

Witness Name: Carol Holmes

Statement No. WITN: 07710100

Dated: 7 February 2023

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST STATEMENT OF CAROL HOLMES

I, **Carol Holmes**, will say as follows...

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a former employee of Post Office Limited and held the position of Horizon Field Support Officer (**HSFO**).
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**').
3. I have been asked to set out my professional background, including summaries of any roles I had at the Post Office or ICL Pathway/Fujitsu. Throughout my

professional career, I have worked in several administration roles. I began working in a Sub-Post Office before joining the Post Office as a Counter Clerk. I progressed over the years and took up other job roles, including a Helpline Operator, Horizon Field Support Officer (HFSO), and Admin Assistant.

BACKGROUND

4. I have been asked to describe any training and/or instruction I received in relation to the Horizon IT project and/or my position as an HFSO. For the HFSO role, I received classroom-based training which led up to an assessment at the end of the training with a pass certificate gained. Instructions and updates further to the training were issued regularly throughout the project by the managers from our team leaders via meetings, telephone calls, letters.

5. I have been asked to set out my experiences working as an HSFO. In relation to the responsibilities and the description of my average working day, I can confirm that in the HFSO role I was required to support the sub-postmaster (SPM) and their staff through the transition of the new horizon system which consisted of transferring their current paper-based system on to the Horizon automated system. This required being supportive and helpful before and during the process and the days after. Being there for the staff, building rapport with the SPM and listening to their needs. Spending time with each team member of staff individually, helping them build their confidence using the new system by practising in training mode, sending reports, balancing procedures and resolving issues.

6. In relation to any specific requests for support from subpostmasters or complaints that I consider to be important to the Inquiry's terms of reference can confirm that if further support was necessary, this was documented in reports for the office which were sent to the head office as well as being fed back to team leaders and managers. I do not recall any specific examples.

7. In relation to what resources I had available to assist resolving calls for support and whether they were adequate, I can confirm that training manuals were available as well as the Horizon Helpdesk which provided support, but was often difficult to get through to. The system was new to all and we learned more throughout the role with the experience from each other. I don't recall anything specific.

8. In relation to how the HFSSOs were managed, I can confirm that communication, support and guidance was provided from the managers in head office through our team leaders via meetings and telephone calls and we were managed by them.

9. I have been asked whether subpostmasters were adequately trained in how to use Horizon. Sub-postmasters were invited to attend training prior to the go-live of the system in their office. This was beneficial for them to familiarise themselves with the procedures especially if they had never used an automated system before. The time spent supporting varied from office to office, due to their understanding and confidence using the system and depending how well their training was received.

10. I have been asked if I was able to provide adequate advice and assistance on Horizon to subpostmasters. Due to my experience in dealing with subpostmasters throughout my various roles at the Post Office, I could empathise with them and try to understand their needs and would strive to support them with any issues they had to the best of my knowledge and ability and ask for additional support for them when they requested this. I only remember being helpful and supportive and doing what was asked by my superiors.

11. I have been asked if I was aware of any bugs, errors or defects within the Horizon IT system at the time I was an HSFO. I was not aware of any IT defects or bugs occurring within the system as an HFSO or as a member of NBSC.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed:

GRO

Dated: 07/02/2023