

Message

From: Tom Wechsler [GRO]
Sent: 05/03/2015 13:33:01
To: Callard Richard (ShEx) [GRO]; Thompson Laura (Shareholder Executive)
Subject: RE: Sparrow commitment

Richard / Laura

With apologies for the delay in coming back with a full line, I have now drafted the lines below following discussions with others in POL.

Our view is that the 2013 commitment must be seen in context. It was made in relation to concerns about Horizon rather than whatever random complaint any SPMR (or Alan Bates) wishes to raise at any time. Although some work was done internally looking at options it was overtaken by the scheme. Time has moved on. In our view it is also time to get back to a position where the NFSP as the SPMRs' representative body are the means to raise concerns and to address them. Consequently, we suggest the line below.

- After nearly 3 years of investigation and review by Post Office and Second Sight, no system wide issue with Horizon has been found.
- Nonetheless, Post Office has reflected on whether improvements can be made in addressing any concerns that serving SPMRs may have. As a result we have made a number of changes including:
 - changing the approach to dealing with breaches in contract by SPMRs so that the SPMR stays in the branch while Post Office investigates issues wherever possible (i.e. without suspension). This has resulted in 123 remaining in post this year who would have been suspended under the previous approach; and
 - establishing the Branch User Forum to provide a way for SPMRs and others to raise issues and insights around business processes, training and support, feeding directly into the organisation's thinking at the highest level.
- These changes have been discussed with NFSP, the independent body representing the vast majority of subpostmasters, and implemented following their feedback.
- We also intend to introduce a process where the NFSP executive may escalate cases within Post Office where they believe a Subpostmaster may have been treated unfairly.

If Pressed

- When the commitment was made in 2013 we hadn't investigated the cases and the claims made by Applicants. We have now completed all our investigations and no system wide issue with Horizon has been found.
- We believe the changes that have been implemented are a more appropriate response reflecting how Post Office and Subpostmasters operate today rather than in the past.

As indicated yesterday, our plans on timing have been brought forward to a Tuesday launch.

If the Minister is minded to issue a WMS covering our statement (it remains our view that it would be prudent to do so) we can support and we will need to talk about timing as it needs to be co-ordinated with our communications to stakeholders. Our plans are starting to crystallise so happy to discuss tomorrow or Monday if helpful.

Communications colleagues have confirmed that they could provide an alternative WMS answer (assuming the title is a non-specific as "Post Office") based on an update to the House on NT as we hit 4000th branch.

I hope that this is helpful

Happy to discuss

Tom

Tom Wechsler
GRO

From: Callard Richard (ShEx) GRO
Sent: 04 March 2015 08:22
To: Tom Wechsler; Thompson Laura (Shareholder Executive)
Subject: RE: Sparrow commitment

Hi Tom

Thanks for the re-assurance that you are still on the safety net case. Perhaps one way is to talking about those cases that were a) in the scheme and resolved outside of mediation and b) those cases that have been resolved/dealt with as purely business as usual outside the scheme – not just horizon claims but any issues. I understand you have “disputes” with SPMs all the time that get resolved one way or another through normal contractual mechanisms.

In terms of the sub, Laura and I will discuss today. In the end we didn’t put up an early sighting sub given the board papers were so imminent. Our timing would be informed by where we can get to on the above point and the extent to which we can find an alternative WMS topic as a fall back position. i.e. if we won’t get those until say next week, we would put up a sighting sub in the next day or so, followed by a firmer sub thereafter, but if we can get those things quicker, we could put a “complete” sub up by the end of the week or Monday which say includes a draft WMS etc. Either way, a Monday/Tuesday launch date seems a bit too early.

Laura and I will discuss and then we’ll be in touch.

R

From: Tom Wechsler GRO
Sent: 03 March 2015 18:16
To: Thompson Laura (Shareholder Executive)
Cc: Callard Richard (ShEx)
Subject: RE: Sparrow commitment

Laura

Just to assure you that I have not forgotten this. We have a decent story to tell about what we have actually done and it may be that NFSP offers an independent endorsement. I’ve a few facts to check and will get you a line shortly.

In the meantime, how is you getting on briefing Jo? Beyond the Board papers is there anything you need from us?

Also, if we had a go live date of Thursday 12th March would that cause you an issue? I am assuming that you would wish to avoid Wednesday given the chance (however microscopic) of something coming up at PMQs. Monday or Tuesday may be possible from our perspective but squeezes our stakeholder management plans in a way that generates risk.

Let me know

Tom

Tom Wechsler
GRO

From: Thompson Laura
Sent: 26 February 2015 17:18
To: Tom Wechsler
Cc: Callard Richard (ShEx)
Subject: Sparrow commitment

GRO

Hi Tom

Good to meet you earlier, thanks for the useful chat. This (highlighted) was the particular commitment I mentioned – part of Jo's statement on 9 July 2013 (Hansard column 198):

The Post Office statement issued yesterday welcomed the broad thrust of the report's findings and outlined three initiatives to deal with the issues raised. First, it will set up a working party to complete the review of cases started by Second Sight, and will consider all 47 cases brought forward by the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance—the JFSA—and MPs. The JFSA has been invited to join the working party. Secondly, an independent figure will chair a review to determine how best to adjudicate disputed cases in future. The JFSA and other stakeholders will also be invited to take part in this process. Finally, a new branch user forum will provide a channel for sub-postmasters and others to raise issues at the highest level on business processes, training and support. The company will take forward the proposals as an urgent priority. I commend this statement to the House.

Great if you could let me know what you think – do give me a call if easier to discuss, contact details are below.

Thanks

Laura

Laura Thompson | Assistant Director, Post Office Network Team | Shareholder Executive

BIS, 1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET

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www.gov.uk/government/organisations/the-shareholder-executive

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