

Speaking note for call with Jo Swinson on SS investigation, 3 July

Suggested running order for the conversation:

- a) Update her on the position with the investigation and the process through to Monday
- b) Reassure her on the extent of the problem, i.e.:
 - no systemic issues with computer system;
 - many of the reported issues with our support systems are historical and have already been addressed - but we're determined to keep on improving;
 - needs to be kept in the perspective of the enormous volume of transactions going through Horizon;
 - no reason to believe that past convictions are unsafe)
- c) Highlight the significant reputational risks if the report isn't communicated in a careful and balanced way. Update her on JA meeting in this context, and if necessary ask for her support (either directly or through Ministerial colleagues) to manage him to a better place.
- d) Reassure her that we are preparing a detailed communications and stakeholder plan and will keep her officials closely involved.
- e) Briefly explain proposed process beyond next Monday (i.e. user forum to close down other MPs' cases and learn any lessons)

Speaking notes:

- To recap: Second Sight appointed last summer to investigate alleged issues with Horizon. Appointed by PO, but independent process working in consultation with James Arbuthnot (and JFSA).
- They've conducted an initial review of 49 cases (29 from MPs, 20 via JFSA), then narrowed down to 4 "best" cases for detailed review. Interim report due to be shared with JA and MPs on Monday.
- We will see a draft on Friday and already have a briefing meeting scheduled with your officials that day.
- Based on provisional verbal briefing from Second Sight, we expect them to conclude that there is no evidence of systemic problems with the computer system itself based on the 4 cases they have assessed in detail – but they will draw attention to issues/areas for improvement with our wider training and support processes.
- Many of these issues historical, and process changes have already made. But we recognise that there is scope for further improvement, which we are happy to acknowledge. (Links to wider theme of changing the culture of the Post Office which we've discussed).

- And important these issues are kept in perspective – 6 million transactions per day across 11,800 branches. More transactions per second (1,500) than in this entire review. It is inevitable that some issues will arise on a system of this scale – the important thing is that they are handled properly.
- Our concern is that the report and its findings may not be communicated in a factual and even-handed way. [[We fear that JA wants to turn this into a bigger issue – with him as the champion of a campaign against miscarriages of justice.]] TO UPDATE IN LIGHT OF MEETING WITH JA
- [[Would appreciate any support that you or your Ministerial colleagues could provide in persuading JA to take a sensible approach to this issue. The Post Office is too important a business to millions of customers and thousands of spmrs for confidence to be undermined unfairly.]]
- We're developing a detailed communications and stakeholder plan which we will share with your officials over the next couple of days.
- Also need to think about how we manage the process beyond next Monday. There is an expectation that the other MPs cases will be reviewed by SS through a second stage of the process. Our concern is that the process has already taken too long to the detriment of everyone concerned, and we also have to have regard for the appropriate use of public money.
- So our proposal is to set up a user group (chaired by our CIO) which would meet regularly to learn from experiences of spmrs and to provide a forum for continual improvement. Our plan is that this would involve the JFSA (and potentially SS) for the immediate period with the priority of learning any further lessons from existing MPs cases.