

Witness Name: Neil Kevan Edwards

Statement No.: WITN07400100

Dated: 4th February 2023

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST STATEMENT OF NEIL KEVAN EDWARDS

I, Neil Kevan Edwards, will say as follows...

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a former employee of Post Office Limited ('POL') and held the position of Tier 2 Service Support Advisor at Network Business Support Centre ('NBSC').
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry (the 'Inquiry') with the matters set out in Rule 9 Request dated 3 January 2023 (the 'Request')

BACKGROUND

3. My professional background prior to joining POL was with the Cooperative Bank from 20/10/1975 to 20/10/2000. I commenced my employment with POL on 13th November 2000 before ceasing my time with POL on 1st June 2022 when I officially fully retired. My role during this time with POL was that of Tier

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2 Service Support Advisor to the Post Office Branch network - Network Business Support Centre (NBSC).

4. All calls made by Postmasters into the NBSC were initially taken and handled by Tier 1 Advisors. If the Postmasters query, regardless of its nature, could not be resolved by the Tier 1 Advisor taking the initial call, the query would then be assigned to Tier 2 to progress to the point of resolution.
5. Both Tier 1 and Tier 2 Advisors main source of reference in relation to any query raised by any Postmaster, was to that of what is known and is still called the 'Knowledge Base'. This knowledge base information consists of current information held on any Counter related product/transaction, and the procedures to follow for the handling Advisor.
6. Such information is constantly updated as and when product content changes together with any new processes that also require implementation/change. Depending upon the subject of the Postmasters call, all advisors would link into this main area of subject information at the first point of call, to ascertain and formulate a response that fully satisfied the requirements of the calling Postmaster .
7. The training I received as a Tier 2 Advisor within NBSC, related to gaining an understanding of the numerous products carried out by POL over the Branch counters via the Horizon system throughout the whole network, and also of the linked financial elements of such transactions. Further to the aforementioned transactional training, I along with other Tier 2 Advisors, received training relating to the balancing of a Horizon Counter Stock Unit (Branch Counter Clerks till) in order to gain an understanding of accounting and finalising the balancing of a Branch Clerks Horizon Stock Unit. Also included with this

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training element of finalising a Stock Unit balance, was how to assist in searching for any mis-balance / discrepancy the Branch may be looking for, regardless of a gain or a loss they may have had at the time .

8. I did not have any involvement in any shape or form, with any testing / implementation of the Horizon system/IT Project.
9. My experiences of working within NBSC consisted of a very professional environment, and always a willingness to assist the Postmaster.
10. My responsibilities as a Tier 2 Advisor, was to assist the Postmaster with any enquiry they had cause to raise that could not be resolved by the Tier 1 Advisor taking the initial call. Even if their query could not be instantly resolved, and further information would need to be obtained via other areas of POL if need be, the Postmaster would then be called back with the resolution to their query/issue, and then only with the agreement of the Postmaster confirming that his issue had been resolved to their satisfaction, would the case be closed.
11. The NBSC was initially sited at Deame House in Barnsley, before the operation was moved and re-sited to Chesterfield in June 2016 as the Business Support Centre (BSC). This re-siting to Chesterfield unfortunately resulted in redundancies of the more long standing and experienced Advisors, who did not wish to travel daily to the site in Chesterfield . This therefore, resulted in replacing very experienced Advisors with new inexperienced Advisors who then had to go through the very involved training programme and carried out by the in-house Training Manager. Again, all the new Advisors would again be made familiar with the workings of the previously mentioned Knowledge Base and its information/procedures held within .

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12. I was one of the more experienced Advisors who chose to make the move to Chesterfield, commuting daily by train. Once the new Advisors came out of their initial in - house training, I along with a few other experienced members of staff, was utilised as what was known as a ' floor walker '. This was with a view to assisting the new Advisors in an effort to aid their transition from the training room and onto the floor when they started to take 'live' calls from Postmasters, as their subject matter was numerous and varied .
13. Once the new Advisors became more familiar with the working practices of BSC and all the subject matter/procedures that it involved, my 'floor walking' role ceased where I then became part of a small Team that answered Advisor queries by telephone link rather than putting their hands up when they required assistance, as was the case under the previous 'floor walking' arrangement .
14. In my experience, any Postmaster request for support in relation to Horizon , would only be progressed as a further training request on the Horizon system, and would then be escalated to the relevant Area Manager to liaise with the Branch Postmaster only. From this, it would be the responsibility of the Postmaster to cascade the further Horizon training received to the remainder of their Branch staff .
15. Outside of any request from Branches for training on the Horizon system, any other queries/requests would be classed as 'business as usual' and would be handled accordingly by any Advisor via the processes outlined and held within the BSC Knowledge Base information, and a satisfactory resolution sought.
16. To the best of my knowledge, I am not aware of any specific requests for

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support or events that I consider to be important to the Inquiry's terms of reference .

17. The most common types of calls received that I recall, depended upon the day of the week. The balancing week for Offices run from start of play on Thursday morning until close of play the following Wednesday, at which point, Offices prepare a balance of their Horizon Stock Units, so if any discrepancies arise at this point, Offices will call asking for balancing assistance. Such calls were known to carry over into Thursday and also Friday in the cases of Offices who carry out National Lottery transactions. Aside of such balancing queries, all other calls often related to queries at the Branch counter with a customer transaction(s) where the Office were asking for assistance in how to process via the Horizon system. The Office could also be asking for clarification or a ruling on an aspect of a transaction, so the nature of their request/subject matter could often vary.

18. The resources available were initially via the aforementioned Knowledge Base, which was constantly updated as and when new information/procedures warranted a change. Further to this, should this information not resolve the Postmasters query satisfactorily, there was always the option to escalate the query via email to the appropriate Departments within POL Chesterfield, also including the relevant Product Managers located in London .

19. Each individual Team within BSC was managed most efficiently by the respective Team Leaders, the Team Leaders in turn came under the ultimate control of the BSC Contact Centre Manager. I presume that this is still the case since my Retirement of 1st June 2022 .

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20. To the best of my knowledge, the attitude of members of the NBSC / BSC to Subpostmasters, always put the Postmasters first in an effort to always resolve any issue they had cause to raise, to their satisfaction.
21. In my view, I felt that the NBSC / BSC through whatever channels were available to them, did provide adequate support to subpostmasters calling for assistance.
22. During my time working in NBSC / BSC up until the point of my Retirement from POL on 1st June 2022, I was not aware of any confirmed bugs, errors or defects within the Horizon IT System. Even though rumours were circulating as initiated by the Media that there could be Horizon accounting issues , such claims were at the time , yet to be confirmed by both POL and Fujitsu . Such statements as generated by the Media prompted Postmasters to call NBSC to lay claim to any past discrepancies and stating that they felt that Horizon was at fault and the route cause . Such calls made to NBSC by Postmasters were logged accordingly and then assigned to the Outlet Field Support Team to action and progress (as per the agreed process at the time and confirmed as such under reference of POL00029521 which shows details of a case I touched back on 12/07/2012 where I carried out such an instruction .) Quite what their processes involved , I do not know , other than to investigate the discrepancy findings as reported by the Postmaster . I was not aware at the time that any unconfirmed bugs supposedly lying within the Horizon system , could result in such high value discrepancies as were reported by the Media Consequently , as far as I am aware , POL initiated the required investigations from this point forward .
23. To the best of my knowledge, I am not aware of anything else that the Chair

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should be aware of relating to the IT Horizon Project.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed:

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