POL00316847

Panorama briefing

Chair of meeting – Mark Davies

Opening points

- Welcome, explain roles of PO attendees and ask Matt and Tim to explain their roles

- We're happy for you to tape – we are doing the same to save taking notes and for the importance of it being on the record. We're grateful though for your assurance it is not for broadcast because we would not want anything taken out of context from a 2 hour meeting

- We offered briefing to help the balance and fairness of programme, but we do also want to understand its nature and purpose. I don't think that it's unreasonable that, if there are being specific allegations put to you that you tell us about those so that we can address them fully

- We want to answer questions about this, not just today but throughout the preparation of the programme – if there are further specific allegations/ questions that arise then we should have, and I am sure you would want to provide us with, the opportunity to continue to respond beyond today's briefing to any points raised

- We've nothing at all to hide – but this does not mean we can give the media all of the information we might like to do to show that claims have been made that are not true

- So we can't speak about individual cases. We never have, no matter what - even when this has meant very 'one-sided' stories have appeared about some cases

- We gave an assurance when we instigated the independent review and subsequently the scheme that our postmasters – serving or former – could come forward in complete confidence if they had any concerns. The absolute promise of confidentiality was to encourage people to come forward.

- We are also in mediation in many cases and mediation is always subject to confidentiality – our independent mediator will not operate without this and for very good reasons

- We also have to remember that there is a legal and court process involved. Discussing cases and the evidence of those cases with the media could not possibly be right – these are matters for the impartiality of the courts

Outline rest of meeting

- Before we get into questions, Patrick will give you a brief overview of the Post Office's position and what we've been doing regarding the complaints put to us – I think this is extremely important so that you have complete clarity about what has happened over the past three years, but we will keep it short, we know you have read our report

- Then let's get into questions. We'll give you the fullest information we can - if there are any points of detail we need to check then we will take that away of course and come back to you.

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[Hand over to Patrick]

Closing points

- Been a useful meeting but we will of course need to understand more about the programme as you continue your research and I must underline that we want the opportunity to continue to respond to all and any specific allegations as this moves forward – today should not be considered the complete Post Office response to Panorama

- Like to re-iterate again the main points from us about this:

- This is, at its core, about missing money and we've got a duty to protect it.

- People are not prosecuted for making mistakes or because Horizon is showing losses – that serious, and rare, action is taken in the light of ALL the evidence. The defence and the court scrutinise this

- It's about facts and not theories – we are talking about an electronic till system that records sales transactions, in the same way you would expect from any large retailer and there's not a single example in any of these cases that suggests it hasn't done that properly. Theories about what might or might not be possible with a computer system are all very well but do any of these theories actually apply in these cases? No they do not.

- We know we didn't get everything right – there were people we could have given more help and support to and we're mediating with those people

- We'll confirm the filming arrangements as soon as we can but again, I would stress the importance of making sure we are given the opportunity to answer any specific allegations being made