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POST OFFICE LTD - CONFIDENTIAL

Name: 1. Anne NIELD
2. Angela SEFTON

Rank: 1. Manager
2. Sub office assistant

Branch: Fazakerley Branch Code 214 420

Enquiry POLTD/1112/0208
Reference

Security Operations
Casework Team
Post Office Ltd

Ms Anne NIELD is the appointed manager of above branch and Mrs Angela SEFTON is the sub office assistant at the above branch. They both appeared at Liverpool Crown Court on Friday 3rd May 2013 for sentence.

They were both due to stand trial on Monday 15th April 2013 but both had previously pleaded guilty to false accounting at Liverpool Crown Court on Thursday 11th April 2013 after a Goodyear hearing.

The Magistrate adjourned the case for pre sentence reports and the matter was passed to Truro Crown Court for sentence on 20th November 2012.

Mr John Gibson represented Post Office Ltd on 11th April 2013 and Ms Charlotte ATHERTON defended Ann NIELD and Ms Kate MORLEY defended Angela SEFTON. HHJ Andrew HATTON presided over matters.

After hearing both arguments HHJ HATTON ruled that the maximum sentence he would be imposing was one of a suspended sentence. HHJ HATTON allowed Mr GIBSON to open as he would not be available on the date of sentence.

Mr GIBSON told the court that the discrepancies where noticed by a trustee of the charity and the charity's bookkeepers carried out an investigation and found £34,000 had not been credited to their account. A Post Office Ltd Security Manager was carrying out an investigation when he received a letter saying that they had held back deposit and 40 deposit slips were found behind the counter.

HHJ HATTON adjourned the case until the 3 May 2013 for pre sentence reports.

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On 3 May 2013, Miss Andrea FITZGERALD represented Post Office Ltd and Ms ATHERTON and Ms MORLEY again represented Anne NIELD and Angela SEFTON. HHJ Hatton again presided over proceedings.

Ms MORLEY opened first on behalf of SEFTON and said that her client blamed the Horizon system that had caused problems for other staff, the system was not fool proof and that Charles MCLAUGHLIN had represented others. She had made up the shortfall by using credit cards and wages and this was not the first time it had happened, there was a £4,000 shortage and was informed by the sub postmaster that any shortfalls would fall on their shoulders. This led to the holding back of the deposit slips and burying their heads in the sand. Her health had suffered and she had been brought to financial ruin and become bankrupt, her marriage had broken down and her reputation was in tatters with the prospect of any future employment being nil.

Ms ATHERTON on behalf of NIELD agreed that it passes the custody threshold and the amount given in relation to the guilty plea. She had worked at the Post Office for 25 years with the first 17 years having no problems. The difference between the Prosecution and the Defence is that the Prosecution say they have taken the money, The Defence say they have covered up the money but they have had the benefit of the £34,000. Her client maintained that it was false accounting and not theft. She was made bankrupt in April 2012 and is not considered fit to work due to mental health. As the losses built up they adopted an ostrich syndrome and she had been brought to her knees by the prosecution.

On hearing the facts of the case and the mitigation advanced on behalf of the defendants HHJ HATTON said he was dealing with two frightened women who appeared before him on 11 April 2013 seeking clarification of the maximum sentence and they then entered guilty pleas. £34,000 had gone missing and together you both had false accounted to cover it up

It was the prosecution case that you had benefited by it and a jury would not be able to indicate theft but that would be left up to him.

The Horizon system had been criticised and he was not in a position to comment on that. But he was confident that if there were any difficulties with the Horizon system, the Post Office is a large organisation and they would have put something in place to overcome any difficulties.

He further said that they had both been remorseful since the confession letter, had entered guilty pleas and suffered difficulties in health, their personal lives and both had been made bankrupt, are unemployed at the ages of 57 and 60. This was entirely your own doing over a considerable amount of time and he has taken into account the points raised in mitigation and the pre sentence reports.

HHJ HATTON sentenced Anne NIELD to 5 months custodial suspended for 12 months, 12 months supervision order and 20 sessions as the Women's Turn Around Project.

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HHJ HATTON said that Angela SEFTON was not of previous good character and sentenced her to 6 months custodial suspended for 12 months, 12 months supervision order and 20 sessions as the Women's Turn Around Project.

No costs or compensation was ordered, HHJ HATTON said both of you are not in any position to contribute to costs. The Post Office will have to bear an even greater burden.

The sub postmaster is currently repaying the outstanding debt from his remuneration.

These papers are sent so that the outcome can be noted and the papers filed away in due course.

GRO

S Bradshaw
Security Manager
Post Office Ltd Security Team.
10 May 2013