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Friday, 4 March 2022 1 1 just do some quick introductions about what we're 2 (10.00 am) 2 going to do and then we will get started. 3 3 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: As the three of you will obviously As you know I'm an independent facilitator and 4 know, I am chairing this Inquiry and we have actually 4 my role here is to give you the chance to tell your 5 been working now for the better part of 16 months, so 5 stories, to listen to what you have to say and, 6 6 we have a considerable amount of knowledge about effectively, be Sir Wyn's representative in the 7 relevant matters but we can never learn enough and so 7 meeting. 8 that is why these sessions have been thought up and 8 Sir Wyn, in this instance might ask some 9 9 I have sanctioned them. And I'm very, very grateful questions as well, either during or at the end of the 10 to the three of you for being prepared to come along 10 session, as he hears what you have to say and it's 11 in this forum and discuss matters which sometimes, no 11 important that you know that when, at the end of all 12 doubt, will be personal and sometimes, no doubt, will 12 of this process because we've got these running 13 not be very pleasant. But I'm very grateful for you 13 through March, Sir Wyn will be taking this away into 14 for doing it and I'm really looking forward to what 14 the next stage of his Inquiry. So while it's great to 15 you have to say. 15 hear your stories now it's also -- they are of value 16 Just so that the public at large knows, members 16 for him in the future as well. So it is important you 17 of the secretariat are also linked into this session 17 know that. 18 as is some IT support should the IT, which is allowing 18 As you have already gathered it's a fairly 19 this to happen, develop some glitches but of course we 19 relaxed session. Now, you may have seen or may not 20 20 have seen some of that public inquiry hearings that 21 21 Sir Wyn's been hosting. This is very different in the So thank you very much again and I'll now ask 22 Mr Norris to get the session going in the formal sense 22 sense that you will all be talking to each other, you 23 of the word. 23 will be able to hear each other's experiences and to 24 24 Over to you, Mr Norris. share and compare. FACILITATOR: Thank you, Sir Wyn, that is great. I'll 25 25 My only rule really is don't all talk at once

because this will all be transcribed later and it's hard for the transcription to hear you know when people talk over each other.

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Now, also you may have heard lots of other people's experiences, other subpostmasters, but this all about your stories, so this is your chance and you have got the right to share those stories so please, as far as possible, restrict yourself to your own experiences and to what it is that you have been through.

We have two hours, and part of my role is to keep to time so it might be that occasionally I will move you on or ask Sir Wyn if he wants more detail on that but that's -- my YouTube feed has just started. I beg your pardon. So that's -- but please don't think I'm being rude or not listening to you. It's just we do have a lot to get through and we want each of you to have enough time to talk.

That said, please share as much as you are comfortable sharing and if you do feel the need to step outside, as you know, we have a counsellor on hand should you want to do that and you can do that separately from the rest of us, and that's absolutely fine. So if anything is triggered that you perhaps get emotional about that's totally fine. You know,

that's in the nature of these conversations and we understand that.

> That's it really, just be honest be -- you know, share what you want to. Okay.

So the first thing I'd like you to do is just to very briefly introduce yourself and your context and just a little bit about yourself so that Sir Wyn has a feel for your situation as it stands today.

I would like to start, perhaps, Mike, with you if that's okay just to give a little bit of background to vourself.

Mike, you're muted, sorry. If you just unmute yourself, sorry. If you go to the bottom left of your screen -- that's it.

15 MIKE BALL: Can you hear me?

16 FACILITATOR: Yes, perfect. Thank you.

17 MIKE BALL: I was born and brought up in Eastbourne.

18 I joined the Air Force when I left school. I did 19 about 23/24 years in the Air Force. When I left the 20 Air Force I bought a post office. I retired just 21

about a year and a half ago.

22 FACILITATOR: Right, thank you, and you were at that same 23 Post Office throughout that time, were you, same 24 branch?

25 MIKE BALL: Well, yes. It was my Post Office.

FACILITATOR: You didn't move around, because some people we have spoken to have taken -- right, lovely, thank you. Okay, that's great. Thank you very much. Rebecca, do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself. REBECCA WHATLEY: I started the Post Office in 2003 with buying a little community office in South Wales and so for 18 years as postmistress. I sold last year and since then I have been worked back in another Post Office branch so I've stayed with Post Office for, you know, to the last 19 years and so, yes, I've been in it from the very beginning, if you like, with all of this. FACILITATOR: Okay. Thank you. So what capacity are you working in other Post Offices now then? **REBECCA WHATLEY:** Sorry? **FACILITATOR:** What capacity are you working in the other Post Offices now. REBECCA WHATLEY: Well, as I keep saying to everyone I'm not the boss but I am the most experienced person so I'm trying to train everyone else up to work the Post Office, because obviously when these Post Offices open up as a local model within a shop, you don't generally have any staff, any trained staff, to go with. So that's where I stepped in and so it's my job

to teach the boss how to do Post Office. FACILITATOR: Right, okay, thank you Rebecca. Finally, Idu, do you want to give us a little background about yourself, so Sir Wyn knows a little bit about you. IDU MIAH: I worked as an accountant with a firm of chartered accountants in the City Centre of Manchester for 16 years and back in 2002 I acquired this branch. This is in Mossley -- Mossley, Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester. FACILITATOR: Mm-hm. IDU MIAH: I still am working as a postmaster there and I enjoyed it, being a subpostmaster, being part and parcel of the community. **FACILITATOR:** Excuse me, Idu, can I ask you to speak a tiny bit louder so that -- thank you. We did catch all that I think but -- so again you have been in Mossley for some time then you were saying. IDU MIAH: Always lived in Mossley. We're of Bangladeshi origin but I think when my father and my uncle came back in early '60s and then my Mum and I joined in '74. So I was fairly young, you know, in a way I don't know any different. FACILITATOR: Yes. IDU MIAH: Mossley's been the town all my life (unclear).

going to go through the next couple of hours I'm going to ask you a little bit about that process of becoming a postmaster, then we'll move on to the some of your experience of running a branch and then we want to talk about working with Post Office Limited, how all that went through the years, and then obviously the impact that all of these events have had on you in various parts of your life. So that's the kind of the structure of where we'll go. But I am keen to be led by you and, you know, for you to, you know, sort of take control of where we go.

So if we perhaps go back right to the beginning I just wonder if you could sort of describe to me some of your feelings and expectations when you first sort of opened that office and made that decision to buy or, you know, take over the Post Office.

Just any of you tell me a little bit about that, your feelings then.

REBECCA WHATLEY: Well, it was an interesting process.

I mean, I don't know if anyone knows how these things work but you know nothing about Post Office and you suddenly have to go for -- do a business plan and go for a big interview and you're buying a business and it's got a Post Office in it but you're told that you have to be approved and you might buy the business but

you won't necessarily have the Post Offices.

FACILITATOR: Okay, thank you. So the way that we're

So that's an interesting scenario that is unusual, which is what you keep getting told. And the weird thing is when you do go through all this and you do finally get approved so it's very nerve-racking to actually enter Post Office, the Post Office world, when you know nothing about it and you go through this approval process, up until the very last minute. And then when you do have it and you go through all those hoops that are put in front of you, it's -- you are classed as an agent and so when you go to your accountant when you buy a business and they say, "Well, I don't quite know -- you're a grey area".

So the whole -- so Post Office is no -- I suppose it's not clear-cut and I don't think it ever has been. I don't think it ever will be because of the diverse nature of it but as a person going into it I think this is where we came from, you know, you feel very much unique, in a different position that you don't know who to go to for advice and where you can get the correct advice to help you in what you do. And that's from the very beginning.

I don't know if things have -- I mean, I am talking 19 years ago. I don't know if processes and things have changed but, you know, it's certainly

a unique situation and, as I said, the fact that we're always classed as agents, we're not technically employed, we're not technically self-employed. We're a mixed sort of in between and I think that does breed that sort of instability of your security of your --of what you do and I think that's the -- you know that was just my personal -- I would be interested to see what other people have to say on this. FACILITATOR: Right, thank you, Rebecca. So now does that compare, Mike, with what you experienced at the outset and your feelings? MIKE BALL: Slightly differently. I started somewhat earlier. I gave them in notice at the Air Force, with the Air Force, because peace had broken out and I couldn't see myself going any further but I had to give a year's notice and when I came out the jobs that were available when I handed my notice in had gone. I came back to Eastbourne where we bought a house and I was looking around for a job and the local postmaster had been caught fiddling and was banned from entering his Post Office and had to sell it, so I applied for the job. FACILITATOR: Mm-hm. MIKE BALL: I went through the same interview process, had to do a business plan. I had a fair amount of cash

because I'd done a pensionable engagement and was able to take that from the Air Force. I passed the interview and it was established that they'd leave trainer in there for a short period.

While all this was going on, I went to my local

Crown Office and was allowed to stand behind people and watch transactions. That was a brilliant process because it taught me in a very short time virtually everything, every experience, every time they got a different transaction, I'd sit behind somebody else and learn about all the process.

**FACILITATOR:** Whose idea was that, to do that, to visit the Crown Office, Mike.

MIKE BALL: It was my idea. I put it to the Post Office
 and they spoke to the manager and he was in full
 agreement. He just allowed me to come.

17 FACILITATOR: Okay, right.18 MIKE BALL: Very, very useful.

**SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Which year was this, Mr Ball? Can you

20 remember?21 **MIKE BALL:** 1991.

22 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you.

23 FACILITATOR: Thanks. So, Idu, when you started out what

24 were your sort of experiences and expectations of

25 starting up?

IDU MIAH: Yes. As I mentioned before, I'd worked in the accountants' practice for 16 years as a project manager/auditor and doing that nationally, and what happens is after -- depends on an individual basis, if you've been there for 14/15 years (unclear) that particular sector otherwise you get a burn out. So I was looking for something in Mossley.

Many friends encouraged me to set up an accountancy practice and I thought it might not be all that fruitful because you have to get the client service here so -- but this branch, the subpostmaster knew me as a young boy and, you know, so I've grown up in that community and you go into that branch fairly regularly and it's great. There's a (unclear) there.

And all of a sudden, probably in 2000 he said, "You are going to buy this branch, aren't you (unclear)?

"Really?"

He said, "Yes, Idu, you are" because it's that kind of relationship with him, brilliant, and I said, "Ooh, right, well, if you help me", but -- so you know my position of being in that accountancy sort of position, coming out of there wanted to do something in Mossley, I thought (unclear). And so I think this thing in progress, I met him once or twice more which

took it further, contacted the Post Office, regional manager in some form of other, trying to sort recruiting subpostmistresses.

I was interviewed and I think interview was all right, and then I was asked to prepare accounts and so I did that as well and then it went quiet, nothing was happening. You know, it was about a year, about a year, when they came back to me and they said, "We would like you to prepare these accounts again, because you have to prepare a year's accounts and everything, your business plan", and all that.

So I had an interview initially. Then they called me to go to another interview. By this time, it was about 15 months (unclear). So I was interviewed again and then eventually it did go through. We agreed the terms of purchasing the building and then there was a bit of goodwill (unclear).

It went through but, you know, in 2002. I was in there (unclear) expectation was great because the impression is in the community you know someone who is a subpostmaster, you know, this person is respected and when you go and purchase something in the Post Office branch it's a reliable product and what

have you, that sort of thing, and people friends and 12

FACILITATOR: Okay. Can I move on to the others, if you 1 you know people from the community encouraged me to 1 2 2 want. What were expectations of how, kind of, that get in there as well. 3 3 So that was it, you know. I was excited. The process would work, of being managed, monitored, 4 first week, went through a lot of training by the way 4 supported and so on. 5 but it was a different thing. 5 Mike, what were your thoughts at that early 6 6 **FACILITATOR:** Okay, we will come on to that in a moment, stage. 7 7 about what happened next. Just picking up on MIKE BALL: I was prepared for anything that came along. 8 something that Rebecca touched on around the 8 I was -- I did find it very hard during the first 9 9 relationship between yourselves and the Post Office year. I don't know exactly what the percentage was. 10 Limited, I just wondered what were your expectations 10 I think it might have been 50 per cent but the 11 about how you would be monitored and managed and 11 Post Office actually kept 50 per cent of your wages 12 supported and trained? What impression did you all 12 for a year to buy the franchise. So I was doing 13 have at that point about what would happen in the 13 things like gardening on a Wednesday afternoon, on 14 future. 14 a Sunday, and stuff like that for people to make ends 15 IDU MIAH: I think the -- I thought you would be supported 15 meet. Had I not had a military pension I'd have given 16 to a reasonable extend but I found, I certainly found 16 up. 17 the sort of gap -- experienced a gap between myself 17 The support from the trainers for the first I think it was a week or two was very good but after 18 and Post Office, the Post Office management. For many 18 19 years I didn't have a regional manager, a Post Office 19 that there was virtually no backup. 20 manager anyway, but that's later on, but I think to 20 FACILITATOR: Right, okay. 21 start with it was you've got a phone call from time to 21 Rebecca, what was your impression of ...? 22 22 REBECCA WHATLEY: It was the same. I mean, the initial time and initially gone through some training but it 23 wasn't -- it was bit more of like a dictatorial 23 hand over of the office, "Here is your trainer". Had approach, "You will do this. You will do that", that 24 24 a trainer for two weeks, which was excellent. I mean, 25 sort of thing. 25 obviously the issues, especially when you're in 13 1 a community office and it's not a big mains office, 1 2 you don't get all of the transactions every single 2 at it, I thought, "Well, this is great. I'll do 3

day, and there's lots of things you won't even touch on. So there's a limit to how much training, apart from your daily bog standard transactions that you can actually get through. But, yes, that initial two weeks brilliant.

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The fear of being left on your own: very real. That whole I mean, obviously, back then we were still doing pension books. We had a lot of paperwork to do, and to do correctly.

Yes, you do feel very much alone because once that trainer leaves all you have is the help desk and I think all of us have been very clear on our feelings of how helpful the help desk actually was back then, and the fact that we had no-one to talk to direct. We just had to speak to a help desk, hope that someone could help us, and if they couldn't we were of our own.

FACILITATOR: Okay. Now, just before we move on to working and running the branch, Idu used the word "excited" as he was about to set out on this journey. In a word or phrase, how would you sum up how you felt about your work, yourself, and your expectations then?

REBECCA WHATLEY: What me and the Post Office? Yes, 15

I knew. I'd never done it before and the way I looked 3 something different". I know how to deal with people. 4 I've been in the hospitality industry from a very 5 young age and so it was being part of a community and 6 having a life where you're -- you know, people sort 7 of, you know, sort of look to you as if, you know, you 8 can help them. And it's like Idu said, you don't go 9 into Post Office to make a million. You go in for, 10 you know, looking for your own self and looking after 11 people and being part of a community. It's not 12 a millionaire way.

FACILITATOR: Okay, yes. 13 14

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Mike, finally, how were you sum up your feelings when you were starting out in a word or phrase?

16 MIKE BALL: It was very hard. I mean, back in the day there were no computers or anything. You had to do 18 everything manually. I used to work regularly on 19 balance day every week until midnight or beyond just 20 balancing the books.

21 FACILITATOR: Yes.

MIKE BALL: All the pension dockets, et cetera, et cetera, 22 23 et cetera.

24 FACILITATOR: Okay.

25 MR WHITTAM: It was -- I mean, I did enjoy working with

1 1 the public. That was the good side. Post Office, not because we provide a service that others necessarily 2 2 can't, and it's -- we don't -- the time that it takes, 3 3 FACILITATOR: Right, okay. Let's keep on that theme then it's a lot of time. We don't get paid for every 4 of running the branch. Working with the public. 4 minute of every hour we're there. We have a lot -- we 5 What else did you enjoy about that role, 5 do a lot of extra. 6 6 throughout the time that you have been involved, not You don't see when we pop over the road to check 7 just the beginning, what have you liked about running 7 on a customer that hasn't been in. You don't see all 8 8 the extras that we take on board, and that's not paid 9 REBECCA WHATLEY: It's different. Every day is totally 9 for, and there's a huge gap between, you know, pay, 10 different. You know, you can never say one day is the 10 expectations, and what we deliver and what we have to 11 same as the next, yes. You will see the same people 11 deal with that goes on in the background. 12 but it's -- you know, I do like to learn and if you 12 So, yeah, as I said, it's an interesting mix and 13 want to know the ins and outs of how everything 13 you learn a lot along the way. 14 works -- you know, Post Office, they're -- I would 14 **FACILITATOR:** Right, thank you. So how does that match, 15 15 never say it's boring because there's always something Idu, with the things you have liked about running the 16 you can learn and -- if you want to. That's 16 branch over the years? 17 blindingly apparent by lots -- when you visit others. 17 IDU MIAH: Yeah, I think I certainly didn't expect to earn 18 It is what you want to get out of it. 18 a great deal of money. That was like -- it was in the 19 But, yes, I think it's a personal thing. 19 past. I knew that. But the biggest thing for me was 20 I think some people are better suited to it than 20 that it was working for and with the community. 21 others and it does depend on your disposition and 21 That's what I did. That's what it is. 22 where you place your values, and if you place your 22 It's simple term, nice, you know, easily said 23 values within people and services, that's what you're 23 but it's a massive package there. You know, many 24 24 doing. You are providing a service and I think that's branches are like that obviously throughout the 25 why we will tend to disagree between ourselves and POL 25 country but I like to think this particular branch I'm

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involved with it's a community office. It's part and parcel of the community. People don't just walk past the branch, there are a lot who will not, you know, just walk past and not, you know, they will not, you know, sort of just go past they will either come in or push the door and say hello or wave and what have you, that sort of thing.

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But, you know, throughout the day, every single day, people come in to talk to you as well as maybe (unclear) conversation, connecting up with us, I had a small team and myself when I'm there, in terms of one-to-one. That's the biggest reward, the biggest satisfaction I got and I get, this being with the community all the time.

You know, right from the beginning that is how it's been but it's taught me a great, great lesson this. This Covid period, my God, we have lived it through, you know, through this period, lived their life, my life, friends', customers' life experience, which is why I listen. And you have to listen and I don't mean that's in a negative way. You have to listen because we -- out only motive it comes out sometimes, you know, sometimes it comes out quite quicker because then, you know, there's a serious situation one is involved with, maybe with others it

takes time, something has to prompt it, but my God 2 we've gone through, we lived through all this?

> Thank God. We have had the problem, we had the Covid situation. In fact, I haven't but my staff have (unclear) have had Covid but I've managed to keep the branch open throughout and normal hours, thank God.

You know, apart from providing the Post Office, you know, regular service it's about being there. It's about sharing. It's about, you know -- and even my personal own circumstances, you share that as well, don't you, whether it's sort of a very difficult situation. Now we enjoy talking to people and that's how it is. That's how it is. It's not about earning money.

Sometimes I end up giving people, in an informal way, advice totally outside the remit of the Post Office services.

18 FACILITATOR: Yes.

19 IDU MIAH: You have to be careful, obviously, you have to 20 be professional about it but that's what you do when 21 you're part and parcel of the community. In that 22 wider area, if I don't know someone by name I will 23 know them by appearance.

24 REBECCA WHATLEY: Yes.

25 IDU MIAH: It's that sort of close contact and close

community. To be honest, on many occasions I think this is the wider family. This is the wider family. That's how close you are. People, sometime when they talk about their personal family sort of situation they break down and so you open the door and you come out and you hug them.

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You know, on many occasions what we're doing, I keep a box of Celebrations or sweets or something -children, my God they're absolutely (unclear). They come in. On one side of my office, on one wall, I've got these toys, children's toys. The three things I specialise in, I like to think, toys, gifts and greeting cards. When children come in they go wow, and they know what they want, you know, and so they talk to me, talk to their parents, and then the parents talk to me about what they want. You join in a conversation and you give them chockies and what have you, so it's a brilliant connection with the community.

FACILITATOR: Thank you, yes. It sounds like you have a lot in common in that sense of your role then, that things at rewarding and enjoyable.

So, Mike, I wonder if you could move on to some of the things about running a branch that you like less. You know the harder things that you mentioned.

1 Do you want to just expand a bit more on that for us. 2 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Norris, before Mr Ball does that 3 there's just one detail I want to make clear. I take 4 it from what you've said, Mr Miah and Ms Whatley, that 5 Horizon was in the branch when you first bought it. 6 REBECCA WHATLEY: Yes. 7 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Is that correct?

8 REBECCA WHATLEY: That is. 9

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Whereas that wouldn't have been the 10 case with you, Mr Ball, in 1991 so I would like you to 11 tell me just a little bit about how the transition to

Horizon took place in your branch, if you would.

12 13 MIKE BALL: Okay. Yes, when I bought the Post Office and 14 started to run it, there was nothing at all and I was 15 working -- as things got busier, I was working longer 16 and longer hours so I bought a private computer system 17 that dealt with the Post Office. It was approved by 18 the Post Office, but half-heartedly. But it was more 19 basic but similar to Horizon, and I ran that for 20 several years until Horizon came in. At first Horizon 21 was quite good but I mean, over the years I have had 22 sums of money go missing.

23 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, before we get to that, I'm sure 24 Mr Norris will deal with that with you, if you could just tell me your view about how, if at all, you were 25

1 given appropriate training when Horizon was introduced 2 and things like that right at the beginning.

MIKE BALL: It was a very short period. They came and installed it and a trainer came in for a couple of days.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine, okay.

MIKE BALL: It was all staff we dealt with and it was, as I said, similar to the system that I bought to speed things up.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. Sorry, Mr Norris. Back to you again but I just wanted to get those details.

**FACILITATOR:** You don't have to apologise.

Right, so to Rebecca and Idu, just to pick up on some of these themes around what you've not liked or what had been difficult, do you want to just build on some of the things that Mike was saying there and tell us some of your less positive experiences.

IDU MIAH: Well, as it's been said already, I'd received plenty of training as well at the beginning, the first fortnight (unclear).

21 FACILITATOR: That was training in general administration 22 of the Post Office, was it?

IDU MIAH: That's right and also how to manage Horizon in that situation. The first week was fine. I stood

behind the two ladies I'd inherited that worked there

1 for quite some time before I got in. I actually 2 watched the first week and then --

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FACILITATOR: Sorry, can you just speak -- do you mind just speaking up a little. Your voice fades occasionally.

IDU MIAH: So I watched my staff doing the transaction as they worked and then the trainer wanted me to carry on working as well so I did that as well. The first week went well, you know, that's how it went, and the second week.

Towards the end of the second week I think the trainer had left by Wednesday or Thursday, finished, and I think on a -- I can't remember, on a Thursday or a Friday there was a bit of a difficulty at the end of the day in the balance. It was out by £1,400, and the two mature ladies, I'd known them for years, you know, and they were spending a lot of time, we were in there after, you know, we closed the office. We went through everything. We didn't know what it was.

We just -- and I got fed up eventually. Even that first incident I got fed up. I said, "Look, leave it". I knew the balancing was coming up (unclear) and then it was declared. It was balanced centrally. So we declared and declared centrally. That means I didn't pay it then. Then I didn't make

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REBECCA WHATLEY: Yeah, I mean, as you say I think, yes, 1 good, so you have that opportunity to pay up later on. 1 2 So that was that. That was the first one. 2 if you have a background and you have some experience 3 3 FACILITATOR: So how would you sum up, just briefly, how well prepared you felt at the end of that first 4 4 5 training phase? How well prepared did you feel to run 5 6 6 that branch? 7 IDU MIAH: That really hit me because I thought there's 7 8 plenty of training, I understood a lot, not that I was 8 9 9 sort of -- obviously, you know, in terms of facts and 10 figures, you know, that's what I do, that's my 10 11 profession, and I didn't think there was anything that 11 12 12 complicated anywhere and the two ladies were massively 13 experienced in these things. One of them had 13 14 a post office branch in Danesly(?), in Hyde, which is 14 15 15 where the other branch is, but then she had -- she did 16 say other things which sort of indicated that there 16 17 were -- she had experienced problems in her branch 17 18 18 with the Horizon System. 19 FACILITATOR: So was this right at the beginning in the 19 20 first sort of fortnight or very early period? Right, 20 21 21 okay, thank you. 22 So move on to you, Rebecca, briefly then how 22 23 well prepared did you feel in terms of running the 23 24 24 accounts, running Horizon, the financial side, when 25 you were setting up? 25 25

in accounting, then you know definitely you feel happier doing that. If that's not your background then it's going to be a real struggle. Yes, you are prepared to a degree but then you have to remember that within Post Office we have a weekly balance and a monthly balance and of course back then we had a lot more paperwork to get through. So it's all good and well having two weeks of training but actually when you come up to that first monthly balance it's a big thing and like, you know, they used to keep the help desk telephone line open specifically on a Wednesday night for us to -- because they knew that was when we would have issues. The problem is you're on hold for at least half-an-hour or more and you'll carry on and you're tearing your hair The stress -- it's very stressful and I don't think that is appreciated. (a) It's stressful when you have an issue and it's in branch. (b) It's stressful when you have an issue and you're balancing. You know, it's -- when you have only got a help desk to ring, you know, you can't get all the answers when you want them. Sometimes you don't the answers at all

and you're just told, "Look, you know, if it's not there, you have got to put it in. It's, you know, if it's a loss in the office you have got to make good".

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FACILITATOR: Can I just ask you then, we'll come on to the helpline in a moment. You say it's a big thing was how you described it when you're preparing to do that.

Obviously, Sir Wyn and I have never run a post office branch. Can you just sort of describe to us how that feels, that sort of -- internally, how that feels when you're about to do that balancing and end of the periods and so on.

REBECCA WHATLEY: Well, you know, if you run a tight office so you balance every day, you do your cash declaration and every day you do it correctly and it's going okay then, you know, come to the monthly there shouldn't be any nasty surprises. Nothing should be a huge -- there shouldn't be any issues.

But you always, always have -- when you have to pull everything out the safe and count everything you're always on the look out for some anomaly and when you have done it all and you're like, "Oh, this is great. No, this is really good. I'm feeling good about this", and then suddenly you print your balance snapshot and it's no, there's an issue, you are then

thrown into turmoil because you're like where am I going to start looking for this?

> Obviously, you know, we now have training on everything. We didn't have backup training on anything back then. We were lucky if we had the occasional training meeting that was put together, some by POL, most of the time by the Federation, and I would attend every single one of those because we didn't have anything else.

10 11 from Horizon, is it? Your (unclear: multiple 12

13 14 we balance. That shows up any gains, losses, any 15 anomalies within stamps.

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Obviously, you had your own IT system that you'd introduced. So when you came to that transition into Horizon, how well prepared did you feel in those early days of running Horizon? I know you'd been to the Crown Office and so on, but just tell us a little bit about how your experiences were?

FACILITATOR: Your balance snapshot, that's your printout REBECCA WHATLEY: Yes, we do the balance snapshots before FACILITATOR: Thank you, right. So come to you, Mike, for a sec then. MIKE BALL: Well, initially, it was quite good but there were niggling things that would happen, just like the (7) Pages 25 - 28

appens every week, you think oh God you just have to keep putting it in. So you were putting it in and the others allar sorts of things. How well did Il prepared did you feel to sort of a that sort of came up? How did you u had to put it in or what your options w, in those very early days of Horizon	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	FACILITATOR: Okay. So let's take yourselves back to when you first started spotting discrepancies and shortfalls, aside from the theft, obviously, to all of you, how well did you supported did you feel from Post Office Limited in terms of resolving those issues?  REBECCA WHATLEY: No support. You were up, you were down,
So you were putting it in and the others nilar sorts of things. How well did Il prepared did you feel to sort of that sort of came up? How did you u had to put it in or what your options	4 5 6 7 8	shortfalls, aside from the theft, obviously, to all of you, how well did you supported did you feel from Post Office Limited in terms of resolving those issues?
ailar sorts of things. How well did Il prepared did you feel to sort of that sort of came up? How did you u had to put it in or what your options	5 6 7 8	you, how well did you supported did you feel from Post Office Limited in terms of resolving those issues?
Il prepared did you feel to sort of that sort of came up? How did you u had to put it in or what your options	6 7 8	Post Office Limited in terms of resolving those issues?
that sort of came up? How did you u had to put it in or what your options	7 8	issues?
u had to put it in or what your options	8	
		REBECCA WHATLEY: No support. You were up, you were down,
w, in those very early days of Horizon	9	
	_	you were on your own. You know, they don't know how
	10	to look for it; we don't know how to look for it.
In't just give up. I spent a lot of time	11	That was the you know, "It's your office. If it's
sactions, going over the figures again	12	not there, it's not there. You must have done
couldn't occasionally, I'd find	13	something". There's only certain back then they
recover the money but when you didn't,	14	certainly didn't delve into the historic transaction
can't go beyond 1.00 in the morning or	15	side of things. I know they do now but back then they
ou have just got to give it up and put	16	didn't. It's just a case of, "No, you're on your
	17	own".
low soon into your experience of Horizon	18	FACILITATOR: For you personally, Rebecca, how frequently
crepancies arising, Mike?	19	were those discrepancies arising?
t was fairly early. I have to say,	20	REBECCA WHATLEY: Luckily I didn't have any my issue
ht two members of staff in the early	21	was never clouded by staff because I was a single
and it's impossible to know whether some	22	position office so just me. So it was for me, as
were theft Obviously Last rid of	23	I said, I feel guilty, if you like, as opposed to
word their. Obviously, right hid of	24	others. Mine certainly didn't run into tens of
ent that I actually caught them but it's	25	thousands but, yes, over 18 years if you add it all up
Э	nd it's impossible to know whether some were theft. Obviously, I got rid of	nd it's impossible to know whether some  22 were theft. Obviously, I got rid of 23 ent that I actually caught them but it's 24 know whether the problem was with 25

 You know, they don't know how know how to look for it. now, "It's your office. If it's e. You must have done only certain -- back then they into the historic transaction v they do now but back then they of, "No, you're on your personally, Rebecca, how frequently cies arising? Luckily I didn't have any -- my issue y staff because I was a single me. So it was -- for me, as ou like, as opposed to y didn't run into tens of over 18 years if you add it all up 1 2 rarely would you ever balance bang on. That would --

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you are talking thousands because the little amounts and it's silly things like you can be a £100 loss on one night and £100 gain the following morning and you can't -- you're looking at it, there's no reason, so you put it in but then it's showing it's over. And there is no reason for it. You have gone through everything. There was always just little anomalies that couldn't be explained and you always blame yourself.

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And it's only when something then comes out you go, "Oh, I thought it was just me", and it's only now that it comes out that actually we look back and go, "Oh, so it wasn't just me then". These things I couldn't explain. These things I couldn't tell you why they've happened. I couldn't, you know, go back myself and do the digging in the computer system because I didn't know anything about it. I don't know where to start looking, do I? It's up for them for the forensic team to go through all that. We don't

So, yeah, you're talking little losses but you put them in and, yeah, if you add them up they do add

FACILITATOR: How many of your balancing and trading periods would be affected by a discrepancy?

REBECCA WHATLEY: There's always been discrepancies. Very 3 (unclear: multiple speakers). 4 FACILITATOR: How often were you personally settling them 5

with cash of cheque or however? **REBECCA WHATLEY:** Yes, you would -- I mean, there was never a weekly balance that went by that balanced bang on, so your monthly balance would be, that would have been the big one and you would be like, "Right, okay,

fingers crossed now, this is going to be okay", and you know as I said I feel lucky in the fact that mine you're only ever talking sort of hundreds of pounds. You're not talking thousands of pounds. But it's still your money that you have to put in and there's no way for you to prove any other way.

FACILITATOR: Thank you.

17 Idu, how does this compare with your sort of 18 early experiences of Horizon and how you would react 19 and so on.

IDU MIAH: Just a few words on the balancing issues. Weekly balancing, which you know are called BPs, we did them just to make sure everything was running, you know, at a reasonable level or if there was a problem then it would highlight, the weekly balances, but even on weekly balances I regularly found £200 or £300

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1 shortage. 2 Now, in terms of managing staff and who they 3 were I had no problem because these two ladies, well 4 known in the community, and they have been in 5 business, they are trusted and what have you, and they 6 were there before me. So -- plus you are taught as a subpostmaster as to how to control your money, the 7 8 counters, each counter. So there are controls you can 9 use to put controls in place and so, you know, it 10 makes sure every night is balanced, so there are those 11 procedures. So that's fine. 12 But nevertheless, you know, every month, once or 13 twice a month, you'd come across £200, £300 or £400 14 shortage. There's no reason. And you always thought, 15 I always thought, "Oh my God (unclear) mistake. Have 16 I done something?" 17 It really gets you thinking in a negative way 18 19 20 21 22

and it shouldn't be like that. Many times I thought, "Have I been too tired? Have I done something?" That is so bad. That is so bad, and I've managed, you know, millions and millions of pounds in terms of figures for businesses for about 16 years. If something didn't balance, even out by a penny, I would know exactly how to get it balanced.

But in my little business there you think,

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"What's happening here? There's no explanation, there's nothing". There's something called the Excel spreadsheet I use say for stock, for example, for stamps, say 1p stamp. I can go back several months and I can say that month I declared so much, so when the system comes up and saying there's a sort of shortage of so many hundreds in cash or stock you go back to my records and I check line by line my entries to see if there were significant or material differences: no.

And this is what really got to me -- and monthly balances, by the way, were a nightmare because the system, the whole Horizon System network, is a terrible, weak system, because the helpline, they got -- it got clogged up. You could be waiting for an hour or so and then -- and then, yeah, this was going to sound negative, and then the answers you got or the answer you got at the other end, from the person answering the phone, you know, it's just not appropriate, not really helpful.

And then if you were unlucky to have to ring again, the second time you got a different answer.

REBECCA WHATLEY: That was a classic.

IDU MIAH: That's the kind of situation we've been faced with. Monthly balances were always a nightmare and

1 then you can guarantee that every time it was going to 2 be short. 3

FACILITATOR: Just briefly, just interested, how much sort of time do you all think you had to dedicate each week or each balancing period to sort it out. Just give me a sort of number of hours you thought you were spending to -- (unclear: multiple speakers).

IDU MIAH: In our house, you know, in the morning I wake up, washing and brushing up, but before that you turn the tap on water. How much water you spend there is no limit. You just spend -- sometimes if there was a mirror here, in front of me over there, me looking at the mirror, "Have I got something on my face", but the tap is running, you don't care. And this is the -- and I'm using that analogy for time. There's absolutely no limit on the length of time I have spent in my office.

**FACILITATOR:** Right, okay.

So, Mike, you are hearing these memories of how it was at the start and so on. Do you want to tell me a little bit about the support that you feel you had or could access from POL when things were looking awry?

24 IDU MIAH: I could say a few things on that.

FACILITATOR: Can I just go over to Mike. I'll come back

1 to you in a minute, Idu.

2 MIKE BALL: (unclear: multiple speakers) -- you had to 3 wait a long time. I didn't bother mentioning it to 4 the Post Office when I lost a small amount and by 5 a small amount I mean 100/200 guid. On one occasion 6 I lost 15,000. That was a fair blow.

7 FACILITATOR: When would that have been, mike, just to pin 8

that in time?

9 MIKE BALL: Ten years.

10 FACILITATOR: Ten years ago?

11 MIKE BALL: Mmm.

12 **FACILITATOR:** So clearly that's colossal amount of money.

MIKE BALL: While we're on Horizon, one of the things that 13 14 kept coming up was that they did overnight upgrades, 15 just like your iPhone. You plug it in and they change 16 something in the system and nearly every time the

17 Post Office did an upgrade, something else entirely unrelated was affected. But because the Post Office

18 19 wouldn't pay Fujitsu to do a test on the upgrade, they

20 didn't know about it until it hit us on the shopfloor. 21 **FACILITATOR:** So on the day-to-day basis going back there,

22 how did a postmaster find out about an upgrade was

23 about to or had happened?

24 MIKE BALL: They'd warn you that -- although why I don't

25 know -- they warn you that you must leave your

1 1 changed? What's moved?" computers switched on this night because an upgrade 2 was being carried out. But you left them on 24/7 2 Sometimes it would just be icons that had moved, 3 3 icons that are added, icon's removed, and those are anyway. 4 REBECCA WHATLEY: Yes. 4 the things, but you are just, you know, preparing 5 MIKE BALL: So it was a bit irrelevant to tell you. But 5 yourself then, the PIN pad would fail because you 6 6 I do know that every time they did an upgrade would have to then reboot that. There was all these 7 something -- it would be completely unrelated to what 7 things that to be rebooted. 8 they'd done would be affected, but they didn't know 8 Back then we had all of the information stored 9 9 about it to the tower. They then ended up changing that and 10 10 FACILITATOR: So how did you know? How did you spot that not storing the information in branch. It would then 11 effect? 11 be sent centrally. Now, that had an impact. I don't 12 MIKE BALL: Well, it was random things. It perhaps 12 know if that was obviously a relevant issue within 13 wouldn't let you sell a stamp. It could be anything. 13 a lot of balancing. I don't know why but there was 14 And until you came in, switched it on, and tried to 14 certainly around the time that we stopped storing the 15 use it that morning you wouldn't know there was 15 info on the towers and everything sent in centrally it 16 16 a fault. So you'd ring up and they say, "Oh, yeah, we was meant to be quicker but we certainly had slightly 17 know about that. We're working on it. We've had 47 17 more issues then in branch. 18 As you say, we can't -- and we don't write the 18 calls this morning already", and it's 8.05. 19 FACILITATOR: Right, okay. 19 computer systems, we just have to work with them. We 20 Rebecca, I think you are making nodding noises, 20 weren't even involved in the creation of them, even 21 if you know what I mean. Tell me if that chimes with 21 though we work in the branch, in the office. So we 22 22 what your experiences were. were just -- we are just there, we do what we're told, 23 REBECCA WHATLEY: Oh yeah, totally, you'd come in and you 23 and we press the buttons, and if it doesn't work it's 24 24 know there's going to be an upgrade, and then you'd our fault. just be looking at the systems going, "Okay, what's 25 25 FACILITATOR: One thing I would like to be a bit clearer 1 1 on so I can understand it: was there any structured transaction gone through or hasn't it? 2 communication around the purpose of those updates or 2 That was the worst time when we were on the 3 the duration of them or fixing them if they appeared 3 phone to the help desk. Because it's, you know, 4 to go wrong? 4 a software failure, there's nothing we can do and we 5 5 MIKE BALL: None at all. don't know and that was -- we always queried whether 6 FACILITATOR: So the first you found out was ringing up in 6 losses were due to that, because we didn't know. 7 7 the morning and finding out that 47 people had already MIKE BALL: Exactly. If you handed out £150 to 8 rung? 8 a pensioner and it fails at that point, then you are 9 9 MIKE BALL: You'd upgrade and you'd think, "Oh God, what's going to be £150 down. going wrong tomorrow morning?" So then you'd get in, 10 10 REBECCA WHATLEY: But if you ring help desk they would say 11 something wouldn't work, so you'd ring the helpline 11 if it was in a stack then it's gone through. And we

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12 and them and, as I said, you could be 47th in the 13 queue and it's 8.05. (unclear: multiple speakers) 14 FACILITATOR: Were there any manuals or manual updates or 15 anything like that, printed information at all? 16 REBECCA WHATLEY: We would have a memo view come through 17 We would print that off and it would just tell us 18 what's going on and -- but, as you said, we had a lot 19 of issues within whenever we had upgrades with blue 20 screening. So our computers would just freeze and 21 what we had issues with and what we never knew, we 22 didn't get the answers, when we were in the middle of 23 a transaction, if we -- someone was taking cash out or 24 paying cash in, when we were in the middle of it and 25 the computer went down, what happens? Has that

REBECCA WHATLEY: But if you ring help desk they would satisf it was in a stack then it's gone through. And we said, "Okay, but should the — if it's in a stack and you are telling me it's gone through, I thought I had to fast cash it and it had to be off the screen for it to have gone through". We always queried that process and we were always told the same, like you said, Mike, it's gone through.

**FACILITATOR:** So again just to be clear there are times where you would have a discrepancy and you would make up the cash yourselves, the shortfall yourself.

Would you also be ringing the helpline on all those occasions, some of those occasions? What generally was your practice?

So, Idu, do you want to just describe to me, Idu, what you did when there were shortfalls.

**IDU MIAH:** Can I just mention something very briefly. Post Office has always told us that keep the terminals on overnight but then I thought what a strange thing to say because they're always on. You cannot switch them off, so -- and then they did the *(unclear)* but then we were always reminded keep them on.

Now, in terms of communication and I'm going to sort of say a few words here, in terms of communications with Post Office and certain sections of the Post Office, the management team, if I can call it that, it's absolutely poor, still is, even now, you know, because -- you know, they call, Rebecca's mentioned it, the memo view you get, it is like a memo that comes and you read it, products and so on, instructions or training and what have you, that's fine, but you cannot, you as a branch manager, subpostmaster/mistress, you cannot send them an email.

It's only over the last three or four years the area managers have said, "Oh, you can send me an email. Give me a call", but you try and do that and you try and get an answer. It's so difficult.

You know even up to now the communication is so poor, I just don't understand how they think, you know, the person in the business is going to be supported and is going to do a reasonable level of

business to keep it afloat. I just don't understand it. It's just so non-business-like and unprofessional.

Now, during balance times, you know, it put me off the fact that when you phoned them early evening or maybe 6.00 or something like that, over the years, it put me off because when you phone them you're waiting, you're waiting, you're waiting for a long time and, you know, on many occasions you give up. You leave it. You cannot get through.

The previous Horizon System, the balance procedure, the balancing procedure, was so difficult, it took so long, it went round the loop for so long it was — once it crashed on me and I lost £10,000 just like that, there was no explanation, and I had been (unclear) and what have you.

But the communication, I'm afraid, is extremely -- has been extremely difficult. When I got through, my two ladies, the employees, have always encouraged me, pushed me, to report these losses and the losses I'm talking about over £1,000 or maybe (unclear) because lower level, at lower levels £300, £400, £500 I always paid it in. I was in a fortunate -- financially, in a fortunate situation.

My wife used to be a school teacher. I was earning money from City Centre and then various other, I think one or two other (unclear) I was reasonably comfortable and I just paid it in.

But I thought it was just me and I didn't want to -- see, the other thing that used to scare me and this is reality, whether it is stupidity or not it's up to people. I always thought I had regular losses in the office and if that got out in the community -- people know Idu's managing this branch. Idu's the subpostmaster and there's money missing. If that got out there in the community it just would have not have been helpful at all.

I became a councillor, Tameside councillor, back in 2011. Before that, I wasn't a councillor but I was heavily involved, enjoyed it, it was (unclear), enjoyed it, involved with a lot of community, sort of, you know, activity and what have you, still do. But it really scares me to think if people got it their head that there's money going from this Post Office, how would that have been read, because there are all sorts of people out there in the community. There are people who are, you know, who would readily have a negative attitude because of differences, political differences and what have you because I subscribe to

a particular party and they know me.

So that was always scary. So, you know, I stood the losses and made it good throughout this 17/18 years.

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. So can I just play that back to all three of you then, just to check that we've understood you right. There are a number of losses which you would just make up and never report to the hotline; is that fair?

REBECCA WHATLEY: Yes.

FACILITATOR: So when did you decide when to call the hotline? How did you decide -- the helpline, I should say, and I think you've made already some comments about the kind of response you got but I'd like to get a bit more detail, if you like, on some of those -- the responses.

So, Rebecca, can I start with you where you, let's say you had to -- how did you decide when to call and what happened when you did?

REBECCA WHATLEY: Well, as I said, mine were very small compared to others that I've heard and I've spoken to but yeah for me if it was £100 it was like whoa, now how? If it was in that sort of realm I'd be looking and I don't know how on earth this has gone. That would be a prompt, if you like, to ring.

Everything else -- as I said, you blame yourself and, yes, there is exactly what Idu said, you are respected and you are trusted in your community. If they were to think that you couldn't run your business, which is you know what the Post Office is, then, yeah, you don't want that getting out there because you know they're like, "Well, that's very poor, isn't it. I thought they were better than that". And, you know, it's a -- because this is a personal thing and, as I said, with my office it was just me, so it is a personal thing.

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And, yeah, you certainly don't want to admit that. So it's only when it sort of hit -- anything more than and you would think well, I've got to -- and you would have to take it from your own personal money to make that right and, as you said, once you rung the help desk once over that sort of situation and the sort of response you get it puts you off doing it again, because you're like, "Look, they're going to tell me the same thing. It's pointless going through it", and being on hold, like you say, for a half hour to an hour. I haven't got the time of day to waste on that.

**FACILITATOR:** Thank you. So, Mike, when would you be calling the help desk.

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MIKE BALL: When the 15K went missing.
 FACILITATOR: Tell us about the experience you had then taking us back to that call, if you like, or calls.
 MIKE BALL: I couldn't believe it. They sent an audit team in that Friday I think and it just wasn't there.

FACILITATOR: So that was something that simply emerged on
 your trading period printouts, was it, at the end of
 that period?

9 MIKE BALL: Yes. Pushed the button, balance, minus 15.

10 FACILITATOR: So what was your initial action?11 MIKE BALL: I rechecked everything several times.

12 **FACILITATOR:** And then you contacted ...?

13 **MIKE BALL:** My local -- I had an area manager at that time so I told him as well.

15 FACILITATOR: Okay. How did you feel inside at that
 point, you know, when you were talking to that area
 manager?

MIKE BALL: Absolutely gutted. I just couldn't believe
 it. It's just a chunk, isn't it? You know, it's not
 a small thing. I mean, I did have another fairly

21 horrendous thing happen to me with Horizon.

22 Obviously, you might not know anything about Horizon

but there are some things that you can pay using

24 a card. For example, premium bonds. I had quite 25 a lot of people come in and they'd buy 20, 30, even

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50,000 on a card in premium bonds and you'd have to wait for the bank to authorise it but it would go through.

Then one day some chap wanted I think he was paying in 40,000 and it was a post office account, a savings account, and I said, well, I would think you'd be able to pay with a card. You certainly can with premium bonds. So he put it in and it wouldn't work and Horizon wouldn't let you out of it except by saying transaction paid. So when all this was finished it obviously hadn't taken the money. I reversed it, and I phoned up the Post Office and told them about it and they said, "No problem, we'll deal with that". Only they forgot, so at the end of the month I was 40,000 down and I spoke again to the same chap who was dealing with it and he was able to get to the money back out of this chap's account and reinstate it to the Post Office, and he did apologise for the oversight.

But for nearly a month I was £40,000 down and had that chap been dishonest, the one who put the money in his account, he could have drawn it all out. That was a bit worrying.

**FACILITATOR:** So when you said you called the Post Office, who specifically were you talking to to resolve that?

MIKE BALL: I called the helpline initially and they put me on to the people who reverse transactions.

3 REBECCA WHATLEY: Chesterfield.

4 MIKE BALL: Yes.

5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: And approximately when was this,

6 Mr Ball?

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7 **MIKE BALL:** Probably about 12 years ago.

8 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So the large shortfall of about 15,000

and this incident that you're describing, if I said
 that they both occurred in the period around about,

say to give it a reasonable range, 2008 to 2012; is

12 that it?

13 MIKE BALL: Yeah.

14 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I ask that deliberately because

15 I wondered whether at that time it was Legacy Horizon

16 as we've called it in some of the papers or Horizon

17 Online that you were operating. Can you remember?

18 **MIKE BALL:** I didn't know there were two different kinds.

19 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Right, fine. That's fine. As it

20 happens I do but there we are.

21 **FACILITATOR:** So we've --

22 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Sorry, just one last thing and then

23 I promise I'll be quiet. The 15,000 discrepancy, how

was that ultimately resolved, Mr Ball?

25 MIKE BALL: From me.

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SIR WYN WILLIAMS: You paid it? SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So you were suspended. Were you also 1 1 2 2 suspended, Mr Ball? MIKE BALL: Yes. 3 3 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, okay. MIKE BALL: No. 4 FACILITATOR: Tell us about how you came to settle that 4 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No. All right. And I'm assuming, but 5 yourself then. What communications happened before 5 please correct me if I'm wrong, neither of you were 6 6 you made that choice? prosecuted over it? 7 MIKE BALL: When they did the audit it was down, it had to 7 MIKE BALL: No. I did the right thing in reporting it to 8 8 the right people at the right time, so that's just how 9 **FACILITATOR:** What were the alternatives? 9 it was 10 MIKE BALL: None. 10 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, all right. Thanks, thanks 11 FACILITATOR: Okay. Did they give you any choices about 11 Mr Norris, thank you. 12 or any advice or support around that process? 12 13 MIKE BALL: No, no, I got called up to London for an 13 14 interview about what had happened by a senior lady in 14 15 15 the Post Office and she said she'd looked at it in experience. 16 great depth and she couldn't find anything. So that's 16 17 how it's left. 17 18 FACILITATOR: Okay. Do you have any questions about these 18 19 processes that we've talked through, Sir Wyn, before 19 20 20 21 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I think I would like to ask Mr Miah how 21 22 his £10,000 was resolved. Did you do the same 22 (unclear) --23 Mr Miah? Did you pay the 10,000? 23 24 24 IDU MIAH: Yes, I had to pay it but it took a long time (unclear: multiple speakers) 25 because I was suspended. 25 1 1

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auditors, and when they phoned Post Office and they were being instructed, the auditors were instructed to inform me what was going to happen, you know and, you know, I was being suspended there and then. I was told to phone -- I was also given contact numbers for some postmasters mistresses whose actually become involved to manage your office (unclear) until your suspension is (unclear). I was having to go through all that. It took maybe an hour and a half the whole -- but it was hell.

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It was hell. It was not -- it was not manageable, but then you have no choice. You have to go through it. I never thought in my life I would face a situation like that but it was really, really horrible. I'd never cried over any situation in my life. Maybe -- well, must have done when I was a child with my parents for not giving me the toy I wanted, I remember that on one occasion, but as an adult doing the things you do in the world, you know, for your work responsibilities and what have you, you just get on. But managing this Post Office and getting into that situation was a different, different thing and I certainly don't want to go through it

FACILITATOR: So what were the conversations and

FACILITATOR: Thank you. So that suspension, Idu, tell us a bit about that and how -- how it happened and how it felt at the time, just so the others can hear your **IDU MIAH:** Oh my God, it's almost like killing a person really because the day it happened when the auditors came to go through that process it was -- I was crying in the back office, and it was so embarrassing, I was embarrassed with myself, I was crying. The two members of staff who were actually working the counter FACILITATOR: Sorry, do you mind speaking slightly --IDU MIAH: Yeah, I was in the back office with the communications that happened that led you to pay off 2 the 10.000? 3 IDU MIAH: After the suspension, because the loss had 4 occurred, you know, during that period of three 5

months' period they had investigated, that's what I was advised, they'd investigated and couldn't see anything. And, yeah, the fact is the flipping thing had crashed. You know, they wouldn't discuss that in detail, when it crashes what happens. I kept asking 10 about that. There were no problems apparently. It had been looked into and everything was right, and 12 I had to pay it over, I think it was over a year or 13 18 months. 14 FACILITATOR: When was this sorry?

IDU MIAH: This is back in 2013. 15 16 I just want to add something about 17 communication. I meant to mention it before. When 18 I'd incurred losses of up to anything from £1,500 to 19 maybe £2,000 or £3,000 you couldn't just pay it. You 20 know there's a limit as to how much you could make 21 good, you know. So you had to report it and, you 22 know, my staff team they kept saying, "You've got to

report it. If you don't report it then they don't know", so you know -- so when I decided, when I did phone the support team on many occasions I asked for

them to send people to come and investigate see, you know, what the problem was.

Do you know, after lengthy discussions they would pass me on to their audit team, it happen so

would pass me on to their audit team, it happen so many times, and the person at the other end, an auditor of some sort, said who is it? How many people have you got working, yourself, this, that and the other, and he said are they good. They try and direct the whole thing towards a member of staff, because the phrase they've used so many times is "the person who you trust the most usually does steal it". That's what they used to say. That was so annoying, so hurtful and they -- that's it, that's it.

FACILITATOR: So if you were to put into one sentence, Idu, how it was to work with the Post Office Limited when there was a shortfall, how would you sum up in one sentence how it felt or how they behaved?

IDU MIAH: I just thought they were cheating, they were stealing money from me and not being concerned about it.

21 FACILITATOR: Thank you.

The same question to you, Mike, if you were to put that -- (unclear: multiple speakers)

**MIKE BALL:** The other day when we had this preliminary chat, if you have got 750 postmasters who have lost

got a system that does accounting for you. Why didn't the Post Office know that they were £21 million up or more? FACILITATOR: Mm-hm. So, okay, we'll move on in a moment. That's a useful point to park that just for one second. So --MIKE BALL: (Unclear: multiple speakers) FACILITATOR: Sorry, do you want to say something? MIKE BALL: No, no, that's fine. FACILITATOR: So, Rebecca if you were to describe in one sentence how it is to deal with the Post Office when there's a discrepancy, what's it like? REBECCA WHATLEY: Oh, not helpful. I mean, you know, you are -- it's you. It's not them, it's you, and I think that's the only thing we all say. If we ring up the help desk, unless we've got a specific query over a specific issue, if it's anything to do with money discrepancies then it's us because we're the one operating the office, and we're the one pressing the buttons, and we're the one counting the money. Now, I don't know why it's pushed back. I appreciate this is a people business. We are all people operating and as -- there's human error but,

£30,000 over the years, that is £21 million. You have

that office. These are dirty bits of paper you look after. That's it.

I know that within that then there's always going to be that element of trust, whether it's abused or not. But I don't see why they would assume -- I think that's how we felt, we assumed -- you know, that help desk would assume if we rung them up, we pinched it. Oh yeah, I'm going to pinch money out of my own office that I've then got to put in. It's not going to happen. You know, you have -- there has to be a degree of trust and I think that's the only thing that we would question, whether we are actually trusted enough sometimes or we are just assumed to be the perpetrator of the event that's occurred and it's not always the case.

**FACILITATOR:** I'm just interested to know a little bit more about the role and support from area, regional managers. We don't have an enormous amount of time to go into that but I'm keen to hear a little bit about how those processes worked at that time and moving forward through the Horizon experiences.

So let's stay with you, Rebecca. What's been your experiences of your area and regional management and so on.

**REBECCA WHATLEY:** Yeah, absolutely nothing. So if you

think for the first 15 years I was with Post Office, nothing. I think I was audited once. I had a mystery shopper once and I saw one manager at some point. That was it.

you know. I was taught the first moment I stepped in

As I said, the rest of my contact was only through the Federation of Subpostmasters when they would put on meetings, training events, and general meetings, and I can remember two Post Office actual events for training. That was it for contact.

Only in the last then three years have we then had the joy, and it is a joy, of actually being a part of Post Office Limited because we now feel that we're connected in a much, much better way through WhatsApp, through area managers. You have a point of contact. You have a problem, you ring them. You can speak to a person. They will turn up in branch.

This is something we have not had. But it is late. I mean, we've been doing Post Office many, many years and -- but now 100 per cent better.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Ms Whatley, is that something that occurred after the litigation had been settled? That is the litigation with the 555 as they are the called, or had that started to happen even before the litigation was concluded?

**REBECCA WHATLEY:** I'll be honest, my love, I really don't

1	know because, you know, not being funny, my focus is	
2	branch. The world has happened around me.	
3	I appreciate that but I really focus on branch and	
4	I don't know time-wise, but I do know that that point	
5	where we all had a dedicated area manager and we	
6	started getting a visit, our first visit was a joy,	
7	and then we started having being part of a WhatsApp	
8	group and we had a personal telephone number we could	
9	ring.	
10	So, yes, I'm not sure on timing but that was the	
11	sort of time that I know it happen.	
12	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right. I'm not trying to pin you down	
13	but it is quite important for me to understand this.	
14	You said that you thought that started to happen about	
15	three years ago, is that	
16	REBECCA WHATLEY: Yeah. That sounds about right, yes,	
17	because it was when it would have been, you know,	
18	I'm talking another year. That I think timeline-wise	
19	I was selling my old Post Office and that was when	
20	I started having area manager visits. So yes, it	
21	would have been about then.	
22	FACILITATOR: About 2019-ish?	
23	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Ball, you were I think still	
24	operating the Post Office in about 2019. I think you	
25	said you retired a year and a half ago, so did you	
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notice anything of these changes? MIKE BALL: I did in the last few months have quite a few visits from a new area manager who was -- I knew him from before. I think he was at one of the meetings I went to and he used to turn up probably once a month in the last six months that I was there. Prior to that there was one occasion where somebody senior in the Post Office sent me an email saying, "Have you seen your area manager?" I said, "No, not for five years", and he appeared the next day. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: What about you, Mr Miah? Have you noticed this difference over the last three years or IDU MIAH: Definitely so, prior to that -- from time to time, years, you saw -- someone rang and said they were the regional manager but then in terms of having a working relationship, that wasn't there. You didn't have the support. But I think, as you say, I think it's around the litigation time I think when I started noticing things and these regional groups and what have you, they were official from the top, started sort of communicating with us, communicating, you know, in terms of products, how they were arranging things, their -- you know, in terms of reports,

performance reports, and things like that. Yes, it's a lot, and when you phone for help anywhere, it's a totally, totally different attitude. Yes, they do want to help.

If I may just mention one, back in September 2020 there was a loss all of a sudden and I just didn't understand it and, again, that was a little less than £2,000 and on the Horizon System, this is the new Horizon System, it had said the loss was -- £1,600 or £1,700 was to do with stock and the other around £300 was to do with cash.

Now, as I was describing earlier on, I use Excel spreadsheet for my accounting records (unclear) through the Horizon System and I went through line by line, you know, for a few months and I just couldn't see any difference. So it went on for -- I declared it to settle it centrally. It was September 2020 and then, you know, you get these letters to pay up and then I took my time. I think I took over two months and then I phoned Chesterfield people to settle up with a credit card and I didn't have the (unclear). So, you know, I just said to the lady, "I'll settle up and I'll use my credit card because I've been receiving letters".

She said, "Oh, just a minute, have you contacted

the support centre? Have you reported it?" I said, "No, I haven't." She said, "Well I think you should." She said, "You know you just don't know, they'll look into it and they'll come back to you". I said, "Really? This is something different".

And this change, you know, positive change in their approach and whatever, it wasn't registering properly but that was a sort of specific moment in time I thought, "My God, there is something different". I can't pay (unclear) for my losses. I can't pay this is — so I thought, "Okay, so what do I do?" She said, "I will ring on your behalf, ring, you know, the team and they will come back to you and then they'll take some details and investigate".

Brilliant, you know, and that's what she did, this lady from Chesterfield. The support team came back to me and they took some details and what have you, looked into it, they took time, maybe just over a couple of months and they said, "Mr Miah, we've looked into it. You don't have to pay".

They didn't tell me what the problem was. They said, "We've looked into it and you don't have to pay".

So that's the sort of, you know -- it sort of demonstrates, I think, the depth of difference.

FACILITATOR: So that would have been resolved sort of 1 2 beginning of last year, some time, would it? 2 3 3 IDU MIAH: That's right, that's right. Prior to that I would have been -- they would have, you know, if I 4 4 5 went and offered to pay it would have been taken. 5 6 6 FACILITATOR: Right, thank you. I would like to use the 7 rest of our time together broadly to speak about the 7 8 impact of all of these issues, the Horizon Issues, on 8 9 9 yourselves. 10 10 Mike, I wonder if I could start with you given 11 the scale of your losses from what I understand is the 11 12 largest amongst the three of you. If you want to just 12 13 describe to us the impact it's had on you in any area 13 14 of your life or on the people around you. 14 15 15 MIKE BALL: Obviously, I'm down quite a consider sum over 16 16 the years. 17 I think had I not had a military pension 17 18 I wouldn't have been able to complete the number of 18 19 vears that I did. I was actually running the 19 20 Post Office for 29 years but I would have given up 20 21 a long time ago had I not got a military pension and 21 22 virtually over those years a lot of the time I was 22 23 working for little or nothing. I was doing probably 23 24 24 a 60-hour week, maybe more on occasions. I didn't 25 feel that I could go away on holiday and leave 25

1 somebody else in charge for ten years. It was -- I think all -- when I first bought the Post Office years ago, I went for my interview and I said, "The one thing that concerns me is that Eastbourne has got a lot of Post Offices. I want to be sure that you're not going to open any more", and they assured me that that wouldn't happen. There was a thing with the Federation that safeguarded -- not everybody could -- you could move a post office but you couldn't open a new one, and I was a year in and somebody opened a post office in Asda which is a quarter of a mile from me, and they were given the full list of services, road tax, the lot, at the outset and I complained and said, you know, to the Federation and the Post Office about the way that I'd been treated. I thought that that was slightly dishonest and they said, "Oh it's a corporate decision. It's none of your business". FACILITATOR: So going back to you -- just dividing up your virtually three decades of time with the Post Office Limited, you had a decade roughly speaking before Horizon came in. MIKE BALL: Yes. FACILITATOR: Then two decades after, how were the shortfalls different and how were the impacts on your

1 finances different before and after would you say, 2 specifically because of Horizon? 3 MIKE BALL: The thing was the fear. I used to dread 4 Wednesdays because it was you never knew what was 5 going to happen and it was never good. 6 FACILITATOR: I don't think any of us can imagine how it 7 feels to have to fork out 15 or 10 grand to make good 8 a shortfall that clearly you know what you had taken 9 responsibility for or at least settling it. How did 10 that actually feel to be, effectively, writing that 11 cheque or however? 12 MIKE BALL: Dreadful. It was years of savings. I mean, 13 on top of that when I actually finally retired I got 14 a post office payment for the month of July ending 15 about 3 or 4 August and then I retired on 25 August 16 and handed over to the new people, and I thought, "Well, I'm going to get another three weeks payment 17 18 out of that because obviously I'd had my expenses, 19 paying for staff, running the office, things like 20 that", and when it never appeared I got hold of 21 Post Office Limited and they said, "Oh no, you don't 22 get paid for that", and nobody even said thank you 23 after 29 years. 24 FACILITATOR: So, Rebecca, I'll move on to you as you are

no longer in the same status that you were. What

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1 impact has all of this had on you, whether it's 2 financial, personal, on any part of your life, 3 specifically the Horizon failings? 4 REBECCA WHATLEY: I suppose, I'm very mindful of how, yes, 5 how the whole situation has manifested itself into 6 something that I thought was nothing and into 7 something that is something and even though -- and 8 obviously I stayed within Post Office, now I suppose 9 what it has done, yes, it wasn't easy but because 10 I knew that it wasn't anything dishonest on my behalf, 11 it's much easier for you to continue doing what you do 12 and your job to the best of your ability if you are 13 founded on a very, strong grounding of, "I'm not 14 dishonest. I'm just doing my job. These things have 15 happened. I haven't done anything wrong". To continue then with Post Office but to see 16 17 that things have changed and there is a future it just 18 makes you -- in the back of your mind you are very 19 wary of everything that you do and that when -- so 20 like with the new office you are very mindful of 21 everything that you do, trusting the system, but when

it doesn't quite work out there is that thing tinkling

away in the back of your mind going, "Now, is this

just me or is this something to be worried about",

because actually we're still having issues, but

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1 different issues. 2 I suppose that's the only thing once you have 3 been through what we have all experienced you have --4 you are just a little bit wary of 100 per cent trust 5 in the system that you use, and I think that's the sad 6 part of it but it's a very real part of it, and 7 there's a lot of people just like me who are still 8 doing the same job and we're still putting in -- and 9 this is when I say, you know, we've done it and we've 10 made good any losses through that, you know, maybe not 11 our fault but we've stayed with Post Office. 12 Now we wouldn't stay with Post Office for the 13 fun of it because, you know, we couldn't do anything 14 else. We stayed with it because we wanted to or that 15 we see that this is where -- you know, there is 16 a future but lessons do have to be learned from. 17

So I think it just -- you know, you just have to be mindful of what you do. But unfortunately there isn't 100 per cent trust in a system that we don't think is infallible.

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21 FACILITATOR: So are you able to estimate what amount you 22 have made good over the years in your time as 23 a postmaster?

24 REBECCA WHATLEY: As I said, I think -- you know, I really 25 do feel completely overshadowed by everyone else

1 because I am only talking, you know, a few thousand 2 over years. I'm not talking thousands upon thousands. 3 You just know that every month when you've had to put 4 in a little bit, you know that that adds up. But you 5 don't add it up because you just -- you don't think 6 about it. You just put it in, make good, move on. 7 You don't dwell on it because it was just -- nothing 8 can be done. If you can't actually remedy a situation 9 yourself, you can't worry yourself sick over it 10 because you've got a job to do and if you've got your 11 job to do, you have to just put your best foot forward 12 and keep going. 13

But you are -- as I said, mine pales into insignificance. You're only talking a few thousand, which is still a lot of money and it shouldn't have had to be mine when we don't get paid a lot, but there's still losses there.

FACILITATOR: Yeah, I'm sure. You know, it's sort of very 18 19 generous spirited of you to compare your situation 20 with theirs but I don't think most of us would want to 21 swap with you. What I'm interested in is how that 22 felt, a bit like I said to Mike, you know, how did it 23 feel when you were making those payments back? You 24 know, just take yourself back in time.

REBECCA WHATLEY: Well, it's just -- you're just looking

at it and you don't understand why because you're thinking, "I'm not a thick person. I've got a brain. I can count. Why can I not make the figures add up?" That's what I don't understand. And you're not being funny. You can count the money three times. You get your Mum in to come and count; you get, you know, your husband in to come and count; you get your -- you will get people to double count, double-check your work, "Can you count them stamps for me?" because you stop trusting implicitly on your own abilities because something is making you doubt it. And that's not pleasant, but it's something I think we've all --I don't know, I assume -- I think it's something we've all had to deal with at some point, is that we're looking at it going, "I can count. Why are the figures not adding up?" You know?

FACILITATOR: Yeah. So anyway if we think about the impact it's had on you first of all financially, do you want to talk to us and tell us a bit about that financial impact of the Horizon failings?

IDU MIAH: I think it's changed me as a person because it puts you into a financial -- a financially difficult situation because you can't afford the things you want to for your wife, for your child (unclear).

FACILITATOR: Sorry, do you mind just leaning forward

1 a little, so that -- are you saying you can't afford 2 the things you want to?

3 IDU MIAH: You can't, you know. I can't afford the 4 luxuries that I want to, you know, afford because over 5 the years being, you know, you can't -- I would have 6 got out of Post Office if I could but I couldn't 7 because I got a, you know, business loan to buy the 8

premises, the building, and so I am sort of trapped ... (connection frozen)

10 FACILITATOR: I think Idu's connection might ... Idu, are 11 vou still there?

12 IDU MIAH: -- I would have earned --

13 FACILITATOR: Sorry, your connection's --

14 IDU MIAH: Can you still hear me? Yeah. I think that 15 might have been the problem. I don't know why.

16 FACILITATOR: Sorry, can I just take you back before you 17 glitched there. You were saying you felt trapped 18 because of your loan and your running of the business.

19 IDU MIAH: Yes.

20 FACILITATOR: So carry on, yeah.

22 that building became vacant, it's very, very extremely 23 difficult to lease it or rent it out because you don't 24 get people just coming. In fact, over the years a lot 25 of retail units in that area, and I believe this whole

IDU MIAH: So that building -- you know, if I left and

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situation's replicated throughout the country, they become vacant, businesses go out of business, you know, out of these town centres, or even if it's a little town centre, and, you know, you don't get anybody taking over and so you're paying rent and what have you. So these things go through your mind and you think, "What am I going to do?" And you can't do a thing about it, except just to try and carry on.

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balances there.

I've lost a substantial amount over a period of about 18 years. I've provided ample evidence, hard evidence, and I've had to declare it centrally, you know, at the end of the balancing process because it's a substantial amount. As I've said before, you know, if it's £3/4/500, then I would rather pay it and get rid of it. But, you know, it's when you can't do that, when it's like 1,500, £2,000, £2,500, you have to take time and agree a settlement sort of agreement, agree to, you know, pay it over two or three months and that's what I've done.

What it has done is sort of, you know, you end up with debt because you can't pay it off when you want to. You're always catching up, catching up. My wife is ill thinking about it. We can't afford the things we want to. You know, it's just, yeah, you can manage. You can just about manage and sort of -- you can't buy anything extra, you know. But the debt builds up and that really puts you into a difficult situation.

4 FACILITATOR: So you say that you've declared it. I guess 5 you've got it documented somewhere. What sort of sum 6 would you be telling Sir Wyn you've been deprived of, 7 if you like?

IDU MIAH: I think I've indicated on my historical loss application when I put it together somewhere in the region of £60,000, and 30 of it I've given hard evidence about. It's there, it's there. They cannot dispute that.

Some -- well, most of what I paid in, I can't give you specific information but I've been doing it from the second week.

FACILITATOR: These are these ad hoc --

**IDU MIAH:** Yeah, it's a regular thing. The Horizon System -- Post Office is great. Post Office branch is great. Managing it is great. The Horizon System, you know, in your head, that's the negative bit. That's the -that is the problem creator. That's the bit when you think about your branch, you think you've got that, oh my God, I've got to live with this and that's it. That's how it is. That's what life is about.

It's changed me in terms of I'm not at all,

I know, I've not be for a long time, I've not been a, shall we say, a happy, jolly, shall we say, all that communicative at home, all that responsive. I'm okay. I think they put up with me. I tend to -- very easily I get irritated and that's what's happened to me over the years.

**FACILITATOR:** To what extent do you attribute that to the

Horizon stresses versus just the general life? IDU MIAH: It's the money problems and the money problems goes back to the Horizon System because I can't -- you know, you get a bill for something maybe, you know, and you can't pay it when you want to. You've got to take your time. You've got to have -- and I've got credit card balances because I've done through things, not out of choice, used by credit card and I've got

So, you know, these things are there in the back of my mind and these things do worry you. You know, I wake up, middle of the night. I will sleep for two hours and then -- this goes back a few years when this started. I'll sleep for two hours and I will wake up and that, just at that moment in time, your debt is in your mind because you are ...

I've -- you know, on a regular basis, many months the remuneration we get, it's not mine. It's absorbed by the Post Office debt or I've used my credit card to pay something when I've had the money -- sorry, when I've had the remuneration I paid off that. So I've not had extra money. And you think about debt. The money problems that it's about, it really is about. And it makes you tired, makes you ill, makes you a different person. You become irritable, that sort of thing.

FACILITATOR: So Mike, you've talked about your financial issues. How do you feel when you're hearing Idu there talk about the sort of personal changes, personality, emotions and things? To what extent do you recognise that, or not, in yourself because of Horizon?

MIKE BALL: I do feel that I've deprived the family of holidays and things. I don't let it change my personality. But, to be honest, the Horizon System --I don't think they put enough money into it and I think the people that they employ to maintain it are somewhat inadequate.

When I was working, I was running a four position Post Office and in the last year, I kept having problems with the card payments -- you know, where you put in a card into the machine and you put in your four digit number -- and two of them wouldn't work. And I think Fujitsu sent somebody down about

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1 ten times. They changed everything on the system on 2 these two positions at least three times: cables, 3 boxes, the little thing that you put the card in, 4 absolutely everything, the keyboard, the screen. And 5 they had one final conference with people from the 6 Post Office, people from Fujitsu, all talking amongst 7 themselves. And they moved the gateway, which was in 8 the back office, to one of the ones that had the 9 problem and that sorted it. 10 But it's just that they had absolutely -- no-one 11 knew why: not a clue what they'd done; it had fixed 12 it; that's it. 13 FACILITATOR: Was that chip and PIN system, from 14 a technical point of view, was that separate from the 15 Horizon System or was it that -- they communicated 16 with each other, obviously, but --17 MIKE BALL: You pay a bill, I type in the amount, put your 18 card in, and then it takes £100 or whatever, pays your 19 bill. veah. 20 **FACILITATOR:** Sorry, but the sort of hunt for a solution, 21 did that involve hunting within Horizon or just the 22 hardware of the chip and PIN from Fujitsu? 23 MIKE BALL: For some obscure reason, the gateway was in 24 the back office and they moved it to position 3 in the 25 Post Office and that cured the problem, but none of

1 them had any idea why. 2 FACILITATOR: Right. 3 MIKE BALL: Just a bunch of headless chickens. 4 FACILITATOR: Okay. 5 Rebecca, if I just come to you for a moment, I'd 6 just like to pick up on something you were mentioning 7 about. You were sort of talking about the emotional 8 impact of all this. You sort of described an element 9 of self-doubt, if you know what I mean, about when 10 you're doing things now. Do you want to just tell us 11 a little bit more about the impact that these Horizon 12 events have had on the way that you think and act at 13 work and more widely? 14 REBECCA WHATLEY: I mean, you know, when you do -- if you 15 think what our job entails, like I said, it's a huge 16 range of things but it comes down to you being able to 17 press the right buttons, give out the right, money 18 take the right money, and account for that. Now, in 19 essence, that sounds very simple but we are trusting 20 systems in place to help us facilitate that. Now, if 21 everything that you do you think, "Well, I've done 22 that right" and then something happens and you declare 23 it and it's wrong, you go, "Oh, well, was that me or

and you've done all that for years and years and years and, like we said, for the first part which is like, "Oh, do you know, it must be me" and then, as I said, when it comes out that actually it's a relief when you think, "Oh, it wasn't me then. So I can do my job properly. I think I'm pretty good at it". But you do doubt whether you are as good at it as you think you

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And, not being funny, Post Office is not something that you go through masses of training and you -- you literally will jump in from any walk of life into a post office, have minimal training and be running an office. That is a huge step for someone with no background to come in and then you're expecting them to trust. So all new subpostmasters coming in, all new postmasters coming in, they have a very -- they have two days of class-based training and then they are thrown into an office. And the thought of that for me, which is why I do what I do now, because the thought of that for me is quite terrifying. You're asking them to put faith in a system that has been openly questioned and that's very, very tough because there's me going, "Yes, you know, we've got to trust this system. You know, this is what we do. This is what we have to work with".

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1 And you will have on the open forum questions 2 over the system that we use and, yes, it was an old 3 system we're questioning but we're equally questioning 4 the new system because we are still using Verizon, you 5 know, (unclear). And so you have to think of the 6 people that are working it and the history that is 7 with that and, again, as I said, I can't -- it's 8 always down to trust and trust on both ways and many 9 levels.

Now, as I said, it's -- when you've gone through

was that the system?"

FACILITATOR: So we've got about ten minutes left to run and I'd like Sir Wyn to have the chance to ask some more questions in a moment if he wants to. I just wondered for Rebecca and Idu, who are still in the system, if you like, to what extent do you feel that Horizon has improved to a point where you can work with it confidently?

REBECCA WHATLEY: Well, yeah. I think the silence spoke volumes there. I've got to say, I'm not loving much about the new system, the changes that happen. We've just had a new upgrade. Our banking system has all changed and it's been slow, we've had glitches. There's been quite a few tech issues in branches throughout. There hasn't been anything that has said to us this is great, we're all moving forward, trust in your system.

1 1 FACILITATOR: And you move between a number of branches at I still question the same thing when it comes to the 2 the moment, don't you? Is that right? 2 Horizon System, the Horizon System. And it's cash in 3 REBECCA WHATLEY: Yes, and it doesn't matter which branch 3 cash out when it's in the stack and the system blue 4 you're in, we all have reconditioned units. If 4 screens a lot; so we can be there and it will freeze 5 something goes wrong, you -- if your printer goes 5 or it will blue screen, and we know there's issues 6 6 wrong, they come out, you get a reconditioned unit. within -- and this is recent. And, because of that, 7 So you might have had a problem with it feeding the 7 you question what you were doing at the time. What's 8 label but on the next one you might have a problem 8 happened to that transaction? Has it been lost? Has 9 9 it been gained? Is there an issue within? And we printing it. 10 10 You just end up swapping one problem for another don't know. 11 problem, to be honest, and that's how it's always 11 **FACILITATOR:** Okay. So just to be clear, how often in the 12 been. I haven't seen any changes in that and it 12 average branch in the average week or month would you 13 doesn't matter whether you're in a single position 13 be getting a blue screen? 14 branch or a multi position branch, we all have the 14 REBECCA WHATLEY: Oh, there's weeks when you can go 15 15 same issues. without and then there's weeks where you'll have it 16 **FACILITATOR:** And in your experience, are those glitches. 16 constantly and you'll look on -- as I said, the joy 17 as you describe them, are they having an accounting 17 now of being on a WhatsApp group. As soon as you have 18 impact in the same way the Horizon problems in the 18 any issues in branch, you're on to your WhatsApp 19 past were? 19 group, "Anyone else having any issue?" You find out 20 **REBECCA WHATLEY:** There's got to be something somewhere. 20 then if it's you and it's your equipment or if it's 21 I mean, I'm still -- you know, as I said, you still --21 a national issue. Stops any ringing round; you don't 22 22 when you balance your office, there's still things have to ring the help desk; you get an answer straight 23 coming up and down and you can't quite question --23 away. That is a benefit now that we have -- we were 24 24 and, as I said, because we're having operational saying our communication's better: it is. And very 25 issues with our PIN pads, we are back to the same --25 rarely is it just you; it's normally a national thing, 1 and we're all having the same issue. So, yeah, you 1 to my office to my description of it is "downgraded", 2 could be talking anything from sort of once a week to 2 you know, this transformation business. I went 3 sort of once every few weeks. 3 through the downgrading process. I am now -- I have 4 FACILITATOR: Thank you. 4 been since 2016, a local branch. Before that I was 5 5 ldu, I wonder if you could just sum up for us just a normal branch and for years and years, we'd 6 6

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the current your current faith in Horizon as it's operating now.

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IDU MIAH: As I was speaking before, the biggest loss was back in September 2020 but, luckily, I didn't have to pay to make it good. But I still don't understand why we have these losses in stock mainly if Horizon System describes it as "stamp" and it could be less than £100 nearly every time you balance, and it is so annoying. Why is it? You know, because I'm at the counter and I have a very -- you know, somebody capable, you know, two other people to count it and I still don't know why we have these losses. They're ongoing.

These glitches, as Rebecca says, you know, they just says change time, whatever, and we get on and that's how we are managing these days.

I just -- sorry, go on. I wanted to go on to something that hasn't come up in the conversation because it just shows -- it might demonstrate something here.

Back in 2016, it took them probably a few visits

been trained to sell postal products, financial products and everything, attended everything. My staff team have gone through training and what have you. We've taken every opportunity and attended all the training and everything because we needed it. We were good at it. Financial products we were extremely good at and, you know, they were selling well and earning money from it, obviously.

But come 2016, they had this bright idea of downgrading my branch, like many others throughout the country, and the process was, you know, it was getting to accept to go through the transformation. They literally forced it. They told me if I didn't go through it I could -- you know, I either leave or sign up. That was the kind of situation.

Later on, I did complain about it (unclear). So what happened is when they downgraded by

office is we lost tonnes of products. Financial products just went. We couldn't do insurances anymore, couldn't do bonds and things and what have

you. They'd withdrawn the Post Office card account where we used to deal with the card account, setting up, you know, sort of new accounts and what have you (unclear). All that went. We were left with postal mails products mainly. That's a massive loss to our business, our income.

What didn't make sense to me is that all that training for years and years, they must have spent tens of thousands of pounds in training, but then they changed the business model and then we lost all the product. Even in terms of selling -- this is how silly it appeared to me -- we were selling prior to that pictorial stamps. Now, in my area, in any other area, we have got friends who have relatives in America, in New Zealand, in Australia and they send cards and they like to sent picture stamps. So all those things were withdrawn. The -- what do you call -- the presentation packs, they were withdrawn. As a local office, you can't sell those. You can't have those. So even that Post Office core product I couldn't sell anymore because we're a local office, not offered to us.

This was the depth of change. It hit my massively and then it was forced, you know, down my throat. I had to accept it or leave. That's the kind

of situation I was faced with back in 2016. They forecast my income post transformation totally irrelevant, totally inaccurate, nothing like what I should have been earning.

So, you know, they are so, you know, not business-like it's unbelievable. It's just -- and they were not co-operative, they were not -- it was like whatever target they had to achieve they put me through that situation there to achieve their target. I was just a number. That is the kind of way they ran the business and that's what they did.

FACILITATOR: Okay, thank you.

I'm going to ask one final question to each of you and really to answer, if you can, in just a sentence or two and then ask Sir Wyn if he's got any final question.

And really I'm just interested in what you would say or ask of Post Office Limited or Fujitsu or the Government or any individual organisation within those who doesn't understand what it was like to go through, I just wonder what would you ask or say to that person.

So we'll start with you, Mike. What would you your main statement or question?

MIKE BALL: I think they should apologise for not

investigating their system properly and, as a corporate body, I really am not impressed with the way that they behaved, even down to saying thank you. I can't believe that nobody said thank you very much.

FACILITATOR: Right, thank you.

Rebecca, what would be your main statement or question to the people who have been involved with Horizon over the years?

REBECCA WHATLEY: Yeah, I think we deserve reassurance or -- yeah, something to say, you know, there were -- if they did just stand up and say, yeah, you know, there were issues; you were working with a flawed system; that, you know, you weren't imagining these things; these things didn't, you know, just, you know, manifest themselves just to make you question what you do. And I think they need to give reassurance that this is not going to happen again. I think that's what we're all looking for now.

Yes, it happened and it needs to be addressed but it needs to be addressed in such a way that [it's] put to bed and this is a new system, and it needs to be proved that the new system is infallible and that we can trust it. And I think that's the most important thing. We need to move on and us that are still in it, we need to trust what we do and we need

to be able to trust that we are not going to be held [to] account for something that was not our fault.

**FACILITATOR:** Thank you. That's nice and clear.

Finally, Idu, what would your main question or statement be to the people involved with Horizon over the years?

IDU MIAH: I would ask them first and foremost why did they not admit that there was a problem? Why did they tell me so many times it's my office problem, my staff were stealing? Why would they not do it in a professional way and say, "Look, we think there is a problem and we're looking into it" when this was first happening? Why would they not own up? That's the thing.

The other thing is they're not working with us.

Even now, they're not working with us to keep us informed as to what is happening with this new Horizon System. It's not reliable. Even now, it's not reliable. I'm still losing money.

FACILITATOR: Okay, right. Thank you. Thank you so much.
 Right, I'll just pass back to Sir Wyn for any other
 questions that you have for the team.

**SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Well, I don't have any other questions, thank you very much, and I think we've reached the witching hour, but I do want to say something.

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Primarily, what I want to say to you Mr Miah, you Mr Ball, and you Ms Whatley, is how grateful I am that you have been able to come and discuss these issues with openness and frankness. I'm extremely grateful to you.

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I also want to tell you that much of what you have told me of course is said to me by other people, so it's not a story which is in some ways unique to you, but I've not heard from anyone yet who hasn't had a unique aspect, if I can put it in that way. Each of you are very individual in this sense and, although there are problems which generally afflicted you all, each of you has had something to tell me which nobody else has done so as yet.

That leads me, if you like, to a request that I may make of you in the future. You know that under the Inquiry process a number of people have made witness statements and a number of people have given formal oral evidence. You have chosen, and I'm very glad that you did, to provide information to me in this forum. But certain things that you've told me might benefit from me having them in witness statement form, and so I'm not going to ask you to make any decisions today as we're on the screen, so to speak, but don't be surprised if, in a few weeks' time,

I may ask you to foreshorten something or to speak bit louder or whatever it might be, but really its all about yourselves and your stories.

Now this is, as you know, it's all part of the public inquiry that Sir Wyn is heading and he has talked to a whole number of different postmasters and now wants to hear your views which he will be then taking forward with him into the subsequent stages of the public inquiry where he will be talking to the organisations and the individuals involved.

Now, obviously you will have heard lots of other experiences but really today this next two hours is all about yourselves. So it's about what you have personally have been through, what you personally feel about things. We would ask that you only share what you are comfortable with sharing and, as you know, we have a counsellor on hand because things can get guite emotional, as you can imagine, and I don't want you to feel that are, if you like, being forced into the public spotlight to the share something you don't want to because that's not what this is about. It's a relaxed session but I may ask you for clarification and Sir Wyn may ask you for clarification on things just so that we've got a kind of an accurate record of what you are saying.

members of the secretariat get in touch with you and ask you would you be prepared to make a witness statement about certain aspects of the things that you have told me. I won't compel you to do it, it will be a request, and if you wish to comply, I'd be very grateful but if you don't wish to comply, I will understand. But I just wanted to warn you that that might happen because it is important that every detail which is important to my work is captured in a witness statement, if that is possible.

So thank you very, very much for participating. Thank you for Mr Norris for guiding you through a huge range of topics, really, in two hours and I look forward to my next session with people like you which will be 2.00 this afternoon.

So thank you and very nice to meet you.

17 REBECCA WHATLEY: Thank you. 18 MIKE BALL: Nice to meet you.

19 FACILITATOR: Thanks again. Take care now. Thank you.

20 (12.05)

(AM session concluded)

22 FACILITATOR: (unclear) -- want to emphasise I'm here 23 mainly as a listener, mainly as Sir Wyn's 24 representative to help you share your story, so I will

ask questions and I will guide you along a little bit.

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And really there are no other rules other than don't all talk at once because we are -- we will be transcribed subsequently and it's hard to transcribe something when there's two people talking.

So in a moment I am going to ask you to just briefly go round the room and just tell us a tiny bit about your background, yourself, and your context so that Sir Wyn has a feel for who's in the room with him. So I'm going to start if, it's okay with Philip because you are next to me on my screen. So Philip I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about yourself and your business, if that's okay. Than you.

13 PHILIP VENN: Hi, I'm Philip Venn. I'm the husband of 14 a subpostmistress but primarily I run the business, do 15 all the accounting and such like, and I've been in 16 business for 40 years, 38 of that on the same site and 17 that's about it really. Currently, the Post Office is 18 Post Office local and it's in a filling station,

19 petrol filling station.

> FACILITATOR: So how long have you and your wife been involved with that particular site of that

22 Post Office?

23 PHILIP VENN: The Post Office itself since 2008. 24 I started in business in 1984, took over part of the 25 site, then another part of the site, and then in 2008

1	after seeing it bankrupt four times we took over the	1	that I'm also the national chair of the National
2	filling station part it which just had a new	2	Federation of SubPostmasters and I'm also the
3	Post Office local I forget what it was called	3	non-executive director for the Federation for the
4	then installed and it was the first of three the	4	north-east.
5	pilots in the country.	5	FACILITATOR: Right, thank you.
6	So it was closed for a couple of months while we	6	SUSAN EDGAR: (unclear: multiple speakers) I'd say that.
7	took over and then we took over the defunct contract	7	FACILITATOR: Thank you. As I may, we're mainly talking
8	of the Post Office and went from there, basically.	8	about your personal experiences but I guess that's
9	FACILITATOR: Thank you. And you are in Somerset?	9	a background that's useful to us. Thank you.
10	PHILIP VENN: Somerset, Merriott, Somerset, it's	10	David, I wonder if you could just give us
11	a little well, it's a big-ish village.	11	a little bit of background to yourself if that's okay.
12	FACILITATOR: Okay, thank you very much. Well, thank you	12	DAVID HARTLEY: Yeah, sure. I do apologise if a two year
13	for joining us. It's helpful to get that background.	13	old grandson suddenly appears but we're trying to keep
14	PHILIP VENN: Thank you very much.	14	him under control.
15	FACILITATOR: I wonder if Sue, could you just give us a	15	FACILITATOR: Don't worry. He's more than welcome.
16	little background to yourself, if that's okay.	16	DAVID HARTLEY: Well, my wife is, not me.
17	SUSAN EDGAR: Yes, I can. My name is Sue Edgar. I	17	My name's David Hartley. I'm currently
18	currently am a postmistress at Guisborough in	18	subpostmaster at Bispham Road Post Office in
19	Cleveland, which is just on the edge of the North	19	Southport. Prior to taking on this office in 2005,
20	Yorkshire Moors. I've been there since eight years	20	from 1999, prior to Horizon introduction, I was at
21	I've been in Guisborough but I was also in another	21	Hope Place Post Office in Nelson.
22	Post Office I had and I closed it under NT (network	22	Without going into too much detail is there
23	transformation) and then went to Guisborough and all	23	anything else you'd like to know.
24	in all I've been within post offices for over 30 years	24	FACILITATOR: No. So you're still running the Post Office
25	35 I think it is, 36 years, but I must mention as well	25	in Southport then?
	89		90

DAVID HARTLEY: Well, I'll cover that in what I've got to 1 2 say, if you don't mind. 3 FACILITATOR: Okay, that's fine, thank you. Thank you 4 very much. Nice to meet you David. 5 Finally, Diane do you want to say a little bit 6 about yourself. 7 DIANE BATH: Hi, I'm Diane Bath. I run 8 Broughton-in-Furness Post Office in Cumbria. We 9 bought the place in 2005. Previous to this I left 10 school with eight 'o' levels. I thought I was fairly 11 intelligent. I worked for a solicitor. I've done 12 computer courses at college and I thought I had all 13 the ability to run a post office but the Post Office 14 seemed to think differently now because I keep making 15 mistakes and it shows I can't add up anymore. So 16 that's my story so far. I'm still currently 17 subpostmaster at Broughton-in-Furness. 18 FACILITATOR: Lovely, okay, well thanks very much. That's 19 really helpful context. So what I'd like to do is start by asking you just to go back in time in your 20 21 minds to when you started out as a postmaster or, you 22 know, involvement with the Post Office and wondering 23 what your expectations and hopes were at that time if 24 you could take yourself back to that person. Diane, 25 you are on screen with me so do you want to just tell

1 me a little bit about how you felt and what you were 2 hoping for at that time? 3 **DIANE BATH:** Well, at the time my husband was a train 4 driver so he had a pretty good wage anyway and 5 I wanted a new challenge, and we thought about buying 6 a shop and then realised that the Post Office you 7 actually get paid as well and I thought well that 8 would be a fantastic thing to do because Post Office 9 are really well thought of, we would be -- we would 10 hold a big position in the community, the Post Office 11 we liked, which is here in Broughton, it's in a small 12 town on the edge of the Lake District. It's 13 a beautiful little place, anybody would want to live 14 here, and we really thought that this could be 15 a business that we could run as a family and it might 16 be something that we could hand on to our children 17 when we wanted to retire. 18 So it has been a family business. My son and 19 daughter both work with us here, although now we've 20 had to take on extra jobs to sort of keep the 21 Post Office running all this time. But now it appears 22 my husband won't be able to retire until he is 82 23 because of our mortgage. We had to take out a huge

mortgage to actually buy this place in the first place

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FACILITATOR: Right, okay. 1 1 another one. We both had lived in Southport prior to 2 DIANE BATH: So we've put everything we possibly can into 2 moving to Nelson but we looked all over, so we found 3 3 it and we had great expectations thinking that it was this one in Southport so it seemed a good buy and it 4 a trusted brand and it would be something that we 4 didn't have a retail side per se only cards and 5 could be proud of and something, as I said, that we 5 stationery, which was fine. 6 6 could pass on to our children. That side of it is negligible really but the 7 7 FACILITATOR: Right. Thank you, Diane. That's really business side, you know, we have built up. But Diane 8 8 touched on it, the trusted brand. That was why we 9 9 How about you, David, what were your sort of actually came into the Post Office because it's seen 10 10 expectations and hopes when you set out in the role of as a national institution but sadly no longer. 11 a subpostmaster? 11 Further on I will cover that part as to the 12 MR HARTLEY: Prior to buying the first office I had been 12 state of the Post Office now but the reason that 13 in retail for quite a number of years, so I've got 13 I came into the Post Office because I thought it was 14 a retail background and the office that we took on --14 a good move and that it would settle our future 15 15 well, it just -- it was horrendous, the state of it. together. 16 16 So we had a big challenge facing us. I'm slightly past -- well, well past retirement 17 But I actually built the business up over five 17 age. I'll only admit that to yourselves but to 18 years by 700 per cent. That's the business side. I'm 18 actually sell a post office now is nigh impossible 19 not talking Post Office side, but the business side. 19 because the word's got out there to the general public 20 20 Nearly killed us but it had a newsagents and we opened had naturally they don't want to touch it with a barge 21 an off-licence within it so we were working seven days 21 pole. Would you? 22 a week from 5 in the morning until 10 at night and if 22 FACILITATOR: Right, thank you. That's helpful I get the 23 I never see another newspaper as long as I live it 23 sense of, you know, where you have come from and where 24 24 will be too soon. (unclear: multiple speakers) things are headed, so thank you very much. 25 So we decided to sell that office and look for 25 I appreciate that. 94

So, Philip, tell us a bit about your sort of hopes and aspirations when you started out with the Post Office part of your business.

PHILIP VENN: Well, the Post Office really was incidental

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PHILIP VENN: Well, the Post Office really was incidental in the fact that it was already in the filling station that we were taking on and we spoke to a guy called Wyn de Cruz from the Post Office. He came down to see us and said it would be a great help if we could keep it, because prior to that there had been a sub-Post Office in the village for decades with two people running it all day long, so it was a busy biggish village, so we decided we'd keep it in there and he came down to see us and he was really good and helped us sort it out and get it going, and then he eventually left.

So really it was incidental. It started costing us money when there was errors in the accounting, as obviously where we're leading to, and currently to date I'm still disillusioned with it in the fact that we currently get a remuneration of an average monthly of £1,243.06 average over the last year, 2021, but the wages, what that averaged out, because we have to employ somebody to do it because it's a busy filling station so the same person can't run that side as well, so we basically lose £401.44 a month on average,

1 but we only keep it for the sake of the village 2 because there's a lot old people in the village, a lot 3 of people rely on it. It's almost like a community 4 hub and we're keeping it for the sake of the village, 5 but it's actually costing us money to keep it. 6 **FACILITATOR:** Yeah, yeah. So just thinking back to when 7 you had the meeting with Wyn de Cruz did you -- what 8 was the sort of feeling of why you agreed to take it 9 on then, if that's the right phrase? 10 PHILIP VENN: Well, he was quite good and he was very 11 helpful, and he was quite enthusiastic, and it did 12 seem quite exciting because I'm an electrician by 13 trade. I did that for eight years and then I had been 14 in the motor trade for 24 years leading up to when we 15 took this on in 2008, and I thought, okay, Wyn talking 16 to us as well and I thought that will be, you know, 17 different again, the Post Office, and yeah we'll give 18 it a go and see how it goes. Which is what we've 19 done.

FACILITATOR: Thank you.

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Sue, so to come to you then. So obviously you have been involved with at least two Post Offices. Do you want to tell us a little bit about what was the forefront of your mind when you started out?

SUSAN EDGAR: Yes. I worked in a post office where I live

part-time and I don't know if this will go down very well but I have always been a person that loves what they do. I always consider myself because I love working for the Post Office, and my job interacting with other people, and I just decided I would start off doing relief work and I did work for people who were going on sick, maternity leave, et cetera, holidays, and I did some cover for Post Office when there was different things happening with people, and I went in and covered the Post Office until a new postmaster or new postmistress, the postmaster came back.

I then took on a post office on my own in Middlesbrough. I still loved it but couldn't explain the shortages at the time, different things, and then I closed that under NT and I opened one in Guisborough where I currently am and I still have to say, no matter what's gone on, I love what I do and I love my interaction with my customers, and when Diane and David say the same about a trusted brand, Post Office is a trusted brand, it is to a point but I personally I believe it's not the Post Office that is a trusted brand it's the postmaster themselves. We do so much for our customers on the social side and the benefits that they get from us that we don't get paid for, we

come to us because they like to talk to us and know that they are going to get some kind of help and a good answer, and I think that's the most important bit of our job if I'm honest. No matter where I've worked we've kept it like a community office, more a villagey feel and we still do that, and I still love what I do. FACILITATOR: Right, thank you. That brings us nicely on to the area I was going to ask you about, which was, talking about running a branch, what are the things that you do like about it. So Sue's picked up some there. How about the rest of you? What sort of things do you like about being involved with the branch? Diane, what would you say you like about doing it? DIANE BATH: Well, up until recently I have really loved doing what I do. I like people. We're in an area where there's a lot of elderly people and it is nice to be able to help them to the extent that like on one

don't expect to be paid for.

You know, our oldies come in and they have got

a bill and they don't understand it or things are

happening within their lives, you know, they like to

morning between 10 and 11 o'clock, and one week she didn't turn up. So at lunchtime I went and had a look, I went to her house to see if she was okay and her milk was still on the doorstep and I knocked the door, and she answered door and hadn't got a clue who I was. I went inside and she'd got butter in the microwave and she was trying to cook it. Her fire was out in her living room and her car keys were in it, and I could see she was in some sort of a state and I was able to phone her son and say come on over there's something wrong with your Mum, you know. She did go into hospital straight away but she had had a brain tumour and subsequently died.

But I mean, it's things like that. Being a subpostmaster you are there and you know what's going on in your community. If something is wrong in your community you know how to act, you know your customers on a personal basis and it is quite nice to be involved with them and if they have problems they will come to you, not just for Post Office-type queries.

You know, you might be the only person they speak to in that day. You might have said what you're saying, you know, "It's a lovely day, isn't it. We're going to — it's nice to have a nice cup of coffee in

the garden today". You might have said that 100 times that day but they have only heard it that once, so to have the interaction with the public that's the bit I like, as I say, until recently.

occasion a lady used to come in regularly, Tuesday

Unfortunately, recently, since lock down, I have had -- well, previous to that as well I did have a little bit of a breakdown, but during lock down, with people wearing masks, I am deaf, I wear hearing aids and I do rely a lot of lipreading and wearing masks I couldn't cope in the Post Office at all, because not only have you got the screen in front of you, people wearing masks, you can only see that part of their face so you couldn't tell by their expression what they were saying and I've just found it impossible to work.

**FACILITATOR:** Right, okay. I'm sorry to hear that. Thank you.

David, do you want to tell us about some of the things you like about being in the Post Office?

MR HARTLEY: Well, I echo what Diane said really and Sue with the -- you're more than the brand itself. You're part of the community. I mean, when the first lock down happened, I worked alone for six days without a break. You know, I didn't close for lunches or anything like that, and I didn't feel it fair that the

staff should be coming in because of this unknown infection and I was just shattered at the end of it.

Yes, things got a bit easier and things are easier now that we're coming out of the pandemic but people -- the majority of the general public recognised the fact that we were an emergency service at times because without us a lot of the general public couldn't survive and, like Diane says, we might be the only person that they see on a day-to-day basis

I loved doing that. I'm not saying I didn't, but it was shattering, absolutely shattering, for ten weeks on my own.

FACILITATOR: I can imagine, yes. Thank you.

How about you, Philip? How do you and your wife, you know, what do you get from it in terms of the good things?

PHILIP VENN: It's very much the same as the others have been saying really. Like, it's nice to see the customers, the different things they want to talk about. When there was lots of pensions going out, which isn't so much now, on a Monday we used to have a queue halfway round the shop and they would be giving me stick about bringing them coffee and one thing and another, all the old-ish sort of people, old

biddies and such like, and it was just a nice community spirit and they'd use it as a community hub, almost really like they spent far too long there and talked to others and give us hassle and, you know, which is why we still do it now even though it's costing us money to do it.

It's much like the other lady was saying about the neighbour and such like. You know, we have had a few instances likely that and we've had a few her and helped a few people, and we delivered lots of food to them over the pandemic and such like when they were shielding lots of them and that, you know, because it is a village here so it's quite a village community spirit.

So I don't actually spend that much time in the shop now. I'm more doing paperwork most of the time and the accounting and that sort of thing. Plus I quite like the figure work as well, like working things out if there's something wrong, looking for it and that, so I enjoyed a lot of this work, but this has caused some problems obviously as we're obviously aware. So I like things when things work out and that, so you know I enjoy that when it's right, which is more nowadays.

**FACILITATOR:** So let's think then about the not so good 102

things about running a branch specifically. Before we get into all the detail about Horizon and so on. But what are the things that have perhaps not lived up to your expectations of running a branch?

I'll begin with you, Philip, what would you say about that?

PHILIP VENN: Firstly, when we took it on in 2008 obviously we knew very little about retail, let alone Post Office, and there was a main Post Office two miles from here in Crewcerne and we knew the postmistress and master quite well, and they said, "If you need any help come and see us, ring us, we'll help you at any time", because they were pleased we were keeping it going.

Anyway, we were struggling to make sense of the old Horizon System, like trying to do the accounting on the end of day and week and such like, month, and we went to see them, and I spoke to her over the counter down there in the shop to start with and I said, "I've rung the helpline and I'm not getting much help", and she said, "Well, that's your first mistake. We don't call it the helpline. We call it the 'hell line'. You're wasting your time", sort of thing and she went through things with me and explained how we should be doing it. Obviously, it's

different in their's because they were a main Post Office. They had a lot more going on than we did, but gradually we learnt what we were doing and it was all okay then until obviously there was issues.

So that was quite disillusioning, and just one more thing on the helpline, just to say how bad they are at times in my experience, we've got a strange FAD code because we started off as one of three pilots in the country of this little sort of local-type thing, which I can't remember what it's called, we've got a strange FAD code, so when you ring them up they tend to think we're a sub-post office, some think we can do things that we can't so they often tell us to try and press something or do something that we don't have anyway

But the worst time, I rang up one day. The screen was black. It wasn't doing anything at all. It wasn't responding, and I checked the output from the transformer and there was no output so it just needed a new power supply, basically.

I rang up.helpline and said we need a new power pack for the transformer. There's no output we can't use the touch screen at all and she said, "Okay, please can you press engineer", or something like that, whatever it was, and I said, "I can't press

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1 anything because it's black. I can't see it". 2 "Okay, so please press engineer and then tell me 3 what it says." I said, "You're not listening to me. 4 I can't press anything because it's black and I can't 5 see anything", and she said -- and she said the same 6 again. And after three times I said, "Am I wasting my 7 time here", and she said, "I'm really sorry but I've 8 got to run through my list of questions". I said, 9 "Okay, go on." 10 "Press engineer. What can you see?" 11 "Nothing, it's black." 12 "Press this. What can you see?" 13 "Nothing." 14 "Press this. What can you see?" 15 "Nothing." I went through about ten questions 16 like this she said, "Okay, I'm going to have to send 17 an engineer out to have a look for you. I thought, 18 well, this is just ludicrous and that's been --19 I guess that's why I am quite negative. 20 **FACILITATOR:** How long ago would that have been? 21 PHILIP VENN: That was probably about four or five years 22 ago, perhaps, something like that. A while ago, but 23 it sticks in your mind, silly things like that. There 24 was just no logic whatsoever. 25 FACILITATOR: Yeah, yeah, thank you.

So Diane, obviously, we take your point about the masks and everything but in terms of running the branch what other things have you felt were not perhaps what you hoped they would have been, would you say? You're on mute, Diane. **DIANE BATH:** I wasn't sure whether it was or not. Well, when we first took over the Post Office I was supposed to have four days' training. That was made into two because it was snowing and I had to go all the way from Cumbria down to Burnley for my training which was, oh, I a couple of hours away anyway. So I was supposed to be settling into a new home and a new branch and I wasn't physically here to do it because I was supposedly training. They sent two trainers out -- sorry, two days' worth of training once I got into the Post Office but it was a very quiet time and we had hardly any customers so the training was absolutely useless. We were a sorting -- well, at the time I was a sorting office as well and I was supposed to have training from Royal Mail. The Royal Mail actually

22 left our building last year and I am still waiting for 23 the training from that, so I went 16 years without 24 ever having been trained at all with the Royal Mail 25 aspect of it. 106

And the same as Philip just said, if you wanted any help from the helpline they were no help whatsoever. When I went to them with any problems that I had I just got what I've been hearing from everybody else, "I'm sorry, its just you that's got the problem. We haven't heard it anywhere else before. It's your fault. You've done something wrong", and I said, "Well, it's definitely not me", and they said, "Well, take a look that your family", which I was absolutely horrified by because, you know, I trust my family implicitly. It's just the help. I just needed help from somewhere.

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I didn't have a manager, anybody at all I could turn to, so I felt from day 1 I'd been completely on

FACILITATOR: Right, thank you. I will come back to some of those issues then from all of you in a minute. That's helpful, thank you.

Just picking up on the start of that then. So, David, let me just come to you for a minute on the training issue that Diane mentions, just those early days of the sort of training and advice and information that you got both as a postmaster and then with Horizon, do you want to tell me a little bit about the process you went through there?

DAVID HARTLEY: Well, when I first started it was with the 2

old ledgers. It wasn't with Horizon.

3 FACILITATOR: Yes.

4 DAVID HARTLEY: So I received good training on that.

5 FACILITATOR: Okay.

DAVID HARTLEY: But nothing much has changed really and if

7 I can go to the current day, just a few weeks ago 8 we -- they changed the ATM over to Post Office from 9 Bank of Ireland and the only problems I've had with

10 the Bank of Ireland were when they couldn't connect.

11 I used to have two ATMs and it's gone down to one

12 because of the actual cost of them and the

13 remuneration and everything, but when they changed

14 them over to the Post Office we were sent a booklet,

15 just a few leaves of paper actually, not even

a booklet. That was the extent of the training for

I've since -- and I'm not on my own -experienced losses in the ATM. I've got a paper here that's asking me to pay £1,426.61. That's just come yesterday because of shortages in the ATM.

Now, nothing seems to have changed from the start here. You asked, I don't know if you want to cover this in this part, but how I felt over the years. I'm part of the Federation, like Sue is, and

1	I used to be an executive officer in around 2012,	1	the other one out. Mistakes are made. I'm not saying
2	around those years there, and we were told by the then	2	that mistakes aren't made, but we were able to check
3	General Secretary that we have to believe that the	3	back then.
4	system is robust, even though I've been paying God	4	Well, once Horizon started, and somebody, you
5	knows how much back to the Post Office over the years	5	know, took money out by card you hadn't a clue.
6	from when Horizon first started. So I believed it.	6	FACILITATOR: So at that sort of transition time, what
7	You know, I thought it's bound to be mistakes on	7	sort of training and advice or guidance did you get
8	somebody's part. I've sacked staff in the past	8	from Post Office Limited about managing that
9	thinking they were stealing.	9	transition into the new system, going all the way back
10	FACILITATOR: Can I just ask you just to hold that for one	10	to the beginning of Horizon.
11	sec. So you were were these both at Nelson and at	11	MR HARTLEY: Very little.
12	Southport where this has happened, firstly? It's been	12	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Before we go any further can I just
13	across that time zone. So if you check it back, when	13	check that I've got the details right about each of
14	Horizon came in, if we just go back to that moment for	14	you. I think Mr Venn you started at a time when
15	a while, what was the sort of chronology of problems	15	Horizon had been established for a number of years so
16	arising then and how did that compare with when you're	16	you know nothing but Horizon; is that correct?
17	on the ledger.	17	PHILIP VENN: Yes, that's correct.
18	MR HARTLEY: There's no comparison. There's just no	18	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Whereas the other three, I suspect, may
19	comparison at all. Yes, we had to stay until	19	have had experience pre-Horizon. Have I got that
20	sometimes 9.00 trying to find things and my mother in	20	right?
21	law used to check the dockets for the pension books,	21	DIANE BATH: No. No, I've only known Horizon.
22	you know, and say that there's one missing here and	22	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, you have only known Horizon.
23	you knew instinctively, you know, if you'd left one in	23	So Ms Edgar do you agree with Mr Hartley that
24	a book because you knew the amount and, "Oh yes, it	24	although it may have been very laborious it was much
25	was Mrs so and so", and next time she came in we tore 109	25	easier to balance under the old ledger system than 110
1	under Horizon?	1	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you both very much.
2	SUSAN EDGAR: Absolutely, we had to write it all in pencil	2	Back to you, Mr Norris.

Absolutely, we had to write it all in pencil 3 and if we were a penny out on the dockets we had to go 4 through them again because we -- well, we just had to 5 have it right and that was all there was to it. We 6 never had shortages like we've had since Horizon. 7 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, and I've heard guite a lot of 8 evidence to the effect that the reason that it was 9 easier to balance is because you were able to make 10 extensive checks under the old ledger system, whereas 11 that simply isn't possible with Horizon. 12 Is that your experience as well? 13 SUSAN EDGAR: Yes, it is and with most of the 14 personalisation because we don't know who each 15 customer is because they come with a card and we don't 16 even see anything unless they are paying any bills 17 where we knew by dockets how's Elsie and different 18 things. 19 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. 20 SUSAN EDGAR: Yeah, it was so easy to balance, whether it 21 was laborious or not. And it was always right. It 22 was very rare that it was wrong and if it was it 23 would, in fact, in the end only be pennies or a couple 24 of pounds, it was never these hundreds and thousands

of pounds wrong -- never.

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3 FACILITATOR: So Sue, as I was asking David that moment of 4 transition into Horizon era, what support and 5 information and training did you get to manage that 6 transition? 7 SUSAN EDGAR: We had a trainer come into our branch and 8 I think they stayed for two or three days and we were 9 given these big files, these books, Horizon but --10 what there was then on Horizon there was a screen you 11 could go to to not play around with but you could 12 train on it yourself and that's what you had to do, 13 and just, you know, it was like a training Horizon 14 plate if you like, but then they took away the 15 training mode so you didn't have that anywhere. So 16 basically we all trained ourselves if I'm honest. If 17 somebody knew something they would somebody else how to do it and it was all trial and error really in the 18 19 early days. That's how it was. 20 FACILITATOR: So for all of you when you were having your 21 first experiences with Horizon, how well prepared did 22 you feel you were to use it to manage your accounts 23 and so on? 24 SUSAN EDGAR: We didn't. We were told it was going to be

less paperwork and it would be much easier because it

would be all computerised. Well, I'm not very technical anyway but for all it is simply if it goes right, when something goes wrong you haven't got a clue where look.

Even now I consider myself well versed in Horizon having used it for so many years but there is no way you can look, if you have made a mistake, you can't -- you do a transaction log but it's just not same as I think paper and ink anyway. But you have no background to look at as such.

FACILITATOR: Thank you. So Diane when you were starting with Horizon how well prepared did you feel you were?

DIANE BATH: Well, it wasn't like any computer that I'd ever seen before. For a start off, the keys are very close together. I don't know whether anybody else has noticed that but it's not like a normal keyboard. It

noticed that but it's not like a normal keyboard. It seems to be compressed into a smaller space, so I think it is quite easy to touch another key.

I wasn't taught terribly well because we were just taught on dummies at the training centre and, as I say, it was only two days.

It seems pretty straightforward to use it. You know, you press a first class stamp to sell a first class stamp, second class stamp to sell a second class, et cetera. But as Susan has just said, when 113

anything goes wrong there is just absolutely no way to check. You can go over and over the figures that you've got but you have so little information it's really, really hard to try and trace a problem when you have got one and phoning the helpline isn't helpful whatsoever. So it's just a matter of you going over and over and over it, the same figures, and coming up with the same answers all the time because what isn't -- if something isn't there you can't --you can't possibly find an answer to it.

FACILITATOR: Yeah.

So, David, when you're thinking about, you know, both those early days of Horizon and, you know, getting used to using it and also when you started to see issues can you just describe to me a bit about how well you felt supported by Post Office Limited or in any of their, you know, any of their people.

MR HARTLEY: The support wasn't there. It's as simple as that. The blame was entirely in your hands and it was up to us to actually, find it.

Now we have what we call a tier 2 where they will investigate if there is any problems but to actually find it on your own when you've had so little training and, again, what Sue said about the testing of it and, you know, I can't remember the name of it,

what they used to call it, but they took that away and you ring the help desk and, like Diane said, it's well known as the hell desk, because they all don't sing from the same hymn sheet, and amount of times I've lost my rag with them on the phone because they are telling me different things all the time and is that down to their training? I don't know. It could well be, or lack of.

It's appalling really the treatment we've had over the years and the blame, you know, it's like having the Sword of Damocles hanging above your head all the time because you are responsible for that money and money is going missing and you cannot understand why and you've got this suspicion all the time of yourself.

**FACILITATOR:** Can I just ask then, so you say, you know, quite with feeling, that there was no support available what processes were supposed to be in place if and when you found a discrepancy? Just describe to me how that worked and how it felt.

21 MR HARTLEY: How do you mean?

FACILITATOR: Let us say you do your balancing or your
 trading period ends, you find there's a discrepancy.
 What was the process supposed to be that you would go
 through and how did it feel to be going through that?

MR HARTLEY: The process was you put it right. That was the end of it. There was no -- it was either a black and white. There was no grey areas. It was either black or white. If there was a shortage you put it in. You made that right. There was no disputing it like there is nowadays. You to rectify that problem. We've had to borrow from family members, from friends, we couldn't even -- sorry ...

We couldn't even afford a pint of milk one week because we'd had to put that much money in.

FACILITATOR: Were you putting money in for all of the shortfalls that appeared or were you reporting some of them? What was your sort of personal policy on how to deal with it

MR HARTLEY: We had to make it right. It's as simple asthat. We had to make it right.

**FACILITATOR:** Who was telling you that, or why --

18 MR HARTLEY: You weren't given an option. It was, you
 19 know, make good cash or make good cheque.

**FACILITATOR:** To what extent did you see that changing over time, that specific feeling of having to make it

22 good? Did that change over time or not?

MR HARTLEY: Only these last few years when they have actually admitted that there were faults. We've taken pay cuts as postmasters to keep the business afloat

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1 and I challenged the then chief executive officer, 2 Paula Vennells. I stood up at conference and said, 3 "Can you tell me why we are taking pay cuts and you 4 are awarding yourself an 18 per cent pay rise of over 5 £500.000". 6 And I said, you know, "You should hang your head 7 in shame". She didn't even have the guts to -- well, 8 to respond to it. She just looked at her side kick 9 10

and nodded and he stood up and said, "I think that's rather personal". Well, yes, it was rather personal. It was personal to all of us that we're taking pay cuts.

13 FACILITATOR: Yes.

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14 MR HARTLEY: I'm sorry if I'm getting ...

15 FACILITATOR: No, no, I understand it's painful,

16 absolutely, yes.

> So just going back to these -- I just like to think about some of the wider support that was or wasn't available to you. So you've talked about calling the helpline, a little bit about the training, such as you had.

What other ways would you have had to kind of help you solve these problems before having to put the money in or face sanctions or whatever? Just tell me about that.

117

MR HARTLEY: Me or --1 2 FACILITATOR: To all of you really. Did you have someone 3 else you could talk to within the Post Office Limited? 4 How did it all work? 5 MR HARTLEY: We had an area manager that, again, you know, 6 put the blame on us. At the time, it's different now. 7 I will say it is different now and I've just lost an 8 area manager that I got on famously with and she was 9 absolutely brilliant. Prior to that it was, "You are 10 at fault and you must put that right". 11 FACILITATOR: Okay. 12 How about you, Philip? What had been your 13 experiences of sort of support or advice within 14 Post Office Limited to help you if there was 15 a shortfall? 16 PHILIP VENN: Well, as I say, in the early days there was 17 Wyn de Cruise who was quite -- you could approach. He 18 was approachable and he'd try and help or get some 19 help for us maybe, and then there was somebody called 20 Paula, that I can't remember her surname, but we had 21 mobile numbers for them. We could actually call them 22 and ask what was what, or maybe help us, possibly. 23 But after that help seemed to disappear and we 24

have a self-funded Post Office. It's our own money that's in the Post Office safe, not belonging to Post Office Limited, because that was the option, the only option we had when we took it on in 2008. We had to supply the cash for it, which I wasn't keen on, but as it turned out it was okay, it was a pain because we had to draw cash from banks all the time which cost money to bring into it, but as the years have gone by it balanced out to the money we were taking over the retail counter, because we'd take about [redacted] cash over the counter in the filling station even now.

So it was helpful because we could then put that into the Post Office and it would save the banking charges. So but now it's actually turned its head on us now because now they are saying there's a new system coming and we can't be self-funded anymore. We have to be a funded Post Office, meaning we've got [redacted] cash that we're going to have to bank at [redacted] bank charges to bank it, so not only are we losing £400 per month but now we have all these charges which amount to about £5,000 a year of bank charges to bank that -- (unclear: multiple speakers)

23 FACILITATOR: Okay, just so I'm clear, a self-funding 24 office, you are still processing everything through 25 Horizon, though?

PHILIP VENN: Yes, it still all goes through Horizon. You basically rem cash in or rem it out if you need to

had no contacts at all. Now, you see if there was

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a discrepancy, you see, it's probably unusual but we

3 take any out sort of thing. Generally it's remming 4 cash in because cash goes out over the counter a lot 5

now, but we do now take a lot of bank deposits recently, now all the banks or closing everywhere.

But going back to the transaction log and how we'd look for problems and that, like we'd end up printing a day's transaction log and going through it, which some of that doesn't make that much sense. There's about five lines of text just for a mail label. So it's hard to sort of understand it but you just briefly look through it.

One or two problems likely cause issues is if you forget to press fast cash on a customer and that transaction is still on the till when you serve the next one. If you weren't alert what was going on you maybe pay out too much cash. But once you have looked through and looked for that sort of problem then there's very little can be happening and we thought at times the staff were making errors somewhere along the line, yet we couldn't find them on the audit trail because we're not a huge Post Office but, as I say, it's only a local, so we'd look through and sometimes there might be a reason for something yeah and you can

1 find something? Somebody did make a mistake but more 1 for where that could have possibly gone, unless 2 often than not it didn't. 2 somebody had stolen it, which we knew wasn't the case, 3 But two things I'd like to just briefly bring 3 but obviously that's a possibility, so we rang the 4 4 helpline and said, "We've got this discrepancy. It up, if I can. 5 FACILITATOR: Yes. 5 doesn't make any sense at all. Is there anything your 6 6 PHILIP VENN: In 2012 we had an audit and because we got end you can see that might have caused an issue", and 7 National Lottery as well on site and they went through 7 they looked and said, "No, there's definitely nothing. 8 everything and everything was fine allegedly, apart 8 It's down to you, your end. You have lost the £600." 9 9 from the National Lottery scratch cards. They said we So me and Cynthia at the time, the manager, 10 10 owed about £2,000 for scratch cards, which was looked through it again and we looked through it the 11 nonsense because we always do an invoice every week 11 next day and the next day. We couldn't work out for 12 and pay it from that because it's complicated with the 12 the life of us where this £600 could have gone, so we 13 Post Office and the lottery. 13 rang the helpline twice more over two or three days 14 So -- but we have no choice but to pay it so we 14 and every time they looked at it and said, "No, it's 15 15 had to pay that out of our savings as well and so from definitely your fault. It's your problem. It's down 16 16 2012 on I made a spreadsheet and I've kept a record of to you. There's nothing our end that could have 17 every pack of scratch cards that come in, when they 17 caused that discrepancy". 18 are authorised, when they are confirmed, when they go 18 Anyway, about three weeks later, all of 19 out, when they are paid for, so that they can't 19 a sudden, as I was keeping a spreadsheet of where --20 possibly do that to me again. Which we've not had an 20 of how much money should be going into our bank every 21 audit since. 21 day because they pay us back whatever we've paid out 22 22 But also there was one incident, apart from the extra sort of thing, so I keep a spreadsheet of what 23 losses that were unexplained, there was one incident 23 I was expecting in each day, and all of a sudden 24 24 about. I think it was either three weeks or six weeks in 2016 whereby we were about £600-something short at end of the day and there was no way we could account 25 25 later, all a sudden this exact figure of 122 1 1 £600-and-something, whatever it was, I can't remember 2 100 per cent, suddenly appeared in our bank extra to 2 3 what we were expecting. So it was too much of 3 FACILITATOR: Thank you. 4 a coincidence. It had to be that £600-odd that we had 4 5 5 been looking for for days that somehow materialised 6 back into out account. And we rang the helpline again 6 7 7

and they couldn't shed any light on it, didn't want to know, basically. So it just goes to prove that things were going on, you know, that money we got back, a lot we obviously didn't, but ... sorry if I didn't probably answer your question you started out --

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FACILITATOR: No, that's fine, absolutely, that's fine. So briefly what was your supposition of that, where that money was and what happened to it to get back to you?

PHILIP VENN: Well, that £600, I've no idea. It was obviously something going on their end that they were showing something should be cash or not or whatever I'm not sure, and so somehow or another they re-accounted for it later on and paid it back to us with no explanation.

So because the figure always tied generally what we were expecting into the bank, because I keep track of it so I know where we are, but that day it didn't 123

by that amount and it was coincidentally exactly the same amount that we had allegedly lost.

So can I just check for all of you have I understood it right when there was shortfalls or discrepancies you were all paying them back either out of your own pocket or out of the other parts of the business? Was that true for all of you, that that's been common practice.

PHILIP VENN: For me, yes.

11 FACILITATOR: And Diane and Sue and David, I think; is

12 that right?

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13 **DAVID HARTLEY:** Yes.

14 FACILITATOR: So --

SUSAN EDGAR: To be honest, it wasn't until I had 15 16 a massive shortage and I wouldn't pay it back they 17 said I'd taken it or one of my staff had taken it and 18

I refused.

19 FACILITATOR: Okay. Just pause there one sec. So when 20 you were doing those -- when you were settling it 21 yourselves were you also ringing the hotline or not 22 even ringing the hotline? How did that work in terms

23 of what you were doing?

24 **DIANE BATH:** Well, I used to to start with but it's an 25 absolute waste of time because you get the same

1	answers all the time: "It's nothing to do with us; we		
2	can't put it right; it's your fault; you're the only		
3	one it's happening to; you have got to make it right."		
4	FACILITATOR: When would that when in time would that		
5	have been, what sort of years would that be getting		
6	DIANE BATH: That would have been early on, sort of		
7	2006/2007, something like that. You do, you get fed		
8	up of phoning them and being given the same answer and		
9	they say, "Well, if there is anything wrong that we've		
10	done it will come back do you in a transaction		
11	correction", so you can wait weeks and weeks and weeks		
12	and, occasionally, something might come back but more		
13	often than not nothing ever did.		
14	FACILITATOR: Right.		
15	DIANE BATH: And if it's a large amount that you can't		
16	afford to put in yourself you have to settle centrally		
17	and then they take it straight out of your wages. So		
18	it's win-win for them and lose-lose for us all the		
19	time, I'm afraid.		
20	FACILITATOR: So back to you, Sue, then. Was that similar		
21	to what you had been doing and what triggered this to		
22	change, would you say, Sue?		
23	SUSAN EDGAR: I think well, I was having lots of		
24	and the second of the second o		
	problems with my system. It kept going off lots of		

transactions. We had no signal. We had somebody come out from computer centre that watched my router and in the end what they did do at the very, very end and said that I'd asked for it -- which I hadn't -- they took all the wiring out and rewired the whole system, put me all new Horizon kit in and a new router, et cetera, and told me that I had some kind of hub in my fortress position that I shouldn't have because they were obsolete. Well, I didn't even know I had a hub down there because you don't touch it, you don't go anywhere near the Horizon wiring, et cetera.

But we were just losing connections all the time and one day when we were doing our balance we normally do a balance period and then when it gets to trading period we know that everything is more or less right, you know, you know where you're at basically and this Wednesday morning I counted by currency up and everything and my manager she double checked it. I think we were EUR 5 adrift, but come teatime when we'd hardly sold any Euros we were 2,000 and I think it was 800 short, and I was looking at it. I thought I'd counted them wrong so I asked my manager to double-check. I said go over there and you count them away from me, because I also lost money on my stamps so I had to check my stamps again as well.

And she had the same answer as me, but we didn't -- our answer wasn't the same as Horizon said. So then the other girl that was working that day, I asked her to count them separately and she got the same figure as us, which was not far from what we had on the morning, and the same with the stamps.

The comeuppance of it all was I ended up over

The comeuppance of it all was I ended up over £68,000 short and --

FACILITATOR: How did that go to 68,000 then?

SUSAN EDGAR: Because they said I had a shortage in my cash and I'm saying, "No, I haven't. You know, I didn't have that amount of cash to start with so how can I be that amount short?" And, to be honest, I was demented, as you can imagine, and then they said in 2017 I had said that -- I'd reported that I sent a REM back for 23,500 on 10 January 2017. They didn't notify me until 2018, April 2018, that it had happened. We went looking for paperwork. Couldn't find anything and meanwhile I just -- well, I didn't

know where to turn or anything. They sent me 26,000

that wouldn't go into Horizon system. When you scan

wouldn't so we were £26,000 over so we rang them and

it, it normally just goes in, into your cash. This

told and them of that.

They then sent us another pouch that had £17,000
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in and it should have only had 11 in, so we rang them and told them about that, because the slip inside was for our branch but the address on the bag was not for us, so we had this extra 6,000 and an extra 26,000.

FACILITATOR: Right.

SUSAN EDGAR: That took nearly two years before it was corrected and we had to kept telling them, telling them, that we had this money and then when we got it all put right we kept getting this 6,000 saying, "You're £6,000 short; you're £6,000 short".

"No, we're not." You know, I rang the helpline. They said, "Oh, put it into suspension, do this, do that", and it just kept multiplying. I'm saying, "No, if I put that there, that's going to be 12,000 and that's going to be 18,000".

"No, no, that's not who have to do." I knew it wasn't right but I said, do you know what, if ever I'm over again I will never ring them. I won't tell them.
I'll just keep it there until they come looking for it. But that night I never slept and my husband and everything, we were all, as you can imagine, in such a state and my actual contracts adviser, because I expected the next morning, Thursday morning, to have auditors at my door, so I rang the then other contracts adviser, because mine was on holiday, and

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I said, "Look, I don't know what's gone on, but it's just gone berserk. This system is just like multiplying and doing things", I said, "And I haven't had the money". You know, I said, "And I'm going to lose everything for something I hadn't done", and at the time he said, "No, don't worry about it. You'll be fine". All right.

But I mean it doesn't make you feel fine. I mean, and I think that was the start of my mental health problems. I mean, I finished up I'm on antidepressants and everything and my husband was in such a state because he thought I was going to go to prison he actually asked me, "Will you go to prison for this", and I said, "No, because I haven't done it", but then you find out that people have been to prison for things they haven't done.

**FACILITATOR:** This was in about 2017?

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SUSAN EDGAR: Yes, yes. (unclear: multiple speakers) used to pay the money and I had to -- I kept ringing up every week for somebody to come and do me an audit thinking had I done something wrong. They never even sent an auditor out and I said, "Look, this is wrong somewhere", and I was asked, "Well, do you want an audit?" I said, "Well, yes, I do because I believe I've done something wrong but I don't know what". 129

1 The auditors couldn't find anything wrong, 2 obviously, and it took me ringing every week and my 3 contacts adviser actually said to me, said, "Nobody 4 rings two or three times a week asking have you found 5 anything", and I went to a meeting and I have to say 6 this because there's a lot of people saying nasty 7 things, the Federation stood by me all the way and 8 they were such a great support, they really were. 9 They kept me up, if you like, because I could have 10 just ended it all because I was in such a state 11 because, as you can imagine, 68,000-and-whatever is 12 not a little sum of money. 13 FACILITATOR: No. 14 **SUSAN EDGAR:** And we went to the meeting and a Federation 15 rep came with me, Milesh Joshi, a lovely guy and had 16 sent me the paperwork beforehand and I had 14 sheets 17 of paperwork that they said showed that I'd taken the 18 money or my daughters, I had two daughters work with 19 me, or one of my staff, and the staff, apart from one, 20 are all related. We're all family as such, and I just 21 knew they hadn't done anything and then as we were 22 turning pages they said that my manager, when the 23 26,000 came in she'd come out of the screen and gone 24 to another screen that I didn't even know existed, to

rewind and show us how he did that. We didn't know how it happened.

And then they went on to page 15 and page 16 which we didn't have and there were 21 pages in total but they hadn't sent us them all, which supposedly proved what had happened.

Anyway, it took until -- they agreed that they would write this money off because I thought I was going to lose everything, they agreed that they -- the Federation pushed and pushed for it to be sorted and the 23 and a half that they couldn't come to me for it anyway, it was too late, et cetera, and it took the Federation, Callum and Milesh and others, pushing and pushing the Post Office to write this money off because I hadn't had it, and I asked for it in writing because -- it sounds awful but I didn't want them to come back at me and say, you know, at a later date, like as now or whatever, "You still owe this money", and that took months just to get that email with it written out.

FACILITATOR: Thank you for recounting that.

22 SUSAN EDGAR: (unclear: multiple speakers) -- had no idea. 23 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Excuse me, can you just tell me, only

> approximately but so that I've got a proper feel for it, over what period of time this was so, for example, 131

1 did it start in, say, 2016 and finish in 2016 or what? 2 Just give me an idea of the scale of it.

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be honest, and neither did Milesh, so we asked them to

3 SUSAN EDGAR: It went from 2017 to 2020 before I got the 4 letter but when they came out and looked at my system 5 and changed everything, that was in 2019 where they 6 took all my system out and changed it.

7 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So I just want to be clear about this, 8 if I could be Ms Edgar, is this a situation where, and 9 I'll put it in straightforward terms, it's probably 10 much more complicated than this on the ground, but it 11 was being alleged that you owed the Post Office 12 £68,000 or you were responsible for that shortfall and 13 you resisted them, in effect, and said, "No, I'm not, 14 I've done nothing wrong", and ultimately they accepted 15

SUSAN EDGAR: In the end, yes.

17 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right.

18 SUSAN EDGAR: Because I would not do a false cash 19 declaration, as a shortage, and I refused to do 20 a false cash declaration because then I knew if I did 21 that then I was committing a crime, if you like --

22 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, fine.

23 SUSAN EDGAR: -- of a false declaration.

24 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: And do you still have some documents 25 relating to this whole episode?

1	SUSAN EDGAR: I do. I have (unclear: multiple	1	them?
2	speakers)	2	DIANE BATH: I'm treated like I'm stupid, like I'm the one
3	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Would you be prepared to sent them to	3	that's that I'm the one that's got it all wrong.
4	me so I can see what was said in writing?	4	It makes me feel so small and insignificant. It's
5	SUSAN EDGAR: I will.	5	taken all my confidence away. For a long time, I just
6	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you very much. Back to you	6	felt like I didn't want to be in the Post Office.
7	SUSAN EDGAR: It will best a bit gibberish because it's	7	I just wanted to fall into a big black hole and not
8	all in	8	come back out because the Post Office made me feel
9	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That's fine. Lawyers like nothing	9	like I was worthless.
10	better than pouring over documents, even if the people	10	FACILITATOR: So what were they doing and saying to make
11	who made them think that they don't make much sense.	11	you feel that way?
12	Don't you worry about that, Mrs Edgar.	12	<b>DIANE BATH:</b> Well, you try to get hold of the helpline.
13	SUSAN EDGAR: Thank you.	13	They don't want to know. You ask if there's anybody
14	FACILITATOR: Thank you, sir. So I would like to sort of	14	else out there that can come and help you. No, there
15	take a step up, if you want to think about it that	15	isn't. There's absolutely nobody to turn to. You
16	way. Obviously, you have all experienced	16	know, my husband and I, we've been through the figures
17	discrepancies and I just wondered if you could	17	over and over again. I've even got a friend of mine
18	describe to me how you feel about the way Post Office	18	whose a forensic accountant, he came round and he had
19	Limited responded or respond when you go through this	19	a look at the books as well. He had no idea where
20	period of shortfalls. So I'm not talking about the	20	anything was going, he said, "But if you want me to
21	person on the helpline now as such but just the whole	21	look into things any further it will cost so much an
22	general tenor of their response.	22	hour which is going to cost more than what they are
23	Diane, how would you describe that?	23	asking you to pay so just pay it", so on every single
24	<b>DIANE BATH:</b> I don't really know how to answer this.	24	account it seems like there is just nobody there to
25	<b>FACILITATOR:</b> How does it feel when you're dealing with 133	25	help you. I didn't have a manager. I had nobody, 134
1	nobody. The only number I'd got at that time was the	1	FACILITATOR: Can I just

2 helpline and they were very, very unhelpful. 3 **FACILITATOR:** To what extent has that changed over time 4 now? 5 DIANE BATH: I just tend to keep everything to myself now 6 and I don't bother with the helpline anymore because 7 they have always been so awful to me. There's just 8 still nobody. I don't know whether it's because our 9 Post Office is sort of away from the towns and it's 10 further for anybody to come out and see me but 11 I haven't seen anybody from the Post Office, apart 12 from an audit twice. I've never seen anybody from the 13 Post Office here in 17 years. FACILITATOR: Right, so let's imagine just for a moment, 14 15 hopefully not, but let's say your next trading period 16 you've got a discrepancy of let's say £2,000 that you 17 can't explain. 18 What would you do now if that arose? 19 DIANE BATH: Well, I know I should be phoning the 20 helpline. It's absolutely a waste of time. I'd look 21 and look, and look, and I know damn well I'm not going 22 to find anything so we would probably end up paying it 23 because I know if I push too far they'll send somebody 24 out and they'll say, "Right, okay, you owe X Y Z. 25 We're going to close you down".

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2 DIANE BATH: And that threat is sort of held over you all 3 the time and because I signed the postmaster's 4 contract all those years ago it says on it, you know, 5 I have to make good any losses, so ... 6 FACILITATOR: How recently did you last put money into 7 make up a discrepancy? 8 **DIANE BATH:** I do nearly every month. 9 FACILITATOR: Okay, thank you. 10 **DIANE BATH:** It might only be, I don't know, £50, £100, 11 £200, but it's very rarely it's on the Post Office's 12 side and then if it is I keep the money in a separate 13 bag in the Post Office because I know damn well that 14 next month it's going to be wanting money back again 15 so it all goes back. 16 FACILITATOR: Okay. So, David, the same sort of questions 17 to you really about how you'd characterise the 18 response of the Post Office Limited when you've got 19 a discrepancy, particularly in recent times, but just 20 generally, first of all? 21 MR HARTLEY: Generally, it was, as I say, there was no 22 grey areas. It was black and white and you were 23 expected to pay that money back and you had to more or 24 less plead with the contracts manager to put it over

a few months because you couldn't afford to pay it all

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1 back at once because, you know, it could be quite 2 a substantial amount that you were expected to 3 reimburse them for. 4 You say you don't want to know about the current 5 ones just yet but if I can just raise this, I mean, 6 I showed you that letter with the £1,426.61. At the 7 top of it it says: 8 "This is not a demand for payment." 9 And then on the next page how to pay, so if 10 that's not a demand for payment why put that extra 11 sheet in, how to pay? 12 This is what I mean about it being just black 13 and white. There's no grey areas whatsoever. 14 FACILITATOR: So in the same way I asked Diane there, what 15 do you do? Who do you contact at the moment, you 16 know, to get to try and get a resolution to something 17 like that? 18 MR HARTLEY: Well, I am fortunate, not like Diane, that 19 I do see an area manager from time to time and that 20 they are always there at the end of a phone call. 21 I will say that I still contact the previous 22 area manager because she was so good and she's 23 actually been out to the office. 24 I mentioned the Bank of Ireland ATM 25 discrepancies that we had some time ago, 2018 it was. 137

and even Bank of Ireland couldn't connect -- similar to Sue, actually -- they couldn't connect with the system, with their system, with Bank of Ireland. I was stood at the two ATMs at the back of them and they said we cannot connect with them and it was giving out money and nothing was being taken from anybody's account. So I ended up over £6,000 short, over this period of time. I received a telephone call just last year saying that, "We realise you hadn't been given enough training and that we will send a trainer out and because we take responsibility we will not be asking you for that money back".

I should think not, because when the area manager found out, and he's my current one, i said just laughed when they said we hadn't had enough training because I had had those ATMs for years.

19 Never had a problem with them.

20 FACILITATOR: Can I just check then, what you are describing there, just so I am clear, is that 22 a mis-communication between the Bank of Ireland system 23 and Horizon or Bank of Ireland --

DAVID HARTLEY: No, no, Horizon --24

FACILITATOR: (unclear: multiple speakers) -- your own 138

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Hartley, can I ask you, in respect

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MR HARTLEY: No, it was the telephone lines between Bank of Ireland and BT that were at fault so the money was being dispensed to people's account -- well, to people who were stood there, and money wasn't being taken from their accounts. They couldn't prove who had taken money because they'd no record of it at all.

But that was then, but still Post Office, you know, said that I was still responsible for over £6,500 and that you know as a gesture of goodwill they weren't going to expect me to pay for it. Well, I should think not. I haven't had it.

FACILITATOR: Okay. So just thinking about all of your experiences of dealing with discrepancies, how would you sort of say things have changed since the Horizon Issues obviously came to the fore and we've had all the, you know, court cases and things.

What changes have you seen from the Post Office side to support you if these things happen.

MR HARTLEY: Well, I've mentioned tier 2, that you can escalate any discrepancies to them, and on some occasions they have found them but I will say that the system has got far better but I can tell you now I haven't had this money. I have not had that money and not from the ATM. I've never --139

2 of that letter over the £1,400 what process are you 3 going to follow to dispute it, so that I can 4 understand. This is an absolutely current case if 5 I can put it in that way so I'd like to understand 6 what you will do to dispute this alleged shortfall. 7 MR HARTLEY: I've already said I'm disputing it. 8 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, but what will you do to dispute 9 it? Will you -- is there some kind of process you 10 have to go through? 11 **MR HARTLEY:** There's a telephone number for the branch 12 support centre, which is basically the helpline, but 13 there's also a team -- I don't know what -- it just 14 says by calling my team but the letter isn't 15 actually -- oh, wait a minute: postmaster account

support manager. 17 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right.

18 MR HARTLEY: So we just have to ring them and say we're 19 disputing it.

20 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I ask because I've obviously read some 21 evidence, coming from the Post Office which suggests 22 that currently there is a proper mechanism for

23 disputing shortfalls if they are alleged against you. 24 So I was just interested to learn what, if anything,

you may have done. But this is probably all too

1	recent I guess, is it?	1	small discrepancies now, but not very much now to be
2	MR HARTLEY: Well, it was only yesterday I received that.	2	fair, but usually we just sort it, if we can't make
3	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine, all right.	3	sense of it in the audit trail then we just have to
4	FACILITATOR: So before we move on I'd like to talk in	4	put it right. I don't even bother ringing the
5	a little while about the impact of all of this on you	5	helpline or anything, but to be fair nowadays we get
6	but before we move on, if you could put into	6	very, very little wrong anyway, so but just no
7	a sentence for me how it feels to work with	7	logic I'd say and no help.
8	Post Office Limited when there are discrepancies, you	8	FACILITATOR: Sue, how would you describe it to somebody,
9	know, Diane, how would you put it into a sentence that	9	somebody who has never been involved, a bit like me
10	feeling of trying to sort discrepancies?	10	and Sir Wyn, what's it like?
11	DIANE BATH: Into a sentence. It's like not banging	11	SUSAN EDGAR: It's our fault, there's my demand for
12	your head against a wall. That's	12	payment. It's not a demand for payment because
13	FACILITATOR: Okay, fair enough, right, thank you. Fair	13	I refuse to pay because I couldn't explain these
14	enough.	14	discrepancies and I asked them to investigate and I've
15	Philip, when you're dealing with a discrepancy	15	got a total of 1,135.95 branch discrepancies over four
16	and trying to get it resolved with Post Office Limited	16	trading periods, because I've looked and we've looked
17	how would you describe it in a sentence, the feeling	17	in the branch and can find nothing. I asked
18	and the process?	18	Post Office to look and see if they could find
19	PHILIP VENN: Well, basically, I like to do things through	19	anything and I've had to agree to pay it back to them
20		20	over four months at a rate of 283.98 a month for
	logic, in all my years of business and that,		
21	everything I work on logic, if it's logical that's	21	something I've not had but it's hanging over me, my
22	good sort of thing.	22	head.
23	With the Post Office there's no logic	23	FACILITATOR: That's live right now, is it?
24	whatsoever. That's how I see it, like nothing makes	24	SUSAN EDGAR: That's live right now. This "not a demand
25	much sense, and the small discrepancies, we have a few 141	25	for payment" came on 21 February and these are our 142
1	trading periods and that's when we rolled over and	1	can say don't pay that cash out basically because it
2	asked them to investigate. And yes they investigate	2	hasn't gone through the system, and some postmasters,
3	but, like us, they could find nothing wrong so it's	3	not myself on this occasion doing that, have lost lots
4	down to us again to pay because that is our contract	4	of money.
5	that we make good any shortfalls and so I have to do	5	Horizon is not still good. There are still
6	that and I know that but at the same time we haven't	6	errors being made.
7	had that money and it's not fair.	7	FACILITATOR: If I can divide this up into two issues, if
8	Again, they are taking that money and then they	8	you like, because I feel like we could have been
9	went us to do other jobs and work for nothing.	9	having this conversation ten years ago or something,
10	FACILITATOR: So how clearly do you understand where those	10	so I might be misunderstanding something.
11		11	So one issue is there should be technical
	figures have come from, those discrepancies?		
12	SUSAN EDGAR: I can't. They are just on our trading	12	problems with Horizon or, as you say, it could be
13	period we're short and we don't understand. We've	13	other reasons but technical problems with Horizon
14 15	looked through things. A couple of times I must admit	14	causes discrepancies.
15 16	we do find odd errors, but I agree humans are not	15 16	Second issue is how Post Office Limited respond
16	infallible. Errors do happen, but not to this extent	16	to you when they happen.
17	every month and this is what Post Office say	17	So let's put the technical issues aside for
18	Horizon's robust now and everything's okay. It isn't,	18	a minute because we're not technical experts. Just
19	because it still keeps crashing. The ATMs crash.	19	tell me about that process of how they have responded

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There are still what -- we call them blips. You're in

the middle of serving somebody and it can go off.

you've -- it will say you have given that --

Different things happen and you don't know whether

authorised that cash to that person and if that person

leaves with your cash and then you come back on, it

to get to the point where they are now sending you

Limited when you're on the phone and the girls that

sympathetic and they are nice people. It's not their

SUSAN EDGAR: If I can be really honest, Post Office

work there, et cetera, and the guys, they are

that demand for payment.

1	fault. They are just doing their job, but they still
2	have to get that money back. Post Office are not
3	going to lose that money and in their eyes we have had
4	that money even though we haven't and, as I say, in
5	our contract we have to make good and that's it. Like
6	David said, it's black and it's white. We have to
7	make good.
8	FACILITATOR: So I understand that. What I don't really
9	understand is why it's not possible to trace where
10	that money's gone anymore, because I was maybe
11	there's a reason but do you want to just explain to me
12	what you could do to identify where that money is or
13	even if it exists in the real world, if you know what
14	I mean.
15	SUSAN EDGAR: Well, I'll tell you what we do. When we do
16	a trading period, a balance period and everything's
17	fine, great. All my staff run individual stock units
18	so if it's short we know where to look for it. But
19	sometimes it's short in a couple of stock units and
20	what we do is we go through all their work because we
21	keep every stock unit's work separate. So we'll go
22	through the transaction. We'll print off
23	a transaction log and we'll look for something similar
24	to that amount or even half of the amount that they
25	are short, because we think well did somebody withdraw 145
1	paid out too much or whatever, or they've paid too
2	much, they will go to the bank if they can, but then
3	it's down to that individual customer whether they say
4	yay or nay, "I had that money", and if they say they
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and you've put it as a deposit, you know, or a withdrawal and, you know, different way round and it doubles. So we go through the transaction log. "Can you remember who did that banking? Who was this, you know, when there's large amounts. Who was that?" And then because you're used to doing the job as such we can say, "Well, that's so and so. That's that pub over the road. That's that pub. I can remember that.

But then there was one occasion where we were £600 short in my shop till, Post Office, and what it actually was, because when I went through the transaction log if the showed Post Office card account, withdrawal of £600, which was the maximum you could withdraw, but on the transaction log it actually said zero and nothing paid out. But there had -- the counter clerk was at fault, she hadn't looked back at the screen and she had paid £600 to this gentleman.

Now, to go to Post Office, you go to Post Office, "Look, I know this is what happen", and you give them the transaction details, the time, everything that you've got on your paperwork, on your transaction log. They don't help you. They cannot help.

Now, what they will do if it's a bank and you've

much, they will go to the bank if they can, but then it's down to that individual customer whether they say yay or nay, "I had that money", and if they say they didn't have it, then we've got to go to the banking team and they've got to try and do -- there's now a protocol where they can pay us back, but it's their decision whether they pay us back or not and then they have to try and claim from the customer.

**FACILITATOR:** Right.

**SUSAN EDGAR:** But Post Office don't help you as such.

FACILITATOR: So is there any way, just to help me
 understand a little bit, that Post Office Limited can
 interrogate what's going on within Horizon to help you

15 find out what's happened to that discrepancy?

SUSAN EDGAR: They can, they can, and they tell us they will but I know this is going back a little bit but can I just say I actually visited Fujitsu's offices where they were showing us what the Horizon would do and what it couldn't do after a conference one year and it was myself and another postmistress, my friend Ann, and we went and we were looking round and we were saying, "Oh, so this is where you do whatever, and this is where you write the programmes", and what have you.

And then they took us into another room that we weren't allowed to discuss because we shouldn't have been in there apparently and this guy was showing us ... so we said, "What do you do?" He said, "Oh, I go through the systems and blah, blah". I can't really exactly say what he said but he said, "Look, I can get into every Post Office in the land, I can get into their system", and Ann and I just looked at each other and he said, "I'll show you".

What he did, he said, "There, look what I'm doing", and he went into a postmaster's stock unit and he took I can't remember the amount but he took some Euros out of that guy's stock unit, and our jaws just dropped to the floor, and we were looking at each other and said, "But won't he be short now? Are you putting them back in?

"Oh no, I'll put them back in tomorrow."

18 "Right. Well, what happens if it's his trading19 period or he wants to balance?

"Well, he'll be short but they'll be back tomorrow and he'll find them tomorrow." And we said, "But you can't do that. You know, it was wrong."

"Oh no, no, it's okay, it's okay. I'll put them back tomorrow."

Now, we left that night and got on the train to

come home but we didn't know if he'd put them back in and whether that postmaster was right or whether he balanced right or he balanced short. Like people used to say they could do that and I said no, but I used to say there will be a back door, I mean even though I'm not techie I knew there must be a back door into a system because every computer has that and I did mention this to --FACILITATOR: When was that? Sorry, Sue. **SUSAN EDGAR:** Sorry? FACILITATOR: When was that you visited Fujitsu? SUSAN EDGAR: I've just asked my friend, to be honest, because I can't remember exactly the date but we think it was about 2016 and I mentioned this to my contracts manager. I mentioned it to a couple of people that were in the Federation at the time who were higher than me, because I was just at the branch secretary then, and they more or less -- especially Post Office, they just fobbed me off with, "No, he was just going on. He was just like showing off. He can't do that. He's just like telling you that. Because you don't understand he's just saying that". But we actually saw it. Two of us saw it at the time and, to be honest, it was a topic of conversation all the way home.

**FACILITATOR:** So there's a difference. Okay, right, thank you. So before we move on, do any of you have any other sort of experiences you would like to share about the way the Post Office Limited is still carrying on the way it's doing, is it improving the way things are doing. Just to get a feel for because obviously Sir Wyn's looking to look at improvements that may have happened or progress or otherwise. So I'd just like to get a bit of a feel for any of that. David, I think you have got your hand raised. Do you want to just tell us little bit about that. HARTLEY: Similar to what Sue's just mentioned about the printing of transaction logs and we go through them of a nighttime because you can't do it while you're in the office and there can be reams and reams of paper and, like Philip said, you know, you going to get five or six lines just to do one -- and they can be spread out, you know, you've got all these little lines and then you will find something further down that's relating to that one. So you have got to -it's really, really time consuming. To actually find it is difficult. We are on individual stock units and

or not, I don't know. It could well be. But like Sue hers has doubled up. I'm convinced this is something to do with this £600 because it seems to have doubled up from the previous month.

She gave out £600 to this Post Office card account customer and again just pressed, you know, to finish it, didn't look at the screen, wracked her brains trying to think where the £600 had gone, and she contacted me, "Can you have a look on the CCTV", which, you know, I've paid for personally.

Post Office don't pay for this. So I looked on the CCTV. She gave me a time because she'd gone through the transaction log herself and found this zero and she said could it have been that because it was exactly £600 short.

So I looked on the CCTV, saw exactly who it was, recognised the girl, the young lady, who it was but she doesn't come in that often. So it was difficult. And, of course, we don't know their names because you don't know who's putting these cards in, not like the old docket system where you had a name.

So I said you just have to settle it centrally but ring the help desk, get a reference number, and tell them that we will eventually get it back.

I just happened to be in the office that day 151

because of these current ongoing problems with the ATM and in she walks. So I told her I said, "Look who's over there", she went across and we got that money back from her. She withdrew another £600 but didn't take the cash.

Now, whether this is something to do with this

one of the staff was £600 short last month.

So that you think would balance out. To my mind, it's doubled up. So this may well not be the ATM. I don't know because there have been that many discrepancies over this last two months that I don't know where I'm up to with it at all. The poor girl's tearing her hair out, the manager.

So it's difficult but the Post Office themselves when she rang up and said, you know, it's at this time, the transaction log number and everything, "Well, we will try but there's no guarantee we'll get anything back because we can't relate that to a zero transaction. We don't know who it's gone to".

FACILITATOR: I just want to do a quick show of hands given all these different things that are going on, how many of you feel that overall, technically, or technologically, Horizon is improving? So I'll do a count down clock. So not very many. So does that mean the rest of you are not sure or you think it's basically not improved at all? Technically, we're talking about.

SUSAN EDGAR: I think the only thing that's improved is 1 1 So if we're down on one or up on one we have to 2 that you can ask tier 3 to investigate. That's the 2 either put in cash or take out cash to balance it so 3 3 only thing that's improved, as far as I'm concerned. to speak and then the next per month it might go the 4 FACILITATOR: That was --4 other way so then we put the cash back in or take it 5 **DAVID HARTLEY:** The trust has gone. 5 out to put it right again, if you follow what I'm 6 6 SUSAN EDGAR: Absolutely. trying to say. 7 FACILITATOR: Okay, well let's park trust for a minute. 7 You know, sometimes Steve's counted them twice, 8 That's a huge issue. 8 gone through them, make sure he's not miscounted sort 9 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Hang on, Mr Venn wants to say 9 of thing so it's like the system's getting it wrong 10 10 and then it puts it right again later on. something. 11 PHILIP VENN: All I wanted to say was we do a cash 11 FACILITATOR: Right, okay. 12 declaration every day and most of the time the cash is 12 So if we are just dividing up the Horizon 13 spot on, no discrepancies. We might get a little bit 13 technology, current Horizon as it's working, from what 14 of discrepancy here and then and then if it's there 14 you are saying there's no great show of enthusiasm 15 it's still there the next day so we can follow and 15 from you about it being better than it used to be, 16 16 look for it if it's a small amount. unless I've misunderstood you. 17 But what we're getting more so is at the end of 17 In terms of how the Post Office Limited is 18 week or end of month declarations we find that we're, 18 responding to discrepancies, put your hand up if you 19 say, for instance, 20 first class books down of stamps 19 think that has improved in the round, you know. Have 20 20 and 20 second class books up, so we assume that there been improvements? 21 somebody's been pressing the wrong button or something 21 SUSAN EDGAR: I think there has in that, yes, they have 22 22 sent that and it's not demand for payment but you have when they are selling them, but sometimes the 23 following month it comes back the other way, that 23 to pay it. They seem a bit more lenient if you like, 24 suddenly we're up on the other one and down on the 24 a bit more understanding when you speak to them, but 25 other one and it comes back right. 25 you still have to pay the money. There doesn't seem 153 154 1 1 it's a self-funded one, I don't really know.

to be that urgency that you have to make that good 2 now. You know, like that's going to be over four 3 months. Even though I don't owe that money I'm still 4 going to pay it because I have to pay it. But anyway 5 that's another bone of contention.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I don't want to put words into

6 FACILITATOR: Yes.

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8 anybody's mouth but the impression I'm getting is that 9 they may be more inclined to investigate your 10 complaints now but the end result seems to be much the 11 same, at the end of it they still want you to pay. 12 Now, as I say, I don't want people to agree with that 13 if I've got that wrong but that's the impression I'm 14 getting.

15 MR HARTLEY: Absolutely.

SUSAN EDGAR: That's right. That's correct, Sir Wyn. 16

17 PHILIP VENN: We haven't really contact with them much for

18 a long time so I can't really comment on that one.

19 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Venn, can I address you correctly.

20 Of the four, you seem to be less concerned, let me put 21

it in that way, about current Horizon than you were

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22 formerly; is that fair?

23 PHILIP VENN: Yes, that's pretty fair to say. As I say, 24 on a day-to-day basis we're rarely out on the cash 25 sort of thing but ours might work different because 2

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, while you said that and I'll make a general statement about witness statements in due course, but you are the first person I've heard from with a self-funded model. So I'm intrigued by it so I may want you to put something in writing to me, if you are prepared to, to explain it to me, all right. I don't want to take up --

PHILIP VENN: Yes.

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10 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: -- 10 minutes now but I would be 11 grateful if you did explain it to me so I understand 12 what it is. Anyway I will say something about 13 statements at the end, all right.

14 PHILIP VENN: Sorry, sorry, from what I understand I think 15 there's about 30 of them in the country at the moment 16 still because they are developing a new system now and 17 it won't cater for self-funded Post Offices anymore. 18 hence we've got to go to a funded one or I just call

19 it a day.

> SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, okay. Well, it may be that ultimately the issue of self-funding is not crucially important in relation to what I have to investigate, but I'm being a bit nosy if you like and since it's the first time I've heard about it I would just like to understand it a bit more. Anyway, as I say, we'll 156

1	come back to statements at the end.	1 1	FACILITATOR: Right, okay. Thank you.
2	PHILIP VENN: That's okay. You are welcome to email me at	2 1	MR HARTLEY: It doesn't mention tier 3 though, does it,
3	any time and I can respond to you if that of any use.	3	Sue?
4	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, thank you.	4	SUSAN EDGAR: No, no, no, just that Post Office it's
5	Yes, Mr Norris.	5	just that we know it goes to tier 3, sorry. But yes,
6	FACILITATOR: Thank you. So I think it was Sue who	6	the Post Office will investigate.
7	mentioned about I might be wrong, one of you	7	FACILITATOR: Is there anywhere forgive my it maybe
8	mentioned about tier 3 being available basically for	8	sounds a bit old fashioned, but is there a manual
9	escalating disputes.	9	which explains this is what you do if you've got a
10	SUSAN EDGAR: Yes.	10	you know, it might not mention tier 3 by name but, you
11	FACILITATOR: I just wanted to know, you know, if I was in	11	know, this is what to do? Or is there a manual which
12	your position and I wanted to dispute something do you	12	explains how Horizon has come to this result or
13	feel there have been improvements in the escalation	13	anything like that? Are there resources which you can
14	process? Would I be getting a better experience in	14	refer to, I guess is the question? Sorry
15	terms of trying to resolve things, even if the end	15 I	MR HARTLEY: What's a manual?
16	result is the same?	16	SUSAN EDGAR: Yes, yes.
17	SUSAN EDGAR: I think so. You would feel like they were	17	FACILITATOR: What resources do you have to kind of know
18	doing something. (unclear: multiple speakers)	18	what to do then?
19	FACILITATOR: Is it clear enough to everyone, do you	19	SUSAN EDGAR: You use your brain. And just you
20	think, what to do?	20	investigate and look for it and then you ask Post
21	SUSAN EDGAR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it comes up on	21	Office because you have no access to the back end
22	everybody's screen when you're doing the trading	22	of transactions, that's the part that Post Office have
23	period.	23	to investigate. We can only investigate our end.
24	FACILITATOR: Did it used to?	24	You have to do training on Horizon and do tests
25	SUSAN EDGAR: No.	25	for compliance, financial services, et cetera? And
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1	look at the booklet, read the questions and answers	1	system was robust and since the court case and
2	the sort of thing in the booklet. You don't get	2	Post Office admitting that it wasn't robust, the trust
3	a booklet. That was years ago you used to get them.	3	itself has just gone, gone completely in the system as

4 But you can look -- go on Horizon help, if it doesn't 5 freeze like it normally does and then your whole 6 system goes down and you have to reboot. But what 7 I know most people just do the answers because, 8 basically, you know them and what you do. 9 FACILITATOR: So if you've got experience you might guess, 10 but if you haven't ... right. 11 Okay, I just want to pick now just a quick 12 aside. One of the things I wanted to cover was the 13 impact of all of this on you of the Horizon failures. 14 We're not going to have an enormous amount of time for 15 that but I'd like to come to it before we finish 16 because I just wanted to pick up on something that 17 David said and I asked him to park, which was about 18 trust. 19 So when I was asking about technology, you said, 20 "Well, we've lost all trust" was, you know, your view 21 of it, David. Do you mean you're lost trust in the 22 technology to work or do you mean trust more widely? 23 Could you just talk to that for me for a minute,

DAVID HARTLEY: Having had it drummed into us that the

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4 a whole. And, unfortunately, that will take a long, 5 long time to come back to having any form of trust. 6 And still, you know -- I mean, Philip said that, 7 you know, we do daily cash declarations which we do. 8 So we narrow it down to finding anything wrong. We 9 don't check the stock every day, we do that once 10 a week, but at least we, you know, keep it to a 11 minimum of any discrepancies that it's easier to 12 actually find. 13 But when we get things like this that I've just 14 had that, you know, whatever tier it is that's 15 supposedly investigated, you've no proof that they've 16 investigated and that lack of trust should not be 17 there. You know, we're supposed to be a trusted 18 organisation, a trusted brand, and I'm afraid that has 19 been lost because of the debacle that is Horizon. 20 FACILITATOR: Okay, thank you. 21 So, Diane, on that subject of trusting the 22 technology and trusting the Post Office Limited, where 23 do you stand on that? 24 **DIANE BATH:** I think I've lost all my trust in it as well.

I used to be very proud to be part of the Post Office

1	but I think basically they've done the dirty on us,
2	well and truly both, with the technology and the back
3	up that they should be giving us. They should be
4	there to sort of guide us and help us and they should
5	be glad to have us and they're just not, they're just
6	not oh everybody's changed. We seem to be the
7	lowest of the low as far as the Post Office are
8	concerned. That's how I feel anyway.
9	FACILITATOR: David, you've got your hand raised.
10	DAVID HARTLEY: Yes, if I'll let others speak before
11	I just mention what I was going to mention, sorry.
12	FACILITATOR: Okay. Do any of you differ from that view
13	that we've just heard? Philip, do you feel that maybe
14	trust is rebuilding over time in the system and in
15	Post Office Limited?
16	PHILIP VENN: Well, to be fair we're having a lot less
17	issues now than we did a few years ago; so I guess, in
18	my opinion, maybe it has improved. But who knows it's
19	not varying from branch to branch, so all these
20	errors different just for the reasons we've already
21	said.
22	But my main issue with Post Office more so than
23	that at the moment is the fact we're getting nowhere
24	near enough for what we're doing really. Whereas, as
25	I said, there was two people running a sub-post office 161

in this village for decades on a salary, and they did away with that and now they've gone for these Post Office local things where we just get remunerations on transactions. And it's finding a tiny little village shop where you use the same person for working the till and the shop and the Post Office as well because then it's extra income, but in a busy filling station like we've got you've got to have somebody there, a competent person, that's watching all the pumps and there's not a 5-year old spraying fuel everywhere and things like that. You can't use the same for both. So you've got to actually have somebody specific for that role for the Post Office, hence it doesn't work. Sorry, I've probably gone off on a tangent. FACILITATOR: Sorry, I really -- we don't probably have time to think about the levels of remuneration but I totally hear what you're saying and I've heard it from others as well. But I can't really get into that David, do you want to just say what you were 

going to say and then I'll come to you, Sue.

DAVID HARTLEY: A week or two back, I was on with the NFSP

about the Horizon Inquiry and I mentioned about the historical shortfall and they expected us to give to 162

Post Office information of what monies we've actually paid back over the years. Now, I haven't kept it on computer what I've paid back over the years, but they have a computer system that will have that historical data. I was told they've destroyed it. Anything over seven years ago, they have destroyed it -- even from a computer. Now, I think that's -- well, I can smell a rat.

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. I think I will have to play that one into Sir Wyn's brain to store up for later, I think, but I hear what you're saying about it.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, I think it's no surprise to anyone that part of my remit permits me to look at the workings of the Historical Shortfall Scheme; so in due course there will be sessions dealing specifically with that.

MR HARTLEY: Thank you.

18 FACILITATOR: Sue, do you want to just say what you were19 going to say. Thank you, David.

susan Edgar: Fine. The Post Office -- there is no trust between postmasters and the Post Office because you've got Nick Read on one hand saying he's going to reset the relationship between the Post Office and the postmaster and we're going to be properly remunerated, and then at the same time you've got them taking away

the stamp process for special delivery envelopes where you make a bit more money than you do on selling a normal stamp or printing a label, and you're supposed to use the prepaid envelopes where you make more money. Now, some offices are using 50 and 60 of those a day that are busy near embassies, et cetera, but there aren't any in stock. So you have to have an envelope or a plain special delivery and put postage on or a label.

So again -- and the same with the ATMs. They're rolling out a software program for the ATMs to take on the Post Office software in the old ATMs until everybody gets a new ATM. That's not fit for purpose and it's costing thousands. Some postmasters are losing money all the time.

Post Office are rolling out so much that is not fit for purpose. They're not paying us -- we only get pennies. All these banks are closing and the banking is coming to us, the banking framework. The banks are saving billions and we're getting paid a pittance again. We are getting paid in pennies. They don't reset the relationship because they're coming at us, they want us to do work for nothing. Large letters and normal letters under 100 grams we get nothing for.

pay for it. We have to take this over our counter but they don't pay us for it. We're taking all these letters and cards over our counters. They don't pay us for it. I would like to know how many in Post Office Limited would do a day's work for nothing because that's what they want us to do and it's not fair. FACILITATOR: Yes. No, I hear what you say. I mean, what you're saying is marginally I think out of the scope of what Sir Wyn --SUSAN EDGAR: Possibly but I just think it has to go out there. FACILITATOR: I see that it perhaps is a reflection of how it feels to be in your position absolutely, yes. We've only get about quarter of an hour left to go and I did want to cover the impact that this has had on you, so that doesn't give each of you much time but, hopefully, if there's another outlet for that, you know, we can pursue that. But just for now I just wondered if you could summarise for me -- could I just check have any of you been suspended or got to that point at all? It doesn't sound like you have. No. I wonder could you just describe to me -- I want

I could start with you if you could just tell me what, if any, impact it's had on you personally, financially and personally. PHILIP VENN: To be fair, emotionally or mentally it hasn't really affected me because I've run a pretty stressful business for decades, so I'm used to dealing with stress on a day-to-day basis, sort of thing, and we've had enough funds in personal savings to pay back the bits and pieces that were missing all the time. So it's really only affected me financially. I wouldn't say it's affected my life apart from that and I feel really sad for the people that obviously have had severe issues or been in prison or worse. So --FACILITATOR: Do you want to -- are you able to quantify those financial impacts, even approximately? PHILIP VENN: In amounts you mean? FACILITATOR: Yes. PHILIP VENN: Well, it's hard to say because I've never kept record of it because, to start with, we didn't realise there was an issue. We thought it was staffing issues and they were doing something wrong and gradually it became clear, but I can only guess really. Obviously, we've got the £2,000 in scratch

and the people around you. So, Philip, I wonder if

cards that I talked about earlier. But I'd say it's
probably a minimum of 5,000 -- it could be a lot more,
it could be 10,000 -- but over a few years that is.

FACILITATOR: Yes, Okay. Thank you -PHILIP VENN: Not in tens of thousands like the other lady
is saying. It's not masses.

FACILITATOR: Thanks, Philip.

So diane, I wonder if I could come to you just

specifically about the failings of Horizon accounting,

the impact it has had on you financially, personally

So diane, I wonder if I could come to you just to describe to Sir Wyn the impact that the Horizon failings have had on you financially, personally or the people around you.

DIANE BATH: Massively. Well, financially we have really, really struggled. We've had to pay money back from the beginning. So it started out, like, I was just paying it out of our savings. I got my husband involved when it became too much for just me to handle -- because I thought it was just me to start with, you know, I thought I was being pretty thick -- and it was coming out of the retail business. The retail business wasn't doing too brilliantly at the time either, so the business started to suffer.

And then it got to the stage where we were paying money back and we couldn't afford to pay the business loan back for a couple of months, and the bank got on to us and we were urged to put the house 167

and the business on the market, because the house and business is all in one. That was absolutely horrifying because people were coming in and saying, "Well, why do you want to leave?" and, you know, "Why do you want to leave this village?" and I was saying, "Well, actually I don't really want to. It's the bank that are kind of insisting that we do because of any losses that we're making".

So at that time both Alan and I decided we would take on other jobs as well as the Post Office to sort of help our finances. Alan took on a round as a courier as well. So he does courier work. He took on two rounds, actually; so he was out working all hours doing that as well as running the shop. We've got a newsagent, so, you know, he starts work at 6.30 in the morning and he was running the two jobs.

I'm quite arty and crafty, so I was making lots of things to sell in the shop as well and refurbishing furniture and making rag rugs and all sorts just to sell in the shop and selling on Facebook and eBay. So every night, every morning, every minute of our working day was spent either in the Post Office or trying to make money to pay the Post Office back and to live.

**FACILITATOR:** And what period of time are you referring to 168

1 1 here? 2 DIANE BATH: I'm sorry? 2 3 3 FACILITATOR: What period of time are you referring to 4 4 here? 5 DIANE BATH: This was about 2011. We managed to claw our 5 6 6 way back into a situation where we could tell the bank 7 that we didn't have to sell anymore. You know, we 7 8 convinced them that we could manage the payments. Any 8 9 9 big transactions that I couldn't pay back, the 10 Post Office were just taking straight out of my wages 10 11 anyway so everything was being met. Things haven't 11 12 really changed over the years. 12 13 As far as my health is concerned, I suffer with 13 14 type 2 diabetes now and that was brought on by all the 14 15 stress and everything. I've been -- since I've been 15 16 here, I've been put on antidepressants and I've been 16 17 on them ever since. About five years ago I started 17 18 having anxiety attacks as well. I'm on tablets for 18 19 anxiety as well. 19 20 I'm having counselling. I've been having 20 21 21 counselling for about a year now and this is my first 22 22 trial really. A couple of years ago I would never, 23 ever have come on to a site like this and spoken out 23 24 24 about this because I've always felt that anything that 25 the Post Office -- anything Post Office-related was my 25 169

fault because it was my baby, I must be the one that's making all the errors because I was told point blank by the helpline -- sorry, by the helpline that nobody else was having these problems, it was just me and look at my family. And, as I say, I trust my family implicitly and now it's come to light that it isn't just me, there are other people like it. It has been like a weight lifted off my shoulders to know that other people are going through similar things to me but it doesn't help that feeling inside that makes you feel dead. And it used to be such a joy to get up every morning. I'd walk down the stairs, into my Post Office, and I'd love it. But I don't know. That joy seems to have gone out my life and it seems to be now it's just a job. Network transformation came along and we weren't able to put our Post Office with anybody else in the village because they wouldn't have it, and it feels now like we're stuck with the Post Office now whether we like it or not. It's still losing money and Post Office have this grip over me that I just can't get out of. I feel quite desperate at times but there we go. Got to keep smiling and put a happy face on

for the customers. **FACILITATOR:** Thank you for sharing that so openly.

I hear what you're saying, thank you. We might run over by a few minutes, if that's okay, but hopefully not too much, but I don't want to cut you all short.

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Sue, could I just come to you just to describe sort of where you are now in terms of the impact of all of this, you know, how you reflect on it.

SUSAN EDGAR: Yes. Now I am better than I have been.
I am still on antidepressants. I've had counselling.
I don't sleep. I'm very lucky if I get two hours
a night. Three is a good sleep for me.

Basically, I can break down in tears at any time and it got to the point where I wanted to end it all and I made myself a noose in the woods. And my daughter was ringing but I left my phone on the side, and she came looking and she was all over and she did find me. And the only reason it didn't happen were there were some walkers in the woods at the time and I was waiting for them to pass. But I just thought I can't do this anymore and I just thought there's no point.

Now, because I made a promise to her that I will never do it again -- I'm still depressed at times.

I love my job, I do, but I need to get out of the Post Office now for my sanity, I think, but ... I just don't know because I just think what am I going to do

1 because I can't stay in the house all the time because

2 I just feel so down. And I don't feel trusted,

3 I don't feel like I have the confidence to do things,

I keep forgetting things. I'm just not how I used to be. I'm just not the same person. I'm a different

person completely to what I used to be.

FACILITATOR: Right.

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SUSAN EDGAR: It's awful, it really is.

9 FACILITATOR: Thank you. I think Sir Wyn and I appreciate

your willingness to share that. Thank you.

So finally, David, in terms of the impact all this has had on you, do you want to sort of describe that to Sir Wyn about the different impacts it's had on you?

MR HARTLEY: Initially when these losses first started,
I hid them. I hid them from my wife because I thought
it's, you know, it's my fault because at first I was
working on my own but then, because we got busier,
I employed staff. But when I was initially on my own
I hid those losses from my wife and it caused tension
between us and, you know, we got this close to divorce
because of the stress that it actually caused.

Sue mentioned about sleep deprivation. I don't sleep, I still don't sleep, and I'm on tablets to help me get some form of sleep but it's disturbed sleep all

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the time. It's because things are, you know, going 1 2 over in your mind all the time. I did go on 3 antidepressants but I came off them because I didn't 4 want to become reliant on them, but I still have to 5 take something to help. 6 For the future, I see a dire future for the 7 Post Office, for the whole of the network, because of 8 the adverse publicity that this has actually caused to 9 the network. 10 I've tried -- I mentioned tried and failed at 11 selling the office. They want it giving away 12

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basically. I was even approached by One Stop, who are owned by Tesco's, "We'll take it off you. We'll just put it in the One Stop which is next door" but they weren't going to give any money for it, they just wanted us to give it to them.

And I'm afraid mud sticks. Mud does stick. So for all these people that have been imprisoned, there's always that doubt at the back of people's minds will they ever, ever be trusted? Will I ever be trusted because of all these failures that we've had over this last however many years, which is still ongoing. And Sue said she's had, you know. This is not a demand for payment. Well, what the hell is it if it's not a demand for payment when the next page

tells you how to pay?

No, I'm afraid mud does stick and it's done the network an enormous amount of, well, just bad publicity and whether we'll ever recover from this I have grave, grave doubts.

FACILITATOR: Thank you. In a moment, I will hand back to Sir Wyn for final questions or comments but I would just like to ask each of you for a quick sentence or question or statement that you would want to ask or say to the organisations and individuals involved with Horizon over the years, or even now (so that could be the Post Office or Fujitsu or the Government, whoever) but I'd just be interested to hear your final sort of states or questions.

So I'll start with you, Sue, if that's okay just to tell me what you would want to say or ask of the organisations and individuals involved.

SUSAN EDGAR: There's only one thing I would want to say really and that's why did you lie? Why did you lie to postmasters and say everything was good when it wasn't? It's caused no end of problems. Why lie? That's the thing I want to know, why they lied to us.

FACILITATOR: Okay. Philip what would your -- how would you sum up your feelings and thoughts in that sense.

PHILIP VENN: I think an apology, especially for the

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          people we've just been hearing from that are obviously
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          suffering badly from it, really badly from it,
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          because, you know, to say there's not a problems and
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          suchlike when there clearly is such a problem going
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          over the years, a big apology and financial
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          remuneration for them to somehow make it a little bit
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          better for them basically.
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     FACILITATOR: Diane, what would your question or statement
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be?

**DIANE BATH:** I think we all do need an apology and we need to know how much longer this is all going to go on for. It needs putting right and it needs putting right now. FACILITATOR: Okay, thank you. David, over to you.

MR HARTLEY: Similar to Sue. Why tell us lies? It's 15 16 criminal, absolutely criminal, what the hierarchy of 17 Post Office did over so many years by telling people 18 they were the only ones. Being part of the 19 Federation, I knew that we weren't the only ones but 20 those people who were accused, imprisoned, lost their 21 lives, it beggars belief that these people could stand 22 there and hold their heads high and still take money 23 from so-called bonuses and salaries while we were 24 taking pay cuts.

FACILITATOR: Sorry, I know I said that was my last 175

1 question but I was just wondering if Nick Read is 2 watching this now or in the future, he is probably 3 thinking, "Well, what do I have to do to get that 4 trust back?" What could he do now as the person who 5 wasn't around then to get, start to get, your trust 6 back? David, what do you say? 7 MR HARTLEY: Well, I think an apology is the least that 8 could be done from not Nick but the previous ones that 9 were in charge and that hadn't got the decency to be 10 honest with us and say that there was a problem with 11 the Horizon System, knowing, knowing full well, that

13 FACILITATOR: What do the rest of you feel? Is there 14 anything that Nick Read could be saying or the new 15 leadership that would make you believe that there's --16 you know, trust can be rebuilt?

there was. That, as I say, is criminal.

**SUSAN EDGAR:** But there isn't new leadership. We've still got -- we've got Nick Read who's new but we've got so many of the old hierarchy still in place. None of them have stood up and counted and said, "Do you know what, I knew. I'm sorry I knew". They're all playing hard ball and pretending as if it's over their heads and it isn't. They knew and they knew what was happening. And it's not just Paula Vennells, it's the ones before her as well and same with Government.

1	Somebody must have known and they all lied. That's
2	what I want. I want them to stand up and be counted
3	and say, "Yes, I did know".
4	FACILITATOR: Diane or
5	DIANE BATH: We just need justice really. The way we've
6	been treated is totally unfair. Things have gone on
7	for far too long. And people did know about it and
8	why should we keep suffering?
9	FACILITATOR: Thank you. Finally, Philip, what's your
10	view of all of this of that.
11	PHILIP VENN: Just to make it right really and justice as
12	they're saying, basically. I don't know what else
13	I can say, really. I'm not sure what they can do to
14	make it right 100 per cent for some people, obviously.
15	FACILITATOR: Okay. I'll conclude my part by thanking you
16	all for sharing so openly and listening to each other.
17	Sorry, David, you've got your hand raised.
18	DAVID HARTLEY: Can I just add that this Historical
19	Shortfall Scheme I've accepted a payment just to get
20	it over with because I cannot cope with any more
21	stress that this has caused. I honestly don't think
22	it comes anywhere near what I've reimbursed
23	Post Office since the year 2000 since Horizon started,
24	but I just want it over and done with. And Diane
25	said, you know, we need to know how long this is going 177

1 to go on. It is just -- I mentioned "Sword of 2 Damocles" and it is. It's just hanging above our 3 heads all the time and we're being treated better now, 4 admitted, but appallingly over the years. 5 FACILITATOR: Well, thank you again to all of you for 6 sharing your personal experiences and feelings. It's 7 been really, really great to hear from you. Thank you 8 so much. So I'll hand over to --9 SUSAN EDGAR: Thank you, Jerome and Sir Wyn, for allowing 10 us to do this. 11 MR HARTLEY: Hear, hear. 12 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, I've got a few words and 13 I suppose, like all lawyers, I enjoy having the last 14 word, so let my words be the last for this afternoon. 15 First of all, we've skirted around two topics, 16 the Historical Shortfall Scheme and the role of the 17 National Federation, and for all those who are 18 listening as well as you let me make it clear that 19 those two aspects will be looked at in detail in due 20 course in sessions to come. 21 The second thing I'd like to say is that this 22 has been an extremely informative session as far as 23 I'm concerned and all of you have said things which, 24 although I may have known something about, I now know

> more about some aspects of these things and it's in 178

that context that I want to mention the possibility of witness statements. In the course of the coming weeks, the secretariat will probably write to some or all of you asking whether you'd be prepared to make witness statements setting out some of the things that you have alerted me to this afternoon. And I can't force you to do it -- well, strictly I can but I wouldn't dream of it -- it has to be voluntary if you want to do it, but I would encourage you to do it if you are asked because the more hard information I have in writing, the better.

Then finally my heart-felt thanks for the four of you, Ms Edgar, Ms Bath, Mr Hartley, Mr Venn. These things are about you, so thank you for taking the trouble to come and inform me.

**DAVID HARTLEY:** Thank you.

17 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So with those words, we will now finish 18 this session, which means that the public YouTube 19 aspect of it will cease, but I've got no doubt that 20 the four of you may want to say a few words to each other in private, so to speak, after this session has 22 ended. So goodbye everyone.

23 (4.08 pm)

(PM session concluded)

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**[14]** 90/12 90/16 91/1 108/1 108/4 108/6 124/13 138/24 153/5 159/25 161/10 162/23 177/18 179/16 **DIANE BATH: [25]** 91/7 92/3 93/2 98/21 106/6 110/21 113/13 124/24 125/6 125/15 133/24 134/2 134/12 135/5 135/19 136/2 136/8 136/10 141/11 160/24 167/12 169/2 169/5 175/10 177/5 FACILITATOR: [232] **IDU MIAH: [37]** 6/5 6/11 6/18 6/24 11/1 13/15 18/17 20/19 20/25 23/18 23/23 24/6 25/7 32/20 34/24 35/8 35/24 41/1 49/24 50/16 50/25 52/3 52/15 53/18 58/15 61/3 67/21 68/3 68/12 68/14 68/19 68/21 70/8 70/17 71/9 79/8 84/7 MIKE BALL: [59] 4/15 4/17 4/25 9/12 9/24 10/14 10/18 10/21 14/7 16/16 16/22 22/13 23/3 23/7 28/24 29/11 29/20 36/2 36/9 36/11 36/13 36/24 37/5 37/12 39/5 39/9 40/7 46/1 46/4 46/9 46/11 46/13 46/18 48/1 48/4 48/7 48/13 48/18 48/25 49/2 49/7 49/10 49/13 50/3 50/7 53/24 54/8 54/10 58/2 61/15 62/23 63/3 63/12 72/14 73/17 73/23 74/3 82/25 86/18 MR HARTLEY: [30] 93/12 100/20 109/18 110/11 114/18 115/21 116/1 116/15 116/18

DAVID HARTLEY:

116/23 117/14 118/1 118/5 136/21 137/18 139/2 139/20 140/7 140/11 140/18 141/2 150/13 155/15 158/2 158/15 163/17 172/15 175/15 176/7 178/11 MR WHITTAM: [1] 16/25 PHILIP VENN: [29] 88/13 88/23 89/10 89/14 95/4 96/10 101/18 103/7 105/21 110/17 118/16 120/1 121/6 123/17 124/10 141/19 153/11 155/17 155/23 156/9 156/14 157/2 161/16 166/5 166/18 166/20 167/5 174/25 177/11 **REBECCA WHATLEY: [39]** 5/6

5/16 5/19 7/19 14/22 15/25 17/9 20/24 22/6 22/8 26/1 27/13 28/13 30/8 30/20 32/1 32/6 34/23 37/4 37/23 39/16 40/10 44/10 44/20 48/3 54/14 55/25 56/25 57/16 64/4 65/24 66/25 74/14 76/17 77/3 77/20 78/14 83/9 86/17

**SIR WYN WILLIAMS: [54]** 1/3 10/19 10/22 22/2 22/7 22/9 22/23 23/6 23/10 48/5 48/8 48/14 48/19 48/22 49/1 49/3 49/21 50/1 50/4 50/10 56/20 57/12 57/23 58/12 84/23 110/12 110/18 110/22 111/7 111/19 112/1 131/23 132/7 132/17 132/22 132/24 133/3 133/6 133/9 140/1 140/8 140/17 140/20 141/3 153/9 155/7 155/19 156/2 156/10 156/20 157/4 163/12 178/12 179/17 **SUSAN EDGAR: [50]** 89/17 90/6 96/25 111/2 111/13 111/20 112/7 112/24 124/15 125/23 127/10 128/6 129/18 130/14 131/22 **11 [2]** 99/1 128/1 132/3 132/16 132/18 132/23 133/1 133/5 133/7 133/13 142/11 142/24 143/12 144/22 14 [1] 130/16 145/15 147/11 147/16 **14/15** years [1] 11/5 149/10 149/12 153/1 153/6 154/21 155/16 157/10 157/17 157/21 157/25 158/4 158/16 158/19 163/20 165/11 171/7 172/8 174/18 176/17 178/9

'hell [1] 103/23 **'o' [1]** 91/10 ... **[5]** 68/10 123/11

148/4 159/10 171/24

**'60s [1]** 6/20

**'74 [1]** 6/21

... **Idu [1]** 68/10

1,000 [1] 42/22 **1,135.95 [1]** 142/15 **1,243.06 [1]** 95/21 **1,400 [2]** 24/15 140/2 **1,426.61 [2]** 108/20 137/6 **1,500 [2]** 52/18 69/16 **1,600 [1]** 59/10

**1,700 [1]** 59/10 **1.00 [1]** 29/15 **10 [4]** 63/7 93/22 99/1 156/10

10 January 2017 [1] 127/16

**10,000 [5]** 42/15 49/22 49/23 52/2 167/3

**10.00 [1]** 1/2 **100 [7]** 31/2 31/3 44/22 73/18 79/12 100/1 136/10

**100 grams [1]** 164/24 100 per cent [5] 56/19 65/4 65/19 123/2 177/14 **100/200 [1]** 36/5 **12 years [1]** 48/7 **12,000 [1]** 128/14 **12.05 [1]** 86/20 **15 [3]** 46/9 63/7 131/3 **15 months [1]** 12/14 **15 years [1]** 56/1 **15,000 [3]** 36/6 48/8 48/23 **150 [2]** 40/7 40/9 **15K [1]** 46/1 **16 [1]** 131/3 **16 months [1]** 1/5 **16 years [4]** 6/7 11/2 33/22 106/23 **17 years [1]** 135/13 **17,000 [1]** 127/25 17/18 years [1] 44/4 **18 months [1]** 52/13 18 per cent [1] 117/4 **18 years [3]** 5/8 30/25 **23,500 [1]** 127/16 69/10 **18,000 [1]** 128/15 **19 [1]** 8/24 **19 years [1]** 5/11 **1984 [1]** 88/24 **1991 [2]** 10/21 22/10 **1999 [1]** 90/20 **1p [1]** 34/4

2 **2,000 [7]** 52/19 59/8 69/16 121/10 126/20 135/16 166/25 **2,500 [1]** 69/16 **2.00 [1]** 86/15 **20 [3]** 46/25 153/19 153/20 **200 [4]** 32/25 33/13 36/5 136/11 **2000 [2]** 11/15 177/23

**2002 [2]** 6/7 12/19 **2003 [1]** 5/6

**2005 [2]** 90/19 91/9 **2006/2007 [1]** 125/7

**2007 [1]** 125/7 **2008 [6]** 48/11 88/23 88/25 96/15 103/7 119/4 **2011 [2]** 43/15 169/5 **2012 [4]** 48/11 109/1 121/6 121/16 2013 [1] 52/15 **2016 [8]** 79/25 80/4 80/14 82/1 121/24 132/1 132/1 149/14 **2017 [4]** 127/15 127/16 129/17 132/3 **2018 [3]** 127/17 127/17 137/25 **2019 [2]** 57/24 132/5 **2019-ish** [1] 57/22 **2020 [4]** 59/6 59/17 79/9 132/3 **2021 [1]** 95/21 **2022 [1]** 1/1 **21 February [1]** 142/25 21 million [2] 54/1 54/3 **21 pages [1]** 131/4 **23 [1]** 131/11 **23/24 years [1]** 4/19 **24 [1]** 96/14 **24/7 [1]** 37/2 **25 August [1]** 63/15 **26,000 [4]** 127/20 127/23 128/4 130/23 **283.98 [1]** 142/20

63/23

**3,000 [1]** 52/19 **3/4/500 [1]** 69/14 **30 [3]** 46/25 70/10 156/15 **30 years [1]** 89/24 **30,000 [1]** 54/1 **300 [4]** 32/25 33/13 42/23 59/11 **35 [1]** 89/25 **36 years [1]** 89/25 **38 [1]** 88/16

**29 years [2]** 61/20

4	9	112/22 139/6	110/7 118/13	agreement [2] 10/16
4 March 2022 [1] 1/1	<b>9.00 [1]</b> 109/20	accurate [1] 87/24	<b>advised [1]</b> 52/6	69/17
<b>4.08 pm [1]</b> 179/23		accused [1] 175/20	adviser [3] 128/22	aids [1] 100/9
<b>40 years [1]</b> 88/16	<u>A</u>	achieve [2] 82/8 82/9	128/25 130/3	Air [6] 4/18 4/19 4/20
<b>40,000 [3]</b> 47/5 47/15	abilities [1] 67/10	acquired [1] 6/7	affected [6] 31/25	9/13 9/14 10/2
47/20	ability [2] 64/12 91/13	across [3] 33/13	36/18 37/8 166/6	Alan [2] 168/9 168/11
<b>400 [3]</b> 33/13 42/24	able [16] 2/23 10/1	109/13 152/3	166/11 166/12	alert [1] 120/17
119/20	47/7 47/16 61/18	act [2] 74/12 99/17	afflicted [1] 85/12	alerted [1] 179/6
<b>401.44 [1]</b> 95/25	65/21 74/16 84/1 85/3	action [1] 46/10	<b>afford [9]</b> 67/23 68/1	all [212]
<b>47 [2]</b> 37/17 39/7	92/22 98/24 99/10	activity [1] 43/18	68/3 68/4 69/23 116/9	alleged [3] 132/11
<b>47th [1]</b> 39/12	110/2 111/9 166/16	actual [3] 56/8 108/12		
5	170/17	128/22	afloat [2] 42/1 116/25	allegedly [2] 121/8
	about [200]	actually [51] 1/4 8/6	afraid [5] 42/18	124/2
<b>5,000 [2]</b> 119/21	above [2] 115/11	14/11 15/6 15/15 24/1	125/19 160/18 173/17 174/2	<b>allowed [3]</b> 10/6 10/16 148/2
167/2	178/2	26/11 29/21 29/24 31/12 50/21 51/6		
<b>50 [2]</b> 136/10 164/5	absolute [1] 124/25	55/12 56/11 61/19	<b>after [16]</b> 11/4 14/18 16/10 24/18 52/3 53/3	<b>allowing [2]</b> 1/18 178/9
<b>50 per cent [2]</b> 14/10	absolutely [24] 3/23	63/10 63/13 64/25	55/2 56/21 62/24 63/1	
14/11	21/9 35/16 41/11	66/8 75/4 92/7 92/24	63/23 89/1 105/6	<b>almost [3]</b> 50/16 96/3 102/3
<b>50,000 [1]</b> 47/1	46/18 55/25 73/4	93/17 94/9 94/18 96/5	118/23 147/20 179/21	alone [3] 15/12
<b>500 [2]</b> 42/24 69/14	73/10 101/12 106/18			100/23 103/8
<b>500,000 [1]</b> 117/5	107/10 111/2 114/1	114/20 114/23 116/24		along [6] 1/10 14/7
<b>555 [1]</b> 56/22	117/16 118/9 123/13	118/21 119/14 129/13	again [38] 1/21 6/16	18/13 86/25 120/21
6	134/15 135/20 140/4	130/3 137/23 138/2	12/9 12/15 23/11 29/3	170/16
<b>6,000 [5]</b> 128/4 128/9	153/6 155/15 165/14	140/15 146/12 146/15	29/12 29/13 34/22	already [8] 2/18
128/10 128/10 138/8	168/2 175/16	147/18 149/22 150/22	40/18 45/19 47/15	23/18 37/18 39/7
<b>6,500 [1]</b> 139/10	absorbed [1] 72/1	160/12 162/13 163/1	51/24 59/7 76/7 83/17	44/13 95/5 140/7
<b>6.00 [1]</b> 42/6	abused [1] 55/4	168/6 168/13 172/22	86/19 96/17 105/6	161/20
<b>6.30 [1]</b> 168/15	accept [2] 80/17 81/25	173/8	111/4 114/24 118/5	also [16] 1/17 2/15
<b>60 [1]</b> 164/5		ad [1] 70/16	121/20 122/10 123/6	3/4 23/23 40/21 50/1
<b>60,000 [1]</b> 70/10	accepted [2] 132/14 177/19	add [8] 30/25 31/22	126/25 128/18 134/17	51/5 85/6 89/21 90/1
<b>600 [12]</b> 122/8 122/12	access [2] 35/22	31/22 52/16 66/5 67/3	136/14 143/4 143/8	90/2 114/14 121/22
123/17 146/11 146/14		91/15 177/18	151/6 154/5 154/10	124/21 126/24 140/13
146/18 150/24 151/3	account [16] 47/5	added [1] 38/3	164/10 164/21 171/22	
151/5 151/8 151/15	47/6 47/17 47/22	adding [1] 67/16	178/5	although [5] 36/24
152/4	74/18 81/1 81/2 84/2	address [2] 128/3	against [2] 140/23	85/11 92/19 110/24
<b>600-odd [1]</b> 123/4	121/25 123/6 134/24	155/19	141/12	178/24
600-something [1]	138/7 139/4 140/15	addressed [2] 83/19	age [2] 16/5 94/17	always [36] 6/18 9/2
121/24	146/14 151/6	83/20	agent [1] 8/11	17/15 27/19 27/19
<b>68,000 [3]</b> 127/8	accountancy [2] 11/9	adds [1] 66/4	agents [1] 9/2	27/21 31/7 31/8 32/1
127/9 132/12	11/22	administration [1]	ago [20] 4/21 8/24	33/14 33/15 34/25
7	accountant [3] 6/5	23/21	36/10 48/7 57/15	40/5 40/15 40/16 41/2
7	8/12 134/18	admit [4] 45/12 84/8	57/25 61/21 62/3	41/4 41/6 42/20 42/24
700 per cent [1]	accountants [1] 6/6	94/17 143/14	105/20 105/22 105/22	43/8 44/2 55/3 55/15
93/18	accountants' [1] 11/2	admitted [2] 116/24	108/7 136/4 137/25	69/22 76/8 77/11 97/2
<b>750 [1]</b> 53/25	accounted [1] 123/21	178/4	144/9 159/3 161/17	97/3 111/21 121/11
8	accounting [9] 26/3	admitting [1] 160/2	163/6 169/17 169/22	123/23 135/7 137/20
	54/2 59/13 77/17	adrift [1] 126/19	<b>agree [6]</b> 69/17 69/18	169/24 173/19
<b>8.05 [2]</b> 37/18 39/13	88/15 95/17 102/17	adult [1] 51/19	110/23 142/19 143/15	<b>am [26]</b> 1/2 1/4 5/20
<b>800 [1]</b> 126/21	103/16 165/24	adverse [1] 173/8	155/12	6/11 7/9 8/23 28/1
<b>82</b> [1] 92/22	accounts [7] 12/5	advice [7] 8/20 8/21	agreed [4] 12/16 96/8	
	12/9 12/10 25/24 81/3	20/16 49/12 107/22	131/7 131/9	83/2 85/2 86/21 88/5

**am... [11]** 89/18 97/17 100/8 105/6 105/19 106/22 137/18 138/21 171/7 171/8 171/25 America [1] 81/15 amongst [2] 61/12 73/6 amount [25] 1/6 9/25 36/4 36/5 36/12 55/18 65/21 69/9 69/13 73/17 109/24 115/4 119/21 124/1 124/2 125/15 127/12 127/13 137/2 145/24 145/24 148/12 153/16 159/14 174/3 amounts [3] 31/1 146/5 166/18 **ample [1]** 69/10 analogy [1] 35/15 **Ann [2]** 147/22 148/8 **annoying [2]** 53/12 79/13 anomalies [2] 28/15 31/7 anomaly [1] 27/21 another [20] 5/9 12/13 46/20 57/18 63/17 77/10 88/25 89/21 93/23 94/1 101/25 113/18 123/20 127/25 130/24 147/21 148/1 152/4 155/5 165/18 answer [12] 34/18 34/22 41/21 78/22 82/14 98/7 114/10 123/12 125/8 127/1 127/2 133/24 answered [1] 99/5 **answering [1]** 34/19 answers [8] 26/24 26/25 34/17 39/22 114/8 125/1 159/1 159/7 antidepressants [4] 129/11 169/16 171/8 173/3 anxiety [2] 169/18 169/19

any [71] 5/24 5/24 6/22 7/17 9/15 27/17 27/18 28/14 28/14 30/20 32/15 39/1 39/14 49/11 49/12 49/18 51/15 59/16 61/13 62/6 63/6 64/2 65/10 74/1 75/11 77/12 78/18 78/19 78/21 81/13 82/15 82/19 84/21 84/23 85/23 103/12 103/13 106/17 107/2 107/3 110/12 111/16 113/13 114/17 114/17 114/22 120/3 122/5 123/7 126/20 134/21 136/5 139/21 143/5 147/12 150/3 150/3 150/10 157/3 157/3 160/5 160/11 161/12 164/7 165/21 166/3 168/7 169/8 171/11 173/15 177/20 anybody [9] 69/5 92/13 107/13 113/15 134/13 135/10 135/11 135/12 170/17 anybody's [2] 138/7 155/8 anymore [9] 80/25 81/21 91/15 119/16 135/6 145/10 156/17 169/7 171/19 anyone [4] 7/20 78/19 85/9 163/13 anything [49] 3/24 14/7 16/17 25/11 28/5 28/9 31/17 37/13 39/15 45/13 46/22 49/16 52/7 52/18 54/18 58/1 64/10 64/15 65/13 70/1 76/23 79/2 90/23 100/25 104/17 105/1 105/4 105/5 111/16 114/1 122/5 125/9 127/19 127/20 130/1 130/5 130/21 134/20 135/22 140/24 142/5 142/19 152/16 158/13 160/8 163/5 169/24

169/25 176/14 **anyway [18]** 13/20 37/3 67/17 92/4 103/15 104/15 106/12 113/2 113/9 122/18 131/7 131/12 142/6 155/4 156/12 156/25 161/8 169/11 anywhere [7] 25/12 59/2 107/6 112/15 126/11 158/7 177/22 apart [7] 15/4 20/7 121/8 121/22 130/19 135/11 166/12 apologise [4] 23/12 47/18 82/25 90/12 apology [4] 174/25 175/5 175/10 176/7 appalling [1] 115/9 appallingly [1] 178/4 apparent [1] 17/17 **apparently [2]** 52/10 148/3 **appearance** [1] 20/23 **appeared [6]** 39/3 58/10 63/20 81/12 116/12 123/2 **appears [2]** 90/13 92/21 application [1] 70/9 applied [1] 9/22 **appreciate [4]** 54/23 57/3 94/25 172/9 appreciated [1] 26/20 approach [3] 13/24 60/7 118/17 approachable [1] 118/18 approached [1] 173/12 appropriate [2] 23/1 34/20 approval [1] 8/8 approved [3] 7/25 8/5 22/17 approximately [3] 48/5 131/24 166/17 **April [1]** 127/17 **April 2018 [1]** 127/17 are [162] 1/17 2/15 3/19 5/14 5/17 8/10 8/10 11/16 11/19

17/20 17/24 18/24 19/3 21/3 26/5 27/25 31/1 32/21 33/5 33/6 33/8 33/10 35/19 37/20 38/3 38/3 38/4 38/22 40/8 40/13 40/18 43/21 43/22 43/23 44/7 45/2 45/3 46/23 48/20 53/8 54/15 54/23 55/1 55/12 55/13 56/22 63/24 64/12 64/18 64/20 65/4 65/7 65/21 66/13 67/15 68/1 68/10 70/16 71/17 71/23 72/18 74/19 75/7 75/8 75/18 76/4 76/6 76/13 77/16 77/17 77/25 79/20 82/5 83/24 84/1 85/11 85/12 87/16 87/19 87/25 88/1 88/2 88/10 | **Asda [1]** 62/11 89/9 91/25 92/9 94/24 101/3 103/3 104/7 110/1 111/16 113/14 115/5 115/12 117/3 117/4 118/9 119/15 119/19 119/24 121/18 121/18 121/19 123/25 130/20 134/22 137/20 138/20 140/2 140/23 141/8 142/25 143/8 143/12 143/15 143/20 144/5 144/20 144/24 144/25 145/1 145/2 145/25 148/15 150/7 150/23 152/19 152/23 153/22 154/12 154/14 156/4 156/7 156/16 157/2 158/13 161/7 164/5 164/6 164/14 164/16 164/18 164/19 164/21 166/16 168/7 168/25 169/3 170/7 170/9 171/5 173/1 173/12 175/1 178/17 179/10 179/14 area [23] 8/13 20/22 41/19 46/13 46/16 55/17 55/23 56/14 57/5 57/20 58/3 58/9

61/13 68/25 81/13 81/14 98/13 98/22 118/5 118/8 137/19 137/22 138/15 areas [3] 116/3 136/22 137/13 aren't [3] 11/16 110/2 164/7 arising [3] 29/19 30/19 109/16 arose [1] 135/18 around [19] 5/1 9/19 13/8 23/14 38/14 39/2 48/10 49/12 57/2 58/20 59/11 61/14 109/1 109/2 112/11 166/1 167/11 176/5 178/15 arranging [1] 58/24 **arty [1]** 168/17 as [193] **Ashton [1]** 6/8 98/3 98/6 98/14 99/15 Ashton-under-Lyne [1] 6/8 aside [3] 30/4 144/17 159/12 ask [34] 1/21 2/8 3/13 6/14 7/2 27/4 48/14 49/21 76/11 82/13 82/15 82/18 82/21 84/7 85/23 86/2 86/25 87/1 87/15 87/22 87/23 88/5 98/13 109/10 115/16 118/22 134/13 140/1 140/20 153/2 158/20 174/8 174/9 174/16 asked [17] 12/5 52/25 108/23 126/4 126/22 127/4 129/13 129/23 130/25 131/15 137/14 142/14 142/17 143/2 149/12 159/17 179/10 asking [10] 52/9 75/21 91/20 108/20 112/3 130/4 134/23 138/13 159/19 179/4 aspect [3] 85/10 106/25 179/19 aspects [3] 86/3 178/19 178/25

# aspirations [1] 95/2 assume [4] 55/5 55/7 67/13 153/20 assumed [2] 55/6 55/13 assuming [1] 50/4 assured [1] 62/7 **ATM [8]** 108/8 108/19 108/21 137/24 139/25 152/1 152/8 164/13 **ATMs [7]** 108/11 138/4 138/18 143/19 164/10 164/11 164/12 attacks [1] 169/18 attend [1] 28/8 attended [2] 80/7 80/9 attitude [2] 43/24 59/3 attribute [1] 71/7 audit [10] 46/4 49/7 53/4 120/22 121/6 121/21 129/20 129/24 135/12 142/3 audited [1] 56/2 auditor [3] 11/3 53/6 129/22 auditors [5] 50/17 51/1 51/2 128/24 130/1 August [2] 63/15 63/15 Australia [1] 81/15 **authorise** [1] 47/2 authorised [2] 121/18 143/24 available [4] 9/17 115/18 117/19 157/8 average [5] 78/12 78/12 95/20 95/21 95/25 averaged [1] 95/22 awarding [1] 117/4 aware [1] 102/22 away [14] 2/13 61/25 64/23 78/23 99/12 106/11 112/14 115/1 126/24 134/5 135/9 162/2 163/25 173/11

**awful [3]** 131/16

awry [1] 35/23 В **baby [1]** 170/1 back [121] 5/9 6/7 6/20 7/12 9/18 12/8 15/9 15/15 16/16 23/10 26/8 28/5 30/2 30/13 30/15 31/12 31/15 34/4 34/8 35/25 36/21 38/8 43/14 44/5 46/3 47/17 50/19 50/25 52/15 54/22 59/5 60/4 60/13 60/17 62/19 64/18 64/23 66/23 66/24 68/16 71/10 71/17 71/20 73/8 73/24 77/25 79/9 79/25 82/1 84/21 91/20 91/24 96/6 97/12 107/16 109/5 109/13 109/14 110/3 110/9 112/2 117/17 120/7 122/21 123/6 123/10 123/16 123/21 124/6 124/16 125/10 125/12 125/20 127/16 131/17 133/6 134/8 136/14 136/15 136/23 137/1 138/4 138/14 142/19 143/25 145/2 146/17 147/7 147/8 147/17 148/16 148/17 148/20 148/24 149/1 149/5 149/7 151/24 152/4 152/16 153/23 153/25 154/4 157/1 158/21 160/5 161/2 162/23 163/2 163/3 166/9 167/13 167/23 167/24 168/23 169/6 169/9 173/19 174/6 176/4 176/6 background [13] 4/10 6/3 18/11 26/2 26/4 75/14 88/7 89/13 89/16 90/9 90/11 93/14 113/10 backup [2] 14/19 28/4 bad [4] 33/20 33/20 104/6 174/3

135/7 172/8

badly [2] 175/2 175/2 bag [2] 128/3 136/13 **balance [28]** 16/19 24/15 26/7 26/8 26/12 155/24 166/8 27/14 27/24 28/10 28/13 28/14 32/2 32/7 32/8 33/23 42/4 42/12 46/9 77/22 79/13 110/25 111/9 111/20 126/13 126/14 145/16 148/19 152/6 154/2 balanced [7] 24/23 32/7 33/10 33/24 119/9 149/3 149/3 balances [6] 32/24 32/25 34/12 34/25 71/14 71/16 balancing [12] 16/20 24/22 26/22 27/11 31/24 32/20 32/21 35/5 38/13 42/13 69/12 115/22 **ball [9]** 10/19 22/2 22/10 48/6 48/24 50/2 57/23 85/2 176/22 bang [2] 32/2 32/7 banging [1] 141/11 Bangladeshi [1] 6/18 bank [23] 47/2 108/9 108/10 119/18 119/19 119/19 119/21 119/22 120/5 122/20 123/2 123/24 137/24 138/1 138/3 138/22 138/23 139/2 146/25 147/2 167/25 168/6 169/6 **banking [7]** 76/20 119/13 139/1 146/4 147/5 164/18 164/19 **bankrupt** [1] 89/1 banks [4] 119/7 120/6 164/18 164/19 banned [1] 9/21 barge [1] 94/20 based [1] 75/17 **basic** [1] 22/19 basically [18] 89/8 95/25 104/20 112/16 120/2 123/8 126/16 140/12 141/19 144/1 152/24 157/8 159/8 161/1 171/11 173/12

175/7 177/12 basis [7] 11/4 36/21 71/24 99/18 101/10 Bath [2] 91/7 179/13 be [213] be able [1] 92/22 beautiful [1] 92/13 became [4] 43/14 68/22 166/24 167/16 because [244] become [4] 51/6 69/2 72/7 173/4 becoming [1] 7/2 bed [1] 83/21 been [118] 1/5 1/8 2/21 3/9 5/9 5/12 6/16 6/24 8/16 9/20 11/5 14/10 15/14 16/4 17/6 18/7 19/16 22/9 23/15 23/18 28/21 32/1 32/9 33/4 33/19 34/24 36/7 42/16 42/19 43/13 43/21 47/21 52/11 55/22 56/18 56/21 57/17 57/21 59/23 61/1 61/4 61/5 61/18 62/16 65/3 68/15 70/6 70/14 71/1 75/22 76/21 76/22 76/23 77/12 78/8 78/9 80/4 80/6 82/4 83/7 85/3 87/14 88/15 88/20 89/20 89/21 89/24 92/18 93/12 95/9 96/13 96/22 97/2 101/19 105/18 105/20 106/4 106/24 107/4 107/14 109/4 109/12 110/15 110/24 118/12 123/5 124/9 125/5 125/6 125/21 129/15 134/16 135/7 137/23 138/11 142/9 144/8 148/3 151/14 152/8 153/21 154/20 157/13 160/19 165/21 166/14 169/15 169/15 169/16 169/16 169/20 170/8 171/7 173/18 175/1 177/6 178/7 178/22 before [34] 11/1

15/20 16/1 22/2 22/23 24/1 28/13 33/6 35/9 43/15 49/5 49/19 52/17 56/23 58/4 62/22 63/1 68/16 69/13 79/8 80/4 103/1 107/7 110/12 113/14 117/23 128/6 132/3 141/4 141/6 150/3 159/15 161/10 176/25 beforehand [1] 130/16 beg [1] 3/15 beggars [1] 175/21 begin [1] 103/5 beginning [11] 5/12 7/12 8/22 17/7 19/15 23/2 23/19 25/19 61/2 110/10 167/14 behalf [2] 60/12 64/10 behaved [2] 53/17 83/3 **behind [3]** 10/6 10/10 23/25 being [42] 1/10 3/16 6/12 6/12 11/22 14/3 15/8 16/5 16/11 19/13 20/8 37/2 45/21 51/2 51/4 53/19 56/11 57/1 57/7 67/4 68/5 74/16 75/9 78/17 87/19 98/17 99/14 100/19 125/8 132/11 137/12 138/6 139/4 139/5 144/6 154/15 156/23 157/8 167/18 169/11 175/18 178/3 belief [1] 175/21 believe [8] 46/4 46/18 68/25 83/4 97/22 109/3 129/24 176/15 believed [1] 109/6 belonging [1] 119/2 benefit [2] 78/23 85/22 benefits [1] 97/24 berserk [1] 129/2 best [3] 64/12 66/11 133/7 **better [14]** 1/5 17/20 45/8 56/13 56/19 78/24 133/10 139/23

В better... [6] 154/15 157/14 171/7 175/7 178/3 179/11 between [12] 9/4 13/9 13/17 17/25 18/9 77/1 99/1 138/22 139/2 163/21 163/23 172/21 beyond [2] 16/19 29/15 biddies [1] 102/1 big [12] 7/23 15/1 26/12 27/5 32/9 89/11 92/10 93/16 112/9 134/7 169/9 175/5 biggest [4] 18/19 19/12 19/12 79/8 biggish [1] 95/11 **bill [4]** 71/11 73/17 73/19 98/3 **billions [1]** 164/20 **bills [1]** 111/16 **Bispham** [1] 90/18 bit [58] 4/7 4/10 5/4 6/4 6/15 7/2 7/17 12/17 13/23 22/1 22/11 24/14 28/22 35/21 37/5 38/25 44/15 47/23 50/13 55/16 55/19 65/4 66/4 66/22 67/19 70/20 70/21 74/11 86/25 87/1 88/6 88/11 90/11 91/5 92/1 95/1 96/23 98/8 100/3 100/7 101/3 107/24 114/15 117/20 133/7 142/9 147/13 147/17 150/10 150/12 153/13 154/23 154/24 156/23 156/25 158/8 164/2 175/6 bits [2] 55/1 166/10 black [10] 104/17 105/1 105/4 105/11 116/2 116/4 134/7 136/22 137/12 145/6 **blah [2]** 148/5 148/5 blame [5] 31/8 45/1 114/19 115/10 118/6 blank [1] 170/2 **blindingly [1]** 17/17

blips [1] 143/20 **blow** [1] 36/6 blue [4] 39/19 78/3 78/5 78/13 **board [1]** 18/8 **body** [1] 83/2 **bog [1]** 15/5 bonds [4] 46/24 47/1 47/8 80/25 bone [1] 155/5 bonuses [1] 175/23 book [1] 109/24 booklet [5] 108/14 108/16 159/1 159/2 159/3 books [7] 15/10 16/20 109/21 112/9 134/19 153/19 153/20 **boring [1]** 17/15 born [1] 4/17 **borrow [1]** 116/7 boss [2] 5/20 6/1 **both [11]** 48/10 76/8 92/19 94/1 107/23 109/11 112/1 114/13 161/2 162/12 168/9 **bother [3]** 36/3 135/6 142/4 **bottom [1]** 4/13 bought [8] 4/20 9/18 22/5 22/13 22/16 23/8 62/2 91/9 **bound [1]** 109/7 **box [1]** 21/8 boxes [1] 73/3 boy [1] 11/12 **BPs [1]** 32/21 brain [4] 67/2 99/13 158/19 163/10 **brains [1]** 151/8 branch [56] 4/24 5/10 6/7 7/4 11/11 11/13 11/16 12/24 15/21 17/4 17/8 18/16 18/25 19/3 20/6 21/24 22/5 22/12 25/6 25/14 25/15 25/17 26/21 27/9 38/10 38/17 38/21 41/16 43/10 56/16 57/2 57/3 70/18 70/22 77/3 77/14

77/14 78/12 78/18

80/4 80/5 80/15 98/14 98/18 103/1 103/4 106/3 106/13 112/7 128/3 140/11 142/15 142/17 149/17 161/19 161/19 branches [3] 18/24 76/22 77/1 brand [7] 93/4 94/8 97/20 97/21 97/23 100/21 160/18 break [3] 21/5 100/24 171/11 breakdown [1] 100/7 breed [1] 9/4 **briefly [9]** 4/6 25/3 25/22 35/3 41/1 88/6 120/13 121/3 123/14 bright [1] 80/14 **brilliant [6]** 10/7 11/20 15/7 21/18 60/15 118/9 **brilliantly [1]** 167/20 bring [2] 119/8 121/3 **bringing [1]** 101/24 **brings** [1] 98/12 broadly [1] 61/7 **broken [1]** 9/14 brought [2] 4/17 169/14 **Broughton [3]** 91/8 91/17 92/11 **brushing** [1] 35/9 **BT [1]** 139/3 build [1] 23/15 **building [5]** 12/17 68/8 68/21 68/22 106/22 **builds [1]** 70/2 **built [2]** 93/17 94/7 bunch [1] 74/3 **burn [1]** 11/6 **Burnley [1]** 106/10 busier [2] 22/15 172/18 business [43] 7/22 7/23 7/25 8/12 9/25 12/11 33/5 33/25 41/24 42/1 42/2 45/5 54/23 62/18 68/7 68/18 69/2 80/2 81/6

81/10 82/6 82/11

88/12 88/14 88/16 88/24 92/15 92/18 93/17 93/18 93/19 94/7 95/3 116/25 124/8 141/20 166/7 167/19 167/20 167/21 167/24 168/1 168/2 business-like [1] 82/6 **businesses** [2] 33/22 69/2 | **busy [4]** 95/11 95/23 162/8 164/6 but [355] but ... I just [1] 171/24 but ... sorry [1] 123/11 butter [1] 99/6 **button [2]** 46/9 153/21 **buttons [3]** 38/23 54/21 74/17 buy [10] 7/15 7/25 8/12 11/16 14/12 46/25 68/7 70/1 92/24 94/3 buying [4] 5/7 7/23 92/5 93/12 **by [50]** 7/10 12/13 13/4 17/17 20/22 20/23 22/17 24/12 24/15 28/7 28/7 30/21 31/25 32/7 33/23 34/8 34/12 36/4 47/9 49/14 59/14 65/25 71/15 72/1 80/22 85/7 91/20 93/18 96/12 100/13 107/10 109/2 110/5 111/17 114/16 119/8 124/1 126/17 130/7 140/14 156/5 158/10 169/14 170/3 170/3 171/2 173/12 173/13 175/17 177/15

cables [1] 73/2 call [17] 13/21 41/10 41/12 41/20 44/11 44/19 46/3 81/18 103/22 103/22 114/21

115/1 118/21 137/20 138/10 143/20 156/18 called [13] 12/13 32/21 34/2 47/24 48/1 48/16 49/13 56/22 89/3 95/6 104/10 118/19 175/23 calling [3] 45/25 117/20 140/14 calls [2] 37/18 46/3 Callum [1] 131/13 came [32] 6/19 8/18 9/16 9/18 12/8 14/7 22/20 23/3 23/4 28/19 29/7 37/14 49/4 50/18 60/16 62/22 94/9 94/13 95/7 95/13 97/11 109/14 109/25 130/15 130/23 132/4 134/18 139/16 142/25 170/16 171/15 173/3 can [127] 1/7 3/22 4/15 6/14 8/20 10/19 14/1 15/5 16/8 17/10 17/16 24/3 27/4 27/9 31/2 33/8 34/4 34/5 35/1 35/25 39/1 40/4 41/1 41/10 41/19 44/5 44/17 46/23 47/7 48/17 50/14 56/8 56/15 63/6 66/8 67/3 67/3 67/5 67/9 67/15 68/14 68/16 69/24 69/25 75/5 76/15 78/4 78/14 82/14 83/23 85/10 87/17 87/18 89/17 93/2 100/12 101/14 104/12 104/24 105/10 105/12 105/14 108/7 109/10 110/12 113/7 114/2 114/15 115/16 117/3 120/20 120/25 121/4 122/6 124/4 125/11 127/13 127/14 128/21 130/11 131/23 133/4 134/14 136/1 137/5 138/20 139/20 139/23 140/1 140/3 140/5 142/17 143/21 144/1 144/7 144/22 146/3 146/7 146/8 146/9 147/2

C can... [26] 147/7 147/13 147/16 147/16 147/18 148/7 148/7 150/16 150/18 151/9 153/2 153/15 155/19 157/3 158/13 158/23 159/4 163/7 165/19 166/24 171/11 176/16 177/13 177/13 177/18 179/7 can't [64] 18/2 24/13 26/24 29/15 31/4 38/18 60/10 60/11 66/8 66/9 67/23 68/1 68/3 68/3 68/5 69/7 69/15 69/21 69/23 70/1 70/13 71/10 71/12 76/7 77/23 81/19 81/19 83/4 91/15 95/24 104/10 104/13 104/22 104/25 105/1 105/4 105/4 113/8 114/9 114/10 114/25 118/20 119/16 121/19 123/1 125/2 125/15 135/17 142/2 143/12 148/5 148/12 148/22 149/13 149/20 150/15 152/16 155/18 162/12 162/19 170/21 171/19 172/1 179/6 cannot [9] 41/4 41/16 41/17 42/10 70/11 115/13 138/5 146/23 177/20 capable [1] 79/15 capacity [2] 5/14 5/17 captured [1] 86/9 car [1] 99/8 card [18] 46/24 47/1 47/7 59/21 59/23 71/14 71/15 72/2 72/22 72/23 73/3 73/18 81/1 81/2 110/5 111/15 146/13 151/5 cards [9] 21/13 81/16 94/4 121/9 121/10 121/17 151/20 165/3 167/1 care [2] 35/14 86/19

careful [1] 20/19 carried [1] 37/2 carry [4] 24/7 26/17 68/20 69/8 carrying [1] 150/6 case [6] 22/10 30/16 55/15 122/2 140/4 160/1 cases [1] 139/17 cash [38] 9/25 27/14 32/5 34/7 39/23 39/24 40/14 40/20 59/11 78/2 78/3 116/19 119/5 119/7 119/11 119/18 120/2 120/4 120/4 120/15 120/18 123/19 127/11 127/12 127/22 132/18 132/20 143/24 143/25 144/1 152/5 153/11 153/12 154/2 154/2 154/4 155/24 160/7 catch [1] 6/15 catching [2] 69/22 69/22 cater [1] 156/17 caught [3] 9/20 29/21 29/24 cause [1] 120/14 caused [8] 102/21 122/6 122/17 172/20 172/22 173/8 174/21 177/21 causes [1] 144/14 **CCTV [3]** 151/9 151/12 151/16 **cease [1]** 179/19 Celebrations [1] 21/8 cent [9] 14/10 14/11 56/19 65/4 65/19 93/18 117/4 123/2 177/14 centrally [8] 24/24 24/24 38/11 38/15 59/17 69/11 125/16 151/22 centre [7] 6/6 43/2 60/1 69/4 113/20 126/2 140/12 centres [1] 69/3 certain [4] 30/13 41/9 85/21 86/3

certainly [10] 8/25 13/16 18/17 30/14 30/24 38/14 38/16 45/12 47/7 51/23 cetera [11] 16/22 16/22 16/23 97/7 113/25 126/7 126/11 131/12 144/24 158/25 164/6 **chair [1]** 90/1 **chairing [1]** 1/4 **challenge [2]** 92/5 93/16 challenged [1] 117/1 **chance [3]** 2/4 3/6 76/11 change [8] 36/15 60/6 chronology [1] 60/6 72/15 79/19 81/23 116/22 125/22 changed [18] 8/25 38/1 64/17 67/21 70/25 73/1 76/21 81/10 108/6 108/8 108/13 108/22 132/5 132/6 135/3 139/15 161/6 169/12 **changes [5]** 58/1 72/11 76/19 77/12 139/18 changing [2] 38/9 116/20 **chap [3]** 47/4 47/16 47/21 chap's [1] 47/17 characterise [1] 136/17 **charge [2]** 62/1 176/9 **charges [4]** 119/14 **chartered** [1] 6/6 chat [1] 53/25 cheating [1] 53/18 **check [15]** 18/6 34/8 44/6 67/8 109/13 109/21 110/2 110/13 114/2 124/4 126/23 126/25 138/20 160/9 165/21 **checked [2]** 104/18 126/18 **checks [1]** 111/10 cheque [3] 32/5 63/11 closing [2] 120/6

116/19 Chesterfield [3] 48/3 59/20 60/16 **chickens** [1] 74/3 **chief [1]** 117/1 **child [2]** 51/17 67/24 **children [4]** 21/9 21/13 92/16 93/6 children's [1] 21/11 **chimes [1]** 37/21 **chip [2]** 73/13 73/22 **chockies [1]** 21/17 choice [4] 49/6 51/12 71/15 121/14 choices [1] 49/11 **chosen [1]** 85/19 109/15 **chunk [1]** 46/19 circumstances [1] 20/10 City [2] 6/6 43/2 **claim [1]** 147/9 clarification [2] 87/22 87/23 **class [7]** 75/17 113/23 113/24 113/24 113/25 153/19 153/20 class-based [1] 75/17 classed [2] 8/11 9/2 classic [1] 34/23 claw [1] 169/5 clear [12] 8/15 15/14 22/3 40/18 78/11 84/3 119/23 132/7 138/21 157/19 166/24 178/18 clear-cut [1] 8/15 clearer [1] 38/25 119/19 119/21 119/22 clearly [4] 36/12 63/8 143/10 175/4 clerk [1] 146/17 **Cleveland [1]** 89/19 click [1] 164/25 client [1] 11/10 clock [1] 152/22 clogged [1] 34/15 close [7] 20/25 20/25 21/3 100/24 113/15 135/25 172/21 closed [4] 24/18 89/6 89/22 97/16

164/18 **clouded [1]** 30/21 **clue [4]** 73/11 99/5 110/5 113/4 co [1] 82/7 co-operative [1] 82/7 code [2] 104/8 104/11 coffee [2] 99/25 101/24 coincidence [1] 123/4 coincidentally [1] 124/1 college [1] 91/12 colossal [1] 36/12 **come [69]** 1/10 10/16 13/6 19/5 19/9 21/5 21/10 21/13 26/11 27/4 27/16 28/17 33/13 35/25 37/23 39/16 46/25 53/1 60/4 60/13 67/6 67/7 74/5 75/14 77/6 79/22 80/14 85/3 94/23 96/21 98/2 98/5 98/25 99/10 99/20 103/12 107/16 107/20 108/20 111/15 112/7 121/17 125/10 125/12 126/1 126/19 128/19 129/20 130/23 131/11 131/17 134/8 134/14 135/10 143/11 143/25 149/1 151/18 157/1 158/12 159/15 160/5 162/22 167/8 169/23 170/6 171/4 178/20 179/15 comes [13] 19/22 19/23 31/10 31/12 34/6 41/14 74/16 75/4 78/1 153/23 153/25 157/21 177/22 comeuppance [1] 127/7 comfortable [3] 3/20 43/4 87/16 coming [17] 11/23 24/22 36/14 68/24 75/16 75/16 77/23 101/1 101/4 114/8 119/16 140/21 164/19 164/22 167/19 168/3

coming... [1] 179/2 comment [1] 155/18 **comments** [2] 44/13 174/7 committing [1] 132/21 common [2] 21/21 124/9 communicated [1] 73/15 communicating [2] 58/23 58/23 communication [6] 39/2 41/7 41/22 42/18 52/17 138/22 communication's [1] 78/24 communications [3] 41/9 49/5 52/1 communicative [1] 71/3 community [30] 5/7 6/13 11/13 12/21 13/1 15/1 16/5 16/11 18/20 19/1 19/2 19/14 20/21 21/1 21/19 33/4 43/9 43/12 43/17 43/22 45/3 92/10 96/3 98/9 99/16 99/17 100/22 102/2 102/2 102/13 compare [5] 2/24 9/10 32/17 66/19 109/16 compared [1] 44/21 comparison [2] 109/18 109/19 compel [1] 86/4 **competent** [1] 162/9 complain [1] 80/21 complained [1] 62/14 complaints [1] 155/10 complete [1] 61/18 completely [5] 37/7 65/25 107/14 160/3 172/6 compliance [1] 158/25 complicated [3] 25/12 121/12 132/10

comply [2] 86/5 86/6 compressed [1] 113/17 computer [11] 22/16 31/16 38/19 39/25 91/12 113/13 126/2 149/8 163/3 163/4 163/7 computerised [1] 113/1 **computers [3]** 16/17 37/1 39/20 **concerned** [6] 53/19 153/3 155/20 161/8 169/13 178/23 concerns [1] 62/4 **conclude [1]** 177/15 concluded [3] 56/24 86/21 179/24 conference [3] 73/5 117/2 147/20 **confidence [2]** 134/5 172/3 **confidently [1]** 76/16 **confirmed** [1] 121/18 **connect [4]** 108/10 138/1 138/2 138/5 **connected** [1] 56/13 **connecting [1]** 19/10 connection [3] 21/18 68/9 68/10 connection's [1] 68/13 connections [1] 126/12 **consider [3]** 61/15 97/3 113/5 considerable [1] 1/6 **constantly [1]** 78/16 consuming [1] 150/22 contact [8] 20/25 51/5 56/5 56/9 56/14 137/15 137/21 155/17 **contacted [4]** 12/1 46/12 59/25 151/9 contacts [2] 118/24 130/3 **contention** [1] 155/5 context [4] 4/6 88/7 91/19 179/1

continue [2] 64/11

64/16 **contract [4]** 89/7 136/4 143/4 145/5 contracted [1] 164/25 contracts [4] 128/22 128/25 136/24 149/14 **control [3]** 7/11 33/7 90/14 **controls [2]** 33/8 33/9 conversation [5] 19/10 21/17 79/22 144/9 149/24 conversations [2] 4/1 51/25 **convinced [2]** 151/2 169/8 cook [1] 99/7 **cope [2]** 100/10 177/20 core [1] 81/20 **corporate [2]** 62/17 83/2 correct [6] 8/21 22/7 50/5 110/16 110/17 155/16 **corrected** [1] 128/7 correction [1] 125/11 **correctly [3]** 15/11 27/15 155/19 cost [4] 108/12 119/7 134/21 134/22 costing [4] 95/16 96/5 102/6 164/14 could [75] 7/13 15/18 | counter [9] 33/8 21/23 22/24 34/15 35/22 35/24 37/13 39/12 47/22 52/20 57/8 61/10 61/25 62/9 62/9 68/6 79/2 79/5 79/12 80/19 88/11 89/15 90/10 91/24 92/14 92/15 92/16 93/5 93/6 95/8 99/9 107/13 112/11 112/11 115/7 118/3 118/17 118/21 119/12 121/25 122/1 122/12 122/16 130/9 132/8 133/17 137/1 141/6 142/18 143/3 144/8 144/12 145/12 146/15 149/4 151/1 151/14 159/23

165/20 165/20 165/23 166/2 166/2 167/2 167/3 167/8 169/6 169/8 171/4 174/11 175/21 176/4 176/8 176/14 couldn't [41] 9/15 15/18 29/13 31/8 31/14 31/14 31/15 45/4 46/4 46/18 49/16 52/6 52/19 59/15 62/10 65/13 68/6 80/24 80/25 81/21 97/14 100/10 100/13 101/8 108/10 116/8 116/9 120/22 122/11 123/7 127/18 130/1 131/11 136/25 138/1 138/2 139/6 142/13 147/20 167/23 169/9 **councillor** [3] 43/14 43/14 43/15 counselling [3] 169/20 169/21 171/8 **counsellor** [2] 3/21 87/17 count [12] 27/20 67/3 67/5 67/6 67/7 67/8 67/9 67/15 79/16 126/23 127/4 152/22 counted [5] 126/17 126/22 154/7 176/20 177/2 50/21 79/14 103/19 119/10 119/11 120/4 146/17 165/1 counters [2] 33/8 165/3 counting [1] 54/21 **country [6]** 18/25 69/1 80/16 89/5 104/9 156/15 couple [12] 7/1 23/4 29/1 60/19 89/6 106/11 111/23 143/14 145/19 149/15 167/24 169/22 **courier [2]** 168/12 168/12 course [8] 1/19 26/8 85/7 151/19 156/4

163/15 178/20 179/2 **courses [1]** 91/12 **court [2]** 139/17 160/1 cover [6] 91/1 94/11 97/8 108/24 159/12 165/16 covered [1] 97/10 Covid [3] 19/17 20/4 20/5 **crafty [1]** 168/17 crash [1] 143/19 **crashed** [2] 42/15 52/8 crashes [1] 52/9 **crashing [1]** 143/19 creation [1] 38/20 creator [1] 70/21 credit [5] 59/21 59/23 71/14 71/15 72/2 Crewcerne [1] 103/10 **cried [1]** 51/15 crime [1] 132/21 **criminal [3]** 175/16 175/16 176/12 crossed [1] 32/10 **Crown [3]** 10/6 10/13 28/22 crucially [1] 156/21 Cruise [1] 118/17 Cruz [2] 95/7 96/7 **crying [2]** 50/18 50/20 Cumbria [2] 91/8 106/10 **cup [1]** 99/25 **cured [1]** 73/25 **currency [1]** 126/17 **current [9]** 79/6 79/6 108/7 137/4 138/16 140/4 152/1 154/13 155/21 currently [8] 88/17 89/18 90/17 91/16 95/18 95/20 97/17 140/22 **customer** [6] 18/7 111/15 120/15 147/3 147/9 151/6 customers [6] 97/19 97/24 99/18 101/20 106/17 170/24

С	122/13 123/5	164/8	156/16	83/14 94/4 99/2
	days' [2] 106/8	delve [1] 30/14	diabetes [1] 169/14	100/24 100/25 101/11
customers' [1] 19/19	106/15	demand [9] 137/8	diane [24] 91/5 91/7	107/13 112/15 112/24
cut [2] 8/15 171/3	de [3] 95/7 96/7	137/10 142/11 142/12	91/24 93/7 94/7 97/19	117/7 121/2 123/7
cuts [4] 116/25 117/3	118/17	142/24 144/21 154/22	98/19 100/20 101/8	123/11 123/11 123/25
117/12 175/24	dead [1] 170/11	173/24 173/25	106/1 106/5 107/21	126/9 127/2 127/12
<b>Cynthia [1]</b> 122/9	deaf [1] 100/8	demented [1] 127/14	113/11 115/2 124/11	127/16 127/19 130/24
D	deal [9] 16/3 18/11	demonstrate [1]	133/23 137/14 137/18	
daily [2] 15/5 160/7	18/18 22/24 47/14	79/23	141/9 160/21 167/8	134/6 134/25 147/5
7	54/12 67/14 81/2	demonstrates [1]	175/8 177/4 177/24	149/1 151/7 152/4
damn [2] 135/21 136/13	116/14	60/25	dictatorial [1] 13/23	166/21 169/7 171/16
	dealing [6] 47/16	depend [1] 17/21	did [98] 4/18 6/15	173/3
<b>Damocles [2]</b> 115/11 178/2	133/25 139/14 141/15	depends [1] 11/4	12/6 12/15 13/12 14/8	
	163/15 166/7	deposit [1] 146/1	16/25 17/5 18/21 24/8	
Danesly [1] 25/14	dealt [2] 22/17 23/7	deposits [1] 120/5	25/5 25/15 25/23	difference [4] 58/13
data [1] 163/5	debacle [1] 160/19	depressed [1] 171/22	28/20 29/5 29/6 29/7	59/16 60/25 150/1
date [3] 95/19 131/17 149/13	debt [5] 69/21 70/1	deprivation [1]	30/5 30/5 32/22 36/14	
	71/22 72/1 72/5	172/23	36/17 36/22 37/6	43/24 43/25
daughter [2] 92/19	decade [1] 62/21	deprived [2] 70/6	37/10 37/10 40/25	different [36] 2/21
171/14 daughters [2] 130/18	decades [5] 62/20	72/14	41/5 44/11 44/12	6/22 8/19 10/10 13/5
	62/24 95/10 162/1	depth [3] 49/16 60/25	44/18 44/19 46/15	16/3 17/9 17/10 34/22
130/18	166/7	81/23	46/20 47/18 49/7	48/18 51/22 51/22
David [22] 90/10	decency [1] 176/9	describe [16] 7/13	49/11 49/22 49/23	59/3 60/5 60/10 62/25
90/17 91/4 93/9 97/20	decide [4] 29/8 44/11	27/9 40/24 54/11	50/7 52/24 57/25 58/2	
100/18 107/20 112/3	44/12 44/18	61/13 77/17 114/15	60/15 61/19 63/9	96/17 97/9 97/15
114/12 124/11 136/16 145/6 150/11 159/17	decided [5] 52/24	115/19 133/18 133/23	66/22 73/21 80/21	101/20 104/1 111/17
159/21 161/9 162/21	93/25 95/12 97/5	141/17 142/8 165/23	82/11 83/11 84/7 84/8	
163/19 172/11 175/14	400/0	167/9 171/4 172/12	85/20 96/7 96/11	143/22 146/2 152/19
176/6 177/17	decision [3] 7/15	described [2] 27/6	96/13 97/6 97/8 99/12	
	62/18 147/8	74/8	100/6 104/2 109/16	172/13
day [46] 15/3 16/16 16/19 17/9 17/10 19/8	decisions [1] 85/24	describes [1] 79/12	110/7 112/5 112/21	differently [2] 9/12
19/9 24/15 27/14	declaration [5] 27/15	describing [3] 48/9	113/12 115/25 116/20	
27/15 36/21 36/21	132/19 132/20 132/23	59/12 138/21	116/22 118/2 118/4	difficult [12] 20/11
45/22 47/4 50/17	153/12	description [1] 80/1	121/1 124/22 125/13	23/15 29/25 41/21
53/24 58/11 95/11	declarations [2]	deserve [1] 83/9	126/3 127/9 130/25	42/13 42/19 67/22
99/23 99/24 100/2	153/18 160/7	desk [15] 15/13 15/15		68/23 70/2 150/23
101/9 101/9 103/17	declare [2] 69/11	15/17 26/13 26/23	136/6 145/25 146/4	151/18 152/12
104/16 107/14 108/7	74/22	40/3 40/10 45/17	148/10 149/8 156/11	difficulty [1] 24/14
121/25 122/11 122/11	declared [6] 24/23	45/25 54/17 55/7	157/24 161/17 162/1	digging [1] 31/16
122/21 122/23 123/25	04/04/04/04/04/5	78/22 115/2 115/3	165/16 171/15 173/2	digit [1] 72/24
126/13 127/3 151/25	59/16 70/4	151/23	174/19 174/19 175/17	dire [1] 173/6
153/12 153/15 155/24		desperate [1] 170/22	177/3 177/7	direct [2] 15/16 53/8
155/24 156/19 160/9	dedicated [1] 57/5	destroyed [2] 163/5	didn't [67] 5/1 13/19	director [1] 90/3
164/6 166/8 166/8	definitely [5] 26/3	163/6	18/17 24/19 24/25	dirty [2] 55/1 161/1
168/22	58/15 107/8 122/7	detail [8] 3/13 22/3	24/25 25/11 28/4 28/9	
day's [2] 120/9 165/6	122/15	44/15 52/9 86/8 90/22	29/11 29/14 30/14	disappear [1] 118/23
day-to-day [1] 36/21	defunct [1] 89/7	103/2 178/19	30/16 30/20 30/24	discrepancies [22]
days [16] 23/5 28/21	degree [2] 26/6 55/11	details [5] 23/11	31/17 33/23 36/3	29/19 30/3 30/19 32/1
29/9 29/22 75/17	deliberately [1] 48/14		36/20 37/8 39/22 40/6	
79/20 93/21 100/23	deliver [1] 18/10	146/21	43/5 48/18 54/2 58/18	
107/22 112/8 112/19	delivered [1] 102/10	develop [1] 1/19	59/7 59/21 60/21	141/8 141/10 141/25
113/21 114/13 118/16	delivery [2] 164/1	developing [1]	61/24 79/9 80/18 81/7	
110/21 117/10 110/10				

D discrepancies... [6] 143/11 144/14 152/9 153/13 154/18 160/11 discrepancy [15] 31/25 40/19 48/23 54/13 115/19 115/23 118/25 122/4 122/17 135/16 136/7 136/19 141/15 147/15 153/14 discuss [4] 1/11 52/8 85/3 148/2 discussions [1] 53/3 dishonest [4] 47/21 62/17 64/10 64/14 disillusioned [1] 95/19 disillusioning [1] 104/5 dispensed [1] 139/4 disposition [1] 17/21 dispute [5] 70/12 140/3 140/6 140/8 157/12 disputes [1] 157/9 disputing [4] 116/5 140/7 140/19 140/23 **District** [1] 92/12 disturbed [1] 172/25 diverse [1] 8/17 divide [1] 144/7 dividing [2] 62/19 154/12 divorce [1] 172/21 do [241] docket [1] 151/21 dockets [4] 16/22 109/21 111/3 111/17 documented [1] 70/5 documents [2] 132/24 133/10 does [15] 9/4 9/9 17/21 18/14 22/2 32/17 53/11 54/2 133/25 152/22 158/2 159/5 168/12 173/17 174/2 doesn't [16] 38/23 64/22 77/3 77/13 82/20 120/10 122/5 129/8 151/18 154/25

158/2 159/4 162/14 165/17 165/22 170/10 doing [44] 1/14 11/3 14/12 15/10 17/24 21/7 24/6 26/4 45/18 51/19 56/18 61/23 64/11 64/14 65/8 70/14 74/10 78/7 97/6 98/19 98/22 101/11 102/16 103/25 104/3 104/17 124/20 124/23 125/21 126/13 129/3 134/10 144/3 145/1 146/6 148/11 150/6 150/7 157/18 157/22 161/24 166/23 167/20 168/14 don't [145] 2/25 3/15 5/23 6/22 7/20 8/13 8/15 8/16 8/20 8/23 8/24 14/9 15/2 16/8 18/2 18/3 18/6 18/7 19/2 19/21 20/11 20/22 23/12 26/19 26/25 30/9 30/10 31/17 31/19 35/14 36/24 38/11 38/13 38/18 40/5 41/23 42/1 44/24 45/6 45/12 51/23 52/23 52/23 54/22 55/5 55/18 56/25 57/4 60/3 60/20 60/22 63/6 63/21 65/19 66/5 66/5 66/7 66/16 66/20 67/1 67/4 67/13 68/15 68/23 69/4 72/15 72/17 77/2 78/10 78/21 79/10 79/16 84/23 85/25 86/6 87/18 87/20 88/2 90/15 91/2 94/20 97/1 97/25 98/1 98/3 102/15 103/22 104/14 108/23 111/14 111/15 113/15 115/3 115/7 126/10 126/10 129/1 129/6 129/25 133/11 133/12 133/24 134/13 135/6 135/8 136/10 137/4 140/13 142/4 143/13 143/22 144/1

145/8 146/23 147/11

151/19 151/20 152/8 152/9 152/17 155/3 155/7 155/12 156/1 156/8 159/2 160/9 162/16 164/21 165/2 165/3 168/6 170/14 171/3 171/9 171/25 172/2 172/3 172/23 172/24 177/12 177/21 done [35] 10/1 16/1 27/22 30/12 33/16 33/19 37/8 51/16 64/9 64/15 65/9 66/8 69/19 | 163/14 178/19 69/20 71/14 73/11 74/21 75/1 85/14 91/11 96/19 107/7 125/10 129/5 129/14 129/16 129/21 129/25 130/21 132/14 140/25 161/1 174/2 176/8 177/24 door [8] 19/6 21/5 99/5 99/5 128/24 149/6 149/7 173/14 doorstep [1] 99/4 double [4] 67/8 67/8 126/18 126/23 double-check [2] 67/8 126/23 doubled [3] 151/2 151/3 152/7 **doubles [1]** 146/3 doubt [7] 1/12 1/12 67/11 74/9 75/7 173/19 179/19 doubts [1] 174/5 down [42] 21/5 29/1 30/8 39/25 40/9 47/15 47/20 49/7 57/12 61/15 72/25 74/16 76/8 77/23 81/24 83/3 95/7 95/13 97/1 100/5 100/7 100/23 103/19 106/10 108/11 115/7 122/8 122/15 126/10 135/25 143/4 147/3 153/24 154/1 159/6 160/8 170/12 171/11 172/2 downgraded [2] 80/1

149/21 151/1 151/11

80/22 downgrading [2] 80/3 80/15 draw [1] 119/7 drawn [1] 47/22 dread [1] 63/3 **Dreadful [1]** 63/12 dream [1] 179/8 driver [1] 92/4 drop [1] 164/25 dropped [1] 148/14 drummed [1] 159/25 due [4] 40/6 156/3 **dummies [1]** 113/20 **duration [1]** 39/3 during [5] 2/9 14/8 42/4 52/4 100/7

dwell [1] 66/7 each [20] 2/22 2/23 3/3 3/17 33/8 35/4 35/5 73/16 82/13 85/10 85/13 110/13 111/14 122/23 148/8 148/14 165/17 174/8 177/16 179/20 earlier [3] 9/13 59/12 167/1 early [14] 6/20 14/5 25/20 28/20 29/9 29/20 29/21 32/18 42/5 107/21 112/19 114/13 118/16 125/6 earn [1] 18/17 earned [1] 68/12 earning [4] 20/13 43/1 80/13 82/4 earth [1] 44/24 easier [7] 64/11 101/3 101/4 110/25 111/9 112/25 160/11 easily [2] 18/22 71/4 east [1] 90/4 Eastbourne [3] 4/17 9/18 62/5 150/20 152/22 153/19 easy [3] 64/9 111/20 113/18 **eBay [1]** 168/20 echo [1] 100/20 **Edgar [5]** 89/17

110/23 132/8 133/12 179/13 edge [2] 89/19 92/12 effect [3] 37/11 111/8 132/13 effectively [2] 2/6 63/10 eight [3] 89/20 91/10 96/13 either [10] 2/9 19/5 80/19 116/2 116/3 122/24 124/6 154/2 167/21 168/22 elderly [1] 98/23 electrician [1] 96/12 element [2] 55/4 74/8 else [21] 5/21 10/10 17/5 28/9 36/17 45/1 62/1 65/14 65/25 78/19 85/14 90/23 107/5 107/6 112/17 113/15 118/3 134/14 170/4 170/17 177/12 Elsie [1] 111/17 email [5] 41/17 41/20 58/8 131/19 157/2 embarrassed [1] 50/20 embarrassing [1] 50/19 **embassies** [1] 164/6 **emerged** [1] 46/6 **emergency** [1] 101/6 **emotional** [3] 3/25 74/7 87/18 emotionally [1] 166/5 **emotions** [1] 72/12 **emphasise** [1] 86/22 **employ [2]** 72/18 95/23 **employed [3]** 9/3 9/3 172/19 **employees [1]** 42/20 **encourage** [1] 179/9 encouraged [3] 11/8 13/1 42/21 end [40] 2/9 2/11 20/15 24/11 24/14 25/4 27/12 34/18 46/7 47/14 53/5 69/12 69/20 77/10 101/2 103/17 111/23 116/2

Ε end... [22] 120/8 121/25 122/6 122/8 122/16 123/18 126/3 126/3 132/16 135/22 137/20 153/17 153/18 155/10 155/11 156/13 157/1 157/15 158/21 158/23 171/12 174/21 ended [5] 38/9 127/7 130/10 138/8 179/22 ending [1] 63/14 ends [2] 14/14 115/23 engagement [1] 10/1 engineer [4] 104/24 105/2 105/10 105/17 **enjoy [5]** 16/25 17/5 20/12 102/23 178/13 **enjoyable** [1] 21/22 enjoyed [4] 6/12 43/16 43/17 102/20 **enormous [3]** 55/18 159/14 174/3 enough [11] 1/7 3/18 55/13 72/17 138/11 138/17 141/13 141/14 157/19 161/24 166/9 **entails [1]** 74/15 enter [1] 8/6 entering [1] 9/21 enthusiasm [1] 154/14 enthusiastic [1] 96/11 **entirely [2]** 36/17 114/19 **entries** [1] 34/8 **envelope** [1] 164/8 **envelopes [2]** 164/1 164/4 episode [1] 132/25 **equally [1]** 76/3 **equipment** [1] 78/20 era [1] 112/4 error [2] 54/24 112/18 **errors** [7] 95/17 120/21 143/15 143/16 144/6 161/20 170/2 **escalate** [1] 139/21 **escalating** [1] 157/9 **escalation** [1] 157/13

**especially [3]** 14/25 149/18 174/25 **essence** [1] 74/19 established [2] 10/3 110/15 **estimate** [1] 65/21 et [11] 16/22 16/22 16/23 97/7 113/25 126/7 126/11 131/12 144/24 158/25 164/6 et cetera [10] 16/22 16/22 16/23 97/7 126/7 126/11 131/12 144/24 158/25 164/6 **EUR [1]** 126/19 **Euros [2]** 126/20 148/13 even [46] 15/3 20/9 24/20 32/24 33/23 38/20 38/20 41/11 41/22 46/25 56/23 63/22 64/7 69/3 81/11 81/20 83/3 84/16 84/18 102/5 108/15 109/4 111/16 113/5 116/8 116/9 117/7 119/11 124/22 126/9 129/21 130/24 133/10 134/17 138/1 142/4 145/4 145/13 145/24 149/6 155/3 157/15 163/6 166/17 173/12 174/11 evening [1] 42/5 event [1] 55/14 events [4] 7/7 56/7 56/9 74/12 eventually [4] 12/15 24/20 95/15 151/24 ever [14] 8/15 8/16 32/2 32/12 106/24 113/14 125/13 128/17 169/17 169/23 173/20 173/20 173/20 174/4 every [40] 10/9 10/9 15/2 16/19 17/9 18/3 18/4 19/8 27/14 27/15 28/8 29/2 33/10 33/12 existed [1] 130/24 35/1 36/16 37/6 66/3 79/3 79/13 80/9 86/8 121/11 121/17 122/14 122/20 129/20 130/2

134/23 136/8 143/17 145/21 148/7 149/7 153/12 160/9 168/21 168/21 168/21 170/12 **everybody** [3] 62/9 107/5 164/13 everybody's [2] 157/22 161/6 **everyone [5]** 5/19 5/21 65/25 157/19 179/22 **everything [42]** 10/9 12/11 16/18 17/13 24/19 27/20 27/20 28/4 31/7 32/22 38/15 | 157/14 159/9 45/1 46/11 52/11 64/19 64/21 73/1 73/4 74/21 80/7 80/7 80/10 93/2 106/2 108/13 119/24 121/8 121/8 126/15 126/18 128/21 129/5 129/11 131/9 132/5 135/5 141/21 146/22 152/14 169/11 169/15 174/20 everything's [2] 143/18 145/16 everywhere [2] 120/6 explain [7] 31/14 162/11 evidence [6] 69/10 69/11 70/11 85/19 111/8 140/21 exact [1] 122/25 exactly [9] 14/9 33/24 158/12 40/7 45/2 124/1 148/6 explanation [3] 34/1 149/13 151/15 151/16 42/16 123/22 **example [3]** 34/3 46/24 131/25 **Excel [2]** 34/2 59/12 excellent [1] 14/24 except [2] 47/9 69/8 **excited [2]** 13/3 15/22 76/14 98/24 108/16 **exciting [1]** 96/12 **Excuse [2]** 6/14 131/23 **executive [3]** 90/3 109/1 117/1 exists [1] 145/13 **expand** [1] 22/1 expect [3] 18/17 98/1 139/11

**expectation** [1] 12/20 | **F** expectations [10] 7/14 10/24 13/10 14/2 15/24 18/10 91/23 93/3 93/10 103/4 **expected [4]** 128/23 136/23 137/2 162/25 **expecting [4]** 75/15 122/23 123/3 123/24 **expenses** [1] 63/18 experience [13] 7/4 10/9 19/19 26/2 29/18 46/2 50/15 77/16 104/7 110/19 111/12 experienced [8] 5/20 9/10 13/17 25/13 25/17 65/3 108/19 133/16 experiences [17] 2/23 3/5 3/9 10/24 23/17 28/23 32/18 37/22 55/21 55/23 87/12 90/8 112/21 118/13 139/14 150/4 178/6 **experts [1]** 144/18 97/14 135/17 142/13 145/11 156/7 156/11 **explained** [2] 31/8 103/25 **explains [2]** 158/9 expression [1] 100/13 **extend [1]** 13/16 **extensive** [1] 111/10 extent [8] 71/7 72/12 116/20 135/3 143/16 extra [10] 18/5 70/1 72/4 92/20 122/22 123/2 128/4 128/4 137/10 162/7 **extras** [1] 18/8 **extremely [6]** 42/19 42/19 68/22 80/11 85/4 178/22 eyes [1] 145/3

face [5] 35/13 51/13 100/13 117/24 170/23 Facebook [1] 168/20 faced [2] 34/24 82/1 facilitate [1] 74/20 facilitator [1] 2/3 facing [1] 93/16 fact [12] 9/1 15/16 20/4 32/11 42/5 52/7 68/24 95/5 95/19 101/6 111/23 161/23 facts [1] 25/9 **FAD [2]** 104/7 104/11 fades [1] 24/4 fail [1] 38/5 failed [1] 173/10 failings [4] 64/3 67/20 165/24 167/10 fails [1] 40/8 failure [1] 40/4 **failures [2]** 159/13 173/21 fair [14] 9/25 36/6 44/9 100/25 141/13 141/13 142/2 142/5 143/7 155/22 155/23 161/16 165/7 166/5 fairly [6] 2/18 6/21 11/13 29/20 46/20 91/10 faith [2] 75/21 79/6 fall [1] 134/7 false [3] 132/18 132/20 132/23 family [12] 21/2 21/2 21/4 72/14 92/15 92/18 107/9 107/11 116/7 130/20 170/5 170/5 famously [1] 118/8 fantastic [1] 92/8 far [11] 3/8 91/16 102/3 127/5 135/23 139/23 153/3 161/7 169/13 177/7 178/22 fashioned [1] 158/8 fast [2] 40/14 120/15 **father [1]** 6/19 fault [15] 29/14 37/16 38/24 65/11 84/2

fault... [10] 107/7 118/10 122/15 125/2 139/3 142/11 145/1 146/17 170/1 172/17 faults [1] 116/24 fear [2] 15/8 63/3 February [1] 142/25 fed [3] 24/20 24/21 125/7 **Federation [14]** 28/7 56/6 62/8 62/15 90/2 90/3 108/25 130/7 130/14 131/10 131/13 149/16 175/19 178/17 feed [1] 3/14 feeding [1] 77/7 feel [52] 3/20 4/8 8/18 15/12 25/5 25/23 26/3 28/20 29/6 30/5 30/23 32/11 35/21 46/15 56/12 61/25 63/10 65/25 66/23 72/10 72/14 76/14 87/14 87/19 88/8 98/10 100/25 112/22 113/12 115/25 129/8 131/24 133/18 133/25 134/4 134/8 134/11 144/8 150/7 150/10 152/20 157/13 157/17 161/8 161/13 166/13 170/11 170/22 172/2 172/2 172/3 176/13 feeling [7] 27/23 96/8 115/17 116/21 141/10 141/17 170/10 feelings [7] 7/14 7/18 9/11 15/14 16/14 174/24 178/6 feels [6] 27/10 27/11 63/7 141/7 165/14 170/18 felt [16] 15/23 25/4 50/14 53/17 55/6 66/22 68/17 92/1 106/3 107/14 108/24 114/16 115/20 134/6 169/24 179/12 few [26] 32/20 35/24 41/8 58/2 58/2 59/15

66/1 66/14 71/20 76/22 79/3 79/25 85/25 102/9 102/9 102/10 108/7 108/15 116/23 136/25 141/25 161/17 167/3 171/2 178/12 179/20 fiddling [1] 9/20 figure [4] 102/18 122/25 123/23 127/5 figures [9] 25/10 29/12 33/22 67/3 67/16 114/2 114/7 134/16 143/11 files [1] 112/9 filling [7] 88/18 88/19 89/2 95/5 95/23 119/11 162/8 final [5] 73/5 82/13 82/16 174/7 174/13 finally [9] 6/2 8/5 16/14 63/13 84/4 91/5 172/11 177/9 179/12 finances [2] 63/1 168/11 financial [11] 25/24 64/2 67/20 67/22 72/9 80/6 80/11 80/23 158/25 166/17 175/5 financially [8] 42/25 67/18 67/22 165/25 166/3 166/11 167/10 167/12 find [27] 14/8 29/13 36/22 49/16 78/19 109/20 114/10 114/20 114/23 115/23 120/22 | following [2] 31/3 121/1 127/19 129/15 130/1 135/22 142/17 142/18 143/3 143/15 147/15 148/21 150/20 150/22 153/18 160/12 171/16 finding [3] 39/7 160/8 forced [3] 80/18 162/4 fine [21] 3/24 3/25 23/6 23/24 33/11 41/16 48/19 48/19 54/10 91/3 94/5 121/8 123/13 123/13 129/7

129/8 132/22 133/9

141/3 145/17 163/20

fingers [1] 32/10 finish [4] 132/1 151/7 159/15 179/17 finished [3] 24/12 47/11 129/10 fire [1] 99/7 firm [1] 6/5 first [45] 4/5 7/14 13/4 14/8 14/17 22/5 22/20 23/19 23/24 24/2 24/8 24/21 25/2 25/4 25/20 26/11 30/3 **fortress [1]** 126/8 39/6 54/25 56/1 57/6 62/2 67/18 75/2 84/7 84/13 89/4 92/24 93/12 100/22 103/21 106/7 108/1 109/6 112/21 113/23 113/23 136/20 153/19 156/4 156/24 169/21 172/15 **found [11]** 13/16 172/17 178/15 firstly [2] 103/7 109/12 fit [2] 164/13 164/17 five [6] 58/10 93/17 105/21 120/11 150/18 72/24 89/1 105/21 169/17 fixed [1] 73/11 fixing [1] 39/3 flawed [1] 83/12 flipping [1] 52/7 floor [1] 148/14 **fobbed [1]** 149/19 focus [2] 57/1 57/3 follow [3] 140/3 153/15 154/5 153/23 **food [1]** 102/10 foot [1] 66/11 force [7] 4/18 4/19 4/20 9/13 9/14 10/2 179/7 81/24 87/19 **fore [1]** 139/16 forecast [1] 82/2 forefront [1] 96/24 foremost [1] 84/7 forensic [2] 31/19 134/18 foreshorten [1] 87/1

forget [2] 89/3 120/15 **forgetting [1]** 172/4 forgive [1] 158/7 forgot [1] 47/14 fork [1] 63/7 form [4] 12/2 85/23 160/5 172/25 formal [2] 1/22 85/19 formerly [1] 155/22 fortnight [2] 23/20 25/20 fortunate [3] 42/25 42/25 137/18 forum [3] 1/11 76/1 85/21 forward [7] 1/14 55/21 66/11 67/25 76/24 86/14 87/8 13/16 32/25 39/6 94/2 100/14 115/19 130/4 138/16 139/22 151/13 founded [1] 64/13 four [12] 41/18 72/20 106/8 142/15 142/20 155/2 155/20 179/12 179/20 framework [1] 164/19 franchise [1] 14/12 frankness [1] 85/4 freeze [3] 39/20 78/4 159/5 frequently [1] 30/18 Friday [3] 1/1 24/14 46/5 friend [3] 134/17 147/21 149/12 friends [4] 11/8 12/25 | 119/16 119/17 156/1 81/14 116/7 friends' [1] 19/19 from [112] 3/23 5/12 8/18 8/22 9/21 10/2 13/1 13/21 14/17 15/5 **funny [3]** 57/1 67/5 16/4 19/15 20/7 22/4 28/11 30/4 30/5 34/18 35/22 43/2 43/20 45/15 48/25 52/18 53/19 55/17 58/3 58/4 58/15 58/22 60/16 61/11 62/12 65/16

70/15 73/5 73/6 73/13 73/14 73/22 75/11 79/2 80/13 85/9 85/22 89/8 90/20 93/22 94/23 95/7 97/25 101/16 103/10 104/18 106/10 106/21 106/23 107/2 107/4 107/12 107/14 107/17 108/8 108/22 109/6 110/8 115/4 116/7 116/7 119/7 121/9 121/12 121/15 121/22 126/2 126/24 127/5 130/19 132/3 135/9 135/11 135/12 135/12 137/19 138/6 139/6 139/18 139/25 140/21 143/11 147/9 151/4 152/4 154/13 154/15 156/4 156/14 161/12 161/19 162/19 163/6 166/12 167/13 172/16 172/20 174/4 175/1 175/2 175/2 175/23 176/8 178/7 front [3] 8/10 35/12 100/11 frozen [1] 68/9 fruitful [1] 11/10 fuel [1] 162/11 Fujitsu [7] 36/19 72/25 73/6 73/22 82/18 149/11 174/12 Fujitsu's [1] 147/18 full [3] 10/15 62/13 176/11 fun [1] 65/13 funded [7] 119/1 156/5 156/17 156/18 funding [2] 119/23 156/21 funds [1] 166/9 75/9 Furness [2] 91/8 91/17 furniture [1] 168/19 further [7] 9/15 12/1 94/11 110/12 134/21 135/10 150/20

F 145/2 148/7 148/7 35/25 39/4 47/2 50/18 129/4 129/12 131/9 66/10 67/2 68/6 68/7 150/7 150/10 150/18 51/9 51/12 51/23 134/20 134/22 135/21 70/5 70/22 70/23 future [9] 2/16 13/14 151/23 151/24 152/15 55/19 61/25 69/2 69/6 135/25 136/14 139/11 71/12 71/13 71/13 64/17 65/16 85/16 153/13 159/2 159/3 74/23 75/10 78/14 140/3 145/3 147/14 71/15 75/24 76/10 94/14 173/6 173/6 160/13 162/3 162/19 79/21 79/21 80/17 147/17 149/19 150/17 76/18 77/20 81/14 176/2 164/17 164/24 165/15 80/18 82/20 88/6 152/19 155/2 155/4 82/15 87/24 91/1 93/13 94/19 98/2 99/5 170/12 170/22 171/9 91/20 96/18 97/1 159/14 161/11 162/22 171/23 172/25 176/3 99/12 105/9 106/9 163/19 163/22 163/24 99/6 100/11 101/3 gain [1] 31/3 176/5 176/5 177/19 108/7 109/14 110/12 170/9 171/25 173/1 104/7 104/10 105/8 gained [1] 78/9 **gets [3]** 33/17 126/14 111/3 112/11 114/2 173/15 175/4 175/11 106/16 107/4 107/5 gaining [1] 125/25 164/13 115/24 121/18 126/11 177/25 107/23 108/19 110/13 gains [1] 28/14 126/23 127/9 127/21 110/19 113/3 114/3 getting [19] 8/3 45/6 gone [33] 9/17 13/22 gap [3] 13/17 13/17 129/12 129/13 133/19 20/2 31/6 40/1 40/11 114/5 115/14 118/8 51/22 57/6 78/13 18/9 80/16 103/20 114/14 140/10 143/21 145/20 40/13 40/15 40/17 119/17 121/6 122/4 garden [1] 100/1 44/24 74/25 80/8 145/21 146/3 146/19 123/10 125/3 127/4 117/14 125/5 128/9 **gardening** [1] 14/13 153/17 154/9 155/8 146/19 147/2 147/5 97/18 108/11 119/8 128/8 131/24 132/3 gateway [2] 73/7 155/14 157/14 161/23 122/1 122/12 129/1 148/5 150/14 154/3 134/3 134/17 135/1 73/23 164/20 164/21 156/18 159/4 165/11 129/2 130/23 144/2 135/16 136/18 139/23 gathered [1] 2/18 gibberish [1] 133/7 165/16 170/23 173/2 145/10 151/8 151/12 142/15 146/22 147/5 gave [3] 9/13 151/5 175/11 178/1 152/17 153/5 154/8 147/6 148/25 150/11 gifts [1] 21/12 151/12 girl [2] 127/3 151/17 God [12] 19/17 20/1 160/3 160/3 162/2 150/19 150/21 152/3 general [9] 23/21 20/3 20/6 21/9 29/2 162/15 170/14 177/6 155/13 156/18 158/9 girl's [1] 152/10 56/7 71/8 94/19 101/5 girls [1] 144/23 33/15 39/9 50/16 60/9 good [44] 14/18 17/1 159/9 161/9 162/8 101/7 109/3 133/22 give [25] 2/4 4/10 6/3 22/21 25/1 26/10 27/3 162/9 162/12 163/22 70/23 109/4 156/3 9/16 21/17 29/11 goes [16] 18/11 71/10 27/23 27/23 28/24 163/25 165/21 166/25 generally [7] 5/24 29/16 35/5 41/20 71/20 77/5 77/5 96/18 44/3 52/21 53/8 63/5 167/15 167/22 167/25 40/23 85/12 120/3 42/10 48/11 49/11 63/7 65/10 65/22 66/6 168/15 170/23 171/12 113/2 113/3 114/1 123/23 136/20 136/21 70/14 74/17 83/16 120/1 120/4 123/9 75/6 75/7 79/10 80/11 172/18 172/21 176/9 generous [1] 66/19 89/15 90/10 96/17 127/22 136/15 158/5 80/12 92/4 94/3 94/14 176/18 176/18 176/18 gentleman [1] 146/18 177/17 178/12 179/19 102/4 132/2 146/21 159/6 95/13 96/10 98/7 **gesture** [1] 139/10 Government [3] 162/25 165/17 173/15 going [104] 1/22 2/2 101/17 102/25 108/4 get [97] 1/22 2/2 3/17 173/16 7/1 7/1 8/17 9/15 10/5 116/19 116/19 116/22 82/19 174/12 176/25 3/25 8/5 8/21 11/6 11/16 26/5 27/16 28/2 136/5 137/22 141/22 given [14] 14/15 23/1 gradually [2] 104/3 11/10 13/2 15/2 15/6 51/5 61/10 61/20 29/12 32/10 34/16 143/5 144/5 145/5 166/24 17/18 18/3 19/13 62/12 70/10 85/18 35/1 36/21 37/24 145/7 155/1 171/10 grams [1] 164/24 22/23 23/11 26/9 112/9 116/18 125/8 37/25 39/10 39/18 174/20 grand [1] 63/7 26/24 33/24 39/10 grandson [1] 90/13 138/11 143/23 152/19 40/9 41/7 41/24 41/25 goodbye [1] 179/22 39/22 41/13 41/21 giving [6] 20/15 51/17 43/20 45/19 45/20 goodwill [2] 12/17 grateful [6] 1/9 1/13 42/10 44/14 45/18 101/24 138/6 161/3 51/3 55/4 55/8 55/10 139/10 85/2 85/5 86/6 156/11 47/17 51/21 59/18 173/11 62/6 62/19 63/5 63/17 got [134] 2/12 3/7 grave [2] 174/5 174/5 63/17 63/22 66/16 7/24 10/9 13/21 19/13 great [21] 1/25 2/14 glad [2] 85/20 161/5 64/23 66/12 67/15 67/5 67/6 67/7 67/8 5/3 11/14 12/20 16/2 glitched [1] 68/17 69/7 75/23 82/13 21/11 22/15 24/1 68/24 69/4 69/14 71/5 **glitches [4]** 1/19 83/17 84/1 85/23 88/5 24/20 24/21 26/23 18/18 19/16 19/16 71/11 71/25 77/6 88/9 90/22 95/14 97/7 76/21 77/16 79/18 27/2 27/3 29/16 29/23 27/23 49/16 70/18 78/22 79/19 86/1 go [90] 4/13 5/24 7/1 98/6 98/13 99/16 34/11 34/15 34/15 70/18 70/19 76/24 87/17 89/13 92/7 7/9 7/11 7/12 7/22 99/25 101/21 103/14 34/17 34/18 34/22 93/3 95/8 130/8 94/22 95/14 95/20 35/13 42/19 43/9 145/17 154/14 178/7 7/22 8/4 8/7 8/9 8/11 104/2 105/16 110/9 97/25 97/25 98/6 8/20 11/13 12/13 112/24 114/7 115/13 43/11 43/19 44/14 Greater [1] 6/9 101/16 103/2 110/7 45/14 45/22 49/13 12/15 12/23 16/8 16/9 115/25 117/17 119/18 greeting [1] 21/13 112/5 118/18 123/15 120/7 120/9 120/17 52/22 53/7 53/25 54/2 19/5 21/13 22/22 grey [4] 8/13 116/3 124/25 125/7 131/19 29/15 31/11 31/12 122/20 123/9 123/18 54/17 55/9 61/21 62/5 136/22 137/13 134/12 137/16 137/16 31/15 31/19 34/4 34/7 125/24 128/14 128/15 63/13 63/20 66/10 grip [1] 170/21 141/16 142/5 144/20

G ground [1] 132/10 grounding [1] 64/13 group [3] 57/8 78/17 78/19 groups [1] 58/21 grown [1] 11/12 **guarantee** [2] 35/1 152/15 guess [8] 70/4 90/8 105/19 141/1 158/14 159/9 161/17 166/24 guidance [1] 110/7 guide [2] 86/25 161/4 guiding [1] 86/12 guilty [1] 30/23 Guisborough [4] 89/18 89/21 89/23 97/16 guts [1] 117/7 gutted [1] 46/18 guy [3] 95/6 130/15 148/3 guy's [1] 148/13 guys [1] 144/24

### Н

had [223] hadn't [12] 47/11 99/5 110/5 126/4 129/5 130/21 131/5 131/15 138/11 138/17 146/17 176/9 hair [2] 26/17 152/11 half [8] 4/21 22/18 26/16 45/21 51/10 57/25 131/11 145/24 half-an-hour [1] 26/16 half-heartedly [1] 22/18 halfway [1] 101/23 hand [11] 3/22 14/23 87/17 92/16 150/11 154/18 161/9 163/22 174/6 177/17 178/8 handed [3] 9/17 40/7 63/16 handle [2] 29/7 167/17 hands [2] 114/19 152/18

hang [2] 117/6 153/9 hanging [3] 115/11 142/21 178/2 happen [21] 1/19 13/13 28/25 46/21 51/3 53/4 55/10 56/23 57/11 57/14 62/7 63/5 76/19 83/17 86/8 139/19 143/16 143/22 144/16 146/20 171/16 happened [24] 13/7 31/15 36/23 44/19 49/5 49/14 50/13 50/17 52/1 57/2 64/15 71/5 78/8 80/22 83/19 haven't ... right [1] 100/23 109/12 123/15 127/18 131/2 131/6 147/15 150/9 151/25 happening [9] 12/7 34/1 84/13 84/17 97/9 98/4 120/20 125/3 176/24 happens [7] 11/4 29/2 39/25 48/20 52/9 74/22 148/18 happier [1] 26/4 happy [2] 71/2 170/23 hard [11] 3/2 14/8 16/16 69/10 70/10 88/3 114/4 120/12 166/20 176/22 179/10 harder [1] 21/25 hardly [2] 106/17 126/20 hardware [1] 73/22 **Hartley [4]** 90/17 110/23 140/1 179/13 has [53] 3/14 4/7 8/16 20/1 39/25 41/2 42/19 44/24 55/10 57/2 62/5 64/1 64/5 64/9 69/20 75/22 76/15 76/20 76/23 78/8 78/8 85/13 85/14 87/5 88/8 92/18 102/21 108/6 109/12 113/15 113/25 135/3 139/23 142/9 149/8 151/2 153/5 154/19 154/21 158/12 160/3 160/18 161/18 165/11 165/16 165/25 170/8

172/12 173/8 177/21

178/22 179/8 179/21 hasn't [7] 18/7 40/1 76/23 79/22 85/9 144/2 166/6 hassle [1] 102/4 have [370] haven't [20] 20/4 45/22 60/2 64/15 77/12 107/6 113/3 127/11 129/3 129/14 129/16 135/11 139/12 | hear [17] 2/15 2/23 139/24 143/6 145/4 155/17 159/10 163/2 169/11 159/10 having [29] 16/6 26/10 51/9 57/7 57/20 58/17 64/25 72/22 77/17 77/24 78/19 79/1 85/22 106/24 112/20 113/6 115/11 116/21 117/23 125/23 | 175/1 144/9 159/25 160/5 161/16 169/18 169/20 169/20 170/4 178/13 he [62] 2/10 3/13 10/15 10/16 11/15 11/19 15/22 47/4 47/8 heavily [1] 43/16 47/16 47/18 47/22 53/8 58/4 58/5 58/10 76/12 87/5 87/7 87/9 92/4 92/22 95/7 95/12 hello [1] 19/6 95/13 95/14 96/10 96/10 96/11 117/9 118/17 129/6 129/12 129/13 131/1 134/18 134/18 134/19 134/20 148/4 148/6 148/6 148/9 148/10 148/10 148/11 148/12 148/12 148/15 148/19 149/2 149/3 149/19 149/20 149/20 168/12 168/12 168/13 168/15 168/16 176/2 176/4 he'd [2] 118/18 149/1 he'll [2] 148/20 148/21 he's [7] 82/15 90/15 138/16 149/21 149/22 154/8 163/22

head [7] 43/20 70/20 115/11 117/6 119/14 141/12 142/22 headed [1] 94/24 heading [1] 87/5 headless [1] 74/3 heads [3] 175/22 176/22 178/3 health [2] 129/10 169/13 3/2 4/15 50/14 55/19 68/14 87/7 100/16 162/18 163/11 165/8 171/1 174/13 178/7 178/11 178/11 heard [11] 3/4 44/21 85/9 87/11 100/2 107/6 111/7 156/4 156/24 161/13 162/18 hearing [5] 35/19 72/10 100/8 107/4 hearings [1] 2/20 hears [1] 2/10 heart [1] 179/12 heart-felt [1] 179/12 heartedly [1] 22/18 held [2] 84/1 136/2 hell [4] 51/10 51/11 115/3 173/24 help [52] 8/21 11/21 15/13 15/15 15/17 15/18 16/8 26/13 26/23 40/3 40/10 45/17 45/25 54/17 55/7 59/2 59/4 74/20 78/22 86/24 95/8 98/6 98/24 103/12 103/12 103/21 107/2 107/2 107/11 107/12 115/2 117/23 118/14 118/18 118/19 118/22 118/23 134/14 134/25 142/7 146/23 146/24 147/11 147/12 147/14 151/23 159/4 161/4 168/11 170/10 172/24 173/5 helped [2] 95/13 102/10

helpful [12] 15/15 34/20 43/13 54/14 89/13 91/19 93/8 94/22 96/11 107/18 114/6 119/12 helpline [25] 27/5 34/14 39/11 40/21 44/12 48/1 103/20 103/22 104/6 107/2 114/5 117/20 122/4 122/13 123/6 128/11 133/21 134/12 135/2 135/6 135/20 140/12 142/5 170/3 170/3 hence [2] 156/18 162/14 her [18] 25/17 99/3 99/4 99/7 99/8 99/8 99/10 102/9 103/18 117/8 118/20 127/4 151/7 152/2 152/4 152/11 171/21 176/25 here [23] 2/4 11/11 14/23 34/1 35/12 41/8 79/24 86/22 92/11 92/14 92/19 102/13 103/10 105/7 106/13 108/19 108/23 109/22 135/13 153/14 169/1 169/4 169/16 hers [1] 151/2 herself [1] 151/13 **Hi [2]** 88/13 91/7 hid [3] 172/16 172/16 172/20 hierarchy [2] 175/16 176/19 high [1] 175/22 higher [1] 149/16 highlight [1] 32/24 him [9] 2/16 11/20 11/25 46/14 58/3 87/8 88/9 90/14 159/17 his [5] 2/14 9/21 47/22 49/22 148/18 historic [1] 30/14 historical [6] 70/8 162/25 163/4 163/14 177/18 178/16 history [1] 76/6 hit [4] 25/7 36/20 45/13 81/23

Н hm [3] 6/10 9/23 54/5 hoc [1] 70/16 hold [7] 26/16 45/21 63/20 92/10 109/10 134/12 175/22 hole [1] 134/7 holiday [2] 61/25 128/25 holidays [2] 72/15 97/8 home [5] 71/3 92/25 106/13 149/1 149/25 honest [14] 4/3 21/1 56/25 72/16 77/11 98/8 112/16 124/15 127/13 130/25 144/22 149/12 149/24 176/10 honestly [1] 177/21 hoops [1] 8/10 hope [3] 1/20 15/17 90/21 hoped [1] 106/4 hopefully [3] 135/15 165/18 171/2 hopes [3] 91/23 93/10 95/2 hoping [1] 92/2 Horizon [105] 22/5 22/12 22/19 22/20 22/20 23/1 23/23 25/18 25/24 28/11 28/20 28/21 29/9 29/18 30/1 32/18 34/13 36/13 42/12 46/21 46/22 47/9 48/15 48/16 55/21 59/8 59/9 59/14 61/8 62/22 63/2 64/3 67/20 70/17 70/19 71/8 71/10 72/13 72/16 73/15 73/21 74/11 76/15 77/18 78/2 78/2 79/6 79/11 83/8 84/5 84/17 90/20 103/2 103/16 107/24 108/2 109/6 109/14 110/4 110/10 110/15 110/16 110/19 110/21 110/22 111/1 111/6 111/11 112/4 112/9 112/10

112/13 112/21 113/6 113/12 114/13 119/25 120/1 126/6 126/11 127/2 127/21 138/23 138/24 139/15 144/5 144/12 144/13 147/14 147/19 152/21 154/12 154/13 155/21 158/12 158/24 159/4 159/13 160/19 162/24 165/24 167/9 174/11 176/11 177/23 Horizon's [1] 143/18 horrendous [2] 46/21 93/15 horrible [1] 51/15 horrified [1] 107/10 **horrifying** [1] 168/3 hospital [1] 99/12 hospitality [1] 16/4 hosting [1] 2/21 hotline [4] 44/8 44/12 124/21 124/22 hour [10] 18/4 26/16 34/16 45/21 45/22 51/10 61/24 84/25 134/22 165/15 hours [12] 3/11 7/1 20/6 22/16 35/6 71/20 71/21 86/13 87/12 106/11 168/14 171/9 house [6] 9/19 35/8 99/3 167/25 168/1 172/1 how [152] 6/1 7/5 7/20 13/11 14/2 15/4 15/15 15/23 15/23 16/3 16/14 17/13 18/14 19/15 20/13 20/13 21/3 22/11 22/25 23/23 24/9 25/3 25/3 25/5 25/22 27/6 27/10 27/10 28/20 28/23 29/5 29/6 29/7 29/18 30/5 30/9 30/10 30/18 31/24 32/4 32/17 32/18 33/7 33/24 35/3 35/10 35/19 36/22 37/10 37/10 41/23 43/21 44/12 44/18 44/23 44/24 46/15 48/23

49/4 49/17 49/21 50/8 50/13 50/13 50/13 52/20 53/6 53/15 53/16 53/17 53/17 54/12 55/6 55/20 58/24 62/24 62/25 63/6 63/9 64/4 64/5 66/21 66/22 70/24 72/10 77/11 78/11 79/20 81/11 85/2 98/16 99/17 101/15 101/15 103/25 104/6 105/20 108/24 109/5 109/16 112/17 112/19 112/21 113/12 114/15 115/20 115/20 115/21 115/25 116/13 118/4 118/12 120/7 122/20 124/22 127/9 127/12 131/1 131/2 133/18 133/23 133/24 133/25 136/6 136/17 137/9 137/11 139/14 141/7 141/9 141/17 141/24 142/8 143/10 144/15 158/12 161/8 165/5 165/13 171/6 172/4 174/1 174/23 175/11 177/25 how's [1] 111/17 however [3] 32/5 63/11 173/22 hub [4] 96/4 102/2 126/7 126/10 hug [1] 21/6 huge [8] 18/9 27/18 74/15 75/13 86/12 92/23 120/23 153/8 human [1] 54/24 humans [1] 143/15 hundred [1] 29/1 hundreds [3] 32/12 34/7 111/24 hunt [1] 73/20 hunting [1] 73/21 hurtful [1] 53/13 husband [8] 67/7 88/13 92/3 92/22 128/20 129/11 134/16 167/15

**Hyde [1]** 25/14 **hymn [1]** 115/4 I acquired [1] 6/7 I actually [6] 24/1 29/21 29/24 63/13 93/17 147/18 l agree [1] 143/15 I also [1] 85/6 88/20 92/1 93/9 96/18 | I always [4] 33/15 42/24 43/8 97/3 I am [13] 1/4 5/20 7/9 8/23 68/8 85/2 88/5 100/8 106/22 137/18 138/21 171/7 171/8 I applied [1] 9/22 I appreciate [4] 54/23 57/3 94/25 172/9 I ask [2] 48/14 140/20 I declared [2] 34/5 l asked [7] 52/25 126/22 127/4 131/15 142/14 142/17 159/17 l assume [1] 67/13 I became [1] 43/14 I been [1] 33/19 144/19 152/20 154/17 | I bought [4] 4/20 22/13 22/16 23/8 I called [1] 48/1 I came [4] 9/16 9/18 94/13 173/3 I can [26] 34/4 41/10 56/8 67/3 67/15 75/5 85/10 101/14 108/7 121/4 133/4 137/5 139/23 140/3 140/5 144/7 144/22 146/8 146/9 148/7 157/3 163/7 166/24 171/11 177/13 179/7 I can't [24] 24/13 60/10 60/11 68/3 70/13 71/10 76/7 83/4 91/15 104/10 104/25 105/1 105/4 114/25 118/20 123/1 143/12 148/5 148/12 155/18 162/19 171/19 172/1 179/6 I cannot [1] 177/20 | I certainly [3] 13/16 18/17 51/23

I challenged [1] 117/1 I check [1] 34/8 I checked [1] 104/18 I closed [2] 89/22 97/16 I complained [1] 62/14 I could [10] 35/24 61/10 61/25 68/6 99/9 107/13 130/9 132/8 166/2 167/8 I couldn't [11] 9/15 29/13 31/14 31/14 31/15 46/4 68/6 81/21 100/10 142/13 169/9 I counted [1] 126/17 I decided [2] 52/24 168/9 59/16 I did [20] 4/18 12/6 14/8 16/25 18/21 24/8 46/20 50/7 52/24 58/2 61/19 80/21 96/13 97/6 97/8 100/6 132/20 149/8 165/16 173/2 I didn't [23] 13/19 24/25 24/25 25/11 29/11 30/20 31/17 36/3 43/5 48/18 59/21 61/24 79/9 100/24 101/11 107/13 123/11 126/9 127/12 127/19 130/24 134/6 173/3 I do [20] 17/12 25/10 37/6 48/20 57/4 60/12 72/14 75/19 75/19 84/25 90/12 97/18 98/11 98/22 100/9 129/24 133/1 136/8 137/19 171/23 I don't [56] 6/22 7/20 8/13 8/15 8/23 8/24 14/9 19/21 20/22 26/19 31/17 36/24 38/11 38/13 44/24 54/22 55/5 57/4 63/6 66/20 67/4 67/13 68/15 72/15 72/17 84/23 97/1 102/15

I don't... [28] 108/23 113/15 115/7 129/1 129/25 133/24 135/6 135/8 136/10 140/13 142/4 145/8 151/1 152/8 152/9 155/3 155/7 155/12 156/1 156/8 168/6 170/14 171/3 171/9 172/2 172/3 172/23 177/12 I done [3] 33/16 33/19 129/21 I echo [1] 100/20 l either [1] 80/19 I employed [1] 172/19 lend [1] 20/15 I ended [2] 127/7 138/8 I enjoy [2] 102/23 178/13 I enjoyed [2] 6/12 102/20 l ever [1] 173/20 I expected [1] 128/23 I feel [6] 30/23 32/11 144/8 161/8 166/13 170/22 I felt [2] 107/14 108/24 I finished [1] 129/10 I first [2] 62/2 108/1 I found [1] 13/16 I gave [1] 9/13 I get [4] 19/13 71/5 94/22 171/9 **I go [1]** 148/5 I going [3] 28/2 69/7 171/25 **I got [16]** 19/13 24/1 24/20 24/21 29/23 35/13 42/19 49/13 63/13 63/20 68/7 106/16 110/19 118/8 132/3 167/15 I quess [5] 70/4 105/19 141/1 158/14 161/17 I had [26] 9/15 9/25 12/12 33/3 40/13

42/16 43/8 46/13 46/24 52/12 56/2 81/25 89/22 93/12 106/9 107/4 126/7 126/9 126/25 127/10 127/15 130/16 130/18 134/25 138/18 147/4 I hadn't [3] 126/4 129/5 131/15 I handed [1] 9/17 I have [19] 1/9 22/21 27/8 29/20 35/16 79/15 80/3 98/21 100/5 130/5 136/5 139/24 143/5 155/4 156/22 172/3 174/5 176/3 179/11 I haven't [10] 20/4 45/22 64/15 77/12 129/3 129/14 135/11 139/12 139/24 163/2 I hear [2] 165/8 171/1 I hid [3] 172/16 172/16 172/20 I honestly [1] 177/21 I joined [2] 4/18 6/20 I just [42] 7/13 13/10 23/11 41/23 42/1 43/4 46/18 52/16 53/18 59/7 59/15 59/22 74/5 76/12 82/21 86/7 97/5 107/4 107/12 117/17 130/20 132/7 133/17 134/5 134/7 135/5 148/8 151/25 156/18 157/11 159/11 159/16 161/11 165/11 165/19 165/20 170/21 171/4 171/18 171/19 171/25 | I might [2] 144/10 177/24 I keep [7] 5/19 21/8 91/14 122/22 123/24 136/12 172/4 I kept [3] 52/9 72/21

129/19

176/21

I knew [11] 16/1

18/19 24/22 58/3

64/10 128/16 132/20

149/6 175/19 176/21

I knocked [1] 99/4

I know [16] 16/3

28/21 30/15 55/3 57/11 71/1 123/25 135/19 135/21 135/23 | I promise [1] 48/23 136/13 143/6 146/20 147/17 159/7 175/25 I left [5] 4/18 4/19 68/21 91/9 171/14 I like [6] 18/25 21/12 98/22 100/4 102/22 141/19 I listen [1] 19/20 I live [2] 93/23 96/25 I look [1] 86/13 I looked [2] 151/11 151/16 I lost [2] 36/6 42/15 I love [4] 97/3 97/18 97/18 171/23 I loved [1] 101/11 I made [3] 121/16 171/13 171/21 I may [7] 59/5 85/16 87/1 87/22 90/7 156/6 | I reversed [1] 47/12 178/24 I mean [28] 7/20 8/23 | I said [39] 9/1 11/20 14/24 15/9 16/16 16/25 22/21 26/1 32/6 36/5 37/21 46/20 54/14 56/18 63/12 74/9 74/14 77/21 99/14 100/22 129/8 129/9 129/10 137/5 137/12 145/14 149/6 160/6 I mentioned [5] 137/24 149/14 149/15 162/24 178/1 I met [1] 11/25 157/7 I must [3] 89/25 143/14 170/1 I need [1] 171/23 I never [3] 51/13 93/23 128/20 I not [4] 14/15 61/17 61/21 67/3 I now [1] 178/24 I opened [1] 97/16 I paid [2] 70/13 72/3 I passed [1] 10/2 I personally [1] 97/21 | I specialise [1] 21/12

I phoned [2] 47/12 59/20 I push [1] 135/23 I put [3] 10/14 70/9 128/14 I quite [1] 102/18 I ran [1] 22/19 I rang [3] 104/16 128/11 128/24 I really [5] 56/25 57/3 65/24 83/2 162/16 I received [3] 108/4 138/10 141/2 I rechecked [1] 46/11 I refuse [1] 142/13 I refused [2] 124/18 132/19 I regularly [1] 32/25 I remember [1] 51/18 | I take [1] 22/3 I retired [2] 4/20 63/15 I run [1] 88/14 18/12 24/21 30/23 32/11 39/12 44/20 45/1 45/10 47/6 48/9 56/5 58/9 60/1 62/4 65/24 74/25 75/3 76/7 93/5 103/20 104/25 105/3 105/6 105/8 107/8 117/6 126/23 128/17 129/1 129/4 129/14 129/22 129/24 149/5 152/2 161/25 175/25 I saw [1] 56/3 I say [7] 65/9 100/4 136/21 145/4 155/12 170/5 176/12 I see [3] 141/24 165/13 173/6 I sent [1] 127/15 I should [5] 44/12 82/4 135/19 138/15 139/12 I shouldn't [1] 126/8 **I showed [1]** 137/6 I signed [1] 136/3 I sold [1] 5/8

I spent [1] 29/11 **I spoke [2]** 47/15 103/18 I started [6] 5/6 9/12 57/20 58/20 88/24 169/17 I stayed [1] 64/8 I stepped [2] 5/25 54/25 **I still [9]** 6/11 78/1 79/10 79/16 97/14 97/17 98/10 137/21 173/4 I stood [3] 23/24 44/2 117/2 I suffer [1] 169/13 I suppose [5] 8/15 64/4 64/8 65/2 178/13 I suspect [1] 110/18 I talked [1] 167/1 I tend [1] 71/4 I then [1] 97/13 I think [83] 6/16 6/19 8/18 9/4 9/6 12/4 13/15 13/20 14/10 14/18 15/14 17/19 17/20 17/24 18/17 21/1 24/11 24/13 26/1 37/20 44/13 46/5 47/4 52/12 54/15 55/6 55/11 56/2 57/23 57/24 58/4 58/19 58/19 58/20 59/19 60/2 60/25 62/2 65/5 65/17 67/12 67/13 67/21 68/14 70/8 71/4 72/18 72/25 75/6 76/17 82/25 83/9 83/16 83/17 83/23 84/24 89/25 98/7 110/14 112/8 113/18 117/9 122/24 125/23 126/19 126/20 129/9 150/11 154/21 156/14 157/6 157/17 160/24 161/1 163/7 163/10 163/12 165/9 171/24 172/9 174/25 175/10 176/7 I thought [27] 11/9 11/24 13/15 25/7

122/19 122/23 125/23 126/21 127/13 129/12 I thought... [23] 31/11 129/23 130/10 131/8 33/18 40/13 41/3 43/5 132/21 134/9 138/4 45/8 60/9 60/11 62/16 139/9 140/24 145/10 63/16 91/10 91/12 157/11 159/19 161/11 92/7 94/13 96/15 162/23 167/14 167/18 96/16 105/17 109/7 168/5 168/17 170/2 126/21 131/8 167/17 171/18 172/17 172/19 167/18 172/16 173/12 176/1 I told [2] 46/14 152/2 I wasn't [5] 43/15 I took [2] 59/19 59/19 106/6 106/13 113/19 I totally [1] 162/18 119/5 I trust [2] 107/11 I wasting [1] 105/6 170/5 I watched [1] 24/6 I type [1] 73/17 I wear [1] 100/8 I understand [4] I went [15] 9/24 10/5 61/11 117/15 156/11 58/5 59/14 62/3 80/2 156/14 97/10 99/2 99/3 99/6 I understood [2] 25/8 105/15 106/23 107/3 124/5 130/5 146/12 I use [2] 34/3 59/12 I will [18] 3/12 20/22 I used [9] 16/18 63/3 60/12 71/19 71/21 108/11 109/1 124/24 86/6 86/24 86/25 149/5 160/25 172/4 94/11 107/16 118/7 172/6 128/18 133/5 137/21 I wake [2] 35/8 71/19 139/22 156/12 171/21 I want [9] 22/3 62/5 174/6 68/4 85/1 165/23 I won't [1] 86/4 174/22 177/2 177/2 I wonder [8] 21/23 179/1 61/10 79/5 88/11 I wanted [7] 51/18 90/10 165/23 166/1 79/21 92/5 153/11 167/8 157/12 159/12 171/12 I wondered [1] 48/15 l was [**89**] 6/21 9/19 I worked [4] 6/5 91/11 11/7 12/4 12/5 12/14 96/25 100/23 12/19 13/3 14/7 14/12 I would [27] 4/9 9/7 22/14 22/15 25/8 17/14 22/10 28/8 30/21 42/24 43/1 43/3 33/23 38/25 47/6 43/15 47/15 47/20 49/21 51/13 61/4 61/6 49/25 50/18 50/19 61/20 68/5 68/12 50/20 50/25 51/4 51/4 69/14 84/7 97/5 51/5 51/9 51/16 52/6 132/18 133/14 156/10 54/25 56/1 56/2 57/19 156/24 165/5 169/22 58/6 59/12 61/19 174/7 174/18 179/9 61/22 61/23 62/10 I wouldn't [2] 61/18 72/20 72/20 79/8 80/4 179/8 82/1 82/10 89/21 **I'd [41]** 4/5 10/1 10/10 90/20 91/10 98/13 11/1 14/15 16/1 23/18 99/6 99/10 101/2 23/25 24/16 29/13 106/8 106/12 106/14 44/14 44/23 51/15 106/20 107/10 112/3 52/18 62/15 63/18

74/5 76/11 86/5 90/6 91/19 107/14 113/13 121/3 124/17 126/4 126/22 127/15 130/17 135/1 135/20 140/5 141/4 142/7 150/10 159/15 167/1 170/12 170/13 174/13 178/21 I'd say [1] 167/1 **I'II [27]** 1/21 1/25 16/2 35/25 48/23 56/25 59/22 59/23 63/24 71/21 84/21 91/1 94/17 103/5 128/19 132/9 145/15 148/9 148/17 148/23 152/21 156/2 161/10 162/22 174/15 177/15 178/8 I'm [117] 1/9 1/13 1/14 2/3 3/16 5/19 5/21 7/1 18/25 19/11 22/23 27/23 35/15 41/7 42/18 42/22 50/4 50/5 55/8 55/16 55/19 57/10 57/12 57/18 61/15 63/17 64/4 64/13 64/14 66/2 66/18 66/21 67/2 70/25 71/3 75/6 76/18 77/21 79/14 82/13 82/17 84/19 85/4 85/19 85/23 86/22 88/9 88/13 88/13 90/1 90/2 90/17 91/7 91/16 | 177/22 178/12 179/19 93/18 94/16 95/19 96/12 98/8 100/16 101/11 102/16 103/20 idea [8] 10/12 10/14 105/7 105/16 107/5 108/18 108/25 110/1 112/16 113/1 117/14 117/14 119/23 123/20 125/19 127/11 128/13 | 10/23 11/19 15/21 128/17 129/4 129/10 132/13 133/20 134/2 134/2 134/2 134/3 135/21 140/7 148/10 149/6 151/2 152/10 153/3 154/5 155/3 155/8 155/13 156/5 156/23 160/18 166/7 168/17 169/2 169/18 169/20 171/9 171/22

172/4 172/5 172/5 172/24 173/17 174/2 I've [98] 5/10 5/11 11/12 16/4 20/5 21/10 33/20 44/21 44/21 45/14 55/9 59/23 67/2 69/9 69/10 69/11 69/13 69/19 70/8 70/10 70/14 70/23 71/1 71/1 71/13 71/14 71/15 71/24 72/1 72/2 72/3 72/4 72/14 74/21 76/18 85/9 88/15 89/20 89/21 89/24 91/1 91/11 93/13 98/8 100/14 103/20 105/7 107/4 108/9 108/18 108/19 109/4 109/8 110/13 110/21 111/7 115/4 118/7 121/16 123/17 129/25 131/24 132/14 134/17 135/12 139/20 139/25 140/7 142/19 142/21 149/12 151/10 154/16 155/13 156/4 156/24 160/13 160/24 162/15 162/18 163/3 166/6 166/20 169/15 169/15 169/16 169/16 169/20 169/24 171/8 173/10 177/19 icon's [1] 38/3 icons [2] 38/2 38/3 74/1 80/14 123/17 131/22 132/2 134/19 identify [1] 145/12 Idu [20] 6/3 6/14 16/8 18/15 23/13 32/17 36/1 40/24 40/25 45/2 50/12 53/15 68/10 72/10 76/13 79/5 84/4 **Idu's [3]** 43/10 43/10 68/10 if [226] ill [2] 69/23 72/7 imagine [7] 63/6

87/18 101/14 127/14 128/21 130/11 135/14 176/21 177/13 178/23 imagining [1] 83/13 impact [18] 7/7 38/11 61/8 61/13 64/1 67/18 67/20 74/8 74/11 77/18 141/5 159/13 165/16 165/25 166/3 167/9 171/5 172/11 impacts [3] 62/25 166/17 172/13 **implicitly [3]** 67/10 107/11 170/6 important [8] 2/11 2/16 57/13 83/24 86/8 86/9 98/7 156/22 impossible [3] 29/22 94/18 100/15 **impressed** [1] 83/2 **impression [5]** 12/21 13/12 14/21 155/8 155/13 imprisoned [2] 173/18 175/20 140/20 142/14 142/16 improved [6] 76/15 152/24 153/1 153/3 154/19 161/18 improvements [3] 150/8 154/20 157/13 improving [2] 150/6 152/21 inaccurate [1] 82/3 **inadequate [1]** 72/19 incident [4] 24/21 48/9 121/22 121/23 incidental [2] 95/4 95/16 inclined [1] 155/9 income [3] 81/6 82/2 162/7 incurred [1] 52/18 independent [1] 2/3 indicated [2] 25/16 70/8 individual [6] 11/4 82/19 85/11 145/17 147/3 150/23 **individuals [3]** 87/10 174/10 174/17 industry [1] 16/4 **infallible [3]** 65/20 83/22 143/16

infection [1] 101/2 info [1] 38/15 inform [2] 51/3 179/15 informal [1] 20/15 information [10] 38/8 38/10 39/15 70/14 85/20 107/23 112/5 114/3 163/1 179/10 informative [1] 178/22 informed [1] 84/17 inherited [1] 23/25 initial [3] 14/22 15/6 46/10 initially [6] 12/12 13/22 28/24 48/1 172/15 172/19 ink [1] 113/9 inquiry [7] 1/4 2/14 2/20 85/17 87/5 87/9 162/24 ins [1] 17/13 inside [4] 46/15 99/6 128/2 170/11 insignificance [1] 66/14 insignificant [1] 134/4 insisting [1] 168/7 instability [1] 9/5 installed [2] 23/4 89/4 instance [2] 2/8 153/19 instances [1] 102/9 instinctively [1] 109/23 **institution** [1] 94/10 **instructed** [2] 51/2 51/2 instructions [1] 41/15 insurances [1] 80/24 intelligent [1] 91/11 interacting [1] 97/4 interaction [2] 97/19 100/3 interested [7] 9/7 35/3 55/16 66/21 82/17 140/24 174/13 interesting [3] 7/19

8/2 18/12 internally [1] 27/10 interrogate [1] 147/14 interview [8] 7/23 9/24 10/3 12/4 12/12 12/13 49/14 62/3 interviewed [2] 12/4 12/15 into [69] 1/17 2/13 8/17 11/13 16/9 28/1 28/19 29/18 30/14 30/24 51/22 52/11 53/14 55/19 60/4 60/18 60/20 60/22 64/5 64/6 66/13 67/22 70/2 72/17 72/23 75/12 75/18 84/12 87/8 87/19 90/22 93/2 94/9 94/13 99/12 103/2 106/9 106/12 106/16 110/9 112/4 112/7 113/17 119/8 119/13 122/20 123/6 123/24 127/21 127/22 128/12 134/7 134/21 136/6 141/6 141/9 141/11 144/7 148/1 148/7 148/8 148/11 149/7 155/7 159/25 162/19 163/10 169/6 170/13 intrigued [1] 156/5 **introduce** [1] 4/6 introduced [2] 23/1 28/19 introduction [1] 90/20 introductions [1] 2/1 investigate [13] 53/1 60/14 114/22 142/14 143/2 143/2 153/2 155/9 156/22 158/6 158/20 158/23 158/23 investigated [4] 52/5 52/6 160/15 160/16 investigating [1] 83/1 invoice [1] 121/11 involve [1] 73/21 involved [18] 17/6 19/1 19/25 38/20 43/16 43/17 51/7 83/7 **job [16]** 5/25 9/19

84/5 87/10 88/21 96/22 98/17 99/19 142/9 167/16 174/10 174/17 involvement [1] 91/22 iPhone [1] 36/15 Ireland [8] 108/9 108/10 137/24 138/1 138/3 138/22 138/23 139/3 **irrelevant** [2] 37/5 82/3 irritable [1] 72/8 **irritated** [1] 71/5 ish [3] 57/22 89/11 101/25 isn't [15] 45/8 46/19 65/19 99/24 101/22 111/11 114/5 114/9 114/9 134/15 140/14 143/18 170/6 176/17 176/23 issue [18] 26/21 26/22 27/25 30/20 38/12 54/18 78/9 78/19 78/21 79/1 107/21 122/6 144/11 144/15 153/8 156/21 161/22 166/22 issues [30] 14/25 26/15 27/18 30/7 32/20 38/17 39/19 39/21 61/8 61/8 64/25 65/1 72/10 76/22 77/15 77/25 78/5 78/18 83/12 85/4 104/4 107/17 114/15 120/14 139/16 144/7 144/17 161/17 166/14 166/23 it's [292] its [3] 87/2 107/5 119/14 itself [4] 64/5 88/23 100/21 160/3 **January [1]** 127/16 jaws [1] 148/13

**Jerome [1]** 178/9

146/6 170/15 171/23 jobs [5] 9/16 92/20 143/9 168/10 168/16 join [1] 21/16 joined [2] 4/18 6/20 joining [1] 89/13 jolly [1] 71/2 **Joshi [1]** 130/15 journey [1] 15/22 joy [6] 56/11 56/11 57/6 78/16 170/12 170/14 **July [1]** 63/14 jump [1] 75/11 just [335] justice [2] 177/5 177/11 K keen [3] 7/9 55/19 119/5 keep [31] 3/12 5/19 8/3 17/3 20/5 21/8 26/13 29/3 41/2 41/6 42/1 66/12 84/16 90/13 91/14 92/20 95/8 95/12 96/1 96/5 116/25 122/22 123/24 128/19 135/5 136/12 145/21 160/10 170/23 172/4 177/8 keeping [3] 96/4 103/14 122/19 keeps [1] 143/19 **kept [15]** 14/11 36/14 52/9 52/22 72/21 98/9 121/16 125/24 128/7 128/9 128/13 129/19 130/9 163/2 166/21 key [1] 113/18 keyboard [2] 73/4 113/16

**keys [2]** 99/8 113/14

kick [1] 117/8

killed [1] 93/20

killing [1] 50/16

kind [15] 7/8 11/20

14/2 34/24 44/14

80/20 81/25 82/10

66/10 66/11 74/15

75/5 97/4 98/8 145/1

9/22 64/12 64/14 65/8 87/24 98/6 117/22 126/7 140/9 158/17 168/7 kinds [1] 48/18 kit [1] 126/6 knew [26] 11/12 16/1 18/19 24/22 26/15 39/21 58/3 63/4 64/10 73/11 103/8 103/10 109/23 109/24 111/17 112/17 122/2 128/16 130/21 132/20 149/6 175/19 176/21 176/21 176/23 176/23 knocked [1] 99/4 know [385] knowing [2] 176/11 176/11 knowledge [1] 1/6 known [7] 24/16 33/4 110/21 110/22 115/3 177/1 178/24 knows [5] 1/16 6/4 7/20 109/5 161/18

> label [4] 77/8 120/12 164/3 164/9 laborious [2] 110/24 111/21 lack [2] 115/8 160/16 ladies [5] 23/25 24/16 25/12 33/3 42/20 lady [7] 49/14 59/22 60/16 98/25 102/7

151/17 167/5 Lake [1] 92/12 land [1] 148/7 large [5] 1/16 48/8 125/15 146/5 164/23 largest [1] 61/12 last [22] 5/8 5/11 8/8 41/18 48/22 56/10 58/2 58/6 58/13 61/2 72/21 95/21 106/22 116/23 136/6 138/10 150/24 152/9 173/22 175/25 178/13 178/14

late [2] 56/18 131/12

122/25 123/21 131/17

later [10] 3/1 13/20

25/1 80/21 122/18

later... [2] 154/10 163/10 laughed [1] 138/17 law [1] 109/21 lawyers [2] 133/9 178/13 leadership [2] 176/15 176/17 leading [2] 95/18 96/14 leads [1] 85/15 leaning [1] 67/25 learn [6] 1/7 10/11 17/12 17/16 18/13 140/24 learned [1] 65/16 learnt [1] 104/3 lease [1] 68/23 least [6] 26/16 63/9 73/2 96/22 160/10 176/7 leave [10] 10/3 24/22 36/25 42/10 61/25 80/19 81/25 97/7 168/4 168/5 leaves [3] 15/13 108/15 143/25 led [2] 7/9 52/1 ledger [3] 109/17 110/25 111/10 ledgers [1] 108/2 left [17] 4/13 4/18 4/19 15/8 24/12 37/2 49/17 68/21 76/10 81/4 91/9 95/15 106/22 109/23 148/25 165/15 171/14 Legacy [1] 48/15 Legacy Horizon [1] 48/15 length [1] 35/16 lengthy [1] 53/3 lenient [1] 154/23 less [10] 21/25 23/17 59/8 79/12 112/25 126/15 136/24 149/18 155/20 161/16 lesson [1] 19/16 lessons [1] 65/16 **let [10]** 37/13 47/9

72/15 103/8 107/20 115/22 155/20 161/10 178/14 178/18 let's [10] 17/3 30/2 44/18 55/22 102/25 135/14 135/15 135/16 144/17 153/7 letter [4] 132/4 137/6 140/2 140/14 **letters [5]** 59/18 59/24 164/23 164/24 165/3 level [3] 32/23 41/25 42/23 levels [4] 42/23 76/9 91/10 162/17 licence [1] 93/21 lie [3] 174/19 174/19 174/21 lied [2] 174/22 177/1 lies [1] 175/15 life [16] 6/24 7/8 16/6 19/19 19/19 19/19 51/13 51/16 61/14 64/2 70/24 71/8 75/12 122/12 166/12 170/14 lifted [1] 170/8 light [2] 123/7 170/6 like [170] 4/5 4/9 5/12 12/9 13/23 14/13 14/14 16/8 17/12 18/18 18/24 18/25 21/12 21/20 21/24 22/10 23/2 26/12 27/22 28/1 28/25 30/23 31/2 32/9 33/18 36/15 38/25 39/15 40/16 41/13 42/2 42/6 42/16 44/14 44/15 44/22 44/25 45/7 45/19 45/21 46/3 49/21 50/16 51/14 54/13 59/1 61/6 63/19 64/20 65/7 66/22 69/16 70/7 74/6 74/15 75/2 75/2 76/11 76/14 80/15 81/16 82/3 82/6 82/8 82/20 85/15 86/14 87/19 88/15 90/23 91/19 96/3 98/4 98/5 98/9 98/15 98/17 98/19 98/22 98/24

99/14 100/4 100/19 100/25 101/8 101/19 102/1 102/3 102/7 102/8 102/11 102/18 102/18 102/22 103/16 **listener [1]** 86/23 103/17 104/24 105/16 listening [4] 3/16 105/22 105/23 108/25 111/6 112/13 112/14 113/13 113/16 115/2 115/10 116/6 117/17 120/8 121/3 125/7 129/2 130/9 131/18 132/21 133/9 133/14 134/2 134/2 134/6 134/9 134/24 137/17 137/18 140/5 141/4 141/11 141/19 141/24| 142/9 142/10 143/3 144/8 144/8 145/5 149/4 149/20 149/21 150/4 150/10 150/17 151/1 151/20 154/9 154/23 155/2 156/23 156/24 157/17 158/13 159/5 159/15 160/13 162/8 162/11 165/5 165/22 167/5 167/14 169/23 170/7 170/8 170/19 170/20 172/3 174/8 178/13 178/21 liked [4] 17/7 18/15 23/14 92/11 likely [2] 102/9 120/14 limit [4] 15/4 35/11 35/16 52/20 **Limited [25]** 7/5 13/10 30/6 53/15 56/12 62/21 63/21 82/18 110/8 114/16 118/3 118/14 119/3 133/19 136/18 141/8 141/16 144/15 144/23 147/13 150/5 154/17 160/22 161/15 165/6 line [6] 26/13 34/8 34/8 59/14 59/15 120/22 line' [1] 103/23 lines [4] 120/11 139/2 150/18 150/20 linked [1] 1/17

lipreading [1] 100/9 list [2] 62/13 105/8 listen [4] 2/5 19/20 19/20 19/22 105/3 177/16 178/18 literally [2] 75/11 80/18 litigation [4] 56/21 56/22 56/24 58/20 little [54] 4/7 4/10 5/4 5/7 6/3 6/4 7/2 7/17 22/11 24/4 28/22 31/1 31/7 31/21 33/25 35/21 55/16 55/19 59/8 61/23 65/4 66/4 68/1 69/4 73/3 74/11 86/25 88/11 89/11 89/16 90/11 91/5 92/1 92/13 96/23 100/7 103/8 104/9 107/24 110/11 114/3 114/23 117/20 120/20 130/12 141/5 142/6 147/13 147/17 150/12 150/19 153/13 162/5 175/6 live [7] 70/23 92/13 93/23 96/25 142/23 142/24 168/24 lived [6] 6/18 19/17 19/18 20/2 94/1 103/3 lives [2] 98/4 175/21 living [1] 99/8 loan [3] 68/7 68/18 167/24 local [12] 5/23 9/20 10/5 46/13 80/4 81/19 81/21 88/18 89/3 104/9 120/24 162/3 local-type [1] 104/9 lock [3] 100/5 100/7 100/22 log [10] 113/8 120/7 120/9 145/23 146/3 146/13 146/15 146/23 151/13 152/14 logic [5] 105/24 141/20 141/21 141/23 142/7 logical [1] 141/21 logs [1] 150/14

**London [1]** 49/13 long [18] 36/3 42/9 42/14 42/14 49/24 61/21 71/1 88/20 93/23 95/11 102/3 105/20 134/5 155/18 160/4 160/5 177/7 177/25 longer [5] 22/15 22/16 63/25 94/10 175/11 look [46] 16/7 24/21 27/1 27/21 30/10 30/10 31/12 45/19 55/1 60/3 78/16 84/11 86/13 93/25 99/3 105/17 107/9 113/4 113/7 113/10 120/8 120/13 120/24 129/1 129/22 134/19 134/21 135/20 135/21 135/21 142/18 145/18 145/23 146/20 148/6 148/10 150/8 151/7 151/9 152/2 153/16 158/20 159/1 159/4 163/13 170/5 looked [23] 16/1 49/15 52/11 60/18 60/20 60/22 94/2 117/8 120/18 120/19 122/7 122/10 122/10 122/14 132/4 142/16 142/16 143/14 146/17 148/8 151/11 151/16 178/19 looking [25] 1/14 9/19 11/7 16/10 16/10 28/2 31/4 31/18 35/12 35/22 37/25 44/23 66/25 67/15 83/18 84/12 102/19 123/5 126/21 127/18 128/19 147/22 148/14 150/8 171/15 loop [1] 42/14 lose [6] 95/25 125/18 125/18 129/5 131/9 145/3 lose-lose [1] 125/18 losing [6] 84/19 119/20 125/25 126/12

losing... [2] 164/15 170/20 loss [8] 27/3 31/2 52/3 59/6 59/9 70/8 79/8 81/5 losses [22] 28/14 29/23 31/21 40/6 42/21 42/22 43/8 44/3 44/7 52/18 60/10 61/11 65/10 66/17 79/11 79/17 108/19 121/23 136/5 168/8 172/15 172/20 lost [19] 36/4 36/6 42/15 53/25 69/9 78/8 80/23 81/10 115/5 118/7 122/8 124/2 126/24 144/3 159/20 159/21 160/19 160/24 175/20 lot [40] 3/17 13/4 15/10 18/3 18/4 18/5 18/13 19/3 21/21 24/17 25/8 26/8 29/11 38/13 39/18 43/17 46/25 59/2 61/22 62/5 62/13 65/7 66/15 66/16 68/24 78/4 96/2 96/2 98/23 100/9 101/7 102/20 104/2 111/7 120/4 120/5 123/10 130/6 161/16 167/2 lots [11] 3/4 15/3 17/17 87/11 101/21 102/10 102/12 125/23 125/24 144/3 168/17 **lottery [3]** 121/7 121/9 121/13 louder [2] 6/15 87/2 **love [7]** 56/25 97/3 97/18 97/18 98/10 170/13 171/23 loved [3] 97/14 98/21 101/11 lovely [4] 5/2 91/18 99/24 130/15 loves [1] 97/2 loving [1] 76/18 **low [1]** 161/7

**lower [2]** 42/23 42/23 lowest [1] 161/7 luckily [2] 30/20 79/9 lucky [3] 28/5 32/11 171/9 **ludicrous** [1] 105/18 lunches [1] 100/24 lunchtime [1] 99/2 **luxuries** [1] 68/4 **Lyne [1]** 6/8

### M

machine [1] 72/23 made [18] 7/15 44/3 44/13 49/6 65/10 65/22 85/17 106/9 110/1 110/2 113/7 116/5 121/16 133/11 134/8 144/6 171/13 171/21 mail [4] 106/21 106/21 106/24 120/11 mails [1] 81/5 main [6] 82/24 83/6 84/4 103/9 104/1 161/22 mainly [5] 79/11 81/5 86/23 86/23 90/7 mains [1] 15/1 maintain [1] 72/18 majority [1] 101/5 make [51] 14/14 16/9 22/3 24/25 27/3 32/22 40/19 44/8 45/16 52/20 63/7 66/6 67/3 79/10 81/7 83/15 85/16 85/23 86/2 103/15 111/9 116/15 116/16 116/19 116/19 116/21 120/10 121/1 122/5 125/3 129/8 133/11 134/10 136/5 136/7 142/2 143/5 145/5 145/7 154/8 155/1 156/2 164/2 164/4 168/23 175/6 176/15 177/11 177/14 178/18 179/4 makes [8] 33/10 64/18 72/6 72/6 72/7 134/4 141/24 170/11 making [9] 37/20

66/23 67/11 91/14 120/21 168/8 168/17 168/19 170/2 manage [7] 23/23 51/7 69/25 69/25 112/5 112/22 169/8 manageable [1] 51/11 managed [5] 13/11 14/3 20/5 33/20 169/5 management [3] 13/18 41/10 55/23 manager [29] 10/15 11/3 12/2 13/19 13/20 matters [2] 1/7 1/11 41/16 46/13 46/17 56/3 57/5 57/20 58/3 58/9 58/17 107/13 118/5 118/8 122/9 126/18 126/22 130/22 134/25 136/24 137/19 137/22 138/16 140/16 149/15 152/11 manager/auditor [1] 11/3 managers [3] 41/19 55/18 56/14 managing [6] 33/2 43/10 51/21 70/19 79/20 110/8 Manchester [2] 6/6 6/9 manifest [1] 83/15 manifested [1] 64/5 manual [4] 39/14 158/8 158/11 158/15 **manually [1]** 16/18 manuals [1] 39/14 many [27] 11/8 13/18 18/23 21/1 21/7 31/24 33/18 34/7 42/9 52/25 53/5 53/6 53/10 56/18 56/18 71/24 76/8 80/15 84/9 113/6 152/8 152/20 152/22 165/5 173/22 175/17 176/19 March [2] 1/1 2/13 marginally [1] 165/9 market [1] 168/1 masks [4] 100/8 100/10 100/12 106/2

masses [2] 75/10

167/6 massive [3] 18/23 81/5 124/16 massively [3] 25/12 81/24 167/12 master [1] 103/11 match [1] 18/14 material [1] 34/9 materialised [1] 123/5 **maternity** [1] 97/7 matter [5] 77/3 77/13 97/18 98/8 114/6 mature [1] 24/16 maximum [1] 146/14 may [19] 2/19 2/19 3/4 59/5 85/16 87/1 87/22 87/23 90/7 110/18 110/24 140/25 150/9 152/7 155/9 156/6 156/20 178/24 179/20 maybe [18] 19/9 19/25 42/6 42/22 51/10 51/16 52/19 60/18 61/24 65/10 71/11 118/19 118/22 120/18 145/10 158/7 161/13 161/18 me [175] 4/15 6/14 7/13 7/17 10/8 10/16 11/8 11/12 11/21 12/8 12/13 13/1 15/25 18/19 19/16 21/15 21/16 22/11 22/25 24/7 25/7 30/22 30/22 31/11 31/13 33/6 34/11 35/5 35/12 35/12 35/20 37/21 40/13 40/24 41/19 41/20 42/4 42/7 42/15 42/21 42/21 43/5 43/6 43/19 44/1 44/22 45/11 45/20 46/21 48/2 48/25 50/5 51/3 51/17 53/4 53/19 57/2 57/13 58/8 60/17 64/24 65/7 67/9 67/21 68/14 70/25 71/4 71/5 74/23 75/3 75/5 75/19

75/20 75/23 80/18 81/7 81/12 82/8 84/9 85/7 85/7 85/13 85/15 85/20 85/21 85/22 86/4 88/10 90/16 91/25 92/1 101/24 103/24 105/2 105/3 107/8 107/20 107/24 108/20 114/15 115/6 115/20 117/3 117/24 118/1 121/20 122/9 124/10 126/6 126/7 126/24 127/1 127/17 127/20 129/13 129/20 130/2 130/3 130/7 130/9 130/15 130/16 130/19 131/11 131/17 131/23 131/23 132/2 133/4 133/18 134/4 134/8 134/20 135/7 135/10 139/11 141/7 142/9 142/21 144/19 145/11 147/12 149/17 149/19 151/9 151/12 155/20 156/6 156/7 156/11 157/2 159/23 163/13 165/20 165/23 166/2 166/6 166/11 167/16 167/17 170/4 170/7 170/10 170/21 171/10 171/16 172/25 174/16 178/18 179/6 179/15 mean [36] 7/20 8/23 14/22 14/24 15/9 16/16 16/25 19/21 22/21 26/1 32/6 36/5 37/21 46/20 54/14 56/18 63/12 74/9 74/14 77/21 99/14 100/22 115/21 129/8 129/9 129/10 137/5 137/12 145/14 149/6 152/23 159/21 159/22 160/6 165/8 166/18 meaning [1] 119/17 means [2] 24/25 179/18 60/21 62/4 62/7 62/12 meant [2] 38/16 52/17 meanwhile [1] 127/19 mechanism [1] 140/22

M meet [4] 14/15 86/16 86/18 91/4 meeting [5] 2/7 28/6 96/7 130/5 130/14 meetings [3] 56/7 56/8 58/4 member [1] 53/9 members [5] 1/16 29/21 50/21 86/1 116/7 memo [3] 39/16 41/13 41/13 memories [1] 35/19 mental [1] 129/9 mentally [1] 166/5 mention [10] 41/1 52/17 59/5 89/25 149/8 158/2 158/10 161/11 161/11 179/1 mentioned [15] 11/1 21/25 29/5 41/13 137/24 139/20 149/14 149/15 150/13 157/7 157/8 162/24 172/23 173/10 178/1 mentioning [2] 36/3 74/6 mentions [1] 107/21 Merriott [1] 89/10 met [2] 11/25 169/11 Miah [6] 22/4 49/21 49/23 58/12 60/19 85/1 microwave [1] 99/7 middle [4] 39/22 39/24 71/19 143/21 Middlesbrough [1] 97/14 midnight [1] 16/19 might [31] 2/8 3/12 7/25 11/9 14/10 46/22 68/10 68/15 77/7 77/8 79/23 85/22 86/8 87/2 92/15 99/22 99/23 100/1 101/8 120/25 122/6 125/12 136/10 144/10 153/13 154/3 155/25 157/7 158/10 159/9 171/1 mike [20] 4/9 4/12

9/10 10/13 14/5 16/14 misunderstanding [1] monitored [2] 13/11 21/23 23/16 28/17 29/19 35/19 35/25 36/7 40/16 45/24 53/22 61/10 66/22 72/9 82/23 mile [1] 62/12 miles [1] 103/10 Milesh [3] 130/15 130/25 131/13 military [3] 14/15 61/17 61/21 milk [2] 99/4 116/9 million [3] 16/9 54/1 54/3 millionaire [1] 16/12 millions [2] 33/21 33/21 mind [13] 24/3 50/23 64/18 64/23 67/25 69/6 71/18 71/23 91/2 96/24 105/23 152/7 173/2 mindful [3] 64/4 64/20 65/18 minds [2] 91/21 173/20 mine [8] 30/24 32/11 44/20 66/13 66/16 71/25 128/25 134/17 minimal [1] 75/12 minimum [2] 160/11 167/2 minus [1] 46/9 minute [11] 8/8 18/4 36/1 59/25 107/17 107/20 140/15 144/18 153/7 159/23 168/21 minutes [3] 76/10 156/10 171/2 mirror [2] 35/12 35/13 mis [1] 138/22 miscounted [1] 154/8 missing [6] 22/22 43/11 46/1 109/22 115/13 166/10 mistake [4] 33/15 103/22 113/7 121/1 mistakes [4] 91/15 109/7 110/1 110/2 mistress [1] 41/17 mistresses [1] 51/6

144/10 misunderstood [1] 154/16 mix [1] 18/12 mixed [1] 9/4 **Mm [3]** 6/10 9/23 54/5 Mm-hm [3] 6/10 9/23 54/5 Mmm [1] 36/11 mobile [1] 118/21 **mode [1]** 112/15 model [3] 5/23 81/10 156/5 moment [18] 13/6 27/5 29/24 54/5 54/25 60/8 71/22 74/5 76/12 77/2 88/5 109/14 112/3 135/14 137/15 156/15 161/23 174/6 **Monday [1]** 101/22 money [86] 18/18 20/14 22/22 29/14 29/17 32/14 33/7 36/12 43/2 43/11 43/20 45/15 47/11 47/17 47/22 53/19 54/18 54/21 55/8 66/15 67/5 71/9 71/9 72/3 72/4 72/5 72/17 74/17 74/18 80/13 84/19 95/17 96/5 102/6 110/5 115/13 115/13 116/10 116/11 117/24 119/1 119/8 119/9 122/20 123/10 123/15 126/24 128/8 129/4 129/19 130/12 130/18 131/8 131/14 131/18 136/6 136/12 136/14 136/23 138/6 138/14 139/3 139/5 139/7 139/24 139/24 143/7 143/8 144/4 145/2 145/3 145/4 145/12 147/4 152/3 154/25 155/3 164/2 164/5 164/15 167/13 167/23 168/23 170/20 173/15 175/22 money's [1] 145/10 monies [1] 163/1

14/3 month [21] 33/12 33/13 34/5 47/15 47/20 58/5 63/14 66/3 78/12 95/25 103/17 119/20 136/8 136/14 142/20 143/17 150/24 151/4 153/18 153/23 154/3 monthly [7] 26/8 26/12 27/16 32/8 34/11 34/25 95/20 months [18] 1/5 12/14 34/4 52/13 58/2 58/6 59/15 59/19 60/19 69/18 71/25 89/6 131/19 136/25 142/20 152/9 155/3 167/24 months' [1] 52/5 Moors [1] 89/20 more [45] 3/13 11/25 13/23 22/1 22/18 26/9 26/17 38/17 44/15 45/14 54/4 55/17 61/24 62/6 74/11 74/13 76/12 90/15 98/9 100/21 102/16 102/24 104/2 104/6 121/1 122/13 125/12 126/15 132/10 134/22 136/23 149/18 153/17 154/23 154/24 155/9 156/25 159/22 161/22 164/2 164/5 167/2 177/20 178/25 179/10 Mr Venn [4] 110/14 morning [16] 29/15 31/3 35/8 37/15 37/18 39/7 39/10 93/22 99/1 126/17 127/6 128/23 128/23 168/16 168/21 170/12 mortgage [2] 92/23 92/24 **Mossley [6]** 6/8 6/8 6/17 6/18 11/7 11/24 Mossley's [1] 6/24 most [11] 5/20 28/7 53/11 66/20 70/13 83/23 98/7 102/16

111/13 153/12 159/7

mother [1] 109/20 motive [1] 19/22 motor [1] 96/14 mouth [1] 155/8 move [18] 3/13 5/1 7/3 14/1 15/20 21/23 25/22 49/20 54/5 62/9 63/24 66/6 77/1 83/24 94/14 141/4 141/6 150/3 moved [4] 38/1 38/2 73/7 73/24 moving [3] 55/20 76/24 94/2 Mr [30] 1/22 1/24 10/19 22/2 22/2 22/4 22/10 22/24 23/10 48/6 48/24 49/21 49/23 50/2 50/11 57/23 58/12 60/19 85/1 85/2 86/12 110/14 110/23 112/2 140/1 153/9 155/19 157/5 179/13 179/13 Mr Ball [8] 10/19 22/2 22/10 48/6 48/24 50/2 57/23 85/2 Mr Hartley [3] 110/23 140/1 179/13 Mr Miah [6] 22/4 49/21 49/23 58/12 60/19 85/1 Mr Norris [9] 1/22 1/24 22/2 22/24 23/10 50/11 86/12 112/2 157/5 153/9 155/19 179/13 Mrs [2] 109/25 133/12 Mrs Edgar [1] 133/12 Mrs so [1] 109/25 Ms [7] 22/4 56/20 85/2 110/23 132/8 179/13 179/13 **Ms Bath [1]** 179/13 **Ms Edgar [3]** 110/23 132/8 179/13 Ms Whatley [3] 22/4 56/20 85/2 much [58] 1/21 3/19 5/3 8/19 15/4 15/12 17/2 34/5 35/3 35/10

## M much... [48] 52/20 56/13 56/13 64/11 76/18 83/4 84/20 84/24 85/6 86/11 89/12 89/14 90/22 91/4 91/18 94/24 97/23 101/18 101/22 102/7 102/15 103/21 108/6 109/5 110/24 112/1 112/25 116/10 120/10 120/18 122/20 123/3 132/10 133/6 133/11 134/21 141/25 142/1 147/1 147/2 155/10 155/17 164/16 165/17 167/16 171/3 175/11 178/8 **mud [3]** 173/17 173/17 174/2 multi [1] 77/14 multiple [16] 28/11 32/3 35/7 36/2 39/13 50/24 53/23 54/8 90/6 93/24 119/22 129/18 131/22 133/1 138/25 157/18 multiplying [2] 128/13 129/3 Mum [3] 6/20 67/6 99/11 must [11] 30/12 36/25 51/16 75/3 81/8 89/25 118/10 143/14 149/7 170/1 177/1 mute [1] 106/5 muted [1] 4/12 my [158] 2/4 2/25 3/11 3/14 4/25 5/25 6/19 6/19 6/20 6/24 9/7 9/17 10/5 10/14 11/22 19/17 19/19 20/1 20/4 20/10 21/9 21/10 24/6 25/10 30/20 33/15 33/25 34/8 34/8 35/13 35/17

42/20 43/1 45/10

46/13 50/16 51/13

51/15 51/17 52/22

57/19 59/13 59/19

55/9 56/5 56/25 57/1

59/23 60/9 60/10 62/3 **national [8]** 78/21 63/18 64/10 64/14 69/22 70/8 70/23 71/18 72/1 72/15 75/5 80/1 80/1 80/7 80/15 81/13 81/23 81/24 82/2 84/9 84/9 86/9 86/14 88/10 89/17 90/16 90/17 91/16 92/3 92/18 92/22 97/4 97/13 97/18 97/19 101/13 104/7 105/6 105/8 106/10 107/11 107/15 108/18 109/20 115/5 124/17 125/24 126/2 126/8 126/18 126/22 126/24 126/25 127/10 128/20 128/22 128/24 129/9 129/11 130/2 130/18 130/19 130/22 132/4 132/6 134/5 134/16 138/16 140/14 141/20 142/11 142/21 145/17 146/11 147/21 149/12 149/14 152/6 158/7 160/24 161/18 161/22 163/13 negligible [1] 94/6 169/13 169/21 169/25 neither [2] 50/5 170/1 170/5 170/5 170/8 170/13 170/14 171/13 171/14 171/23 171/24 172/16 172/17 175/25 177/15 178/14 179/12 **my God [1]** 19/17 my YouTube [1] 3/14 myself [11] 9/15 13/17 19/11 31/16 50/20 97/3 113/5 135/5 144/3 147/21 171/13 mystery [1] 56/2 N

name [5] 20/22 89/17 114/25 151/21 158/10 name's [1] 90/17 names [1] 151/19 narrow [1] 160/8 nasty [2] 27/17 130/6

78/25 90/1 90/1 94/10 121/7 121/9 178/17 **nationally [1]** 11/3 **naturally [1]** 94/20 **nature [2]** 4/1 8/17 nay [1] 147/4 near [4] 126/11 161/24 164/6 177/22 79/13 93/20 128/6 136/8 necessarily [2] 8/1 18/1 need [13] 3/20 83/16 83/24 83/25 83/25 103/12 104/21 120/2 171/23 175/10 175/10 177/5 177/25 needed [3] 80/10 104/20 107/12 needs [5] 83/19 83/20 83/21 175/12 175/12 negative [6] 19/21 33/17 34/17 43/24 70/20 105/19 166/12 167/15 169/10 neighbour [1] 102/8 130/25 Nelson [3] 90/21 94/2 night [10] 26/14 31/3 109/11 nerve [1] 8/5 172/18 172/19 172/20 nerve-racking [1] 8/5 **network [6]** 34/13 89/22 170/16 173/7 173/9 174/3 never [28] 1/7 16/1 17/10 17/15 27/8 30/21 32/7 39/21 44/8 51/13 51/15 63/4 63/5 63/20 93/23 111/6 111/24 111/25 128/18 128/20 129/21 135/12 138/19 139/25 142/9 166/20 169/22 171/22 nevertheless [1] 33/12 new [32] 58/3 59/9 62/10 63/16 64/20

75/15 75/16 76/4

76/19 76/20 81/3

81/15 83/21 83/22 84/17 89/2 92/5 97/10 97/11 104/20 104/21 106/12 106/13 110/9 119/15 126/6 126/6 156/16 164/13 176/14 176/17 176/18 New Zealand [1] 81/15 nearly [6] 36/16 47/20 newsagent [1] 168/15 newsagents [1] 93/20 newspaper [1] 93/23 next [21] 2/14 7/1 13/7 17/11 58/10 77/8 86/14 87/12 88/10 109/25 120/17 122/11 122/11 128/23 135/15 136/14 137/9 153/15 154/3 173/14 173/25 **NFSP [1]** 162/23 nice [12] 18/22 84/3 86/16 86/18 91/4 98/23 99/18 99/25 99/25 101/19 102/1 144/25 nicely [1] 98/12 Nick [5] 163/22 176/1 176/8 176/14 176/18 niggling [1] 28/25 nigh [1] 94/18 33/10 37/1 71/19 93/22 128/20 148/25 168/21 171/10 **nightmare [2]** 34/12 34/25 **nighttime** [1] 150/15 **no [111]** 1/11 1/12 8/14 14/19 15/16 16/17 27/23 27/25 30/8 30/16 31/4 31/6 32/15 33/3 33/14 34/1 34/10 35/11 35/16 42/16 47/13 49/13 49/13 50/3 50/4 50/7 51/12 52/10 54/10 54/10 58/10 60/2 63/21 63/25 73/10 75/14 88/1 90/24 94/10 97/17 98/8 104/19 104/22 105/24 107/2 109/18 109/18

110/21 110/21 113/7 113/9 114/1 115/17 116/2 116/3 116/5 117/15 117/15 118/24 121/14 121/25 122/7 122/14 123/13 123/17 123/22 126/1 127/11 128/11 128/13 128/16 128/16 129/6 129/14 130/13 131/22 132/13 134/14 134/19 136/21 137/13 138/24 138/24 139/2 139/7 141/23 142/6 142/7 148/17 148/23 148/23 149/5 149/19 152/15 153/13 154/14 157/25 158/4 158/4 158/4 158/21 160/15 163/12 163/20 164/25 165/8 165/22 171/19 174/2 174/21 179/19 **no-one [2]** 15/16 73/10 **nobody [10]** 63/22 83/4 85/13 130/3 134/15 134/24 134/25 135/1 135/8 170/3 **nodded** [1] 117/9 nodding [1] 37/20 noises [1] 37/20 non [2] 42/2 90/3 non-business-like [1] 42/2 non-executive [1] 90/3 none [5] 39/5 49/10 62/18 73/25 176/19 nonsense [1] 121/11 **noose [1]** 171/13 normal [5] 20/6 80/5 113/16 164/3 164/24 normally [4] 78/25 126/13 127/22 159/5 Norris [9] 1/22 1/24 22/2 22/24 23/10 50/11 86/12 112/2 157/5 north [2] 89/19 90/4 north-east [1] 90/4 nosy [1] 156/23 not [188]

### Ν

nothing [34] 7/21 8/7 12/6 22/14 27/17 34/2 40/4 55/25 56/2 61/23 64/6 66/7 82/3 105/11 105/13 105/15 108/6 108/22 110/16 122/7 122/16 125/1 125/13 132/14 133/9 138/6 141/24 142/17 143/3 143/9 146/16 164/23 164/24 165/6 notice [4] 9/13 9/16 9/17 58/1 noticed [2] 58/13 113/16 noticing [1] 58/21 **notify [1]** 127/17 now [116] 1/5 1/21 2/15 2/19 3/4 5/15 5/18 9/9 15/20 20/12 28/3 30/15 31/11 32/10 33/2 38/11 41/7 41/11 41/22 42/4 44/22 54/22 56/12 56/19 59/12 64/8 64/23 65/12 74/10 74/18 74/20 74/25 75/20 78/17 78/23 79/7 80/3 81/13 83/18 84/16 84/18 86/19 87/4 87/7 87/11 91/14 92/19 92/21 94/12 94/18 101/4 101/22 102/5 102/16 108/22 113/5 114/21 118/6 118/7 118/24 119/11 119/14 119/15 119/15 119/20 120/5 120/5 120/6 131/18 133/21 135/4 135/5 135/18 139/23 142/1 142/1 142/23 142/24 143/18 144/20 146/19 146/25 147/6 148/15 148/25 150/25 155/2 155/10 155/12 156/10 156/16 159/11 161/17 162/2 162/20 163/2 163/7 164/5 165/19 169/14 169/21 170/6 170/15

170/19 170/19 171/5 171/7 171/21 171/24 174/11 175/13 176/2 176/4 178/3 178/24 179/17 nowadays [3] 102/24 116/6 142/5 nowhere [1] 161/23 NT [2] 89/22 97/16 number [16] 35/6 44/7 57/8 61/18 72/24 77/1 82/10 85/17 85/18 87/6 93/13 110/15 135/1 140/11 151/23 152/14 **numbers** [2] 51/5 118/21

o'clock [1] 99/1 obscure [1] 73/23 **obsolete [1]** 126/9 **obviously [42]** 1/3 5/22 7/6 14/25 15/9 18/24 20/19 25/9 27/8 28/3 28/18 29/23 30/4 38/12 46/22 47/11 61/15 63/18 64/8 73/16 80/13 87/11 95/18 96/21 102/21 102/21 103/8 103/25 104/4 106/1 122/3 123/11 123/18 130/2 133/16 139/16 140/20 150/8 166/13 166/25 175/1 177/14 occasion [6] 36/5 51/18 58/7 98/25 144/3 146/10 occasional [1] 28/6 occasionally [4] 3/12 24/5 29/13 125/12 occasions [8] 21/1 21/7 40/22 40/22 42/10 52/25 61/24 139/22 occurred [4] 48/10 52/4 55/14 56/21 odd [2] 123/4 143/15 off [24] 39/17 40/14 41/5 42/5 42/7 45/18 52/1 69/21 72/4 93/21

97/6 104/8 113/14 125/24 131/8 131/14 143/21 145/22 149/19 149/20 162/15 170/8 173/3 173/13 off-licence [1] 93/21 offered [2] 61/5 81/22 office [264] **Office's [1]** 136/11 officer [2] 109/1 117/1 offices [10] 5/15 5/18 5/22 8/1 62/5 89/24 96/22 147/18 156/17 164/5 official [1] 58/22 often [6] 32/4 78/11 104/13 121/2 125/13 151/18 oh [29] 27/22 29/2 31/11 31/13 33/15 37/16 37/23 39/9 41/19 50/16 54/14 55/8 59/25 62/17 63/21 70/22 74/23 75/3 75/5 78/14 106/11 109/24 128/12 140/15 147/23 148/4 148/17 148/23 161/6 okay [82] 4/4 4/10 5/3 5/14 6/2 6/25 10/17 13/6 14/1 14/20 15/20 16/13 16/24 17/3 22/13 23/6 25/21 27/16 30/2 32/9 32/10 35/18 37/19 37/25 40/12 44/5 46/15 49/3 49/11 49/18 54/5 60/11 71/3 74/4 78/11 82/12 84/20 88/9 88/12 89/12 89/16 90/11 91/3 91/18 93/1 96/15 99/3 100/16 104/4 104/23 105/2 105/9 105/16 108/5 118/11 119/6 119/23 124/19 135/24 136/9 143/18 148/23 148/23 ones [6] 73/8 137/5 150/1 153/7 154/11 156/20 157/2 158/1

163/9 167/4 171/2 174/15 174/23 175/14 177/15 **old [15]** 57/19 76/2 90/13 96/2 101/25 101/25 103/16 108/2 110/25 111/10 151/21 158/8 162/10 164/12 176/19 old-ish [1] 101/25 oldies [1] 98/2 once [20] 2/25 11/25 15/12 33/12 42/15 45/16 45/17 56/2 56/3 58/5 65/2 79/2 79/3 88/2 100/2 106/16 110/4 120/18 137/1 160/9 one [91] 15/16 17/10 19/12 19/12 19/25 21/10 21/10 22/3 25/2 25/13 28/8 31/3 32/9 36/5 36/13 38/25 43/3 47/4 47/21 48/22 51/18 53/14 53/17 54/6 54/11 54/19 54/20 54/21 56/3 58/4 58/7 59/5 62/4 62/10 73/5 73/8 73/10 77/8 77/10 82/13 94/1 94/3 97/16 98/24 99/1 101/24 104/5 104/8 104/16 108/11 109/10 109/22 109/23 110/1 114/5 116/9 120/14 120/17 121/22 121/23 124/17 124/19 125/3 126/13 130/19 130/19 option [3] 116/18 134/2 134/3 138/16 144/11 146/10 147/20 150/18 150/21 150/24 153/24 153/25 154/1 154/1 155/18 156/1 156/18 157/7 159/12 163/9 163/22 168/2 170/1 173/12 173/14 174/18 136/16 139/13 141/13 one-to-one [1] 19/12 175/18 175/19 176/8 176/25 159/11 160/20 161/12 ongoing [3] 79/17

152/1 173/23 **Online [1]** 48/17 only [52] 2/25 19/22 26/23 30/13 31/10 31/11 32/12 41/18 45/13 47/14 54/16 55/11 56/5 56/10 65/2 66/1 66/14 87/15 94/4 94/17 96/1 99/22 100/2 100/11 100/12 101/9 108/9 110/21 110/22 111/23 113/21 116/23 119/4 119/19 120/24 125/2 128/1 131/23 135/1 136/10 141/2 153/1 153/3 158/23 164/17 165/15 166/11 166/24 171/16 174/18 175/18 175/19 Ooh [1] 11/21 open [7] 5/23 20/6 21/5 26/13 62/6 62/10 76/1 opened [4] 7/15 62/11 93/20 97/16 openly [3] 75/22 170/25 177/16 openness [1] 85/4 **operating [5]** 48/17 54/20 54/24 57/24 79/7 operational [1] 77/24 operative [1] 82/7 opinion [1] 161/18 opportunity [2] 25/1 80/9 opposed [1] 30/23 119/3 119/4 options [1] 29/8 or [200] oral [1] 85/19 organisation [2] 82/19 160/18 organisations [3] 87/10 174/10 174/17 origin [1] 6/19 other [54] 2/22 3/3 3/4 3/5 5/15 5/17 9/8 12/2 25/15 25/16 29/1 32/15 34/18 43/2 43/3 43/6 53/5 53/8 53/24

0 other... [35] 59/11 73/16 79/16 81/13 84/15 84/21 84/23 85/7 87/11 88/1 88/1 97/5 102/7 106/3 110/1 110/18 117/22 124/7 127/3 128/24 143/9 144/13 148/9 148/15 150/4 153/23 153/24 153/25 154/4 167/5 168/10 170/7 170/9 177/16 179/21 other's [1] 2/23 others [15] 14/1 17/17 17/21 18/1 19/25 29/4 30/24 44/21 50/14 80/15 101/18 102/4 131/13 161/10 162/19 otherwise [2] 11/6 150/9 our [49] 15/14 15/18 35/8 38/24 39/20 57/6 61/7 65/11 74/15 76/20 77/25 78/24 81/5 81/6 84/2 92/16 92/23 92/25 93/6 94/14 97/24 98/2 98/8 106/22 112/7 119/1 121/15 122/16 122/20 123/2 126/13 127/2 128/3 135/8 142/11 142/25 143/4 143/12 145/5 148/13 158/23 165/1 165/3 167/15 168/11 168/21 169/5 170/17 178/2 ours [1] 155/25 ourselves [2] 17/25 112/16 out [123] 9/14 9/16 10/23 11/6 11/23 15/22 16/15 17/18 19/22 19/22 19/23 21/6 24/15 26/18 27/20 27/21 29/14 31/10 31/12 33/23 35/5 36/22 37/2 39/6 39/7 39/23 40/7 43/9

43/12 43/22 45/6 47/9

47/17 47/22 55/8 63/7 63/18 64/22 68/6 68/23 69/2 69/3 71/15 74/17 75/4 77/6 78/3 78/19 91/21 92/23 93/10 94/19 95/2 95/14 95/22 96/24 99/8 101/4 101/21 102/19 102/22 105/17 106/15 110/1 110/5 111/3 119/6 119/9 120/2 120/3 120/4 120/18 121/15 121/19 122/11 122/21 123/6 123/12 124/6 124/7 125/17 126/2 126/5 129/15 129/22 130/23 131/20 132/4 132/6 134/8 134/14 135/10 135/24 137/23 138/6 138/12 138/16 144/1 146/16 147/1 147/15 148/13 150/19 151/5 152/6 152/11 154/2 154/5 155/24 164/11 164/16 165/9 165/11 167/14 167/15 167/19 168/13 169/10 169/23 170/14 170/22 171/23 179/5 outlet [1] 165/18 output [3] 104/18 104/19 104/22 outs [1] 17/13 outset [2] 9/10 62/14 outside [2] 3/21 20/16 over [114] 1/24 3/3 7/16 14/23 18/6 18/16 22/21 29/12 30/25 31/5 35/12 35/25 41/18 42/6 42/22 45/17 50/6 51/15 52/12 52/12 54/1 54/17 58/13 59/19 60/18 61/15 61/22 63/16 65/22 66/2 66/9 68/4 68/24 69/5 69/9 69/18 71/5 76/2 83/8 84/5 88/24 89/1 89/7 89/7 89/24 93/17 94/2 95/21 99/10 102/11

103/18 106/7 108/8 108/14 108/24 109/5 114/2 114/2 114/7 114/7 114/7 115/10 116/21 116/22 117/4 119/9 119/11 120/4 122/13 126/23 127/7 127/23 128/18 131/25 133/10 134/17 134/17 135/3 136/2 136/24 138/8 138/8 139/9 140/2 142/15 142/20 142/21 143/1 146/8 152/3 152/9 155/2 161/14 163/2 163/3 163/5 165/1 165/3 167/3 169/12 170/21 171/2 171/15 173/2 173/22 174/11 175/5 175/14 175/17 176/22 177/20 177/24 178/4 178/8 overall [1] 152/20 overnight [2] 36/14 41/3 overshadowed [1] 65/25 oversight [1] 47/19 owe [3] 131/18 135/24 155/3 owed [2] 121/10 132/11 own [22] 3/8 15/8 15/19 16/10 20/10 28/18 30/9 30/17 45/15 55/9 67/10 84/13 97/13 101/13 107/15 108/18 114/23 119/1 124/7 138/25 172/18 172/19 owned [1] 173/13 pack [2] 104/22

121/17

package [1] 18/23

page [4] 131/3 131/3

page 15 [1] 131/3

packs [1] 81/18

pads [1] 77/25

137/9 173/25

pad [1] 38/5

pages [2] 130/22 131/4 paid [25] 18/3 18/8 42/24 43/4 47/10 49/1 63/22 66/16 70/13 72/3 92/7 97/25 98/1 121/19 122/21 123/21 146/16 146/18 147/1 147/1 151/10 163/2 163/3 164/20 164/21 pain [1] 119/6 painful [1] 117/15 pales [1] 66/13 pandemic [2] 101/4 102/11 paper [5] 55/1 108/15 108/19 113/9 150/17 papers [1] 48/16 paperwork [8] 15/10 26/9 102/16 112/25 127/18 130/16 130/17 146/22 parcel [3] 6/13 19/2 20/21 pardon [1] 3/15 parents [3] 21/15 21/16 51/17 park [3] 54/6 153/7 159/17 part [30] 1/5 3/11 6/12 16/5 16/11 19/1 20/21 56/11 57/7 64/2 65/6 65/6 75/2 87/4 88/24 88/25 89/2 94/11 95/3 97/1 100/12 100/22 108/24 108/25 109/8 158/22 160/25 163/13 175/18 177/15 part-time [1] 97/1 participating [1] 86/11 particular [4] 11/6 18/25 44/1 88/21 particularly [1] 136/19 parts [2] 7/8 124/7 party [1] 44/1 pass [4] 53/4 84/21 93/6 171/18 passed [1] 10/2

page 16 [1] 131/3

past [8] 18/19 19/2 19/4 19/5 77/19 94/16 94/16 109/8 Paula [3] 117/2 118/20 176/24 Paula Vennells [2] 117/2 176/24 pause [1] 124/19 pay [65] 18/9 24/25 25/1 36/19 46/23 47/7 49/23 49/24 52/1 52/12 52/19 59/18 60/10 60/11 60/20 60/23 61/5 69/14 69/18 69/21 71/12 72/2 73/17 79/10 108/20 116/25 117/3 117/4 117/11 120/18 121/12 121/14 121/15 122/21 124/16 129/19 134/23 134/23 136/23 136/25 137/9 137/11 139/11 142/13 142/19 143/4 144/1 147/7 147/8 151/11 154/23 154/25 155/4 155/4 155/11 165/1 165/2 165/3 166/9 167/13 167/23 168/23 169/9 174/1 175/24 paying [11] 39/24 47/5 63/19 69/5 109/4 111/16 124/6 135/22 164/17 167/15 167/23 payment [12] 63/14 63/17 137/8 137/10 142/12 142/12 142/25 144/21 154/22 173/24 173/25 177/19 payments [3] 66/23 72/22 169/8 pays [1] 73/18 peace [1] 9/14 pencil [1] 111/2 pennies [3] 111/23 164/18 164/21 penny [2] 33/23 111/3 pension [6] 14/15 15/10 16/22 61/17 61/21 109/21 pensionable [1] 10/1

**pensioner** [1] 40/8

P pensions [1] 101/21 people [86] 3/3 5/1 9/8 10/6 12/25 13/1 14/14 16/3 16/6 16/11 17/11 17/20 17/23 19/2 19/9 20/12 20/15 21/3 39/7 43/8 43/10 43/19 43/22 43/23 46/25 48/2 50/8 53/1 53/6 54/23 54/24 59/20 61/14 63/16 65/7 67/8 68/24 72/18 73/5 73/6 76/6 79/16 83/7 84/5 85/7 85/17 85/18 86/14 88/4 95/10 96/2 96/3 97/5 97/6 97/9 98/22 98/23 100/8 100/12 101/5 101/25 102/10 114/17 129/15 130/6 133/10 139/4 144/25 149/4 149/15 155/12 159/7 161/25 166/1 166/13 167/11 168/3 170/7 170/9 173/18 175/1 175/17 175/20 175/21 177/7 177/14 people's [3] 3/5 139/4 173/19 per [12] 14/10 14/11 56/19 65/4 65/19 93/18 94/4 117/4 119/20 123/2 154/3 177/14 percentage [1] 14/9 perfect [1] 4/16 performance [1] 59/1 perhaps [8] 3/24 4/9 7/12 37/12 103/3 105/22 106/4 165/13 period [26] 10/4 19/17 19/18 23/3 25/20 35/5 46/7 46/8 48/10 52/4 52/5 69/9 115/23 126/14 126/15 131/25 133/20 135/15 138/9 143/13 145/16 145/16 148/19 157/23 168/25 169/3 periods [4] 27/12

31/25 142/16 143/1 permits [1] 163/13 perpetrator [1] 55/14 person [27] 5/20 8/17 12/22 34/18 41/24 50/16 53/5 53/10 56/16 67/2 67/21 72/7 82/22 91/24 95/24 97/2 99/22 101/9 133/21 143/24 143/24 156/4 162/6 162/9 172/5 172/6 176/4 personal [19] 1/12 9/7 17/19 20/10 21/4 45/10 45/11 45/15 57/8 64/2 72/11 90/8 99/18 116/13 117/10 117/10 117/11 166/9 178/6 personalisation [1] 111/14 personality [2] 72/11 72/16 personally [10] 30/18 32/4 87/14 87/14 97/21 151/10 165/25 166/3 166/4 167/10 petrol [1] 88/19 phase [1] 25/5 **Philip [16]** 88/9 88/10 88/13 95/1 101/15 103/5 107/1 118/12 141/15 150/17 160/6 161/13 166/1 167/7 174/23 177/9 **phone [12]** 13/21 34/19 40/3 42/7 51/5 52/25 59/2 99/10 115/5 137/20 144/23 171/14 phoned [4] 42/5 47/12 51/1 59/20 phoning [3] 114/5 125/8 135/19 phrase [4] 15/23 16/15 53/10 96/9 physically [1] 106/13 pick [4] 23/13 74/6 159/11 159/16 picked [1] 98/15 picking [2] 13/7 107/19

**pictorial** [1] 81/13 picture [1] 81/16 pieces [1] 166/10 pilots [2] 89/5 104/8 pin [6] 36/7 38/5 57/12 73/13 73/22 77/25 pinch [1] 55/8 pinched [1] 55/8 pint [1] 116/9 pittance [1] 164/20 place [12] 17/22 17/22 22/12 33/9 74/20 90/21 91/9 92/13 92/24 92/24 115/18 176/19 **plain [1]** 164/8 plan [3] 7/22 9/25 12/11 plate [1] 112/14 play [3] 44/5 112/11 163/9 playing [1] 176/21 plead [1] 136/24 pleasant [2] 1/13 67/12 please [7] 3/7 3/15 3/19 50/5 104/24 105/2 159/24 **pleased [1]** 103/13 plenty [2] 23/19 25/8 **plug [1]** 36/15 **plus [2]** 33/6 102/17 pm [2] 179/23 179/24 pocket [1] 124/7 point [17] 13/13 40/8 46/16 54/6 56/3 56/14 57/4 67/14 73/14 76/15 97/21 106/1 144/20 165/22 170/2 171/12 171/20 pointless [1] 45/20 **POL [3]** 17/25 28/7 35/22 **pole [1]** 94/21 **policy [1]** 116/13 political [1] 43/24 poor [4] 41/11 41/23 45/8 152/10 **pop [1]** 18/6 position [12] 8/19 11/22 11/23 30/22

72/21 73/24 77/13 77/14 92/10 126/8 157/12 165/14 positions [1] 73/2 positive [2] 23/17 60/6 **possibility** [2] 122/3 179/1 possible [4] 3/8 86/10 14/7 25/4 25/5 25/23 111/11 145/9 possibly [6] 93/2 114/10 118/22 121/20 122/1 165/11 post [226] Post Office [189] Post Office's [1] 136/11 **Post Office-related [1]** 169/25 Post Office-type [1] 99/20 post offices [7] 5/18 5/22 8/1 62/5 89/24 96/22 156/17 postage [1] 164/8 postal [2] 80/6 81/4 postmaster [13] 6/11 7/3 9/20 36/22 65/23 91/21 97/11 97/11 97/23 107/23 140/15 149/2 163/24 postmaster's [2] 136/3 148/11 postmasters [9] 51/6 53/25 75/16 87/6 116/25 144/2 163/21 164/14 174/20 postmistress [5] 5/8 89/18 97/11 103/11 147/21 pouch [1] 127/25 pounds [6] 32/12 32/13 33/21 81/9 111/24 111/25 **pouring [1]** 133/10 **power [2]** 104/20 104/21 practice [4] 11/2 11/9 40/23 124/9 **pre [1]** 110/19 pre-Horizon [1] 110/19

preliminary [1] 53/24 premises [1] 68/8 premium [3] 46/24 47/1 47/8 prepaid [1] 164/4 **prepare [3]** 12/5 12/9 12/10 prepared [14] 1/10 26/6 28/20 29/6 86/2 112/21 113/12 133/3 156/7 179/4 preparing [2] 27/6 38/4 presentation [1] 81/18 press [12] 38/23 74/17 104/14 104/24 104/25 105/2 105/4 105/10 105/12 105/14 113/23 120/15 pressed [1] 151/6 pressing [2] 54/20 153/21 pretending [1] 176/22 pretty [6] 75/6 92/4 113/22 155/23 166/6 167/18 previous [6] 42/12 91/9 100/6 137/21 151/4 176/8 primarily [2] 85/1 88/14 print [3] 27/24 39/17 145/22 **printed [1]** 39/15 printer [1] 77/5 printing [4] 77/9 120/9 150/14 164/3 **printout** [1] 28/10 **printouts** [1] 46/7 prior [10] 58/7 58/15 61/3 81/12 90/19 90/20 93/12 94/1 95/9 118/9 prison [4] 129/13 129/13 129/16 166/14 private [2] 22/16 179/21 probably [16] 11/15 48/7 58/5 61/23 79/25 105/21 118/25 123/11

P probably... [8] 132/9 135/22 140/25 162/15 162/16 167/2 176/2 179/3 problem [28] 20/3 26/16 29/25 32/23 33/3 47/13 53/2 56/15 60/21 68/15 70/21 73/9 73/25 77/7 77/8 77/10 77/11 84/8 84/9 84/12 107/6 114/4 116/6 120/19 122/15 138/19 175/4 176/10 problems [25] 25/17 52/10 71/9 71/9 72/5 72/22 77/18 85/12 99/19 102/21 107/3 108/9 109/15 114/22 117/23 120/8 120/14 125/24 129/10 144/12 144/13 152/1 170/4 174/21 175/3 procedure [2] 42/13 42/13 procedures [1] 33/11 process [24] 2/12 7/2 7/19 8/8 9/24 10/7 10/11 14/3 40/15 49/12 50/18 69/12 80/3 80/16 85/17 107/25 115/24 116/1 140/2 140/9 141/18 144/19 157/14 164/1 processes [4] 8/24 49/19 55/20 115/18 processing [1] 119/24 product [3] 12/24 81/11 81/20 products [8] 41/14 58/24 80/6 80/7 80/11 80/23 80/24 81/5 profession [1] 25/11 professional [2] 20/20 84/11 program [1] 164/11 programmes [1] 147/24 progress [2] 11/25 150/9

project [1] 11/2 promise [2] 48/23 171/21 prompt [2] 20/1 44/25 **proof [1]** 160/15 **proper [2]** 131/24 140/22 properly [4] 60/8 75/6 148/23 149/1 154/2 83/1 163/24 prosecuted [1] 50/6 **protocol** [1] 147/7 proud [2] 93/5 160/25 **prove [3]** 32/15 123/9 139/6 proved [2] 83/22 131/6 provide [2] 18/1 85/20 **provided** [1] 69/10 providing [2] 17/24 20/7 **pub [2]** 146/7 146/8 public [12] 1/16 2/20 17/1 17/4 87/5 87/9 87/20 94/19 100/3 101/5 101/8 179/18 **publicity [2]** 173/8 174/4 pull [1] 27/20 **pumps [1]** 162/10 purchase [1] 12/23 purchasing [1] 12/16 purpose [3] 39/2 164/13 164/17 pursue [1] 165/19 push [2] 19/6 135/23 pushed [5] 42/21 46/9 54/22 131/10 131/10 **pushing [2]** 131/13 131/14 put [74] 8/10 10/14 27/2 28/6 29/8 29/16 31/5 31/22 32/14 33/9 42/4 42/7 47/8 47/21 48/1 49/8 53/14 53/23 55/9 56/7 66/3 66/6 66/11 70/9 71/4 72/17 72/23 72/23 73/3 73/17 75/21 82/8 83/21 85/10 93/2 116/1 116/4 116/10

117/23 118/6 118/10 119/12 125/2 125/16 126/6 128/9 128/12 128/14 132/9 136/6 136/24 137/10 140/5 141/6 141/9 142/4 144/17 146/1 148/17 154/4 154/5 154/18 155/7 155/20 156/6 164/8 167/25 169/16 170/17 170/23 173/14 **puts [4]** 45/18 67/22 70/2 154/10 putting [8] 29/3 29/4 65/8 116/11 148/16 151/20 175/12 175/12

quantify [1] 166/16 quarter [2] 62/12 165/15 queried [2] 40/5 40/15 queries [1] 99/21 query [1] 54/17 question [16] 53/22 55/12 77/23 78/1 78/7 82/13 82/16 82/24 83/7 83/15 84/4 123/12 158/14 174/9 175/8 176/1 **questioned** [1] 75/22 questioning [2] 76/3 76/3 questions [13] 2/9 49/18 76/1 76/12 84/22 84/23 86/25 105/8 105/15 136/16 159/1 174/7 174/14 queue [2] 39/13 101/23 quick [4] 2/1 152/18 159/11 174/8 quicker [2] 19/24 38/16 quid [2] 29/2 36/5 quiet [3] 12/6 48/23 106/17 quite [31] 8/13 19/23 22/21 24/1 28/24 46/24 57/13 58/2

61/15 64/22 75/20 76/22 77/23 87/17 93/13 96/10 96/11 96/12 99/18 102/13 102/18 103/11 104/5 105/19 111/7 113/18 115/17 118/17 137/1 168/17 170/22

racking [1] 8/5 rag [2] 115/5 168/19 raise [1] 137/5 raised [3] 150/11 161/9 177/17 ran [2] 22/19 82/10 random [1] 37/12 rang [11] 58/16 104/16 104/21 122/3 122/13 123/6 127/23 128/1 128/11 128/24 152/13 range [3] 48/11 74/16 86/13 rare [1] 111/22 rarely [4] 32/2 78/25 136/11 155/24 rat [1] 163/8 rate [1] 142/20 rather [3] 69/14 117/10 117/10 re [1] 123/21 re-accounted [1] 123/21 reached [1] 84/24 react [1] 32/18 read [8] 41/14 43/21 140/20 159/1 163/22 176/1 176/14 176/18 readily [1] 43/23 real [4] 15/8 26/5 65/6 145/13 realise [2] 138/11 166/22 realised [1] 92/6 reality [1] 43/7 really [77] 1/14 2/25 4/3 11/18 25/7 27/23 33/17 34/11 34/20 recently [5] 98/21 43/19 50/17 51/14 51/14 56/25 57/3 60/5 65/24 70/2 72/6 82/14 **rechecked [1]** 46/11

82/17 83/2 86/13 87/2 87/12 88/1 88/17 91/19 92/9 92/14 93/7 94/6 95/4 95/13 95/16 98/21 100/20 101/19 102/3 105/7 108/6 112/18 114/4 114/4 115/9 118/2 130/8 133/24 136/17 144/22 145/8 148/6 150/22 150/22 155/17 155/18 156/1 161/24 162/16 162/19 166/6 166/11 166/13 166/25 167/12 167/13 168/6 169/12 169/22 172/8 174/19 175/2 177/5 177/11 177/13 178/7 178/7 realm [1] 44/23 reams [2] 150/16 150/16 reason [9] 31/4 31/6 33/14 73/23 94/12 111/8 120/25 145/11 171/16 **reasonable [4]** 13/16 32/23 41/25 48/11 reasonably [1] 43/3 reasons [2] 144/13 161/20 reassurance [2] 83/9 83/16 **Rebecca [17]** 5/4 6/2 9/9 13/8 14/21 23/13 25/22 30/18 37/20 44/17 54/11 55/22 63/24 74/5 76/13 79/18 83/6 **Rebecca's [1]** 41/12 reboot [2] 38/6 159/6 rebooted [1] 38/7 rebuilding [1] 161/14 rebuilt [1] 176/16 received [4] 23/18 108/4 138/10 141/2 receiving [1] 59/24 recent [3] 78/6 136/19 141/1

100/4 100/5 120/6

136/6

R recognise [1] 72/12 recognised [2] 101/6 151/17 reconditioned [2] 77/4 77/6 record [4] 87/24 121/16 139/7 166/21 records [2] 34/8 59/13 recounting [1] 131/21 recover [2] 29/14 174/4 recruiting [1] 12/3 rectify [1] 116/6 redacted [3] 119/10 119/18 119/19 refer [1] 158/14 reference [1] 151/23 referring [2] 168/25 169/3 reflect [1] 171/6 reflection [1] 165/13 refurbishing [1] 168/18 **refuse [1]** 142/13 refused [2] 124/18 132/19 region [1] 70/10 regional [6] 12/1 13/19 55/17 55/23 58/17 58/21 registering [1] 60/7 regular [4] 20/8 43/8 70/17 71/24 regularly [4] 11/14 16/18 32/25 98/25 reimburse [1] 137/3 reimbursed [1] 177/22 reinstate [1] 47/18 relate [1] 152/16 related [2] 130/20 169/25 relating [2] 132/25 150/21 relation [1] 156/22 relationship [5] 11/20 13/9 58/18 163/23 164/22 relatives [1] 81/14

relaxed [2] 2/19 87/22 relevant [2] 1/7 38/12 reliable [3] 12/24 84/18 84/19 reliant [1] 173/4 relief [2] 75/4 97/6 rely [2] 96/3 100/9 rem [3] 120/2 120/2 127/15 remedy [1] 66/8 remember [15] 10/20 24/13 26/6 48/17 51/18 56/8 104/10 114/25 118/20 123/1 146/4 146/8 146/9 148/12 149/13 reminded [1] 41/6 remit [2] 20/16 163/13 remming [1] 120/3 removed [1] 38/3 remunerated [1] 163/24 remuneration [6] 71/25 72/3 95/20 108/13 162/17 175/6 remunerations [1] 162/4 rent [2] 68/23 69/5 rep [1] 130/15 replicated [1] 69/1 report [5] 42/21 44/8 52/21 52/23 52/23 reported [2] 60/1 127/15 reporting [2] 50/7 116/12 reports [2] 58/25 59/1 rewired [1] 126/5 representative [2] 2/6 rid [2] 29/23 69/15 86/24 request [2] 85/15 86/5 reset [2] 163/22 164/22 resisted [1] 132/13 resolution [1] 137/16 resolve [2] 47/25 157/15 resolved [4] 48/24 49/22 61/1 141/16

resolving [1] 30/6

**resources [2]** 158/13 158/17 respect [1] 140/1 respected [2] 12/22 45/3 respond [4] 117/8 133/19 144/15 157/3 responded [2] 133/19 144/19 responding [2] 104/18 154/18 response [4] 44/14 45/18 133/22 136/18 **responses** [1] 44/16 responsibilities [1] 51/20 responsibility [2] 63/9 138/13 responsible [3] 115/12 132/12 139/9 **responsive** [1] 71/3 rest [6] 3/23 56/5 61/7 98/16 152/23 176/13 restrict [1] 3/8 result [3] 155/10 157/16 158/12 retail [8] 68/25 93/13 93/14 94/4 103/8 119/10 167/19 167/20 ringing [9] 39/6 40/21 retire [2] 92/17 92/22 retired [4] 4/20 57/25 63/13 63/15 **retirement** [1] 94/16 reverse [1] 48/2 reversed [1] 47/12 reward [1] 19/12 rewarding [1] 21/22 rewind [1] 131/1 right [107] 3/7 4/22 5/2 6/2 7/12 9/9 10/17 11/21 12/5 14/20 17/3 **rolling [2]** 164/11 18/14 19/15 23/2 23/10 23/13 23/23 25/19 25/20 28/16 32/9 35/18 37/19 44/7 45/16 48/19 49/3 49/8 round [9] 42/14 78/21 50/4 50/7 50/8 50/8 50/10 52/11 57/12 57/16 61/3 61/3 61/6 74/2 74/17 74/17

84/20 84/21 90/5 93/1 93/7 94/22 96/9 98/12 100/16 102/23 107/16 rude [1] 3/16 110/13 110/20 110/22 111/5 111/21 113/3 116/1 116/5 116/15 116/16 118/10 124/5 124/12 125/2 125/3 125/14 126/15 128/5 128/9 128/17 129/7 132/17 132/22 135/14 135/24 140/17 141/3 141/13 142/4 142/23 142/24 147/10 148/18 149/2 149/3 150/1 153/25 154/5 154/10 154/11 155/16 156/7 156/13 158/1 159/10 172/7 175/12 175/13 177/11 177/14 ring [18] 26/24 34/21 37/16 39/11 40/10 44/25 54/16 56/15 57/9 60/12 60/12 78/22 103/12 104/11 115/2 128/18 140/18 151/23 78/21 124/21 124/22 129/19 130/2 142/4 171/14 rings [1] 130/4 rise [1] 117/4 road [4] 18/6 62/13 90/18 146/8 robust [4] 109/4 143/18 160/1 160/2 role [8] 2/4 3/11 17/5 21/21 55/17 93/10 162/13 178/16 rolled [1] 143/1 164/16 room [4] 88/6 88/8 99/8 148/1 roughly [1] 62/21 88/6 101/23 134/18 146/2 147/22 154/19 168/11 **rounds [1]** 168/13

74/18 74/22 77/2 83/5 router [2] 126/2 126/6 **Royal [3]** 106/21 106/21 106/24 rugs [1] 168/19 rule [1] 2/25 rules [1] 88/1 run [16] 22/14 25/5 27/8 27/13 30/24 45/4 76/10 88/14 91/7 91/13 92/15 95/24 105/8 145/17 166/6 171/1 rung [4] 39/8 45/16 55/7 103/20 running [27] 2/12 7/4 15/21 17/4 17/7 18/15 21/24 25/23 25/24 28/21 32/22 35/14 61/19 63/19 68/18 72/20 75/13 90/24 92/21 95/11 98/14 103/1 103/4 106/2 161/25 168/14 168/16

### S

sacked [1] 109/8 sad [2] 65/5 166/13 sadly [1] 94/10 safe [2] 27/20 119/2 safeguarded [1] 62/8 said [154] 3/19 9/1 11/15 11/19 11/20 12/8 16/8 18/12 18/22 22/4 23/8 23/18 24/21 29/1 30/23 32/11 39/12 39/18 40/12 40/16 41/19 44/20 45/1 45/2 45/10 45/16 47/6 47/13 47/24 48/9 49/15 53/6 53/8 56/5 57/14 57/25 58/9 58/16 59/9 59/22 59/25 60/1 60/2 60/3 60/4 60/12 60/19 60/22 62/4 62/14 62/17 63/21 63/22 65/24 66/13 66/22 69/13 74/15 74/25 75/2 75/3 76/7 76/23 77/21 77/24 78/16 83/4 85/7 93/5 95/8

S said... [84] 99/23 100/1 100/20 103/11 103/20 103/21 104/21 104/23 104/25 105/3 105/5 105/5 105/6 105/7 105/8 105/16 107/1 107/8 107/9 113/25 114/24 115/2 117/2 117/6 117/9 121/9 122/4 122/7 122/14 124/17 126/4 126/23 127/2 127/10 127/14 127/15 128/12 128/17 129/1 129/3 129/4 129/6 129/14 129/22 129/24 130/3 130/3 130/17 130/22 132/13 133/4 134/20 138/5 138/16 138/17 139/9 140/7 145/6 146/16 148/4 148/4 148/6 148/6 148/9 148/10 148/15 148/21 149/5 150/17 151/14 151/22 152/2 152/13 156/2 159/17 159/19 160/6 161/21 161/25 173/23 175/25 176/20 177/25 178/23 sake [2] 96/1 96/4 **salaries [1]** 175/23 salary [1] 162/1 same [46] 4/22 4/23 9/24 14/22 17/11 17/11 40/16 45/20 47/16 49/22 53/22 63/25 65/8 77/15 77/18 77/25 78/1 79/1 88/16 95/24 97/20 101/18 105/5 107/1 113/9 114/7 114/8 115/4 124/2 124/25 125/8 127/1 127/2 127/5 127/6 136/16 137/14 143/6 155/11 157/16 162/5 162/12 163/25 164/10 172/5 176/25 sanctioned [1] 1/9 sanctions [1] 117/24

sanity [1] 171/24 satisfaction [1] 19/13 **save [1]** 119/13 saving [1] 164/20 savings [5] 47/6 63/12 121/15 166/9 167/15 saw [5] 56/3 58/16 149/23 149/23 151/16 say [117] 1/15 2/5 2/10 8/12 9/8 17/10 17/15 19/6 25/16 26/1 27/5 29/20 34/3 34/4 34/5 35/24 37/16 38/18 40/10 41/4 41/8 44/13 44/18 45/21 48/11 53/12 54/9 54/16 58/19 63/1 65/9 70/4 71/2 71/2 76/18 82/18 82/21 83/10 83/11 84/11 84/25 85/1 90/6 91/2 91/5 97/17 97/20 98/19 99/10 100/4 103/5 104/6 106/5 109/22 113/21 115/16 115/22 118/7 118/16 120/23 125/9 125/22 130/5 131/17 132/1 135/15 135/16 135/24 136/21 137/4 137/21 139/15 139/22 140/18 142/7 143/17 143/23 144/1 144/12 145/4 146/7 147/3 147/4 147/18 148/6 149/4 149/5 153/9 153/11 153/19 154/6 155/12 155/23 155/23 156/12 156/25 162/21 162/22 163/18 163/19 165/8 166/12 166/20 167/1 170/5 174/10 174/16 174/18 174/20 175/3 176/6 176/10 176/12 177/3 177/13 178/21 179/20 security [1] 9/5 saying [38] 5/19 6/17 23/16 34/6 47/10 52/22 58/9 68/1 68/17 78/24 83/3 87/25 99/24 100/14 101/11 101/19 102/7 110/1

119/15 127/11 128/9 128/13 130/6 134/10 138/11 147/23 149/22 154/14 162/18 163/11 163/22 165/9 167/6 168/3 168/5 171/1 176/14 177/12 says [7] 79/18 79/19 101/8 105/3 136/4 137/7 140/14 scale [2] 61/11 132/2 scan [1] 127/21 scare [1] 43/6 scares [1] 43/19 scary [1] 44/2 scenario [1] 8/2 **Scheme [3]** 163/14 177/19 178/16 school [3] 4/18 43/1 91/10 **scope [1]** 165/9 scratch [4] 121/9 121/10 121/17 166/25 self [10] 9/3 16/10 screen [17] 4/14 40/14 73/4 78/5 78/13 85/24 88/10 91/25 100/11 104/17 104/23 self-doubt [1] 74/9 146/18 151/7 157/22 screening [1] 39/20 screens [1] 78/4 se [1] 94/4 **searching [1]** 29/12 sec [3] 28/17 109/11 124/19 second [10] 24/10 24/11 34/22 54/7 70/15 113/24 113/24 144/15 153/20 178/21 secretariat [3] 1/17 86/1 179/3 **secretary [2]** 109/3 149/17 **sections** [1] 41/9 **sector [1]** 11/6 see [42] 9/7 9/15 17/11 18/6 18/7 34/9 43/6 52/6 53/1 55/5 59/16 64/16 65/15 93/23 95/7 95/13 96/18 99/3 99/9

100/12 101/9 101/19 103/12 103/18 105/1 105/5 105/10 105/12 105/14 111/16 114/15 116/20 118/24 118/25 122/6 133/4 135/10 137/19 141/24 142/18 165/13 173/6 seeing [1] 89/1 seem [5] 96/12 154/23 154/25 155/20 161/6 seemed [3] 91/14 94/3 118/23 seems [8] 108/22 113/17 113/22 134/24 151/3 155/10 170/14 170/15 seen [9] 2/19 2/20 58/9 77/12 94/9 113/14 135/11 135/12 139/18 74/9 119/1 119/16 119/23 156/1 156/5 156/17 156/21 112/10 130/23 130/24 self-employed [1] 9/3 self-funded [2] 119/16 156/17 self-funding [1] 156/21 sell [12] 9/21 37/13 80/6 81/19 81/21 93/25 94/18 113/23 113/24 168/18 168/20 169/7 selling [8] 57/19 80/12 81/11 81/12 153/22 164/2 168/20 173/11 send [7] 41/17 41/19 53/1 81/15 105/16 135/23 138/12 sending [1] 144/20 senior [2] 49/14 58/8 sense [13] 1/22 2/22 21/21 81/7 85/11 94/23 103/15 120/10 122/5 133/11 141/25 142/3 174/24 sent [16] 38/11 38/15

46/4 58/8 72/25 81/16 106/14 108/14 127/15 127/20 127/25 129/22 130/16 131/5 133/3 154/22 sentence [9] 53/14 53/17 54/12 82/15 141/7 141/9 141/11 141/17 174/8 separate [3] 73/14 136/12 145/21 separately [2] 3/23 127/4 **September [3]** 59/6 59/17 79/9 **September 2020 [3]** 59/6 59/17 79/9 serious [1] 19/24 **serve [1]** 120/16 service [5] 11/11 17/24 18/1 20/8 101/6 **services [4]** 17/23 20/17 62/13 158/25 serving [1] 143/21 session [11] 1/17 1/22 2/10 2/19 86/14 86/21 87/22 178/22 179/18 179/21 179/24 **sessions [3]** 1/8 163/15 178/20 set [3] 11/8 15/22 93/10 setting [3] 25/25 81/2 179/5 settle [7] 49/4 59/17 59/20 59/22 94/14 125/16 151/22 settled [1] 56/21 **settlement [1]** 69/17 settling [4] 32/4 63/9 106/12 124/20 seven [2] 93/21 163/6 several [3] 22/20 34/4 46/11 severe [1] 166/14 **shall [2]** 71/2 71/2 shame [1] 117/7 **share [10]** 2/24 3/7 3/19 4/4 20/10 86/24 87/15 87/20 150/4 172/10 **sharing [6]** 3/20 20/9

S sharing... [4] 87/16 170/25 177/16 178/6 **shattered** [1] 101/2 shattering [2] 101/12 101/12 she [46] 25/15 25/15 25/17 49/15 49/16 59/25 60/2 60/3 60/12 60/15 99/1 99/3 99/5 99/7 99/9 99/11 99/12 103/21 103/24 104/23 105/5 105/5 105/7 105/16 109/25 117/7 117/8 118/8 126/18 127/1 127/4 137/22 146/17 146/18 151/5 151/9 151/12 151/14 151/18 152/2 152/3 152/4 152/13 171/15 171/15 171/15 she'd [4] 49/15 99/6 130/23 151/12 she's [2] 137/22 173/23 **shed [1]** 123/7 sheet [2] 115/4 137/11 **sheets [1]** 130/16 shielding [1] 102/12 **shop [11]** 5/23 92/6 101/23 102/16 103/19 146/11 162/5 162/6 168/14 168/18 168/20 shopfloor [1] 36/20 **shopper [1]** 56/3 **short [22]** 10/4 10/8 23/3 35/2 121/24 126/21 127/8 127/13 128/10 128/10 138/8 143/13 145/18 145/19 145/25 146/11 148/15 148/20 149/3 150/24 151/15 171/3 shortage [7] 33/1 33/14 34/7 116/4 124/16 127/10 132/19 **shortages [3]** 97/15 108/21 111/6 shortfall [11] 40/20 48/8 53/16 63/8

118/15 132/12 140/6 162/25 163/14 177/19 178/16 **shortfalls** [8] 30/4 40/25 62/25 116/12 124/5 133/20 140/23 143/5 should [23] 1/18 3/22 27/17 40/12 44/12 60/2 82/4 82/25 101/1 103/25 117/6 122/20 123/19 128/1 135/19 138/15 139/12 144/11 160/16 161/3 161/3 161/4 177/8 **shoulders** [1] 170/9 shouldn't [6] 27/17 27/18 33/18 66/15 126/8 148/2 **show [4]** 131/1 148/9 152/18 154/14 **showed [3]** 130/17 137/6 146/13 **showing [5]** 31/5 123/19 147/19 148/3 149/20 **shows [3]** 28/14 79/23 91/15 sick [2] 66/9 97/7 side [16] 17/1 21/10 25/24 30/15 93/18 93/19 93/19 94/4 94/6 94/7 95/24 97/24 117/8 136/12 139/19 171/14 **sign [1]** 80/19 **signal [1]** 126/1 signed [1] 136/3 significant [1] 34/9 silence [1] 76/17 silly [3] 31/2 81/12 105/23 similar [9] 22/19 23/8 29/5 125/20 138/1 145/23 150/13 170/10 175/15 simple [4] 18/22 74/19 114/18 116/15 simply [3] 46/6 111/11 113/2 since [15] 5/9 80/4 88/23 89/20 100/5

108/18 111/6 121/21 139/15 156/23 160/1 169/15 169/17 177/23 smaller [1] 113/17 177/23 sing [1] 115/3 single [6] 15/2 19/8 28/8 30/21 77/13 134/23 sir [29] 1/25 2/6 2/8 2/13 2/21 3/13 4/7 6/4 27/8 49/19 70/6 76/11 82/15 84/21 86/23 87/5 87/23 88/8 133/14 142/10 150/8 155/16 163/10 165/10 167/9 172/9 172/13 174/7 178/9 Sir Wyn [20] 2/13 3/13 4/7 6/4 27/8 49/19 70/6 76/11 82/15 84/21 87/5 87/23 88/8 155/16 165/10 167/9 172/9 172/13 174/7 178/9 **Sir Wyn's [5]** 2/6 2/21 86/23 150/8 163/10 **sit [1]** 10/10 site [6] 88/16 88/21 88/25 88/25 121/7 169/23 situation [23] 4/8 9/1 19/25 20/4 20/12 21/4 23/24 34/24 42/25 45/17 51/14 51/15 51/22 64/5 66/8 66/19 67/23 70/3 80/20 82/1 82/9 132/8 169/6 **situation's [1]** 69/1 six [4] 58/6 100/23 122/24 150/18 **skirted [1]** 178/15 sleep [9] 71/19 71/21 171/9 171/10 172/23 172/24 172/24 172/25 172/25 **slept [1]** 128/20 slightly [5] 9/12 38/16 somebody's [2] 50/23 62/16 94/16 slip [1] 128/2 slow [1] 76/21 small [10] 19/11 36/4 36/5 44/20 46/20

92/11 134/4 141/25 142/1 153/16 **smell [1]** 163/7 **smiling [1]** 170/23 snapshot [2] 27/25 28/10 **snapshots** [1] 28/13 **snowing [1]** 106/9 so [440] **so-called [1]** 175/23 social [1] 97/24 software [3] 40/4 164/11 164/12 **sold [2]** 5/8 126/20 **solicitor [1]** 91/11 **solution [1]** 73/20 solve [1] 117/23 some [66] 1/18 1/19 2/1 2/8 2/20 5/1 6/17 7/3 7/13 12/2 13/22 17/20 21/23 23/14 23/16 23/17 24/1 26/2 27/21 28/7 29/22 40/22 44/13 44/15 46/23 47/4 48/16 51/6 53/6 56/3 60/14 60/17 61/2 67/14 70/13 73/23 76/11 85/8 97/8 98/6 98/15 99/9 100/18 102/21 104/12 107/16 116/12 117/18 118/18 120/10 126/7 132/24 137/25 139/21 140/9 140/20 144/2 148/12 164/5 164/14 171/17 172/25 177/14 178/25 179/3 179/5 somebody [23] 10/10 58/8 62/1 62/11 72/25 79/15 95/23 110/4 112/17 112/17 118/19 121/1 122/2 126/1 129/20 135/23 142/8 142/9 143/21 145/25 162/9 162/13 177/1 109/8 153/21 **somehow [3]** 123/5 123/20 175/6 someone [7] 12/21 15/17 20/22 39/23

58/16 75/13 118/2 Somerset [3] 89/9 89/10 89/10 something [95] 11/7 11/23 12/23 13/8 16/3 17/15 20/1 21/8 29/16 30/13 31/10 33/16 33/19 33/23 34/2 35/13 36/16 36/17 37/7 39/11 41/1 42/6 46/6 52/16 54/9 56/17 56/20 60/5 60/9 64/6 64/7 64/7 64/24 67/11 67/12 67/13 71/11 72/2 74/6 74/22 75/10 77/5 77/20 79/22 79/24 83/10 84/2 84/25 85/13 87/1 87/20 88/4 92/16 93/4 93/5 99/11 99/16 102/19 104/14 104/14 104/24 105/22 107/7 112/17 113/3 114/9 120/25 121/1 121/24 123/1 123/18 123/19 125/7 125/12 129/5 129/21 129/25 137/16 142/21 144/9 144/10 145/23 150/20 150/25 151/2 153/10 153/21 156/6 156/12 157/12 157/18 159/16 166/23 173/5 178/24 **sometime** [1] 21/3 sometimes [14] 1/11 1/12 19/23 19/23 20/15 26/25 35/11 38/2 55/13 109/20 120/24 145/19 153/22 154/7 somewhat [2] 9/12 72/19 **somewhere [6]** 70/5 70/9 77/20 107/12 120/21 129/23 son [2] 92/18 99/10 soon [3] 29/18 78/17 93/24 **sorry [36]** 4/12 4/13 5/16 23/10 24/3 48/22 50/23 52/14 54/9 67/25 68/13 68/16

S sorry... [24] 72/3 73/20 79/21 100/16 105/7 106/15 107/5 116/8 117/14 123/11 149/9 149/10 156/14 156/14 158/5 158/14 161/11 162/15 162/16 169/2 170/3 175/25 176/21 177/17 sort [99] 7/10 7/13 7/14 9/4 9/5 10/24 11/22 12/2 12/25 13/17 13/25 16/6 16/7 19/5 19/7 20/11 20/25 21/4 25/9 25/16 25/20 27/9 27/10 29/6 29/7 32/12 32/17 34/6 35/3 35/5 35/6 41/8 43/17 44/23 45/13 45/17 45/18 53/6 57/11 58/23 60/8 60/24 60/24 61/1 66/18 68/8 69/17 69/20 69/25 70/5 72/8 72/11 73/20 74/7 74/8 79/2 79/3 81/3 92/20 93/9 95/1 95/14 96/8 98/16 99/9 101/25 102/17 103/23 104/9 107/22 109/15 110/6 110/7 116/13 118/13 120/3 120/12 120/19 122/22 125/5 125/6 133/14 135/9 136/2 136/16 139/15 141/10 141/22 142/2 150/4 154/8 155/25 159/2 161/4 166/8 168/10 171/5 172/12 174/13 sorted [2] 73/9 131/10 **sorting [2]** 106/19 106/20 sorts [3] 29/5 43/22 168/19 sound [2] 34/17 165/22 sounds [5] 21/20 57/16 74/19 131/16 158/8

**South [1]** 5/7 **South Wales [1]** 5/7 **Southport [5]** 90/19 90/25 94/1 94/3 109/12 **space [1]** 113/17 speak [12] 6/14 15/17 24/3 56/15 61/7 85/24 87/1 99/23 154/3 154/24 161/10 179/21 speakers [16] 28/12 32/3 35/7 36/2 39/13 50/24 53/23 54/8 90/6 93/24 119/22 129/18 131/22 133/2 138/25 157/18 speaking [4] 24/4 50/23 62/21 79/8 **special [2]** 164/1 164/8 specialise [1] 21/12 **specific [6]** 54/17 54/18 60/8 70/14 116/21 162/13 specifically [7] 26/14 47/25 63/2 64/3 103/1 163/15 165/24 **speed [1]** 23/8 spend [3] 35/10 35/11 113/14 124/24 127/12 102/15 spending [2] 24/17 35/7 **spent [5]** 29/11 35/16 81/8 102/3 168/22 **spirit [2]** 102/2 102/14 spirited [1] 66/19 spoke [5] 10/15 47/15 76/17 95/6 103/18 **spoken [3]** 5/2 44/21 169/23 **spot [2]** 37/10 153/13 **spotlight** [1] 87/20 **spotting** [1] 30/3 **spraying [1]** 162/11 **spread [1]** 150/19 spreadsheet [5] 34/3 59/13 121/16 122/19 122/22 stack [3] 40/11 40/12 78/3

staff [23] 5/24 5/24

20/4 23/7 24/6 29/21 30/21 33/2 50/21 52/22 53/9 63/19 80/8 | 156/3 156/13 157/1 84/9 101/1 109/8 120/21 124/17 130/19 states [1] 174/14 130/19 145/17 150/24 station [7] 88/18 172/19 **staffing [1]** 166/23 stage [3] 2/14 14/6 167/22 stages [1] 87/8 **stairs [1]** 170/13 **stamp [8]** 34/4 37/13 79/12 113/23 113/24 113/24 164/1 164/3 stamps [9] 28/15 34/4 stealing [3] 53/19 67/9 81/13 81/16 126/24 126/25 127/6 153/19 **stand [5]** 10/6 83/11 160/23 175/21 177/2 **standard** [1] 15/5 stands [1] 4/8 start [24] 4/9 13/21 28/2 31/18 35/20 44/17 61/10 82/23 88/9 91/20 97/5 103/19 107/19 108/23 129/9 132/1 166/2 166/21 167/17 174/15 176/5 **started [32]** 2/2 3/14 5/6 9/12 10/23 22/14 30/3 56/23 57/6 57/7 57/14 57/20 58/20 58/22 71/21 88/24 91/21 95/2 95/16 96/24 104/8 108/1 109/6 110/4 110/14 114/14 123/12 167/14 167/21 169/17 172/15 177/23 **starting [3]** 10/25 16/15 113/11 **starts [1]** 168/15 state [6] 93/15 94/12 99/9 128/22 129/12 130/10 **statement [9]** 82/24 83/6 84/5 85/22 86/3 86/10 156/3 174/9

175/8 **statements** [6] 85/18 179/2 179/5 88/19 89/2 95/5 95/24 119/11 162/8 stationery [1] 94/5 status [1] 63/25 stay [4] 55/22 65/12 109/19 172/1 **stayed [5]** 5/10 64/8 65/11 65/14 112/8 steal [1] 53/11 84/10 109/9 step [3] 3/21 75/13 133/15 **stepped [2]** 5/25 54/25 **Steve's [1]** 154/7 stick [3] 101/24 173/17 174/2 **sticks [2]** 105/23 173/17 still [63] 6/11 15/9 32/14 41/11 43/18 57/23 64/25 65/7 65/8 66/15 66/17 68/11 68/14 76/4 76/13 77/21 77/21 77/22 78/1 79/10 79/16 83/25 84/19 90/24 91/16 95/19 97/14 97/17 98/10 98/10 99/4 102/5 106/22 119/24 120/1 120/16 131/18 132/24 135/8 137/21 139/8 139/9 143/19 143/20 144/5 144/5 145/1 150/5 153/15 154/25 155/3 155/11 156/16 160/6 170/20 171/8 171/22 172/24 173/4 173/22 175/22 176/17 176/19 stock [12] 34/3 34/7 59/10 79/11 145/17 145/19 145/21 148/11 148/13 150/23 160/9 164/7

stolen [1] 122/2 stood [8] 23/24 44/2 117/2 117/9 130/7 138/4 139/5 176/20 stop [3] 67/9 173/12 173/14 **stopped** [1] 38/14 Stops [1] 78/21 store [1] 163/10 stored [1] 38/8 **stories [5]** 2/5 2/15 3/6 3/7 87/3 storing [2] 38/10 38/14 story [3] 85/8 86/24 91/16 straight [4] 78/22 99/12 125/17 169/10 straightforward [2] 113/22 132/9 **strange [3]** 41/3 104/7 104/11 stress [5] 26/19 166/8 169/15 172/22 177/21 stresses [1] 71/8 stressful [4] 26/19 26/20 26/22 166/7 **strictly [1]** 179/7 strong [1] 64/13 **structure** [1] 7/9 **structured** [1] 39/1 **struggle** [1] 26/5 **struggled** [1] 167/13 **struggling [1]** 103/15 stuck [1] 170/19 stuff [1] 14/14 **stupid** [1] 134/2 **stupidity** [1] 43/7 sub [3] 95/9 104/12 161/25 sub-post office [1] 104/12 subject [1] 160/21 subpostmaster [10] 6/12 11/11 12/22 33/7 41/17 43/11 90/18 91/17 93/11 99/15 subpostmaster/mistr ess [1] 41/17 subpostmasters [4] 3/5 56/6 75/15 90/2 subpostmistress [1]

S subpostmistress... **[1]** 88/14 subpostmistresses **[1]** 12/3 **subscribe** [1] 43/25 subsequent [1] 87/8 subsequently [2] 88/3 99/13 substantial [3] 69/9 69/13 137/2 such [18] 83/20 88/15 102/1 102/8 102/11 103/17 113/10 117/21 128/21 129/12 130/8 130/10 130/20 133/21 146/6 147/11 170/12 175/4 suchlike [1] 175/4 **sudden [5]** 11/15 59/6 122/19 122/23 122/25 suddenly [5] 7/22 27/24 90/13 123/2 153/24 Sue [23] 89/15 89/17 96/21 100/20 108/25 112/3 114/24 124/11 125/20 125/22 138/2 142/8 149/9 151/1 157/6 158/3 162/22 163/18 171/4 172/23 173/23 174/15 175/15 Sue's [2] 98/15 150/13 suffer [2] 167/21 169/13 **suffering [2]** 175/2 177/8 suggests [1] 140/21 suited [1] 17/20 sum [9] 15/23 16/14 25/3 53/16 61/15 70/5 79/5 130/12 174/24 summarise [1] 165/20 sums [1] 22/22 **Sunday [1]** 14/14 **supply [2]** 104/20 119/5 **support [19]** 1/18

14/17 30/8 35/21 49/12 52/25 55/17 58/19 60/1 60/16 112/4 114/18 115/17 117/18 118/13 130/8 139/19 140/12 140/16 **supported [6]** 13/12 13/15 14/4 30/5 41/25 114/16 suppose [5] 8/15 64/4 64/8 65/2 178/13 **supposed [7]** 106/8 106/12 106/20 115/18 115/24 160/17 164/4 supposedly [3] 106/14 131/5 160/15 supposition [1] 123/14 sure [12] 22/23 32/22 33/10 57/10 62/6 66/18 90/12 106/6 123/20 152/23 154/8 177/13 surname [1] 118/20 surprise [1] 163/12 **surprised [1]** 85/25 surprises [1] 27/17 survive [1] 101/8 **Susan [1]** 113/25 suspect [1] 110/18 **suspended [5]** 49/25 50/1 50/2 51/4 165/21 suspension [4] 50/12 51/8 52/3 128/12 suspicion [1] 115/14 swap [1] 66/21 swapping [1] 77/10 sweets [1] 21/8 switch [1] 41/4 **switched** [2] 37/1 37/14 Sword [2] 115/11 178/1 sympathetic [1] 144/25 system [72] 22/16 23/8 25/18 28/18 31/16 34/6 34/13 34/13 34/14 36/16 42/12 54/2 59/8 59/9 59/14 64/21 65/5 65/19 70/17 70/19

71/10 72/16 73/1 73/13 73/15 74/24 75/22 75/24 76/2 76/3 76/4 76/14 76/19 76/20 76/25 78/2 78/2 78/3 79/11 83/1 83/13 87/6 102/4 117/19 83/21 83/22 84/18 103/16 109/4 110/9 110/25 111/10 119/16 20/12 31/1 31/21 125/24 126/5 127/21 129/2 132/4 132/6 138/3 138/3 138/22 139/1 139/23 144/2 148/8 149/7 151/21 156/16 159/6 160/1 160/3 161/14 163/4 176/11 system's [1] 154/9 systems [4] 37/25 38/19 74/20 148/5

tablets [2] 169/18 172/24 take [37] 7/11 7/16 10/2 18/8 22/3 30/2 45/15 60/14 66/24 68/16 69/17 71/13 74/18 86/19 91/24 92/20 92/23 96/8 106/1 107/9 119/10 120/3 120/5 125/17 133/15 138/13 152/5 154/2 154/4 156/8 160/4 164/11 165/1 168/10 173/5 173/13 175/22 taken [13] 5/2 47/11 61/5 63/8 80/9 116/24 124/17 124/17 130/17 134/5 138/6 139/5 139/7 takes [3] 18/2 20/1 73/18 taking [16] 2/13 39/23 46/3 69/5 87/8 90/19

95/6 117/3 117/11

179/14

119/9 143/8 163/25

165/2 169/10 175/24

talk [18] 2/25 3/3 3/18

7/5 15/16 19/9 21/4

21/15 21/15 21/16 67/19 72/11 88/2 98/5 101/20 118/3 141/4 159/23 talked [6] 49/19 72/9 167/1 talking [25] 2/22 8/24 32/12 32/13 42/22 46/16 47/25 57/18 66/1 66/2 66/14 73/6 74/7 79/2 87/9 88/4 90/7 93/19 96/15 98/14 133/20 152/25 Tameside [1] 43/14 tangent [1] 162/15 tap [2] 35/10 35/14 target [2] 82/8 82/9 taught [6] 10/8 19/16 33/6 54/25 113/19 113/20 tax [1] 62/13 teach [1] 6/1 teacher [1] 43/1 team [14] 19/11 31/19 41/10 46/5 52/22 52/25 53/4 60/13 60/16 80/8 84/22 140/13 140/14 147/6 tearing [2] 26/17 152/11 tears [1] 171/11 teatime [1] 126/19 tech [1] 76/22 techie [1] 149/6 technical [6] 73/14 113/2 144/11 144/13 144/17 144/18 technically [4] 9/2 9/3 test [1] 36/19 152/20 152/24 technologically [1] 152/21 technology [5] 154/13 159/19 159/22 160/22 161/2 telephone [5] 26/13 57/8 138/10 139/2 140/11 tell [46] 2/4 5/4 7/17 22/11 22/25 23/16 28/22 31/14 35/20

37/5 37/21 39/17 45/20 46/2 49/4 50/12 60/21 67/19 74/10 84/9 85/6 85/13 88/6 88/11 91/25 95/1 96/23 100/13 100/18 104/13 105/2 107/24 117/3 117/24 128/18 131/23 139/23 144/19 145/15 147/16 150/12 151/24 166/2 169/6 174/16 175/15 telling [8] 40/13 70/6 115/6 116/17 128/7 128/7 149/21 175/17 tells [1] 174/1 ten [8] 36/9 36/10 62/1 73/1 76/10 101/12 105/15 144/9 tend [4] 17/25 71/4 104/11 135/5 tenor [1] 133/22 tens [3] 30/24 81/9 167/5 tension [1] 172/20 term [1] 18/22 terminals [1] 41/2 terms [22] 12/16 19/11 25/9 25/23 30/6 33/2 33/21 41/7 41/8 58/17 58/24 58/25 70/25 81/11 101/16 106/2 124/22 132/9 154/17 157/15 171/5 172/11 terrible [1] 34/14 terribly [1] 113/19 terrifying [1] 75/21 **Tesco's [1]** 173/13 testing [1] 114/24 tests [1] 158/24 text [1] 120/11 than [23] 17/20 45/8 45/14 59/8 79/12 88/1 88/12 90/15 100/21 104/2 110/25 121/2 125/13 132/10 133/10 134/22 149/17 154/15 155/21 161/17 161/22 164/2 171/7 thank [87] 1/21 1/25

70/24 71/5 73/12 74/1 75/15 75/21 140/11 140/13 141/23 51/4 51/12 52/23 75/22 77/11 79/20 77/17 79/25 84/7 54/19 55/3 55/9 56/10 142/11 145/11 146/5 thank... [85] 4/16 4/22 81/5 81/25 82/11 85/22 98/24 99/19 56/10 57/7 57/21 147/6 150/1 152/15 5/2 5/3 5/14 6/2 6/15 83/17 83/23 84/3 101/24 102/11 102/12 58/17 59/18 59/19 154/14 156/15 162/10 6/25 9/9 10/22 18/14 84/13 87/21 88/12 103/18 104/11 107/3 59/20 60/14 62/24 164/25 165/18 171/19 20/3 20/6 21/20 25/21 88/17 89/16 90/8 90/9 108/12 108/14 111/4 63/15 64/16 69/14 173/19 174/18 175/3 28/16 32/16 45/24 115/5 116/13 118/21 176/15 90/11 91/3 91/16 71/20 73/18 74/22 50/11 50/12 53/21 91/18 93/7 93/18 118/21 120/22 124/6 75/3 75/5 75/14 75/18 these [65] 1/8 2/12 61/6 63/22 79/4 82/12 94/22 96/9 98/7 100/3 125/8 125/18 126/22 78/15 78/20 81/9 4/1 5/22 7/7 7/20 12/9 83/3 83/4 83/5 84/3 103/21 105/18 105/19 126/23 127/4 127/23 81/10 81/24 82/15 21/11 23/14 25/13 84/20 84/20 84/24 107/5 107/18 108/20 127/24 128/1 128/2 87/7 88/25 88/25 89/4 29/19 31/13 31/14 86/11 86/12 86/16 108/20 110/17 112/12 128/7 128/8 128/18 89/7 89/23 90/25 92/6 33/3 35/19 38/6 42/21 86/17 86/19 89/9 112/19 117/9 119/2 128/18 130/25 131/5 95/14 96/9 96/13 49/18 55/1 58/1 58/21 89/12 89/12 89/14 122/3 123/13 123/13 131/16 132/13 133/3 96/21 97/13 97/15 59/18 61/8 64/14 69/3 90/5 90/7 90/9 91/3 124/8 128/14 128/15 133/11 134/1 137/3 102/25 104/4 105/2 69/6 70/16 70/16 91/3 93/7 94/22 94/24 128/16 133/9 134/3 138/4 138/5 138/19 107/17 107/19 107/23 71/17 71/18 73/2 96/20 98/12 100/16 134/3 137/10 141/12 139/21 139/22 140/18 109/2 109/16 110/3 74/11 79/11 79/17 101/14 105/25 107/16 141/21 141/24 142/23 142/14 142/19 143/2 112/10 112/14 115/16 79/18 79/20 83/13 107/18 112/1 113/11 143/20 146/21 148/16 142/24 143/1 145/5 117/1 118/19 119/12 83/14 85/3 109/11 124/3 131/21 133/6 120/19 125/17 125/20 146/7 146/7 146/8 148/17 148/21 148/23 111/24 112/9 112/9 133/13 133/14 136/9 150/21 153/1 153/2 149/1 150/15 151/24 126/14 127/3 127/9 116/23 117/17 117/23 141/13 150/1 157/4 153/3 153/8 155/2 153/22 154/7 154/8 127/14 127/25 128/8 119/20 139/19 142/13 157/6 158/1 160/20 155/5 155/13 155/16 154/24 155/17 156/15 128/24 129/15 130/21 142/25 150/19 151/20 163/17 163/19 167/4 155/16 155/23 157/2 131/3 132/20 132/21 152/1 152/19 161/19 159/3 159/8 163/25 170/25 171/1 172/9 169/8 169/17 171/18 158/22 160/14 161/8 136/12 137/9 138/20 162/2 164/18 165/2 172/10 174/6 175/14 162/9 163/7 164/13 172/16 172/16 173/3 139/8 142/3 143/8 170/4 172/15 173/18 177/9 178/5 178/7 165/7 170/1 171/2 173/4 173/16 175/6 143/25 146/6 146/10 173/21 175/21 178/25 178/9 179/14 179/16 174/15 174/19 174/22 175/7 176/20 177/2 147/2 147/5 147/8 179/13 thanking [1] 177/15 177/1 theme [1] 17/3 148/1 149/18 150/20 they [302] thanks [7] 10/23 themes [1] 23/14 they'd [9] 10/3 36/24 theft [2] 29/23 30/4 153/14 153/14 154/3 50/10 50/10 86/19 themselves [4] 73/7 154/4 154/10 158/18 37/8 46/25 52/6 73/11 their [29] 19/18 21/4 91/18 167/7 179/12 21/15 43/19 53/4 83/15 97/23 152/12 158/20 159/5 162/7 81/1 102/2 139/7 that [892] 58/25 60/7 82/9 83/1 then [177] 2/2 5/9 162/22 163/25 167/22 they'll [6] 60/3 60/4 that's [153] 3/14 3/15 60/14 135/23 135/24 98/4 100/13 100/13 5/15 6/17 6/20 7/3 7/4 172/18 176/5 179/12 3/23 3/25 4/1 4/3 4/10 114/17 114/17 115/7 7/6 7/18 8/9 12/5 12/6 there [199] 148/20 4/14 5/3 5/25 7/8 8/2 123/18 133/22 138/3 12/12 12/15 12/17 there's [75] 11/14 they're [15] 17/14 8/22 9/6 13/20 17/16 139/6 144/25 145/1 15/9 15/15 15/24 17/3 | 15/3 15/4 17/15 18/9 21/9 41/4 45/7 45/19 17/23 17/24 18/8 145/3 145/20 147/7 19/24 21/15 21/21 19/24 22/3 25/7 27/25 79/17 84/15 84/16 18/21 18/21 19/12 148/8 151/19 175/20 24/2 24/7 24/23 24/25 30/13 31/4 32/1 32/14 161/5 161/5 164/10 19/21 20/12 20/13 175/22 176/22 24/25 25/15 25/22 33/14 34/1 34/2 34/2 164/17 164/22 176/21 20/20 21/3 23/23 24/9 their's [1] 104/1 34/6 35/15 37/24 40/4 26/3 26/5 26/6 26/8 177/12 25/10 25/10 26/4 theirs [1] 66/20 43/11 43/20 52/20 27/4 27/16 27/24 they've [8] 31/15 28/10 33/11 34/24 them [118] 1/9 9/13 27/25 28/5 28/17 54/13 54/24 55/3 65/7 53/10 147/1 147/6 36/12 41/15 45/7 16/8 20/23 21/6 21/17 66/17 75/23 76/22 30/13 30/15 31/5 160/15 161/1 162/2 48/19 49/16 50/8 52/5 24/16 25/13 26/25 31/10 31/13 32/24 77/20 77/22 78/5 163/5 53/11 53/13 53/13 29/24 29/24 31/18 34/16 34/16 34/17 78/14 78/15 88/4 96/2 thick [2] 67/2 167/18 54/6 54/10 54/16 55/2 31/22 31/22 32/4 34/21 35/1 37/24 38/5 98/23 99/11 102/19 thieving [1] 29/22 55/6 55/11 55/14 32/22 37/2 38/19 38/6 38/8 38/9 38/10 104/22 109/18 109/18 thing [58] 4/5 8/4 60/15 60/24 61/3 61/3 38/20 39/3 39/3 39/12 38/17 39/10 40/8 109/22 115/23 119/15 11/25 12/25 13/5 65/2 65/5 67/4 67/11 41/5 41/6 41/17 42/5 40/11 41/3 41/5 41/6 120/11 120/20 122/7 13/25 17/19 18/19 69/19 70/20 70/20 42/7 47/13 53/1 54/15 43/2 44/6 45/6 46/2 122/16 130/6 134/13 19/7 26/12 27/5 38/25 70/21 70/23 70/24 55/7 56/15 67/9 72/24 46/12 47/4 48/22 49/5 134/15 135/7 137/13 41/3 43/6 45/10 45/11

179/14 those [39] 3/7 8/9 8/7 8/9 9/24 12/16 60/9 60/18 61/2 61/7 think [148] 3/16 6/16 23/11 28/8 28/20 29/9 12/19 13/4 13/22 15/6 61/21 61/22 62/20 thing... [42] 45/20 6/19 8/15 8/16 8/18 29/23 30/6 30/19 19/18 19/18 20/2 20/2 65/22 66/24 69/17 46/20 46/21 48/22 9/4 9/6 11/24 12/4 33/10 38/3 39/2 40/22 24/19 26/9 31/6 31/19 71/1 71/13 71/22 78/7 50/7 51/23 52/7 53/9 13/15 13/20 14/10 40/22 44/15 55/20 39/16 40/1 40/11 79/13 79/19 85/25 54/16 55/11 62/4 62/8 14/18 15/14 17/19 91/20 91/23 92/2 92/3 61/22 66/23 77/16 40/13 40/15 40/17 63/3 64/22 65/2 69/8 92/21 97/1 97/15 17/20 17/24 18/17 81/17 81/19 81/20 42/11 42/20 45/20 70/17 72/8 73/3 78/1 18/25 21/1 21/12 82/19 107/17 107/21 47/3 49/19 50/18 51/9 102/15 102/16 103/13 78/25 83/24 84/14 24/11 24/13 25/11 109/2 114/13 124/20 51/12 51/23 55/21 103/23 104/16 105/7 84/15 92/8 101/25 26/1 26/20 29/2 33/25 136/4 138/18 143/10 106/17 106/19 109/13 56/6 56/13 56/14 102/17 103/24 104/6 35/4 37/20 39/9 41/23 143/11 164/6 166/17 59/14 59/14 65/3 109/25 110/6 110/14 104/9 120/3 122/22 43/2 43/19 44/13 45/4 172/20 175/20 178/17 65/10 69/6 71/14 114/8 115/6 115/12 141/22 153/1 153/3 45/14 46/5 47/4 47/6 178/19 179/17 74/25 75/10 80/3 80/8 115/15 116/21 116/22 154/9 155/25 159/2 49/21 52/12 54/15 though [9] 38/21 64/7 80/17 80/19 82/9 118/6 119/7 122/9 166/8 174/18 174/22 55/6 55/11 56/1 56/2 102/5 109/4 119/25 82/20 86/12 87/14 122/14 124/25 125/1 178/21 145/4 149/6 155/3 125/4 125/19 126/12 57/18 57/23 57/24 103/24 105/8 105/15 things [111] 7/20 58/4 58/19 58/19 158/2 107/25 111/4 115/25 129/6 131/25 134/5 8/23 8/25 14/13 15/3 58/20 59/19 60/2 thought [47] 1/8 11/9 115/25 119/24 120/1 135/1 135/3 135/20 18/15 21/11 21/22 60/25 61/17 62/2 63/6 11/24 13/15 16/2 25/7 120/9 120/13 120/19 136/3 137/19 137/19 21/24 21/25 22/15 65/5 65/17 65/20 31/11 33/14 33/15 120/24 121/7 122/10 137/25 138/9 143/6 23/2 23/9 23/16 25/13 65/24 66/5 66/20 33/18 35/6 40/13 41/3 122/10 133/19 134/16 146/21 149/16 149/23 25/16 28/25 29/5 67/12 67/13 67/17 43/5 43/8 45/8 51/13 140/10 141/19 143/14 150/22 151/12 152/14 30/15 31/2 31/13 67/21 68/10 68/14 53/18 57/14 60/9 144/2 145/20 145/22 153/12 155/18 156/24 31/14 35/22 35/24 60/11 62/16 63/16 146/3 146/12 148/5 69/7 70/8 70/22 70/22 157/3 159/14 160/5 36/13 37/12 38/4 38/7 71/4 72/4 72/17 72/18 64/6 75/19 75/20 150/14 151/12 154/8 161/14 162/17 163/25 46/23 51/19 58/21 72/25 74/12 74/15 91/10 91/12 92/5 92/7 170/9 164/15 165/17 166/10 58/25 59/1 63/19 74/21 75/5 75/6 75/7 92/9 92/14 94/13 167/21 168/9 168/25 throughout [9] 4/23 64/14 64/17 67/23 76/5 76/17 82/25 83/9 96/15 96/16 105/17 17/6 18/24 19/8 20/6 169/3 171/11 171/17 68/2 69/6 69/24 71/14 83/16 83/17 83/23 109/7 120/20 126/21 44/3 69/1 76/23 80/15 172/1 173/1 173/2 71/17 71/18 72/12 178/3 84/11 84/24 89/25 129/12 131/8 166/22 thrown [2] 28/1 75/18 72/15 74/10 74/16 91/14 98/7 102/25 167/17 167/18 171/18 **Thursday [3]** 24/12 time-wise [1] 57/4 77/22 80/25 81/17 104/12 104/12 110/14 171/19 172/16 24/13 128/23 timeline [1] 57/18 83/14 83/14 85/21 112/8 113/9 113/18 tied [1] 123/23 thoughts [2] 14/5 timeline-wise [1] 86/3 87/15 87/17 117/9 117/18 122/24 174/24 tier [8] 114/21 139/20 57/18 87/23 94/24 97/9 124/11 125/23 126/19 thousand [2] 66/1 153/2 157/8 158/2 times [23] 33/18 97/15 98/3 98/14 126/20 129/9 133/11 66/14 158/5 158/10 160/14 40/18 42/4 46/11 53/5 98/17 99/14 100/19 133/15 138/15 139/12 thousands [9] 30/25 tight [1] 27/13 53/10 67/5 73/1 73/2 101/3 101/3 101/17 145/25 149/13 150/11 31/1 32/13 66/2 66/2 till [3] 120/16 146/11 84/9 89/1 100/1 101/7 101/20 102/19 102/22 151/8 152/6 152/23 81/9 111/24 164/14 104/7 105/6 115/4 162/6 102/22 103/1 103/3 153/1 154/19 154/21 167/5 time [135] 3/12 3/18 120/21 125/25 130/4 103/24 104/13 105/23 156/14 157/6 157/17 4/23 6/17 10/8 10/9 threat [1] 136/2 136/19 143/14 170/22 106/3 109/20 111/18 157/20 160/24 161/1 three [25] 1/3 1/10 12/13 13/21 13/22 171/22 115/6 121/3 123/9 timing [1] 57/10 162/17 163/7 163/9 21/11 41/18 44/6 52/4 17/6 18/2 18/3 19/14 129/3 129/16 130/7 163/10 163/12 165/9 56/10 57/15 58/13 20/1 24/1 24/17 28/7 tinkling [1] 64/22 134/21 139/15 139/17 165/11 171/24 171/25 61/12 62/20 63/17 29/11 34/22 35/1 35/4 tiny [3] 6/15 88/6 139/19 141/19 143/14 172/9 174/25 175/10 67/5 69/18 73/2 89/4 35/15 35/16 36/3 36/8 162/5 143/22 150/7 152/19 176/7 177/21 104/8 105/6 110/18 36/16 37/6 38/14 40/2 tired [2] 33/19 72/6 157/15 159/12 160/13 thinking [10] 33/17 112/8 122/13 122/18 42/9 45/22 46/13 to [1180] 162/3 162/11 168/18 67/2 69/23 93/3 96/6 122/24 130/4 171/10 48/15 49/24 50/8 today [4] 4/8 85/24 169/11 170/10 172/3 109/9 114/12 129/21 87/12 100/1 throat [1] 81/25 50/14 55/18 55/20 172/4 173/1 177/6 57/4 57/11 58/15 together [5] 28/6 61/7 139/13 176/3 through [88] 2/13 178/23 178/25 179/5 this [214] 3/10 3/17 7/1 7/6 8/4 58/16 58/20 59/19 70/9 94/15 113/15

69/4 92/12 88/3 tumour [1] 99/13 under [9] 6/8 85/16 towns [1] 135/9 transcription [1] 3/2 turmoil [1] 28/1 89/22 90/14 97/16 told [21] 7/24 8/3 27/1 toy [1] 51/17 transformation [5] turn [7] 35/9 56/16 110/25 111/1 111/10 38/22 40/16 41/2 toys [3] 21/11 21/11 80/2 80/17 82/2 89/23 | 58/5 99/2 107/14 164/24 46/14 47/13 51/5 21/12 170/16 127/20 134/15 understand [27] 4/2 80/18 85/7 85/21 86/4 trace [2] 114/4 145/9 transformer [2] turned [2] 119/6 39/1 41/23 42/1 57/13 109/2 112/24 126/7 track [1] 123/24 104/19 104/22 119/14 59/7 61/11 67/1 67/4 127/24 128/2 152/2 trade [2] 96/13 96/14 transition [6] 22/11 turning [1] 130/22 79/10 82/20 86/7 98/3 163/5 170/2 trading [11] 31/24 28/19 110/6 110/9 twice [5] 11/25 33/13 115/14 117/15 120/12 tomorrow [5] 39/10 122/13 135/12 154/7 46/7 115/23 126/14 112/4 112/6 140/4 140/5 143/10 148/17 148/21 148/21 135/15 142/16 143/1 143/13 145/8 145/9 trapped [2] 68/8 two [56] 3/11 14/18 148/24 143/12 145/16 148/18 147/13 149/22 156/11 68/17 14/24 15/6 23/25 tonnes [1] 80/23 24/16 25/12 26/10 156/14 156/25 157/22 treated [4] 62/16 too [15] 33/19 90/22 trail [2] 120/22 142/3 134/2 177/6 178/3 29/1 29/21 33/3 42/20 understanding [1] 93/24 102/3 120/18 train [4] 5/21 92/3 treatment [1] 115/9 43/3 48/18 50/20 56/8 154/24 123/3 131/12 135/23 trial [2] 112/18 169/22 112/12 148/25 59/19 62/24 69/18 understood [3] 25/8 140/25 147/1 147/1 trained [5] 5/24 13/12 tried [3] 37/14 173/10 71/19 71/21 72/24 44/6 124/5 167/16 167/20 171/3 unexplained [1] 80/6 106/24 112/16 73/2 75/17 79/16 173/10 177/7 trainer [9] 10/4 14/23 triggered [2] 3/24 82/15 86/13 87/12 121/23 took [35] 12/1 22/12 14/24 15/13 23/4 24/7 88/4 90/12 95/10 unfair [1] 177/6 125/21 42/14 49/24 51/9 24/12 112/7 138/12 trouble [1] 179/15 96/22 103/9 106/9 unfortunately [3] 59/19 59/19 60/17 106/15 106/15 108/11 trainers [2] 14/17 true [1] 124/8 65/18 100/5 160/4 60/18 79/25 88/24 106/15 truly [1] 161/2 112/8 113/21 120/14 unhelpful [1] 135/2 89/1 89/7 89/7 93/14 trust [30] 53/11 55/4 121/3 122/13 128/6 training [44] 13/4 unique [4] 8/19 9/1 96/15 97/13 103/7 13/22 15/4 23/1 23/19 55/11 65/4 65/19 130/4 130/18 138/4 85/8 85/10 106/7 110/5 112/14 23/21 25/5 25/8 26/11 75/15 75/24 76/8 76/8 144/7 149/23 152/9 unit [3] 77/6 148/11 115/1 119/4 126/5 161/25 162/23 168/13 28/3 28/4 28/6 41/15 76/24 83/23 83/25 148/13 128/6 130/2 131/7 56/7 56/9 75/10 75/12 168/16 171/9 178/15 84/1 107/11 153/5 unit's [1] 145/21 131/12 131/19 132/6 75/17 80/8 80/10 81/8 153/7 159/18 159/20 178/19 units [5] 68/25 77/4 148/1 148/12 148/12 145/17 145/19 150/23 81/9 106/8 106/11 159/21 159/22 160/2 type [4] 73/17 99/20 168/11 168/12 106/14 106/15 106/18 160/5 160/16 160/24 104/9 169/14 unknown [1] 101/1 top [3] 58/22 63/13 106/21 106/23 107/21 161/14 163/20 170/5 unless [4] 54/17 137/7 107/22 108/4 108/16 176/4 176/5 176/16 111/16 122/1 154/16 topic [1] 149/24 trusted [13] 33/5 45/3 ultimately [3] 48/24 110/7 112/5 112/13 unlucky [1] 34/21 topics [2] 86/13 132/14 156/21 112/15 113/20 114/24 55/13 93/4 94/8 97/20 unmute [1] 4/12 178/15 unbelievable [1] 82/6 115/7 117/20 138/12 97/21 97/22 160/17 unprofessional [1] tore [1] 109/25 uncle [1] 6/19 138/18 158/24 160/18 172/2 173/20 42/3 total [2] 131/4 142/15 unclear [46] 6/24 173/21 transaction [23] unrelated [2] 36/18 totally [10] 3/25 17/9 11/5 11/14 11/17 10/10 24/6 30/14 trusting [5] 64/21 37/7 20/16 37/23 59/3 59/3 11/24 12/14 12/18 39/23 40/1 47/10 78/8 67/10 74/19 160/21 until [18] 8/8 16/19 82/2 82/3 162/18 12/20 19/10 20/5 21/9 113/8 120/7 120/9 160/22 22/20 36/20 37/14 177/6 23/20 24/23 28/11 120/16 125/10 145/22 try [12] 41/20 41/21 51/7 92/22 93/22 touch [6] 15/3 86/1 32/3 33/15 35/7 36/2 145/23 146/3 146/13 53/8 69/8 104/13 97/10 98/21 100/4 94/20 104/23 113/18 39/13 41/5 42/17 114/4 118/18 134/12 146/15 146/21 146/23 104/4 109/19 124/15 126/10 42/23 43/3 43/16 150/14 151/13 152/14 137/16 147/6 147/9 127/17 128/19 131/7 touched [2] 13/8 94/8 50/22 50/24 51/7 51/8 152/17 152/15 164/12 tough [1] 75/23 53/23 54/8 59/13 trying [13] 5/21 12/2 unusual [2] 8/3 transactions [10] towards [2] 24/11 59/21 60/10 67/24 10/7 15/2 15/5 29/12 57/12 90/13 99/7 118/25 53/9 76/5 80/21 81/4 86/22 48/2 125/25 126/1 103/16 109/20 141/10 **up [127]** 1/8 4/17 5/21 tower [1] 38/9 90/6 93/24 119/22 141/16 151/8 154/6 158/22 162/4 169/9 5/23 8/8 10/25 11/8 towers [1] 38/15 129/18 131/22 133/1 transcribe [1] 88/3 157/15 168/23 11/12 13/7 14/16 town [4] 6/24 69/3 138/25 157/18 transcribed [2] 3/1 **Tuesday [1]** 98/25 15/23 16/14 19/10

### U

up... [114] 20/15 23/9 23/13 24/4 24/20 24/21 24/22 25/1 25/3 25/25 26/11 28/14 29/7 29/11 29/16 30/8 30/25 31/18 31/22 31/23 34/6 34/15 35/9 35/9 36/14 37/16 38/9 39/6 40/20 41/22 42/10 43/8 44/8 47/12 49/13 52/18 53/16 54/3 54/16 55/7 56/16 58/5 59/18 59/20 59/22 61/20 62/19 66/4 66/5 67/3 67/16 69/21 69/22 69/22 70/2 71/4 71/19 71/21 74/6 77/10 77/23 79/5 79/22 80/20 81/3 83/11 84/13 91/15 93/17 94/7 96/14 98/15 98/21 99/2 103/3 104/11 104/16 107/19 114/8 114/20 117/2 117/9 120/8 121/4 125/8 126/17 127/7 129/10 129/19 130/9 133/15 135/22 136/7 138/8 144/7 151/2 151/4 152/7 152/10 152/13 153/20 153/24 154/1 154/12 154/18 156/8 157/21 159/16 161/3 163/10 170/12 174/24 176/20 177/2 up.helpline [1] 104/21 updates [2] 39/2 39/14 upgrade [8] 36/17 36/19 36/22 37/1 37/6 37/24 39/9 76/20 upgrades [2] 36/14 39/19 upon [1] 66/2

**urged [1]** 167/25

urgency [1] 155/1

15/14 15/18 19/10

us [111] 3/23 5/4 6/3

22/1 23/17 26/14 27/10 28/22 36/20 39/17 41/2 46/2 46/3 49/4 50/12 54/19 58/23 61/13 63/6 66/20 67/19 67/19 74/10 74/20 76/24 79/5 81/22 83/24 84/15 84/16 84/16 88/6 88/11 89/13 89/15 90/9 90/10 92/19 93/16 93/20 95/1 95/8 95/13 95/14 95/17 96/5 96/16 96/23 97/25 98/5 98/5 98/12 100/18 101/7 102/4 102/6 103/12 103/12 104/13 114/20 115/22 117/11 118/6 118/19 118/22 119/15 122/12 122/21 123/21 125/1 125/18 127/5 127/25 128/4 131/1 131/5 143/3 143/4 143/9 147/7 147/8 147/16 147/19 148/1 148/4 149/23 150/12 159/25 161/1 161/3 161/4 161/4 161/5 162/25 164/17 164/19 164/22 164/23 165/2 165/4 165/7 167/25 172/21 173/16 174/22 175/15 176/10 178/10 us ... so [1] 148/4 use [17] 33/9 34/3 37/15 59/12 59/23 61/6 65/5 76/2 102/2 104/23 112/22 113/22 157/3 158/19 162/5 162/12 164/4 used [33] 15/21 16/18 26/13 43/1 43/6 53/10 53/12 58/5 63/3 71/15 72/1 81/2 98/25 101/22 108/11 109/1 109/21 113/6 114/14 115/1 124/24 129/18 146/6 149/4 149/5 154/15 157/24 159/3 160/25 166/7 170/11 172/4 172/6

useful [3] 10/18 54/6 90/9 useless [1] 106/18 using [5] 35/15 46/23 76/4 114/14 164/5 usually [2] 53/11 142/2

vacant [2] 68/22 69/2 **value [1]** 2/15 values [2] 17/22 17/23 various [2] 7/8 43/2 varying [1] 161/19 **Venn [5]** 88/13 110/14 153/9 155/19 179/13 Vennells [2] 117/2 176/24 **Verizon [1]** 76/4 versed [1] 113/5 versus [1] 71/8 very [85] 1/9 1/9 1/13 1/13 1/21 2/21 4/6 5/3 5/12 8/5 8/8 8/19 8/22 14/18 15/8 15/12 15/14 16/4 16/16 20/11 23/3 25/20 26/19 29/9 29/25 32/1 41/1 44/20 45/7 64/4 64/13 64/18 64/20 65/6 66/18 68/22 68/22 71/4 74/19 75/17 75/23 75/23 78/24 79/15 83/4 84/24 85/11 85/19 86/5 86/11 86/11 86/16 89/12 89/14 91/4 91/18 94/24 96/10 97/1 101/18 103/8 106/16 110/11 110/24 111/22 112/1 113/1 113/14 120/20 126/3 126/3 133/6 135/2 135/2 136/11 142/1 142/6 142/6 152/22 160/25 171/9 view [7] 22/25 39/16 41/13 73/14 159/20 161/12 177/10

views [1] 87/7 village [12] 89/11 95/10 95/12 96/1 96/2 96/4 102/13 102/13 162/1 162/5 168/5 170/18 villagey [1] 98/10 virtually [4] 10/8 14/19 61/22 62/20 visit [4] 10/12 17/17 57/6 57/6 visited [2] 147/18 149/11 visits [3] 57/20 58/3 79/25 voice [1] 24/4 **volumes [1]** 76/18 **voluntary [1]** 179/8

W wage [1] 92/4 wages [4] 14/11 95/22 125/17 169/10 wait [4] 36/3 47/2 125/11 140/15 waiting [7] 34/15 42/8 10/8 10/18 10/18 14/8 42/8 42/8 42/9 106/22 171/18 wake [3] 35/8 71/19 71/21 **Wales [1]** 5/7 walk [4] 19/2 19/4 75/11 170/12 walkers [1] 171/17 walks [1] 152/2 wall [2] 21/10 141/12 want [93] 3/17 3/22 4/4 5/4 6/3 7/4 14/2 17/13 17/16 17/18 21/14 21/16 22/1 22/3 23/15 26/25 35/20 40/24 43/5 45/6 45/12 51/23 52/16 54/9 59/4 61/12 62/5 66/20 67/19 67/23 68/2 68/4 69/22 69/24 71/12 74/10 84/25 85/1 85/6 86/22 87/18 87/20 91/5 91/25 92/13 94/20 96/23 100/18 101/20 107/24 108/23 123/7 129/23 131/16

132/7 133/15 134/6 134/13 134/20 137/4 145/11 150/12 152/18 155/7 155/11 155/12 156/6 156/8 159/11 162/21 163/18 164/23 165/7 165/16 165/23 166/16 168/4 168/5 168/6 171/3 172/12 173/4 173/11 174/9 174/16 174/18 174/22 177/2 177/2 177/24 179/1 179/9 179/20 wanted [19] 11/23 23/11 24/7 47/4 51/18 65/14 79/21 86/7 92/5 92/17 107/1 134/7 153/11 157/11 157/12 159/12 159/16 171/12 173/16 wanting [1] 136/14 wants [5] 3/13 76/12 87/7 148/19 153/9 warn [3] 36/24 36/25 86/7 wary [2] 64/19 65/4 was [481] washing [1] 35/9 wasn't [28] 13/23 31/13 43/15 46/5 58/18 60/7 64/9 64/10 75/5 104/17 104/18 106/6 106/13 108/2 113/13 113/19 114/18

117/19 119/5 122/2 124/15 127/2 128/17 139/5 160/2 167/20 174/21 176/5 waste [3] 45/22 124/25 135/20 wasting [2] 103/23 105/6 watch [1] 10/7 watched [3] 24/2 24/6 126/2 watching [2] 162/10 176/2 water [2] 35/10 35/10 wave [1] 19/6

way [43] 6/21 6/25

19/21 20/16 32/15

13/4 16/1 16/12 18/13

### W

way... [34] 32/15
33/17 34/12 56/13
62/15 74/12 77/18
82/10 83/3 83/20
84/11 85/10 106/10
110/9 113/7 114/1
121/25 130/7 133/16
133/18 134/11 137/14
140/5 146/2 147/12
149/24 150/5 150/6
150/7 153/23 154/4
155/21 169/6 177/5
ways [3] 76/8 85/8
117/22

we [452]

we'd [8] 80/5 95/12 116/10 119/10 120/8 120/8 120/24 126/20 we'll [16] 7/3 7/9 27/4 47/13 54/5 82/23 96/17 103/12 145/21 145/22 145/23 152/15 156/25 173/13 173/13

we're [64] 2/1 6/18 6/25 9/1 9/2 9/3 9/3 18/4 21/7 36/13 37/17 38/22 54/19 54/20 54/21 56/12 64/25 65/8 67/14 76/3 76/3 76/24 77/24 79/1 81/21 83/18 84/12 85/24 90/7 90/13 95/18 96/4 98/22 99/24 101/4 102/21 104/12 117/11 119/18 120/23 128/11 130/20 135/25 140/18 143/13 144/18 152/24 153/17 153/18 153/24 154/1 155/24 159/14 160/17 161/16 161/23 161/24 163/24 164/20 164/25 165/2 168/8 170/19 178/3

we've [63] 2/12 20/2 34/24 37/17 44/6 48/16 48/21 49/19 54/17 56/18 60/19 60/22 65/9 65/9 65/11

67/12 67/13 75/24 76/10 76/19 76/21 80/9 84/24 87/24 92/19 93/2 96/18 98/9 102/9 104/7 104/10 111/6 115/9 116/7 116/24 119/17 121/20 122/4 122/21 125/9 134/16 139/16 142/16 143/13 147/5 156/18 159/20 161/13 161/20 162/8 163/1 165/15 166/9 166/25 167/13 168/14 173/21 175/1 176/17 176/18 176/18 177/5 178/15 weak [1] 34/14 wear [1] 100/8 wearing [3] 100/8 100/9 100/12 Wednesday [4] 14/13 24/12 26/14 126/17 Wednesdays [1] 63/4 week [25] 13/4 14/18 16/19 23/24 24/2 24/8 24/10 24/11 29/2 35/4 61/24 70/15 78/12 79/2 93/22 99/1 103/17 116/9 121/11 129/20 130/2 130/4 153/18 160/10 162/23 weekly [5] 26/7 32/7 32/21 32/24 32/25 weeks [16] 14/24 15/7 26/10 63/17 78/14 78/15 79/3 101/13 108/7 122/18 122/24 122/24 125/11 125/11 125/11 179/3 weeks' [1] 85/25 weight [1] 170/8 weird [1] 8/4 welcome [2] 90/15 157/2 well [154] 2/9 2/16

4/25 5/19 7/19 8/13

19/9 20/10 22/23

11/21 12/6 13/2 16/2

23/18 23/19 24/8 24/8

24/9 25/4 25/5 25/23

28/24 29/5 29/6 30/5

26/10 27/13 28/20

33/3 37/12 44/20 45/7 45/14 46/14 47/6 51/16 60/2 63/17 66/25 70/13 74/21 74/23 76/17 80/12 84/23 89/11 89/12 89/25 90/16 91/1 91/18 92/3 92/7 92/7 92/9 93/15 94/16 94/16 95/4 95/25 96/10 96/16 97/2 98/21 100/6 100/6 100/20 102/18 103/11 103/21 105/18 106/7 106/19 106/20 107/8 107/9 108/1 110/4 111/4 111/7 111/12 112/21 113/1 113/5 113/12 113/13 113/19 114/16 115/2 115/7 117/7 117/10 118/16 121/7 121/15 123/17 124/24 125/9 125/23 126/9 126/25 127/19 129/23 129/24 134/12 134/19 135/19 135/21 136/13 137/18 139/4 139/11 139/20 141/2 141/19 145/15 145/25 when [196] 146/7 148/18 148/20 151/1 152/7 152/15 153/7 156/2 156/20 159/20 160/24 161/2 161/16 162/7 162/19 163/7 163/12 166/20 167/12 168/4 168/6 168/10 168/12 168/14 168/18 169/18 169/19 173/24 174/3 176/3 176/7 176/11 176/25 178/5 178/12 178/18 179/7 went [44] 7/6 9/24 10/5 12/6 12/19 13/4 24/9 24/9 24/18 32/7 39/25 42/14 46/1 58/5 59/14 59/16 61/5 62/3 80/2 80/24 81/4 89/8 89/23 97/10 99/2 99/3

99/6 103/18 103/24

105/15 106/23 107/3

107/25 121/7 127/18

130/5 130/14 131/3 132/3 143/9 146/12 147/22 148/11 152/3 were [192] weren't [9] 38/20 83/13 116/18 120/17 139/11 148/2 170/16 173/15 175/19 what [279] what's [17] 34/1 37/25 38/1 39/9 39/18 54/13 55/22 71/5 78/7 97/18 99/15 129/1 142/10 147/14 147/15 158/15 177/9 whatever [15] 60/7 73/18 79/19 82/8 87/2 104/25 117/24 122/21 123/1 123/19 130/11 131/18 147/1 147/23 160/14 Whatley [3] 22/4 56/20 85/2 WhatsApp [4] 56/13 57/7 78/17 78/18 whatsoever [5] 105/24 107/3 114/6 137/13 141/24 whenever [1] 39/19 where [64] 5/25 7/9 7/11 8/18 8/20 9/18 16/6 17/22 25/15 28/1 31/18 40/19 44/17 57/5 58/7 65/15 72/23 76/15 78/15 81/2 87/9 94/23 94/23 95/18 96/25 97/17 98/8 98/23 109/12 111/17 113/4 114/21 122/1 122/12 122/19 123/15 123/25 126/16 127/20 132/5 132/8 134/19 143/10 144/20 145/9 145/12 145/18 146/10 147/7 147/19 147/23 147/24 151/8 151/21 152/10 160/22 162/3 162/5 164/1 164/4 167/22 169/6 171/5 171/12 whereas [4] 22/9

110/18 111/10 161/24 whereby [1] 121/24 whether [24] 20/11 29/22 29/25 40/5 43/7 48/15 55/4 55/12 64/1 75/7 77/13 106/6 111/20 113/15 135/8 143/22 147/3 147/8 149/2 149/2 150/25 170/19 174/4 179/4 which [61] 1/11 1/18 8/3 10/19 11/25 14/24 19/20 25/14 25/16 32/21 44/7 45/5 62/11 66/15 73/7 75/2 75/19 77/3 85/8 85/12 85/13 86/9 86/14 87/7 89/2 89/19 92/11 94/5 96/18 98/13 101/22 102/5 102/23 104/10 106/11 107/10 119/5 119/7 119/21 120/10 121/10 121/20 122/2 126/4 127/5 131/4 131/5 134/22 140/12 140/21 146/14 151/10 158/9 158/11 158/13 159/17 160/7 173/14 173/22 178/23 179/18 while [10] 2/14 10/5 36/13 89/6 105/22 109/15 141/5 150/15 156/2 175/23 white [5] 116/3 116/4 136/22 137/13 145/6 who [45] 8/20 12/21 19/3 33/2 43/23 43/23 47/16 47/21 47/25 48/2 50/21 53/6 53/10 53/25 58/3 65/7 76/13 81/14 82/20 83/7 85/9 97/6 99/5 111/14 116/17 118/17 128/16 133/11 137/15 139/5 139/6 142/9 146/4 146/4 146/5 149/16 151/16 151/17 152/17 157/6 161/18 173/12 175/20 176/4 178/17 who's [4] 88/8 151/20 152/2 176/18 whoa [1] 44/22

# W

whoever [1] 174/12 whole [14] 8/14 15/9 34/13 51/10 53/9 64/5 68/25 87/6 126/5 132/25 133/21 159/5 160/4 173/7 whose [3] 10/12 51/6 134/18 why [40] 1/8 17/25 19/20 31/15 36/24 38/13 54/2 54/22 55/5 67/1 67/3 67/15 68/15 73/11 74/1 75/19 79/10 79/14 79/17 84/7 84/8 84/10 84/13 94/8 96/8 102/5 105/19 115/14 116/17 117/3 137/10 145/9 168/4 168/4 174/19 174/19 174/21 174/22 175/15 177/8 widely [2] 74/13 159/22 wider [4] 20/22 21/2 21/2 117/18 wife [8] 43/1 67/24 69/23 88/20 90/16 101/16 172/16 172/20 will [82] 1/3 1/12 1/12 2/2 2/13 2/22 2/23 3/1 3/12 8/16 13/6 13/24 13/24 17/11 17/25 19/3 19/4 19/5 20/22 22/24 56/16 60/12 60/13 67/7 71/19 71/21 75/11 76/1 78/4 78/5 86/4 86/6 86/15 86/24 86/25 87/7 87/9 87/11 88/2 93/24 94/11 96/16 97/1 99/20 107/16 114/22 118/7 125/10 128/18 129/13 133/5 133/7 134/21 137/21 138/12 138/13 139/22 140/6 140/8 140/9 143/23 146/25 147/2 147/17 149/5 150/20 151/24 152/15 156/12 158/6 160/4 163/4 163/9

163/15 171/21 173/20 173/20 174/6 178/19 179/3 179/17 179/19 willingness [1] 172/10 win [2] 125/18 125/18 win-win [1] 125/18 wiring [2] 126/5 126/11 wise [2] 57/4 57/18 wish [2] 86/5 86/6 witching [1] 84/25 with [199] withdraw [2] 145/25 146/15 withdrawal [2] 146/2 146/14 withdrawn [3] 81/1 81/17 81/18 withdrew [1] 152/4 26/7 28/15 38/12 39/19 55/3 64/8 73/21 78/6 78/9 82/19 89/24 92/25 93/21 98/4 118/3 118/13 147/14 without [5] 78/15 90/22 100/23 101/7 106/23 witness [7] 85/18 85/22 86/2 86/9 156/3 179/2 179/5 won't [8] 1/20 8/1 15/3 86/4 92/22 128/18 148/15 156/17 wonder [11] 7/13 21/23 61/10 79/5 82/21 88/11 89/15 90/10 165/23 166/1 167/8 wondered [5] 13/10 48/15 76/13 133/17 165/20 wondering [2] 91/22 176/1 woods [2] 171/13 171/17 word [5] 1/23 15/21 15/23 16/15 178/14 word's [1] 94/19 words [7] 32/20 41/8

155/7 178/12 178/14

179/17 179/20 work [43] 5/21 7/21 14/3 15/24 16/18 38/19 38/21 38/23 39/11 47/9 51/20 53/15 64/22 67/8 72/25 74/13 75/25 76/15 86/9 92/19 97/6 97/6 100/15 102/18 102/20 102/22 118/4 122/11 124/22 130/18 141/7 141/21 143/9 144/24 145/20 145/21 155/25 159/22 162/14 164/23 165/6 168/12 168/15 worked [11] 5/9 6/5 11/1 23/25 24/7 55/20 91/11 96/25 98/9 100/23 115/20 within [19] 5/23 17/23 working [31] 1/5 5/15 5/17 6/11 7/5 15/21 16/25 17/4 18/20 22/15 22/15 24/8 37/17 50/21 53/7 58/18 61/23 72/20 76/6 83/12 84/15 84/16 93/21 97/4 102/18 127/3 154/13 162/6 168/13 168/22 172/18 workings [1] 163/14 works [1] 17/14 world [4] 8/6 51/19 57/2 145/13 worried [1] 64/24 worry [5] 66/9 71/18 90/15 129/6 133/12 worrying [1] 47/23 worse [1] 166/14 worst [2] 40/2 104/16 worth [1] 106/15 worthless [1] 134/9 would [143] 4/9 9/7 12/9 13/11 13/13 13/15 14/3 15/23 17/14 22/10 22/12 25/3 26/15 28/8 28/25 31/25 32/2 32/2 32/6 32/8 32/8 32/9 32/18 32/24 33/23 36/7 37/7 37/8 38/2 38/5 38/6

39/17 39/17 39/20 40/10 40/19 40/19 40/21 43/12 43/21 43/23 44/8 44/25 45/14 45/15 45/24 47/2 47/6 49/21 51/13 53/4 53/16 55/5 55/7 55/12 56/7 57/17 57/21 61/1 61/2 61/4 61/4 61/5 61/6 61/20 63/1 66/20 68/5 68/12 69/14 70/6 78/12 82/17 82/21 82/23 83/6 84/4 84/7 84/10 84/13 86/2 87/15 92/8 92/9 92/9 92/13 93/4 94/14 94/21 95/8 97/5 98/19 101/23 103/5 105/20 106/4 106/4 111/23 112/17 112/25 113/1 115/24 117/22 119/13 125/4 125/4 125/5 125/6 125/22 131/8 132/18 133/3 133/14 133/23 135/18 135/22 139/14 141/9 141/17 142/8 147/19 150/4 152/6 156/10 156/24 157/14 157/17 165/5 165/6 168/9 169/22 174/7 174/9 174/16 174/18 174/23 174/23 175/8 176/15 179/9 wouldn't [18] 22/9 36/19 37/13 37/15 39/11 47/8 47/9 52/8 61/18 62/7 65/12 72/24 124/16 127/21 127/23 166/12 170/18 179/8 wow [1] 21/13 wracked [1] 151/7 write [6] 38/18 111/2 131/8 131/14 147/24 179/3 writing [5] 63/10 131/15 133/4 156/6 179/11 written [1] 131/20

wrong [32] 39/4

38/10 38/25 39/16

39/10 50/5 64/15 74/23 77/5 77/6 99/11 99/16 102/19 107/8 111/22 111/25 113/3 114/1 125/9 126/22 129/21 129/22 129/25 130/1 132/14 134/3 142/6 143/3 148/22 153/21 154/9 155/13 157/7 160/8 166/23 **Wyn [27]** 1/25 2/8 2/13 3/13 4/7 6/4 27/8 49/19 70/6 76/11 82/15 84/21 87/5 87/23 88/8 95/7 96/7 96/15 118/17 142/10 155/16 165/10 167/9 172/9 172/13 174/7 178/9 Wyn's [5] 2/6 2/21 86/23 150/8 163/10

yay [1] 147/4 yeah [42] 18/12 18/17 26/1 31/21 31/22 34/16 37/16 37/23 44/22 45/6 45/12 48/13 50/25 52/7 55/8 55/25 57/16 66/18 67/17 68/14 68/20 69/24 70/17 73/19 76/17 79/1 83/9 83/10 83/11 90/12 96/6 96/6 96/17 105/25 105/25 111/20 114/11 120/25 157/21 157/21 157/21 157/21

year [22] 4/21 5/8 10/19 12/7 12/8 14/9 14/12 52/12 57/18 57/25 61/2 62/10 72/21 90/12 95/21 106/22 119/21 138/10 147/20 162/10 169/21 177/23

year's [2] 9/16 12/10 years [92] 4/19 5/8 5/11 6/7 7/6 8/24 11/2 11/5 13/19 18/16 22/20 22/21 24/16 30/25 33/22 36/9

Υ	177/3	your [191]	
	yesterday [2] 108/21	yourself [28] 3/8 4/6	
years [76] 36/10	141/2	4/7 4/11 4/13 5/5 6/4	
41/18 42/6 44/4 48/7	yet [4] 85/9 85/14	15/24 31/9 38/5 40/20	
54/1 56/1 56/10 56/19	120/22 137/5	45/1 49/5 53/7 66/9	
57/15 58/10 58/13	Yorkshire [1] 89/20	66/9 66/24 72/13 88/7	
58/16 61/16 61/19	you [1409]	88/12 89/16 90/11	
61/20 61/22 62/1 62/3	you'd [17] 28/18	91/6 91/24 112/12	
63/12 63/23 65/22	28/21 20/1 33/13	115/15 117/4 125/16	
66/2 68/5 68/24 69/10	37/16 37/23 37/24	yourselves [8] 13/9	
71/6 71/20 75/1 75/1	39/9 39/9 39/10 39/11	30/2 40/20 61/9 87/3	
75/1 80/5 80/5 81/8	47/1 47/7 90/23	87/13 94/17 124/21	
81/8 83/8 84/6 88/16	109/23 136/17 179/4	YouTube [2] 3/14	
89/20 89/24 89/25	you'll [4] 26/17 78/15	179/18	
93/13 93/18 96/13	78/16 129/6		
96/14 105/21 106/23	you're [68] 4/12 7/23	Z	
108/25 109/2 109/5	7/24 8/13 14/25 16/6	<b>Zealand [1]</b> 81/15	
110/15 113/6 115/10	17/23 20/21 26/16	zero [3] 146/16	
116/23 119/8 125/5	26/17 26/22 27/1 27/6	151/13 152/16	
128/6 135/13 136/4	27/11 27/21 27/22	zone [1] 109/13	
138/18 141/20 144/9	28/1 30/16 31/4 31/21		
159/3 161/17 163/2	32/12 32/13 42/7 42/8		
163/3 163/6 167/3	12/8 12/8 15/10 18/0		
169/12 169/17 169/22	62/6 66/14 66/25 67/1		
173/22 174/11 175/5	67/4 69/5 69/22 72/10		
175/17 178/4	74/10 75/14 75/21		
yes [85] 4/16 4/25	77/4 77/13 78/18		
5/11 6/23 11/1 11/19	90/24 99/23 100/21		
15/6 15/12 15/25	100/21 103/23 105/3		
16/13 16/21 17/11	106/5 109/16 114/12		
17/19 20/18 20/24	125/2 126/16 128/10		
21/20 22/6 22/13 26/1	128/10 133/25 1/11/15		
26/5 28/13 30/25 32/6	143/20 144/23 146/6		
37/4 44/10 45/2 46/9	150/16 157/22 150/21		
48/4 49/2 49/24 50/10	162/18 163/11 164/3		
57/10 57/16 57/20	165/9 171/1		
59/1 59/3 62/23 64/4	you've [40] 11/5		
64/9 68/19 75/23 76/2	13/21 22/4 23/14		
77/3 83/19 89/17	44/13 52/22 66/3		
96/25 101/3 101/14	66/10 66/10 70/4 70/5		
108/3 109/19 109/24	70/6 70/22 71/12		
110/17 111/13 111/19			
117/10 117/13 117/16	85/21 107/7 114/3		
120/1 121/5 124/10	111/23 115/11 117/10		
124/13 129/18 129/18	135/16 136/18 143/23		
129/24 132/16 140/8	146/1 146/22 146/25		
143/2 154/21 155/6	150/19 158/9 159/9		
155/23 156/9 156/20	160/15 161/9 162/8		
157/4 157/5 157/10	162/12 163/21 163/25		
158/5 158/16 158/16	177/17		
161/10 165/8 165/14	young [4] 6/21 11/12		
166/19 167/4 171/7	16/5 151/17		
•	•	•	(82) years zone