

Witness Name: Benjamin Cane

Statement No.: WITN07700100

Dated: 3rd February 2023

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN RICHARD CANE

I, Benjamin Cane, will say as follows...

INTRODUCTION

1. I have been asked to supply a witness statement to the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry because of my former role as Horizon Field Support Manager. I no longer work for the Post Office but set out my professional background below, beginning with my current employment.
2. Since leaving the Post Office in January 2004 I have worked in the Affordable Housing sector, specifically in housing development. These roles have mostly been with not for profit Housing Associations, aside from my current role which is a ' for profit' subsidiary of Legal & General Capital:

2.1 Feb 2019 to present: Head of Development at Legal & General Affordable Homes

2.2 July 2012 to Jan 2019: Head of Development at The Guinness Partnership

2.3 Feb 2004 to July 2012: Various roles with Mendip Housing (which merged with Aster Group) including Head of Development, Senior Project Manager, Project Manager

3. The following roles were all for Post Office, whether that was Post Office Counters Ltd, Post Office Ltd, Royal Mail or Consignia, I can't be certain of the exact company details for each role.

4. Circa Feb 2002 to Feb 2004: Implementation Project Manager as part of Network Transformation Team – Post Office Ltd. This role related to physical changes to sub Post Offices; closure of offices (for example in rural areas where the service level had declined), opening new ones, relocation of offices (say from a village store to another retailer in the village), and refurbishment of existing offices. Work included the project management for the logistics of moving Horizon equipment, safes, counter screens, arranging for cash/stock to be collected securely during these changes and alarm installation as well as new signage, etc.

5. Circa mid 1999 – Feb 2002: Horizon Field Support Manager (HFSSM), Post Office Ltd. The detail of this role is outlined in the 'background' section below.

6. Nov 1997 – mid 1999: Helpline Manager, South West, Post Office Ltd. This role was as the Manager for the internal and external customer helpline based in the Bristol office. I managed a team of around 25 Helpline staff whose role it was to answer incoming calls from the public or from sub-postmasters or PO counter staff relating to transactional queries (how to do a certain transaction) or complaints from the public. The regional helplines were all closed down over a period of time and the calls all went to a Call Centre based in the North East.

7. 1995 – Nov 1997: Retail Network Manager, POCL. I ‘managed’ up to 100+ s Post Offices across various areas in and around South West Herts and into West/North London. These areas changed regularly so I can’t be exact. The role was to make visits to Sub-Post Offices, review the secure environment (checking safety measures like parcel screens were closed or secure area door was closed), encouraging the SPMR to keep the retail area tidy, keep the up to date leaflets/info up to date, clean the signage and so on. It was really a support role for the SPMRs. There were times we were asked to encourage them to sell more, upsell etc. Also to encourage them to invest in the latest retail signage (from red to green to red!), support them if they had a break in or robbery, arrange for training on new products.

8. 1989 – 1995: Counter clerk, assistant Branch Manager, Branch Manager. POCL. I joined POCL as a counter clerk at Borehamwood Post Office and over the 6 years in this operational role I worked in many Post Offices across South West Hertfordshire, West London and Central London. My last operational role as Branch Manager was at Kings Cross Post Office.

9. 1988 – 1989: Postman at Borehamwood Delivery Office. Royal Mail.

BACKGROUND

10. My role as HFSM was brief and only came to an end as the implementation phase of the Horizon rollout came to an end; there were no more rollouts as part of the overall programme. I worked out of the South West office in Aztec West, Bristol. I was one of 3 HFSMs covering the South West and the Midlands. I had between 15-20 HFSOs in my team and I had line management responsibility for them.

Training

11. I don't recall the specific dates/times or length of the training but as part of the Implementation Project start up, there were many sessions as a wider South West/Midlands team covering everything from admin (how and what to claim for expenses, ordering/arranging hire cars for work business) to sessions on the Horizon system itself. I do recall there being 'Train the Trainer' sessions so we as Horizon Field Support team were able to coach the trainees (be it SPMR or PO Counter Clerks).

HFSM experience

12. My responsibilities as HFSM were primarily to line manage the HFSO team. An average day might begin in the Bristol office for a team meeting, processing travel expenses (the team were away for much of their working week and generated many receipts for hotels/subsistence claims), travelling to site to do

a Horizon implementation to support a HFSO, or even doing an implementation with a SPMR myself.

13. There was a lot of travel involved – I was regularly travelling to places 3 or 4 hours drive from home. My team lived across the South West and South Wales area and were almost always required to stay overnight 3 times week. Supporting them with 1:1s, coaching and any supplementary training was the bulk of my role.

14. When I did an actual implementation of the Horizon system, which was mostly within the Sub Post Office network, although sometimes we were required to work in bigger teams in bigger Branch (Crown) offices, the day which was usually Wednesday (I think sometimes we did 2 offices a week) balance day would be travel from home or hotel to site, introductions with the SPMR, check all infrastructure was in place (i.e. was the Horizon kit there and working), getting the SPMR set up on the system. Once the PO was closed, and the SPMR balanced their last time manually, we would check the balance sheet to make sure it balanced and that the sheet was correctly completed (i.e. columns added up and the summaries matched the final balancing figure) then we would 'migrate' the balance sheet figures onto the Horizon system and from memory there were print outs the SPMR was asked to check and sign to say they agreed with the figures.

15. The next 2 days were spent supporting the SPMR in the live environment and then there was a return visit the following week to support them with their first Horizon balance.
16. In my time as HFSM I don't recall any specific requests for support other than what they were all given. If there were requests they were directed to the Programme Manager who I think sometimes arranged for remedial support but the programme and site visits were planned well in advance and there weren't many HFSOs available or spare to offer additional help.
17. There was a Programme Manager based in the Bristol office who had a small team managing the HFSO timetable and who went to what office, etc. I believe this team would have been the support available.
18. The HFSOs were managed by a HFSM with the support of the Programme Manager. Based in Bristol but travelled from home or hotels. Regular 1:1s on site or in the Bristol office, regular training or briefing on latest operational changes.

SPMR training

19. In my view the SPMR were given adequate training for the system. Some needed more coaching, others took to it very quickly and minimal support was given. In my experience, most HFSOs gave the SPMR their mobile number and they had an additional, informal route for support.

20. The first migrations the team did were all new experiences for us all but as we got busier and did more, the level of support and knowledge of the system became really good between us, and we felt like we could answer all of the queries and issues which came up from the SPMRs.

Awareness of defects/bugs

21. In my time as HFSM, I wasn't aware of any bugs/defects/errors with the Horizon system.

22. There is nothing else I would like to add or make the Chair aware of.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed:

GRO

Dated: 03/02/2023