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From: Susan Crichton GRO
Sent: Thur 05/07/2012 8:56:19 AM (UTC)
To: Susan Crichton GRO
Subject: FW: Today's Meeting

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From: Ron Warmington GRO
Sent: 04 July 2012 21:29
To: 'Susan Crichton'; 'Simon Baker'
Cc: 'Ian Henderson'
Subject: FW: Today's Meeting

As reported verbally, a good meeting. Ian and I felt it went well. My feedback later in the afternoon, from GRO James' PA, is that they felt good about the meeting too.

As well as James and GRO .. and Ian and myself... the following were there:

Andrew Bridgen MP
Mike Wood MP
Tessa Munt MP
Mary Glindon MP

A representative of Andrew Garnier MP also attended.

Oliver Letwin MP sent his apologies but wants to be closely involved going forward.

JA took the lead and welcomed us, summarising what we were there to address. Nothing surprising here: they wanted to know how we came to be short-listed/selected for the work; what we understood the scope to be; whether we were likely to carry out a one-sided, biased or inadequate job; whether we expected to drill deep into Horizon; and to whom we expected to report. RW answered all those questions.

JA stated that it was a pity that, having cleared it that the JFSA leader Alan Bates could attend, in the end he was unable to do so at short notice. JA clearly wanted to - and now wants to - get some buy-in from AB and seemed genuinely disappointed that the whole thing now couldn't be buttoned up today. He asked whether RW would be prepared to come back for a three-person meeting in his (JA's) office. RW of course offered to do that. GRO will arrange. Apparently, AB had commented along the lines that "this all seemed to be moving rather too quickly. All agreed that that seemed a strange and inappropriate comment.

Mike Wood - initially bordering on hostile - challenged us on how the sample of cases had been selected. RW answered that the sample was not yet finalised but that they (the MPs) had largely driven it. MW asked whether his constituent's case was included (don't know but don't think so as yet... will need to be... need the name). One or two (mainly MW and AB) pressed for a larger sample. We expect them to call for that. RW said that it would be surprising if the sample of cases pushed forward by the MPs would fail to surface to the reviewers instances of the sort of Horizon-induced shortages that have been so publicly alleged if they are there to be found.

Some discussion on whether there could be bugs in the (or for that matter any) system that could generate spurious cash shortages... or perhaps some

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central figure(s) milking off funds and laying a trail of blame pointing to innocent others. Answer: hypothetically possible... we've dealt with cases like that before. Near sighs of relief that we weren't trotting out the (clearly not accepted) party line that the system was and is bug-free and above suspicion. This point seems to be central: almost all of them seem to harbour suspicions that there is "something out there". They wanted to be assured that we're genuinely independent, objective and have open minds on this point and that the PO is asking us - and will allow us - to dig deep. We carried out a reality check here, saying that we'd NOT been asked to dig deep into Horizon looking for deeply-embedded bugs at the code level... indeed, we'd not recommend that course of action (certainly not at this stage). Rather, we trust our instincts and experience that a deep review of a sample of cases, focussing not on whether there had been False Accounting but on IDENTIFYING THE UNDERLYING ROOT CAUSE OF THE DISCREPANCY, would without doubt help us to formulate a recommendation as to whether some such deep digging would, later, be worthwhile. MB said that the conclusion of the Case Review would probably provide them (the MPs) with an opportunity to call for such a deep dive system review.

JA conceded that he was prepared to be convinced (he seemed to have a balanced, open attitude here) of the guilt of his constituent(s). RW said that the term "guilt" needed, in his mind, to be clarified... the Reviewers would pay little heed to convictions for False Accounting. What we would focus on would be identifying the real cause of the losses;... and... ideally, where the money went; whether it was stolen; by whom; and WHY. But we had to be realistic in that we might never know - indeed the people in the office themselves may not know - the answers to those key questions. To that end we will probably need to re-generate (using retained computer records, interviews, etc.) the most likely destiny of the missing funds and underlying root causes of the losses.

The issue of whether some perpetrators' (in respect of False Accounting) assertions that: "They were at their wits end and had no viable alternative, given their distrust of - or absence of help from - the Helpdesk", is also clearly pivotal to the MPs. They want to know whether any of those claims are valid... and they clearly expect the Review to feed back to them on this point. They seem to suspect that the way things have in the past worked (and the Contractual Terms) have led to a situation where some sub-postmasters have received little or no real help in finding out what has gone wrong and where many of them lack the skills/resources to get to the bottom of it unaided. Their suspicion here seems to be that the PO may not care "since (contractually) it's not its problem".

JA asked whether he would be given a draft copy of the Report (I think he meant at the same time as it goes to PO Senior Management). We couldn't of course commit to that so for sure he'll ask about that. He also stressed that, since leaks to the press (from Westminster) were sadly a fact of life, we'd need to be very careful not to name any constituent in the Report.

In regard to AB and the JFSA, whilst JA clearly wants AB's buy-in, he doesn't want to give AB the impression that he (AB) has power of veto over who carries out the Review, its scope and how it is to be carried out.

The meeting concluded with JA confirming - on behalf of all present - that they are satisfied that 2nd Sight is a suitable choice and that it now remains to get that AB/JFSA concurrence. JA stated that the big challenge here will be "to carry the sub-postmasters with us". Note from RW: that's not a big challenge, it's a colossal one. It means we'd not only have to convince each of the (case-selected) perpetrators that they'd been fairly dealt with by the courts and the PO but also (and without allowing into the public domain case-specific details) we'd need to turn the tide of public opinion in the PO's favour! Let's discuss!!!

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Speak at tomorrow's 09:00 hrs call. Best Regards, Ron.