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POST OFFICE LTD Executive Committee

Branch Support Programme

1.   Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to:

1.1   Update the Post Office Executive Committee on the improvements to the training and support provided to branches made and being made by the Branch Support Programme and particularly in relation to Sparrow.

2.   Improvements to training and support already introduced

2.1   The content of the training provided to new Subpostmasters has been refreshed with more focus on balancing and how to look for discrepancies when they occur within branch. A further review of this is being undertaken as part of the on-line training scheduled to go live in pilot in January 2015.

2.2   A revised balancing guide has been produced to help new postmasters balance their accounts correctly; this is a hand-out from the initial training provided to new postmasters and assistants where appropriate. A further best practice guide to identify discrepancies in branch has been produced This is a hand-out at on-site training for new postmasters and follow up visits where branches are experiencing balancing difficulties.

2.3   A refreshed approach to supporting branches with discrepancy issues has been introduced by the Branch Support Team. Where NBSC is unable to resolve a caller's query/issue the Branch Support Team is able to provide more in depth telephone support to the branch. This team will also assess whether on-site additional support or further training is required and will organise if appropriate.

2.4   The volume of calls from branches is now assessed by the Network Business Support Centre (NBSC) with the branches that have a higher than average call volume being proactively contacted by the Branch Support team to understand the reason for the high level of calls; establish what extra support can be offered and whether any changes need to be made to training etc. The response has been positive from the branches contacted to date.

2.5   Compliance testing is a precursor to new Subpostmaster training and is an annual regulatory requirement for all branch staff. Traditionally this training and testing has been delivered by paper workbooks. After a successful pilot, this is now being provided on-line to the branch network. User satisfaction in the pilot scored very highly at 88%.

3.   Training and support improvements in development

3.1   On line training is currently being developed for new postmasters that will reduce the requirement for classroom training and enable postmasters to complete the training when it's convenient for them and at their own pace.

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Competency will be assessed throughout the on-line training with the requirement for additional training assessed on completion of the initial training. The on-line training is being developed and tested by current postmasters and branch staff and will launch in pilot in January 2015.

3.2 The on-line training will be available to all branch staff to enable refresher training to be accessed by experienced branch staff and as a training package for postmasters to access for new employees.

3.3 A new approach has been developed to analyse the calls received by NBSC to identify the root cause of the issue; to identify the solution for the branch in the first instance and implement wider business changes if appropriate eg content of and method of delivering new product training

4. Other Branch Support Programme Improvements

4.1 **Subpostmaster Contract Breaches** - The suspended termination approach was launched in April 2014 to deal with subpostmasters where mitigating circumstances are such that it is inappropriate to terminate the contract. The subpostmaster remains in post on the condition that if a further material breach of contract occurs in an agreed period (set by the nature of the first breach and typically a year) then the contract termination may be triggered. Postmaster suspensions are less than half year on year (26 at period 7). 81 postmasters have been kept in post that would probably been suspended pre policy change.

4.2 **Horizon system transaction improvements**

- The transaction for customers paying by debit or credit card for bureau transactions was changed in Sept 2014. The transaction now includes an automatic re-print of the receipt which includes the card and identification details of the customer, which needs to be presented in case of fraudulent use of the card. Previously, the branch would have to remember to request a reprint and would be liable for the loss of they failed to provide it to Finance Service Centre. Postmasters were held liable for £65k in 13/14 (average per branch £2.5k)

- The end of day cheque remittance process has been reviewed and a new solution to drive out errors has been identified. This is scheduled for the next software release in March 2015 reducing calls into NBSC (650 per month) and the Transaction Corrections (c.570 pm periods 1-5 2014) issued by Finance Service Centre.

5. Recommendation

5.1 ExCo is asked to note the update set out above.

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20th Nov 2014