

Prepared Statement
Of
Jo Hamilton

G08/2

I took over the running of South Warnborough village shop in October 2001. At the time there was a sub-postmaster and another woman who was trained to work in the Post Office. However after one month she handed in her notice to leave on Christmas Eve.

I was persuaded to take over the sub-post office under the direction of the sub-postmaster.

My first day of training was 24th December 2001 by someone from the Post Office. I then had two weeks of half day training sessions. At the time I did not attend any training days. At the beginning, we basically sold stamps and cashed pension books. There was nothing very technical about it. I was shown how to balance the end of week, which I mastered with the help of one of my staff.

When I took over the shop and was running the Post office for the sub postmaster, there were manuals in the office, but they were old and not updated. Whilst I continued to receive updates, I had no training as to how to update the manual, nor did I know how old the manual was in the first place. In addition to this, I have always been encouraged to ring the help desk rather than refer to the manual.

The Post Office authorities became more and more remote.

I took over as sub-postmistress in October 2003. I was not audited at any stage after I took over as sub-postmistress.

On one occasion after I took over there was a shortage of £1500 which I could not explain or work out how it had happened. I cannot remember who I spoke to about it. It was either the helpline or Colin Woodbridge. I was told what to do and it immediately doubled the shortfall to £3000. I was told to send in a month's transaction logs which I did. They could not work out what had happened and told me I had to repay all of the £3000 which they took out of my pay.

After that there was another error making a shortfall of £750. They took that out of my pay as well.

Neither error triggered an audit. In fact I have never been audited during my time as sub-postmistress until now.

Since taking over we have moved to card accounts, electronic banking and all sorts of systems have been introduced. It has turned a very small sub-post office into a bank for which I have received no training.

When we switched from weekly cash accounts to monthly trading, my training consisted of the Post Office sending me a DVD when I do not have a DVD player.

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All transactions are now done on a screen. But the screen would not let me question any errors.

The Post Office systems are shambolic. On one occasion I swiped a debit card for foreign currency which I subsequently discovered I should not have done as it ended up with the customer being charged twice. I had to refund the customer but I never knew whether the Post Office credited me.

I returned traveller cheques to Hemel Hempstead in the wrong pouch. I was never credited for them.

If I missed the cut off date for obsolete stock overnight the value of the stock would be converted to cash on the system even though the cash is not there. There is no way of going into the screen to alter it because the icon has disappeared.

We only ever had one user ID, as I had received no training in how to change or create new user IDs. Consequently, all the staff used the same user ID.

These are just a very few examples of problems that spring to mind.

I have never been trained properly.

I have never understood the system except right at the beginning.

Consequently I cannot answer any questions as I do not know the answers.

I can say that I have never stolen any money or acted dishonestly.

J Hamilton

5th May 2006

Witnessed by:

K Taylor

KATE SOLICITOR