

Message

From: Paula Vennells [GRO]
on behalf of Paula Vennells [GRO]
Sent: 19/06/2012 21:56:51
To: Alice Perkins CB [GRO]
Subject: Fwd: Message from James Arbuthnot to Tadge Channer at Shoosmiths - Post Office / Horizon

Alice, i thought you'd like to see this - a remarkable note from James to Shoosmiths. Very balanced and helpful.

I won't reply to him as I think it needs to be left low key between us, as he is suggesting to Shoosmiths. (And it is being handled well between his and our staff.) We can thank him in person next time we meet.

Paula

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Alana Renner [GRO]
Date: 19 June 2012 17:59:57 GMT+01:00
To: Susan Crichton [GRO], Alwen Lyons [GRO],
Paula Vennells [GRO], Mike Granville [GRO]
Subject: FW: Message from James Arbuthnot to Tadge Channer at Shoosmiths - Post Office / Horizon

All, fyi, a constructive note from James to Shoosmiths below. We have not been approached by the Times yet, our on call press officer has our statement and instructions to come to me or Ronan if contacted, I will let you know if we are. Have a nice evening. Alana

From: WALKER, Janet [mailto:[GRO]]
Sent: 19 June 2012 17:41
To: Alana Renner
Subject: Message from James Arbuthnot to Tadge Channer at Shoosmiths - Post Office / Horizon

Alana,

Here is what James has just sent to Mr Channer. Shall I leave you to share this with your people?

Kind regards
Janet

Janet Walker
Office of the Rt Hon James Arbuthnot
MP for North East Hampshire
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

T: [GRO]
E: [GRO]
www.jamesarbuthnot.com

Dear Tadge,

Thank you for your patience and understanding in not being invited to the meeting on 18 June, between MPs and Post Office Limited management. I felt that it was important to discuss the entire SubPostmasters and Horizon matter between these parties first before we brought in other groups, largely because I believe we have found a very positive way to resolve this problem.

As you know, prior to yesterday's meeting, I met privately with the Chairman of Post Office Ltd and members of her staff. On each occasion, the meeting was cordial and productive. From these meetings, we have come up with a plan for the Post Office to appoint an independent forensic accountant (to be chosen in consultation with me) who will examine each case individually in order to establish exactly what has happened. The individual SubPostmaster / mistress concerned will be given the opportunity to be involved, as will his or her MP. Interviews will be conducted, data investigated, and in this way it is hoped that an explanation can be arrived at that will put to rest any question over what exactly has occurred.

I must put to you here that all this is extremely sensitive. This you know, but the Post Office has told me and the other MPs who are interested in this matter that in every situation where an individual has been prosecuted for alleged fraud or theft involving the Horizon system, the courts have found in favour of the Post Office. The question was asked repeatedly of the Post Office staff yesterday whether there had been any case upheld where the discrepancy reported or found had been found to be the fault of the system. We were assured this was not the case.

The MPs at the meeting were happy with the solution offered. I believe it is the best possible way to proceed, and am satisfied with what detail I have seen thus far. I have sent a press release to this effect to The Times.

I am not sure how you might handle things from your end. Of course you will have a different take on this, but I would urge some caution. If – and I am not entirely credulous – the Post Office is correct, and individuals may well find themselves at fault while believing vehemently that they are not, trumpeting the proposed solution too early and too loudly may well result in serious embarrassment, to say the least, of those involved. The problem is that, of course, everyone is innocent until proven guilty, but IF it turns out that one of the most trusted individuals in a given community – which SubPostmasters and mistresses invariably are – is not innocent, then a higher price will be paid by that individual than if things were done rather more discretely.

You may wish to discuss this. It is a terrible conundrum, and I myself am not at all certain how to handle things. Until I am, I am being rather less triumphant publicly about this than perhaps I ought to be, but I am cautious by nature. And I am happy to talk this through.

I am grateful to you for being so very helpful in this matter, and hope you will understand my attitude.

Yours ever

James

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