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Message

From: Paula Vennells GRO
on behalf of Paula Vennells [redacted]
Sent: 04/07/2013 22:01:07
To: Mark R Davies GRO
CC: Martin Edwards GRO
Subject: Re: Monday Meeting

Thought as much. All depends... Time for bed - I began to imagine chairing a user group with JFSA and Unite and Fed and CWu..

Sent from my iPad

On 4 Jul 2013, at 22:58, "Mark R Davies" GRO wrote:

> Yep did think about this but mentioned them for fear of inflaming George! Lets discuss
>
> Sent from my iPhone
>
> On 4 Jul 2013, at 22:46, "Paula Vennells" GRO wrote:
>
> > Sorry should also have said below - as we know, there is antagonism vs NFSP from JFSA. Stating in our release that NFSP will be in the group could be inflammatory. We might just mention "other stakeholders" whilst our priority is on managing JFSA. P
> >
> > Sent from my iPad
> >
> > On 4 Jul 2013, at 22:39, "Paula Vennells" GRO wrote:
> >
> > > Interesting idea of Patrick Burns, I think he could do this well.
> > >
> > > I do think the adjudicator/ombudsman role has an attraction and we'd better have a view: as you say Mark, I can see JA wanting to announce such. In fact, Patrick Burns or Mike O'Connor, who is looking for a new role (portfolio - so would be ok), would be ideal ombudsman candidates/types.
> > >
> > > Mark, is it worth bringing Mike G into the loop - he will have past insights and is just a good thinker as to how we could make it work?
> > >
> > > I like much of the draft statement. Thank you. And will read again in the morning. I did suggest to Alan Bates that I would be happy to offer him a quote. Worth a punt? P
> > >
> > > Sent from my iPad
> > >
> > > On 4 Jul 2013, at 22:16, "Mark R Davies" GRO wrote:
> > >
> > > > Very interesting. In principle I am attracted to it, though obviously there are lots of issues and clearly we would have to have some important safeguards.

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In the statement just sent, we have proposed the Branch User Forum and also a working group to review our processes around support and training. So it would be possible for Alan to bring this idea to the group and I think we should look at it, without committing too hard at this stage. Could we get an independent reviewer, a Patrick Burns type figure, to lead this review?

I was also musing on the way home about whether we could create an independent and confidential hotline/helpline which might be another way of creating this middle man role.

They are quite attractive ideas politically - they can be linked in to a responsible business agenda.

Funding is an issue and it could become an industry.

But worth thinking about.

M

Sent from my iPad

On 4 Jul 2013, at 21:49, "Paula Vennells" <GRO> wrote:

> I am only sending to you in the first instance. Alan shared this in a goodwill sense. And although he didn't say it was confidential, it was a genuine gesture on his part.
>
> I think there is some merit in it - I think I prefer ombudsman or independent expert than adjudicator, but would bow to the experts on appropriate terminology.
>
> Martin, thx for the board mail - does this change any of it do you think?
>
> Paula
>
> Sent from my iPad
>
> Begin forwarded message:
>
> **From:** Alan Bates
> **GRO**

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Date: 4 July 2013 20:36:23 BST
To: <paula.vennells@GRO GRO
Subject: Monday Meeting

Hello Paula,

The following is the content of the email I sent through to James Arbuthnot earlier today, it really is in a raw state. Regarding meeting on Monday, I am free any time after 3pm and may be able to make it slightly earlier if I can move another appointment, if that would help.

Regards

Alan

Dear Mr Arbuthnot,

Further to our telephone conversation yesterday, I have listed my thoughts on how Subpostmaster, Post Office and Horizon issues might be addressed in the future. I have long since held the view that there has to be a third party that a Subpostmaster can approach if they suddenly find they have problems and nowhere else to turn. I have just expanded on that view but these are only my

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initial jottings on the issue, yet I think they are adequate to illustrate the type of structure that might be acceptable.

Independent Adjudicator

An external independent adjudicator has to be appointed to review cases and Horizon issues between Post Office and Subpostmasters.

If a Subpostmaster has had problems that the normal Post Office system cannot resolve, before that Subpostmaster finds themself in a position of no return, they should have the option to approach the adjudicator in total confidentiality. The mechanism would not replace any of the Post Office systems that are there to deal with the serious cases of actual fraud or theft, but would exist to provide a means that a Subpostmaster may use to stop a small problem becoming life and career threatening.

The adjudicator should have the authority to

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demand documents from Post Office and the Subpostmaster as well as having a team of skilled technical and legal staff they can call upon who are able to gain access and check any system or documents that they deem necessary. As part of the agreement, and before a case is accepted, both parties would have to accept the decision from the adjudicator's office as being final.

Why is there a need for such a body?

The position between a Subpostmaster and Post Office with the use of Horizon is in part unique. Post Office designs, funds and maintains its Horizon system which it requires its agent, the Subpostmasters to use. Post Office then holds the Subpostmaster liable for all losses from that system regardless of however caused and without allowing the Subpostmaster full access to that system. In effect this removes any onus from Post Office to improve the system or user

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friendliness of that system to the benefit of the Subpostmaster, because any cost would be for Post Office to bear.

This situation has existed ever since the introduction of Horizon and has been behind much of the dissatisfaction that Subpostmasters have had with using Horizon, and which has often led to conflict.

Key Points:-

- The adjudicator would not replace or act as a Subpostmaster representative organization, the role would be solely to be involved with day to day operational issues affecting Subpostmasters .
- The adjudicator has to show they are totally independent. T hey can neither be funded by Post Office, nor work from any Post Office building.

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- Whilst liaison between Post Office and the adjudicator would be a necessity, all instances would become a matter of record.
- Each case undertaken would conclude with the production of a report of the findings and decision of the adjudicator. Copies of that report being issued to Post Office and the Subpostmaster.
- The adjudicator would retain the right to refer a case directly to Post Office to address or correct as it would if it began to find evidence of criminal intent. On such occasions the adjudicator would receive a report from Post Office as to what action they had undertaken with that case.

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- The adjudicator would maintain records and statistics of case numbers, types and causes altering Post Office to issues that became common place.

Possible Funding Options

- A legacy from government after privatization.
- An annual 'insurance' levy /option for a Subpostmaster.
- A set fee based case charge to stop frivolous cases, £x's for simple cases or £xx's for more complex cases, matched by a similar amount from Post Office in each case that the adjudicator accepted.
- Combination of the other options