

Message

From: Paula Vennells
on behalf of Paula Vennells
Sent: 04/07/2013 21:56:26
To: Martin Edwards
CC: Mark R Davies [mailto:mark.davies@gro.co.uk]
Subject: Re: Monday Meeting

GRO

GRO

let's discuss tomorrow then - I imagined this could be a mechanism for delivering just that. Without some significant changes to the way we run the business - ie., forcing us to act differently, it won't happen quickly enough.

I do like the helpline. Very much. But if (when) it doesn't work, an independent safety net is not a bad idea. Happy to remain open though :)

Thanks both. Note sent to Board anyway.
Cheers, Paula

Sent from my iPad

On 4 Jul 2013, at 22:41, "Martin Edwards" <martin.edwards@gro.co.uk> wrote:

Really good sign that he shared the email, and we obviously need to engage with the substance of his concerns. Will think about it further overnight, but my initial gut reaction is that his proposal is inconsistent with where we want to take the business, i.e. a modern, professional retail business working through a network of equally modern and professional retailers, with models of engagement built on the best principles of mutualisation. This instead feels like a resource intensive and cumbersome solution to the inevitable conflicts that emerge in the old style business.

I'd be more attracted to something lighter touch, e.g. Mark's confidential hotline idea.

On your specific question, I don't think this changes anything in the email to the board - would be premature to go into this debate.

Thanks,
Martin

From: Mark R Davies
Sent: Thursday, July 04, 2013 09:15 PM
To: Paula Vennells
Cc: Martin Edwards; Mark R Davies
Subject: Re: Monday Meeting

Very interesting. In principle I am attracted to it, though obviously there are lots of issues and clearly we would have to have some important safeguards.

In the statement just sent, we have proposed the Branch User Forum and also a working group to review our processes around support and training. So it would be possible for Alan to bring this idea to the group and I think we should look at it, without committing too hard at this stage. Could we get an independent reviewer, a Patrick Burns type figure, to lead this review?

I was also musing on the way home about whether we could create an independent and confidential hotline/helpline which might be another way of creating this middle man role.

They are quite attractive ideas politically - they can be linked in to a responsible business agenda.

Funding is an issue and it could become an industry.

But worth thinking about.

M

Sent from my iPad

On 4 Jul 2013, at 21:49, "Paula Vennells" <[REDACTED] GRO > wrote:

I am only sending to you in the first instance. Alan shared this in a goodwill sense. And although he didn't say it was confidential, it was a genuine gesture on his part.

I think there is some merit in it - I think I prefer ombudsman or independent expert than adjudicator, but would bow to the experts on appropriate terminology.

Martin, thx for the board mail - does this change any of it do you think?

Paula

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: Alan Bates <[REDACTED] GRO >
Date: 4 July 2013 20:36:23 BST
To: <paula.vennells@[REDACTED] GRO >
Subject: Monday Meeting

Hello Paula,

The following is the content of the email I sent through to James Arbuthnot earlier today, it really is in a raw state. Regarding meeting on Monday, I am free any time after 3pm and may be able to make it slightly earlier if I can move another appointment, if that would help.

Regards

Alan

Dear Mr Arbuthnot,

Further to our telephone conversation yesterday, I have listed my thoughts on how Subpostmaster, Post Office and Horizon issues might be addressed in the future. I have long since held the view that there has to be a third party that a Subpostmaster can approach if they suddenly find they have problems and nowhere else to turn. I have just

expanded on that view but these are only my initial jottings on the issue, yet I think they are adequate to illustrate the type of structure that might be acceptable.

Independent Adjudicator

An external independent adjudicator has to be appointed to review cases and Horizon issues between Post Office and Subpostmasters.

If a Subpostmaster has had problems that the normal Post Office system cannot resolve, before that Subpostmaster finds themselves in a position of no return, they should have the option to approach the adjudicator in total confidentiality. The mechanism would not replace any of the Post Office systems that are there to deal with the serious cases of actual fraud or theft, but would exist to provide a means that a Subpostmaster may use to stop a small problem becoming life and career threatening.

The adjudicator should have the authority to demand documents from Post Office and the Subpostmaster as well as having a team of skilled technical and legal staff they can call upon who are able to gain access and check any system or documents that they deem necessary. As part of the agreement, and before a case is accepted, both parties would have to accept the decision from the adjudicator's office as being final.

Why is there a need for such a body?

The position between a Subpostmaster and Post Office with the use of Horizon is in part unique. Post Office designs, funds and maintains its Horizon system which it requires its agent, the Subpostmasters to use. Post Office then holds the Subpostmaster liable for all losses from that system regardless of however caused and without allowing the Subpostmaster full access to that system. In effect this removes any onus from Post Office to improve the system or user friendliness of that system to the benefit of the Subpostmaster, because any cost would be for Post Office to bear.

This situation has existed ever since the introduction of Horizon and has been behind much of the dissatisfaction that Subpostmasters have had with using Horizon, and which has often led to conflict.

Key Points:-

- The adjudicator would not replace or act as a Subpostmaster representative organization, the role would be solely to be

involved with day to day operational issues affecting Subpostmasters.

- The adjudicator has to show they are totally independent. They can neither be funded by Post Office, nor work from any Post Office building.
- Whilst liaison between Post Office and the adjudicator would be a necessity, all instances would become a matter of record.
- Each case undertaken would conclude with the production of a report of the findings and decision of the adjudicator. Copies of that report being issued to Post Office and the Subpostmaster.
- The adjudicator would retain the right to refer a case directly to Post Office to address or correct as it would if it began to find evidence of criminal intent. On such occasions the adjudicator would receive a report from Post Office as to what action they had undertaken with that case.
- The adjudicator would maintain records and statistics of case numbers, types and causes altering Post Office to issues that became common place.

Possible Funding Options

- A legacy from government after privatization.
- An annual 'insurance' levy /option for a Subpostmaster.
- A set fee based case charge to stop frivolous cases, £x's for simple cases or £xx's for more complex cases, matched by a similar amount from Post Office in each case that the adjudicator accepted.
- Combination of the other options