan which BAAs are to carry out the BAV and who has been allocated the "lead" role.

4.2 It is the lead BAAs responsibility to prepare for the BAV, manage activities on site, accurately report on the financial position of the branch and subsequently complete the BAV reports. The Lead BAA shall be provided with access to the Rationale Document (**RD**) and will need to take a copy of this with them to the BAV.

4.3 The lead is responsible for the introductory discussions with the Postmaster, following the reason for BAV script, in section 7, below, providing regular updates and performing the closing meeting, (following the Closing Script in section 10, below).

4.4 The lead is responsible for delegating tasks (for example, Compliance BAV Tool completion, checking of foreign currency, ATM etc.) to ensure the BAV is run in an orderly manner, making efficient use of the resource available and minimum disruption to customer service.

4.5 The lead is also responsible for the decision to re-open the branch on the conclusion of the BAV providing the involvement of the Contract Advisor (CA) is not required.

4.6 The lead is responsible for contacting the other BAAs to discuss arrangements and organise travel in accordance with the current Business Travel Expenses (BTE) policy (available from - Travel and Events Booking Portal (sharepoint.com) to arrange a meeting point and consider contingency arrangements in the event of absence, sickness, travel or other problems.

4.7 The lead must provide the official working papers for use in the branch. Only the current versions of working papers available on Knowledge Centre are acceptable.

4.8 Mobile phone usage should be kept to a minimum, be relevant to the BAV and phones should always be kept on silent/vibrate whilst in the branch. Any exceptions to this would need to be agreed with the lead in cases of urgent/emergency calls being expected. Branch staff serving on the counter must be able to converse with customers without being hampered by conversations taking place behind the counter.

Section 5 - Planning

5.1   The lead is responsible for carrying out the pre visit preparation. The lead must check the BAV type (closure, financial, robbery etc.), branch name and code and other details supplied by BAST. Using the Branch Assurance Portal (BAP), the lead can find all the information on the branch including branch opening times.

5.2   The BAV Reporting Tool contains the NaSA Business Database, and the Lead BAA must take note of what type of branch this is, for example:
- Agency Branches
- Directly Managed Branch (ref-additional information in Appendix A)
- A Franchise or Strategic Partner (ref-additional information in Appendix B)
- Open plan or a combi store (ref-additional information in Appendix C)
- WH Smith (ref-additional information in Appendix D)
- Core and Outreach (ref-additional information in Appendix E)
- Post Office Local (ref-additional information Appendix F)
- Post Office Main

5.3   The type of branch will indicate any further preparation required. Exceptions that relate to specific types of branches are detailed in the appendices.

5.4   The lead BAA must also determine if any non-standard transactions are performed at the branch as they will need to ensure that monies associated with these transactions are included in the BAV checks. The branch should also be able to demonstrate that these products are being accounted for in the correct manner.
- Foreign Currency (ref-Section 8.2.5)
- PayStation (ref-Section 8.4)
- Automated Teller Machines ATM (ref-Appendix G)
- Retail Service Point (ref-Appendix C)
- Bidi, Bidi Magnum, and roller cash dispensers (ref-Appendix I)
- Self Service Kiosks (SSK)

There are instructions for dealing with these non-standard transactions in the relevant section of HOL HELP; BAAs must familiarise themselves with these to be prepared to check cash and accounting practices at on site activities.

5.5   The lead must also consider any other factors that may impact on the amount of resource required for BAV activity and advise the Branch Assurance Team Leader BATL who will inform BAST.

5.6   The lead is responsible for supplying all working papers for completion during the BAV. This includes all financial working papers (Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 02 BAV Activity – Working Papers). A copy of the Compliance questions can be printed from the Knowledge Centre (BAV – Chapter 02 BAV Activity – CAT Tool).

Section 6 – Branch Assurance Visit Systems

6.1 A Branch Assurance Reporting Tool (BART) is a Microsoft Excel Template designed to support planning, verification of assets and generate the reports required by Financial Branch Assurance Visit activity at all branches. The lead BAA is responsible for ensuring all recipients that require the reports are included on the BART.

6.2 The Branch Compliance Report Tool (BCRT) is a excel template designed to support the planning and testing of regulatory compliance and business conformance and recording and reporting the results. The BAA uses the tool to access the lists of Regulatory Compliance and Business Conformance tests required and record the answers.

   The lead BAA is responsible for uploading the BCRT SharePoint once completed.
   The latest version of the BCRT is available from our database (Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 02 BAV Activity CABT).

6.3 The BART is regularly reviewed, and a new version should be downloaded for each activity from the Knowledge Centre, meaning a new version is to be used for each activity.

6.4 The lead BAA must download the current copy of the BART and check that they have the latest version of the BCRT Reporting Tool, directly from Knowledge Centre for every activity. local copies can be saved, but to avoid use of out-dated versions, checks must be made to ensure that any local copy is the correct version before an activity takes place.

6.5 The current BART and Guide can be accessed from our database: Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 02 BAV Activity – BART Tool.

6.6 BAAs must ensure that they have read and understood the current versions of the instructions.

6.7 All findings from the BART and BCRT must be submitted within the timescale as stated at 11.2 and while connected to the Intranet, follow the instructions on the BAV & the BCR tools to submit the form to the SharePoint sites.

6.8 The Rationale Document (RD) is a summary of the reason for the BAV request. This document will be sent to the lead BAA, prior to the scheduled BAV date.

6.9 The Branch Assurance Portal (BAP) is an online platform, which contains links to the information that may be required by an BAA during the preparation and execution of an BAV.

6.10 There are other tools that can be used as required, such as the Branch Insights Tool.

Section 7 – On Site Activity

7.1   Before approaching the branch, the lead BAA should take the opportunity to brief the team on the approach for the visit and clarify all roles and responsibilities. Please await the arrival of your colleagues before entering the branch.

7.2   The lead BAA must arrange for a call to be made to Branch Support Centre to notify them that an BAV is taking place and the branch will remain closed until its completion. This should also be completed before entering the branch where possible.

7.3   Branch Assurance Visit Opening Script:

The introduction, by the lead BAA, to the first person arriving on site should be worded as follows.

"Hello, my name is ………… from the Post Office Branch Assurance Team. I am here to verify Post Office assets in your branch". Introduce colleagues and ascertain the role of the staff member.

Postmaster – ask to speak to them in private.
"The reason we are here today is because [set out reason for visit and read through page one of the Branch Assurance Rational Document i.e., primary findings, secondary findings and summary]"

If the Postmaster is absent – ask OIC/staff to contact the Postmaster to advise them that the branch is being verified and invite them to attend. The lead BAA shall also try to contact the Postmaster where possible. This also applies to all multiple partners.

If the Postmaster wishes to attend, the lead BAA will allow a reasonable time for them to arrive before commencing the BAV, what is reasonable will be decided on a case-by-case basis and documented. Record this contact information for the BART Tool. If in doubt, the lead BAA can refer to your Branch Assurance Team Leader.

"That's fine, we will not start the BAV until you arrive".

The branch can remain open whilst waiting for the Postmaster. If the Postmaster does not wish to attend commence with the BAV. If the Postmaster hasn't arrived by their expected time of arrival, then contact your Branch Assurance Team Leader.

On arrival of the Postmaster:
"Due to this, I will be conducting a Branch Assurance Visit to verify cash, currency and stock on hand. This is so that Post Office Ltd can be assured of its assets and provide additional assistance to support you in achieving the required business standards, if required.

I am going to check all cash, currency, and stock on hand for all stock units, so can you please confirm where everything is kept.

I will also require the PayStation figures for the day so far and request that no further transactions should be put through until the Branch Assurance Visit is complete.

After the financial Branch Assurance Visit, I will be asking you some questions around compliance and will require the input of yourself and any other staff members that work on the Post Office terminal. We encourage any feedback and there will also be an opportunity for you to verify and comment on any findings and ask questions. Once the Branch Assurance Visit is complete, I will go through the findings with you.

If you would like support from the National Federation of Subpostmasters during the Branch Assurance Visit, they can be contacted either through your representative or their Head Office on ⌐ GRO ⌐

Do you have any questions?"

Make a note of any questions and your answers, if you are unable to answer any questions advise the Postmaster that you will raise that question on their behalf.

If you have manager access to the Horizon, would you please add my SmartID to the system. if no one has access advise the Postmaster that:

I will use a Global User account to add my Smart ID, I will not use that for anything else and I will provide a transaction log of my activities throughout my visit. If we find any discrepancies the Global User will be used to settle that discrepancy to the Central Postmaster Account.

Any comments and feedback from the Postmaster and staff should be carefully noted and taken into consideration.

7.4 Other points for the opening discussion should include as a minimum:

- The purpose of the BAV is to verify cash and stock items.
- Explain the reason (trigger) for the visit.
- Go through RD with the Postmaster and explain any discrepancies that have been identified on HOL and the accounting processes behind them where possible.
- Explain the process that will be followed.
- The reason behind the use of laptops and the BART (using tools independent of the Horizon system for verification)
- The course of events and establish where all assets are held in branch.
- The need for access to the HOL system.
- Obtain PayStation figures for the day so far and make a visual check that the cash is present and instruct not to operate until advised.
- Other aspects of the BAV; for example, reconciliation of non-value stock. e.g., POCA cards
- The Compliance part of the BAV, which will require the input of the Postmaster/OIC and staff.
- ⌐ IRRELEVANT ⌐

7.5 If they are not the Postmaster, then **they must be advised to contact** the Postmaster to let them know their branch is being verified and invite them to attend. The lead BAA shall also try to contact the postmaster where possible. This also applies to all multiple partners. If the postmaster wishes to attend, the Lead BAA will allow a reasonable time for them to arrive before commencing the BAV. What is reasonable will be decided on a case-by-case basis and documented. If in doubt, the lead BAA can defer to their line manager.

7.6 The Postmaster or staff may wish to verify your identity with the Post Office® before allowing access; this will mean that BAAs may have to wait outside until their identity has been confirmed and the branch staff have completed their first access procedures. (**Verification is not mandatory**; BAAs may be admitted on production of their security pass). The Postmaster or staff should be advised that he/she should not access cash, stock or the HOL system until the BAAs have gained access. In the event the postmaster is absent but travelling to the office the branch may remain open until the postmaster arrives. In these circumstances, any irregularity should be documented, and a transaction log obtained from the HOL system to ensure there has been no activity on the system before the BAAs were allowed access.

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7.8 Having gained entry to the building the lead BAA must arrange for the notices informing the public of the closure to be displayed in a prominent position. The details on the poster will include the names and postcodes of alternative branches, nearest MVL branch if applicable and an estimated opening time for the branch.

7.9 Each BAA must ensure that they sign a visitor's book or log recording their arrival, date, time and purpose of their visit. They must also enter their departure time before leaving the branch. If there is no existing visitor's book, one should be created at the time.

7.10 Establish facilities for BAAs and where bags and personal belongings should be stored. Some branches have policies in place which forbid taking handbags, personal cash, food etc. into the counter area. BAAs must abide by these policies. If BAAs are concerned about leaving personal items in a different area or locking them in a vehicle, then they are advised not to carry unnecessary items to BAV.

7.11 **BAAs should not have un-witnessed access to cash and stock.** Where it is not possible for the postmaster to attend or the postmaster chooses not to be present, then checks must be made in the presence of a nominated Officer in Charge (OIC) - (this should be agreed with the postmaster on the call). It is important that any checks are not made in isolation. Both the BAA and stockholder should acknowledge the accuracy of the figures following the check. Where a discrepancy is highlighted, the Postmaster or OIC should be offered the opportunity to verify the findings and sign the cash and/or stock sheet to confirm that the figures to be used as part of the BAV are correct. If they decline the offer, then this should be noted, and included in the subsequent BAV report and documented and signed accordingly on the working papers.

7.12 **The need to identify and produce all cash, stock, and vouchers.** It must be stressed at the outset that there will be a need to identify and produce all cash, stock, and vouchers and to remind the Postmaster/OIC that this includes items kept at all Post Office serving positions; this will include both PayStation cash which is due for sales and transaction since the last TA received.

If the Postmaster, Office in Charge, or a member of staff present cash or stock after the BAV has commenced, even after it has been confirmed all the cash or stock has been produced this cash and/or stock can be counted and used towards the final figure. It does not need to be recorded separately or reported to the Contracts Advisor.

On completion of the BAV all assets should be secured by the BAA and witnessed by either

another member of the team or the Postmaster/OIC.

7.15   Obsolete Stock**.** This can no longer be sold in the "Front Office".

A check must be made to see if the stock has an icon which allows it to be returned to the Stock Centre using the Rems' – Out to ADC" function; if it has the right icon, the stock item can remain in the system, but the branch should be advised to return the stock immediately. If no icon exists, the "Obsolete Stock Process" (found on the front page of the BART) should be followed to remove the stock from HOL and the subsequent discrepancy will be covered: this should be noted in the branch assurance report.

Section 8 – Procedures for a Branch Assurance Visit

8.1   Horizon Reports.
8.1.1   Ascertain the number and types of stock units on the system.

8.1.2   Ask the postmaster or a member of staff with manager's access to create a user ID for the lead BAA using your SmartID. See Appendix H for Instructions on Accessing the Horizon System if no one in the branch has manager access. With the migration of stock ordering to Branch Hub remember to remove your SmartID before you leave the branch otherwise you will receive future stock order emails from the branch.

8.1.3   If the BAV takes place on a Thursday, following the end of a branch trading period, and the branch trading statement has not been fully completed, the final branch trading statement must be completed prior to commencement of the BAV. If the stock units are in different trading periods, they will need to be brought into the same trading period before the BAV commences.

8.1.4   The required report printouts must be obtained from the HOL system, examined, and filed with the working papers in line with the current retention process:

The reports below must be printed and checked by the lead for any irregularities to enable completion of the Financial BAV. Once these reports have been obtained the lead can then assist colleagues in counting cash/stock. (Please do not write on any of the reports)

- **Un-reconciled/outstanding transfers report** – for multi stock branches. Please ensure you accept all transfers before printing the Office Snapshot as failure to do so will distort your BAV findings on the BART and make it impossible to produce an accurate BAV result.
- **Transaction log for the day of the BAV.**
- **Office snapshot**
- **Balance snapshot for each stock unit** – please ensure this includes the Self-Service Kiosk/s as this is directly linked to Horizon, prior to reopening the branch.
- **Most recent cash declaration holdings** for each stock unit
- **Foreign currency holdings**
- ## IRRELEVANT
- **Suspense account report -** During the branch assurance visit, it is necessary to identify any figures recorded here and obtain proof that they are proper to be held. If they should be in the Suspense Account, then they are deemed as AUTHORISED if not then they are

UNAUTHORISED on the BART.

- **Transaction corrections outstanding -** This report is obtained to ensure that there are no outstanding TC's which need to be included as part of the BAV.
- **Transfer Reconciliation** - Each transfer transaction has a mode of "TO" (Transfer Out) and should have a corresponding mode of either "TI" (Transfer In) or "ER" (Existing Reversal), these will indicate that the transfer has either been accepted by the relevant stock unit or cancelled by the issuing stock unit. If the transfer only has a mode of "TO" (no corresponding "TI" or "ER") then it has not been accepted by the relevant stock unit. All transfers whether value or non-value must be accepted before the Office Snapshot is produced as any items not accepted will not show on the Snapshot and affect the BAV result. If any transfers have not been accepted on a full BAV (Transfer, and Robbery etc.) it will create a misbalance on the BART.
- **User summary** - obtain a list of all HOL users and take note of their full names. This can then be checked by accessing the 'modify user' screen and checking that all entries are current and in the correct format (non SmartID branches). (If any amendments are made to usernames, including the addition and removal of BAAs, please reprint the user summary to reflect the changes).
- **IRRELEVANT**
- **Transaction corrections processed** (this will also show instances whereby evidence has been requested – entries will be preceded with an 'E'). The rationale behind checking this report is to see if the staff are making regular common errors which they may need help or extra training on while you are on site.
- **Remittance summary** (ins and outs) for the whole branch for the trading period

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Please note: - Further reports can be obtained from the HOL system as required.

E.g., branch trading statement reprints, event logs and further transaction logs for investigation purposes. The above list is not exhaustive. However, this should be seen as the minimum.

See Knowledge Centre – BAV -Chapter 02 BAV Activity – BART Tool – BART Tool data sources and files for: BAV Report Paths, See Knowledge Centre – BAV - Chapter 06 Retention of Papers.

This handout is also contained within the BART – Front Page. Check all cash, Cheques, currency, postage, stock on hand as required for completion of BART. Refer to the latest Guide on the Knowledge Centre for completion of the BART.

- **For Currency Revaluations**:
  From the final office snapshot get the currency revaluation figure down and the currency revaluation figure up and minus one from the other.

  > **Example:**
  > Currency revalue up   +£70.24.
  > Currency revalue down   -£28.35 = +£41.89

  Get the currency value in sterling from the 1st office snapshot and deduct the currency value in sterling from your final office snapshot.

  > **Example:**
  > Currency value on 1st office snapshot £13745.94
  > Currency value on final office snapshot: £13544.00 = £201.94
  > Then minus the net currency revaluation from the above figure i.e.
  > £201.94 - £41.89 = £160.05

  Then take the discrepancy figure for the currency of the BART and minus it from the above figure, which in this case was £162.13 - £160.05 = £2.08

  > This is your currency revaluation figure to be entered on the BART.

  Please note that if the first office snapshot is printed after 9.30 am then you would need to get the currency revaluation up and down from there and net it out with the new currency revaluation figures from the final office snapshot.

POCA Cards – Any remaining stock must be destroyed before leaving the branch, and Horizon adjusted to zero.

Please note all empty stocks, when verified, should have the cash declared as zero before coming out of the stock unit.

8.2   Checking Cash, Stock, Foreign Currency and Vouchers on Hand
All **Cash**, **Stock** and **Foreign Currency** must be verified by the Postmaster or a nominated member of staff, if no one is willing to verify it then it must be checked by a 2nd BAA. Working Papers must be annotated to confirm this.

8.2.1

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8.2.2   Branches should be asked to stop any further transactions PayStation terminals where applicable.

8.2.3   **Cash check** - obtain the final cash declaration for the day prior to the BAV by reprinting the last "existing" declaration or obtaining the report via the event log. Where the BAV is carried out later in the day and the branch has been open for business then it will not be possible to confirm cash to a branch declaration. However, the report should still be obtained and examined.

8.2.4 **Cheques** -. Count and record Cheques on hand and verify to the HOL snapshot or the branch trading statement if the branch trading period has been completed. Ensure that Cheques are examined for validity and that any "personal" Cheques are not on hand, including those belonging to staff members, without the correct annotation and a matching transaction that can be verified through HOL.

8.2.5 If an irregular personal Cheque (not associated with any transaction) is found contact the Contract Advisor. The personal Cheque must be impounded, excluded from the BAV result and a receipt issued.

8.2.6 **Foreign Currency -** Verify all currencies on hand to the correct amount on the balance snapshot. Totals from the currencies should be documented for later inclusion in the BART.

8.2.7 **Stock** – All stock to be verified against the balance snapshot. Any discrepancy in stock levels must be adjusted with the Stock 'Adjust' button, unless the postmaster can demonstrate that there is an outstanding sales transaction. Back Office (F14) – Monthly Accounting (F3) – Adjust (55).

8.2.8 **ATM (if applicable)** - All cash to be verified against the balance snapshot.

8.3 **PayStation** – All monies relevant to PayStation TAs (Transaction Acknowledgements) must be accounted for, within Post Office funds.

At the BAV – request that the postmaster and staff refrain from using the PayStation terminal, summaries should be taken, and the cash secured for the days takings to be included in the BAV.

8.4 **Postmaster Account Support Team** –

[lossrecovery GRO replaced with formeraccountsupport GRO agents.accounting.team GRO is now postmasteraccount GRO The outstanding discrepancy figures & rem figures need to be confirmed on the BAP.

8.5 **Pre-prepared Remittances** - There is no need to hold back and open rem bags awaiting collection if they are due for dispatch the same day as the branch assurance. The reference numbers from the bags must be recorded on the BART.

If rem bags have been made up in advance and are not due for dispatch on the day of BAV, they should be opened, and contents verified. If any rem bags are made up and sealed by an BAA, these must be witnessed by either a second BAA or the Postmaster/OIC.

8.6 On completion of the BAV, the lead BAA is to contact the Cash Management Team for an assessment of the branch performance using one of the specific contact numbers supplied to the BAA Team. In the event of excess cash holdings, remit excess back to the cash centre. Record amount returned on the BART (Post Branch Assurance Activity Page (PBAA) and remind Postmaster/OIC of the correct cash management process.

Section 9 - Irregularities

9.1   During the BAV the BAA may find discrepancies, transaction corrections, inappropriate items held in suspense or business practices contrary to the Post Office® operating instructions these items should be summarised in your report.

9.2   At all BAV, all stock units must be reconciled to reflect the actual position so that all figures on Horizon are correct by the time the BAV is completed.

9.3   **Accounting by Central Finance in Chesterfield -** Problems with irregularities involving errors in accounting, Transaction Corrections or entries in the suspense account may be progressed with the help of the appropriate contact.

Following a Financial BAV [**IRRELEVANT**] all discrepancies should be settled into centralized holding account using the Global ID.

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9.4   **Support from Contract Advisor -** As part of the preparation for the BAV the nominated Contract Advisor (CA) is confirmed via email and added to the branch assurance workplan to enable the reporting of admissions.

9.4.1   # IRRELEVANT

9.4.2   The Contract Advisor should be contacted if anything happens during the visit that might suggest that the postmaster may be in breach of their contract, for example:

- **IRRELEVANT**

9.4.3   # IRRELEVANT

The Contract Advisor will need to decide whether the contract should be precautionary suspended and will need the following information:

- Branch name and code
- Contract type
- Postmaster's name
- If not the Postmaster, then the name of the OIC or person in control on the day
- Does the Postmaster have other branches? – If so, are BAV results from them known?
- Amount and breakdown of discrepancy
- Any reasons for the discrepancy that have been offered to the BAA.
- Any admissions
- If any previous issues are known
- Date of last branch trading statement
- Any relevant information provided by the Postmaster or staff.
- Any relevant circumstances.
- Any outstanding discrepancies

Should the Postmaster be suspended, there is a possibility that the branch will remain closed, and the assets defunded. In this case, a special notice to this effect should be displayed and **Branch Support** (formerly NBSC) **should be contacted to advise them of the situation.** If the branch is to remain closed, all cash; coin; currency and value stock along with the date stamps and PayStation should be locked in the safe.

The door and safe keys/safe codes, should be dispatched by Royal Mail Special Delivery to:
    Branch Assurance Support Team
    2nd Floor West Wing
    1 Future Walk
    Chesterfield
    S49 1PF

Please also ensure you Contact Cash Management **by phone and follow up by e-mail** to advise them of the closure and to cease all remittances to the branch.

9.4.4   The Postmaster/OIC/Manager must be invited to complete an independent check of the cash, stock, and foreign currency. They should sign to say that they agree with the figures,

but if they decline the opportunity to verify the BAV findings, all relevant working papers must be signed/documented. The Postmaster should be given the opportunity to raise any comments or questions resulting from the BAV. The lead BAA should make a note of the comments or questions on the BAV Report and advise that they will arrange a response, if required, from an appropriate manager, if they cannot be answered by the lead BAA.

9.4.5   In cases involving suspension, the lead BAA should obtain **IRRELEVANT** worth of branch trading statements, **and if requested** they will send them, along with any other working papers and paperwork related to the BAV for retention to the Contract Advisor. If not requested, the lead BAA will dispose of the working papers **IRRELEVANT** as per business standards.

Originals should be obtained, but copies (where such facilities exist) are acceptable. Should there be no statements available; reprints of the last **IRRELEVANT** statements must be obtained from the HOL system.

If the Postmaster objects to their removal, it should be pointed out that the paperwork is the property of the Post Office®, and if necessary, a POL receipt should be issued.

9.4.6   When a BAV has gone to suspension, the lead BAA should also advise the Branch Assurance Support Team of this on the day. This is particularly important from a scheduling point of view, as the Branch Assurance Support Team may need to cancel or reschedule any work the day after the BAV, if any of the BAAs on the suspension BAV need to carry out any follow up work relating to the BAV.

9.4.7   Transaction Acknowledgement (TA) Instructions on Suspension BAV:
The lead BAA needs to establish that all TA's have been received in branch by checking the TA print out &, if any are missing, **IRRELEVANT**

IRRELEVANT

9.5   **Appointing a Temporary Postmaster on the day of suspension -** If the Contract Advisor decides that the Postmaster is to be precautionary suspended from the branch then it may be possible to appoint a temporary Postmaster in his place to ensure continuity of service. If this happens on the day of the BAV, follow the process below. If it happens at a later date, the transfer is the responsibility of the Training and Onboarding Team.

The Contract Advisor will commence this process with the permission and agreement of the existing Postmaster. The BAA must carry a set of paperwork to carry this out, under the direction of Temporary Postmaster Advisors Team (**GRO** or **GRO**) (Ref Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 03 Transfers - Transfer Pack)

Section 10 – Close of the Branch Assurance Visit Meeting

10.1   Once the financial BAV and compliance tests have been completed, the BAV findings will need to be discussed with the Postmaster. The following guidelines should be followed:

- The closing meeting should already have been discussed and planned with the Postmaster as part of the opening meeting at the outset of the BAV.
- The meeting should be conducted in private whenever possible as some of the points for discussion may be sensitive.
- The lead BAA should be familiar with all the findings of all the tests completed (in conjunction with the person who has completed the Compliance testing if this is not the lead BAA). The

lead BAA is solely responsible for discussing gaps identified during the closing meeting.

- During the closing meeting with the Postmaster the lead BAA must explain and highlight any issues identified from the financial BAV into the gaps discovered during the compliance tests.
- When talking through the findings it is important to discuss them in a balanced way that the Postmaster will understand and be able to qualify exactly what is meant. The reason for, and consequences of, any actions should be made clear. Inform the Postmaster that any gaps may result in further contact from the Post Office by phone or letter. It is essential to highlight where the correct procedure is documented and the importance of adhering to it, as well as explaining the correct procedures and helping the Postmaster to understand them.
- Recognise good working practices in the branch.
- The Postmaster should be encouraged to raise any comments or questions resulting from the branch assurance. The lead BAA should make a note of the comments or questions and advise that they will arrange a response, if required, from an appropriate manager.
- Following a BAA if it is necessary for you to send an email to someone with POL to provide an answer to a query raised by a Postmaster you should ensure that the Branch Assurance Support team are copied in so that they can add it to the Dynamics case. Any replies you receive should also be forwarded to the Branch Assurance Support Team to ensure we can evidence that the Postmaster's query is being dealt with.
- The Postmaster will receive an email asking for feedback for today's visit that will be sent to the same email address as the BAV report.

Branch Assurance Visit Closing Script:

Thank you for taking the time to facilitate this BAV today. Could you please verify today's findings by checking the cash, stock, and currency before we discuss next steps?

If the Postmaster/OIC declines the opportunity to verify the findings, they should be asked to sign the BAV sheets to confirm this. If they decline to sign, the BAA should annotate the sheets accordingly.

Is there somewhere we can go to talk privately please? I will now go through today's findings with you.

BAA to go through the results of the BAV in detail, ensuring that any gaps identified are discussed.

If you would like support from the National Federation of Subpostmasters they can be contacted either through your representative or their Head Office on GRO

I have summarised today's findings on this document, it included a QR code for you to provide feedback about today's visit. Alternatively, you will also receive an email in the coming days asking for feedback on our visit today, it will only take a few minutes to complete, and I would appreciate the feedback.

In the event the Postmaster/OIC wants to dispute a discrepancy

BAA to make the Postmaster/OIC aware of the disputes process.

For support with a recent discrepancy:

"If you need help with a branch discrepancy, please call the Branch Support Centre on GRO **They will help you to investigate further to identify how the discrepancy happened. If they can't resolve the reason for the discrepancy during the call the Branch Support Centre will be able to raise a dispute for you"**

For support regarding a historical discrepancy:

"If you need help with a historical branch discrepancy, please call the Branch Support Centre on GRO **to raise a dispute for you."**

For support regarding discrepancies as a result of a transaction correction:

"Please call the Transaction Correction Disputes Team on GRO **or email** GRO **as soon as possible if you wish to dispute a transaction correction".**

In the event of suspension
The BAA would have a private telephone conversation with the Contract Advisor to discuss the findings but would not enter into any discussion with the Postmaster/OIC in this regard. The Contract Advisor will follow the Suspension Script to direct them in giving the correct and relevant information and support to a suspended Postmaster/OIC.

The Lead BAA will make a note of requests for additional training were considered necessary in order to support the Postmaster.

Any gaps identified as part of the compliance check may result in contact from the Branch Standards Team either by phone or by letter. *BAA should go through the correct procedures for any gaps and clarify understanding.*

And finally, do you have any other questions about the BAV today? Are there any comments or feedback you would like to make?
Note the Postmasters questions, comments and feedback, with your reply, if you are unable to answer them inform the Postmaster you will make an enquiry on their behalf.

I would like to thank you for your time today.

Considerations
- Full record of the closing meeting to be made by the BAA including any questions asked and responses given.
- If Training is deemed necessary by the BAA, they can submit an Intervention Request using the on-line form available here: Intervention Request Form. Access is required to the Knowledge Centre at Training Knowledge Centre to use this form. Alternatively, a Postmaster can request additional training for themselves or their staff via Branch Hub.
- It is appropriate to share the full BAV Rationale Document with the Postmaster during the closing meeting in order to feedback on areas for development, providing that the cases never mention any customer names or identities.

Section 11 – Branch Assurance Visit Reporting

11.1   All BAV reports are embedded within the BART & for the BCRT Tools are completed automatically.

11.2   The BART and BCRT must be completed and submitted within 2 working days of the completion of the BAV. For both actions an email address is essential for a branch, as without it, a copy of the BAV report will not be sent through the post and the BCRT can't be completed online.

11.3   When completing the BAV reports, ensure that the BAV result is detailed by the breakdown of the discrepancy revealed in each stock unit and who discovered the discrepancy.

11.4   When completing the BAV report make sure the report is as full and easy to understand as possible.

Appendix A - Directly Managed Branches

BAV at Directly Managed Branches will be carried out at the request of the Area Manager. The BAV process will remain the same as detailed in this chapter.

Directly Managed Branch Discrepancies

Discrepancies identified should be e-mailed to Post Office Security in **all** instances regardless of value.

IRRELEVANT

IRRELEVANT

Appendix B – Franchise & Strategic Partners

The BAV process will remain the same as detailed in Chapter 02.

When you populate the BART the NaSA database will provide details of branches that are of either a franchise or multiple branch type. The lead BAA should obtain this information at the preparation stage along with:

- The name of the Strategic Partner/ Franchisee
- The Strategic Partner/ Franchise Company contact point e.g., nominee.
- The name of the Contract Advisor

The financial BAV process outlined in this chapter can be applied to Strategic Partner and Franchise branches with the following exception:

On arrival at the branch, the lead BAA should make the visit known to the store manager and any local entry procedures must be adhered to. At the beginning of the BAV the lead BAA is to ask that the branch staff to telephone their area manager/ company contact, to advise that a BAV is taking place and to invite them to the closing meeting at the branch.

The estimated time of the closing meeting should be advised and, if the company contact is unable to attend, it must be confirmed that they are happy for the BAA findings to be discussed with the officer in charge on site. Reasonable consideration should be made to the company contact to enable them to attend if they wish to.
Any irregularities, discrepancies, admissions etc. should be reported to the Contract Advisor.

Appendix C – Open Plan & Combination Formats
(Also described in some instances as "RETAIL SERVICE POINTS")

A Combination Store is the title given to retail branches that combine other retail business with Post Office® transactions using the same point of sale in the retail area. These branches often also have one or more fortress positions. In the retail area the same person will deal with retail and Post Office® transactions, but funds and accounts will be separated.

The financial BAV outlined in Chapter 02 can be applied to open plan and combination branches, but special care must be taken because of the different security arrangements.

To minimize security risk to staff and funds, the following principle applies:

- Under no circumstances should bulk cash be counted in positions which are exposed to the public
- All cash on hand should be counted in a secure back-office area (if available) or prior to the branch opening for business to avoid the problem.
- Cash being moved to a secure area should not exceed the IRRELEVANT for open plan working unless the premises are closed
-

IRRELEVANT

For confirming Bidi Safes and Roller Cash Dispensers – See Appendix I. Appendix D –
WHSmith Branch

(Additional information to be used at WH Smith Branches)

The BAV process will remain the same as detailed in Chapter 02.

- The **lead BAA is to email WHSmith Security** using the email template and email addresses below as they prepare the BART for the BAV. (Agreed September 2018)
- On arrival at the branch, the lead BAA should make the visit known to the store manager and any local store entry procedures must be adhered to.
- There is no need to contact WH Smith (as we would with any other Strategic Partner) as senior WH Smith Security & Investigation managers are aware of the BAV plan.
- **IRRELEVANT**
- The closing meeting will take place with the lead BAA and the Branch Manager (or their representative at the branch) on the day of the BAV, summarizing the outcome of the BAV and outlining the next steps the Branch Manager needs to take.

Contact

If there is an issue onsite, i.e., discrepancy **IRRELEVANT** then there is one main point of contact, John Stiles **GRO** (WH Smith).

Any intervention to suspend staff will be actioned by either John or passed onto an appropriate WH Smith manager to deal with.

One phone call from the lead BAA will be enough.

If John is unavailable, please contact Steve Hall.

John Stiles – **GRO**   **Steve Hall –** **GRO**

WHSmith Security – emails

GRO   **GRO**

Email Title: Branch Assurance Visit Notification [branch code] [branch name]

LEAD baa to Copy and paste below *to the email filling in the details listed:*

A Branch Assurance Visit has been scheduled on dd/mm/yy.

Branch Name:

Branch Code:

Branch Postcode:

Estimated Team Attendance Time:

BAV Lead:

Appendix E – Core & Outreach Branches

(Additional information to be used at Core and Outreach Branches)

The BAV process will remain the same as detailed in Chapter 02.

This is a concept to supply small community and rural areas with a counter service. A Core branch will operate a range of outreach options offering a variety of transactions.

There are four types of outreaches:
1. Partner
2. Hosted
3. Mobile
4. Home Service

Once the Core branch code is entered in the BAV Reporting Tool (BART), any linked branches will be listed in the linked-branch list on the Planning page (this will feed through to the BAV Report page).

Locate the BAV information on the work plan – this should appear with a comment to make clear it is a C&O branch and sufficient resource is allocated.

All outreaches will be verified as well as the Core, for all BAV types, unless otherwise instructed by a Branch Assurance Manager.

To prevent any in transit branch to branch remittances being missed, prior to BAV date the overall lead BAA must check the BAP to check for any issues regarding this.

NB. Ensure that all remittances booked out from one site are booked in at another, by checking the rem in and out print outs obtained from Horizon at each Core and matching them to the print outs obtained for the outreach site(s) before Outreach kit leaves Core.

In the event of any irregularities or issues of concern at any of the outreach branches, the lead BAA at the Core should be informed of these.

If there are Outreaches that do not have access available on the day, take advice from their Team Leader how to proceed.

Required Process in the Event of Postmaster Suspension

The likelihood would be that the mobile and hosted stocks will not have left the Core. All partner branches have a lockable Post Office Coin cabinet in which cash can be stored overnight once verified, until such a time as either a replacement Postmaster is found, or the branch can be defunded.

BAAs should balance the Horizon Online (HOL) system and complete the BART, whilst waiting to hear if the branch is to be transferred or defunded.

If a decision has been made to defund the core and outreaches, all cash and stock held at the outreach sites must be branch to branch remitted back to the core before the BAA leaves the site.

Core branches supply outreaches with cash and stock via branch-to-branch remittances with the use of barcode labels designed specifically for that purpose (these should be on hand at the branch).

IRRELEVANT

So, in order to defund you should follow the process outlined below:

BAA at the partner/outreach site would:
- Rem cash and stock to the core via HOL (via branch-to-branch barcode labels)
- Inform the BAA at the core the value and type of cash/stock and the barcode numbers.
- Place the cash and stock in the appropriate pouches for CViT collection and give these pouch numbers to the BAA at the Core.

The BAA at the core branch would use the information received from the BAA at the outreach:
- Input the cash and stock using the branch-to-branch barcode(s) manually.
- Rem out to ADC by manual input of the pouch number
- Prepare the paperwork for collection the partners pouch(es) by manual input.

When the CViT van has been arranged they will pick up from the outreach first and supply a Trans Trak receipt for any pouches they take. They will then take the pouch(es) to the Core, so there will be a requirement to have BAA present at both locations for the defund. When the ACC card is scanned at the Core all the pouches manually input will be removed from the suspense account together with the pouches physically collected from the Core.

It is the Contract Advisor's decision whether to suspend, based on the facts you provide.

Branch Assurance Visit Reporting

The individual BAAs who prepare a BART and manual BCRT paperwork are responsible for completion and then email electronic documents to the relevant parties. BAAs must complete their individual reports by the designated timescales.

Appendix F – Post Office Local

Post Office Local - **Retailer Cash (Self-funded)** – BAV Process

Normal BAV procedures apply throughout the branch assurance but if a discrepancy is found, further information will be required for branches where the Postmaster provides their own cash to run the Post Office.
NOTE: most PO Local branches are PO funded. Self-funded branches will show on the PAB/Branch Information/Funding Source.

IRRELEVANT

Check to see if the branch is aware of the discrepancy and the cause.
If they are aware, the lead BAA should contact Central Finance, Chesterfield to determine if a transaction correction can be expected.

If the branch is unaware, the lead BAA is to contact Central Finance, Chesterfield and check if they are aware of any discrepancy. If required, Central Finance will liaise with the Branch Analysis team to check if they are aware of any issues.

Any comments or feedback from the branch should be carefully noted and considered.

IRRELEVANT

Defunds of a Retailer Cash Funded Post Office Local Branch
If, as a result of the call to Postmaster Account Support Team, the money in the branch is due to the Post Office, the cash needs to be returned; it will need to be accounted for as follows:
* Back Office (F14)
* Adjustments (F7)
* Loan to PO wdrn (66)
* Enter the cash amount
* [ENTER]
* [SETTLE]

If unable to get a pick-up from CViT then send the Cash by Royal Mail Special Delivery (RMSD) to the local cash centre. If the pouch is to be posted offsite, advice must be obtained from Branch Assurance Team Leader. (Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 04 Closures – RMSD Branches, REM Instructions)

Stock & Stamps:

These would also be returned using the RMSD REM process.

Rem the stock out of the branch via Rem out to ADC – Pouch scanned as normal then Prep-Dispatch (this action should clear the Suspense Account) and seal in an RMSD envelope and send back following the RMSD REM process.

In some cases, a CViT pick up may have been organized but in most cases, there will not be a pick-up from CViT, and it is normal to send Cash to local CashCentre and stock to the Stock Centre by Royal Mail Special Delivery. If the pouch is to be posted offsite advice must be obtained from your Branch Assurance Team Leader.

Closure of a Post Office Local Branch (Self-funded)
For a planned closure, contact should be made prior to the closure date with Central Finance to confirm that you are completing the closure and the date you will be attending.

On arrival at the branch, you need to make sure that no cash is present in the HOL system (currently "loaned to the Post Office"). To do this by checking the Office Snapshot. If cash is present on the Office Snapshot, use the process below to remove it.

       To remove cash, follow the process below:
- Back Office (F14)
- Adjustments (F7)
- Loan to PO wdrn (66)
- Enter the cash amount.
- [ENTER]
- [SETTLE]

Now print an Office Snapshot to confirm that the cash is no longer present.

Once you have finished this activity, email the confirmation to the Integrated Settlement & Billing Team below, confirming that the branch has closed:
- **GRO**

Transfer from a Retailer Funded (Self-Funded) to Post Office Funded Branch

Post Office Local - Retailer Cash Funded – BAV Process

As with closure of a self-funded branch, the Integrated Settlement & Billing Team [GRO] need to be contacted prior to the transfer with dates for cessation of self-funding and commencement of POL funding. This is to ensure that POL cash can be correctly accounted for on the balance sheet and that correct full and final settlement for self-funding can be made with the operator.

Normal BAV procedures apply throughout the BAV but if a discrepancy is found further information will be required for branches where the Postmaster provides their own cash to run the Post Office. (N.B. PO Local branches can be PO funded or self-funded).

[**IRRELEVANT**]

Check to see if the branch is aware of the discrepancy and the cause.
If they are aware the BAA should contact the relevant team in Central Finance (Knowledge Centre- z. Admin-Contact Information) to determine if a transaction correction can be expected.

If the branch is unaware, the BAA is to contact the Postmaster Account Support Team and check if they are aware of a discrepancy. They will be able to advise on the amounts previously settled to centralised holding account with the Review or Dispute option.

Any comments or feedback from the branch should be carefully noted and considered.

When this has been confirmed please contact the Contract Advisor and inform them of the situation. They will make the decision to suspend if appropriate.

IRRELEVANT

Defund of a Post Office Local Branch

If, as a result of the call to Postmaster Account Support Team, the money in the branch is due to the Post Office (and you have been instructed that the cash should be returned to POL), it will needs to be accounted for by withdrawing the full amount of cash held in the branch so that the Snapshot show "zero" for cash on hand – instructions below:
Loan Withdrawn from PO – on Horizon (HOL)

- F7 Adjustments - 66 Loan to PO withdrawn.

The cash is not handed back to the Postmaster, it is to be declared and included in the declared cash and stock and returned to the appropriate POL Cash Centre. **This may cause the HOL system to show a gain**, but this will offset any discrepancy already posted or due to be posted under the settlement agreement at the Financial Service Centre.
Note the details of the cash declaration on the BART.

If unable to get a pick-up from CViT send Cash by Special Delivery to local Cash Centre.
(Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 04 Closures – RMSD Branches, REM Instructions)

If the pouch is to be posted offsite advice must be obtained FROM Branch Assurance Team Leader.

If the money in the branch is not due to the Post Office (i.e., the operators are using their own money as float) follow the procedure for **Closure of a Post Office Local Branch (Self-funded)** as detailed above to remove the cash from Horizon. It is very important that this be done before the branch begins to trade as POL funded as otherwise when the icons change the money will start to appear as POL Cash on Horizon and it will be much more complicated for the operators to get their money back (if this does happen, they will need to raise an IT incident via the ServiceNow portal in the first instance).

Appendix G - Automated Teller Machines

There are 4 different ATM types on site at branches.
The different types of machines in the network are:

- Post Office maintained – this machine holds between IRRELEVANT and is funded by a remittance received at the branch. Some branches are authorised to hold in excess of IRRELEVANT but written notification should be on hand. The transactions are reported through the branch trading statement.
- Fully Serviced – this machine type is totally maintained by cash carrying company therefore would not be included in a branch assurance.
- Self-fill: Retail cash – this machine is funded from private cash and under no circumstances must Post Office® funds be utilised. This is considered misuse of funds and should be reported to the Contract Advisor. The cash in this machine does not form part of the branch assurance.
- Self-fill: Post Office cash – these machines hold £1k - £3k and are funded from Post Office® funds.

There are consequently only 2 machine types that would need to be verified as part of the BAV process.

If the branch (or the retail side) is already open for business when the branch assurance commences then proceed with the BAV as normal leaving the ATM stock until the end of the BAV.

Appendix H - Access to the Horizon System

It will be necessary as part of an BAV to gain access to the HOL system at the branch being verified. There will also be times when different levels of access will be required, and the following should be adopted:

At all BAV:
You should request the Postmaster to add you to the system, if this is not possible due to no one in the branch having managers access, then your Global User ID should be used to access the system. Once logged on with your Global User ID you can then create other users on the system in order to later assist with the production of transaction/event logs and you should add yourself as a user through the normal process to enable you to produce all reports required under that user log on.

As previously stated, **do not attempt** to log on to or gain access to the HOL system with anything other than your **own personal SmartID**.

Please note: - If users have been added to the system during the course of an BAV remember to delete them from the system at the conclusion of the BAV and ask the Postmaster to obtain a reprint of the User Summary. This will ensure all staff on User Summary is accurate before leaving the branch.

Personal SmartID details must be carried and be available for all BAAs, in case they are needed during a BAV.

Appendix I - Verifying Bidi Safes & Roller Cash Dispensers

Bidi Safes

The following process is to be used when BAAs the BAV Post Office position at the Retail Service Point for Locals and Mains.

Process:

1. The BAA(s) upon entry will identify themselves to the Postmaster and the Post Office Service Point must be isolated and all transactions ceased.

2. The BAA(s) will ask the Postmaster if they would like to close the premises whilst all value cash and stock is removed to the secure area. If the Postmaster wishes the premises to remain open, then the following must be applied.

3. The BAA(s) will retrieve all paperwork required from Horizon to establish that Post Office® funds are secure.

4. If there is a back-room terminal this must also be isolated, and the Postmaster instructed that this must not be used without their prior consent.

5.

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IRRELEVANT

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On opening, any unmarked cassettes below the marked cassette can be placed on the bottom of the compartment (if there is only one, this can be withdrawn and counted) and all the cassette(s) above marked cassette stay on top as these are already checked.

8.

IRRELEVANT

9. Each cassette should hold IRRELEVANT so it is acceptable that the risk is minimal in counting this cash one cassette at a time at the Post Office position.

10. Once all the cassettes have been counted, then the cash till contents should also be counted.

11. All other BAV process and practices will apply.

12. The Post Office service position will <u>NOT</u> be put back into service until all cash and stock has been accounted and the BAA has completed all their checks.

Roller Cash Dispensers

It is vital that a full check of the roller cash is performed at all branch assurance visits by all BAAs, to ensure that all full sectors of the roller cash are checked and verified and to check if any empty sectors have cash in them. Rollercash sectors should NOT be assured.

1. There are IRRELEVANT within the Rollercash. With all BAV, a total withdrawal should be performed. This function allows all full sectors to be emptied in quick succession and is available after a 15-minute time delay. It also allows the empty sectors to be checked at the end of the total withdrawal.

IRRELEVANT

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IRRELEVANT

3.

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5.

Document Admin

Title	Performing a Branch Assurance Visit
Subject	Branch Assurance Visits
Version Control	2.7
Purpose	Outline responsibilities and process to perform a Branch Assurance Visit in all branches.
Audience	Branch Assurance Field Team
Next Review date	December 2024

Stakeholders

Stakeholders Name	Responsibility
Pete Marsh	Retail Operations Director
Mike Lowe	Head of Operational Excellence
Nayan Navik	Branch Assurance Manager

Responsibilities in change

Role	Job Title(s)	Date
Author	David Nolan	01/07/2024
Assurance	Mehl Singh	
Authorised	Nayan Navik	
Owner	Mike Lowe	
Communication	Recorded in Knowledge Centre	

Version control

No	Reason for issue	Section No.	Date
1.1	Replacing Contract Holder, Agent or Operator with Postmaster throughout the document.	All	27/10/2020
	Replace Head of Loss Prevention and remove references to Loss Prevention	Stakeholders	
	Loss Recovery Team replaced with Postmaster Account Support Team	All	
	Replace reference to Late account with Final Account Surplus or Deficit	All	
	Obsolete scratch-cards accounting process amended.	8.3.2	
	Reference to CA buddy list removed as CA is allocated in advance.	All	
	Closing script updated to reflect new variance dispute processes.	10	
1.2	Various changes to language, Job titles and staff names	All	30/12/20
1.3	Language amendments	All	03/1/21
1.4	Remove reference to Settle Centrally	All	26/5/21
	Add description for stock adjustments.	8.1.4	
	Amend Responsibilities in Change		
	Review links, syntax and spelling	All	
	Add contact details for National Federation of Subpostmasters	7.4	
	Amend AA&SM to National Audit & Support Manager	All	
2.0	Amend National Audit & Support Manager to Branch Assurance Manager	All	31/05/23
	Include Branch Assurance Team Leader		
	Remove Audit and Support Advisor (A&SA) and replace with Branch Assurance Advisor (BAA)		
	Remove all reference to Audit, and replace with Branch Assurance		
	Remove reference to ART and replace with BART.		
	Remove reference to Audit & Support Team, and replace with Branch Assurance Support Team		
	Remove footer from all pages.		
2.1	Changing Footer layout.	All	16/06/2023
	Changing font to Ariel Nova		
2.2	Checking procedures are up to date and correct.	All	13/07/2023
	Removing Post Office internal from all headers		
	Changing outstanding incorrect references to Casework team and amending to Branch Assurance support team.		
	Removed reference to Security and Security Managers		

2.3	Removed reference to National Lottery in.	1.2.	
	Removed reference to Transfers and chapters.	2.1	
	Removed reference to trading statement	2.3	
	'and comparing this to the Horizon Online (HOL) system derived "balance due to PO figure" using the latest declared branch trading statement, and reports obtained from HOL'		
	Replaced with:	2.4	
	'by comparing our findings with current office snapshot and settling any variance to the Central Postmaster Account'		
	Changed: 'Included in' to 'Included with' and removed mandatory (harsh language)		
	3.2 Replaced. Added:	3.2	
	BAAs should use the opening script and explain the reason for their attendance as outlined in the Rationale Document, provide a copy for the Postmaster.		
	3.9 Removed reference to closure pack.	3.9	
	Closure Pack available: Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 04 Closures		
	We need to confirm the H&S risk assessment and add it to the KC and rollout to the team.	3.10	
	Removed reference to Transfer pack – no longer used:		
	▪ Paperwork necessary for performing a branch transfer, in the event of a same day transfer to a Temporary Postmaster (Knowledge Centre – BAV – Chapter 03 Transfers – Transfer Opening Closure Pack)		
	Do we have a supply of safe seals for this eventually?		
	▪ A supply of "**Safe Sealing Barcodes**" for use if the alarm code can't be changed for any reason or not all the available safe keys are present.		
	Clarity required on the introduction of cash Contract Advisors are now saying include it without any reference and we should not challenge the introduction. I have removed the following:	7.14	
	Should the Postmaster/OIC present cash after the BAV has commenced, and after it has been confirmed that all cash has been produced, this cash MUST BE EXCLUDED FROM THE BAV. The Branch Assurance result must only be based on the verification of the financial assets presented and confirmed as "on hand" at the outset of the BAV. The cash must be accepted from the Postmaster "without prejudice to investigations or the current branch trading position", a receipt issued, and included in Post Office Ltd funds, but not the current branch trading position.		
	Details of the amount should however be **included in the adjusted amounts resolved by cash and a receipt issued**.		
	On completion of the BAV all assets should be secured by the BAA and witnessed by either another member of the team or the Postmaster/OIC.		

2.3 contd.	Removed:	8.3	

	8.3 **Lottery -** All online lottery transactions must be accounted for daily. Print the 2 daily terminal reports from the lottery terminal and calculate any outstanding monies owed to the Post Office; confirm such monies are present in the retail till to cover the sales so far today. If the postmaster doesn't have the money to cover the outstanding sales for today confirm that the lottery is being accounted for incorrectly then see irregularities (Section 9).
	
	8.3.1 Count and record lottery Scratch-cards and reconcile to the HOL snapshot and local records (if held). Scratch-cards will normally be held on the retail counter, and it may be necessary to physically count the cards outside the counter area. Any cash held on the retail side relating to sales should be included in the cash on hand verification.
	
	8.3.2 The scratch-cards on hand can be verified by reference to the Lottery matrix held within the BART. Any obsolete scratch-cards should be remitted out during the BAV and returned to the stock centre. The postmaster must be advised that as the date for the return of these scratch-cards has passed the branch may subsequently receive a transaction correction (TC) for the value of any obsolete scratch-cards and that any TC received should be processed in the normal way. The value of obsolete cards returned should be detailed in the BAV report.
	
	8.3.3 Obtain the following reports from the lottery terminal and the Postmaster, depending on the type of branch Online Lottery Terminal (OLT).
	    • Summary Inventory
	    • Pack status reports for each game listed on the Summary Inventory
	    • Prizes for Online & Instants Report (current day and previous day).
	
	8.3.4 Using the summary inventory and pack status reports confirm and reconcile the un-activated Scratch-cards. It should also be confirmed that the Scratch-cards on sale have all been activated. The pack status reports identify the status of the cards held:
	
	CONFIRMED - Pack is un-activated (pack may have been returned recently; check with branch if paperwork exists to confirm this).
	ACTIVATED - Pack is activated.
	ISSUED - This means the Scratch-card order has been dispatched from Camelot, but not yet received in the branch, so this is not relevant during the branch assurance visit.		

2.3 contd	8.3.5 **Additional Instructions for Tesco & WHSmith Lottery Branches:**		
	Some Tesco & WHSmith Post Offices complete their Lottery accounting a bit differently. They accept TAs as normal into a Lottery Stock Unit but there is no exchange of cash between the retail area and the Post Office. This will create an increased variance in the Lottery Stock Unit which is then 'Assign to Nominee' when the branch completes their Branch Trading Statement. Central Finance, Chesterfield reconciles these figures with figures from Camelot and invoice Tesco & WHSmith which they then pay directly.		
	When completing an BAV at a Tesco or WHSmith branch with Lottery, the Lead BAA will need to review the BAP to obtain the outstanding unsettled cash figure for Lottery, which will also include any other discrepancies assigned to nominee. This can be done the day before the BAV or as early as possible on the day of the BAV.		
	Section 10.	10.	
	Added the following reference to the NFSP to remind the Postmaster their support is available.		
	If you would like support from the National Federation of Subpostmasters they can be contacted either through your representative or their Head Office on GRO		

POST OFFICE

2.4	Removed:	5.4	
	• Lottery (ref-Section 8.3 – 8.3.5)	9.4.2	
	• Lottery takings are not to hand and/or banked in personal account.		
	In the event of a Lottery branch the lead BAA needs to ensure that no instant pack activations are missed by checking the pack activation slips or if these are not on hand to verify the date of activation by ringing Camelot Retailer Hotline (GRO) and checking that all the TA's havebeen received.	9.4.7	
	•	1.2	
	• Post Office® Card Account		
	Added		
	You will receive an email in the coming days asking for feedback on our visit today, it will only take a few minutes to complete, and I would appreciate the feedback.	10. Closing script	
	Added		
	• The Postmaster will receive an email asking for feedback for todays visit that will be sent to the same email address as the BAV report.	10	
	Appendix F removed:		
	When this has been confirmed and if the variance is over £2000, please contact the Contract Advisor and inform them of the situation. They will make the decision to precautionary suspend ifappropriate.		

| 2.5 | • Updated Multiple to Strategic Partner
• Section 9 – Irregularities

Amended
During the BAV the BAA may find discrepancies, transaction corrections, inappropriate items held in suspense or business practices contrary to the Post Office® operating instructions
Remove: and in this situation the irregularity must be discussed with the Contract Advisor.
Insert: these items should be summarised in your report.
9.5   removed of findings, errors, variances

Removed

9.4.2   The Contract Advisor should be contacted if anything happens during the visit that might suggest that the postmaster may be in breach of their contract, for example:
• There is a variance of £2000 or more in a Local/SPSO or £5000 or more in a Main for the Contract Advisor
• Cash on hand has been inflated or an amount of cash is produced after the BAV has commenced.
• There are discrepancies found in on-site verifications (remittances, suspense accounts etc.)
• The Postmaster has declared that the previous period's variance has been made good, however findings are to the contrary
• If the lead BAA has any other concerns about the branch
Core & Outreach branches

Replaced

The lead BAA should then:

• Phone the relevant Contract Advisor to let them know as soon as you identify a potential problem.
• Ring again once you know the final findings and total variance, so the Contract Advisor can make decisions on next steps.
• If there are Outreaches that do not have access available on the day, take advice from the Contract Advisor how to proceed.
With:
If there are Outreaches that do not have access available on the day, take advice from their Team Leader how to proceed. | All | |

2.6	Replaced Variance with Discrepancy throughout the document (56 amendments)	All	
	Removed:		
	• The lead BAA is responsible for completing a check of the Horizon Known Errors prior to a branch visit. Which are available on the Knowledge Centre and emailed monthly to the team.	6.11	
	• The lead BAA to send a text to the allocated Contract Advisor to advise when the BAV has commenced.	7.2	
	Added, to the opening script:	7.3	
	Make a note of any questions and your answers, if you are unable to answer any questions advise the Postmaster that you will raise that question on their behalf. *If you have manager access to the Horizon, would you please add my SmartID to the system.* if no one has access advise the Postmaster that: *I will use a Global User account to add my Smart ID, I will not use that for anything else and I will provide a transaction log of my activities throughout my visit. If we find any discrepancies the Global User will be used to settle that discrepancy to the Central Postmaster Account.*		
	Amended:		
	If there is an admission of the misuse of Post Office funds then the nominated CA should be contacted at the earliest opportunity. This will allow discussions to take place and any necessary decisions made whilst the lead BAA is still on site and will ensure that problems are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Contact should be made via mobile phone, as this will ensure confidentiality. The use of the Postmaster's telephone should be avoided.	9.4.1	
2.7	Added BAV Summary and QR code document to closing script	10	1/7/2024
	• removed all other reason to contact Cas other than an admission of misuse of finds	9.4.2	1/7/2024