

Witness Name: Liggins, Philip  
STATEMENT NO.:  
WITN07760100 Dated: 15  
MARCH 2023

**POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY**

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**FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF PHILIP LIGGINS**

I, **PHILIP LIGGINS**, will say as follows:

**INTRODUCTION**

1. I am a former employee of the Post Office 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 19 January 2023 (the “**Request**”).

**BACKGROUND**

3. I have been asked to set out my responses to the following requests.
  1. *Please set out your professional background, including summaries of any roles you had at the Post Office or ICL Pathway/Fujitsu.*
  2. *Please describe any training and/or instruction you received in relation to the Horizon IT project and/or your position as an HFSO.*
  3. *Please describe your experiences working as an HFSO, including the following details:*
    - a. *Your responsibilities and a brief description of your average working day;*



back to my role as a counter post office clerk in the Lichfield post office. The Post Office has completed most of the sub post office migrations to Horizon and they were reducing the numbers of HFSSOs.

7. [redacted] **GRO** [redacted]  
[redacted] **GRO** [redacted]. Upon returning to work I built up my number of days at work [redacted] **GRO** [redacted] working in the administrative office before it closed down on 30 September 2002. I then transferred back to the Lichfield post office. I held the post of assistant manager a couple of times for periods but mostly I held the role of Post Office Clerk until I took voluntary redundancy aged 57 in 2008.

8. After I left the Post Office I worked on the M6 Toll Road booths for around 6 months before commencing work with Newrose Personnel ("**Newrose**") in 2009.

9. My role with Newrose was to take over the operations of sub post offices on a temporary basis when the post office suspended or terminated their arrangements with a sub postmaster until a permanent replacement could be found or the sub postmaster was reinstated. I worked for Newrose in this capacity as a post office counter clerk until 2013. In this capacity I worked in quite a few sub post offices including Mere Heath, West Bromwich, Lazy Hill Adridge, and a few sub post offices in Oxford. Sometimes I would be required for a few days, other times I would be required for longer. I recall I was at the West Bromwich sub post office for around five months for example.

10. When I left Newrose after around four years in 2013 I went to work with a friend as a Post Office counter clerk in Trent Valley, Lichfield until June 2018. Since then, I have been permanently retired.
11. I have never had a role directly with ICL Pathway or Fujitsu.
12. I would like to make it clear that I have not been provided with any documentation by the Inquiry to accompany the request for me to provide evidence to the Inquiry. I have not retained any paperwork from my employment by the Post Office or Newrose. As such, my evidence has been prepared solely from my recollections.
13. In respect of Request 2 I can confirm that I first started to use the Horizon IT system in around 1992 or 1993 when it was introduced to the Lichfield post office where I was working as one of a number of counter clerks. The Horizon system was first installed by the Post Office into its main branches and then 'rolled out' to sub post offices at a later stage. We received a couple of days training from Post Office training staff that came into the Lichfield post office. This training consisted of supervision of the use of the Horizon system. I found Horizon to be fairly intuitive to use although it helped that there were five or six clerks in the Lichfield post office and, if we were unable to quickly work out how to do something, we could ask each other for help.
14. In around late 2000 / early 2001 I became aware of HFSO roles becoming available to go into sub post offices to migrate them onto the Horizon system and to provide initial training on using Horizon. As I have mentioned, at that time I would go into other post offices to provide cover and as I was already using Horizon daily it seemed an interesting opportunity and so I applied for the role.

15. I received two weeks of training at a hotel in Bristol along with around ten to twelve other Midlands-based HFSOs. The other HFSOs on this training course were also experienced users of the Horizon system. I believe the training was provided by Fujitsu but I cannot be certain about this given the passage of time. I assume that HSFO's in different regions received the same training. This training involved showing the HFSOs how to migrate data from paper records on the Horizon system and how to use the system on a day-to-day basis so that we could demonstrate this to sub post masters. I recall the training was similar to the training we had received when the Horizon system was first installed in the Lichfield post office.
16. During my HFSO training there was ongoing assessment throughout the two weeks, and I recall there was an assessment at the end. The trainers then approved us to go into sub post offices to migrate the paper records to Horizon and to support the sub post masters as they learned to use Horizon.
17. During our Horizon training HSFOs were provide with helpline telephone numbers which we could use for technical support whilst on site in sub post offices and a telephone number which we were to provide to sub postmasters if they had any support requirements after HFSOs had moved on to the next sub post office. I cannot recall whether these were the same or different telephone numbers and I do not recall ever having the need to call this helpline.
18. This is the only training that I received in the use of Horizon. I cannot comment whether HSFOs received further training to refresh their knowledge or to update their knowledge on any Horizon updates. I was only in the post of HFSO for approximately 12 months.

19. In respect of Request 3a I can confirm my role as HFSO involved travelling to a sub post office to migrate their paper records onto Horizon and to help the sub postmaster to get to grips with using the Horizon system over two to three days of support.
  
20. I would be told in advance by a central post office team which sub post offices I would be visiting a week or two in advance and they would make hotel bookings for me and other HFSOs. Typically, HFSOs would be booked into the same accommodation together with our line manager, Mr Phil Cato, and we would each visit a sub post office in the vicinity of the hotel over 2 to 3 days before moving onto the next job. HFSOs were provided with a car and the use of a Post Office credit card to purchase fuel. Mr Cato would visit the HFSOs as we were providing support to sub post offices to check that everything was in order.
  
21. On the day of a migration to Horizon I would tend to arrive at the sub post office between 3pm to 5pm and wait for them to close for the day. Alternatively, a sub post office would have to close for the day of migration. A Fujitsu engineer would arrive at around the same time as me and they would install the hardware required for the sub post office to use the Horizon software.
  
22. Once the sub post office had closed and once the engineer had finished their work, I would then take the paper records for that sub post office, check that the figures balanced and, if so, I would migrate that data across to Horizon. The inputting of the data from paper records into Horizon would take me in the region of 30 to 90 minutes each time. If the paper records did not balance, then I could not migrate the data to Horizon and I would have to come away. I recall that on one instance in a

sub post office off the A30 near Oakhampton their paper records did not balance as the cash figure was incorrect by £1,500. In that case the sub postmaster had to contact their area manager for authority to include new balancing data into their paper records before I was authorised to proceed to migrate it on to the Horizon system.

23. To migrate stock and financial balances to the Horizon system I would take all of the lines of data for the paper records and copy them into Horizon. This data included things such as cash, stamp quantities by class, postal orders, licences such as tv or dog licences, utility payments, postal transactions, etc. Sub post offices typically carried out around 30-40 transaction types compared to around 110 product lines in main branches. Each sub post office's product lines were different. Horizon had fields to complete for each product line and the sub post masters could simply ignore the fields that were not relevant to them.
  
24. Once I had completed migration of the paper records to Horizon I would print the Horizon ledger and staple it to the paper ledger that I had copied the data from. I would then leave this with the sub postmaster so that they had a record of the successful migration to Horizon. I was not required to keep a copy of those records and I did not.
  
25. On the days following migration days I would spend two to three days with each sub postmaster watching them using the horizon system and assisting them if they were having any difficulty so that they could operate it after I had left. My role was to observe the sub postmaster doing their job, supervise their use of Horizon and answer any questions they may have as they learned to use Horizon.



26. I would stay at the sub post office during its opening hours which varied from post office to post office but they were typically 9am to 5pm. At the end of each day we would check that the ledgers on Horizon balanced. This would be straightforward as Horizon would identify where it considered there to be a balancing discrepancy. If the ledgers did not balance straight away, then it would be apparent.
27. I was conscious that the sub post masters may not need to use all of the functions of Horizon during my time with them depending on the nature of the transactions that their customers wanted to perform. In quieter moments I would use the time to demonstrate to sub post masters how to input transactions that they might need to do at a later date. The Horizon system at that time had the ability to create test entries that you could use to familiarise yourself with how it worked although I recall this was later removed from the Horizon system I was using as a counter clerk in the Lichfield Post Office by around 2003/2004.
28. I operated as a HFSO in the Midlands area but I was not confined to the Midlands. When required I migrated data onto Horizon and provided support to sub postmasters in Wales, Cornwall and other places. I never migrated data or provided support in relation to a main branch post office only sub post offices.
29. In respect of Request 3b I can confirm that I do not recall any specific requests for support from sub postmasters or complaints that I consider to be important or relevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference. Normally, I would leave the sub post office after two to three days with no issues. The sub post offices that I visited were predominantly single person operations or occasionally two or three people but not more than this. They were often in very rural locations and they might be operated by elderly sub post masters. Occasionally, if I thought that particular sub postmasters



may need some simple pointers or reminders on how to operate Horizon I would leave them with my mobile telephone number in addition to the Post Office support helpline number. Whenever I did this, I did not receive many calls and any calls that I did receive occurred in the period shortly after I had visited the sub post office and these were always quickly resolved.

30. If I had more serious concerns that a sub postmaster was going to struggle to operate Horizon I had been told to bring this to the attention of my line manager, Mr Cato, for him to take whatever steps he considered to be appropriate to provide additional support.

31. I was never asked to return to any sub post office after migrating the paper records to the Horizon system and completing two to three days with the sub postmaster. Any further support would have been provided via the helpline number that I gave to the sub postmaster when I left them or as may have been organised by Mr Cato if I had informed him of a need for further support.

32. In respect of Request 3c I have mentioned earlier in this statement that during my training I was given a helpline number to call if I had any issues when working as an HFSO in sub post offices. I do not recall that I ever needed to call it. The HFSOs were all staying together in the same hotels as we each visited subpost offices. If any issues had arisen during our days in sub post offices supporting the sub postmasters as they learned to use Horizon, the HFSOs would share our experiences in the evenings and this was always sufficient to address any issues with sub postmasters the following day. HFSOs frequently had our line manager, Mr Cato, available to us during his visits in the sub post offices and during the evenings back at our hotel accommodation to assist with any queries that had arisen. If any

issues arose during my final day in any sub post office which I could not deal with I would discuss these with my fellow HFSOs and Mr Cato that evening and call the sub postmaster with the solution the following day.

33. In respect of Request 3d my experience of being managed as a HFSO was my dealings with Mr Cato when he would visit me on site in sub post offices and in our interactions at the end of the day in our accommodations. I did not have any formal management meetings or reviews in the year that I was a HFSO.

34. In respect of Request 4 my view is that some sub postmasters were adequately trained in how to use Horizon and others may not have been. Often, I left sub post offices confident that the sub postmaster was capable of operating the Horizon system. Sub postmasters were often relatively elderly and some did not adjust easily to moving away from paper-based records. A small number did not wish to have a new system imposed on them. I recall, in particular, there was a sub postmaster in rural Pembrokeshire who was 78 years old and had only around 50 customers a week. The transition to Horizon or any other electronic system was always going to be challenging for that sub postmaster. The transition to Horizon was also more difficult in rural locations where the internet connectivity was patchy. I was aware that in some locations sub postmasters had to occasionally revert to paper-based record keeping during periods when the Horizon system could not connect to the internet and then had the task of updating the Horizon records when their connection was restored. In addition, some product lines were not able to be provided through a sub post office without a computer including applications that required photo ID such as passports and also premium bond transactions. As above, whenever I felt that a sub postmaster might not be equipped to operate the Horizon system when I

left them I brought this to the attention of Mr Cato for him to make further arrangements to support them.

35. In respect of Request 5 I do consider that I was able to provide adequate advice and assistance on Horizon to sub postmasters in the relatively brief time that I spent with each of them. I have mentioned earlier in this statement I had been using the Horizon system and its' predecessor system for a number of years in main post offices. I had experience of being 'parachuted' into sub post offices too. I also received training geared towards helping me understand how best to train others on the use of Horizon and during my training I was given a helpline number to call if I had any issues when working at a HFSO in sub post offices. I do not recall that I ever needed to call it. The HFSOs were all staying together in the same hotels as we each visited sub post offices. If any issues arose during the day we would share our experiences in the evenings and this was always sufficient to address any issues the following day.

36. In respect of Request 6 I can confirm that I was not aware of any bugs, errors or defects within the Horizon IT system at the time I was a HSFO nor was I made aware of any issues of that type during my training prior to taking on the HFSO role. When I stopped working as a HSFO in 2001 GRO GRO and returned to work as a Post Office clerk I would hear stories and rumours of problems with the Horizon system but, to my knowledge, these did not affect anyone in the Lichfield branch and at that time I did not know whether there was any substance to them or not.

37. In respect of Request 7 I think it would be of assistance to the Chair for me to detail my work with Newrose following my redundancy from the Post Office.

38. Newrose Personnel are a provider of postal clerking services. Sub postmasters need to arrange temporary cover for their sub post offices if they are unable to perform that role, for example if they go on holiday. Another reason why postal clerking services may be required is if the Post Office suspends a sub postmaster or terminates their agreement with a sub postmaster.
39. During the period I worked for Newrose I would be placed in sub post offices to operate them while the sub postmaster had been suspended by the Post Office or their agreement with the Post Office had been terminated. There were various reasons why this might have happened the reason why I was asked to go to any particular sub post office had no bearing on the performance of my role. In some cases it was apparent to me that some sub postmasters has been suspended by the Post Office due to suspected financial irregularities. It was common for the suspended sub postmaster to be present when I was acting as sub postmaster as they may have had a personal shop business to operate themselves from the same premises. I would estimate that around 75% of the post offices that I was sent into by Newrose involved investigation of financial irregularity and suspicions of dishonesty by the Post Office. This was sometimes an uncomfortable experience and quite a few of the sub postmasters I was interacting with at this time bore a considerable amount of ill will to the Horizon system and the Post Office.
40. Whilst I heard anecdotes of issues with the Horizon system, I did not have direct experience of this except on one occasion and I was not involved an any investigation of anyone else's use of the Horizon system. Throughout the time I worked with Newrose the conversations I had with suspended sub postmasters

made me increasingly concerned that the Post Office had not been supporting their sub postmasters as they should.

41. In 2010 I was asked by Newrose to go into a sub post office at Lazy Hill, Aldridge. I ran that post office as the sole temporary sub postmaster until a permanent sub postmaster could be identified by the Post Office. There were no other postal clerking staff. It was a feature of this particular sub postoffice that it would act as an agent for Santander Bank account holders. Local pubs would deposit their cash takings regularly into their Santander Bank accounts via the Lazy Hill sub post office.

42. One day, after I had been acting as the Lazy Hill sub postmaster for around 2 months, the Horizon cash balance at the end of the day was £2,000 short. I checked the cash entries for Horizon against the cash deposited that day, but I could not reconcile them. I then called my Newrose manager. Given the passage of time I cannot recall her name. My manager came to the Lazy Hill sub post office that night and together we turned the premises upside down looking for any cash that might account for the discrepancy but could not find it. My manager then spent approximately one week checking the cash receipts for the day in question with the customers that had deposited cash that day. She was able to confirm the receipts matched the deposits made and the discrepancy remained a mystery. I understood from speaking with the previous Lazy Hill sub postmaster that this was similar to their experience and the reason why they had been suspended. I believe that the former sub postmaster was later prosecuted. I cannot recall their names, but this information should be in the records held by the Post Office.

43. As I was the sub postmaster at the time the discrepancy arose, I was required to account to Newrose for the £2,000 cash discrepancy and that amount was deducted

from their payments to me over the next 20 months in equal instalments of £100. This felt very unfair to me as I had not taken or lost the money and through the investigations my Manager had carried out Newrose knew this. I was aware though of the rigorously enforced rule that a sub postmaster must account for any discrepancy in the financial balances of their sub post office.

44. I did not complain to Newrose about the unfairness of the £2,000 being deducted from my pay. There was nothing to be gained from doing this. Newrose would have still insisted that I pay the £2,000 as the Horizon system showed that the cash had been deposited and I would not have been allocated any further work with Newrose.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed: .....

Dated this 15 day of March 2023.

**Index to First Witness Statement of Philip Liggins dated 15 March 2023**

No.	URN	Document Description	Control Number
1	None	None	None