
From: Mark R Davies [GRO]
Sent: Tue 11/08/2015 8:55:50 AM (UTC)
To: Paula Vennells [GRO]
Subject: Re: Panorama - interview

Thank you Paula

Mark Davies
Communications and Corporate Affairs Director
Post Office Ltd

Mobile: [GRO]

> On 11 Aug 2015, at 09:33, Paula Vennells <[GRO]> wrote:

>

> I agree completely - I have no wish to give any legitimacy to Panorama and our statement should make that clear. Where we can give an objective view, eg., in other media then fine.

>

> Mark, if we do other media interviews then the same point has to be made.

>

> Thanks for your work - as always never easy but I do think this is the right call. The decisions will be taken by the proper courts, not a TV one.

>

> Paula

>

> Paula Vennells

> Chief Executive

> Post Office Ltd

>

> T: [GRO]

> [GRO]

>

> Sent from my iPad

>

>> On 10 Aug 2015, at 20:54, Mark R Davies <[GRO]> wrote:

>>

>> Dear all

>>

>> This note is designed, following a GE discussion today, to set out why we are not proposing to put up an interview for Panorama on Horizon.

>>

>> It's worth saying at the outset that this is a very difficult decision. My instinct is always to be as transparent as possible to avoid the impression of "having something to hide". However on this occasion I believe the disadvantages of giving an interview outweigh the advantages.

>>

>> The pros of giving an interview are that:

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>> - we show we are taking the issue seriously

>>

>> - we can demonstrate a degree of empathy for those who believe they have been badly treated

>>

>> - it sends a message of confidence to our people

>>

>> - we know that in Angela we have someone who knows the issues inside out

>>

>> - We are seen as open and transparent

>>

>> The cons are:

>>

>> - we give legitimacy to Panorama's "investigation" which is in truth a rehash of precious allegations

>>

>> - we are in a position where we are putting someone up without Panorama having provided any evidence to support their claims: and are therefore doing so without having a clear understanding of the lines of enquiry

>>

>> - we know the programme is working from a pre-determined agenda and is not seeking an interview to balance the story but to create a TV "moment" where the Post Office spokesman is unable to answer questions

>>

>> - the reporter is John Sweeney, whose modus operandi is sensationalist and aimed at creating an impression in line with the point above. We were sent, by accident, an email from the producer of Panorama which clearly indicated their intent to 'ambush' Angela with questions she would be unprepared for

>>

>> - by appearing in the programme we give them the opportunity to use it as a defence: that the programme is balanced because we appear in it

>>

>> - by not appearing we force the BBC to reflect our robust written statement and points in order to meet its obligations to fairness and balance

>>

>> - 60-70% of the line of questioning will be about individual cases – all cases which are with CCRC and which we cannot speak about

>>

>> - The extracts from documents Panorama intend to use to 'support' their premise concern individual cases we cannot speak about

>>

>> - The programme would be more noteworthy for Panorama with an interview – it will, although damaging, be a duller programme without

>>

>> - Interview can be edited and would be very much designed to look as though PO has 'something to hide' (again a main premise of the programme)

>>

>> - Approach agreed with Brunswick, our external advisers

>>

>> We do propose some approaches aimed at mitigating the risks:

>>

>> - a robust public statement which we will issue in advance and proactively push with other journalists

>>

>> - a presumption that we will put a spokesman up if Panorama is able to secure wider news coverage (eg other BBC outlets)

>>

>> - we have recorded a film with Angela for internal and external use on our channels and YouTube etc...

>>

>> I hope this helps. It is not an easy decision but in the circumstances and having weighed up the points above I do believe we are taking the right approach.

>>

>> Mark

>>

>>

>> Sent from my iPad