

Message

From: Paula Vennells [GRO]
Sent: 06/07/2013 07:43:08
To: Alice Perkins CB [GRO]; Neil McCausland [GRO]; Virginia Holmes [GRO]; Alasdair Marnoch [GRO]; Susannah Storey [GRO]; Tim Franklin [GRO]
CC: Chris M Day [GRO]; Alwen Lyons [GRO]; Susan Crichton [GRO]; Martin Edwards [GRO]; Lesley J Sewell [GRO]; Mark R Davies [GRO]
Subject: SS 5 July update
Attachments: image001.png; image002.png

Dear all,

A quick further update on yesterday's developments with the Second Sight (SS) review:

- I have had two further very constructive telephone conversations with Alan Bates of the JFSA, which confirmed his willingness to work collaboratively with us in taking forward our response to the review. In particular he agreed to participate in a new user forum to provide feedback on training and support issues related to Horizon and bring the existing review process to a conclusion.

- It is worth emphasising that AB's main issue is not 'the computer' but the human aspect: how in his view Post Office failed to support and help vulnerable and 'muddle headed' [sic] Spmrs. We had a useful conversation about this and I will update you more on Tuesday's call. He will collaborate with us in the user forum but will also need reassurance that we will not just ignore past cases. We will work with him to understand what happened and I offered again to meet him and one or two of his colleagues personally. (This time he accepted.) This is the most emotive aspect as we are dealing with perceptions and feelings. It needs careful handling but by working closely with him over the summer, rather than at arms length via SS, I am hopeful we will find a way through.

- He also raised the idea of setting up a new independent third party that spmrs can approach if they are facing issues with Horizon which cannot be resolved through the normal Post Office processes (but which doesn't replace or undermine our existing systems for dealing with serious cases of actual fraud or theft). The idea aligns with some of our own thinking on the need to set up a safety net to prevent small problems snow-balling into more serious issues, which can then lead to prosecution or the termination of spmrs' contracts. We are therefore inclined to agree to the idea - in principle - in our response to the report, without committing to the specific details, which will have to be considered carefully over the next couple of months (with the involvement of JFSA and other stakeholders).

- Alwen and I then had a further meeting with James Arbuthnot yesterday afternoon which was also positive – we briefed him on our proposed response to the review and the points noted above, including our plans for working collaboratively with the JFSA, which he appeared to be very pleased about. This is hopefully an important step forwards in ensuring that his media commentary on the report on Monday is reasonably balanced, although risks remain nonetheless given his desire to gain decent coverage. We agreed to share our respective draft media statements, and will formulate our final handling strategy in light of that. (We will forward under separate cover either over the weekend, or early Monday.)

- One of the main reputational and potentially financial risks arising from the review relates to possible attempts to reopen past prosecutions based on the findings. James Arbuthnot was certainly focussed on this. We had a stronger exchange on this point. It is not clear that any new evidence has emerged. If it does, then as I pointed out to James, legal routes to appeal already exist. Susan and the

legal team are working with our external lawyers to consider whether there are any implications arising from the report for past cases, and we can provide a further update on this work next week.

In terms of the report itself, we received the full draft from SS yesterday and have sent them back a version with tracked changes on a number of sections which we (and Fujitsu) believe are either factually inaccurate or open to misinterpretation. We will be keeping in touch with them over the weekend to understand how they intend to respond to these suggested changes.

I will update you on any further significant developments over the weekend or on Monday.

Kind regards,
Paula

Sent from my iPad

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