

POST OFFICE LTD CONFIDENTIAL: INVESTIGATION, LEGAL

POLTD/1011/0095

Theft & False Accounting

Name: Miss Alison Loraine HALL
Rank: Postmaster Identification Code: 1
Office: Hightown SPSO Branch Code 512 323
Age: **GRO** Date of Birth: **GRO**
Service: 5 years 8 months Date Service Commenced: February 2005

Personnel Printout: At Appendix: C

Nat Ins No:

GRO

Home Address:

GRO

Contract for Services
Suspended:

3rd September 2010 Mrs Karen Arnold

To be prosecuted by:

Royal Mail Group (including Post Office Ltd)

Designated Prosecution
Authority:

Mr Iain Murphy, Fraud Strand Leader

Discipline Manager:

Mrs Sue Muddeman, Contracts Manager

Corporate Security Criminal Law Team

The circumstances surrounding the suspension and subsequent interview of Miss Alison Hall are briefly as follows:

On 2nd September 2010 Ms Tracey Bedford, Migration Support Officer attended Hightown Post Office® prior to the branch being migrated to Horizon Online (HOL). When she counted the cash on hand against the Horizon Cash Declaration a shortage of £13,624.41 was discovered. The branch was closed and a full audit took place the following day, 3rd September, conducted by Mr Jeff Roper and Mr Richard Goss.

Hightown Post Office® branch is situated on the Halifax Road (A649). The premises consist of the Post Office® branch, Newsagent and small off licence. This building is attached the main house which stands behind.

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On Friday 17th September I wrote to Miss Hall and invited her to an interview and gave her details of her legal rights. The next day she telephoned me and I explained further the nature of the interview. She seemed a little confused but she said wished to have a Solicitor present. I advised her to speak to a Criminal Law Solicitor and we could arrange a time and location for the interview.

On Friday 24th September Mr Paul Normandale, Solicitor with Inesons of Cleckheaton telephoned me while Miss Hall was with him. We agreed to conduct the interview at his office.

On Tuesday 28th September in the company of Mr Paul Whitaker I attended the offices of Inesons Solicitors in Cleckheaton. At 11:37hrs a tape recorded interview with Miss Hall commenced. Mr Normandale was also present. Forms GS001 and GS003 were completed and are now at Appendix 'B' and 'C' respectively.

At the start of the interview Miss Hall said that she believed the shortage was due to problems with the Lottery Scratch cards. She went on to say that on a number of occasions she had to alter the stock shown on Horizon to match what was physically in the branch as there was a discrepancy. This would cause a shortage in the cash and this carried on. She added that these alterations were made because of the Transaction Correction (TCs) she was receiving.

She remained adamant throughout the interview that the problem was with the Lottery Scratchcards but she admitted that she had not managed the situation well as she had left it to build up hoping to be able to sort out the problem.

Miss Hall said that she had out in £640 of cash to cover a shortage, but when asked could not recall when that had occurred. She offered to look at her bank details to find the date. (18:30)

Miss Hall said she could not balance the Branch account in January 2010 but could recall how much by (20:46).

Miss admitted that since January 2010 she has been Falsifying the Branch trading statement by increasing the Cash On Hand figure to achieve a balance. When asked she agreed that she had gained an advantage of remaining in employment during this period when if she had raise the matter she may have reasonably expected to be suspended and be in the same position she is now (39:19) (41:50)

Miss Hall was informed that she may have rendered herself liable to prosecution. When asked if she anything further to say she said she was sorry for the all the mess she had caused herself and Post Office Ltd and should have asked for help sooner.

The interview concluded at 12:37hrs.

The tapes were sealed with seal numbers 065759 and 065760

A notebook entry was made of the interview details. A copy and typed copy are at Appendix 'D'

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A Summary of the interview has been compiled and a typed copy is at pages 5 to 19 of these papers. The Working Tapes are at the rear of these papers. I have retained the Master Tapes for safekeeping.

In my opinion any postmaster who had to repay £640 would remember when without too much problem. Checking her bank account would only give a date of any withdrawal it would not confirm with certainty if the money had been put in to the branch account. Miss Hall's failure to recall how much the first loss was in January 2010 suggest that Miss Hall's story is not the whole truth as this would have been a turning point as she would have either have had to make the account good at the Branch Trading period or begin to False Account. By her own admissions the loss had built up over a number of months.

I have spoken in depth to Mr Neil Thorneycroft the Lottery / Scratchcard Manager in the P&BA Section in Chesterfield. He explained the process for Lottery Scratchcards:

- Cards received from Camelot are initially scanned to inform Camelot they have been received.
- Cards then need for sale are scanned and the £s value is entered on to the Horizon system manually.
- At the end of each day the Lottery terminal will give details of Sales and prizes. These figures are manually input in to the Horizon system. At this point the cash must be physically added to the Post Office® till. In essence this is a cash deposit in to the account.

Any TC received would only affect the Scratchcard stock and not the cash on hand figure.

If Miss Hall made manual alterations to the stock on hand this would affect the cash on hand figure. But both TCs and stock alterations do not total anywhere near the £15k loss.

After the interview Miss Hall agreed to complete the Bank Authority forms for her accounts. Due to this and advice from her Solicitor she declined to agree to a search of her house. As financial details would be the main focus of search I decided to accept this. Two days later I received the signed GSO45 and subsequently submitted it to her Bank and requested 12 months of statements.

On 13th October 2010 I attended the home address of Miss Kimberley Langley, Counter Clerk at Hightown Post Office® Branch. Miss Langley (23yrs old) has worked at the branch for approximately four years. She works Monday and Tuesday 09:00 to 17:30hrs and Thursday 12:00 to 17:00hrs.

She said she was not aware of any Lottery issues until recently. While Miss Hall was on holiday during the first two weeks of August 2010 she ran the branch. When she produced the Cash Declaration at the end of each day she was told to add in a specific figure by Miss Hall.

I also went to see Mrs Marjorie Higgins (63yrs old) the other clerk. She only worked on Tuesdays and only if they were desperate as she had grandchildren to look after for her son-in-law following the death of his wife.

Both clerks were registered correctly with Post Office Ltd and were the only ones registered.

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The Helpdesk (NBSC) have confirmed that there were no telephone calls received from Hightown SPSO between 1st January 2010 and 3rd September 2010.

A charge of False Accounting between January and September 2010 would seem appropriate at this time. But an additional charge of Theft should be considered as covering up a loss of this amount must have been done for a reason and that reason was because she was aware of it and had some involvement in the loss.

Miss Hall lives with her partner Mr Richard Walker and their two children (22 year & 20 year olds)

The current loss to Post Office Ltd remains the initial loss at the time of the Audit of £14,775.76

At the interview Mrs Hall said she wanted to repay the loss and that it would have to be by way of a payment on her partner's card credit card. At the date of this report there has been no repayment.

The Financial Enquiry Form (FES) has been completed and is with the Financial Investigators as are the Financial Intelligence Reports.

The NPA01 form and Antecedents have been completed and are now at Appendix '.....'

The Postmaster has not been adhering to basic counter procedures where by User IDs and passwords are not shared. Miss Langley thought that things were being done incorrectly but as she was getting the order from her 'boss' she did not question it. The use of a Whistleblower Helpline may have given her the chance to raise the issue and helped us intervene when the loss was smaller.

These papers are submitted for the position to be seen and noted after which could they be forward to the Criminal Law Team for advice on charges.

GRO

Christopher G Knight
Fraud Investigator

18th October 2010