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Telephone call – Paula Vennells (CEO, Post Office)

Thursday 23 May

10.30am

James to call Paula – GRO

Background

The call is at the request of the Post Office, following the MPs meeting held on 25 March at Westminster. The Post Office is nervous that MPs are wanting individual cases resolved rather than the following the existing approach taken be Second Sight.

An earlier meeting with Alice Perkins demonstrated the concern that the Post Office had been shown no evidence of problems with Horizon. Final para of this note (Second Sight to Alan Bates) indicates that they may have found something.

Note that Janet is still receiving cases to pass on to Second Sight via MPs. She will continue doing this until someone advises otherwise (implications for PO budget).

In addition, James has had an email response from Second Sight to his letter to them, asking for comment on Alan Bates' letter of 1 April. Alan has also replied via email to the comments Second Sight have made.

1 April Alan Bates letter

1. Unhappy that Second Sight 'were so reluctant to bring systemic failures to the fore at the meeting, nor see why the focus of the investigation has not now been centred on them. These systemic failures are proven facts, and are at the root of most of the SPMR cases… It is evident to us that these systemic failures should now become the yardstick that the individual cases are measured against. This approach would offer a quicker and far more efficient method of addressing the whole issue and would minimise the information required from POL, which is the main cause of the slow progress 2nd Sight has made with individual cases.'

16 April – JNA wrote to Second Sight, asking for comment on Alan's letter

10 May – Second Sight email back to James

1. Issues Alan calls 'systemic' are not proven beyond doubt.
2. Different understanding of the use of the word 'systemic' – Second Sight understand it to mean failures encountered right across the network of 11.500 branches – this is NOT what is being found. They are finding some issues that derive from software, but some from operational procedures as well.
3. Second Sight are relaying a series of assertions (not finalised and irrefutable evidence) to Post Office, in Spot Reviews, and they believe the Post Office must be

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given chance to refute these assertions. Spot Reviews now going very well (11 May email update). They have not reached conclusions on any issue / case yet.

4. At meeting, Second Sight did not want to offer any premature information, unfounded assertions.
5. 'As we have progressed through the individual cases, we have come across more and more examples of the same old issues, interspersed …with new ones and one-off matters.'

12 May – Alan Bates' email response to Second Sight

1. Confusion regarding use of terms – 'system errors' versus 'systemic failures'. Alan has faith Second Sight will be able to track down system errors (errors in Horizon), and prove their existence.
2. But he argues that 10-12 systemic failures (failures of an entire process) with Post Office and Horizon can already be proved, and it is immoral of the Post Office to continue its usual working practices when failures can already be proved to exist.
    a. **The nub of this appears to be that the Post office is continuing to call on SubPost Masters to come forward if they find a problem, but it continues to conduct prosecutions on those who step up.**

12 May – Second Sight email response to Alan Bates

1. Second Sight agree with Alan.
2. N.B. 'You have mentioned "numerous miscarriages of justice" and it's pretty clear that James has also focussed on that.... as has POL's top management. You, Kay, Ian and I all know how much reliance has been placed by the courts (Criminal and Civil) on POL's assurances (such as that "*there is no remote access to the system or to individual branch terminals which would allow accounting records to be manipulated in any way*"). As you also know, Alan, several of the Spot Reviews have presented what appears to be evidence that completely undermines and disproves statements like that. I am pretty certain that, in the event that even one of those Spot Reviews (for example SR005 the Bracknell Basement/Rudkin one) turns out to be irrefutable, then James will completely understand the implications, as I'm sure will POL's senior management.'