

Witness Name:Linda Mary Chambers

Statement No.: WITN07470100

Dated: /3 February 2023

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST STATEMENT OF LINDA MARY CHAMBERS

I, Linda Mary Chambers, will say as follows...

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a former employee of Post Office Limited ('POL') and held the position of Service Support Advisor with 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 30 January 2023 (the 'Request')

BACKGROUND

3. I began working at Network Business Support Centre (NBSC) in July 2000 after taking voluntary redundancy from Yorkshire Water where I worked for 20 years in various roles from Receptionist to Information Manager. NBSC was the Helpline for Postmasters and my role was to assist them in resolving their

queries regarding the new Horizon system that had been rolled out to all Post Offices in the UK. I had absolutely no previous experience of how POL or Horizon worked. I cannot remember how much training I had on Horizon when I started working at NBSC but do remember being very unsure of my new role for quite a number of weeks. I had not used touchscreen technology before becoming Service Support Advisor (SSA) but was efficient at telephone work as I had used a telephone in all my previous roles and employments, although wearing a headset was new to me.

4. Following training we worked in teams with a Team Leader heading each team. There was a scripted database that we would use to resolve queries relating to POL products or Horizon queries. If my memory serves me correctly we also had a horizon kit on a few desks that SSAs could use to replicate transactions as relayed by callers or vice versa so that we could talk them through transaction or balancing queries. Sometimes the database did not have the answer to a query in which case we would discuss with our Team Leader the next step. Every call that was taken by SSAs would be written up by the recipient of the call and any actions taken. This would leave a call handling trail for management reporting or follow up call history in case the caller rang back for any reason.

5. I have been asked to set out my professional background and believe that I have already covered this in the Introduction above. I would add that I have not had any experience of working at the Post Office, ICL Pathway or Fujitsu before starting work at NBSC. I retired from work about five years ago..

6. I received some training at NBSC before going onto the live telephone calls, but cannot remember how much time was spent on training, probably the first week, but I learnt more actually doing the job and familiarising myself with the location of the relevant scripts that we had to follow when answering calls. I had no idea the large number of products that POL was responsible for before working at NBSC and it was not always easy to find the relevant script to follow from the database.

7. My experiences working in NBSC are as follows.
 - a. There was an opportunity to do some Horizon testing during my time at NBSC and I volunteered to do this along with a colleague. We travelled to Feltham and stayed one or two weeks testing some new products on Horizon. I cannot remember what the new products were but think it may have been something to do with recorded delivery or parcel force. We flagged up anything that did not work as expected.

 - b. The NBSC dealt with the majority of Horizon transaction queries as far as I can remember. If we could not resolve a Horizon query or the Postmaster required additional support then we would flag up with our Team Leader. What happened after that, I cannot remember.

 - c. I cannot remember any specific requests for support or events that I consider to be important to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference other than

the occasional distressed Postmaster who had been held up at gun point and NBSC would be very diplomatic and helpful to them. I think they sent someone out to support them during this traumatic experience.

- d. We always covered Wednesday working until 10.00 pm as it was balancing day and definitely the most common call on a Wednesday was related to balance discrepancies or transaction errors. It appeared to me that many Postmasters were not aware of how to correct these errors. Generally we would talk them through the correction and the procedure for this was found on the scripted database,

- e. Resources available to me appeared to be adequate at the time, however, I found the first few weeks very challenging because I had no POL background knowledge so it was a very steep learning curve for me and I probably found it more difficult than some of my younger colleagues, some of whom were graduates and absorbed new technology quicker than some of us older ones. The Team Leaders all seemed to have come from a POL background, probably why they were Team Leaders. The scripted database was one resource and appeared to be added to as things changed and the odd piece of Horizon kit scattered about, but not one to a team, not that I can remember. Product Managers based in London or Chesterfield was another resource but not available to all. We had to collate queries related to the same product so that these Managers were not

bombarded by calls or memos from SSAs at NBSC and this would eventually be added to the scripts on the database, but I cannot remember who was responsible for this particular task.

- f. The team was managed by a Team Leader and we generally had meetings at our desks about once a week or as required but I cannot be sure as my memory is not brilliant regarding this.
 - g. I can only speak for myself and my close colleagues regarding the attitude of NBSC towards Postmasters and that was that we treated them with respect, the way we would like to be treated.
8. I believe that we provided adequate support to Postmasters who called for assistance, however, in my view it was apparent that some of them did not receive enough Horizon training as everyone learns at different speeds and what one person finds easy another may have great difficulty with. I found this myself early on working at the call centre, but soon caught up and believe that I became efficient at handling the more complicated balancing calls.
9. I was not aware of any bugs, errors or defects within the Horizon IT System during the time I worked at NBSC which was from July 2000 to 2006, although I cannot remember exactly when I left but think it may have been in December some time. Management asked for voluntary redundancies during my last year and I volunteered as I found the job quite challenging at times plus I wanted to

move to GRO to be near GRO I moved to GRO in 2008 and still reside in
GRO

10. There is nothing else that I can remember that the Chair should be made aware of relating to the Horizon IT Project. It is 17 years since I left and I am 73 years old now and unfortunately my memory is not what it was 20 odd years ago. I would like to add that I do not have any documents relating to my time at NBSC, so there are no attachments to support this witness statement.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed: **GRO**

Dated: 13th February 2023