

Witness Name: Shishir Patel  
Statement No.: WITN07870100  
Dated: 20 March 2023

## POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

---

### FIRST STATEMENT OF SHISHIR PATEL

---

I, Mr Shishir Patel, will say as follows...

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. I am a former employee of Post Office Limited (‘ POL’ ) and held the position of Horizon Field Support Officer (‘ HFSO’ ) from 1999 to approximately 2001.
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 31 January 2023 (the ‘Request’ )

#### **BACKGROUND**

3. I started with POL in October 1988 and started working as a counter clerk for 3 to 4 years before becoming an assistant branch manager at West Norwood post office after a few years I was moved to Camberwell Green post office and worked there for 3 to 4 years. In 1999, I cannot remember the exact date, the

opportunity arose in a new role as a HFSO which it took. I was a HFSO from 1999 to approximately 2001. Following this role, I went back to Camberwell Green and then on to Blackfriars Post office where I stayed for 3 to 4 years before joining the Network Business Support Service as a trainer and auditor. I stayed in this role until 2017 and eventually in 2018 I took voluntary retirement from my role.

4. As a HFSO I was sent on a classroom-based course for 5 days to Hatfield. I was then sent out to the sub post offices that were migrating to the new Horizon IT System.
5. My main responsibility as a HFSO was to go to branch offices and migrate the branch onto the new Horizon IT System. I would attend the branch on the evening before the migration and ask for the branch balance then I would migrate the data onto the Horizon System. I would then print a report and ask the subpostmaster to check the report and verify it. Once the subpostmaster confirmed it was all correct I would migrate it to the Horizon IT System.
6. I would go back to the same post office the next morning at 9am and stay until 5:30pm for the next 2 days to provide training for the subpostmaster. I would stand with the subpostmaster and guide them whilst they typed in the user details etcetera and then navigate them through the system. Once they were comfortable, I would shadow them whilst they served customers. I would show them where to find pages or tabs. At the end of the day, I would help them with the balancing and cash declarations and if there were any errors, I would show them how to rectify them. On Wednesdays I would help the branch to balance.
7. I do not remember any complaints as it was a new system but if a subpostmaster had any issues I would refer them to the helpdesk. There was

also an option for requesting more support and I would refer them to my line manager, and they may send out another HFSO for a couple more days training. The main issues seemed to be around the area of balancing.

8. I had a few resources I could use to assist the subpostmaster such as, referring them to my line manager and providing them with the helpdesk number. There were about 190 different transactions for the subpostmasters to learn. I think that training was inadequate as you could not train them the whole system in 2 days and maybe 5 days would have been better.
9. The HFSO team had about 20 to 30 HFSOs within the team which was supported by a line manager. We were managed daily by telephone as we worked out in the field. Occasionally the line manager would shadow me at a particular office I was working at. We did have a team meeting that we had to attend which was every 2 to 3 weeks.
10. In my view subpostmasters should have had 5 days training instead of 2 days on how to use Horizon. I remember that some of the older subpostmasters did not want to learn the new technology however the younger ones took it up very quickly. Transaction wise they had enough knowledge it was the Horizon IT technology that they needed the training for.
11. I consider that I was able to provide adequate advice and assistance on Horizon to subpostmasters in terms of basic assistance and they had the helpdesk so there was enough help if they became stuck.
12. I was not aware of any bugs, errors or defects within the Horizon IT system at the time I was an HFSO.

13. The only thing I would like to add is that I Worked in Crown branches and had no issues but I am not sure how the subpostmasters had issues such as the losses and so on.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed:           **GRO**          

Dated:   20/03/2023