

Message

From: Mark R Davies [GRO]
on behalf of [GRO]
Sent: 05/12/2014 09:48:43
To: Ruth X Barker [GRO]
CC: Melanie Corfield [GRO]
Subject: Re: Paula Vennells interview request

Hi

Please can we get legal involved? I am v concerned that we are going to get another round of skewed coverage here and while I agree with our approach we can't allow wilful misrepresentation of our position and our business.

Please Mel can you contact nick Wallis and say that we will get back to him ASAP.

Mark

Mark Davies
Communications and Corporate Affairs Director
Mobile: [GRO]

Sent from my iPhone

On 5 Dec 2014, at 09:42, "Ruth X Barker" [GRO] wrote:

Hi Mel

Nick has followed up on his call and provided more info. As suspected the case he is following is susan knight.

I'm off today but have a few bits to finish off so am happy to discuss or go back to him later.

Let me know if need to speak. Not around between one and two but apart from that I'm around and happy to discuss.

Ruth

From: Nick Wallis [GRO]
Sent: Friday, December 05, 2014 07:14 AM
To: Ruth X Barker
Cc: Tim Robinson-Solent [GRO]; Clare Hoban [GRO]
Subject: RE: Paula Vennells interview request

Hi Ruth

Yesterday I had a conversation with your colleague Gabrielle O'Gara (apologies if I have got the spelling wrong) requesting an interview with Paula Vennells or a senior nominee within the Post Office. In the course of our conversation I explained there appears to have been a significant development in the attitude of various MPs towards the Complaint Review and Mediation scheme. I am not exactly clear on what that development is, but I understand it will be known soon.

We are preparing a piece for the One Show which will go out next week. The story is likely to be picked up before then by BBC network news.

In the One Show piece we will interview a former Subpostmaster - Susan Knight in St Keverne - who was accused of theft by the Post Office. She was subsequently completely exonerated, yet she has lost her job, her business, her place in the community, is now living below the bread line and is having to sell her house. Whilst we were there she received a notification that her water supply was in danger of being cut off. Yet she is an innocent woman.

In order to ensure Ms Knight's position on the mediation scheme is not in jeopardy, we have not discussed the mediation scheme at all - we simply wanted to hear about her experience of running the village Post Office and her treatment at the hands of the Post Office and the legal system.

In our One Show piece we will also interview a barrister who is an expert in computer systems. He will say the idea that computer systems are faultless is a nonsense, and that relying solely on their output for criminal investigations (as the Post Office has done in a number of cases) can result in miscarriages of justice. He has been taking a close interest in Horizon and will state his professional opinion on Horizon during our piece. He is unlikely to be complimentary.

We have been in contact with a number of former SPMRs who all claim their innocence, yet most or all have been sacked/forced to resign by the Post Office. Many have been prosecuted, some have criminal convictions, some have been sent to prison. In the cases we are looking into, the common thread is a complete absence of any evidence of deliberate wrongdoing, let alone proof of criminal activity. Some have compelling evidence they are innocent of any crime or negligence. Some also have clear evidence of inexplicable errors made by Horizon.

The BBC, through various outlets, has made repeated requests for interview by the Post Office over the integrity of the Horizon system. These interview requests go back as far as the Taro Naw programme in 2009, my own broadcast on BBC1's Inside Out South in 2011, Matt Prodger's interview requests for BBC News in 2012 and 2013, the request by Taro Naw in 2013 and my request to you earlier this year.

To the best of my knowledge the Post Office has never allowed itself to be properly held to account in a formal recorded interview over the integrity of the Horizon system and/or the way it goes about prosecuting its Subpostmasters. This, in itself, speaks volumes.

I would like to reiterate my interview request with some urgency. **We would have to have it recorded by Monday evening.** We can get a camera crew anywhere reasonable in the UK at reasonable notice, and of course we can make one available at the weekend.

I called Ms O'Gara on your office phone number [GRO] at around 2.30pm yesterday afternoon and have not yet received a response. I think it is immensely important to get the Post Office's perspective on the integrity of the Horizon system, its treatment of Subpostmasters having problems using the Horizon system (including and with specific reference to Susan Knight) and any latest developments in the relationship between the Post Office and MPs over the mediation scheme. If you wish to discuss the exact terms of reference of the interview before it takes place, I would be willing to listen to what you have to say.

Please email me or call me on [GRO] if you require any further information or wish to discuss where and when the interview with Ms Vennells will take place.

Thank you

Nick Wallis
BBC

From: Ruth X Barker [GRO]
Sent: 03 November 2014 15:46
To: Nick Wallis
Cc: Tim Robinson-Solent; Clare Hoban; Jane French
Subject: RE: Paula Vennells interview request

Hi Nick

Sorry for the delay in response.

Thank you for your email requesting an interview with Paula Vennells, unfortunately we will not be able to agree to this.

First, as I am sure you realise that it would be wholly inappropriate for Post Office to discuss or speculate about serious, unsubstantiated allegations about miscarriages of justice in a media interview.

Second, as you know, the Complaints Review and Mediation Scheme, set up following the publication of Second Sight's report last year, is underway. Applicants are assured of confidentiality under the terms of the Scheme. Post Office cannot discuss individual cases publicly. Nor do we consider it to be in the interests of applicants or the Scheme to discuss matters which may be the subject of confidential mediation discussions. Having set up the Scheme it needs to be allowed to run its course.

We of course recognise that there is continued speculation about some of these issues and if you are planning to run a story, we would like the opportunity to consider providing a statement or answering specific questions if we can do so without breaching confidentiality or undermining the Scheme.

Ruth

[GRO]

From: Nick Wallis [GRO]
Sent: 30 October 2014 10:43
To: Ruth X Barker
Cc: Tim Robinson-Solent; Clare Hoban; Jane French
Subject: RE: Paula Vennells interview request

Hi Ruth

I haven't heard from you for 10 days, so I'm emailing to ask how far our interview bid for Paula Vennells has progressed.

As stated below, we would like to discuss potential miscarriages of justice brought about through what some Sub-postmasters are alleging is a combination of Horizon errors, bad training, inadequate auditing, aggressive investigations and unnecessary prosecutions, as well as the SPMR contract, which makes SPMRs liable for any loss at their branch, howsoever it occurs.

We would also like to discuss the Post Office's attitude to the independent investigation it commissioned by Second Sight and the subsequent mediation scheme as a means of resolving Sub-postmasters grievances.

As I said in my initial email below, there are people who believe the Post Office is responsible for a number of serious miscarriages of justice, which has potentially seen innocent people given criminal records. Given the seriousness of these allegations I find it curious that the Post Office has so far refused to give any broadcast interview on the subject in order to defend its record.

I recently watched 2013's Taro Naw S4C Welsh language investigation into the Post Office and noted from the broadcast that the Post Office refused to put forward anyone for interview until the last minute, by which time there was no opportunity to get that interview into the programme. At least, however, it provided welcome news that the Post Office was willing to discuss this serious matter on camera.

Ten days have elapsed since I told you our deadline was Friday 21st November. In order to ensure we are not put in the same position as Taro Naw, I would be most grateful if you could acknowledge this email and let me know how our bid for Ms Vennells is progressing.

If you or Ms Vennells would like to lay down terms under which any interview can go ahead, I would certainly be prepared to look at them.

Many thanks

Nick

GRO

From: Nick Wallis

Sent: 20 October 2014 11:36

To: Ruth X Barker

Cc: Tim Robinson-Solent

Subject: RE: Paula Vennells interview request

Hi Ruth

Thanks for your response. I think we would need to have something filmed by Fri 21st November. If you could take that as the deadline, I would be most grateful.

I would also be grateful if you could **reply to all on our future correspondence**. My colleague Tim Robinson (cc'd) is working on this story alongside me.

Many thanks

Nick

From: Ruth X Barker

GRO

Sent: 20 October 2014 10:25

To: Nick Wallis

Subject: RE: Paula Vennells interview request

Hi Nick

Thanks for the email and sorry for the delay getting back.

We will get back asap but just wanted to check your deadline on this.

Thanks

Ruth

GRO

From: Nick Wallis [GRO]
Sent: 16 October 2014 12:46
To: Pressoffice
Subject: Paula Vennells interview request

Hi

I just spoke to someone in your office who suggested I put my request to you in an email.

I work for BBC Inside Out South and presented a report into the Horizon computer system at the Post Office on 7 Feb 2011.

I think it would be a good time to revisit where the subsequent Second Sight investigation and mediation scheme has got to.

Unfortunately no one from the Post Office was available for interview when we made our report in 2011.

I would very much like the opportunity to discuss Horizon, the Sub-postmaster contract and the Post Office's investigations function with Paula Vennells in a formal interview on camera. There are those who believe the Post Office is responsible for a number of miscarriages of justice, which has seen innocent people given criminal records.

Given the seriousness of these allegations, I am sure Ms Vennells would be very keen to defend the Post Office's record in these cases.

With a little warning we can get a crew to wherever Ms Vennells would like to be interviewed, on a date of her convenience.

Please do not hesitate to give me a call if you would like to discuss this further.

With thanks

Nick Wallis
BBC Inside Out South

[GRO]

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