

WITNESS: NORMAN BARBER

STATEMENT NUMBER: WITN0177\_01

EXHIBITS: 0

DATED: Jan 11, 2022

**POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY**

**FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF NORMAN BARBER**

THIS STATEMENT IS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO THE RULE 9 REQUEST OF  
THE PUBLIC INQUIRY DATED 29/10/2021 TO ADDRESS THE HUMAN IMPACT OF  
THE FAILINGS OF THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM

I, MR NORMAN BARBER Date of Birth:  of

will say as follows: -

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

1. I live with my wife Amanda Barber.
2. I am 62 years old.
3. I work for  on their car parks and have done so even before this incident occurred.

## **POST OFFICE HISTORY**

4. In November 2009 my wife became Sub-Post Mistress of the Thelwall Post-Office, and I occasionally helped out, alongside my role at GRO. Our daughter also worked in the newsagent side of things.
5. My wife used a Post Office loan via Barclays to purchase the Post Office and shop.
6. Prior to this, my wife and I also ran a Post Office in Lancaster, which my wife bought from her father who ran it before us.
7. Alongside all of this, my wife and I also worked for the National Register as an additional income.
8. Amanda and I only became aware of other people having issues with the Horizon system after the Panorama TV series aired a special episode about the issue.

## **CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS AND ANY PROCEEDINGS/CONVICTION**

9. My wife and I knew of shortfalls within the system for some time, but couldn't explain these, and at one point thought previous or current staff members had been dishonest.
10. These problems were reported to the Post Office, but we were told to make good any shortfalls, and as such, were using our own money to make up for these losses.
11. On 21 June 2011, an audit was done on the Post Office and a shortfall was found. We were aware of the shortfall, and I had already organised somebody to purchase my car the very next day to make this up.

12. The auditors weren't interested and suspended my wife on the spot. Later, the same day, an agency worker attended the Post Office. He turned up in a sports car gloating and laughing about how he had been able to make so much money from these scenarios.
13. Although I was not employed by the Post Office, I was told that I would have to attend the police station to give a statement. I initially tried to refuse as they told me it was voluntary; the Post Office finances had nothing to do with me. However, a police officer turned up at the house threatening me, and I was taken down to the police station where two Post Office officials took a statement from me.
14. I was persuaded by my legal representatives to plead guilty to the charge of fraud. I was told that I will most definitely be going to prison if I didn't.
15. I attended Warrington Magistrates Court on 6 June 2012 and alongside with Amanda, pleaded guilty to the charge of fraud in a bid to avoid a custodial sentence.
16. On the same date, I was sentenced to a 12-month Community Order with the requirement to do 100 hours of unpaid work.
17. My conviction was quashed by the Court of Appeal on 18 November 2021.

## **THE HUMAN IMPACT**

18. The human impact which the failings of the Horizon IT System have had and continue to have upon me and my family are set out in the remainder of this statement. The section headings follow the particular questions posed by the Inquiry.

**WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING REQUIRED TO MAKE GOOD APPARENT SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

19. Shortfalls had to be paid back into the system. This was the only thing we were told to do. Our own money and profits were initially used to pay hundreds of pounds at a time.
20. When we couldn't afford to do this anymore, I used inheritance money to pay back the deficits. We even took out credit cards and loans to try and clear the balances. I even tried to sell my car to make up the shortfalls.
21. Despite all of our efforts, shortfalls were continuing to show up in the system, and it was unexplainable. We continued to report this to the Post Office to no avail.
22. At one point my wife and I tried to inflate the value of £2 coins in order to recoup some of these losses. If there was a shortfall, we would say that we had more money in cash in the till than we actually did. For example, if there was a shortfall of £100 and we had £20 in the till, we would say that there was £120 in the till to make the system good. We hoped that this would give us time to figure out where the money had gone.

**WHAT WERE THE COSTS OF MAKING GOOD ALLEGED SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY HORIZON?**

23. As a result of the alleged shortfalls Amanda and I paid, we had to find money from external sources to fund this. We used £50,000 of our inheritance, borrowed £30,000 from our family, and sold our family car.

**HOW WERE YOU AFFECTED WHEN ALLEGED TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS OR DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

24. Initially my wife and I thought that the shortfalls were happening due to dishonest staff. However, there was no evidence of this, and there was no explanation as to why this kept on occurring, irrespective of how much money we were putting back into the system.
25. Following the audit in June 2011, the auditors believed that we were responsible for the shortfalls, and we were suddenly treated like criminals. My wife's car was searched, and we were both interviewed under caution. The whole experience was degrading and frightening.
26. It was unbelievable that we were being blamed for this. This was our livelihood, and we were upstanding people within the community. All of a sudden our reputation was ruined, and it felt shameful, even though we knew we were innocent.

**WHAT WERE THE COSTS OF MAKING GOOD ALLEGED SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY HORIZON?**

27. Due to the issues Amanda and I experienced with the Post Office, we were left in a position where we had to sell our shop and the goodwill of the business. Unfortunately, we had to sell this at a loss.
28. Mine, Amanda's, and our daughter's incomes were all affected after Amanda's role was terminated. Amanda was earning roughly £40,000, which included her salary from the Post Office, share of profits from the shop, and income from National Register work. I was earning roughly £20,000 in my role

in the shop. Our daughter was also working full time in the shop, so she lost her salary too.

**WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

29. Immediately following the audit, my wife was suspended from her role as a Sub-Postmistress, and we were both brought in for questioning.
30. Even though I didn't even work for the Post Office, and only helped my wife out from time to time, they were bringing me into the matter. They told me that the interview was voluntary, but then when I refused, the police arrived at the door and insisted I attend.
31. I had to do interviews with the Post Office at the station where I was charged, and I was then summonsed to Court.
32. I instructed solicitors to help out but was recommended to plead guilty for fraud for the shortfalls in the system.
33. I was handed down a community sentence and had to do 150 hours of unpaid Community Service. I also had to pay the Court costs.

**WHAT WERE YOUR FINANCIAL LOSSES CAUSED BY ACTION TAKEN AGAINST YOU IN RELIANCE UPON HORIZON DATA?**

34. We had the credit cards and loans that we were paying, which were taken out to cover the shortfalls within the system already. Then we had over £5,000 to pay back for the shortfall, and then the legal costs.
35. I had to do 100 hours of unpaid work, which meant I couldn't bring in any income from my job at GRO for a period.

36. We had already lost our business, and without any money coming in to pay for the mortgage, we had to sell our home. However, this took three years to sell, and the debt that we incurred was mounting.
37. I have lost out on promotional opportunities and ways in which I could have progressed as a result of this.
38. Alongside my role in the airport, and occasional helping at the Post Office, my wife and I was also doing frequent work for the National Register. This was an opportunity to make additional income. We could earn £100 per day travelling around, and I would do this at least 2 days per week. Sometimes my wife and I would do this for a whole week if we had cover in the Post Office. Following the audit, the Post Office prevented us from being able to do this anymore.
39. Along with our roles and the additional income from the National Register, my wife and I were planning a fantastic retirement. We wanted a life of luxury with holidays and the best amenities. Because of the wrongful conviction, this is now not possible. My wife and I both live in a caravan to try and make ends meet. We are still paying back the Post Office now.

**WHAT EFFECT DID IT HAVE TO BE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING CRIMINAL OFFENCES AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

40. The charges and convictions were put all over both local and national press, and so it felt as if everyone knew who we were and what we allegedly did. It was very embarrassing for us, and as such, we avoided going out as much where possible.

41. It was humiliating as people wouldn't make eye contact with us and avoided us completely. We were very much involved in our local community and knew most of the residents. They suddenly stopped talking to us.
42. I also had to stop working for the National Register as the Post Office would not allow me to continue.
43. I became depressed and knew that this was going to financially ruin me and my wife. I put all my efforts into doing as many hours as I could at the airport, seven days a week; my wife and I barely saw each other.
44. I worked every single day so that GRO would pay me back my holidays as extra income. It was exhausting; whenever I did see my wife, we would either argue or say nothing at all. It put a massive strain on our relationship.

**WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING CONVICTED OF A CRIMINAL OFFENCE AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

45. My wife and I were in massive debt.
46. In addition to the financial pressures that we had, we were made to do our community service in our local community. I lost all dignity, and it was humiliating. People were already shaming us by ignoring us or walking the other way. I had to do one part of the community service in a Heart Foundation shop, and whenever someone I knew would come in, I would hide away upstairs in shame. I was continually on edge.
47. I was also doing this alongside criminals; some of whom had been in and out of prison before. It was very daunting.



**WHAT EFFECT DID THESE ISSUES HAVE UPON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY?**

48. Prior to the incident, we had a big role in the community and were well known.

A lot of people used the Post Office, and we got to make a lot of friends.

49. Following the conviction, everyone only saw us as guilty, and people stopped talking to us. Even our own family stopped speaking and seeing us. It was horrific.

50. The only family we still talk to is our daughter. We have lost contact with even our close family who all saw us as guilty.

51. My wife and I were isolated after the conviction and felt very alone. Prior to this we were both outgoing people. Now we avoid socialising and don't strike up conversations with new people.

**PLEASE DESCRIBE THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT WHICH THESE ISSUES HAD UPON THE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY?**

52. Our daughter worked with us in the news agency side of the Post Office. She was deeply impacted by the way that we were treated by the Post Office and the criminal justice process.

53. Since the incident, she has never worked. I think it has had a devastating impact upon her, and I think it will be difficult for her to move on also.

54. We had to ask our daughter to lend us her inheritance just so we could get by and pay the bills.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

55. Whilst the convictions may have been overturned, the experience has marked us forever. Even now I can't understand how it happened and why it happened to us. My wife and I discuss this all the time.
56. The whole process makes me angry, and I'm still angry now – particularly as the Post Office apparently knew all about this and didn't prevent it from happening.
57. My wife and I have lost the last 12 years of our lives. We have been in hiding, and haven't seen friends and family for all of that time. Even now, people will ignore us in the street or avoid eye contact if they recognise us.
58. The feelings of humiliation and anger will take some time to go away. Having strangers re-telling our stories brings back these feelings all the time.
59. I am hoping in time I can move past these feelings, but it has ruined both our past and future. We are both just not the same people anymore, and still live in debt, due to the ordeal.

**Statement Of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

**GRO**  
Norman John Barber (Jan 11, 2022 20:04 GMT)

Position Or

Office Held:

Print Full

Date of signature: Jan 11, 2022

Name: NORMAN BARBER

FILE REFERENCE: **GRO**

