

Witness Name: Martin Roberts

Statement No: 1

Dated: 24 September 2024

WITN11580100

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MARTIN ROBERTS

I, Martin Roberts, will say as follows:

1. I am making this statement in response to a Request dated 13 August 2024 for information pursuant to Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, regarding matters within Phase 7 of the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry. The Request contained 3 questions, which I have endeavored to address within my statement below.
2. I have had the assistance of a solicitor in drafting this statement.

CAREER HISTORY

3. In 1983 I left Monks Park School, Bristol, at the age of 16.
4. I then joined the John Lewis Partnership Trainee Manager Programme in Bristol (the 'TM Programme') in 1983.

5. The TM Programme lasted 2 years and was focussed on equipping trainees with key skills related to customer contact and the delivery of high customer service, as well as learning every other aspect of how a large department store runs. During the 2-year training, I gained experience in multiple departments and business areas. The TM Programme also provided me with the opportunity to complete a course in business studies.
6. After completing the TM Programme, I successfully became a Section Manager and remained in this role for 6 years.
7. I left John Lewis Partnership in 1989 and joined the Tesco Regional Management Trainee Program (the 'RMT Programme') that same year. I began my career with Tesco during a time of significant growth for the business.
8. The RMT Programme lasted 2 years and by the end of my training I was appointed to my first store and following success in this role, I went on to lead many stores across the South West of England, including a large superstore in Bristol and also the management of over 20 small express stores. I was able to carry out many store visits in this role. I particularly enjoyed this as I considered my colleagues who were working in Tesco's stores to be the beating heart of the business, and I wanted to ensure that they were happy with our ways of working, and if not, look at what could be done to improve.
9. In 2003 I joined Sainsbury's as their Regional Manager for Middlesex. At the time Sainsbury's was operating in 33 regions and Middlesex was the most poorly performing in the whole company. I had 25 stores under my management and my role was to turn around the performance of this part of the

business. I visited all 25 stores under my management to talk to employees and I formed listening groups to hear about what was and wasn't working for them, so that effective changes could be made to drive improvement. I implemented various changes across the region and performance improved in the stores under my management. For those stores that had made a significant turnaround, I designated them as 'academy stores' to show others within the region what could be achieved. Within a year Middlesex went from the worst performing region to the best performing region.

10. In 2006 I became a Zone Managing Director within Sainsbury's responsible for all the regions that fell into the north zone. This came with an increased level of responsibility as I now had approximately 105 stores under my management, and 30,000 staff. From there I then took on the UK wide Director of Retail Change role which involved increasing productivity and efficiency across the whole business. At the time there was no retail change team within Sainsbury's, so I built the team from nothing and within a period of 2 years I had grown the team to 200 people and I had developed a change programme called 'Lean Stores'. Stores and colleagues were at the heart of the change programme, and in many cases their ideas lead to more freed up time to be spent serving customers better.

11. In 2008 I was made aware of a role which had come up at Sainsbury's Bank – Director of Retail Distribution. I saw this as another opportunity to expand my skill set and retail experience as I had never worked directly in finance. I therefore applied for the role and was successful. The role involved leading the daily operations for the whole of the UK, which included managing retail

distribution, the creation of new products, selling of credit card products and more. I stayed in this role for 2 years until 2010, during which I supported the business in navigating the financial crisis, which affected Sainsbury's bank significantly. Not only were many customers affected, a lot of my colleagues and board directors who had invested savings into Sainsbury's Bank had suffered significant losses, which led to a very distressing and difficult period for my colleagues in their personal and working lives. I was involved in navigating this difficult period and providing support and assurance to customers and team members going forward.

12. In 2010 I left the company and spent some time working on a consultancy basis.

During this time I worked on a project for Morrisons helping them to develop processes and procedures. Much of the work drew on the change programme initiatives that I had delivered during my time as Director of Retail Change at Sainsbury's.

13. In 2011 I became the Retail Director for the DIY business at Wickes. In this role

I led operations across the UK and sat on Wickes' Board. The business strategy which I implemented for the business was 'great stores, with great knowledge and great service.' Wickes formed part of the Travis Perkins Group and at the time were considered the best performing team within the group. We had developed good, customer-centric and family-oriented values across the business and were the largest DIY business in the country.

14. In 2013 I joined Vodafone UK as a Retail Director. I saw this as another

opportunity to advance my career, as I had not previously worked in the tech sector nor in an international business. I was responsible for leading retail

operations across the whole of the UK, which went beyond the company's consumer board. A big part of the role was focused on building a friendly and forward thinking culture, which entailed looking after store image and design, customer experience and relationships with other phone companies. I was also involved in supporting the company during its acquisition of Phones 4 U, to increase the company's presence of sites across the UK.

15. A year later in 2014 I took on a Global Retail Distribution Director role for Vodafone across 7 countries. The aim was to implement a global strategy in all 7 countries. The role was challenging and required a lot of international travel.

16. In 2015 I joined B&M as UK Operations Director. I worked in this role for 6 years between 2015 and 2021, during which time I developed and managed an opening programme of 800 stores. I was also faced with the challenge of navigating the business through the Coronavirus Pandemic, during which B&M became an essential retailer. During my time with the business B&M grew significantly and moved from a FTSE 250 listing to become a FTSE 100 company.

17. I left B&M in 2021 as I wanted to diversify my career. During this time I did some private equity work, and I took on the chairmanship of 2 companies – GoAudits and Taxi Studio. At present, I am still the Chairman of GoAudits.

18. In mid-2021 I was contacted by a recruiter who believed that my experience in retail was suited to the role of Group Chief Retail Officer within Post Office Limited (POL). I attended initial interviews with Angela Evans (CPO), which then led to further interviews with Nick Read (CEO) and POL's Non-Executive

Directors and Chairman. Whilst I knew of a number of people who were with POL at the time I did not know anyone personally and had not worked with anyone at POL during any of my former roles.

19. The role was described as the leadership and future network development of 11,500 Post Office branches, which would also include responsibility for working with Strategic Partners and key Stakeholders. I was contacted by Nick Read on 31 December 2021, who asked me to confirm if I would be interested in taking the position. By that point I had read Nick Wallis' book 'The Great Post Office Scandal', and I was shocked and saddened by what various sub-postmasters across the country had gone through. I understood that the role would entail significant challenges and responsibility, particularly in relation to re-building trust between POL and its sub-postmasters, and implementing positive change going forward in a way that places sub-postmasters at the heart of the business. Nevertheless, I felt that I had the necessary skillset and previous experience to pursue the role. I confirmed to Nick Read that I would take the job and I agreed to start in February 2022.

DEPARTURE FROM POL

20. After approximately 2 years in my role, in January 2024 various members of the General Executive (GE), including myself, were informed they would have to step down from the GE. The GE would no longer exist and a new smaller Senior Executive Group (the 'SEG') would be formed to conduct business going forward. I was also told that I would no longer be reporting in to Nick Read, and instead I would report in to the deputy CEO, Owen Woodley. I believe this organisational change may have resulted from a recommendation by Grant

Thornton following a review by them, however, this is only my assumption and I do not know this for certain. I have not seen a copy of Grant Thornton's report.

21. On 1 May 2024, Nigel Railton was appointed by the then Business Secretary, Kemi Badenoch, as the new interim Chair of POL. On 19 June 2024 I was informed in a meeting with Owen Woodley and Steve Muino (Head of People Partnering – Technology) that along with Mr Railton's appointment came a new brief from the Shareholder Executive (ShEx), which included a strategic review of POL. The review would conclude in Autumn 2024 under the new Government and there would be a removal of some roles from POL, along with the appointment of some new roles. As part of this review a decision was made to appoint a new interim Chief Commercial Officer within POL from 1 July 2024, and it was therefore considered that my role as Group Chief Retail Officer was no longer required in the business. I was informed that POL would consult further on this matter.

22. During the period which followed, I continued to carry out my role and duties but I was alive to the fact that there was a lot of uncertainty around my future within POL, and that there may not be an alternative role for me in the business going forward.

23. In a consultation meeting that I had with Owen Woodley and Steve Muino on 10 July 2024, POL's position in relation to no longer requiring my role within the business was reaffirmed to me. Given the risk of my role being made redundant, I sought to take voluntary redundancy. This was agreed and I continued to work with POL over the next couple of weeks to agree the terms of my exit. My last day working for POL was 2 August 2024.

MY ROLE AND ACHIEVEMENTS AS GROUP CHIEF RETAIL OFFICER FOR POL

24. During my time as Group Chief Retail Officer for POL I was responsible for the leadership and network development of approximately 11,500 Post Office branches. This included around 9,000 traditional branches and approximately 2,500 in retail franchises. I therefore had to work closely and maintain relationships with Strategic Partners such as WHSmith, Asda and Co-operative. I understood from the original mandate for the role that there was a need to improve retail operations and to re-build the connection and trust between the business and sub-postmasters. This would involve working with stakeholders across the business, including the Government, to identify the challenges and opportunities that sub-postmasters and Partners face, and working together to make Post Office branches profitable and successful.

25. When I first joined POL I took some time during the course of 2022 to understand the workings of the business and what had happened in the past, so that I could put in place an effective strategy for the future. I was also tasked with building a team to assist me with delivering this strategy. Having read about some experiences of sub-postmasters I wanted to ensure that the strategy I developed put sub-postmasters at the heart of what we did and involved them in the process of driving change as much as possible.

26. I ultimately developed a 'Retail Strategy House' setting out various pillars of priorities, to be driven by key retail objectives. The ultimate goal was to build a modern, commercially sustainable, well run, customer centric business, with sub-postmasters at the heart.

27. As alluded to earlier in this statement, it has always been my firm belief that the first step to bringing about positive change in a business lies with involving those who are at the heart of the business, in this case – the thousands of sub-postmasters across the country. Therefore, as part of delivering the above objectives I set up the 'Perfect Days' and 'Adopt an Area' initiatives which encouraged senior leaders to get out and visit branches across the country to speak with sub-postmasters, assist with any challenges, conduct listening groups and help to make a difference. I conducted many visits myself across the UK every week to speak with sub-postmasters, and I encouraged POL's non-executive directors to join me on a few occasions. I also conducted my own listening group which I met with approximately every 6-8 weeks. In the 2023/2024 period I believe approximately 480 branch visits by around 130 colleagues under the 'Perfect Days' and 'Adopt an Area' initiatives had been conducted.

28. Whilst the role was a very challenging one, I feel that my team and I achieved a lot in respect of the objectives that I had set for the 2023/2024 period. These included:

- a. We successfully enabled the Mails Strategy and in particular we achieved circa 40,000 new non-Royal mail carrier proposition as part of that strategy, generating additional Real Earnings Management (REM).
- b. In preparation for the Inquiry, we received 1,900 sub-postmaster surveys and continued our development of a Postmaster Engagement Framework. We also recruited and embedded a new Postmaster Experience Director, Mark Eldridge (an experienced sub-postmaster).

During the peak of the Inquiry, we also hosted regular Retail Team Support calls and attended Restorative Justice Meetings.

- c. We reshaped the Network to improve sustainability for both POL and sub-postmasters and delivered the strongest network numbers in over a decade.
- d. We saw improvements in branch profitability, exceeding our network sales budget. The 2022/2023 REM for branch profitability saw a 4% increase from the previous year, which enabled the highest pay-out in 7 years.
- e. To address the root cause of sub-postmaster losses, we conducted 10,273 'Operational Excellence' visits to 5,601 branches. Operational robustness of branches improved and we saw branch discrepancies reduce by £10m, the value of transaction corrections were down by 33%, dispute discrepancies down by 17% and we were hitting our target in terms of sub-postmaster complaint response time, with 88% of complaints being dealt with and closed within 10 days.
- f. We carried out 12,900 commercial excellence visits across over 6,376 branches, which had a positive impact on branch income, particularly related to travel money/travel insurance and parcel volume per branch.
- g. To improve customer experience, we rebuilt POLs website to ensure it met customers' and colleagues' needs and conducted an end to end redesign of the customer complaints process. We also relaunched a travel app and integrated 700,000 customers across the platform, as well

as leading a successful summer travel campaign, which delivered £1.7m of travel money income and £4m travel insurance income.

- h. We ran multiple in-person conferences with excellent feedback received and our metrics improving year on year. We also ran monthly Regional Forums across 12 regions in the UK and hundreds of sub-postmasters became involved in projects, testing, change management and general feedback, as listening and support was a key objective in 2023/24.

29. In addition to the above achievements, I personally received a high 'Ways of Working' rating of 6.09 out of 7 for the 2022/2023 year, which was a form of 360 degree feedback carried out for the purpose of my annual review. I recall that I also received really positive feedback throughout the year which I felt reflected my genuine commitment and passion to being an advocate for sub-postmasters, being sub-postmaster and partner-centric and being a driver for change. I was proud of this feedback, as I felt that it illustrated that what my team and I had set out to do, to improve POL for both the business and its sub-postmasters, was heading in the right direction.

30. Before I left POL, I had put in place an updated 'Retail House Strategy' for the 2024/2025 period with the areas of focus being: Driving profitability, Rebuilding Trust, Transforming Technology and Driving Retail Performance.

31. At POL I believe that my team and I took decisive positive steps towards rebuilding a relationship of trust between POL and its sub-postmasters, as well as delivering on sales and costs targets and taking steps to deliver a stable network.

32. Other than the matters set out above in this statement, there are no further matters that I wish to bring to the attention of the Inquiry Chair.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

GRO

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

24/9/24