

Message

From: Paula Vennells
on behalf of Paula Vennells
Sent: 09/10/2012 10:09:12
To: Theresa Iles
Subject: Fwd: Read out of James Arbuthnot / JFSA meeting

GRO

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Ppo Alice 121

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Begin forwarded message:

From: Martin Edwards1 < > GRO

Date: 4 October 2012 23:45:43 BST

To: Simon Baker < > GRO Alwen Lyons

< > GRO, Susan Crichton < > GRO

Cc: Paula Vennells < > GRO

Subject: Read out of James Arbuthnot / JFSA meeting

Simon, Alwen (and Sue to note on the prosecutions point in particular)

A short read-out of our meeting with James Arbuthnot (JA) and Alan Bates (AB) of the JFSA earlier today. The action points summarised at the end. I took detailed notes which I'm happy to debrief you on verbally, but the key points are captured below. (Paula - please chip in if I've missed anything important).

Overall a reasonably cordial meeting. JA took a back seat, stating that while he was hosting the meeting he saw his role as merely to facilitate a two way dialogue between JFSA and PO. (He also ended by saying that he didn't plan to mediate in the future - the follow-up discussions should be managed directly.)

The primary focus of the discussion was on how to encourage sub-postmasters to submit current cases of alleged Horizon errors to the 2nd Sight investigation. AB said he wasn't looking for blanket immunity from prosecution and debt recovery actions (which he acknowledged would be subject to exploitation) but rather for PO to provide sub-postmasters with firm reassurances that they would not be victimised or disadvantaged for raising cases. Paula said she could absolutely guarantee there would be no negative come back and that all cases would be handled appropriately.

There was therefore broad agreement on the principles, but no commitments given on precisely how they would be communicated and implemented. AB handed over a draft of a four page "immunity agreement principle" (which I'll forward in a separate email), which he wanted us to advertise in Subspace or by other means. We didn't discuss the drafting, but Paula said we would look at it and also consider the arrangements for communicating our reassurances and for ring-fencing the use of personal records submitted to PO as part of the 2nd Sight investigation.

Paula also said that we would conduct another trawl of our recent call centre records to see if there were any unresolved issues with Horizon which could potentially be submitted to the investigation.

Over the remainder of the meeting AB raised unnamed cases as examples of alleged inadequacies in training, support and audit which could lead to accounting errors. Paula said that while such wider issues were beyond the scope of the 2nd Sight investigation, and weren't in her view representative of the whole business, we would readily investigate any specific complaints. She also invited AB to come to 148OS to provide his feedback and experiences directly to the network support teams (which he did not accept explicitly).

AB also raised concerns about PO's approach to prosecutions, implying that they could be initiated with lower standards of evidence that the CPS would require, and could sometimes push sub-postmasters into vulnerable positions. Paula said it was absolutely essential that the judicial process was flawless, and therefore we would consider this point in detail.

Summary of action points (let me know if these should be allocated to other people):

- 1) **Simon** (in consultation with lawyers and others) to consider AB's proposed wording on the commitment to provide "immunity" from reprisals, which will almost certainly need to be fundamentally redrafted (while retaining the spirit as far as possible). In parallel we should consider how this language will be communicated (e.g. via a letter to the JFSA or through Subspace), which will affect the form of words. We should obviously get back to AB with our proposals ASAP.
- 2) **Simon** - please can you liaise with the right people to conduct the trawl of call centre records which we committed to do?
- 3) **Sue** to consider the prosecution issue as part of your wider work on this topic (although we may need to be ready with a quick line of defence).
- 4) **Martin** to email AB to explain how we're following up on the meeting, and to reiterate the invitation to come into 148 to provide wider feedback to the network support teams.

Many thanks for all your help.

Martin

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