

ROYAL MAIL GROUP (POST OFFICE LTD) – CASE REVIEW

R. v KATHLEEN MARY CRANE

Lewes Crown Court

PRE HORIZON ON LINE CASE

Offence

1. On the 30th July 2010 this defendant pleaded guilty and was sentenced, at Hove Crown Court, to a 12 month Community Order with 200 hours unpaid work. The single charge of Fraud alleged that on or about the 19th January 2010 she had made false representations in an accounting document to the tune of £18,721.52. Costs were awarded in the sum of £1,550.00. The defendant had already repaid the full amount missing by the time of sentence.

Case history

2. This case first appeared on the 12th May 2010 at the Eastbourne Magistrates Court and was committed on 30th June 2010. The case was next listed on 30th July 2010 when the defendant was dealt with as above.

Prosecution case

3. The defendant, Kathleen Crane was during the relevant period the wife of the sub postmaster at Old Town Sub Post Office, Eastbourne. She ran the post office for 9 years 3 months GRO prior to being suspended on the 19th January 2010.

4. On 19th January 2010 auditors attended the Old Town Post Office to verify financial assets and confirm compliance with a range of business processes.
5. On the date of the audit, 19th January 2010, the auditor found a total shortage of £18,721.52 made up as follows:
 - £17,174.23 (-) identified as a difference in cash figures
 - £23.58 (-) identified as a difference in stock figures
 - £27.08 (+) identified as a difference in postage figures
 - £1550.79 (-) identified as a difference in Foreign currency figures.
6. During the audit Mrs Crane told the auditors that the foreign currency would be short. The balance snapshot showed that there should have been £28,024.23 on hand. Mrs Crane said that there was £2,000 in the safe giving a possible £17,000 shortage in cash. The defendant declined to do her own count of the cash in hand.
7. In her interviews, conducted under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the relevant Codes of Practice, on the 12th February 2010, the defendant said:
 - Her husband had not worked for some time GRO
 - She had worked at Old Town for about 9½ years.
 - They went on the postmasters' training course but GRO
GRO 8 weeks later and she was thrown in at the deep end. She was confident on Horizon and if she had problems she would ring the helpline.
 - She found that the system crashed more than it used to.
 - She did not have problems with balancing.
 - She did not know why the office was £18,721.52 short.
 - She thought the audit would be fine.
 - She then admitted that she had been covering up the discrepancies
 - She then said that she did not know that you could phone the helpline with such things as discrepancies.

- She could not remember if the discrepancy suddenly appeared.
- She admitted that she had produced false accounts since September 2008.
- Conceded that this was dishonest
- She repeatedly stated that she had not stolen the money.
- Said that had she rung the helpline or told someone from the Post Office of the discrepancy that they “probably would have helped me.”

Defence case

8. In interview the defendant admits fraudulently covering up losses.

Discussion

9. This is a pre Horizon on Line case. The Second Sight Interim Report deals largely with Horizon on Line. We have nothing to disclose that directly relates to the pre Horizon on line cases. If this was a case where the allegation was one of theft or the defendant was sentenced on the basis that she had appropriated the money the position might well have been different.
10. In this case she was charged with Fraud and on her own admissions in interview she is guilty of the offence to which she pleaded guilty.
11. The sentence of a community order with a 200 hour unpaid work requirement is not consistent with a court passing sentence for a breach of trust theft/fraud of over £18,000
12. As far as any training issues are concerned she conceded in interview that had she asked for help she probably would have got it.

Conclusion

13. This is a case in which, had we been possessed of the Second Sight Interim Report, we would not have needed to disclose anything contained therein to this defendant. The passage of time has not changed that position, in my opinion, and we need take no further action upon this file.

Harry Bowyer
Barrister
Cartwright King Solicitors

21st November 2013