

Message

From: Henry Staunton [GRO]
on behalf of Henry Staunton [GRO]
Sent: 25/11/2023 14:05:46
To: Simon Jeffreys [GRO]
Subject: Re: Project Venus

Simon ,

Many thanks . I was being a bit purist asking the two PO Main Board colleagues to “ write a cheque out “ for the agreed differences but I did not want any hint of a “ Loan to a Director “ . Saf was happy with that but Elliot did think that was a bit purist and was not what he had agreed with the PO management . However , I did ask him to think again about it over the weekend .

Kathryn did indeed lack the relevant info which is why I did not agree with her plan that she should brief individual Main Board Directors before the ARC and Board . The amount of a £ 15k trading balance (that has been properly reviewed by Amanda and Lorna) does not require briefing of all Main Board Directors in my opinion . I worry we will not properly brief the auditors and get a sensible position if she does not have the facts .

We have an Inquiry for not treating Post Masters fairly . We must have a culture that does not assume that Horizon is right and our Post Master Main Board directors are wrong . Nick understands the sensitivities but I am not sure , CONFIDENTIALLY , that the message has gone down the chain to Foat and others .

PLEASE TREAT MY COMMENTS AS CONFIDENTIAL . WE CAN CHAT ON MONDAY . There is a lot that I am reluctant to put in writing
BW , Henry

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Simon Jeffreys [GRO]
Sent: Saturday, November 25, 2023 1:18:02 PM
To: Henry Staunton [GRO]
Subject: Re: Project Venus

Thanks Henry. Yes, trading account balances are very different in nature from loans to directors. And it is a small balance in relation to several years of trading, especially covering periods when Horizon provided incorrect information. The problem with Kathryn briefing me is that she lacks relevant information.
Kind regards
Simon

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Henry Staunton [GRO]
Sent: Saturday, November 25, 2023 1:02:08 PM
To: Simon Jeffreys [GRO]
Subject: Re: Project Venus

Simon ,

The account with Eliot needed review . However , when we looked into it we could only prove £15 k or £16 K . So , if that is what we can prove we should focus on that . That is not a huge amount in the context of the large

amounts that go through the inter company account . We know Horizon is a mess and cannot be relied on - hence we have an Inquiry .

Saf's balance goes back to some business purchase I think . A deal was struck that PO would pick up 50 % of the balance which PO were to bill but did not .

I have suggested that both " write out a cheque " to pay the balances to put the whole thing behind us .

Ben keeps up the point about whether Elliot should continue as a director . That is not a view that is shared by Lorna , Amanda or me . The auditors are now wound up . So I thought that , after investigation , it had been put to bed even though months ago we thought we may have a problem . I do not think Amanda or Lorna needed to brief you . Kathryn needed to do that but with some perspective . We do need some perspective about a £15 K proven trading balance .

Of course we need appropriate disclosure of a £ 15 K difference but it was a " trading account " involving hundreds of thousands of pounds passing though it each year .

However , as a Director I am happy for you to see whatever you want .

I spent hours with our two very upset (rightly so I am afraid) PM Main Board colleagues yesterday . They do need to involved by Kathryn and Tom . Tom did an excellent letter to them yesterday and I have written to him to thank him .

BW ,
Henry

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Simon Jeffreys [GRO]
Sent: Saturday, November 25, 2023 12:24:05 PM
To: Henry Staunton [GRO]
Subject: Re: Project Venus

Henry,

Thank you for the clarification. No need to speak over the weekend thank you.

The proposed disclosures would be appropriate based on this summary and should not cause stress or discomfort.

I will speak to Saf and Elliot to explain the accounting requirements.

A bit more background to respond to some of the points you raised.

I have been advised that -

The unreconciled amount in the case of Elliot is over £200,000 and management, after year end, wrote off and provided for most of this leaving a net amount payable of just over £16,000 (to be settled in monthly instalments).

The amounts for Saf are smaller totalling about £32,000.

The investigation apparently raised other concerns, questioning whether it was appropriate for Elliot to continue as a director.

All of this came through in bits and pieces yesterday, and may have absolutely no foundation whatsoever.

As I only became aware of this on Thursday evening I was completely blindsided, I simply calmed down a few concerned individuals. With hindsight, it would have helped if Amanda/Lorna had briefed me as ARC chair at the time of their review.

Hopefully, you and I can speak on Monday morning to agree how to conclude. I will call you.

As a minimum we need to document accurate relevant facts to support any ARA disclosures. It sounds as though Amanda and Lorna have these, which will speed things up considerably.

I would like to read the Investigation report and any legal advice received. (I understand PwC have asked for this too). And any minute from Amanda and Lorna.

I agree with you that this could lead to a FOIR.

Interestingly Ben Foat did not escalate this with me. Kathryn and her team spoke about their concerns during our regular update on Thursday evening, and PwC asked questions on Friday morning. Coincidentally, there was a POI call on Thursday evening with Ben and others (requested by Clare Ryder (POI ARC chair) and Ian Holloway (CRO)) to discuss risk generally in preparation for an FCA return Clare has to sign. Venus, of course, did not come up at all but I did ask Ben after the call if he had been involved in Venus as I needed to understand what on earth it was all about.

I don't know if there is any substance here but as we need to get the documentation in place, and as we have a couple of weeks between the ARC on Monday and the signing of the accounts on 11 December, I propose to defer discussion of the related party note. There is little to be gained by having a rushed heated ARC conversation unnecessarily early. PwC are happy with this timing.

Kind regards

Simon

Sent from Outlook for iOS

From: Henry Staunton (GRO)
Sent: Friday, November 24, 2023 10:43:58 PM
To: Simon Jeffreys (GRO)
Subject: Re: Project Venus

Simon ,

I am sorry but I have been travelling up from Cornwall today . I have just seen that you wrote to at 10.00 pm last night which I have only just seen .

The balances with Elliot , as with so many Post Masters , is problematic partly reflecting the complications with Horizon . A unmary of the saga is as follows . A detailed investigation was undertaken by the Investigations Team and a balance of under £15k was agreed as owing by Elliot . This was built up over a period of 6-10 years . Bearing in mind that about a million pounds a year goes through the inter co account the difference built up over a period of years is de minimus .

Foat spent a considerable amount on legal fees . I asked a sub committee of Lorna (as the Shareholder Director) and Amanda (a lawyer) to look at the legal advice .

. Saf and Eliot have a feeling that Foat just will not let it go - that he keeps raising the matter that somehow Eliot and Saf had an undisclosed conflict of interest . (I gather he said that to you too .) They deeply resent that . They say it shows the PO has not changed in that they think all Post masters are crooks . It is getting heated now when I thought we had cooled the situation weeks ago .

I thought the whole matter had been finalised following Amanda's and Lorna's review but it seems that Foat opened a second front with you !

I have not seen the note that is being considered so am unsighted on what is proposed. Saf and Eliot are obviously concerned that a note will lead to a FOIR which they think is Foat's aim . They think the matter has been investigated fully and the balance found to be owing is de minimus and a FOIR will just allow Foat to pursue his vendetta .

If we had a situation where Elliot owed more it would then be a serious situation .

I have written fully so please keep the comments on Foat confidential .

I will be in the office on Monday morning so happy to chat then . If you need to speak before I am available tomorrow after 2.00 pm and on Sunday evening after 6.00 pm .

BW ,

Henry

Sent from Outlook for iOS

From: Simon Jeffreys (GRO)
Sent: Thursday, November 23, 2023 10:04:14 PM

To: Henry Staunton (GRO)
Subject: Project Venus

Dear Henry,

I was made aware of this project this evening.

It would be helpful please if you could update me before ARC on Monday. Happy to give you a call tomorrow if convenient. I have some meetings but will try and fit in with a time that works for you if you are able to speak.

Kind regards

Simon

Sent from Outlook for iOS