

Witness Name: Mr. Timothy Vause

Statement No: WITN05680100

Dated: 20/02/2023

THE POST OFFICE HORIZON INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY VAUSE

I, Timothy Vause, will say as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. This statement is in response to the request for information in accordance with Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006. The contents of the statement are regarding matters falling within Phases 2 and 3 of the Post Office Horizon Inquiry.

BACKGROUND

2. I joined Post Office Limited [POL] in July 1984, starting as a Postal Officer at Harrogate Crown Post Office. The role started with a six-week training course after which I commenced work behind the main post office counter.

3. In addition to working behind the post office counter there were several back-office roles that I also learnt to do over the years that followed. These included working in the Cash Bureau taking in cash deposits from local businesses, supplying them with change, resetting Franking Machines, and supplying postal officers on the Harrogate branch counter with their requirements for cash at the start of each day.
4. I also worked in the Philatelic Bureau, Returned Letters Branch which dealt with mail that could not be delivered and Television Licence Enquiries which carried out home visits to check if TV licences were held.
5. I spent some time in the Cash Office at Harrogate Post Office sending sub post offices in the Harrogate post code region their weekly stock orders of stamps, postal orders, car tax discs and cash/coin etc.
6. I also completed the main cash account for Harrogate Post office and over time became a counter tutor for new entrants into the postal officer role. This involved sitting behind new starters for the first few weeks and helping them with any issues they had with transactions.
7. I worked at several other Crown office counters, providing cover for annual leave and sick absence.
8. In 1997 I had a short secondment to a new team that were looking at automating the Post Office Counter and spent a short period drafting test scripts for the Testing Team based in Borough High Street in London.

9. Shortly after I had a secondment to the Post Office Automation Team which involved fitting Automated Payment Terminals in sub post offices in the North East. Automated Payment Terminals provided a method of taking payments for Utilities.

10. A further secondment followed in 1999 to the Horizon Programme. This role was a temporary promotion from Postal Officer to Counter Manager 2. The role was based at the Fujitsu offices in Feltham, Middlesex. During this time, I worked with Fujitsu and colleagues from Post Office Ltd and the Department of Work and Pensions on the processes and procedures for using the Horizon system which were documented in Processes and Procedures Descriptions and subsequently documented in the Horizon System User Guides.

11. In 2001, I was successful at interview and took a permanent post as a Change Implementation Analyst in Business Service Management based in Dearne Valley, in South Yorkshire. This was at Counter Manager 3 level. The role primarily dealt with Horizon system changes and drafting and publishing internal communications articles in the POL production of 'Counter News'. Articles were produced in conjunction with Product Managers and the Internal Communications Team. This publication was distributed to both Crown and Sub Post Offices and provided articles on Post Office products and where applicable, how to transact them on the Horizon system.

12. As a Change Implementation Analyst, the role would also require me to review changes such as Change Control Notes (ref 1). CCNs would be distributed to various stakeholders for comment / acceptance. The purpose of my review was to identify if the proposed change would impact on user

documentation and require any changes to controlled documents such as the Horizon System User Guide. I do not recall the background to CCN0965 but in my response within the CCN I have identified that the change, if implemented, would require an update to user documentation.

13. In 2003 I was promoted to the role of Problem Manager [Counter Manager 2]. Still working in Business Service Management at Dearne Valley the role was responsible for the management of business continuity related problems and identification of service improvements. For example, it was identified that if there was a central system failure disrupting the availability of the Horizon system, members of the public using the Post Office Card Account would not be able to get access to benefits so a manual work around was devised and put in place to ensure an interim payment could be made to Post Office Card Account holders.

14. In 2004 I was promoted to the role of Business Continuity Manager [Counter Manager 1]. In this role I worked with both internal teams and external suppliers of IT systems to Post Office Ltd such as Fujitsu, EDS, IBM and Alliance and Leicester, to ensure business continuity plans were in place and appropriately tested. The scope of the testing would include validation of critical systems' resilience and range from single component failure testing to full data centre failover and recovery. IT server component resilience was tested periodically by Fujitsu to ensure there were no single points of failure and that primary components would failover to secondary components without impact to service. These tests were not witnessed but were reported on by Fujitsu. Data centre failover tests were on a larger scale and would include all IT components active in the primary data centre being failed over

to the secondary data centre. Data centre tests were witnessed by me on site with the supplier.

15. In addition, business continuity plans were witness tested for the loss of production and printing of the Post Office Card Account payment card, and the loss of production printing of manual payment vehicles such as child benefit books and the subsequent recovery or printing to alternate sites. These tests were witnessed by me on site with the supplier.

16. The role also covered coordinating business continuity planning for industrial action at post office counters and cash centres, and the development of the Rapid Deployment Team. The Rapid Deployment Team was made up of mostly volunteer non-operational POL staff that could be deployed to work on Post Office Crown office counters all over the country in the event of Industrial Action. A more specialised number of staff within the Rapid Deployment Team was trained to work in secure cash delivery to cover industrial action in cash centres and ensure the ongoing delivery of cash to post office counters in the event of disputes, or other potential disruption scenarios such as pandemic flu.

17. The scope of the role also included development of the POL Crisis Management process. The purpose of the Crisis Management process was to put in place a response process for dealing with unplanned events such as the Buncefield explosion. The work included establishing a Crisis Management Team made up of senior management representatives from across POL that were suitably empowered to represent their business

area in the event of an incident. A requirement of the Crisis Management Team was that it could be invoked at short notice and outside normal business hours, therefore the invocation process was tested on a regular basis. The scope of invocation testing involved sending SMS text messages to Crisis Management Team members both inside and outside normal business hours in order to validate correct contact details were held, that they could be contacted and that they would respond at short notice.

18. Also included in the scope of the role was Pandemic Planning for Post Office Ltd, and response to terrorist incidents such as the London terror attacks and fuel supply disruption.

19. The role also included response and recovery from the Buncefield oil storage depot disaster. POL had two sites located in the vicinity which were impacted, requiring business continuity plans to be invoked.

20. The scope of the role also included reviewing established business continuity plans such as the Horizon Service Desk Business Continuity Plan (ref 2) which was reviewed on a regular basis to ensure the contents were current and up to date. I was not involved in the operation or development of the Horizon Service Desk, but believed it to be effective,

21. In my opinion business continuity was taken seriously at POL, was effective and adhered to good industry practice. I did not have any concerns about continuity planning.

22. During my time at Post Office Ltd I became a member of the Business Continuity Institute and continue to hold membership. The Business

Continuity Institute is the world's leading institute for business continuity and resilience professionals. It was established in 1994 and has a global network of over 9000 members.

Advice and Assistance

23. My roles in POL did not have any direct contact with sub postmasters or managers and assistants working in Post Offices, except during my time at Harrogate. During this time, which was pre-Horizon, I did on a very small number of occasions carry out sub postmaster training. This involved going to new sub postmasters and providing them with some training on how to carry out transactions and complete the weekly 'balance'.

24. When I was seconded to the Automation Team, I had contact with sub postmasters when I installed the terminal and showed them how to use it. Again, this was pre-Horizon.

25. As a Change Implementation Analyst my role involved providing indirect advice and assistance to post office counter staff, including sub postmasters, via publications such as Counter News and Operational Focus. These publications were used to inform post office counter staff about changes to the Horizon system, such as changes to the position of screen icons (ref 3) and Horizon System User Guide information updates (ref 4). The publications were issued on a regular basis with Horizon specific articles included an ad hoc basis.

26. In addition to the operational publications, Counter News and Operational Focus, there was a Message Broadcast System which was used to send

urgent operational messages to end-user Horizon system terminals. Message contents were sent to Fujitsu and they would then distribute the messages, which would be displayed on the Horizon system. The message could be targeted at specific post office outlet types and have a designated retention period. (Ref 5) is an example of a Message Broadcast written by myself, but I do not recall the specific circumstances behind why this message was sent. It appears to be associated with an issue relating to benefits paid into and held in the Post Office Card Account. Funds would be credited to the card account by the relevant government agency so that the customer could withdraw funds by presenting the card at the post office counter, replacing the need for a pension / child benefit book.

Training

27. I was not responsible for managing the contracts of sub postmasters.

28. Any training I carried out for sub postmasters was pre-Horizon and was on the manual processes and procedures – the training was limited as there was a lot to learn in a very short time.

Errors or issues with Horizon system

29. I was not aware of any issues with the Horizon system, other than things like network connectivity issues or component failures at the data centre. For example, where there were network issues this could impact system availability for sub postmasters. Instances like this, would be notified into the Helpdesk by the sub postmaster and assigned a problem manager within Business Service Management to investigate. Network connectivity issues were usually as a result of local issues, such as a severed cable caused by roadworks. I was not involved in the management of these failures.

30. Component failures at the data centre were managed by Fujitsu, and reported to Business Service Management. I was not involved in the management of these failures. Data centre component failures were as a result of hardware failures such as failed discs, and did not result in service failures due to the levels of resilience built into the service design. The service was designed to have no single points of failure – as far as I can recall the design was N+1 - “need plus one”. This meant that for every component in the design, there was always a secondary component built into the design. In my opinion the service was designed with adequate levels of resilience to guard against system failures.

Resolution of disputes

31. I was not involved in or party to any disputes between the Post Office and sub postmasters regarding any alleged shortfalls of money.

32. My role required me to have effective working relationships with business continuity counterparts across third party supplier domains which included Fujitsu. I was not aware of any contact or input from my Fujitsu business continuity counterpart [Tony Wicks] in the resolution of any disputes in connection with sub postmasters regarding any alleged shortfalls of money.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

GRO

Signed:

Dated: 20/02/2023

Index to First Witness Statement of TIMOTHY VAUSE

No.	URN	Document Description	Control Number
<u>1</u>	POL00031810	Change Control Note 0965	
2	FUJ00001981	Horizon Service Desk Business Continuity Plan – contingency plan	V8.0
3	POL00032019	Operational focus – operational publication for Post Office branches	
4	POL00006025	Counter News – operations publication for post offices	
5	NFSP00000386	Post Office Limited Message Broadcast Emergency Cascade.	