

OPERATING LEVEL AGREEMENT

"FINAL"

**Product & Branch Accounting, Network
and Service Delivery.**

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0. Document Control**0.1 Document History**

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0.2 Approval Authorities

Name	Area	Signature	Date
Rod Ismay	Product & Branch Accounting		
Lynn Hobbs	Network		

Mark Weaver	Service Delivery		
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0.3 Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
A&L	Alliance & Leicester
AP	Automated Payments
EDS	Electronic Data System
EFC	Electronic Filing Cabinet
NS&I	National Savings & Investments
OLA	Operating Level Agreement
P&BA	Product & Branch Accounting
Rems	Remittances
TC	Transaction Correction

CONTENTS

0.	Document Control	2
0.1	Document History	2
0.2	Approval Authorities	2
0.3	Abbreviations	3
1.	Executive Summary	5
1.1	Purpose	5
1.2	Rationale for OLA	5
1.3	Mutual Responsibilities	5
1.4	Profit & Loss consequence	5
1.5	Dependencies	5
2.	Introduction & Purpose	6
2.1	Overview	6
2.2	Timescales	6
3.	Operating Level Agreement	6
3.1	Transaction Corrections issued by P&BA	6
3.1.1	Cheques to EDS (processing centre), Cash Rems & Unpaid Cheques	6
3.1.2	Bureau Rems, Camelot, DVLA, Government Services, Paystation, Postal Orders, Suspense, Quantum & Vouchers.....	7
3.1.3	Saving Stamps	7
3.1.4	Fraudulent Cash Cheques	7
3.1.5	Client related errors - A&L, ATMs (all types), First rate pre-order & travellers cheques, Moneygram, NS&I, Personal Banking underpayments & Travel insurance	7
3.1.6	Debit Cards	7
3.1.7	Automated Payments underpayments	7
3.1.8	Stock Transaction Corrections	7
3.1.9	Automated Payment Overpayments and Personal Banking Overpayments	7
3.1.10	Aged / Large volume / value Transaction Corrections	8
3.1.11	Acceptance of Transaction Corrections	8
3.1.12	Timescales - a quick reference guide	9
3.2	Enquiries between Branches and P&BA (could be via NBSC helpline) or Network Support Admin Team	10
3.2.1	Enquiries from Branches to P&BA (could be via NBSC helpline) or Network Support Admin Team	10
3.2.2	Enquiries from P&BA to Branches	10
3.3	Branch Trading	11
3.4	Branch Discrepancies	11
3.4.1	Definition	11
3.4.2	Investigation	11
3.5	Settle Centrally	11
3.6	Dispute Process	12

- 3.6.1 Transaction Corrections.....12
- 3.6.2 Transaction Corrections where there is insufficient time to investigate prior to Branch Trading roll over12
- 3.6.3 Branch Discrepancies13
- 3.6.3 Disputes Appeals13
- 3.7 Debt Recovery Process13
 - 3.7.1 Debt Recovery timescales13
 - 3.7.2 Deductions from Remuneration to Settle Outstanding Debt14
- 3.8 Losses and Write offs14
- 3.9 Network Conduct Cases, Appeals and investigations15
- 3.10 Measurement.....15
- 3.11 Conformance & NBSC Helpline queries.....16
 - 3.11.1 Monthly Reporting16
 - 3.11.2 Knowledge Base16
 - 3.11.3 System Issues16
 - 3.11.4 NBSC Helpline queries to P&BA16
 - 3.11.5 Branch Non-conformance16
- 3.12 Opening Hours.....17
 - 3.12.1 Product & Branch Accounting17
 - 3.12.2 NBSC helpline17
- 3.13 Review & day to day Relationship.....17
 - 3.13.1 Quarterly review17
 - 3.13.2 P&BA Contacts17
 - 3.13.3 Changes17
 - 3.13.4 Day to Day Contacts18
- 4. Dependencies19
 - 4.1 National Federation of Subpostmasters19
 - 4.2 Clients & Joint Venture Partners19
 - 4.3 Suppliers19
 - 4.4 Cash, Bureau & Stock19
- 5. Appendices19

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose

To improve conformance and cut losses via agreed roles and responsibilities, standards and measures for Transaction Corrections, debt recovery, enquiries and conformance between P&BA, branches and Service Delivery. It will commence 1st April 2009 and will be reviewed annually as a minimum.

1.2 Rationale for OLA

1. Preventing losses - stopping recurrence by timely and clear notification to the right parties and pro-active intervention.
2. Improving debt recovery - better chance of recovery when you identify it earlier
3. Owning and managing budgets - budget holders will feel more control and opportunity to act
4. Clarifying standards for P&BA staff - to improve responses through pace and narration

1.3 Mutual Responsibilities

- P&BA will provide timely and informative notice of the issue.
- Network will take prompt and constructive corrective action and ensure branches respond accordingly.
- Service Delivery will ensure that the NBSC are equipped to support this OLA.
- All parties shall work to learn from past issues to prevent future recurrence.
- 95% of individual errors and issues will be reported within 3 months of the date of the transaction, where it is within P&BA's control to do so.

1.4 Profit & Loss consequence

- If timescale met, default is for all losses / write offs to be charged to Network and to Product budgets
- If timescales not met, default is to charge to P&BA budgets
- In the event of dispute, and only as last resort, Finance Analysis to mediate on whose budget

1.5 Dependencies

Product & Branch Accounting will work with clients and suppliers to improve the timeliness of their data to Post Office Ltd to enable further improvement to the timescales for issuing of Transaction corrections. This is also subject

to the authorisation of business cases to employ agency resource within Product & Branch Accounting. Impacts of changes, including Network Efficiency Programme, Back Office Efficiency Programme, HNGX and POLSAP need to be fully understood.

2. Introduction & Purpose

2.1 Overview

This Operating Level Agreement is between Product & Branch Accounting, Network and Service Delivery. It covers all branch types, but some sections are specifically for Agency Branches and need to be expanded to cover the Crown branches and Multiple Partners.

The agreement is for the interaction with Post Office Branches, with regards to Transaction Corrections, Debt recovery, response to queries and branch conformance.

Product & Branch Accounting, Network and Service Delivery will use reasonable endeavours to ensure that the timescales highlighted in the operating level agreement are met.

2.2 Timescales

The commencement date for the OLA is the 1st April 2009.

It will be reviewed at the quarterly Network Relationship meeting for the first year and then as a minimum annually.

3. Operating Level Agreement

3.1 Transaction Corrections issued by P&BA

The following section sets out the standard timescales for the issuing of Transaction Corrections to Branches, by Product & Branch Accounting.

Note: If there is a fraud investigation at any branch, this could delay the Transaction Corrections being issued. This means the timescales detailed above are unlikely to be met.

3.1.1 Cheques to EDS (processing centre), Cash Rems & Unpaid Cheques

95% of Transaction Corrections will be issued within 1 month of the transaction date, with the exception of missing cheques, this allows for late despatch / delivery.

In the case of missing cheques, on occasions these need to be queried with the Client or Customer. In these cases the Branch will be contacted within 3 months, to be aware of the potential issue and its value, and for the branch to provide the relevant information. 95% of these Transaction Corrections will be issued within 6 months.

3.1.2 Bureau Rems, Camelot, DVLA, Government Services, Paystation, Postal Orders, Suspense, Quantum & Vouchers

These areas are matched over a Branch Trading period and therefore 95% of the Transaction Corrections will be issued within 2 months of the transaction date.

3.1.3 Saving Stamps

To allow for the checking and any investigation, 95% of the Saving Stamps Transaction Corrections will be issued within 3 months of the transaction date.

3.1.4 Fraudulent Cash Cheques

These are alerted to Product & Branch Accounting by the Alliance & Leicester, following their checks and investigations. 95% of Transaction Corrections will be issued within 4 months of the transaction date.

3.1.5 Client related errors - A&L, ATMs (all types), First rate pre-order & travellers cheques, Moneygram, NS&I, Personal Banking underpayments & Travel insurance

If a difference needs to be queried with a Client then the Branch will be contacted within 3 months, to be aware of the potential issue and its value, and for the branch to provide the relevant information. The issue will then be queried with the Client. 95% of Transaction Corrections will be issued within 6 months.

3.1.6 Debit Cards

This is dependant on when we receive the chargeback from the bank, following their checks. 95% of Transaction Corrections will be issued within 6 months of the transaction date.

3.1.7 Automated Payments underpayments

95% of Transaction Corrections will be issued within 1 month of the enquiry being received by P&BA.

3.1.8 Stock Transaction Corrections

Branches must report a stock surplus or shortage to the NBSC helpline and follow the standard process. 95% of the Transaction Corrections will be issued within 3 months of the date the surplus or shortage is reported. If a Branch does not follow this process for shortages then the Transaction Correction will not be issued. The same applies to any expected Transaction Corrections for incorrect stock adjustments.

3.1.9 Automated Payment Overpayments and Personal Banking Overpayments

These have to be queried with the Client and Customer. A Transaction Correction will only be issued **if** the Client and Customer agree. 95% of these will be issued within 2 years.

3.1.10 Aged / Large volume / value Transaction Corrections

Product & Branch Accounting will ensure that significant or widespread issues with regard to aged, high volume, high value will be communicated to the Network and Service Delivery in advance of the Transaction Corrections being issued.

- Aged - If Transaction Corrections are to be issued outside the timescales set out in this document and it affects more than 10% of the Network, the Product & Branch Accounting relationship manager will contact Network Co-ordination Team in advance of them being issued. This team will then work with the rest of Network line management, including the PO Ltd NFSP Liaison Manager to understand what communication support and action is required.
- High Volume - If the volume of Transaction Corrections for an individual product is 25% more than usual volumes, the Product & Branch Accounting relationship manager will contact Network Co-ordination in advance of them being issued.
- High Value - If the value of a Transaction Correction is more than £10,000, Product & Branch Accounting or Cash Services will have a conversation with the branch involved and the Network, in advance of issue, unless one of the following applies:

- a) A compensating Transaction Correction is issued at the same time.
- b) The amount can be seen in suspense.
- c) A compensating Transaction Correction or branch discrepancy has been accepted previously.
- d) Evidence has been sent to the branch in advance of transaction correction.

3.1.11 Acceptance of Transaction Corrections

Branches will ensure that all Transaction Corrections are accepted within their Branch Trading period. It is recommended that they are looked at / investigated within 1 week of receipt. Refer to section 3.6 for any disputes and if this affects Branch Trading. P&BA will not issue aged / high volume / high value Transaction Corrections on the Monday / Tuesday prior to Branch Trading, without prior branch agreement. If a Transaction Correction does arrive on Branch Trading day, the branch has to action it before they can roll their branch trading period. The branch however, can still dispute in line with section 3.6.

If a branch receives compensating Transaction Corrections, they must settle these both in the same way, either both make good or both settle centrally.

3.1.12 Timescales - a quick reference guide

Transaction Correction Type	Expected first contact with Branch	Expected Timescale for issue of TC
Alliance & Leicester	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
ATMs (All types)	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
Automated Payment overpayments	Within 1 month	Within 2 years
Automated Payment underpayments	Within 1 month	Within 1 month
Bureau rems	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
Camelot	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
Cash remittance	Within 1 month	Within 1 month
Cheques to EDS (processing centre)	Within 1 month	Within 1 month
Cheques to EDS - Missing	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
Debit Cards chargebacks	Within 6 months	Within 6 months
DVLA	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
First Rate pre-order	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
First Rate travellers cheques	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
Fraudulent Cash Cheques	Within 4 months	Within 4 months
Government Services	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
Moneygram	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
National Savings & Investments	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
Paystation	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
Personal Banking overpayments	Within 1 month	Within 2 years
Personal Banking underpayments	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
Postal Orders	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
Quantum	Within 2 months	Within 2 months

Saving Stamps	Within 3 months	Within 3 months
Stock	Within 3 months	Within 3 months
Suspense	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
Travel Insurance	Within 3 months	Within 6 months
Unpaid Cheques	Within 1 month	Within 1 month
Vouchers	Within 2 months	Within 2 months
Note: Fraud Investigations are likely to delay any of these timescales		

3.2 Enquiries between Branches and P&BA (could be via NBSC helpline) or Network Support Admin Team

The following section sets out the normal timescales for the response to enquiries to / from Branches and/or customer, by Product & Branch Accounting.

3.2.1 Enquiries from Branches to P&BA (could be via NBSC helpline) or Network Support Admin Team

3.2.1.1 Underpayment of a Transaction

P&BA will respond to the branch and issue a Transaction Correction within 1 month of the enquiry being received in P&BA.

3.2.1.2 Overpayment of a Transaction

P&BA will follow up with the Client / Customer on behalf of the Branch, but these could take up to 2 years to resolve (it could be a customer only has an annual statement and does not check them) and are dependant on the Client / Customers agreement. If the Client / Customer does not agree then the branch will be held liable and payment will be requested.

3.2.1.3 Telephone Enquiries from Branches

P&BA will respond to all telephone enquiries, within 2 working days of receipt in P&BA, this may be an update on the query or a resolution. This could be 6 working days from the original enquiry if the enquiry has been through NBSC and / or Network Support Admin Team.

3.2.1.4 Transaction Correction enquiries

The number to contact for Transaction Correction queries will be included on the relevant Transaction Correction. This will be someone in Product and Branch Accounting or the NBSC helpline number, who will be able to assist. NBSC and P&BA will respond to all telephone enquiries, within 2 working days, this may be an update on the query or a resolution.

3.2.2 Enquiries from P&BA to Branches

P&BA will at times ask Branches to provide information to assist in the investigation process, e.g. a cheque listing. The branch will provide these within 1 week.

3.3 Branch Trading

Branches will complete their Branch Trading on the stated date for their Branch Trading Group. In exceptional circumstances this can be completed on the following day. Consequences of branch not completing their Branch Trading on time may mean that the data is archived. If this is the case, the branch may be held liable for any costs incurred in restoring this.

If there is any problem in completing Branch Trading, Branches are instructed to seek advice from the NBSC helpline GRO

3.4 Branch Discrepancies

On Completion of Branch Trading, Branches may have a Branch Discrepancy;

3.4.1 Definition

When Branch Trading is completed Horizon will calculate the expected cash position, using the transactions completed through Horizon. The Branch will then count the actual cash in the branch and declare this. A branch discrepancy is where there is a difference between these two values, either a cash shortage or surplus.

3.4.2 Investigation

It is the responsibility of the branch to investigate and understand the cause of this discrepancy. The Branch may then contact the NBSC helpline GRO and advise that a Transaction Correction is expected. This needs to be specific to include the product / transaction type, date and value.

NBSC helpline will then report these to the relevant team in Product & Branch Accounting for action.

3.5 Settle Centrally

Meaning - choosing the option to "Accept and Settle Centrally" signifies acceptance of a loss or gain within a branch unless the dispute process is instigated. "Settle Centrally" does not prohibit further investigation which might offset all or part of the loss/gain accepted earlier, but this is a branch's responsibility to initiate.

The Settle Centrally process adjusts the system derived cash position to align to the declared total of cash, foreign currency, cheques and value stock within the branch. The shortage or surplus "settled centrally" is transferred to a sub-postmaster's "Customer Account".

The Customer Account is managed by Post Office Ltd, Product & Branch Accounting. Outstanding amounts are resolved through the debt recovery process

3.6 Dispute Process

Post Office Ltd acknowledges the potential financial impact and stress that may be caused by unexpected Transaction Corrections or Branch Discrepancies. An effective dispute process is essential to ensure that settled centrally debts are not recovered from sub-postmasters without reasonable time to investigate, challenge and resolve individual amounts.

There are two routes by which sub-postmasters might instigate the dispute process: -

3.6.1 Transaction Corrections

- Branches should contact the Transaction Correction issuer within 7 days of acceptance at branch to challenge the evidence provided to support the Transaction Correction. NB Where time permits prior to Branch Trading, branches should challenge prior to acceptance.
- If the challenge is accepted in full or part at this stage, a compensating Transaction Correction will be issued to close the dispute.
- On receipt of supporting information the issuing team will suspend the debt recovery process, if the Transaction Correction was settled centrally, until a response has been made. Written submissions to the specific team will receive a written response, within 10 working days, in line with Business standards. It is recommended that written submissions be sent using a priority service.

3.6.2 Transaction Corrections where there is insufficient time to investigate prior to Branch Trading roll over.

- Branches should contact NBSC GRO and request further time to investigate and present supporting information. A reference number will be provided.
- Supporting information to support any dispute must then be presented in writing via Special Delivery to The Current Agents Accounting Team (Debt recovery), 1 Future Walk, Chesterfield S49 1PF within 7 days quoting the above reference number.
- The Current Agents Accounting Team will then present to the issuing team who will suspend the debt recovery process, if the Transaction Correction was settled centrally, until a written response has been made.

P&BA will provide an update on the query or a resolution, within 10 working days.

3.6.3 Branch Discrepancies

- The resolution of branch discrepancies is the responsibility of the branch.
- If the subpostmaster believes a transaction correction is required they should contact the appropriate department in Product & Branch Accounting via NBSC GRO. Supporting information should be presented and resolution then follows the transaction correction process. It is recommended that this be sent using a priority service. P&BA will provide an update on the query or a resolution, within 10 working days.

3.6.3 Disputes Appeals

- If the subpostmaster believes that the supporting information provided to Product & Branch Accounting adequately supports their dispute but the dispute has not been allowed they should make a written submission to: -
The Relationship Manager
1 Future Walk
Chesterfield
S49 1PF
- The debt recovery process, if settled centrally, will be suspended pending a written response.
- A written response will be provided, within 10 working days, in line with Business standards.
- All correspondence will be included on the EFC for the Network to be able to view.

Where a dispute is subsequently not upheld, a branch then becomes liable for the settled centrally debt and no repayment will be made for any debt made good.

3.7 Debt Recovery Process

3.7.1 Debt Recovery timescales

- Week 0 - Branch Trading
- Week 1 - Request for Payment issued.
- Week 2 - Reminder Letter issued
- Week 4 - <£1,000 debt - recovered via next pay run after Contract Manager sign off.
- Week 4 - £1,000 + debt report to Contracts Manager.
- Week 4-6 - Contracts Manager agrees method of payment for debt > £1,000.

Recoveries or payments made through pay will be impacted by payroll cut off timings.

3.7.2 Deductions from Remuneration to Settle Outstanding Debt

- Deductions from remuneration should be the final option; attempts to obtain payment by cheque or credit/debit card should be made first.
- Ideally only one deduction from remuneration is permitted to be running at a time - if more than one is exceptionally allowed this is subject to the criteria below i.e. maximum of 12 months repayment period and 25% maximum of remuneration overall. Where a branch has a deduction from remuneration in place, alternative methods of payment should be sought to settle further outstanding debt.
- Maximum time for paying by deduction from remuneration is 12 months.
- Maximum amount per month that can be enforced to be paid by deduction from remuneration is 25% of the branch remuneration.
- Should the debt not fit within the deduction from remuneration guidelines, i.e. amount too large, a mix of payment methods should be considered, for example, collect a lump sum up front by cheque or credit/debit card and the remainder by deduction from remuneration.
- Under no circumstances should a deduction from remuneration in excess of £1,000 be set up without the branch being contacted verbally and reasonable attempts being made to obtain a contact number for the Subpostmaster, if they are absent from the branch.

3.8 Losses and Write offs

- If timescales have been met by Product & Branch Accounting then default is for all losses to be charged to Network and to Product budgets
- If timescales have not been met by Product & Branch Accounting, default is to charge to P&BA budgets
- If postings originate from Horizon as in the case of Crown office losses / gains and Transaction corrections and retail line write off, these will automatically be charged to the Network
- If Product & Branch Accounting makes a decision on disputes, then the default is to charge to P&BA budgets
- Aged debt outside of the current financial year should be charged to P&BA budgets.
- In the event of dispute, and only as last resort, Finance Analysis to mediate on whose budget

- P&BA will operate the attached write off process to ensure that all steps have been followed before write off.

Please see Appendix A for full write off process.

3.9 Network Conduct Cases, Appeals and investigations

P&BA will provide an accurate summary of the Transaction Corrections, issued, accepted and outstanding within 2 working days of the request being made by the Contract, Appeals or Investigation Manager, on an office-by-office basis.

P&BA will provide an accurate summary of outstanding debt held in the settled centrally account for a branch within 2 working days of the request being made by the Contract, Appeals or Investigation Manager.

P&BA will provide an accurate summary of any other debt, that P&BA were aware of, for a branch within 2 working days of the request being made by the Contract, Appeals or Investigation Manager.

P&BA to provide accurate details for Branch Trading balancing results, showing discrepancies committed on Horizon, for a branch for the previous 12 months prior to a given date (this may be the date of a suspension for example) within 2 working days of the request being made by the Contract, Appeals or Investigation Manager.

P&BA to provide the date of last Branch Trading with response.

P&BA and Contract, Appeals or Investigation Manager will agree a quicker timescales on a case-by-case basis for urgent requests.

3.10 Measurement

To measure this Operating Level Agreement in its entirety would require a lot of resource. Therefore, in the short term, this agreement will be measured on an exceptions basis. Any instances where the agreement has not been met will be reported, with the relevant information, to the following people.

Name	Area	Email Address
Andy Winn	P & BA	andrew.winn@GRO
Andrew Thompson	Network	andrew.J.Thompson@GRO
Phil Ashley	Service	phil.Ashley@GRO

	Delivery		
Julia Marwood	Network	julia.marwood	GRO
Martin Hopcroft	Network	martin.hopcroft	GRO

In the longer term simple measures and reports will be developed to monitor the delivery of this agreement, using a RAG status for reporting. Example to be included when available.

3.11 Conformance & NBSC Helpline queries

3.11.1 Monthly Reporting

Product & Branch Accounting will provide a monthly report of Transaction Corrections to the Network General managers. P&BA will also provide a monthly worst branch report to the Network and Network Efficiency Programme.

3.11.2 Knowledge Base

Product & Branch Accounting will provide regular updates to ensure that the Knowledge Base scripts held at the NBSC are up to date to deal with the incoming calls.

3.11.3 System Issues

Product & Branch Accounting will request intervention/escalation from Service Delivery to deal with specific issues which have not been/can not be resolved via the usual route(s)/processes/procedures. Such issues will include (but are not limited to) missing, incorrect or corrupt data/files from external suppliers/customers, failure to follow agreed processes/procedures by external suppliers/customers, system failures that have not been resolved via the agreed processes or to the agreed timescales.

3.11.4 NBSC Helpline queries to P&BA

Product & Branch Accounting will respond to requests from the NSBC helpline within 10 working days of request.

3.11.5 Branch Non-conformance

Although the responsibility for conformance clearly sits with the Network and Multiple Partners, Product & Branch

Accounting and Service Delivery will work with the Network, Crown offices and Multiple Partners to address conformance issues.

3.12 Opening Hours

3.12.1 Product & Branch Accounting

Product & Branch Accounting will be available to take phone calls between 8.00 am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday (excluding Public holidays). They can also use the email address [GRO] and someone from Product & Branch Accounting will call them back, within 2 working days. This email address can also be used to arrange an out of hours call.

3.12.2 NBSC helpline

The NBSC helpline will be available on branch trading days until 8pm on Branch Trading balancing days.

3.13 Review & day to day Relationship

3.13.1 Quarterly review

A quarterly review meeting is in place led by Marie Cockett and attended by Andy Winn, Paul Dann, John Breedon, Glenn Chester, Karen Arnold, Daina Wellard, Michael Haworth, Shaun Turner, Alan Lusher and Phil Ashley . This group, together with the relevant guests, will review this Operating Level Agreement, quarterly for the first year and then at least annually.

3.13.2 P&BA Contacts

- P&BA will provide details of contacts within P&BA at regular intervals, minimum annually.
- Network will provide details of contacts within the Network at regular intervals, minimum annually.
- Service Delivery will provide details of contacts within Service Delivery at regular intervals, minimum annually.

3.13.3 Changes

- P&BA to provide details of any suggested changes to the Network & Service Delivery, in advance of

implementation, to enable impact assessment by Network & Service Delivery

- Network to provide details of any suggested changes to the P&BA & Service Delivery, in advance of implementation, to enable impact assessment by P&BA & Service Delivery
- Service Delivery to provide details of any suggested changes to the P&BA & Network, in advance of implementation, to enable impact assessment by P&BA & Network

3.13.4 Day to Day Contacts

Name	Role	Area	Email	Telephone
Marie Cockett	Branch Conformance & Liaison	P&BA	GRO	GRO
Andy Winn	Relationship Manager	P&BA		
Paul Dann	Agents Debt accounting	P&BA		
John Breedon	National Contract Manager North	Network		
Glenn Chester	Contract Manager, Central	Network		
Karen Arnold	Contract Manager, North Central England	Network		
Cathy Macdonald	Multiples & Crown Accounting, Fraud & conformance	P&BA		
Alison Bolsover	Financial Services & Bill Payment	P&BA		
Phil Ashley	Branch IT Advisor	Service Delivery		
Shaun Turner	Network co-ordination	Network		
Alan Lusher	Network co-ordination	Network		
Martin Hopcroft	Crowns	Network		
Julia Marwood	Network co-ordination	Network		

4. Dependencies

In order to deliver the levels / timescales in this agreement, the following dependencies need to be met.

4.1 National Federation of Subpostmasters

Agreement to the principles of this OLA must to be sought from the NFSP to the timescales in this document

4.2 Clients & Joint Venture Partners

Timescales for data feeds, enquiries and evidence requests must to be agreed with Client Banks, A&L, Bank of Ireland, Hanco, First Rate, Moneygram, NS&I, Camelot, DVLA, Post Office Ltd Banks, Quantum and the Passport Service to enable the timescales in this document to be achieved.

Failure by our Clients to deliver the requested information will be reported and dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

4.3 Suppliers

Timescales for data feeds, enquiries and evidence requests must to be agreed with EDS, Steria and Fujitsu to enable the timescales in this document to be achieved.

Failure by our Suppliers to deliver the requested information will be reported and dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

4.4 Cash, Bureau & Stock

Timescales for data feeds, enquiries and evidence requests must to be agreed with Cash Services, Cash Centres, Hemel Hempstead, Swindon and Royal Mail Service Delivery to enable the timescales in this document to be achieved.

Failure to deliver the requested information will be reported and dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

5. Appendices

➤ Appendix A - P&BA Write off Process

The P&BA write off process will be attached to this OLA once it has been finalised.