

Name: (Elizabeth) Anne Allaker  
Statement No. WITN06200100

Dated: 30/01/2023

## POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF (ELIZABETH) ANNE ALLAKER

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I, (Elizabeth) Anne Allaker will say as follows:

1. This statement responds to a request for a written statement made to myself under the Inquiry Rules 2006-Request number 1 regarding matters falling within Phase 3 of the Inquiry (Operation: training, assistance, resolution of disputes, knowledge and rectification of errors in the system) of the Inquiry.
2. This statement relates to events which occurred prior to my retirement from Post Office Ltd. in 2017 and is therefore drafted by myself, in my own words, from memory and with the help of the documents provided by the Inquiry.
3. Other than the documents provided to me by the Inquiry, I have no other documents available to me to submit.

#### General

4. I worked as a post woman between 1979 and 1981 before passing an entrance test to train to work as a counter clerk for Post Office Counters Ltd in 1981. On successful completion of the training I then worked within the Crown network as a counter clerk until approximately 1985. I then worked in an administration role for Royal Mail Sales until 1988. I then resigned following the birth of my second child and spent approximately 2-3 years bringing up my children and looking after elderly family members. I returned to work as a casual counter clerk, in the Crown network, in the summer of 1991 but was offered a part-time permanent contract within weeks. I continued in this role until approximately 1998 when I took on a temporary role of auditor to cover maternity leave. This role lasted approximately a year and I returned to the counter clerk role until I again took on a temporary administration support role, in approximately 2001, within Darlington Area Office. This administration role supported the Urban and Rural Sub-postmaster network. I briefly returned to a counter clerk role 6 months later until the administration support role became a permanent role. I continued working in various administration roles within the Area Office until there was a re-organisation in 2006. Following this re-organisation, which saw administration roles being centralised in a smaller number of locations nationally, I continued working in a Network role which involved, amongst other things, managing the Branch Support Team, which was based in Maidstone, administration for the National Multiples Team, working with colleagues in the Network Business Support Center (NBSC) and the Service Management Team both then based primarily in Deane Valley. In 2012 I successfully applied for a role as Contract Advisor, which involved dealing with appointments of Sub-postmasters and any contractual issues that arose. After approximately a year in this role I was asked to work on the Branch Support Programme which I did until taking early retirement in April

2017.

5. During my time in the Branch Support Programme my main involvement with the Horizon IT System was in working with colleagues, including sub postmasters, to review what we currently had and gather requirements for any future system. I also worked on building an inquiry system known then as HORice, which was to build new reports to try and improve the way information could be obtained from the system to handle inquiries.
6. I had no formal qualifications for any of the above roles, I would describe any qualifications and training as more of an apprenticeship of experience built up over years working for Post Office Ltd.

#### **Branch Support Programme**

7. I have been asked to consider POL00039215 and POL00043614. My understanding of this programme was for it to outline the current (2014) ways of working, specifically all interactions to and from the whole Network of Post Office branches, then to look at what it should look like in future with the emphasis on getting things done quicker and better for colleagues, customers suppliers etc.
8. In practice the programme worked with colleagues across the business, including sub postmasters, to gather and collate information. Sub-postmasters could input to the programme via the Branch User Forum, this was a small group of Sub-postmasters who met approximately 6 times a year, with individuals from the programme and input their ideas or ideas gathered from their peers. Post Office Ltd communication team also a facility for sub postmasters and colleagues to input ideas via their Branch Focus communication. All Sub-postmasters were able to access support by ringing the NBSC
9. An intervention visit could be for many things, it may be just for general support or additional training, whether that was in general or on one particular area or piece of equipment. It could be as a result of a robbery/burglary/fire/flood etc. It could be to assist with completion of Regulatory Compliance tests or to help manage the overnight cash holdings in a branch. These are a few examples that spring to mind but I cannot remember every reason. In effect if it was appropriate to visit a visit would be arranged, however it's fair to say that a great deal of intervention was also effectively managed by phone call.
10. In my view the Branch Support Programme was effective at raising awareness of the impact that contact from internal and external sources had on colleagues and customers and gathering requirements for what the future of IT would be, although a new system had not been agreed at the time I left. It created a platform for sub postmasters through the Branch User Forum. I would say that it had begun to be effective but more work would always be needed
11. I have been asked to consider POL00090223. I can't recall the context in which the feedback from NBSC employees was gathered in this case and whilst I had nothing to do with McKinsey I knew of their report. From memory only I think this document would have been gathered together with input from NBSC managers and my own and teams knowledge of feedback gathered within the programme.
12. I don't know what if any changes were made by NBSC managers as a direct result of this feedback.

#### **My role in relation to Training**

13. I have been asked to consider POL00040066 and POL00034508. In relation to the role of Business Improvement Programme and training of Subpostmasters as far as I can remember the involvement of the programme

would have had would have been to review and provide any relevant feedback to their documentation

14. I can only recall the training offers generally not in specific detail as I wasn't part of the training team.
15. The training offer to sub postmasters wasn't part of any role I had although I knew of it and I am aware that the team themselves monitored the effectiveness via feedback forms from sub postmasters and ongoing review.
16. I did not carry out any training on a training programme for the Post Office in any role I had.
17. I can't recall any specific feedback positive or negative provided to me with regard to the Horizon system or training provided. In general I'm sure I listened to individuals commenting on both training and the Horizon system but nothing sticks out in my memory.
18. I'm unable to make comment on whether feedback was collected on the above as this was not in my remit.
19. As I didn't work within the training team I can't comment on any changes as a result of feedback they received.
20. As above I am unable to comment as the evolution of training was not in my remit.
21. I have been asked to consider POL00035473. I can recall that Citizens Advice were interested in the Network Change Programme and had requested information but I did not produce the report.
22. My only role in responding to their request would have been to provide details to the author of the report, from the Intervention Log managed by the Branch Support Team and the NBSC call logs.
23. The further reports would have been, as mentioned above, the calls from the Intervention Log maintained by the Branch Support Team. From reading this document it appears that once I received the report from the team I would check to see that the information in it was meaningful as it was, or whether the report needed additional information added. Specifically I think I was suggesting that the specific model information may need to be added to be meaningful to the Citizens Advice team. I would then have passed this information onto the report author to include in their report. I cannot recall any further information or detail specifically.
24. As stated above any further information I received would have been passed to the report author.
25. I have been asked to consider POL00033606. From reading the document provided to me, the only slide that I can identify being involved in is slide 41 where I am referenced as agreeing to a new and improved Follow Up Balance (FUB) process. I can only think that I would have been asked to review this process by the training team and to provide a view on whether it was fit for purpose. I appear to have been satisfied with any improvements that they had suggested.

#### **Dalmellington Outreach Branch Transaction Discrepancy**

26. I have been asked questions about Dalmellington Outreach Branch and FUJ00085864, FUJ00085842, FUJ00086073- Had it not been for the document provided to me I would not have been able to recall any details as reported by the Sub postmaster at Dalmellington outreach branch.

27. I was not aware of any other issues of this type at Outreach branches or other branch types until this issue was raised. This was the only example raised to me but, as this document states, there were other branches which had been impacted.
28. Once the issue had been raised to Kendra Dickinson it appears the correct steps were taken as the issue was then passed to Finance Service Center (FSC) to manage. They would have been able to check the branch accounts for this branch and other branches mentioned to see what the previous resolutions had been and to check to make sure that the resolution at this branch was the correct one, i.e. to check where in the Branch Trading Period the branch was and establish whether a reversal of transaction, a rem out of an amount or a Transaction Correction (TC) was needed. FSC would have been the team responsible for raising the TC if that was the correct solution, this appears to have been the case with at least 2 of the branches mentioned. My concerns with the way this was handled were that ATOS had sent this onto NBSC with little or no detail to enable NBSC to either escalate to FSC or help the branch. NBSC were unable to check into a branch account or understand whether the action they were being asked to take was appropriate. It states that NBSC did not have a process for this type of instance which seems a fair comment from reading the content and if IT suppliers were aware that a fix was needed for this issue they should also have been aware that NBSC was not in a position to follow a process. I also felt that the early emails did not provide any context relating to what was happening with this known issue to allow anyone to provide reassurance or timescales for a fix should another case arise before that fix was implemented.
29. I cannot comment in detail or specifically about the relationship between NBSC and Fujitsu as I wasn't party to their relationship management. I would say that from my own experience getting information in a format that was understandable to those of us in a non IT environment was one of the things I found difficult.
30. My understanding of the role of ATOS was that they took on the supplier management relationship once the Service Management team had been disbanded. ATOS also took on the Horizon System Helpdesk calls.

#### Horizon Weekly Call

31. I have been asked questions about the Horizon Weekly Call and consider POL00021130, POL00043614, POL00076327, POL00043619. The Horizon weekly call was set up to better understand any issues that were being raised as a result of the Horizon IT system. It was to try to understand if and where any improvements could be made to the way Horizon IT related issues were managed and to check whether there was any duplication of issues being raised across business areas.
32. Initially my role was as a note taker but I also chaired the call in the absence of other managers. I took responsibility for trying to resolve some action points that were raised and to chase up answers from individuals to their own actions.
33. Without the prompt of the documents provided I wouldn't have been able to recall any significant issues raised whether Horizon IT related or otherwise.
34. As I cannot remember the specifics of all the issues raised, I am struggling to give a view. I feel the call was effective in that it made sure issues raised were being managed or escalated as well as they could be, however from looking at the examples in the documents provided it's clear that many of the issues related to other branch equipment i.e. Self-Serve Kiosks (SSK), AEI (I can't remember what this stands for Application, Enrollment & Identity?), ATMs etc. Whilst all transactions would need to go through the Horizon IT kit in branch the issues raised were not necessarily as a result of the Horizon kit.

35. It's clear from the documents sent to me that individual Sub postmaster branch issues were identified on the weekly call. Of the documents sent to me I know nothing of POL00021130 and I think it predates the Horizon weekly call. Of the other documents supplied I can confirm they would all have been raised on the weekly call.
36. I cannot say how aware the rest of the Branch Support Programme were of commonality of issues reported by Sub-postmasters or colleagues but information on commonality of issues raised was available from calls logged to NBSC, the Intervention log and probably from other sources. We all used the management information available to us to help in our improvement suggestions.

#### **Dispute Resolution**

37. I have been asked questions about the resolution of disputes and to consider POL00002396. Firstly with regard to POL00002396, from reading through the document provided it appears that NBSC had received a call from the branch following a report on television. From my response to the NBSC team I can see that I would have checked the branch file on our Electronic Filing Cabinet (EFC) and as I had copied in the Contract Advisor asking him to pick this up it would have been because I could see that the Contract Advisor was already in contact with this sub-postmaster. In this case it wouldn't have been necessary for NBSC to get involved as the Contract Advisor would have been able to request any necessary reports and/or make the necessary contact with the sub-postmaster. I was also both involved with and witnessed disputes between Post Office and spmrs either as a note taker at spmr interviews, held by Contract Advisors prior to 2006, and/or in my role as Contract Advisor between 2012 and 2014.
38. To the best of my knowledge and memory the disputes I was involved with or witnessed were as a result of a shortfall found at audit. These cases would be escalated to the relevant Contract Advisor by the auditor to be managed through to resolution. Resolution could have been a meeting with the Contract Advisor resulting in the termination of a contract, written warning, repayment of loss, conditions attached to continuation of that contract as examples. I cannot remember the names of any individual cases that I was involved in.
39. I am aware that reports could be requested from Fujitsu in some cases to help resolve issues but from memory this was a documented process via a central email box rather than involving individuals.
40. I don't feel able to give a view on improvements to the process as I don't have a full picture of all the cases managed. My involvement was with very few cases.

#### **Knowledge of bugs, error and defects**

41. I have been asked about my knowledge of bugs, error and defects in the Horizon IT system. I was aware that the Horizon system could freeze if there was a communication interruption however there were processes to recover any transactions which were in process at the point of freeze. With regard to bugs, errors and defects I will say that when I first heard these labels I was concerned about their meaning. I heard them used in IT communications, and still do in media reports relating to IT platforms, Social Media platforms or when a banking system is interrupted as examples. In my time with Post Office Ltd it was most commonly used in examples like "any bugs or defects will be ironed out during testing", this was often prior to a new product or product change going live. Also if something was wrong in the live environment e.g. as with the Dalmellington Outreach site, that may also be labeled as an error or defect, not that I'm saying it was in the case of Dalmellington. In my experience these labels meant that something needed to be corrected in the product flow in the IT process.
42. As stated above mention of bugs, errors, defects usually came as a result of

testing prior to product go live or product changing so would be resolved in testing processes. I can also remember seeing emails relating to Known Errors but this usually meant that everyone was aware that something needed to be corrected in the IT transaction flow for example. In these cases, communications were usually sent out to make sure branches were aware of any workaround needed until a fix was in place. In most cases that I was aware of the issue would have been well documented and/or communicated to our Network colleagues.

43. How I dealt with sub postmasters or Post Office Managers/Assistants would not have been any different for having this knowledge. If anyone in Network raised any issue with me, I like to think that I would have listened to their concerns regardless of the issue. I would therefore have done all I could and gathered as much information as possible to alleviate their concerns whether it related to Horizon or to another issue.

44. I can't recall any specific cases where any steps weren't taken in response to any issues I raised.

45. I can't recall ever feeling that people could have done more to assist or make things better. I do feel that the people I worked with did everything they could to help sub postmasters with the information and tools available to them at that time.

46. I have been asked about the rectification of bugs. I can't comment on this topic as I didn't have sight of these processes. My understanding would be that this was done by Fujitsu possibly with input from relevant Post Office colleagues.

47. I can't recall being involved in the rectification of errors in the Horizon IT system, I don't have any IT skills that would have allowed me to be involved.

48. I have been asked whether I have any reflections on the issue being investigated by the Inquiry. With the benefit of hindsight I personally don't know what I could have done differently. I feel that I always gave everything I had to my roles within Post Office Ltd and always tried my best.

49. I don't think I can answer this question as I don't have a full picture of the whole case.

50. As stated above I always felt that individuals did their best and were proud to say they worked for Post Office Ltd. With hindsight if things could have been done differently my own suggestions would be that better IT systems should have been introduced much earlier for both the branch network and for back office employees. Specifically IT systems which allowed different platforms to communicate with each other and with which sub postmasters and employees could access better reporting, with a live training function.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed: E A Allaker

**GRO**

(Elizabeth) Anne Allaker

Dated: 30/01/2023

**Index to First Witness Statement of (Elizabeth) Anne Allaker**

No	URN	Document Description	Control Number
1	POL00039215	Branch Support programme: IT requirements workshop	POL-0035697
2	POL00043614	Email dated 25/07/2014 from Anne Allaker to Shirley Hailstones re Wembley	POL-0040117
3	POL00090223	Email dated 06/05/2015 from Anne Allaker to Angela Van-Den-Bogard cc: Peter Prior-Mills Re: NBSC Employee Feedback	POL-0087192
4	POL00040066	DRAFT overview of Horizon and branch trading practices prepared by POL for the Complaint Review and Mediation Scheme	POL-0036548
5	POL00034508	Online Compliance Training, Colleagues, Agents, Operators and their Assistants	POL-0031443
6	POL00035473	Citizens Advice Information request: Post Office Ltd arrangements for the monitoring, training and service compliance of Post Office Local branches	POL-0032408
7	POL00033606	Training Presentation on Training Review Cascade	POL-0030541
8	FUJ00085864	Outreach rems - further instances	POINQ0092035F
9	FUJ00085842	Problem Report- Dalmellington Outreach Service PC0246997, PC0246949.	POINQ0092013F
10	FUJ00086073	PEAK Incident Management System (Call Reference PC0247207)	POINQ0092244F
11	POL00021130	Email dated 02/07/2009 from Karen Arnold to Gary Blackburn re Hogsthorpe Branch losses	POL-0014322
12	POL00043614	Email dated 25/07/2014 from Anne Allaker to Shirley	POL-0040117

		Hailstones re Wembley	
13	POL00076327	Email dated 03/12/2014 from Anne Allaker to Dave Posnett re: Horizon weekly call	POL-0072890
14	POL00043619	Email dated 19/10/2015 from Helen Dickinson to Anne Allaker re: SSKs	POL-0040122
15	POL00002396	Email from Anne Allaker to Ibrahim Kizildag & others re: system corruption/ glitch claim dated 12/9/2014.	VIS00003410