

**Witness Name: Mr Mujahid Faisal Aziz**  
**Statement No: WITN0241\_01**  
**Exhibits: None Dated: 11 January 2022**

**THE POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY**

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**FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MR MUJAHID FAISAL AZIZ**

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I, MR MUJAHID FAISAL AZIZ WILL STATE as follows:

**INTRODUCTION**

1. I am grateful to the Chair to be invited to provide a “human impact” statement, concerning the physical, psychological, emotional, reputational and financial consequences to me and my family of being held responsible for shortfalls shown by the Horizon IT system and Post Office Limited’s actions toward me and my family. The initial paragraphs below provide a brief summary of my background, and provide context to the detail of the human impact of the Horizon scandal on me and my family. This statement does not reflect a full account of my experiences or those of my family and if necessary or required I will provide further witness statement evidence.
2. I am now 46 years old and I have been married to Shala Ahmed for 15 years. We have five children. I was born in India, but was raised in Saudi Arabia, where I met my future wife. I came to the UK in 1998 to study computing at South Bank University in London. I then also studied computing at Sheffield Hallam University. After completing my studies, I was granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. I found work in London building computers.

3. I then moved to Sheffield, where my brother lived. I got work with PC World, in their 'Know How' call centre providing support for customers with computer and other such problems. At the same time, I was trading clothing on the internet.
4. My wife and I decided to go into business for ourselves. We researched various business, and decided that running a post office would be a good way forward.
5. The advantage of the post office was that there was a guaranteed income, that would meet the basic costs of the business, and this would allow us to build our retail business. We had no doubt that the Post Office was a trusted government organisation, and therefore would be a good organisation to work with.
6. We put all of our life savings into purchasing the post office. We were sure that with hard work we would make a success of it.
7. I was a Subpostmaster of Norwood Post Office, 409 Herries Road, Sheffield S5 7HF from 11 September 2015 until 21 September 2020.
8. As part of the Network Transformation process myself and my business partner (my wife), Mrs Shahla Ahmed signed an On Site Main Post Office Agreement on 7 May 2015. This meant that we became a Main Post Office, providing all of the Post Office Services. We also operated a retail business from the premises, namely a news and convenience store.

### **Training and Support**

9. I received approximately 3 days of training before I took up my position, which took place in a classroom at a branch in Leeds. This covered topics such as postal services, passport check and send and some DVLA services. Whilst I was also given some manuals to take away and read, I did not think that this initial training was adequate at all, as there is a lot more to do when you are in branch such closing/balancing weekly and monthly and balancing the ATM.

10. I then received a further 5 days of in-branch training during my first week of operation. We covered most things, however this training was very brief and not in great depth. I did receive some training on balancing the ATM.
11. During the in branch training, my wife was also present and receiving training.
12. An error occurred while my wife was working under the direction of the trainer. This was then resolved. However, when we came to do the balance at the end of the day, there was a shortfall of approximately £400. The trainer was present when we did the balance. We showed the trainer the shortfall.
13. Rather than investigate the cause of the shortfall, the trainer became defensive and thought that we were accusing her of stealing. We did not in any way accuse her of stealing, we were asking for her help in identifying the cause of the shortfall. She provided no help at all. We are polite people, so we simply apologised and made up the shortfall from our own funds.
14. As such, we experienced our first major shortfall within the first week of trading in the company and under the direction of a Post Office trainer.
15. However, it is important to say that the Horizon System made it impossible to trace back in order to identify any discrepancies or shortfalls. This lack of ability to check back was not explained to us at the time.
16. I also felt that the Post Office Trainers who visited us were only interested in completing their 5 days in our branch before leaving. At one point my wife asked one of the trainers a question about balancing the ATM and the reply was "I will leave it to Faisal to explain it to you later". This was not adequate training.
17. I received no further training.

## Helpline

18. I think it is important to highlight that my wife and I are quiet people. We are not the kind of people to 'rock the boat'. We try to follow the rules and we are quite trusting and deferential to the authorities. We saw the Post Office as a government agency and we were not the kind of people who would challenge a government body. We trusted the Post Office. We later discovered that we were wrong to trust them.
19. I estimate that we contacted the Helpline about once a month with regard to problems relating to alleged shortfalls and/or balancing. In fact, my wife (Shala Ahmed) made most of the calls to the Helpline, as she acted as the manager, while I focused on serving customers.
20. Initially my wife and I were too scared to call the Helpline about the shortfalls we were experiencing, as we thought that the Post Office might think that we were not capable of running the branch.
21. When we did speak with the Helpline and said that we could not understand why Horizon indicated we were short when our records said we should be balanced; we were simply told that it was our responsibility to make up any alleged shortfalls. The Helpline offered no solutions or assistance. They would simply ask us to recheck our stock and cash checks. They offered no help in identifying problems.
22. On one occasion my wife called the Helpline as a large shortfall of approximately £3,700 had arisen. My wife was seeking advice and assistance from the Helpline to identify how and why this shortfall had arisen. The Helpline officer was very rude, and told my wife that she was the person who should be explaining to him where and how the shortfall had arisen.
23. In addition, in about 2018 a senior postmaster came visit us. He ran two Crown Post Offices. Because he was so experienced, we decided to confide in him and to seek his advice. I told him about the shortfalls that were arising, which were about £500



per month at that time. His only advice was that we should keep an eye on our employees. He also suggested that we were making mistakes and that we needed to be more attentive to make sure they were not doing anything wrong on the system.

### **Shortfalls**

24. In this section, I set out in very brief detail my experience of shortfalls arising from deficiencies in the Horizon IT System, and Post Office Limited's actions as a result. This is only a brief introduction to those matters, in order to provide necessary context for the explanation of the human impact which follows.
25. I would estimate that throughout my position in the branch, I paid (or Post Office deducted) in the region of £39,000. This figure is made up of approximately £10,000 we paid into the system to make up shortfalls from our own funds, and £29,000, which was deducted from our remuneration.
26. In fact, the situation became so severe, we ended up working without any remuneration at all.
27. There were very many smaller shortfalls. I would estimate that on average we had £50 - £80 shortfalls every week, which we always made good straight away by paying in cash.
28. However, there were also many larger shortfalls. We kept records of many of these. The following are example shortfalls that occurred, and which we made good:
  - a. 5 December 2015 - £120.00
  - b. 16 December 2015 - £177.68
  - c. 14 January 2016 - £303.90
  - d. 11 February 2016 - £205.49
  - e. 19 April 2016 - £441.40

- f. 1 June 2016 - £320.00
- g. 6 June 2016 - £462.08
- h. 29 July 2016 - £621.70
- i. 9 August 2016 - £150.73
- j. 9 September 2016 - £162.22
- k. 4 October 2016 - £528.08
- l. 13 October 2016 - £465.50
- m. 16 November 2016 - £295.81
- n. 19 December 2016 - £297.40
- o. 4 January 2017 - £315.40
- p. 28 February 2017 - £315.40
- q. 31 March 2017 - £522.50
- r. 10 April 2017 - £500.00
- s. 28 April 2017 - £496.63
- t. 31 May 2017 - £490.00

29. These sums do not represent all of the shortfalls we had to make up. The shortfalls continued after May 2017. For example, we were forced to pay a so-called shortfall of £7,400 in 2019.

30. We repaid all of these alleged shortfalls (either in cash or by Post Office making deductions from our salaries) as and when they arose and recorded the shortfalls in our accounts.

### **Audit and investigation**

31. An audit took place in February 2016. We did not receive any notice that an audit would be taking place, but I was present at the time.

32. Two auditors arrived at our branch at about 10.00am and they spent about 2 hours going through everything before confirming that our cash was correct.

33. We then had the first of two surprise audits.
34. In the first surprise audit in approximately April 2016, the auditors counted the cash and stated that there was a £3000 shortfall.
35. However, one of my employees showed the auditors that they had miscounted the cash. The auditors then recounted, and found that they were wrong and the £3000 was not missing.
36. The auditors did not apologise for their serious error, but instead said (words to the effect), "you are still £200 short, we will not prosecute you for that, but if you are down by £1000 or £2000 we could prosecute you".
37. This was the kind of attitude we had to deal with. When the Post Office auditors were completely wrong in their calculations, there was not even an apology. If we were out (according to the auditors calculations) by a few hundred pounds, we were threatened with prosecution. This kept us in constant fear.
38. Post Office auditors paid a second surprise visit in September 2019 to audit cash and stock. They conducted their audit and declared that we were £7,400 short, which they insisted we pay on the spot.
39. During the audit, I heard that the Post Office auditor speaking to the head office saying that the system is showing £10,000 up and somehow they had to adjust it. By this, I mean that the system was showing £10,000 in our favour.
40. I heard the Post Office auditor discussing this on the phone with another Post Office official. I heard the Post Office auditor say, "there is an error and we have to get it corrected from head office"
41. I challenged the auditor asking if the system was showing that we were £10,000 up. He said, yes it was, but he believed it was a mistake, which he was correcting with

head office. He remained on the phone for five minutes, and then he said it had been corrected.

42. It was clear to me that the Post Office knew that there were problems with their new system also, but they just did not care.
43. In this case, it appeared that the systems was saying that we were due a credit of £10,000. However, and despite this, the auditors said that we were short by £7,400.
44. We were given no opportunity to check their calculations, even though they had been £3,000 out in their calculations on the last audit, and despite what I had overheard on the call the auditor made to head office. They just demanded payment with the threat of prosecution looming over our heads.
45. We obviously did not have that sort of money. We had no choice but to use our business banking over draft completely.
46. After the auditors left, we counted all of the cash again. We also had our assistant (who was the son of the former subpostmaster) count the money. We both separately found that the auditors' calculations were substantially incorrect.
47. We never had a loss of £7,400 in our accounts or on the system before. We were sure that the auditors were incorrect. We were sure that the problem lay with the Post Office's Horizon System. However, what could we do, we were powerless in the face of the Post Office. We had to pay or face prosecution.

### **Termination**

48. These audits were the straw that broke the camel's back. We had been pouring money into the post office accounts to make up for the constant short falls. However, the Post Office auditors frightened us deeply. They did not care about us,

or the accuracy of their auditors; they just wanted our money and threatened us with prosecution.

49. We therefore made the decision that we had to sell the business and do so quickly, in case any more shortfalls arose, and to avoid further audits where thousands of pounds would be demanded from us with threats.
50. We decided that the post office was a never-ending free fall of money. We had to get out before we were completely ruined or prosecuted.
51. We immediately tried to sell the post office. Two potential buyers backed off after hearing about the Post Office scandal from the news. One of them had even passed the Post Office interview and was selected as a Postmaster but backed off out due to fear.
52. Waiting for the Post Office to approve a buyer wasted around 3 years of our lives.
53. I seriously considered simply pulling down the shutters and closing the post office. However, a friend of mine suggested that I sell it at a very low price, so that I got something for it, rather than nothing.
54. I accepted this advice, because we were so frightened. We sold the business in haste. We had to sell off the business for £15,000; £105,000 less than we initially bought it for (£120,000), not including the other costs associated with starting the business of £15000.
55. As I have said, eventually we had to effectively give our business away for £15,000. All of this money was taken by the bank, and we still have an unpaid bank loan of £65,000.

56. We hope that the Inquiry understand how frightened we were, that we felt we had to sell our business for so little because we were so afraid of the constant shortfalls and action the Post Office might take against us.

### **Civil and Criminal Proceedings**

57. The Post Office did not pursue civil or criminal proceedings against me in relation to the alleged shortfalls. However, they threatened to do so as a way of frightening us into always paying the supposed shortfalls.

### **Losses**

58. I paid (or had deducted) the Post Office approximately £39,000 in total.
59. I also lost almost the whole value of my business.
60. We also lost our future remuneration we would have earned running the post office, if we had not been forced to sell it. In our first year of trading, we received £72,000 from the Post Office in remuneration. In the second year, we received £68,000.
61. If we had been able to, we would have continued operating the post office until retirement. I was forced to sell the post office in 2020, when I was 45 years old. I would have expected to have continued to work until the age of 65. I therefore have lost 20 year of remuneration.
62. We also lost the profits from the retail business.
63. However, it is very difficult to put a price on the fear and stress we experienced because of the Post Office, its faulty IT system and the Post Office's threatening auditors.

## **HUMAN IMPACT**

64. Above I have set out a summary of the problems we experienced with the Post Office and its faulty IT Systems.
65. When we took over the post office and shop we were full of hope for the future. We were sure that through hard work we would build up a successful business.
66. However, the post office became a money pit that could never be filled.
67. Initially we thought that the constant discrepancies must be our fault, we thought we must be incompetent. As a result, we tried every single day to be more and more careful in handling cash and stock. This meant that we were constantly checking and rechecking, and staying late at the post office.
68. We became so concerned that we started to ask other subpostmasters if they were experiencing losses as well. As I have said, some were very hesitant to accept or disclose any of their personal situation they were facing, but some did share that they were experiencing a similar plight. They were experiencing the same financial crisis that we were dealing with, caused by the Horizon System.
69. As such, over time it became clear that the problem lay with the Post Office's IT System.
70. However, we felt powerless against the Post Office. The fear of being short on the balance and being penalised by the Post Office, kept us desperately putting cash from the shop side into the post office every day in order to balance out the post office books.
71. A stage came when we could no longer put any more money into the post office from our own funds, as we were completely skint.

72. We requested the post office to deduct money from our remuneration. To date we have paid £29,000. This does not include the further £10,000 we paid from our own funds and from the retail business to make up shortfalls.
73. These payments to the Post Office only stopped after the Group Litigation case concluded in December 2019.
74. We hardly had any income, and our Post Office remuneration was getting lower and lower with each passing year because of the deductions that were being made by the Post Office.
75. Our situation kept on getting worse with every passing month, as we were unable to pay electricity bills or rent on time, because we were constantly making up shortfalls or having deductions from our remuneration.
76. The “cherry on the cake” was when the post office changed the Horizon software to Verizon system, after the exposure of the faults in their IT System in the Group Litigation. This new system, continued to create shortfalls.
77. I have described the Post Office surprise audits above. This was after the introduction of Verizon. The auditors were incompetent and uncaring. They casually threatened us with criminal prosecution to force us to pay them £7,000. We could not take it anymore.
78. My wife and I are effectively bankrupt, with huge debts and having exhausted all avenues of family borrowing. We continued to work with no wages to take home, for nearly 5 years.
79. As a current subpostmaster (as I was at that time), I was afraid to litigate against the Post Office. However, I became a claimant in the group litigation against Post Office Ltd. The monies I received from that claim were a fraction of my actual losses, and took no account of the wider suffering my wife and I experienced. As a party to the group litigation, I am excluded from the Historic Shortfall Scheme.



80. As I say, the fear of being short of cash and being penalized or prosecuted by the Post Office, kept us desperately putting cash from the shop side sales into the post office every day in order to balance out the post office books.
81. A stage came when we could no longer put any money from our own pockets in to the system as we were completely broke. Our situation kept on getting worse with every month, as we were unable to pay electricity bills or rent on time. Our bills kept on piling up, but we had no money to pay them as we were constantly pouring money into the Post Office account to balance shortfalls.
82. We have a high court judgement against us for being unable to pay electricity bill. We also were unable to keep up our car repayment, which was vital for the business to function. As such, they reported us to the credit agency for not being able to continue paying the instalments.
83. We still have the electricity debt of £8,000 hanging over our heads.
84. We had to sell the business off for £15k, which was a huge loss in investment. The bank is still chasing for a payment of £65k.
85. We have had to pay the enormous amount of £29,000 to the post office at roughly around £800 per month. .
86. All of this caused my wife and I unending fear and stress. It led to my wife and I dealing with depression, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels.
87. We had constant sleepless nights because of the fear of going bankrupt. We were working for nothing; everything we made was going to pay Post Office shortfalls.
88. We felt like bonded labourers.

89. I had an accident at work and but had to work after only resting for an hour. I had a hernia surgery but still had to be back at work 3 days after the operation.
90. I feel that I only escaped prosecution and being convicted of criminal offences because I paid all of the shortfalls.
91. There was no fair process. There was no way to challenge the Post Office and their system. We felt like slaves and the Post Office were our masters.
92. My wife and I are blessed to have friends and family who helped us to get through some of our most testing times during the period we were running the post office.
93. There were times when we had to borrow money from our friends and family to pay shortfalls to keep the business afloat.
94. Unfortunately, this affected our relationships with our friends and family. We became so ashamed that we could no longer face some of our friends, because we are still indebted to them. I am still repaying £200 every month to one of my family friends.
95. In December 2020 we were served a Section 21 eviction notice by our landlord; seeking to evict us from our home. The reason stated was the house was overcrowded. Unfortunately, because of our problems with the Post Office, we could never afford a bigger rental house.
96. Private landlords were rejecting tenants on housing benefits (DSS). We had four children under 16 children and we were expecting our 5th baby, who was born on GRO  
**GRO**
97. This should have been a time to be excited and cherish the memories of our children, but sadly, instead we were constantly worried about the roof over our heads.
98. The amount of stress we were going through was unbearable.

99. This continued until we approached our local MP, Gill Furness, and explained our financial situation because of being victims of the Post Office scandal. With her help, we were finally able to get a council house in which we moved into in August 2021.
100. My wife and I have been through rough times during the pregnancy of our 3rd and 4th child due to the work stress and monetary situations.
101. My wife had to keep lifting heavy newspaper bundles, heavy coin bags, delivery bags, heavy parcels etc. until almost her due date in 2017, which caused our baby to be tiny and be breached. Ultimately, the baby had to be delivered through a C-section. It took my wife 6 months to recover. During which time neither she nor I got any maternity/paternity leave or pay.
102. My older children used to come from school and stay with us in the post office until 8pm or sometimes even 10pm at night, while we kept searching for causes of the losses on the Horizon system.
103. The most upsetting situation was when our older children started questioning us about why my wife and I worked so hard and did not take any holidays.
104. Our children also asked why we did not have enough money to buy our own house or even afford to go on holidays. We tried to explain, but could not. The children demanded to know why we ever bought the post office. We had no answers to give them, and were unable to be there for our children as they grew up.
105. We will never get back those years of our life that we wasted in the post office, when we worked without pay for years, because of the incredible amount of money we had to put into the post office to make up for shortfalls caused by the Post Office's Horizon System.
106. My children are victims also. They lost much of their childhood, because their parents were slaves to the Post Office and its faulty Horizon System.

## **CONCLUSION**

107. My wife and I would like the Post Office to fully admit that their Horizon System was deeply flawed, and that they knew this.
108. We would like to know when the Post Office knew that their system was faulty. The reason we would like to know is that we bought our post office in September 2015. If the Post Office knew that their system was faulty at this time, then they had a duty to tell us this at the time, as this would have directly impacted on our decision as to whether we bought the post office or not.
109. Furthermore, if the Post Office knew that their Horizon System was faulty prior to September 2015, they should have told us, so that we could have understood that the shortfalls were caused by the System, and therefore we would have been in a position to refuse to pay the shortfalls.
110. Our hopes and dreams of a good life, working hard to operate and build our family post office business have been destroyed.
111. We invested everything we had in buying and running the post office. All of our life savings have gone, and we are in deep debt, and constantly on the verge bankruptcy.
112. The stress that we were subject to for years impacted on our health, our relationships with our family and friends, and also on our ability to be therefore our children as they grew up.
113. All of this is directly as a result of the actions of Post Office Ltd.
114. As I have said at the beginning of this statement, we are quiet people who trust the authorities. We are the kind of people who follow the rules and respect authority. Our trust in the authorities has been shattered by the Post Office's actions.

115. The only way that our trust can be restored is if those who were responsible for this scandal are held to account.
116. We have received an apology from Paul Scully MP (Department of Business Minister). However, and an apology is not enough. The Department of Business own the Post Office and were supposed to supervise the activities of the Post Office.
117. Therefore, we expect the Minister to ensure that we, and other subpostmasters, are fully and properly compensated.
118. It is deeply unfair that we have to wait and wait for some kind of compensation. We are suffering now, as are our children. We need help now.
119. Therefore, we cannot accept Paul Scully's apology until he shows that he is willing to put our lives back where they should have been.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe the contents of this Statement to be true.

Signed.....**GRO**.....

Dated.....11-01-2022.....