POL00099223

Message

From: Paula Vennells
on behalf of Paula Vennells GRO
Sent: 14/07/2013 16:00:29
To: Alice Perkins GRO
Subject: Re: The case for independence in the Post Office appeals system

Hi Alice,

I agree the two of you must restore the relationship; if not, it is not tenable for Susan to continue with this. I trust you implicitly, so do forgive me for stating the obvious, but belt and braces is always useful in sensitive situations: Susan shared her feelings with me in confidence and at a time when she was feeling very low about ' letting this happen to the business she worked for'.

I'm sure together you can repair it but it's a F2F conversation; as Susan and I need to have as well. I imagine after this weekend she will be of a very different view, having spoken to one Spmr herself and read the background to what happened to Alan Bates. (I will also send on separately to you.)

No need t reply to this. See you tomorrow.

Paula

Sent from my iPad

On 14 Jul 2013, at 14:50, "Alice Perkins" <GRO> wrote:

> Thanks Paula.
> As you say, for our 1:1.
> Susan and I will need to talk if she is really up for it. Can't have stuff unspoken. It's too serious for that.
> On Alasdair, need to think whether this is really a role for a non-exec who is chair of ARC. It may be. Just need to think that through. And as he is a non-exec, I think it would be for me to broach it with him in the first place.
> Look forward to discussing this tomorrow.
> A
>
> ---
>
> **From**: Paula Vennells [mailto: GRO]
> **Sent**: Sunday, July 14, 2013 10:38 AM
> **To**: Alice Perkins
> **Subject**: Re: The case for independence in the Post Office appeals system
>
> Hi Alice, Susan says she is up for it. She consulted a lawyer who we both know, and who I rate highly, who (to put it briefly) told her she should get on with it!
>
> I have also said that we might make the HR change, ie, Fay to report to me in the interim, whilst we recruit the senior HR role. It would reflect the new structure and also give Susan a clear path to concentrate on what needs to be done here. But I will decide that after we have worked out the final plans for how we handle the SS/JFSA actions. The programme, as that is what it will need to be, will need a leader, but the resource cannot just be Susan as there will be network operations changes needed, as well as Mark on the reputation impacts. And as I mentioned, it would be great if Alasdair would chair an internal group. (I was planning to discuss more with

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you and then call him.) Other resources such as Angela and Belinda are still in the mix. Susan and I are getting together tomorrow with Kevin, to work out how we approach all this.

I will follow up with a face to face discussion with Susan as well - always best to see someone say they are up for something (we were only able to speak on the phone). And I'll clarify the final approach after we have had the Board session.

Let's pick up at our 121: I do want to make sure I am not missing something: this is a particularly good example of where people and life are not tidy!

I hope you are having a wonderful weekend - the West Country in the sunshine sounds blissful.

Paula

Sent from my iPad

On 13 Jul 2013, at 11:33, "Alice Perkins" <GRO> wrote:

> When it suits you, could you please let me know what SC has decided to do? Or is she reflecting over the weekend? (Sorry, I can't remember what you told me about her timescale.)
> A
>
> ---
>
> **From**: Paula Vennells [mailto:GRO
> **Sent**: Friday, July 12, 2013 06:18 PM
> **To**: Alice Perkins
> **Subject**: Re: The case for independence in the Post Office appeals system
>
> Well...
> Let's just say if you and Jack know +Desmond Tutu ... I wasn't that far off in my Justice & Reconciliation Commission idea. (And spookily Mark just had the same idea.)
>
> Probably best to tell you rather than mail. We were right to do the review.
>
> Susan btw has been splendid today!
>
> P
>
> Sent from my iPhone
>
> On 12 Jul 2013, at 10:08, "Alice Perkins" <GRO> wrote:
>
> > Well done Paula.
> > I admire you for this email to Susan/Kevin et al.
> > This is painful, time consuming and expensive and I am so sorry it is happening when there is so much going on of such importance but in a funny way, this is potentially strategically symbolic and therefore potentially of equivalent importance in the long run to our strategy discussions. You are doing the right thing and I believe it will pay huge dividends in the end.

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I look forward to hearing what happens next.
Alice
Alice

From: Paula Vennells [mailto: GRO]
Sent: Friday, July 12, 2013 08:38 AM
To: Alice Perkins
Subject: Fwd: The case for independence in the Post Office appeals system

Hi Alice, I hope you are well.

This is not what I would want to wake you up with. A subpostmaster email to JS copied to a large number of MPs about a situation, which if it is correct (and it needs checking) is an example of why the SS review was worthwhile.

It could nonetheless be an opportunity for a possible 'triumph' out of disaster.

I suggest you read my mail below, then go onto to read the Spmr's mail to JS and his attachment.

Happy to talk; though to protect your Friday, I can update you after my call with Susan and Kevin.

Paula

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: Paula Vennells
GRO
Date: 12 July 2013 08:29:03 BST
To: Kevin Gilliland
GRO , Susan Crichton
Cc: Mark R Davies
GRO Martin Edwards
Subject: Fwd: The case for independence in the Post Office appeals system

Hi both/all, please see below and read the attachment.

I would like to take this as an example of how we can begin to turn the SS situation around. And I am taking it very seriously - there are many interested MPs copied and a letter direct to our minister, but irrespective of that (which is clearly important) I

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want the business to respond willingly and with transparency and pace.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the case and there will be views on both sides, if this Spmr has had an unblemished record for 33 years, (which I would want us to verify), why are we suspending him while we investigate around £2000?

That is the optic.

It was already a complicated case (ATM rates related) compounded by a further and totally separate issue, which appears to be caused by the fact that our accounting procedures do not allow for cheque acceptance for stamp purchases over a certain value.n the case in point.

To be very very clear, I am not saying we should abandon disciplinary action. But his note repeats some of what we hear in the SS review: an overbearing/impersonal process, one that is not proportionate to the record or the case in hand, and one that penalises the cashflow/costs of a small business less able to bear those in the short-term. In a case like this, perhaps a formal written warning might have been better as an initial stake in the ground, while we explored the issues - it would be more understanding of Spmr colleagues situations, it would diffuse any angst on the part of PO colleagues trying to understand the confusion, and certainly would be less costly for us: the cost of public funds deployed this case already outweighs the cost of the error/missing funds, which if I have understood correctly are/will not be missing at all.

I would like an answer by this pm as to whether there is any good reason why we cannot just clear this up now. This is a chance for us to move at pace, email Mr Woodrow and the MPs and show that the new PO has common sense and can act quickly but not ignore the risks to the business.

We will then need quickly to work out guidelines for colleagues involved in such cases, to allow for more flexibility, better understanding and reaction to cases/ £ thresholds, as well as impacts on manager support to guide staff.

Susan and I have a 121 this afternoon, Kevin can you join please for the first 15 minutes, I want to understand firstly what we can do about this and

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secondly, what we might need to think about to be able to respond responsibly going forwards. (Someone should call in from Chris' area - please could Susan decide.)

Mark/Martin can you liaise with Will. I will send this onto Alice, it may well reach her in some way and I know she would want to be aware.

Many thanks, I realise this is not easy but it is the best response so that we are seen to be true to our word, and it is absolutely a chance for a 'triumph' as JA would say.

Paula

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: DAVID WOODROW
GRO
Date: 11 July 2013 15:29:32 BST
To: GRO
<jo.swinson.mp GRO
Cc:
"paula.vennells GRO "
GRO >,
JimSheridan
GRO
"alan.bates GRO
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> GRO
<jim.shannon.mp GRO

Subject: The case for independence in the Post Office appeals system

Reply-To: DAVID WOODROW
GRO

Dear Jo.
I write to you as the minister dealing with the inquiry into the Horizon system and I watched with interest the debate on Monday as a constituent in your neighbouring constituency
You seemed to make quite an issue of the fact that there was only 47 cases that have come to light. As a currently suspended subpostmaster after 33 years service I can assure you that the 47 are only the tip of the iceberg. I personally paid out £1900 last year as our office could not resolve a horizon issue to do with reversing M.V.L.transactions.
Only two weeks ago P.O.C.L. issued a very complicated procedure to resolve such matters but because it involves a separate government agency the procedure is fraught with problems and that would be confirmed by helpline operators.
Why I am currently suspended is because I broke the terms of my contract by retaining £2000 in lieu of a rates issue which is exclusive to

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Scotland and is partly due to poor support for current Sub Postmasters from P.O.C.L
I attach a document which I submitted to my first interview at the end of which I was given the option of resigning ot take my case to appeal.
I chose to appeal, but in light of the debate on Monday, the fact that the appeal is to be heard by a Post Office Manager seems a bit contrary to one of the accepted outcomes of the inquiry that there should be some form of independence in any appeal process.
My office has now been closed for nearly 8 weeks and I will attend my appeal on Tuesday 16th in the hope that I and my staff can get back to serving our community.
I am copying this to all the M.P.s who took part in the debate as they all had issues that need to be resolved. There was however a common denominator in that P.O.C.L. has been lacking in their support and training for Sub Postmasters.

Yours sincerely
David Woodrow (Sub postmaster in limbo Bishopton)

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