Tuesday, 30 January 2024

| (10.00 am) | 2 |
| :---: | :---: |
| MS MILLAR: Good morning, sir, can you see and hear us? | 3 |
| SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, I can, thank you very much. | 4 |
| MS MILLAR: May we please call Mr Thorpe. | 5 |
| SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. | 6 |
| FREDERICK LESLIE THORPE (affirmed) | 7 |
| Questioned by MS MILLAR | 8 |
| MS MILLAR: Could you please confirm your full name | 9 |
| Mr Thorpe? | 10 |
| A. Frederick Leslie Thorpe. | 1 |
| Q. Thank you very much for coming to the Inquiry to give evidence and for the provision of your witness statement. You should have that witness statement in front of you. It's dated 22 December 2023. | 12 13 14 15 |
| A. Yes. | 16 |
| Q. If you turn to the last page of that, which is page 14 , is that your signature? | 17 18 |
| A. It is, yes. | 19 |
| Q. I understand that you have a couple of corrections you'd like to make before we proceed? | 20 |
| A. Yes, the first correction is that when I made the statement I hadn't had sight -- or I wrote in it that | 22 23 |
| I hadn't had sight of Mrs McKelvey's taped transcript. | 24 |
| I've since had sight of that, so if that could be | 25 | 1

contents of that witness statement true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. They are, yes.
Q. For the purposes of the transcript the URN is WITN10410100. As you know, my name is Megan Millar and I will be asking you questions on behalf of the Inquiry. I think you'd agree that you've had a long and varied career working for the Post Office?
A. Yes.
Q. For the purposes of your evidence today, I'll just be focusing on the conduct of investigations and particularly in Northern Ireland.
A. Okay. Yeah.
Q. So could we start, please, with the roles you held while working for the Post Office. Is it correct that your career with the Post Office spanned from 1976 to January 2003?
A. It does, yes, albeit the very first part I wasn't a direct employee of the Post Office; I was a subpostmaster so I was agent of the Post Office but was working for the Post Office at that time, yeah.
Q. Thank you. So, when you started working as a subpostmaster, that was in 1976; is that correct?
A. Yes.
Q. You then held a number of roles in Post Office branches
altered.
And the other amendments were that I wrote in it after the interview with Mr McLaughlin and Mrs McKelvey, I hadn't -- had no further involvement in the prosecution case of either party. But, in fact, it brought to my attention, that because I made a witness statement I had in fact had some involvement, so those are just the two amendments I feel I should make.
Q. For us for the purpose of the transcript, in relation to the interview tapes of Mrs McKelvey -- that should be paragraph 39 of your witness statement at page 13 -- you say that "I have now seen case papers relating to this case but not the interview taped transcripts"; so that's a correction in relation to that, that you have seen those transcripts?
A. So, in fact, if you just delete the "but not the" -"but not the" and put in there "and" -- "I've seen the case papers relating to this case and the interview taped transcripts", that would satisfy that one.
Q. Then, just in relation to both case studies, that you did provide a witness statement in both cases but those were limited to describing the fact of both the audit and the interview; is that correct?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Thank you. So having made those corrections, are the 2
until 1987 when you became an Audit Manager?
A. Yes.
Q. You were promoted to District Audit Manager in 1990 before you became a Security and Investigation Manager in 1993; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. In that role, were you based in Leeds?
A. Sorry?
Q. Were you based in Leeds when you became a Security and Investigation Manager?
A. Well, I became a Security and Investigation Manager following a business reorganisation. The area I was working in, the district of Newcastle, was merged with Leeds and my job as an Audit Manager disappeared but I went with my Finance Manager into Security Investigation. Initially, I was doing the physical security, procedural security and the design of security equipment for sub post offices, before I was moved on to the investigation side.
Q. So then in 1996, is it right that you were asked if you'd be interested in becoming an Investigation Manager?
A. Yes.
Q. So, just in terms of the titles of those roles, up to that point you'd been a Security and Investigation

Manager, how did this role then, the new one in 1996, differ from that?
A. It differed in so much as the -- as I say, the first part of the job was security, physical security, procedural security, and then the second part was purely looking at the investigative side of crime or potential crime against the Post Office.
Q. You then explain in your statement at paragraph 10 that when this vacancy arose, so the Investigation Manager vacancy, there was no one who was suitably qualified to fill that vacancy as almost all of the Investigators had been part of the Post Office Investigation Department, which, at that point, had been disbanded; is that correct?
A. What had happened, when it was disbanded, the respective Investigators had been moved into Royal Mail or Post Office Counters. Not everybody seemed to be happy with their allotted business and one of the Investigators put into Post Office Counters in Leeds didn't like the job -- well, he liked the job but he transferred to Royal Mail at the first opportunity and there were no other suitably qualified ex-POID officers available, and I was asked would I like to do the job, subject to an assessment to see whether I was at the right capabilities.

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A. Well, I don't know anything about the recruitment process for the POID officers, as they were then. So I'm not sure whether that was part of their initiation or sort of initial interview. I'm not sure.
Q. Were you told what the results of that psychiatric evaluation was?
A. Well, I assume I was okay because I got the job but I didn't get a formal feedback for it, no.
Q. So is it right then you believe you were the first person to be recruited since the Post Office Investigation Department was disbanded as an Investigator.
A. I believe at that time I was but that's my belief. I may be wrong because, obviously, the Post Office is spread all throughout the UK but I believe I was the first one to go through it.
Q. So in 1996, what geographical areas were you responsible for?
A. 1996, it was -- well, I was based on Leeds but my area was the Northeast from the -- Hull up to the Scottish Borders, bordering by the Pennines, so the very North East section of England.
Q. Then is it right that, following the retirement of two officers in Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2000, you also became responsible for those regions?
Q. So it wasn't, then, that the ex-POID officers were unsuitable, in so much as they were unqualified to fill the new vacancy, but they'd already been allocated to different roles; is that right?
A. I think it was because they'd been allocated different roles in a different business, rather than the lack of qualifications.
Q. How was your suitability for that role assessed?
A. Well, I had to come to London for an interview with the ex-Head of Post Office Investigations and, also, there was a psychiatrist available who did a psychiatric evaluation. Following the interview, then my boss in Leeds was told they felt I was suitable, subject to being able to arrange some training. There wasn't a formal training course available at that time --
Q. Can I just stop you there, just to go back to the evaluation. What did you understand the purpose of the psychiatric evaluation to be?
A. To be quite honest, I wasn't quite sure whether it was -- I don't know to decide whether I was too gung-ho to go charging into investigating people or -- I wasn't sure. It was just something that was thrown in when I was interviewed for the job. So ...
Q. Did you understand that to be common practice? Did other Investigators undergo psychiatric evaluation? 6
A. Well, my boss at that time said, "You're the nearest, would you like to do the job?" and they -- yeah, well, that was basically it. And I said okay, so I shadowed the outgoing POID officer in Scotland and --
Q. Do you remember who that was?
A. It was a man called Peter Webb. He'd formerly been a Senior Manager within POID.
Q. Did you also mentor someone, the person who had been responsible for Northern Ireland?
A. I don't know, I never met them. I don't know who they were.
Q. Do you know why those individuals weren't replaced, so why another person wasn't sent to Scotland and another person wasn't sent to Northern Ireland, rather than you being asked to take over those roles?
A. Well, I was doing the investigation role in the North East of England, I don't know what efforts were made to find somebody else to do that area, I don't know. Geographically, I was the nearest person to take it over.
Q. So is it right, then, from 2000 until your retirement in 2003, that you managed a team of four Investigators who were based in Newcastle, Glasgow, Perth and Belfast?
A. Yes.
Q. Were you still based in the North East of England
throughout that time?
A. Well, I didn't actually have an office as such. So I just used to divide my time between Newcastle and Glasgow, spending more time probably in Glasgow than I did in Newcastle.
Q. Were you ever based in Belfast throughout that time?
A. No, no. I -- well, traditionally, going back, POID did. There was only ever one officer in Belfast and so what would happen -- the Investigator was Suzanne Winter and I would fly over, probably once a month, more often if there was a need for it, which sometimes there was, but -- so Glasgow was a good base for me.
Q. So, as you've said, the manager in Belfast was Suzanne Winter, who the Inquiry heard from last Friday; that's right?
A. Yes, yes, I believe so.
Q. Then the manager based in Perth was Raymond Grant, who the Inquiry also heard from last week? Was it Raymond Grant who you managed?
A. Raymond Grant was the officer in Perth, yes.
Q. So was part of your role supervising the day-to-day conduct of investigations in Northern Ireland?
A. Well, Suzanne would do that. Basically, we were a small team and, although I had the title Team Leader, there was enough work to keep everybody active, including 9
and Scottish law to be able to advise. So it became quite a steep learning curve for Suzanne and myself to learn how to process cases to the prosecution, partly because, previously, we'd been able to deal directly with the DPP, Director of Public Prosecutions --
Q. So we'll come on to that but just back to your point about whenever you first took on the role, you didn't really have experience in Northern Ireland --
A. No.
Q. -- and you sought advice from Post Office Legal

Services?
A. Yeah.
Q. Do you remember who that was in Post Office Legal Services?
A. Well, I had a lot of dealings with Rob Wilson but I can't say for certain that it was Rob Wilson who actually said, "We can't help".
Q. Okay.
A. But I sort of remember him from my days in England.
Q. So moving, then, to the training that you received, first when you became an Investigator and then throughout your time in the role, in your statement at paragraph 11 you explain that when you first became an Investigator in 1993, there was no formal training available, and you touched on that earlier.
myself. So rather than being sort of sitting at a desk managing, I was sort of active as well. So all activities in Northern Ireland were conducted by Suzanne Winter; in Scotland, it depended. There wasn't a geographical split, so Shirley Stockdale or Raymond Grant would pick up the work, wherever it was within Scotland and, in the North East of England, the officer there, I would support him if necessary or, if I was unavailable, then somebody from the Northeast team, based in Leeds, would go and support him.
Q. So did you have any supervisory function in Northern Ireland with Ms Winter's investigations?
A. Well, I was her supervisor, as such, so any work that she undertook, we would discuss as a team, rather than leaving her out there on a limb, yeah.
Q. Before 2000, when you took responsibility for Northern Ireland, did you have any experience of conducting investigations there yourself?
A. Not in Northern Ireland or Scotland, no.
Q. When you took in the role did you appreciate the differences in how the legal systems and processes worked in Northern Ireland and Scotland?
A. Not until I moved there, no. I did speak to Post Office Legal Services for advice but the advice was they don't know -- well, they weren't fully up to speed on Irish 10
A. Yeah.
Q. Is it right, then, that your initial training was provided by the Security and Investigation Service in Croydon?
A. It was, yes. The training team in Croydon, yes.
Q. Was that team an external team or an internal team?
A. No, it was an internal team.
Q. To the best of your recollection, who provided that training? Was it Investigators or lawyers or a mixture?
A. It -- well, several of them I know were ex-POID officers, who'd changed to a training role but whether everybody was, I'm not sure.
Q. How long did that initial course last?
A. Well, it wasn't like a formal course of sort of three weeks or four weeks, it was a case of I would go down to Croydon and this week we would do interview techniques, investigation techniques, or whatever, and then another week I'd go down and it may just be going round courts to see how a court system operated, and things like that. So it was very much made up on the -- as it went along, it was made up until, eventually, they felt I had sufficient knowledge. And then I went back to Leeds with a POID officer, who was then going to be my shadow, and mentor for any work that I did.
Q. At the end of the course, was there any assessment see
whether you had reached the sufficient knowledge to proceed with --
A. There was no formal assessment as such, no.
Q. Who was the ex-POID officer, then, that mentored you when you went back up to Leeds?
A. I can't remember. It was a lady but I can't remember her name. She was based in Croydon. She travelled up from Croydon to Leeds on a weekly basis to mentor me, but I can't -- no, I can't remember her name, sorry, it was 20 odd -- 25 years ago.
Q. So your initial training pre-dated the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act, which came into force in 1996. Do you remember receiving any specific training on disclosure after that legislation came into force?
A. No, I don't, no.
Q. Do you remember at any point receiving training on disclosure?
A. We had -- after my training was complete, we had regular Security Investigation Team meetings, where most points of law and changes to the law were discussed but, no, they were held probably every -- probably every couple of months but I can't be -- you know, be specific as to how often about that.
Q. Who would have communicated the changes in the law to
managers responsible for the particular topic we were talking about.
Q. In relation to that periodic training, in your statement you say that the topics covered included audit and it says "investigator" but I think that should probably be "investigation", so audit and investigation, with Horizon afterwards in brackets you've put?
A. Well, that was -- I think it was just a one-day
familiarisation session, where they said, "This is Horizon, this is what it can do. These are the reports you can get from it", but that was it. There was no real hands on working on it, which, in hindsight, was probably a failing but that's all it was, is a one-day, this is what's coming in to replace the old pen and paper system.
Q. Do you remember when that was, was that around the time of the rollout of Horizon?
A. It must have been around about the time of the rollout, so I'd say what, about 1998/1999 but I can't be sure of the date.
Q. Can you remember who, in particular, led that one-day session?
A. No, I can't think who delivered that session, no.
Q. During that one-day session, did you receive training on how to analyse the data from the Horizon system?
you in those team meetings?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Who would that have been, sorry?
A. Sorry. Sorry?
Q. Who would the person have been in those team meetings who would have explained to you, as an Investigator, "This piece of law has now changed"?
A. Um, most of the training was headed by people from Security Investigations in Croydon, and Phil Gerrish was often active in that -- in the role of leading the meetings.
Q. You then also explain in your statement that team members would also attend periodic training, arranged by the Central Security and Investigation Team; is that right?
A. That's right, yes.
Q. Did you attend that training or was it members of your team?
A. No, usually -- usually the whole team would attend.
Q. Who delivered that training?
A. Again, it would probably be somebody from the National Security or an Investigation Team -- one of the trainers. They had a -- as far as I understand, they had a group of trainers who would come out and give that -- or it may just be Phil Gerrish or one of the 14
A. I don't think the session lasted that long. It was more a case of, "This is the kit they're going to be using in the post offices, you can get your information of it or it can go back to Horizon and ask for information", but it was very, very basic, as best that I remember.
Q. Did any of your training or the periodic training covering the conduct of investigations or prosecutions in Northern Ireland?
A. It didn't, no. Because, as I say, the two experts were Suzanne Winter and myself. We didn't know a great deal at that time.
Q. Is it right, then, that you mentored Ms Winter whenever she started conducting investigations in Northern Ireland?
A. Well, we worked together -- I think the first investigation we did I led the actual investigation. We submitted the -- we were told that we couldn't submit the papers directly to the DPP, as we were now a limited company, and we had no more clout than Marks \& Spencer or one of the big chains.

So we had to go through the PSNI, and the first case that I remember doing, we submitted the papers to the police in Londonderry, and we got a response back "That's rubbish, there's nothing I can do with those", and that was it. So we had to sort of rethink what the 16
 17
A. I can't. Suzanne Winter would have been the one because, as I say, initially I was involved; then, because of my location in Glasgow, it was easier for Suzanne to liaise with the police on a day-to-day or month-to-month basis.
Q. Do you remember when it was, roughly, in terms of the year, that that process then was developed?
A. I think it must have been probably around about 2000.

It was fairly early on in the -- in my involvement in Northern Ireland.
Q. So the Inquiry hasn't been able to find a written process dated from around that time specific to Northern Ireland. Do you remember if that process was committed to writing by Ms Winter?
A. I can't remember whether it was or not.
Q. Can you describe briefly what the process that you developed or Ms Winter led in developing involved?
A. Well, pretty much the same as we had been doing in England; it was preparing a prosecution file which included the sort of offender report, the tape transcriptions, list of evidence, list of the unused material and a disclosure listing, as well. So ...
Q. So just want to take one step become, back to the audit process before going into the investigation process in a little bit more detail. Could we please have page 6
nobody to actually talk with within the Post Office. We'd spoken to Legal Services, they said that they couldn't offer us any specific advice and so we contacted the police.

I say "we" -- initially, I was involved and then Suzanne Winter took it on and she, in fact, developed a process for submitting files to the police service, so that they could be assessed and considered for action, or non-action.
Q. So the catalyst for that was really, whenever you and Suzanne Winter submitted your first case, the feedback from the PSNI was "The quality of that's not good enough", and you then went away to develop a process that you could put in place?
A. Well, the process -- because, ultimately, the files that we were producing were very similar to the files we produced in that first instance. As I say, the police sergeant who reviewed the case wasn't willing to meet us and critique and say "Well, you know, that was rubbish because". So we took it on ourselves to speak to the police service, see what they suggested, where we had failed and how we could improve, and how they wanted everything reporting to them.
Q. So do you remember who, from the police side, assisted you in developing that process?
of Mr Thorpe's witness statement on screen, it's WITN10410100.

Page 6, please, and down to paragraph 19. So you explain at paragraph 19 that:
"Where the pattern of irregularities suggested deliberate action rather than error, then the District Audit Manager would be contacted and a special audit of the accounts of the post office under suspicion requested."

So is this a description of what would happen before a special audit?
A. Well, it depends. One of the most common problems -well, problems we had was with pension allowances, and what would happen is that they, the Paid Order Unit, Lisahally, up in Londonderry, would take an office, check all the pension allowances, if they found any discrepancies, they would report that back to us after a period of time. We would then intercept the pouches from the office locally, have them checked locally and a schedule would be produced from the results of the checks.

When it was decided that the evidence was such that it was probably deliberate action, rather than error, then we would ask for a special order to be committed, and then we would attend the office on the day of the 20
audit.
Q. Who then decided that the evidence was such that it suggested that there was deliberate action, as opposed to error?
A. Well, ultimately, it would have been myself.
Q. So in what circumstances would you consider that the evidence would suggest that there was deliberate action, rather than just error on the part of a subpostmaster or subpostmistress?
A. Well, with the regularity of the pension overclaims -We're going back sort of almost pre-Horizon, when people still had paid pension books and you had to tear a foil out, the subpostmaster retained the foil and paid the person the appropriate amount. And these pension allowance foils were accumulated in the office, adlisted and a figure put into the cash account. Now, if they were -- once they started being checked, if they were regularly missing, then you would check the office account and, if there wasn't the corresponding surplus, the question is why.

And sometimes there were large amounts and sometimes only small amounts which were possibly a keying error and, once we'd established that, we would then call an audit.

If, after doing the checks, there wasn't a pattern 21
weren't -- at that level we weren't sure who would be involved.

So we would speak to the subpostmaster in the first instance; we would explain that we would be conducting the interview under caution; we would further explain the legal rights and that, if they wanted to make arrangements to have a solicitor present, or make arrangements to have -- to interview in the solicitor's office or whatever, they could do that once the audit was completed; and we would also mention the friend option and say "lf you want to invite" -- often it was a union representative from branch office staff or Federation of SubPostmasters for the subpostmasters, but we were fairly lenient on who we allowed as a friend just in the -- just so as not to overwhelm the person being interviewed.
Q. Was it ever the case, though, that a special audit revealed that there was actually no problem with the branch and that the accounts had been balanced?
A. It could do. I can't think of a particular instance where it did but it could do, in which case we'd say, "Okay, there's no problem here, just a careless subpostmaster", and then we'd speak to the Retail Network Manager and arrange to have error notices issued to collect the monies due or repay the monies due from
developing, then we would perhaps pass it back to the Retail Network Manager as a training issue or just to speak to the subpostmaster and say ...
Q. So a few line down then on paragraph 19, you explain that:
"On initial entry [at the office] the Investigation Manager would introduce themselves and explain why the audit had been arranged."

Did you or Ms Winter attend a special audit as a matter of course?
A. Yes, special audits we would, yes.
Q. You also explain that:
"The Investigator would explain that following the audit the subpostmaster or staff from a directly managed branch office would be invited to attend a formal due under caution."
A. Yes.
Q. Were they invited to that interview before the audit had actually taken place?
A. Yes, we would have done. The reason being that we had a potential problem, which the schedule demonstrated, and so we would need to speak to the subpostmaster in the first instance because we didn't how they ran their office. Did they run it hands on? Did they run it from a distance? You know, were staff involved? So we 22
the overstating of the pension allowances that we'd found.
Q. In those situations then a formal interview under caution wouldn't be necessary; is that right?
A. We'd probably would still do that, maybe seem a bit heavy-handed but, as I say, until we spoke to the subpostmaster, we didn't know exactly how the office was managed and how many staff they had, was it a one-man band, as I say, or whether he managed the office from afar or what.
Q. Does it follow from that that, before a special audit had taken place, it that already been decided that a criminal investigation of some description would follow the audit?
A. Yes, we would speak with the Retail Network Manager, explain what evidence we had, and we would then report back to the Retail Network Manager following the audit, and it could be to say "Look, it's not the subpostmaster, there's no evidence to show that he's involved in this in any way", in which case the Retail Network Manager would take -- there's no action to take other than arrange for the error notices to be raised or it could point to the member of staff, in which case, you know, they would need to be interviewed as well.
Q. So that deals, then, with special audits. Could you
just explain briefly what the difference between a special audit and a scheduled audit is?
A. Well, a special audit, the -- would be arranged for a Thursday morning. Each branch had to prepare a weekly account -- it did then, I think it's changed since -but they had to prepare a weekly account on a Wednesday, so going in on a Thursday, you should be faced with a signed cash account representing all the cash and stock which should be in the office at that time and there should be no further business transacted between that being prepared and the audit taking place.

So it was a checking exercise, there was no sort of room for error, that should be what's there, if it isn't there, why not?

And a standard audit was -- would be when the Auditors went in, any day of the week, and completed an audit of the office on that day
Q. There was no particular reason for that audit, in terms of an error hadn't been flagged necessarily, in terms of the scheduled audit?
A. A specialist audit wouldn't be called unless there was grounds for an investigation, no. We would do that to try and establish the facts of what was happening.
Q. A scheduled audit was just done at certain periods in time, just to check in on a branch? 25
would then assess the facts and then invite the subpostmaster again. It was the first point of contact, because they were the ones who ran the operation.
Q. So your Investigation Team wouldn't be present at a scheduled audit; is that right?
A. At a scheduled audit no, no.
Q. So is it the decision of the Retail Network Manager alone to decide whether to involve your team?
A. Basically, yes, yeah.
Q. But if they decided to deal with it as a disciplinary matter, you wouldn't become involved or know about it necessarily at all?
A. There would be no need to involve ourselves, no.
Q. That statement can come down, please. Thanks.

Was that the case throughout the time you were involved in conducting criminal investigations, that the Retail Network Manager would make the decision as to whether an investigation was necessary?
A. Well, they had that right, because the outlet was managed by the Retail Line and, obviously, if they made a decision which was wrong, then they would be held to account. So it was, you know, up to them to decide on the facts what they -- how they wanted to treat the matter.
Q. When you say they would be held to account if they made 27
A. Well, the District Audit Manager would draw up an audit programme and Auditors would go out so every office was audited over a period. So the Auditors would just go out and do an audit on any day of the week, really.
Q. So if we could go over the page, then, to paragraph 20 of your witness statement, please. Can you explain that there:
"Where accounting discrepancies were identified during a scheduled audit, the first point of contact by the Auditors would usually be the respective Retail Network Manager."

When you say "usually" there, would there be exceptions to that?
A. Sorry, I missed the last part of that.
Q. So you say that the first point of contact would usually be the Retail Manager?
A. Yes.
Q. Were there exceptions when it wasn't the Retail Manager?
A. No, no. The Retail Network Managers were responsible for their outlets. So, if the audit found a discrepancy, they would speak to the Retail Network Manager who had the option just dealing with it himself, recovering the monies, whether it was operational errors or whatever. If the Retail Network Manager felt there was more to it, then he would speak to ourselves and we 26
the wrong decision, who would they be held to account by?
A. Well, each district had a Head of Retail Network, and all these Retail Network Managers reported to the Head of Retail Network, but obviously their actions had to be explained to the Head, if they were wrong.
Q. Did you have a view at the time on whether it was appropriate for the Retail Network Managers to decide if a criminal investigation was appropriate?
A. Not really. They managed the outlets so, if they decided they would deal with it, that was fine. I had no strong feelings that we should always be involved as Investigators.
Q. Then, focusing on what happened following an audit in Northern Ireland, it's correct, then, that once your team became involved, the case would be allocated to Ms Winter; is that correct?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. You explain in your statement that, as you were a small team, you've already said, you were actively involved in interviews; is that correct?
A. That's right, yes.
Q. Sometimes you were the Lead Investigator and sometimes you were Second Officer?
A. Yes.
Q. You go on to explain that the circumstances in location of the case would dictate your role. Can you just explain what you mean by that?
A. Well, sometimes it would be workload. If the Investigator for the area, say Ms Winter in Northern Ireland, had a couple of active cases she was working on, then I would take the lead and then I could do the necessary write-ups and preparation of prosecution files, if necessary, to relieve the work load from her.
Q. So in Northern Ireland you were both Lead Investigator and Second Officer on different cases; is that right?
A. Yes, yeah, could do either role, yeah.
Q. In your statement, you describe Ms Winter as a "highly trained and experienced Investigator".
A. Yes.
Q. What was your understanding of her training and experience?
A. To be quite honest, I don't think I ever went into what her training had been. My observations were just working with her, seeing the quality of her work and I had every confidence that what she was doing was good so I was quite happy with that. But what training she'd received, I may have known but I obviously can't remember.
Q. So going back to the interview process, then, is it 29
necessary in a particular case?
A. Yes, we would discuss cases on a regular basis.
Q. You explain in your statement that the Investigation Manager would liaise with other departments where necessary to request further information?
A. Yes.
Q. You explain that the most common departments were the Post Office Audit Department --
A. Yes.
Q. -- the Department for Work and Pensions --
A. Yes.
Q. -- and National Savings in Girobank; is that correct?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. You also explain, at the time of your involvement, it was not common practice to contact Horizon?
A. No, my involvement, Horizon was in its infancy. We were still operating the paper-based system, Horizon, and even a different system in the branch post offices, and we'd never been given any direct contact with Horizon and --
Q. When you say, "Horizon", do you mean Fujitsu?
A. Sorry, Fujitsu, yeah.
Q. Would you have been aware of how you could have contacted Fujitsu if you'd wanted to.
A. I don't think I was aware at that time. If we needed
correct that, up until 2001, interviews in Northern Ireland were recorded in writing by your team?
A. Notes of interview, that's right, yes.
Q. Then it was only after 2001 that they were recorded on tape?
A. Sometimes, and I can't remember where I saw the authority to do that, but, yes, we were allowed to do that.
Q. You estimate that you personally conducted in excess of 100 interviews.
A. Well, I was trying to work it out and I think probably around about the 100 mark, including all my interviews in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, yeah.
Q. Following the interview, then, would it be the case that the Investigation Manager would conduct further enquiries to follow up on the account given interview?
A. Well, yes, it's possible. As I said, our first point of contact would be the subpostmaster. Now, whatever came from that could lead out to further investigations, yes.
Q. Were you involved in liaising with Ms Winter in respect of what further enquiries were necessary in a particular case?
A. Sorry, could you repeat that?
Q. No problem. Were you involved in liaising with Ms Winter in respect of what further enquiries might be 30
to, we'd have had to probably go through National Security.
Q. Were you aware of the availability of the different types of data from Fujitsu, such as ARQ data?
A. I think at that time we would be more reliant on audit because they had the hands-on experience of dealing with Horizon and we'd say, you know, we're looking at pension allowances, can you run off some reports and get them to run off the reports, which we could then use and check any evidence or information that we had.

Ultimately, the investigators did develop a skill of interrogating the system and getting reports from Fujitsu but, in the early days, it was still in its infancy and it was a little bit vague as to what we could get and when we could get it.
Q. So at some point, did you then start to request reports from Fujitsu, which was data from the system?
A. Personally, I've never requested any. I never requested anything from Fujitsu and, up until my leaving, I don't believe anybody on the team, whether Scotland or Northern Ireland, would have requested information.
Q. Could we please have Mr Thorpe's witness statement back on screen at page 7 . While we're waiting for that to come up, was it your role, then, to review the file and then decide whether a case should be submitted for 32
prosecution advice?
A. Yes. Yes.
Q. About halfway through this paragraph, paragraph 20, you explain that, that as Team Leader you would decide:
"... whether to submit the case for prosecution advice ..."

Then you've written:
"... [comma], England [comma], Post Office Legal Services if prosecution was advised I would discuss it with my line manager."

Do you mean there that, before you submitted a case for prosecution advice, you would discuss it with your line manager in England?
A. Usually, yes. Yes.
Q. Then you go on to say:
"In Scotland and Northern Ireland cases were referred to the Procurator Fiscal who would decide on what action to take without further consultation with the Post Office Limited managers."

Should you also have included "Procurator Fiscal or the DPP in Northern Ireland"?
A. Yes, sorry, I missed that, yes.
Q. That's fine.
A. Yes. My line manager appreciated that we, unlike in England, where the Legal Services team would suggest 33
A. No, it didn't go to Legal Services, No.
Q. Did you understand what the reason for that was? Was it just because Post Office had no decision making power in relation to whether to prosecute?
A. Well, I think it was historical. When I took over, that was the process. It went straight to the deciding authority and our Legal Services were not involved and, whenever we spoke for advice, they always said, "Well, we're not really 100 per cent sure on Scottish and Irish law to give advice on that", so they were missed out of the chain of events.
Q. So that statement can come down. Thank you very much.

So, in respect of the Northern Irish cases, you were responsible for reviewing them to decide whether they should be submitted to PSNI.
A. Yes, yes.
Q. That would involve cases where you'd been the Second Officer or the Lead Investigator?
A. Yes.
Q. So, in effect, you would be reviewing cases you'd already worked on?
A. It's possible, yes. Yes.
Q. And at that point, when you were considering whether to submit a case, what test did you apply before you submitted it, or what factors did you consider?
charges, if necessary, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, we had no control over what the prosecution advice would be, whether it was to reject the case, whether it was to prosecute. And so it was agreed that we would just -once the case was completed, we would discuss it with the line manager and then he would sort of give the nod, okay, push it through to the appropriate authorities to see what their view is on the case.
Q. So is it the case that when you're reviewing the file before you've submitted it, in England you did speak to your line manager, but in Northern Ireland and Scotland you didn't?
A. Well, we would, in so much as given the bare bones of the case, what the issue was, what we'd found out as part of the investigation, and then we could submit it through to the Procurator Fiscal or the PSNI. In England we would do the same, the same discussion, but then send it down to Post Office Legal Services and, once it came back with a decision, we would then discuss that with the line manager before applying for summonses and the like to progress the case further, if that was the issue.
Q. So is it -- so it's correct, is it, that in Northern Ireland and Scotland the file didn't go off to Legal Services?

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A. Well, obviously, the evidence, the evidential trail, any admissions or denials made by the people who'd been interviewed, the completeness of the case, so just an overall sort of picture: is this a viable case to submit?
Q. At that point, did you ever decide that the case shouldn't be submitted for prosecution advice?
A. It's possible. There are times when cases have been investigated, and -- excuse me, I've got a dry throat.
Q. No problem.
A. There's been a case where cases have been investigated and the outcome hasn't been sufficiently serious to warrant a prosecution, and that's when it would have been passed back to the Retail Line for him to make a decision as to how to handle it, whether it be discipline or just issue the error notices, recover the money and just business as usual.
Q. Do you remember doing that in some of the cases you reviewed, so you decided "No, actually, we're not going to submit this, we're going to hand it back to the retail" --
A. Yes, that has happened, yes.
Q. So you've explained before, but just to make it clear, that when you initially became involved in investigations in Northern Ireland, files could be 36
submitted directly from your team to the Director of Public Prosecutions; is that correct?
A. That was my understanding but --
Q. Then following a change in 2001, cases had to be submitted to the Police Service of Northern Ireland?
A. That's right because, as the Post Office, we were sort of a corporate body, which had the authority to go straight to the DPP. Once we became Post Office Limited, we then became a limited company, albeit solely owned by the Government. But the status changed, so we then had to go the roundabout route, through the police, through the PPS and then the DPP, yes.
Q. So what would that file, initially submitted to the PSNI, contain?
A. That would contain everything.
Q. That would contain everything that your team had?
A. Everything we had, yes. It would be a complete file: the offender report, the taped transcripts, the disclosure material, witness statements; everything would be there for them to make a judgment on the merits of the case.
Q. So you also explain that PSNI would assess the evidence and consider whether the case had merit, that's how you've described it; is that correct?
A. Yes.
the PSNI to the Public Prosecution Service, which also referred to as the PPS.
A. Yes, yes.
Q. It's the Inquiry's understanding that, from 2000 to 2003, the majority of cases in Northern Ireland would have been prosecuted still by the DPP, with the PPS only having been established in 2005. Does that accord with your understanding, that it would have been the DPP, the file --
A. That sounds like error on my behalf. So --
Q. So should we understand the references in your statement to PPS to be to the DPP?
A. I think that could have been -- that's -- yeah, I understand that, but that was after my time with the Post Office, so yeah, that's an error on my behalf. Yeah.
Q. So is it the case, then, that, even after it had been submitted by the PSNI to the DPP, that Ms Winter would still be involved in assisting?
A. Yes, she, to my understanding, was involved throughout the process, to provide and assist, provide additional information to the DPP or PSNI to progress the case, yeah.
Q. Were you also involved in helping to progress the case?
A. Not directly. I would be if -- Ms Winter and I would
Q. What was your understanding of the test being applied by the PSNI to decide whether a case had merit?
A. Well, whether they felt there was dishonest involved in the case. Often they would liaise with Suzanne Winter because the cases were slightly unusual, in the fact that they involved Post Office accounting procedures. So sometimes they needed a bit of clarity, clarification, guiding them through how the process worked and showing them what evidence there was to show why we believed that an offence had taken place.
Q. Once a case had been submitted to the PSNI, who did you understand was in charge of the investigation at that point?
A. Then PSNI would be involved -- they would be in charge of the case. They'd had all the evidence they had the prosecution or the -- sorry, the file of evidence, and it would be then, they'd then take it through their system to whatever level they required to decide, yeah, we can prosecute this case or sent it back, it has no merit.
Q. So it was a PSNI investigation with the assistance of Ms Winter from Post Office?
A. Basically yes, yeah.
Q. So in your statement and in your evidence, you've referred to the prosecution file then being submitted by 38
discuss the case and see what was required, what she'd been asked to produce, could she produce it, and she would normally progress the case through without my involvement -- without my direct involvement.
Q. Do you remember the PSNI or the DPP ever requesting that further reasonable lines of inquiry were pursued by the Post Office?
A. I can't remember such a case, no.
Q. Once the case then been submitted to the DPP, whose decision was it whether to prosecute a case in Northern Ireland?
A. If the DPP said there were grounds for prosecution, the business would accept it, you know, I would say, "Well, okay, go ahead with it". I would discuss it with my line manager and explain what was happening, and that would usually go forward. The problem is the length of time it took. In England, it was fairly quick process because we had direct access to the legal advice; in Northern Ireland it took a while.
Q. So did you have any input into the decision whether the DPP was going to prosecute a case or not?
A. No. No, I didn't.
Q. What would happen if the DPP decided not to prosecute the case?
A. Then we would recover the case and discuss that with my 40
boss, and with the Retail Line Manager because, ultimately, it would be his responsibility to decide what he wanted to happen with the case, whether he still wanted to deal with it as a discipline matter or whether he just wanted to say we'll recover the monies and reinstate the subpostmaster, or whatever.
Q. Who did you then report to at the time from 2000 to 2003?
A. Well, my initial boss was a Duncan McFadyen, who wasn't an Investigator or had no investigation background and, if I was stuck with a problem with an investigation I would go to National Security Investigations for advice from them.
Q. So he was your line manager but had no experience of investigations; is that correct?
A. That's right, yeah.
Q. What was his title, his job title?
A. I've been racking my brains for weeks on that and I can't remember.
Q. Don't worry.
A. But he was in charge of the physical security side and the investigation side, and his area covered North West England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and a little bit North East England but he had no investigative background in the job.

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submitted it on to the DPP if they considered it had merits?
A. Yes.
Q. The DPP would review the case and then would decide to prosecute if appropriate; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. So then, in contrast with the scheduled audit, at the very start, you would have also had the Retail Network Manager, who would have decided whether there was going to be a criminal investigation at the start; is that right?
A. They had that option, I was going to say authority, but it's probably more of an option, to decide whether or not -- it would depend on the history of the office, you know. Offices were audited not overly frequently but frequently, and if the previous audit report and the current audit report showed there is an issue in the office, the Retail Line may decide it's a disciplinary issue, a training issue, we will deal with it and recover the monies ourselves.
Q. So do you agree, then, that the case potentially passed through quite a few hands before the decision to prosecute was made in Northern Irish cases?
A. Not every case. Some cases, where we did the special audits -- again, I keep going back to pension allowance 43
Q. So I just want to go back to summarise the people that were involved at the various stages because it'll be useful whenever we come to look at the case studies. So in respect of cases in Northern Ireland after 2001, if there was a shortfall discovered following a special audit, the case would have gone to Ms Winter in the first instance?
A. Yeah.
Q. Then you would have decided whether to submit the case to the PSNI?
A. You said a special audit?
Q. Yes.
A. A special audit would be something we'd arranged. If it was a cash shortage then scheduled audit, then that possibly would have been reported to Ms Winter; is that what -- or I misunderstood what you were asking, sorry.
Q. So following a special audit, the case would have sat with Ms Winter --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and then you would have submitted it to the PSNI?
A. Following our investigations --
Q. Yes.
A. -- and any follow-up investigations, yes, we would have done, yes.
Q. PSNI would have reviewed the case and then would have 42
fraud but that was because it was probably the most common one that we dealt with. It would be discussed with the Retail Line before we went in for a special audit, and then they would be told of the outcome and, based on the outcome, they could say "Well, it was a sub office assistant rather than a subpostmaster, it's business as usual but the subpostmaster is ultimately responsible for the shortfall".
Q. At the time, what was your view of how effective the investigation process in Northern Ireland was?
A. As effective as anywhere else.
Q. So you considered --
A. Just --
Q. Sorry.
A. As effective as in England or Scotland, except the timescale was a bit of an issue but, other than that, I think it was just as effective as anywhere else.
Q. So, in your experience, how long would it take from the interview to the decision to prosecute being made by the DPP in Northern Ireland, just as an estimate?
A. Well, we're looking at probably four years, three/four years.
Q. How did that compare with prosecutions in England or Wales?
A. Well, England and Wales, it was a case of we would do 44
the investigation, submit the file to the Legal Services, they would come back and say, "Yes, a case to answer, these are the specimen charges". Then we'd have an officer available to go to a local Magistrates Court, swear out the summonses, and then we would serve the summonses. So it was a fairly compact process.
Q. How long would you estimate that would take in England or Wales?
A. Well, it would probably be done within five or six weeks, in some cases. Other cases, it may drag out a bit longer but it was a fairly compact, self-contained system.
MS MILLAR: Sir, that would be an appropriate moment in my questions for a break, if that's a convenient moment for you.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, certainly. So 15 minutes from now takes us to where?

MS MILLAR: Just after 11.20.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine. Well, let's give ourselves
an extra minute or two and say 11.25 , all right.
MS MILLAR: Thank you very much, sir.
(11.06 am)
(A short break)
(11.25 am)

MS MILLAR: Good morning, sir, can you see and hear us? 45
processes are free from system inaccuracies or discrepancies'."

We can see that the first paragraph above that box, the Terms of Reference were agreed with the Horizon Programme Director on 15 July 1999. Did you recognise this document from before you were provided it by the Inquiry?
A. No, I can't remember seeing it at all.
Q. The Inquiry understands this document to have been written by Jeremy Folkes; do you remember him?
A. Jeremy?
Q. Folkes: F-O-L-K-E-S.
A. No, I don't recognise the name.
Q. If we just go down the name a little bit, under "Management Summary", it says, "POSIS [Post Office Security and Investigation Service] Investigations at Outlets". We can see it says:
"We were extremely concerned to be informed during the review that POSIS currently do not have access to archived data from the system. Data on the system is compressed and archived after 35 days. It was originally intended that access would be gained via the Fraud Risk Management Server, which formed parts of the Benefits Payment System and has now been withdrawn. This means the business could be in a position where it

## SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, I can.

MS MILLAR: Thank you.
Mr Thorpe, before I move on, then, to discuss the two case studies -- the case of Alan McLaughlin and the case of Maureen McKelvey -- I want to just ask you some questions about your knowledge or involvement with the Horizon system.

So in your statement you say:
"In the limited time that I was involved with Horizon I had no knowledge of any problems with the accuracy of the Horizon system."

Does that remain your position?
A. Yes, it hasn't changed. As I say, I left the Post Office beginning of 2003 and, in that period, between its rollout, it was still a very limited number of offices had Horizon, and I wasn't aware and nobody said, "We have a potential problem with the system".
Q. Could we please have the document reference WITN05970134, on screen, please.

We can see that this document has, as its title,
"Review of Horizon Cash Account System -- Stage 2", and just in the box below the introduction, it says:
"... the original TOR [which the Inquiry understands is Terms of Reference] had as its objective 'to confirm that the end-to-end reconciliation and accounting 46
is unable to investigate potential frauds or prosecute cases due to the unavailability of critical data."

Then just going on to the second line, the end of the second line, in the paragraph below:
"Les Thorpe, Investigation Manager in the North East Region ..."

Do you understand that to be a reference to you?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. "... advised us that Pathway had estimated the cost to reintroduce the Fraud Risk Management Server to be in the region of $£ 180,000$ with an additional fee of $£ 1,500$ per man day for performing extraction. These concerns were highlighted after a possible fraud at Grange Park SPSO, which is involved in the Horizon Live Trial."

Can you remember this advice that you've given or being involved in this review?
A. I can't remember this document at all and I agree that's my name, and "Investigative Manager North East Region", so I'm assuming it must have been 1999/1998, somewhere in those -- that period when it was written, but I just can't remember it at all or what enquiries I made to find out the cost of reintroducing the server or what fees would be involved thereafter. I can't remember.
Q. Do you remember having any involvement during the time of the live trial in feeding in to the audit trail or
anything to do with investigations?
A. I honestly can't. I saw this document in the bundle that I was sent and it gave me a shock when I saw my name but I can't remember anything about it at all or any involvement with Horizon -- the Horizon live trial.
Q. If we could just go down, then, to the bottom of page 3 of that document, it's under the heading "Transaction Processing". It says under that title:
"During the course of the review we were made aware of concerns that Transaction Processing had regarding the level of errors generated by Horizon outlets and the impact on operations with the rollout further outlets. This is because the level of Class and Pivot errors are well above the expected levels of 195 and 110 per week respectively."

Did you have any awareness of these errors?
A. None whatsoever, no.
Q. Then finally, if we just look at page 5, the "Conclusion" of that document, we see it says:
"There is a need to ensure that the problems relating to the audit trail or S\&IE investigations demonstrating that the system meets the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act have been impact assessed as incidents and are considered by the Acceptance and Release Authorisation Boards if not 49

I'd like to turn then, please, to your involvement in the investigation of Alan McLaughlin and, to help with your memory of the case, Alan McLaughlin was the postmaster at Brookfield Post Office in Tennent Street in Belfast, and he was prosecuted for 15 offences of false accounting, which were said to have occurred between 13 December 2000 and 26 July.

After initially contesting the charges, he pleaded guilty on 16 February 2005. He received a fine and was or interested to pay compensation and, following his conviction, he lost his business and was made bankrupt, and his convictions were quashed by the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland in 2022.

Is it correct, then, that you were the Second
Officer in Mr McLaughlin's case?
A. Yes.
Q. So l'd like to start, then, with the special audit which was arranged at Mr McLaughlin's branch. You attended that audit on 26 July 2001 with Ms Winter; is that correct?
A. I did, yes.
Q. You explain in your statement that the audit and subsequent interview had been arranged following irregularities having been identified in respect of pension allowance claims at the branch?
satisfactorily resolved. In addition, it will be necessary to consider whether the current level of cash account errors will affect the accuracy of settlement with clients, when considering the rate at which the system should rollout."

From your earlier answers, do we take it that you had no involvement in the conclusion to that report?
A. None whatsoever, and the names that are mentioned, none of the names ring a bell either.
Q. Would you agree that the conclusion appears to draw a link between cash account errors and the accuracy of the audit trail which was used in investigations?
A. It would appear from that that there was significant problems, yes.
Q. Would you have expected that to have been communicated to you?
A. I would have thought so, yes, yes.
Q. So you don't remember any follow-up work after this period, in relation to those errors or concerns that were raised?
A. None whatsoever, or any discussions regarding the suitability of the system as to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, or anything like that, I really can't remember anything at all.
Q. Thank you, that document can come down. 50
A. Yes
Q. Did you have any involvement in looking at those issues before you attended the audit?
A. Yes, Suzanne Winter and myself, we'd been through all the case papers, we'd looked -- she had collated all the information which she'd received regarding pension allowance overclaims and we discussed the matter, a schedule was prepared and we decided there was sufficient evidence to go and talk to the subpostmaster. As l'd previously said, the subpostmaster was our first and primary source of contact.
Q. So during the special audit, what was your role?
A. Nothing. Nothing at all. The special audit -- as previously mentioned, Mr McLaughlin was told special audit had been recalled because of irregularities in the cash account and we were required to speak to him after the audit was complete and he was asked to watch the audit take place, mentioned he would have the right of legal representation and/or a friend, and he chose to have his mother present as friend, which although strictly wasn't part of it but, in the interests of fairness, we said that was not a problem with the interview, and then the audit progressed.
Q. During the audit, did you conduct any searches of Mr McLaughlin's branch?

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A. No, no.
Q. Could we please have AMCL0000032 on screen, please, at page 177. This is an excerpt from Mr McLaughlin's interview, which we'll come back to in more detail in a minute, but it's right, isn't it, that you were one of the interviewing officers along with Ms Winter?
A. Yes, yeah.
Q. If we look about halfway down the page, page 177, so we see the initials "FT", do we take it that that's you speaking?
A. (No audible answer)
Q. Then you say:
"Now we also recovered from the dustbin this morning the -- to try to assist the auditors -- there's actually a listing that somebody had prepared. I'm now showing you a listing which has been stuck together with Sellotape because it had been destroyed."

So did you carry out searches of the branch at any point?
A. I suppose that constitutes a search. We didn't actually go through drawers and cupboards, and the like, but obviously we'd noticed something in the dustbin which was recovered, rather than sort of searching the property, as such, yeah.
Q. To your recollection, was that bin inside the branch or 53
Q. So that can come down for a moment. We'll go back to it, thank you very much.

So is it correct, then, that the interview was conducted later the same day as the special audit?
A. It was conducted the same day, yes, at Mr McLaughlin's premises.
Q. In your statement, you say that, having read the tape transcripts of the interview, Mr McLaughlin briefly mentioned Horizon but did not suggest or have concerns about the reliability of the Horizon system, which could have contributed to the accounting irregularities identified; does that remain your understanding of the interview?
A. Yes, he did mention Horizon and he said initially he'd had a few problems with it but then, when we started talking to him regarding the pension allowance overclaims, he didn't actually say "Oh, it's Horizon's problem". He didn't say that.
Q. So if we could go back then to that interview transcript it's AMCL0000032, starting at page 94 of the document. So we can see that, as you've said, Ms Winter and you were the interviewing officers and Mr McLaughlin was interviewed and his mother, Margaret McLaughlin, was present?
A. Yes.
was it outside the branch?
A. That -- I can't remember but I'm assuming it would have been under the counter in the branch, in the secure area of the Post Office.
Q. So it's your evidence, is it, that you didn't actually formally search the branch but you did search the bin inside the branch?
A. Well, we didn't formally search the premises but we -but I suppose from that, it would appear we searched the dustbins. I can't remember actually doing it. In fact, when I think about it, I think it actually wasn't myself or Ms Winter who found it, I believe it was one of the Auditors who actually found it. I can't remember which one. I think they mention in their statement that they actually found that in the bin and brought it to our attention.
Q. So what you said in that little excerpt of the interview, you said, "we also recovered from the dustbin this morning the -- to try to assist the Auditors". So you agree that it sounds like it wasn't one of the auditors; it was either you or Ms Winter who recovered that?
A. Well, perhaps we did recover it. I honestly can't remember, you know, it was sort of 23 years ago. You know, it's difficult.

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Q. I'd like to take you then to page 152 of the transcript. About a third of the way down that page, we see your initials again, and you say:
"Your balancing is quite exceptionally good."
Do you see that --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- just highlighted there? You then go on to say:
"Ian [which I think must be Alan] must be all credit to you to the systems in the way you operating but when I look through them going back to the beginning of the, of the financial year ..."

You go on to say:
"... there's ups and downs because there's nothing, I don't usually want to go above $£ 50$."

Then, towards the bottom of that page, you say:
"But things that have been declared and you know ..."

Then if we look over to the top of the next page you say:
"... £13 surplus, £9 surplus, £25 short."
You then go on to say:
"It's exceptionally good except ...
"... this."
So were you then looking through Mr McLaughlin's accounts at this point and commenting that, in general, 56
they were of good quality, except for this issue with the pension and allowance claims; is that your reading of that transcript?
A. Yes.
Q. Do you agree with that, yes?
A. Yes.
Q. Going then, please, to page 154. At this stage of the interview Ms Winter was putting to Mr McLaughlin apparent discrepancies relating to pension payments shown by two documents, and that was the computer adlist and the weekly summary sheet, which I think you've referred to earlier in your evidence?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. About a third of the way down, we can see you're referring to the summary and also the actual adlists. Is your understanding that those are two automated documents produced by the Horizon system, the adlist and the weekly summary?
A. The adlisting can be produced by the Horizon system, yes, the idea being that, as you transact a document, it goes into the memory of the system and then, at the end of the week, it produced a -- or you can produce a snapshot at any time and print off the list of vouchers that should be contained within the bundle, yes, yeah.
Q. If we go over to the top of the next page, then, you then ask:
"When did you go onto Horizon?"
He says:
"In September of '99 and it wasn't stable, the balance were not stable at all."

In your statement, you've described that you think
Mr McLaughlin was one of the first branches to move under Horizon; is that correct?
A. Sorry?
Q. In your statement you said that you thought

Mr McLaughlin was one of the first branches to move --
A. Yes, it was rolled -- I believe it was rolled out sometime in July 1999, so Mr McLaughlin would have been one of the first offices, yeah.
Q. Then just a little bit further down, you say:
"But that's 2 years ago."
Then you say:
"Yeah, well, you could control by now not then."
So was what you were saying there that that seemed to be a problem two years ago but didn't explain the problem now; was that your view?
A. Yes, yeah.
Q. So going on, then, to page 166. If we see beside the tape counter time 29.18, Ms Winter says:
Q. Is the same of the weekly summary, that's a document produced by the computer system?
A. And -- so, yes, so what would happen is the -- if the pension allowance had been run off on a daily basis, which it would have been on a busy office, then they would be collated so, at the end of the week, just a gross figure would be showing in the cash account for pension allowances paid, yes.
Q. At the bottom, then, of page 154 , please. We see Ms Winter says:
"And what made it interesting was that you always seem to be balancing."

Then Mr McLaughlin further down says:
"Yeah, it would start, we got dreadful problems starting [because] of the problems with the Capture system and the change over to Horizon, things were very see-saw, very up and down you know."

He then at the bottom of the page says:
"It wasn't stable at all ..."
So do you understand that to be him raising issues with the Horizon system when his branch first moved over?
A. Well, yeah, the Capture was the earlier system and it transferred to Horizon but that was one of the few limited mentions that he had of the Horizon system. 58
"It should, it doesn't explain how for last night for instance there's 3 amounts were then put through the system."

Mr McLaughlin says:
"Again it's person time tying to get the balance on, trying to get it you know done by a certain time in a way. [Because] when I was first here you know and they were all over the place, we were 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock at night, yeah."

So do you agree that at that point he's talking about having further problems getting his balancing correct?
A. Well, it would appear so but whether that was the result of the Horizon system or Mr McLaughlin's operating system, I don't know. But, yes, it would appear that it was the system or some problems.
Q. Do you agree that one possible explanation for the problems could have been the system?
A. One possible explanation could be the Horizon, yeah.
Q. Then at page 169, please. So this second comment from you on that page is:
"Right okay. So you've had some big shortages. You become ..."

Mr McLaughlin, three lines down agrees with you and he says:

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"Big, big shortages yep."You go on to say:"And for that reason with a little bit ofmanipulation here to (inaudible) the surpluses to makegood the shortages."
So was your view at that point that the onlyexplanation for the shortages was that Mr McLaughlin hadbeen manipulating the figures?
A. Well, what Mr McLaughlin was doing wouldn't have created shortages; it would have created surpluses. So what he seems to be saying here is that he was having some shortage with the Horizon system, and -- well, that's one explanation, the Horizon system -- and he was taking it upon himself correct those shortages by manipulating the pension allowance payments that the office was making.
On this, he does say he was having shortages but, at one point during the interview, he also said he had a member of staff who was dishonest and she was dismissed. Shortly after, his balancing did improve, so that was another explanation, not always the Horizon system.
Q. He then goes on to say, at the bottom of that page there, on the screen:
"You think oh fine, that's balancing and all the
that your understanding?
A. That's what he suggested that he was doing. He was making the accounts balance so they looked acceptable, and that was one occasion where he'd made the -adjusted it by $£ 660$, yeah.
Q. Then going to page 196, please. So the second line of that page, we see that the allegation of false accounting is put to Mr McLaughlin:
"So that is a false account which is for you to submit this to the Post Office?
"Answer: Hmm.
"Question: Is actually a criminal offence. And ...
"Answer: ... sorry.
"Question: No, no, it's an, an, this pattern as you'd said has been going on regularly since perhaps January-February of the current year when ...
"Answer: Yeah. In ... when I found out that, you know, what er procedure (inaudible) what the postmasters were actually doing wasn't, because obviously we've had (sighs) wildly variation erm cash accounts for a period but whenever I found out that what they would do would be, they would take the money, hold it, put it in, or keep it aside as according to what indication they were getting of where their cash account was going. I mean that is what in my unclear way erm it's always been well

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rest of it, but stores up, a bit stupid really it stores up problems and you know it's not accurate accounting."

Do you agree that there he is suggesting that it's the system that isn't accurately accounting, rather than him?
A. I took that to be that his accounting wasn't accurate, because of what he was doing, manipulating the cash-on-hand figures and overstating the pension allowances that had been paid, not necessarily attributable to the Horizon system.
Q. Would you agree that it's not necessarily clear, though, on that account there, that he's talking about his own accurate accounting, it could be that he's talking about the computer system?
A. Okay, it's not 100 per cent clear but, as I say, that would have been my understanding at the time.
Q. If we could go on, then, to page 181, please. We see a question from you which is:
"Which was the figure we just carried in your cash account. So why did you adjust it by $£ 660$ ?
"Answer: Obviously to make the cash account show a reasonable balance. If that was the amount over that must have been the adjustment."

So, at that stage, Mr McLaughlin accepts adjusting the figures but that's to make the accounts balance; is 62
this is the practice that everyone's doing so it must be what you do to establish a continuum of (inaudible) acceptable accounts."

So, in summary, do you understand that what Mr McLaughlin was saying was that there are other people with variations in their account and this was how he understood other people were trying to accurately balance their accounts?
A. That's what he's saying. Whether it's based on fact or wishful thinking, I don't know.
Q. Was that something that, taking it at face value, you would have wanted to look at further, if, in fact, other people were having the same problems as him?
A. Well, there were no specific allegations there, just other subpostmasters. It could have been a subpostmaster in Northern Ireland or nationally, or whatever. At one point, Mr McLaughlin employed on a part-time basis the former subpostmaster. So whether they had been talking and the other subpostmaster, from his experience, was saying "Everybody's doing it, get over it", I don't know where that came from. But certainly, from our experience, you know, it's not a wild -- not a widely operated system of fiddling the cash account to make it look good.
Q. Do you mean: in your experience, that isn't what other 64
subpostmasters and mistresses were doing?
A. It's possible. It's difficult to generalise but, ultimately, if a subpostmaster doing that, the likelihood is they're going to be caught out when the office is audited. If they're doing what Mr McLaughlin was doing, by inflating the value of paid pension allowances, then, I think subpostmasters realised that the sheer volume of pension allowance vouchers collated or collected any week there was no way anybody could, actually, or any organisation could physically count every one. So I think there was a belief that it's a bit -- you know, if you try it on like that, then you may get away with it, you may not.
Q. So my question wasn't so much were other people also inflating the figures but whether you were concerned that other people seemed to be saying they were having wild variations in their accounts. Would that have been something that would concern you as an Investigator?
A. That would concern me. What is the problem is that, if they were doing the same as Mr McLaughlin, they were disguising the fact, so nobody would actually know, unless they said to the Retail Network Manager "I'm having problems", that there was a problem in the office. By falsifying the cash on hand or inflating the paid pension allowances to make an acceptable balance,

## falsifying your accounts?

"Answer: Not -- I wouldn't have set out to do that in that form, or, with that intention or plan, but ... as it were that by allowing this kind of pattern to go on the, the, the final accounting probably would not be completely accurate."

Do you accept that Mr McLaughlin is denying criminality? He's saying that it wasn't the case that at the start he was intending to inflate his figures, he was doing it to balance his accounts?
A. Yeah, I accept, on the points to prove for this, he's not accepting dishonesty. But what he was doing was still wrong and so, obviously, others had to decide whether there was a criminal intent in what he was doing.
Q. In terms of points to prove, did you ever consider or give any thought to whether there was an actual loss at this branch?
A. There was an actual loss which was shown in the -- well, there was a loss, because of the value of the pension allowances overclaimed, which was round about $£ 10,000$, I believe, without checking the schedules. So there was a loss to the Post Office in that respect.
Q. Was there evidence of that loss on the weekly summary in the adlists that we talked about?

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it's not showing a true account but it's also not highlighting the problem there is an issue in the office, with the balancing or with the Horizon system.
Q. Would you agree that as an Investigator, you would have had the obligation to look to see whether there are actually problems with the balancing and the figures in the branch?
A. Well, as I say, we did actually look at the cash accounts for the office but, because they were being manipulated, it was difficult to actually identify when -- or when the errors occurred or what the value of the errors were because of what Mr McLaughlin was doing.
Q. Okay. Thank you. If we can move, then, on to page 202, and the second line down, Ms Winter says:
"And you were aware that this was a criminal offence because it was falsifying accounts?
"Answer: I wasn't that -- I never thought about it or erm put it in those terms at all. No I wasn't -- as aware of that, I weren't as aware of that ...
"Question: You were aware that it was wrong to do that?
"Answer: I was aware that erm what I thought was if not unaccepted but a common practice to keep reasonable accounts ...
"Question: So you were aware that you were 66
A. It was a combination of all of the adlists which had been submitting, which had been checked either by Lisahally or by Ms Winter, after the Lisahally had reported a number of discrepancies in the office.
Q. I think you accepted earlier that those two documents, the adlist and the weekly summary, were documents produced by the Horizon system?
A. Yes, yes, yes. They were, yeah.
Q. So did you ever give any thought to the fact that there could be errors in the system that were generating a loss, which wasn't actually there?
A. Well, they weren't generating losses, they were generating discrepancies.
Q. Or a discrepancy, I beg your pardon.
A. So I know the Horizon system -- sorry, going onwards -has shown that a lot of offices were finding lots of losses but what Mr McLaughlin was doing, or what was coming through on the Horizon printouts from his office, was -- would have generated a surplus, not a shortage.
Q. So, in any event, it was a discrepancy in his accounts?
A. It would be a discrepancy but in his favour.
Q. But did you ever consider that that was caused by an error in the system, rather than Mr McLaughlin?
A. Well, no, because we were dealing with physical documents. This was going back in the day. Now, it's 68
all electronic but, back in the day, when you tore a foil out of a pension book, kept that in your office as your record and paid your client however much was due. So there should be a voucher in each adlist to support the figure in the adlist. If there was a voucher missing, then where was it, basically? And if it was happening once or twice, there may be an error.
Q. But the adlist itself was a computer generated document?
A. The adlist would be computer generated but controlled by the operator.
Q. Okay. So is it still the case, then, that you think that potential errors with the system were only mentioned briefly by Mr McLaughlin or do you accept that he did, on numerous occasions, report potential problems?
A. He mentions them in passing. He doesn't mention -- the difficulty, is, substantiating what he's saying by comparing it with the respective cash accounts because these was manipulating the figures in the cash account. If he'd been showing true accounts, then it would have given more scope for an investigation to be carried out, but because he was changing the figures, it was more difficult to actually go back and find out what he'd been -- what the real state of the account was.
Q. But do you agree that it still was your role, as the 69
involvement was, other than the interview.
Q. Can you remember requesting that Ms Winter pursue any lines of inquiry following the interview?
A. No, I don't think I did. No, I'm sure I didn't.
Q. So you've mentioned that the PSNI hadn't progressed this case prior to your leaving the Post Office in January 2003. Do we take it from that that, at some point prior to that, you must have submitted the case to the PSNI?
A. I can't remember when the case was submitted to the PSNI. It would be fairly timely, I would suggest, but I can't say that it was, you know, the end of 2001, the beginning of 2002; I can't remember.
Q. Can you remember what stage the case was left, whenever you left the Post Office, in January 2003?
A. I can't -- I can't be certain. I would suggest it would be well progressed, if not ready for submission to the PSNI, but I can't be certain.
Q. Moving on, then, please from that to your involvement in the case of Maureen McKelvey. Again, to --
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Before you do that, sorry -- before you do that, let me just get Mr Thorpe's view about the likelihood of where the case was when he left.

This interview under caution was July 2001 and you left in early 2003. I mean, from your -- even if you can't remember this specific case, from your dealings
A. I don't have a recollection of exactly what my 70
with cases in Northern Ireland, would you think it likely that you hadn't submitted the case to the PSNI over a period of 18 months?
A. I feel certain, sir, that the case would have been submitted to the PSNI before I left but, as I say, I can't actually categorically say, yes, it was within six months or within six weeks. I can't remember.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, in relation to English cases, you said that it was quite common for them to be processed quickly. My impression from what you've been saying earlier was that you -- from your perspective, namely the Post Office, you would reasonably quickly decide whether or not to present a case to the PSNI, and the delays occurred thereafter. Now, you seem to be suggesting that it could have taken many months for the Post Office to decide whether or not to present a case to the PSNI. I would just like to get a flavour of all of this, if I could.
A. No, I believe, sir, that the delays were once the case was submitted to the PSNI, rather than within the Post Office. Once the case was completed -- the interview was completed, witness statements, all evidence gathered, the case would then have been presented to the PSNI for them to progress it. So, as I say, I can't but a timescale on it, but it would be reasonably quickly.

| SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. Thank you. | 1 |
| :--- | :--- |
| Yes, sorry, Ms Millar. | 2 |
| MS MILLAR: Thank you very much, sir. | 3 |
| Moving on, then, please, to your involvement in the | 4 |
| case of Maureen McKelvey. So Mrs McKelvey cell was the | 5 |
| subpostmistress at Clanabogan Post Office in Omagh and | 6 |
| she was prosecuted for the theft of $£ 4,623.48$, which was | 7 |
| alleged to have occurred between -- | 8 |
| $\quad$ I beg your pardon, she was prosecuted for the theft | 9 |
| of in the region of $£ 4,600$ and she was tried and found | 10 |
| not guilty on 16 September 2004 but, nonetheless, she | 11 |
| lost her business and was made bankrupt. | 12 |
| $\quad$ Is it correct that, similarly to the case of | 13 |
| Mr McLaughlin, you were the Second Officer in this case | 14 |
| and Ms Winter was the Lead Investigator again? | 15 |
| A. Yes. | 16 |
| Q. Also, similarly to Mr McLaughlin's case, a special audit | 17 |
| had been arranged following a number of irregularities | 18 |
| in the pension and allowance claims? | 19 |
| A.Exactly, yes. | 20 |
| Q. Again, you attended the audits on 4 April 2002 with | 21 |
| Ms Winter and members of the Audit Team. | 22 |
| A. (No audible answer) | 23 |
| Q. Later that day, is it right that you and Ms Winter | 24 |
| interviewed Ms McKelvey? |  | 73

and I know if it's a mistake made, I know I have made it and just a simple mistake and it will all sort itself out the following week but that's the way I do to the best of my ability and I don't do anything wrong as far as I can see."

Do you agree when that Mrs McKelvey was explaining that she had trouble balancing her accounts but, in her experience, it usually worked itself out?
A. Yes, yeah. I think what she's also referring to is that the fact that she's running, because it's a rural office, she's bending the rules a little bit and allowing people to come in at all times, and she has this Camphill Community which she runs a post office account for outside of the Post Office. And I think what she's saying is there that she can have errors occurring with the Camphill Community office and with people coming in at odd times of the day but it's likely that, if she'd made a mistake this week, it could correct itself next week when she brings everything to account that she's transacted late on the Wednesday, yeah.
Q. Going, please, then, to page 76 of this document. If we go -- sorry, thank you very much.

So if we just look towards the bottom of the screen, Ms Winter says:
A. We did in the presence of her solicitor, yes.
Q. Could we have the interview transcript on screen, please. It's PNI00000001_062, and it's page 50 of that document.

Thank you. So we can see the date of the interview, you're present with Ms Winter and Mrs McKelvey, and then Stephen Atherton was her solicitor; is that correct?
A. Yes.
Q. Going then to page 54 of that document, please. If we look, then, to Ms Winter's question which is:
"How do you go about preparing everything for your cash account?
"Answer: On the Wednesday?
"Question: Yes."
Mrs McKelvey then gives an account, I'm not going to read all of it but, starting at the end of line 5 , she says:
"You try to audit and do everything, you know put everything out to go through it at different stages on the computer and bring it all to a balance now it doesn't always balance first time as we all know ... but some weeks if I'm out, the next week it usually balances itself out, you know, it's neither big amounts here or there. I know it will balance itself out and I'm happy enough with that [because] I'm the one who's doing it 74
"Just before the completion of the interview I just want to confirm a conversation that I had with Mrs McKelvey this morning where Mrs McKelvey you produced a bundle of 12 paid pension and allowance foils with an adlist paperclipped around them and the date on the adlist was 4 May 2001 timed at 17.52 and it was cash account period 07 and you stated to me that you'd found the bundle of fills last week in an envelope under the counter in the post office, is that correct?"
"Answer: Yes."
Then, if we could go to just about two-thirds of the way down the page, at the bottom of the screen we see you say:
"We can have with us (paper rustling) the foils to be checked to date. Would you like to examine those foils again, that's with the tape recorder off whilst you do that, if you would like to examine them in any way.
"Answer: No."
Going down the page then, please, you say:
"To see if there's anything on there that you can suggest there has been a problem.
"Answer: Are these foils wrong you're saying, these ones from ..."

Ms Winter says:
"from this schedule.""Answer: No, that's okay, no they're okay."Just skipping to the bottom line she says:
"If it's there, it's there like, I can't, you're
saying it's on paper, that's it."
So do you understand that Mrs McKelvey is accepting
that she wouldn't find fault with the hard copy
documents, in terms of the foils themselves?
A. Sorry, I'm not quite sure what you're asking.
Q. So you have presented the foils to her and you've asked
her "Do you want to check these to see if you can find
a problem with them?" and she seems to be saying, "No,
those are all fine, the foils themselves are fine, I'm
not going to find any issue with them". Would you agree
with that?
A. Yes, yeah -- that she doesn't feel there's anything
wrong with the foils on that particular bundle, yeah.
Q. Ms Winter at the bottom of that page then asks:
"Have you anything else you'd like to say
Mrs McKelvey before we conclude the interview?"
If we look over the page, Mrs McKelvey says:
"Yes I do believe I did everything to the best of my
ability, I've been doing it for 11 years and I done it
right, if there's been an error on the computer?? I've
just done that, I didn't mean to do it, that's all I can
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A. Perhaps, yes, it should have been explored slightly further on that particular instance, yeah.
Q. This interview was taking place less than a year after you interviewed Mr McLaughlin. Did you appreciate that there were any similarities between those two cases, Mr McLaughlin and Mrs McKelvey's case?
A. Not really. Pension allowance manipulation was quite a common inquiry that we had to deal with and the surpluses generated could have been to do with satisfying losses on the Horizon system but often subpostmasters would use the means of financing their private business and this sort of thing. I'm not suggesting that in either case that was the issue here. But there was no real suggestion that Horizon was in any way at fault in this because, again, if Horizon was generating these errors then it would have been surpluses in the account, rather than shortages in the account.
Q. Do you accept, though, that, even if it was a surplus, that would have still been an error?
A. Oh, yeah --
Q. It wouldn't have reflected a true account?
A. -- it still would have been an error --
Q. So there could have been a system problem?
A. (The witness nodded)

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say."
Do you agree then that she raised that there might be an error with the computer at that point?
A. Well, it's sort of speculative, isn't it, if there's been an error on the computer? I know earlier in the interview she did say that she liked the new computer system and she felt proud of herself in the way she was coping with it.
Q. But, at this point, you say it was speculative but she did raise it in her answer to Ms Winter at that point, as a potential issue?
A. Well, she's suggesting there could have been error on the computer but only a suggestion, really.
Q. We can see then, the next questions from yourself and Ms Winter, that there were no follow-up questions in relation to there being a potential error on the computer. Is there a reason why neither of you probed that suggestion that there was an error on the computer?
A. Sorry, I'm not sure what we're looking at.
Q. So we're just looking at Mrs McKelvey had made the suggestion that, if there had been an error on the computer, she says with a question mark after it; would that have been something you would have thought "I should ask further to understand what she means by that?" or do you think you -78
Q. In both of these cases, both postmaster and subpostmistress had described problems balancing, in both cases in relation to pensions and allowances, and also mentioned the possibility of there being computer errors; did you draw any link between the two cases at the time?
A. At the time, no, no.
Q. You told us that Mr McLaughlin's case hadn't been progressed by the time you left the Post Office so, at the time of Mrs McKelvey's interview, the investigation into Mr McLaughlin's case would have still been ongoing?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Similarly to Mr McLaughlin's case, did you liaise with Ms Winter about this case following the interview?
A. Liaise with Ms Winter regarding the?
Q. The investigation in Mrs McKelvey's case?
A. I would have liaised with her, yes, but we did feel, in Mrs McKelvey's case, that there was possible confusion because of the way she was manipulating -- not manipulating -- the way she was operating the Downhill Community (sic) because there was large sums of money involved in that, because you're paying pension allowance out and things like that. That was a possible source of the -- to generate losses but then it didn't account for the fact that there was systematic pension 80
allowances being claimed systematically, which hadn't been paid -- which had been shown as being paid but hadn't been -- no documents were there to support the payment.
Q. So is it the case, then, that you considered that part of it might have been down to Mrs McKelvey's error, innocent error, but then it left things unexplained that you considered were -- merited a criminal prosecution?
A. In hindsight, it possibly is, as we talked about earlier on, a borderline case where the subpostmaster could be referred back to the Retail Network Manager for them to say "We think it's an error, therefore we're going to deal with it on a disciplinary matter -- disciplinary form". However, the strength of the evidence shown on the schedules which Ms Winter prepared showed that this was happening week after week, after week, after week, which suggests that it wasn't error; it was more a deliberate action, and we never got to the bottom of why it was occurring.
Q. So, firstly, do you accept that she could, if uncorrected, just have been making the same error, again and again, not realising that she was making an error?
A. She could have been. But the amounts varied week on week and, if it was the same error, as I say, that should be shown in the cash account as surpluses, which 81

## me.

Q. Was there any kind of handover process between the two of you, where you explained "These are my cases, here's the case Mr McLaughlin and Mrs McKelvey"?
A. Well, at the time of the handover, I had no active cases, so I spoke to Mr Pardoe and, obviously, introduced the team and explained how we worked. So it wasn't an in-depth handover because each of the Investigators would be able to sort of talk him through what they did, how they did it, what the reporting procedure was, and the like, because Mr Pardoe had come from England where, obviously, the reporting system was different.
Q. So when you say, though, that you retired and you had no live cases, Mr McLaughlin and Mrs McKelvey's cases were still live at the point where you left?
A. Sorry, yes, yeah, I -- yeah, it's the same mistake I made in my witness statement, yeah. I was active, insomuch as I had made a witness statement in both the McKelvey and the McLaughlin cases but, unless I was called, I wouldn't have had any more input into the case than that.
Q. In terms of them handing over to Mr Pardoe, do you remember talking him through either case and saying, "This needs to be done, this is where we are with it"?
A. It was a gentleman called Dave Pardoe, he took over from 82
A. I can't remember doing that, no.
Q. So lastly, then, with the benefit of hindsight, do you have any reflections in respect of the way in which criminal investigations were conducted specifically in Northern Ireland?
A. I don't think so. I think the cases were investigated to the best of our ability and to the best of our knowledge regarding the Horizon system at that time. Things have progressed since then, so, obviously, as things have progressed, things will have changed in the way investigations were carried out but, on these particular investigations, it was early days within the rollout of Horizon, we were operating three systems, there was Horizon, the pen and paper system and the branch offices had a different system again. So it was learning as we went along, in that respect. But I believe we did what was necessary and the outcomes were what we would have expected, really.
MS MILLAR: Thank you very much for your assistance, Mr Thorpe. I don't have any further questions for you.

Sir, do you have any questions before I check whether there are any from Core Participants?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, thank you, no.
MS MILLAR: Mr Jacobs, thank you, sir.

## Questioned by MR JACOBS

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MR JACOBS: Thank you, Mr Thorpe. I act for Mrs McKelvey.
I have a few questions for you.
You were taken by Ms Millar to Mrs McKelvey's
interview, in which she said, to the best of her
ability, she'd been doing her job for 11 years and there
may have been an error on the computer, and you
acknowledged that should have been explored further; is
that right?
A. Sorry, um --
Q. In your evidence just now, you acknowledged that
Mrs McKelvey's raising the computer system matter at
interview should have been explored further?
A. She only mentioned it very briefly. Earlier on she said
how satisfied she was with the system and how she felt
she was coping with operating the system. I think she
said, "at my age", which is I disregarded saying but
I don't think there's much more we could have done to
interrogate the system.
Q. I'm just referring you to the answer you gave at 12.15
today, you said that you now think this should have been
explored further.
A. Had we had the means to do that, yes, yes.
Q. You left in January 2003; is that right?
A. That's right, yes.
Q. Your name was on the investigation report?
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Mrs McKelvey said she'd had problems balancing and she'd raised the possibility of computer errors?
A. I feel sure that would have been discussed between

Suzanne Winter and the PSNI. I certainly wasn't privy to any discussions regarding that. Perhaps, in hindsight, it was an issue which could have been raised and could have been recorded in writing but I think it was a minor issue regarding what had actually gone on in the office.
Q. Well, isn't this something that should have gone into the investigation report to assist PSNI to decide what to do with the case?
A. Yes, I accept the point, yeah.
Q. You also said at 10.50 this morning in your evidence that you never requested evidence from Fujitsu and you don't believe anybody in the Scottish team or the Northern Ireland team requested information, certainly while you were there; is that right?
A. From Fujitsu?
Q. Mm .
A. Yeah, no, we never did.
Q. If a subpostmaster or subpostmistress had raised an issue with the computer system, why didn't you think it was appropriate to investigate that with Fujitsu, given that you had a duty to undertake reasonable lines
A. Yes.
Q. Did you see that report?
A. I think I did but I can't remember it. It's not in the bundle and I can't remember --
Q. Right, perhaps we can have that on screen, then. It is POL00000001_082 [Inquiry note: please note the correct URN is PNI00000001_082]. Ms Winter was taken to this on Friday. I don't know if you followed that hearing. So if we go to page 4 of the pdf, please, and scrolling down to the bottom, please, of that page, I think we can see there you're named as Les Thorpe --
A. Yes.
Q. -- and you're the Investigation Team Leader --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and the report is submitted in December 2002, so that's a month before you left; is that right?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. So now, if we can go to page 7 of the pdf. If we scroll down, please, to the last line there. So what we can see here is:
"McKelvey could or would not offer a reason for the discrepancies and stated she had done everything to the best of her ability."

Do you accept that, in your investigation report with Ms Winter, you didn't raise the fact with PSNI that 86
of inquiry?
A. Well, in the two cases we've looked at, we were dealing with physical documents, not computer generated information, as is the case now, where everything is on the computer. Then we were dealing with physical documents which were missing. It didn't seem to be an issue with the computer system because, if it was an issue with the computer system, that would have been reflected in the balance recorded by the office on a weekly basis, and that wasn't the case in either McKelvey or McLaughlin cases.
Q. If we could move on, then, going to the next page of the investigation report. What is said on the last page, if you could scroll down, please, the third paragraph from the bottom there:
"The discrepancies summarised on the pension schedule indicate it is due to deliberate action and not error and McKelvey is the only person with the appropriate access and opportunity."

Now, do you remember that an issue came up in the interview for week 32, which was in October 2001, the work had been done with a red pen in a different way to how Mrs McKelvey would normally have done it?
A. Mrs McKelvey did say during the interview she was the soul operator in the post office, with the exception 88
that when her daughter came back from university, I believe the daughter would occasionally help in the post office. But I can't remember the particular --
Q. Maybe we could then just very quickly go to that interview transcript. If we could go to PNIOO00000_062 [Inquiry note: please note the correct URN is PNIO0000001_062], and it's at page 86 of 304 in the pdfs.

So if we could get up to 12.46, please. If we could scroll down. I think it's two pages on from there, 197, if that helps. So we've got Ms Winter saying:
"... I'm showing you copies of updated pension schedule dated 21 May ... for Clanabogan ..."

She goes on to say:
"My interest why anybody had covered for you, if we just go to the final page of the summary, it's just summarising the discrepancies that I discovered when checking the weeks right through from week 26 to week 53 and what I had said on week 32 just halfway down the page, I've indicated it was prepared differently to other weeks compared to the way, week 32 was week ending 31 October 2001 ..."

## Mrs McKelvey says:

"I wouldn't have been on leave I don't think."
She's not sure and Ms Winter says:
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to the office and he had gone through everything for that week's cash account, hence the red ticks. Quite what he found, I think it was $£ 101$ surplus -- shortage in the account.
Q. Did you consider that you should have contacted Mr Groogan to say, "In week 32, did you do the balance at a time when Mrs McKelvey wasn't present at the branch?"
A. I don't think that's said. He'd actually prepared the balance or hadn't she -- hadn't Mrs McKelvey had a problem with the balance and contacted the Retail Network Manager for assistance, to try and find the source of the loss? But we would have spoken with Mr Groogan.
Q. There's no evidence that Mr Groogan was ever contacted and asked, "Were you present without the subpostmistress in week 32 and did you undertake this balance?" There's no evidence of that at all.
A. Okay, well, I feel certain -- I can't remember doing it, personally, but I feel certain that a conversation would have taken place with Mr Groogan, whether it was evidenced in writing -- as you're saying, it isn't. So I can't be sure what they said -- exactly went on.
Q. Do you accept that this is a point that potentially points away from the guilt of Mrs McKelvey and should 91
"It just seems strange."
Mrs McKelvey says:
"Prepared differently from other weeks, red tick on list."

There's a conversation about whether it was Hallowe'en, at the bottom there and, if we scroll over two pages down, at 17.17, and we can see she says:
"Would that have been the week we had the errors that I got Garry out?"

Then she says:
"Yeah there was a week, I remember I said $£ 500$ was it short or over?"
"Question: That particular week, week 32, your office was showing $£ 101$ of a loss in your cash account.
"Answer: That seems like Garry or someone has checked all the bundles or something. There was a week that, so hard to remember ..."

So what we have here is we have a suggestion that one of the transactions that was later said to have amounted to an act of theft could have been undertaken by Garry Groogan, who was the Area Manager; do you recall that?
A. Well, reading that, obviously Mrs McKelvey had had a problem balancing and she had contacted the Retail Network Manager for advice and assistance. He had come 90
have been investigated?
A. I wouldn't like to accept that it points away from Mrs McKelvey. It just shows that she was asking for additional help or she wanted somebody else to prepare a balance, which was $£ 101$ short, either Mrs McKelvey prepared that balance or would the pension allowances had been manipulated to cover that $£ 101$ ?
Q. You're aware that Mrs McKelvey was acquitted by a jury after you left, of course?
A. She was. Yes, I saw it was a majority verdict, yes.
Q. This is a point that should have been raised in the investigation report, isn't it, this point about Mr Groogan --
A. Okay, I accept that it's another factor which should have been recorded but, at the time, it probably didn't seem overly relevant. That's all I can assume.
Q. Isn't that really something for PSNI to decide, not for you?
A. Yes, it would have been, yeah.

MR JACOBS: I haven't got any further questions. Thank you.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Any other questions?
MS MILLAR: Thank you, sir. There's no further questions in the room.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right.
MS MILLAR: Oh no, sorry, I beg your pardon. Ms Page. 92

A. The way it's been worded there, yes, obviously there 93

MS MILLAR: It does, sir, and we're back again tomorrow for the evidence of Kevin Shiels at 10.00.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right, so we'll adjourn until then. Thank you.
MS MILLAR: Thank you.
(12.42 pm)
(The hearing adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)
were concerns at that time.
Q. Can you help us with who would have been responsible for trying to get to the bottom of these concerns and what needed to happen as a result?
A. Well, I didn't recognise any of the names on the report, so I can only imagine it would have been controlled by the Security Investigation Team nationally, rather than just localised, possibly picking on local outlets to sort of create case studies.
Q. So is that Tony Marsh, at this time?
A. At that time, it wouldn't have been. I would think it possibly would have been Phil Gerrish. Tony Marsh, I think, took over after Phil Gerrish but, over time, I can't remember exactly when people were moved in and out of post.
MS PAGE: All right. Thank you very much, those are my only questions.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you.
MS MILLAR: Thank you, sir.
Apologies, that was my oversight. Those are all the questions in the room.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, thank you, Mr Thorpe, for coming to give evidence to the Inquiry and making a statement in advance. I'm grateful to you.

So that concludes today's business, does it, 94

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