

M097 CQR

Ron Warmington

From: Ron Warmington [GRO]
Sent: 07 May 2014 16:18
To: 'schemeenquiries'
Cc: mediation [GRO]
Subject: FW: Completed Case Questionnaire Ms Janet Skinner M097

This came in today from Howe & Co. It refers to an unanswered request for legal info. This CQR is in our hands for the moment and we will review it, posing any questions that we find necessary. It will then be submitted to the WG in the usual way.

We will probably need to see that Legal File also.

Best regards, Ron.

The original App raised the following - 'Archie' issues: NONE!

-----Original Message-----

From: Ron Warmington [GRO]
Sent: Wednesday, May 07, 2014 3:45 PM
To: 'Graham Cade'; mediation [GRO]
Subject: RE: Completed Case Questionnaire Ms Janet Skinner M097

Thanks Graham.

In addition, this CQR raised the following additional 'to what issues making' in all: T13 FES. T14 Audit Trail

-----Original Message-----

From: Graham Cade [GRO]
Sent: Wednesday, May 07, 2014 1:38 PM
To: 'mediation [GRO]'
Subject: Completed Case Questionnaire Ms Janet Skinner M097

Dear Sirs

T19?

I enclose the Case Questionnaire completed on behalf of Janet Skinner. This is the lady that has experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining her file relating to her criminal prosecution by the Post Office. Despite the involvement of the Solicitors Regulation Authority in the case she still has not received the file.

There remains the slight possibility that her file will be passed to her, as a consequence this particular questionnaire is submitted on the basis that we reserve the right to adduce documentation in

support of our clients application should her file of papers be forwarded to her by her criminal solicitors.

Graham Cade

Howe & Co

-----Original Message-----

From: scanner [GRO] [GRO]

Sent: 07 May 2014 12:28

To: Graham Cade

Subject: Message from "RNP002673361FDE"

This E-mail was sent from "RNP002673361FDE" (Aficio MP C2551).

Scan Date: 07.05.2014 13:28:23 (+0200)

Queries to: scanner [GRO]

M097.00R

CASE QUESTIONNAIRE – JANET SKINNER

Address:

GRO

Date of Birth:

Name and Address of Post Office: North Bransholme

Branch: 9 Grampian Way
Bransholme
Hull
HU7 5BZ

FAD Number for Post Office: 174321

BACKGROUND

I, Janet Skinner, of **GRO** WILL STATE as follows:

1. I set out below to the best of my knowledge and recollection my submissions in relation to matters I would like to be considered at the mediation regarding the gross injustice and financial losses suffered by myself as a result of the failures on the part of the Post Office and the Horizon Computer System.
2. I want to make it clear at the beginning of the statement that I have not been able to specify matters and dates precisely as I wish due to the passage of time since 2006 when I was suspended by the Post Office. I therefore ask that everything I say below is read with this proviso in mind, I believe that the Post Office will have records to confirm everything I say.

Signed

GRO

Dated 21.03.14

3. Prior to running my own Post Office I had worked for United News from about February 1994 at Post Offices owned by them. I worked as a counter clerk during this time. It was job that I did enjoy and it suited my lifestyle at the time in terms of looking after my children. I recall that when I first started at the Post Office things were relatively simple and straightforward. Everything was written down on paper and everyone had access to the paper record to check every transaction. I do not recall from 1994 to 2006 that I did not have any problems working for the Post Office and I was never accused of theft of any property during that time.
4. I recall that United News closed down their Post Office operations in August 2003. At that time I was located in a branch in Grandale, which is near Hull. From November 2003 I started working for Caroline Route who ran a sub Post Office in North Bransholme, which is also near Hull. When I started working there she told me that her ambition was to leave the Post Office and she did discuss with me taking over the premises. I agreed to take over as temporary Post Mistress and I agreed to take over the two Post Offices she had, North Bransholme and Bodmin Road . Before I could take over the leases on these premises they were audited by the Post Office, no problems were disclosed by the audits. I recall that I only operated Bodmin Road for about 5 months, this was then closed down as part of the Post Office programme of planned closures. When the office was closed it was audited once again by the Post Office and no problems were discovered as a consequence of the audit.
5. The North Bransholme Post Office was a very busy Post Office. The Post Office was situated within a general store , I had nothing to do with the day to day running of the general store I only leased the Post Office part of the premises. Together with myself there were 4 other members of staff that were transferred from Caroline Route to me upon the transfer of the Post Office to me. They were Katherine Ayres, Theresa Holmes, Colleen Cates and Wendy Lyall. The three of them except Wendy had worked at the branch before I took it over and Katherine had been there for 10 years. They were

Signed

GRO

Dated 21-03-14

all very experienced cashiers. From memory I think that one of the allegations made against me by the Post Office in 2006 was that I had taken over the staff and had not registered them. I do not think that that could be true because each of them was registered for using the Horizon System and they had their own passwords.

6. I first encountered the Post Office new Horizon Accounts System in 2001. Up to that point we used a paper based accountancy system which was easy to understand and I think easy to use, it also left a proper audit trail so you could go back and check whether mistakes had been made. The new computer system in my view eliminated this paper trail and counter staff just became input clerks. I recall that I had 3 days training when the Horizon System was introduced. I do not think that the training was that detailed it was far more to do with how to enter transactions rather than what to do if you thought there was an error or problem with the system. There were no instructions ever given about that.
7. In terms of operating the new Horizon System I do think that we were left very much to our own devices. I had two Regional Managers, Diane Hoyle and Kath Oglesby. I saw one of them at least once every two months, however, in my view their visits were not really to give us training about technical aspects of the running of the Post Office, it was more to do with making sure that the office was clean and tidy, that we were displaying the correct sales literature, that we were kept up to date with new products that were being introduced and were properly informed about the withdrawal of other products. Their visits never covered the Horizon System at all indeed I think we knew more about the system than the Regional Managers did.
8. The members of staff that I inherited from Mrs Route did perform their own weekly balances, however, I did double check them and most of the time I did not see any problems at all. I also used to do my own balances at the end of every week. I recall that at the end of 2005, in November, that system was changed by the Post Office so that we started to submit monthly balances

Signe **GRO**

Dated 21.03.14

rather than a balance every week. To that time I think the only problem I had discovered was with one of Katherine's weekly balances. We had found that she was £1,500.00 down on what, Horizon indicated she should have had in the till. Back then I assumed that Horizon must be correct and I told her that she would have to make good that shortfall in her till. She was, actually in the process of paying it back when the audit happened. This approach is something Mrs Route, when I took over the Post Office from her had told me to do. I recall that she encouraged all of us to put aside £2.50 every week because she said that from time to time minor problems did occur and the easiest way to sort them out was if we had a kind of pool of cash which we could then use to cover minor shortages. As that had been the way I was shown how to operate the branch by Mrs Route I saw no problem with asking Katherine to pay back the loss that she was showing on her system. I think that problem occurred in about the middle of 2005.

9. The first problems I encountered with the Horizon System happened after the change of the weekly to the monthly audit. I recall doing the monthly balance at the end of January 2006 and finding that I was £7,000.00 short. I was very shocked by this and I recall staying in the branch until 11.00 p.m. that night and getting in again at 7.00 a.m. the next morning double checking everything to see how the loss had happened. I could find nothing at all to explain the loss, as I could not explain it I just decided to hide the loss by putting it into another stock unit. I know that it was wrong but at that stage I was still fairly confident that the loss would correct itself as I believed fault was with the horizon system and I was certain that I had done nothing wrong.
10. In February 2007 rather than the loss reducing I found that it had doubled again to £14,000.00, again I was very worried about this and undertook further investigations. I also asked the other staff to double check my figures and none of us could explain how we had arrived at a £14,000.00 loss. The loss went up again in the March of 2006 to £21,000.00 both times I was becoming very concerned about the loss. I was closely watching the staff to

Signed

GRO

Dated... 21-03-04

see if there were any signs that anyone was doing anything untoward but I detected no signs of that, everyone was acting perfectly normally and I really could not account for the losses that were showing on the system. When you first take on a Post Office you are asked to sign a contract by the Post Office, which is quite onerous. One of the condition is that the Post Master is responsible for any loss howsoever caused and I was conscious of the fact that unless I could discover how these losses had occurred I would be responsible for paying the loss back .By March 2006 the loss was showing £21,000.00.

11. In May 2006 I recall I was approached by two Regional Managers Kath Oglesby and Diane Hoyle, they advised me that they would have to do a check of the branch and at that stage I did advise them of the loss which I thought was £35,000.00. I did explain to them that I had no explanation as to how the losses had arisen. I did say that I wanted the problem sorted and I asked if the branch could be audited.
12. I recall that the next day I received a visit from the Post Office Auditors, they turned up unannounced at the branch and conducted an audit that day. As a result of the audit I was told that the loss at the branch was in fact £59,000.00. I was extremely shocked by this. I had no idea how the losses had occurred. As a result of the audit I was suspended immediately by the Post Office. On completion of the audit I received a telephone call from the investigator requesting that I attend a meeting at a main Post Office in Hull the next day. I recall that when I arrived at the main Post Office we had to transfer the meeting to the local Police Station because the Post Office recording apparatus was not working properly. I recall that I was cautioned at the end of the interview. I remember being interviewed by two people and I think that my staff were interviewed. I do not think that during this so called investigation process that any effort was made by the Post Office to actually investigate the cause of the loss. My own impression was that as the Horizon System showed the trading loss of £59,000.00 it was automatically

Signed

GRO

Dated 21-03-14

assumed by the Post Office investigators that I must have stolen the money. At no stage was the Horizon System investigated and no other investigations were carried out to find out what really happened and how the loss had happened. During my interview I informed the investigators that I believed that the loss was caused by a fault in the Horizon system

13. I recall that I was asked by the Post Office to produce my bank account details, presumably for them to check whether or not I had appropriated the alleged missing money for myself. At no stage did anyone ever find any proof that I had stolen any money from the Post Office.
14. I was charged with theft from my employer a charge to which I pleaded not guilty and I was charged with a second count of false accounting. As I knew that I had tried to hide the losses when they first started to occur I did plead guilty to that. I was also advised by my solicitors that if I pleaded guilty I might receive a lesser sentence. I was told that the Prosecution would accept the not guilty plea of theft from my employer and that charge would be dropped.
15. I recall that I appeared at The Hull Crown Court on Friday 5 January 2007 and I was sentenced on 2 February 2007. Much to my surprise I was sentenced to 9 months in prison and I was sent to Wakefield Prison. I was transferred to a semi open prison somewhere in the South of England, nowhere near Hull. I was released from prison on 12 April 2007 but I had to wear a tag for the rest of the 9 months sentence and I was subject to a curfew, basically I had to be home before 7.00 p.m. every day. I also had to make frequent visits to my local Probation Office.
16. Whilst I ran the North Bransholme Branch I received a payment from the Post Office for £4,600.00 per month. Out of this I had to pay staff wages and my over heads such as the lease, however, I was always left with about £1,500.00 to £1,800.00 at the end of each month. Before problems developed with the Post Office I had separated from my husband and we were going through

GRO

Signed

Dated 21-03-14

divorce proceedings, as part of the settlement I was obliged to pay him £25,000.00. As a consequence of this the matrimonial home was then transferred to me.

17. I have mentioned in this statement that I think the Post Office Investigators automatically assumed guilt. I strongly feel during the interviews that the investigators were aware of my divorce settlement and assumed that I had taken the money from the Post Office to pay off my husband, which is simply not the case.

18. After my suspension in May 2006 I had no income, I fell behind with the mortgage and the mortgage company started repossession proceedings against me. Fortunately I was able to sell the property and this was done before the repossession order was granted. However, by the time it came to sell the property I incurred so many charges in terms of late payments and extra interest that I only raised £1,400.00 from the sale. I think the Post Office thought that I was trying to hide the proceeds of the sale from them and I ended up in court again for them to enforce a confiscation order. Eventually after further investigations were carried out it was accepted that I had only received very little from the sale, however, I was ordered to pay £1,400.00 to the Post Office rather than keep it myself and I still have the confiscation order hanging over my head. If in the future I come into any lump sum of money, for example through either an inheritance or from winning the lottery I would have to pay the outstanding amount of £57,000.00 that the Post Office say I owe to them.

19. I do feel very strongly that I did nothing wrong, I now think that the losses showed up as a result of faults in the Horizon System rather than as a result of any action that I might have taken. I have mentioned already in this statement that when the losses started to show I did everything I could to double check where the losses might have come from I also had other members of staff double check what I was doing and none of us could account for the losses that were showing up. I do think that the fault must lie

Signed

GRO

Dated: 21-03-14

with the Horizon System rather than with me and I do feel very strongly that I have been falsely prosecuted. My life really has been very badly affected by what I have gone through. As a result of the criminal process my story was featured on the front cover of the Hull Daily Mail, our local paper on at least two occasions and I feel my local reputation has been very badly affected. I now have a criminal conviction on my record and I have lost both my home and my income.

20. Fortunately I did not own the branch where I was trading the Post Office kept that running indeed within a month they had appointed a new manager to take over from me.
21. After being suspended by the Post Office I did eventually find work as an office temp. I started working for an agency in November 2007 but stopped work in September 2008 shortly after I had been to court again in connection with the confiscation order. I was admitted to hospital in September 2008 and they GROs, which is a very debilitating condition as a consequence I am now suffering from muscle wasting and have a great deal of difficulty walking and I am now registered disabled.
22. I do think that the stress that I was placed under as a result of the proceedings taken against me by the Post Office regarding the alleged missing £59,000.00 have played a major part in the condition that I have now suffered and the physical problems that I suffer today. The period during 2006 and 2008 was a complete nightmare for me. Prison was horrendous and I know the whole case and the publicity had a considerable impact on my family, and, in particular my two children who were aged 14 and 18 at the time that I was sentenced to jail. In fact when I was in jail I refused to allow my children to come and visit me I was so devastated by the whole experience.

Signed GRO

Dated 21-03-14

23. I have been asked what I would like to achieve from mediation. First and foremost I want to bring the Post Office to account, I have been treated and I am sure many others have been treated in an unreasonable and shoddy manner. They have made allegations of wrong doing against me without any proper investigation or evidence to support this allegation. I would like the criminal conviction struck off and I would like a full apology published by the Post Office. I want financial compensation for the losses that I have suffered in particular the loss of earnings that I have suffered since being suspended by the Post Office in May 2006 and I want the Post Office to pay the legal costs that I may incur as a result of going through the mediation process.
24. I confirm that the contents of this statement are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I confirm the contents of this Care Questionnaire are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed

GRO

Dated 21-03-14