POL00097887

Message

From: Alwen Lyons GRO
Sent: 27/03/2013 07:23:54
To: Alice Perkins GRO
CC: Paula Vennells GRO
Subject: Fwd: Second Sight note from meeting 25 March

Sensitivity: Company Confidential

Alice
Please see below an email from Second Sight and James' annotation and reply.

They clearly have a different view of the meeting. Which could be because afterJames left Second Sight continued the discussions with the other MPs. I called Janet yesterday who is doing the official note, and I will speak to her again today.

The main area for contention seems to be the MPs views of how their individual cases will be treated. Investigating every case in full, instead of the issues in the case, will be costly and time consuming.

My suggesting would be that we wait for Janet's note and then you Paula, Susan and I can discuss the best way forward

Thanks
Alwen

Alwen Lyons
Company Secretary
GRO

Begin forwarded message:

From: "ARBUTHNOT, James" GRO
Date: 26 March 2013 15:43:33 GMT
To: "susan.crichton GRO GRO
Cc: 'Alwen Lyons' GRO, 'Simon Baker' GRO, Ian Henderson GRO, 'Ron Warmington' GRO
Subject: Second Sight note from meeting 25 March

Dear Susan,

I have had sight of Ian Henderson's email to you following the meeting held at Westminster on 25 March. I would be grateful if you would forward this message to Ruth X. Barker and Mark R. Davies, neither of whom is known to me, nor do I have their email addresses, but as they were included in the initial circulation, I feel they ought to be able to read my response.

The reason I am writing is that my recollection of the meeting is somewhat different to his. I plan to circulate the note my office made of the meeting in due course, but please would you note the following comments from me (in red), which refer directly to Ian Henderson's points in the email he sent to you, copied below.

1. There was broad support for the concept of reporting on issues rather than individual cases – rather than 'support', I think I would express this as 'understanding'. MPs will, in the end, want to know how their individual constituent's case concludes, and whether it can be stated that their constituent has been wrongly accused.

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2. The MPs want Second Sight to report on a much wider range of issues in July than we had planned i.e. not just the Horizon transaction issues. A consequence of this is that any report in July will be an interim not a final report – this is not my recollection of what was discussed or agreed at the meeting. Although the possibility of a July meeting was mooted, and the possibility that the report that might be presented at that meeting might be interim in nature, no desire for a wider range of issues to be reported on was mentioned by MPs.

3. There was broad support for the proposal to run a series of tests in the Model Office replicating the specific scenarios reported by SPMRs – this was not really discussed. What I heard was that the Model Office was offered to Second Sight as a way to test processes and the system by the Post Office, but no express support – or lack of it – for its use was discussed or agreed.

4. Alan Bates reported that a significant number of SPMRs had not accepted the JFSA / POL agreement and remained concerned about possible retribution from POL. This has resulted in under reporting of cases and issues. (This was the first time we had been told about this) – this is true. I was rather irritated that Alan Bates raised this without warning, and did so publicly.

5. MPs (and JFSA) reported continuing concern about "heavy handed" audit and investigations processes and the inability within POL to differentiate between genuine issues of concern reported by SPMRs compared with suspected fraud or theft. This is causing real hardship to SPMRs and may lead to suicides. (This was mentioned more than once) – this was the view coming from the JFSA, not MPs. I do not recall any mention of suicides at the meeting, but JFSA did raise the point that POL continues even today to prosecute allegations of theft without the prior investigation or the tentativeness that this investigation would suggest might be necessary.

6. MPs were pleased to note the personal involvement of Alice Perkins and Paula Vennells but would like this to be extended within POL to a much more sympathetic attitude to SPMRs with problems. They felt internal communication processes within POL were not working well. There was universal concern about the continuing use of comments such as "we have total confidence in the Horizon system" which are contrary to the experience reported by a number of SPMRs – I am unhappy with the way this is expressed. There was no expression of any views from MPs or their representatives about internal communications within the Post Office, nor that the personal involvement of staff beyond senior management ought to be extended. That the Post Office continues to claim confidence in Horizon is factually correct, and I emphasized that until cases were put to the Post Office which undermined this confidence, the Post Office's stance was understandable.

7. In the light of the issues now being looked at by Second Sight, POL should consider a suspension of all current prosecutions activity until after July at least – this was not specifically discussed at the meeting, but it may well follow from the point I make at 5 above.

8. There was widespread support for the view that it is essential the investigation continues to be supported by POL as it was felt that this is the best opportunity to really dig into the issues and concerns reported by SPMRs – as above, a good point. There was, however, concern that the matter was going on so long and costing POL a lot.

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To my mind, the meeting went as well as could be expected. I would not go so far as to support Ian's opinion that 'extensive concern' was expressed about the investigation and prosecution processes the Post Office is following. My impression is that by and large, we listened to what was being presented to us by Second Sight. Mike Wood and Kevin Barron certainly did mount some robust questioning, as they should, but to shape this as 'extensive concern' is stretching things a bit, I think.

I shall circulate my briefing in due course, but would be grateful if you would note my comments above.

Yours ever,

James

Office of the Rt Hon James Arbuthnot, MP
House of Commons
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Website: **www.jamesarbuthnot.com**
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From: Ian Henderson GRO
Sent: 26 March 2013 10:25
To: 'Susan Crichton'
Cc: 'Alwen Lyons'; 'Simon Baker'; 'Ruth X Barker'; 'Mark R Davies'; 'rwarming GRO
Subject: Meeting with MPs - 25 March 2013
Sensitivity: Confidential

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Susan

The meeting with MPs went reasonably well, however there was robust questioning from a number of MPs, particularly Mike Wood MP and extensive concern expressed about POL investigation and prosecutions processes. Janet Walker will be circulating an official minute of the meeting in due course. Whilst Shoosmiths were present throughout, they took no part in the meeting and did not comment at any point.

I attach a copy of the Second Sight Briefing Note that was tabled at the meeting.

Headline points from the meeting were:

1. There was broad support for the concept of reporting on issues rather than individual cases
2. The MPs want Second Sight to report on a much wider range of issues in July than we had planned i.e. not just the Horizon transaction issues. A consequence of this is that any report in July will be an interim not a final report.
3. There was broad support for the proposal to run a series of tests in the Model Office replicating the specific scenarios reported by SPMRs

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4. Alan Bates reported that a significant number of SPMRs had not accepted the JFSA / POL agreement and remained concerned about possible retribution from POL. This has resulted in under reporting of cases and issues. (This was the first time we had been told about this)
5. MPs (and JFSA) reported continuing concern about "heavy handed" audit and investigations processes and the inability within POL to differentiate between genuine issues of concern reported by SPMRs compared with suspected fraud or theft. This is causing real hardship to SPMRs and may lead to suicides. (This was mentioned more than once)
6. MPs were pleased to note the personal involvement of Alice Perkins and Paula Vennells but would like this to be extended within POL to a much more sympathetic attitude to SPMRs with problems. They felt internal communication processes within POL were not working well. There was universal concern about the continuing use of comments such as "we have total confidence in the Horizon system" which are contrary to the experience reported by a number of SPMRs.
7. In the light of the issues now being looked at by Second Sight, POL should consider a suspension of all current prosecutions activity until after July at least
8. There was widespread support for the view that it is essential the investigation continues to be supported by POL as it was felt that this is the best opportunity to really dig into the issues and concerns reported by SPMRs.

I will circulate Janet Walkers note of the meeting as soon as I receive it

With best wishes

Ian R Henderson CCE CISA FCA
Advanced Forensics - London, UK

Forensic computing expert witness and electronic disclosure specialist

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