

Witness Name: Deepak Patel
Statement No.: WITN07660100
Dated: 14th February 2023

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF *DEEPAK PATEL*

I, *Deepak Patel*, will say as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a former employee of the Post Office Counters and held the position of Horizon Field Support Officer ("HFSO")
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry (the "**Inquiry**") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 31st January 2022 (the "**Request**").

BACKGROUND

3. Prior to the introduction of the Horizon IT System, I was working as a Post Office Counter Clerk and my role consisted of serving customers with their daily post office requirements, such as stamps, envelopes, delivery of parcels. Every Wednesday, I had the responsibility of balancing the till and handing the balancing sheet and contents of the till over to the Manager.

0. I applied to become an HFSO when I was aware that there was a position available, and I did this through the Post-Office Manager. When I was offered the position, I undertook three weeks' training which involved how to run the system and familiarisation and understanding of the product. After the training was completed, I was allocated into a team of HFSO's and we were given various sub post-offices which were to be migrated over from a manual system to the Horizon system.

1. On my first migration, I was shadowing an experienced HFSO so that I could understand the process and familiarise myself with what steps needed to be taken during the course of the migration. Following this, any subsequent migrations I undertook, were done alone. The system was designed so that if, during the course of implementation, the sub post-office's till did not balance, an error message would be flagged on the system, and we were unable to proceed any further with the migration. In this instance, we would ring the IT Support helpline provided by the software developer and they would advise us on what to do next.

2. My responsibility being an HSFO was to spend one day dealing with the migration to the Horizon system and then to provide an additional two days' assistance to the post-master in navigating the system. After the two-day support period, if there were any continuing problems, the post-master was to liaise with the IT support helpline directly as after this time, I would have to move onto another sub post-office to do the migration there.

3. The sub post-masters would often request for additional help with navigating the system. This was because they were not particularly happy with the new system given that they had spent a considerable number of years undertaking the balancing of the sub post-office manually and so doing it via an electronic system would sometimes prove to be a difficult task. In any of these circumstances, we advised the sub post-masters that they needed to contact the IT Support helpline, which is what we had been told during our training.

8. We were not given any additional resources to assist with any help that was required from the sub post-master but simply told that they needed to contact the IT Support helpline directly. We were also told to advise the sub post-office masters that if they experienced any difficulties in balancing their sub post-office, they were to liaise with the IT Support helpline directly.

9. HFSO's had monthly informal meetings at the Head Office in St Albans with the team leader. This was the time in which we discussed our personal experiences we had with the post-masters during the migration process. This was also the time when we were allocated the following month's sub post-offices which were to be migrated over to the new Horizon IT System.

10. I do think that the sub post-masters were adequately trained with the new system and if any issues arose that they could not deal with, they always had access to the IT Support helpline.

11. I do not consider that I was able to provide adequate advice and assistance on the new system as my training only involved how to balance the sub post-office rather than any other additional information on the system intricacies itself.

12. During my time as an HFSO, I was not aware of any defects with the system.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed: GRO

Dated: 14/03/23