

WITNESS: OYETEJU ADEDAYO

STATEMENT NUMBER: WITN0178_01

EXHIBITS: 0

DATED: Feb 4, 2022

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF OYETEJU ADEDAYO

THIS STATEMENT IS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO THE RULE 9 REQUEST OF THE PUBLIC INQUIRY DATED 29/10/2021 TO ADDRESS THE HUMAN IMPACT OF THE FAILINGS OF THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM

I, MRS OYETEJU ADEDAYO, Date of Birth of
 will say as follows:-

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. I am 57 years old. I currently live with my three children. I got married prior to taking over the Post Office, however sadly my marriage broke down under the strain of the Horizon problems. I am not currently in employment.
2. When my children were at school, I wanted a job that meant I could work my hours around my children. My partner suggested going into property development. I didn't want to do this and wanted a shop of my own; I could then have someone to cover me at the shop so I could look after my children and collect them from school.

3. We moved down to Kent and took over a shop there. I believe we took over the business in May 1999. This was a convenience store and an off-licence. The convenience store also had a post office within it, which I took over as a Sub-postmaster at a similar time.
4. Initially, we just had the use of the convenience store and off-licence and rented a property in the area. I can't remember where this was, but it was separate to the shop.
5. I then became Sub-postmistress of Rainham Road Post Office branch on 19th May 1999. The branch was located at 61 Rainham Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 5NG.
6. My contract with the Post Office was subsequently terminated on 5th September 2005.

CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS AND ANY PROCEEDINGS/CONVICTION

7. The audit of my branch took place on 5th September 2005. They presented me with a piece of paper which stated that I had a shortfall of around £50,000, but I had no idea where this figure had been obtained from. I was charged with three offences of False Accounting following the audit.
8. I pleaded guilty to these offences on 19th January 2006 at Medway County Court and was later sentenced at Maidstone Crown Court to 50 weeks' imprisonment, suspended for 24 months, a 12-month supervision order and 200 hours of unpaid work.
9. On 15th May 2006, I was also made subject to a confiscation order in the sum of £52,864.08. The Theft charge was added at the sentencing hearing in the Crown Court, so that a confiscation order could be made.

10. The appeal against my conviction was allowed on 14 May 2021.

THE HUMAN IMPACT

11. The human impact which the failings of the Horizon IT System have had and continue to have upon me and my family are set out in the remainder of this statement. The section headings follow the particular questions posed by the Inquiry.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING REQUIRED TO MAKE GOOD APPARENT SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

12. When the discrepancies were increasing to around £2,000, I took equity out of our house in Slough in order to pay this into the Post Office.

13. By this time, we knew we were going to stay in Kent. I sought financial advice and was advised to get rid of our address in Slough and convert the Kent premises to a freehold, so that we could also purchase the one-bedroom property above the shop.

14. After around 3-4 months of experiencing smaller discrepancies, larger discrepancies started appearing. The helpline advised that we just had to accept these. I would initially be putting the money in myself, but this became difficult, so I began putting money into the Post Office from the retail side of my shop. Initially these discrepancies were relatively small but as they became larger, I could no longer afford to rectify them in this way.

15. We were only a small, one position, Post Office and the discrepancy was getting larger, to the point that I didn't know what to do. We were told just to accept it.

I didn't put the discrepancies into a suspense account; I was just rolling it over to the next week.

16. Eventually I was not able to put any more money in, as there was no more money to put in. When the discrepancies reached more than £20,000, I believed I needed to speak to someone. I was advised to reboot the system and was talked through this.

WHAT WERE THE COSTS OF MAKING GOOD ALLEGED SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY HORIZON?

17. I had to repay the small shortfalls throughout my time at the Post Office and the sum of the confiscation order which was £52,864.08. I would estimate that the further shortfalls amounted to about £9,000 over the course of my tenure

HOW WERE YOU AFFECTED WHEN ALLEGED TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS OR DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

18. At the audit in September 2005, the Post Office staff had already entered the branch and packed up a lot of documents. I did not see or know how much money they took away which should have included money deposited by the milkmen the Saturday before the Monday audit.

19. I wasn't allowed in whilst the audit took place and they moved everything out of the branch. We started arguing outside the Post Office about the difference in the missing Horizon figures because the balancing on the previous Wednesday showed around a £41,000 shortfall, and they gave me a computer printout reading £50,000.

20. I was just so perplexed. I wanted them to come into the Post Office and help me look for the problem, but that didn't happen. I was absolutely devastated. I found the whole situation ridiculous.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

21. My contract was terminated.

22. On the day of the audit, the auditors asked me if there was somewhere quiet that we could speak. By that time people were coming into the shop and we were beginning to raise our voices.

23. I remember asking them if I was the only Sub-postmistress going through this. I was crying at that point, and they said I was the only one and asked if I had heard about any other cases, to which I responded "no".

24. I wasn't charged at the audit; it was sometime after. At the audit they told me I should come up with a story to explain how the money had gone missing or I would end up going to prison.

25. I was told to write down that I admitted taking the money and so I did this, stating that I had borrowed the money whilst I took out a loan, from which I then intended to pay back the money.

26. During the interview I told them that I had borrowed the money to pay back friends and family for money they had lent me; I made this up.

27. I was just trying to say things to stop them taking me away in a police car.

28. They told me I should get a lawyer. I did get legal advice and my lawyer wrote to the Post Office asking them to explain the discrepancies.

29. For some time, we didn't receive a reply. After this they then made it clear that this matter was going to be taken to court.

30. After the Post Office branch was closed, I carried on running the shop. I tried my best to make it work, but I couldn't.

WHAT WERE YOUR FINANCIAL LOSSES CAUSED BY ACTION TAKEN AGAINST YOU IN RELIANCE UPON HORIZON DATA?

31. I attempted to run the shop as a standalone convenience store for approximately one year following the closure of the Post Office, but I could not make this viable and fell into debt and mortgage arrears.

32. I was also losing customers as people were staying away due to the allegations against me. I believe that this was due to the negative coverage in local and regional newspapers.

33. On 15th May 2006, I was also made subject to a confiscation order in the sum of £52,864.08.

WHAT EFFECT DID IT HAVE TO BE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING CRIMINAL OFFENCES AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

34. My case went to the Magistrates Court but I was told, because of the amount of money I had been accused of taking, the case would be sent to the Crown Court for sentencing. At that point I nearly collapsed I was crying so much.

35. At the sentencing hearing the Judge asked for the Post Office to give him the breakdown of the missing money as requested by lawyer, but the Judge did not get a response to the request.

36. However, the Judge told me I would not receive a custodial sentence because I had already started the process of re-mortgaging of our family home to pay back the £52,000, and because I had three young children to look after. I was so relieved.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING CONVICTED OF A CRIMINAL OFFENCE AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

37. I did not want to plead guilty but felt that I had no other choice. The Court case just went over my head due to my frame of mind. The bit I wanted to hear was that I wasn't going to prison.

38. I advised the Barrister I wanted to plead not guilty but was advised not to do so as it would impact the Post Office stance and may mean I had to face a prison sentence.

39. As explained above, I was sentenced to 50 weeks' imprisonment, suspended for 24 months, a 12-month supervision order and 200 hours of unpaid work.

40. After the conviction, I had to go to the probation office, which was on a main road; I found myself hiding behind pillars so that people passing by did not recognise me. Again, this was due to the extreme shame and pain that I felt and knowing that I did not do anything to warrant this.

41. I completed 200 hours of unpaid work at a charity shop from Monday to Friday. I would iron and hang up clothes for resale.

42. As a result of my termination and conviction, I lost the value of the business. I tried to sell the business but was unable to find a buyer. I believe nobody

wished to buy the business due to the stigma attached to it following my conviction.

43. Due to my debts and mortgage arrears piling up, the property was repossessed and auctioned off. All the proceeds of the sale went to the mortgage lenders.
44. Prior to my conviction, we owned the freehold of the property that housed the post office and the convenience store.
45. However due to our growing family we then bought Catkin Close which was a 3 bedroomed house including a convenience store. The property was eventually repossessed as I fell into debt and had to settle the confiscation order. This was a very traumatic experience for me.
46. Although I managed to avoid bankruptcy, I incurred a substantial amount of debt running the shops following the termination of my employment with the Post Office. I was unable to repay these debts because of the reduction in my income following my termination and the loss of income from renting out the flat above the shop.
47. Since the termination of my employment, I have been unable to keep regular work a result of my criminal conviction.
48. Employment agencies have consistently avoided and failed to engage with me because of the stereotyping and stigma around my criminal conviction.
49. I have had several interviews since, but they all appear to have had issues when carrying out the CRB/DBS checks. For example, during the interview process at Sainsbury's, I was denied a position due to the enhanced DBS check. In 2019, my daughter rang a potential employer explaining the

situation around my conviction. After being invited to an interview, I was also rejected for the position, which I believe was due to the criminal conviction.

50. I was on the front page of two local newspapers and mentioned on local radio, which contributed to the psychological symptoms I experienced at the time and added to the stigma around my business. My mental health was severely impacted, and I had suicidal thoughts.

WHAT EFFECT DID THESE ISSUES HAVE UPON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY?

51. My marriage broke down due to the stress of what had happened. The whole situation affected my confidence. I started to go shopping late in the evening, so people didn't see me.

52. I also stayed in the car when picking up my children from school, so that I didn't have to engage with others.

53. As detailed above, my story was also in the local newspapers and the headlines were also written on the billboards outside of the shop. For example, "Mum of 3 convicted of stealing £50,000" and, "Mum of 3 spared jail for theft". The shops were vandalised because of the negative media attention. For example, the word 'thief' was spray painted on the outside of the shop walls and shutters.

54. I was made to feel worthless and had lost my standing in the local community.

55. I couldn't even seek help from my friends or relatives because of the stigma of being called a thief. I was afraid to talk about it because I thought I was the only one this had happened to, and I thought nobody would believe me.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT WHICH THESE ISSUES HAD UPON THE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY?

56. I have three children who also suffered due to this episode; the three of them were subjected to bullying and harassment by other children because of the allegations against me. Seeing my family hurt like this made my own mental state even worse and it still hurts to think of how they were treated
57. My children's schoolmates would say nasty comments to them, both online and in person, such as, "your mum robbed the bank". My children were unsupported in school. One was told, "to get it together" and that she, "can't use what is going on at home as an excuse to allow her schoolwork to suffer".
58. As a result of what was going on with me, my eldest daughter was finding it hard to adjust to school which negatively impacted her behaviour there. She was constantly put in detention, isolated from her peers, and made to feel that she was a troublemaker.
59. Also, since one of the shops was located opposite one of my other children's secondary schools, the teachers there would pick on her and failed to provide her with adequate support. To avoid playground bullying, my youngest child was moved to another primary school but was unsupported there too.
60. The lack of financial stability really impacted my aspirations of helping and supporting my children's university education. For example, during their university education, they had considered doing international student exchange and work internships abroad, however they decided against this because they knew that I would not be able to visit them or support them financially because of my criminal record.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

61. As a result of my conviction, I experienced a lot of stress, depression, anger and emotional instability. I lost a lot of weight and became a recluse to the extent that my doctor put me on a prescribed Vitamin D tablets; I suffered from anxiety and a general loss of confidence. I continually questioned my sanity and considered suicide.

62. The GLO litigation was an eye opener during 2016 – 2019; the amazing judgments from The Honourable Mr Justice Fraser. The reality of the Post Office's behaviour over the years unfolded during the trials and this was extremely traumatic to me and all of the other Sub-postmasters/mistresses.

63. The litigation costs must be recovered from the Post Office to enable everyone to move forward finally.

64. In May 2021, my conviction was overturned in the Southwark Crown Court. Although this was a relief, I am still suffering mentally.

65. I am struggling to adjust to a "new normal" where I have no criminal record.

66. I feel that the Post Office's aggressive behaviour has had an ongoing impact on my life.

67. All I have ever known in the last 16 years is my life with a conviction and the stigma and shame that comes with that. I firmly believe that my family and I will need substantial therapy, counselling and emotional support to overcome this traumatic period of our lives and to be able to move forward in a healthy manner.

68. A good 16 of my prime years have been cruelly, tragically and unjustly taken from me. Shortly after my conviction, my Dad suffered a heart attack having seen his daughter go from a bubbly character to a recluse. No doubt there

was the same toll on my Mum's health. She suffered a stroke last year only to discover that she had suffered previous silent ones before; she sadly passed away last month. I thank God above all that my Mum was able to see my conviction overturned before her glorious call to Heaven.

Statement Of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

GRO

teju Adedayo (Feb 4, 2022 16:07 GMT)

Position Or

Office Held:

Print Full

Date of signature: Feb 4, 2022

Name: MRS OYETEJU ADEDAYO

FILE REFERENCE: **GRO**

