

Note of the telephone conversation between Paula Vennells and James Arbuthnot 23rd May 2013

- PV explained the purpose of the call, her support for the review, wanting to get the truth about horizon, but that the review was taking longer than everyone had hoped
- Explained the number of cases now involved and that some MP cases did not have enough evidence to proceed.
- PV supported progressing in a structured way with an interim report before recess looking at 2-3 cases then a full report by end Oct.
- PV told JA that there were still cases coming through (2 this week) and that this made concluding the review more difficult, suggested using the existing business review process with oversight from CoSec
- JA said he did not understand the confusion as he had been in email correspondence with SS and had not been given any indication that they were not progressing with the 2-3 top themes (did not say MP cases). He said SS said it had initially taken too long to get responses from POL but that evidence was now coming through more quickly.
- That was where he thought we were, and Janet and he were pushing for a meeting on these 3 areas before recess.
- He talked about spot reviews for the interim report, not MP cases.
- JA said that SS had certainly not said that they 'had not come across systemic problems'
- JA they said he had suggested 3 months ago to Alice? And SS that they should focus on the 2 best 'issues', the most challenging, he had not been given the impression that they were waiting for any confirmation as to the way forward.
- PV asked again if he would write to reiterating the TOR with the 2 areas (the system and the processes) and the focus on 2-3 cases, as it would be helpful if he restated this
- JA acknowledged that we were paying and it was getting costly
- He said SS were reacting to JFSA. He accepted that he had said they needed to JFSA happy, but JFSA should not be giving direction or running it. It would be ideal if we keep JFSA on board, as if we do not they will see the review as a whitewash.
- He suggested a 4 way meeting JFSA/POL/James And SS although he then pulled back from this and didn't mention it again
- It was agreed that JA would write out to SS and clarify how to proceed, 2-3 cases, restate TOR. And the need to draw to a close.
- James would not do this until after recess as he wanted to check the letter with Janet his PA first.

- PV said we needed to put boundaries in place, so that costs did not spiral, and to get to a close
- PV suggested that going forward could have a horizon user's focus group or forum to highlight improvements with the system, this would be made up of current subpostmasters, which rules out Alan Bates, but he could help to pull together the TOR.
- JA said that would be a good idea anyway.
- JFSA raised a concern with James that the Post Office is continuing with prosecutions despite the review taking place, predicated on the view that there is 'nothing wrong with horizon'. JA does not think we should be prosecuting on that basis (I think because SS have made noises about finding something)
- PV promised she would go back to James on this point.
- JA said we should not go ahead until we can prove there is no remote access to the system or branch terminal which can change the spms account. (He did not say so but I think SS have suggested this)
- JA said again we have to avoid access to the spm accounts
- PV explained the E&Y audit at year end which gave the IT controls a good report
- JA agreed that we needed to stop cases coming in and that future ones could go through the CoSec route

Issues not resolved

- What to do with MP cases without enough evidence? SS have to lead on this with JA. Alwen to also discuss with Janet.
- How to tell MPs with new cases they are not in the review – I will have to take that up with Janet as well, I suggest a coffee with me to talk things through as soon as she is back (my concern is that she is on holiday until after recess I have sent emails and left messages with no response so far)
- We need to stop SS briefing before they have all the evidence
- We need to think if we can help manage JFSA as James is unlikely to do so
- We need to discuss current prosecutions and go back to James on this issue.