

**POSTMASTER GROUP ACTION
CONFIDENTIAL AND LEGALLY PRIVILEGED**

Steering Group Meeting: 12 July 2017

DECISION: SHOULD POST OFFICE CHANGE ITS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY?

BACKGROUND:

- Since the beginning of this litigation, Post Office has been issuing short and neutral statements in response to low level media coverage. These statements simply acknowledge that Post Office will not comment on live litigation.
- Whilst the Claimants are not permitted under Court rules to use Post Office's Defence (which will be served on 18 July) for media purposes, it is likely that it will be leaked.
- By 26 July all Claimants joining the Group Action will need to have formally issued a Claim, giving near finality to the numbers of Claimants. Freeths have confirmed in recent correspondence that they expect the total number of Claimants to be around 400-500.
- The above two factors may be a catalyst for some media activity by the Claimants. Post Office could therefore consider putting out a more partisan comms message, based around the strength of its Defence and the weaknesses in the Claimants' claims.

ADVANTAGES OF MORE PARTISAN MESSAGE:

- Post Office's passive media position may be encouraging the Claimants who perceive POL's silence as a sign of weakness. This may make it more difficult to settle down the line.
- A neutral statement in response to comments made by Claimants could appear weak. The Post Office network, including both postmasters and clients, may be disappointed if Post Office does not issue a firmer response.
- If Post Office makes clear that it intends to take a strong defence, this is likely to come to the attention of the Claimants' funder and could have a knock-on effect on the funder's willingness to increase its investment.
- By 26 July all Claimants will have joined the litigation so if a stronger line were to be taken, Post Office cannot be accused of deterring anyone from signing up.
- If the comms lines mirror the Defence wording, Post Office can have confidence that these lines have been fully vetted.

DISADVANTAGES

- A more aggressive comms line may create media interest where there is none. History tells us that media interest tends to support the postmasters over Post Office regardless of what Post Office says.

RECOMMENDATION:

Our view is that Post Office should maintain its current reactive and neutral comms strategy unless significant media interest arises. If there is an uptick in interest, then Post Office would be justified in adopting a more partisan message, based on the positions adopted in the Defence.