

**Witness Name: Sinead Rainey**  
**Statement No.: WITN0371\_01**  
**Exhibits: None**  
**Dated: 15/5/2022**

**IN THE POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY**

---

**FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF SINEAD RAINEY**

---

I, SINEAD RAINEY, will say as follows...

**INTRODUCTION**

1. I am grateful to the Chair to be invited to provide a “human impact” statement, concerning the consequences to me and my family as a result of the Horizon IT system and Post Office Limited’s actions toward me and my family. The introductory paragraphs below provide a brief summary of my background, and to provide context to the detail of the human impact of the scandal on me and my family.
2. I currently live in GRO Northern Ireland with my husband and children. I have been married to my husband for 9 years, and we have three children.

**BACKGROUND PRIOR TO APPOINTMENT AS SPM AND DECISION TO BECOME A SPM**

3. I have always worked in retail. When I was 12 years old I got a job in the local Spar shop down the road from me, and I worked there all throughout my school years and I loved it.

4. So when I finished school, the man who owned the shop, Martin Henry told me I should go and work for the Henderson group. The Henderson group are the company that own the Spar franchise.
5. I worked for them for about 10 years, before deciding to set up my own business. I opened and ran an ice cream shop.
6. Even whilst I was working for the Henderson group, whenever I got time off, for example over Christmas, I would go back and work in the shop because I just loved it that much.
7. Then in around early 2016, Martin Henry approached me and said he was retiring and asked if I wanted to take over the shop. I did not want to run two business at the same time, so I decided to close my ice cream shop and I took over the shop in December 2016.
8. When Martin offered me the shop I went to a solicitor because I wanted to purchase it properly. The solicitor said I need to see the books so I asked Martin for his books and he said no. He said if I needed to see the books for the shop he will just close it. This should have been a red flag at the time but I was just too excited by the prospect because I saw the lifestyle it gave him and I loved it and I wanted it.
9. I cannot even put into words how much it meant to me to be able to take over the shop. I was buzzing with excitement, I had such big hopes and dreams for this business, and I really felt like life was just about to get going for me when I took it over. I remember years ago when I first met my husband, I told him that the shop was the love of my life.
10. I invested a lot of money into the shop. Martin Henry sold the shop to me for £16,000 but the shop needed major investment to bring it up to today's standards, it was 25 years old and need a lot of renovations.

11. The Henderson group who supply the shop offer you a loan for the stock to get you up and running, and they loan you money over a period of 5 years to allow you set up the shop how you want to. Therefore, I had a £10,000 stock loan plus a £20,000 loan for the renovations.
12. I had to put new shelves and refrigerators in the shop, I painted the inside and the outside of the shop and I had to rent all of the shop equipment off Henderson's, so I had to make monthly payments towards that.
13. When I decided to purchase the shop I expected that would include the post office as well, but Martin told me that it did not include the post office, despite the fact that I would be operating the post office day-to-day. Martin told me he would see how I got on and then discuss transferring the post office over to me.
14. I operated the Post Office branch in my shop, with shared premises at 6 Loughbeg Road, Toomebridge, Antrim, Northern Ireland, BT41 3TN, from approximately December 2016 until 1 May 2019.
15. I was not the subpostmaster or an employee under contract with Post Office Limited. Following the purchase of a shop from my family friend and previous subpostmaster, Martin Henry, I began to operate the shop and the incorporated post office.
16. The subpostmaster and previous owner of the shop remained the "on-paper" subpostmaster; however, the effective management, control and administration of the branch was my responsibility. I recall that the previous subpostmaster did not enter the branch from the time of my purchase until I left the branch. I ran and operated the branch from the day I took over the shop.
17. I remember the night I took over I had to do a stock take and Martin did the balance in the Post Office so I was ready to start the next day. When he did the balance he

was £1000 short, so Martin put in £1000 to balance it and said that I was good to go. Then a few weeks later his daughter came in to do the balance because I did not know how to balance yet but she did. The system did not balance and showed a £3,500 shortfall so she did what she could to balance it and said 'there you go you are now only £1000 short' but I was only £1000 short because she took £1000 out when she was doing the balance, i.e. the money that Martin had put in on the first night to balance.

18. At the time I was not really sure what to do I had so much faith and trust in these people that I did not think they would ever treat me wrong. I also had nowhere to turn because the post office didn't know I existed.

19. However, in the eyes of the Post Office I did not exist to them because I had no official contract of employment of any sort with them, despite serving in the office every day. I was never a named individual in the post office, I did not even have my own login on the system or anything like that, I used Martin's as everything was in his name.

20. I recall that a few months into owning the shop Martin Henry asked me to do a security check online for some reason. I cannot remember the details of this security check but I do remember carrying it out.

### **TRAINING AND SUPPORT**

21. When I took over the shop and started running the post office I did not receive any training or a formal hand over from the previous Subpostmaster or the Post Office.

22. There was a member of staff who was already employed and worked in the shop and post office when I took over, named Irene Colgan.

23. Irene showed me how to do basic transactions in the post office but she could only show me so much and I did not even know what level of training she had received. I only really learnt how to use the Horizon system by trial and error.
24. I was not adequately trained or prepared to run the post office, and I approached Martin Henry for some training but he refused.
25. Unfortunately, in around 2018 Irene went on holiday, became unwell and ended up GRO after which she was not able to return to work; so I was left running the post office by myself not having had any formal training.

### **HELPLINE**

26. I have never had any contact with the helpline because there was no record of me working for the post office therefore, I could not contact anyone for help.
27. Due to me not having received any formal training I did not know I could even ring someone for help and I did not have any numbers or names of people to contact for support.

### **SHORTFALLS**

28. In this section, I set out in very brief detail my experience of shortfalls arising from deficiencies in the Horizon 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.
29. When I took over the shop I was told to expect regular shortfalls by the previous subpostmaster's daughter, but I was also told by the previous subpostmaster that shortages and discrepancies would eventually right themselves.
30. I did not have that experience, but rather experienced regular and repeated shortfalls. Those shortfalls began to mount up, until the spring of 2019.

31. From the very beginning, I experienced discrepancies on the Horizon system. It would be short £50 one day and then £80 over the next. The way I worked was by using a money bag. Whenever it was over the money went into the money bag and whenever it was under I used the money from the bag to make the accounts balance.
32. I worked using his method for as long as I could, but eventually there was no money left in the bag so I had to start taking money from my retail business and put it into the post office to balance the accounts.
33. We had to do what was called a countdown on the system every night and I recall on one occasion the system was down £2,000 and then by the next morning it had jumped to being £10,000 short.
34. I experienced a large shortfall of £8,000 and I could not afford to make this good.
35. The system was never ever anywhere near accurate. Martin Henry had told me when I took over the post office if I was down one day I will be over the next day, I always thought the post office would pick up on this and look into what was going on.
36. The shortfalls went on for months and months, and it got to the stage where I had to choose between my business and the post office, because I couldn't afford to keep taking money out of my business and putting it into the post office, especially as I was not receiving a salary or any remuneration for running the post office. I chose my business, so as a result I had to leave the post office short when discrepancies occurred.

### **AUDITS AND INVESTIGATIONS**

37. During the time that I ran the post office, I was only ever audited once. The system was playing up from the beginning but I was only audited once during my time running the office and, I have no idea when it was audited prior to that.

38. I have no idea what caused the audit, but when I arrived to work on 01 May 2019 there were two ladies in Post Office uniform waiting for me.
39. They told me they were there to conduct an audit and I told them they will have to tell me what I need to do because I had no idea what they expected from me. The Post Office employees told me I had to ring a number to give them access to the system to carry out their audit so I did.
40. The Post Office employees knew I was not the subpostmaster because they were looking for Martin Henry, I told them I will contact Martin.
41. Following the audit, I was called into the office and the auditors asked me if I had any more money anywhere else because the branch had a significant discrepancy of £63,000.
42. I was in complete shock when I heard the figure; I nearly collapsed. I had no idea that the post office was short that much, this is the first I had heard that figure and I had been working in the office every day. I told the auditors I did not have any more money and they said there had to be more money. They kept pushing me asking for the money and I broke down in tears.
43. Eventually Martin arrived and the auditors spoke to him, I do not what their conversation was about but Martin then left and the Post Office auditors kept on at me, repeatedly asking for the money.
44. I do not know why I said this, but in the end I told them I remembered that I had some money at home. I was in such a state I am not even sure how managed to get home, but I went home and literally emptied my children's penny boxes and gathered every single penny I could get my hands on from my house.

45. Then my Mum and Dad turned up at my house because my husband had called them and told them what was going on. So, my mum, dad and uncles all went to their banks to withdraw as much money as they could in one day and I had managed to gather around £1,500 from the house.
46. In total we managed to scrape together £42,000. My sister had to drive me back to the shop because I could not even manage to drive and I went and put all the money in the safe. The auditors then closed the door on me and took my keys.
47. The auditors locked the office and put up a sign that the post office was closed until further notice. They told me this will be investigated and someone will be in to get the money and from now on the post office will liaise with Martin and Martin will have to liaise with me.
48. After the auditors left, a member of my staff came up to me and asked me if I showed the auditors the list of payments made to Martin Henry's bank account from the Post Office in the shop. I didn't know anything about this at the time. My staff member told me that Martin made her deposit money into his bank account most Wednesday afternoons when I wasn't there. Martin had told her that I was aware of this but I was not. Martin never handed over any money for these transactions. My staff member had made a note of the payments in the back of the stamp book which the auditors locked up and removed so I never actually saw the list myself.
49. I then went home in a complete and utter state, I was beside myself. One of my uncles who had lent me the money said do not let the post office take that money, it is not their money to take.
50. Then my uncle asked me if I have ever heard of a woman called Deirdre Connolly, I had not so I googled her and that is when I first heard about the Post Office scandal. I then messaged Deirdre on Facebook and she rang me and explained everything that had been going on with the Post Office in England and she told me that I hadn't done



- anything wrong and the scandal was real and had been happening all over the country.
51. The next morning I realised I needed to get in touch with a lawyer, so Deirdre put me in contact with a Barrister and whilst I was waiting for a call from him Martin's daughter turned up at my door.
52. She told me that she thought her daddy was having a heart attack and that she needed to take him to A&E, so I immediately asked what on earth she was doing at my door if that was the case and she said to me she needed to speak to me about the money.
53. She said the Post Office does not have the money, Martin doesn't have the money therefore I must have the money and I had to give her the money. She then said if I cannot give her the money then she will report me to the police.
54. I was reported to police by Martin (the subpostmaster registered at the branch) for theft and false accounting.
55. I had to attend an interview and produce any records and/or paper work I had. I spent a full day in Antrim Serious Crime Suite, with police investigating my financial records.
56. I was completely distraught throughout the interview because I just could not believe Martin and his family had done this to me. I had worked in that shop since I was 12 years old, they were my life long family friends and they had reported me for theft.
57. Martin Henry and his three daughters were lifelong friends of mine. I have been friends with his daughters since I was 12 years old. My best friend was one of his daughters and my sisters best friend was also one of his daughters. He attended my wedding that's how close we were. So when they reported me to the police it really

broke me, I couldn't believe they would treat me like that after all these years of friendship, we lost everything.

58. At the end of the interview, the investigating office said this could go on for a wee while but they will be in touch when they have completed their investigation.

59. About 8 weeks after my interview I received a call from the constable in charge of my case. She apologised for keeping me waiting so long and said she was unable to find any evidence of theft or fraud. She asked me if I had heard about the Post Office scandal in England and that I needed to take this further.

### **SUSPENSION AND TERMINATION**

60. I was suspended on 01 May 2019 following the audit and I have never been back in the Post Office since.

61. The post Office discussed my suspension with Martin and ever since he drove off on the day of the audit, I have never heard from him again.

62. As I was not employed by the Post Office nor did I have a contract with Martin to run the post office, there was no official termination for me. The post office was simply closed and that was that.

63. I continued to run my shop for some time but my footfall had dropped massively because we have lost the post office and every bit of cash flow I had was gone.

### **HUMAN IMPACT**

64. It is difficult to put into words just how devastating these events have been on my life.

65. As a result of having to make good the shortfalls on the Horizon IT System, my business began to suffer over time. I was having to take money directly from my business takings and put them into the post office to make up for the shortfalls.
66. As the shortfalls began to increase I was unable to keep making good the discrepancies, I had to prioritise by business but my cash flow slowly became non-existent and this ultimately lead to the closure of my shop.
67. When it was alleged that I was responsible for the shortfalls I found myself in a state of confusion, deep depression, loneliness and stress.
68. I did not know who to talk too for advice. I felt completely alone. I struggled to explain the situation to anyone, as I could not make sense of it myself.
69. I was questioned by the PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) on suspicion of theft and fraud. This was a lengthy interview and a long wait for them to let me know there was no evidence against me. This was particularly terrifying as I had never been involved with the PSNI prior to this.
70. By the time I was questioned, I had been made aware of the Post Office Scandal in England. So I was convinced I was going to be wrongfully charged and possibly end up in prison, I was terrified.
71. I had no information about the shortfall so I felt completely blind as to what was ahead of me. I had no communication from the Post Office, as I was not employed by them and the subpostmaster was not communicating with me either. I struggled to find a solicitor who was willing to attend the interview with me, as they did not understand my situation.
72. I did not leave my house for months. I could not even take my children to school due to the fear of seeing people who knew me and once respected me. I became paranoid that everyone saw me differently.

73. I did not sleep for weeks during this time.
74. I borrowed most of the shortfall money from my family members whom I have never been able to repay.
75. After the post office was closed my business instantly went downhill as every penny I owned, was now gone and I had lost so much footfall as the post office was no longer open.
76. It got to the stage where I had to close the shop. I decided I had had enough, my health was suffering immensely by this stage; I was on a high dose of antidepressants and remember calling my husband one day and just saying I cannot go on anymore.
77. After that, I told my landlord I was going to have to close the shop because I just could not do it anymore and this broke my heart.
78. My landlord was an 80 year old man who I would have done absolutely anything for and I did not want this to impact him, but I could not keep suffering on the way I was.
79. After I made my decision I closed the shop, left everything and I never went back because I just could not face it.
80. My landlord's family were not nice to me and they were devastated that I had closed the shop because it had been in their family for years. This made it harder for me because I cared about my landlord so much.
81. Nobody knew what had actually happened, people asked questions but I just did not know how to answer them. The rumours circulated and people thought my business had gone down the drain because I just did not know how to run it.

82. This could not have been further from the truth. My business was flying and I had plans with Henderson's to extend the shop, but this was all taken away from me because of the actions of the Post Office.
83. I could not look at people's faces knowing they thought badly of me. For some reason I still felt like I had some sort of loyalty to Martin Henry, I didn't want to blame him but I also did not want to take the blame for something that was just not my fault.
84. However, I just could not tell anyone what had happened, my voice was inside me and I just thought no one would believe me.
85. In the end, I just could not pay my business bills or my household bills and this resulted in my husband and I entering into an IVA to prevent the loss of our home.
86. The closure of my business happened very suddenly as I could not face people any longer and answer their questions. This also resulted in me not being able to offer an explanation to my staff who were fantastic. To this day, I have not had the courage to meet any of them as I feel I owed them redundancy which I could not afford to pay.
87. We have struggled financially, mentally and emotionally since.
88. After the shop closed in January 2020, and I spent 6 months in my house, I stayed home 24 hours a day.
89. I could not even walk my kids to their school, which is just down the road. I would only drive them so I could avoid seeing people.
90. I remember one morning an old customer of mine approached me whilst I was in the car, and I just had some sort of a breakdown.

91. I do not go anywhere local anymore, in fact I do not go anywhere, I cannot even take my kids out I do not leave my house.
92. I do not attend any local community events. I lost a few customers due to Covid 19 but I could not find the courage to attend their funerals.
93. I have been in and out of jobs ever since, the longest I have managed to stay in a job is 8 months because I just end up reaching breaking point each time. People laugh at me now and say 'oh I wonder how long you will stick out this job'.
94. I have never been the sort of person to be in and out of jobs. I started a new job last week and I have never worked so far away from home in my life but I feel I have to because I do not want to see anyone.
95. I am constantly anxious though and I just keep waiting for myself to crash again.
96. I have been seeing a counsellor and I continue to do so.
97. I am on the maximum dose of my antidepressants now, and the only thing my doctor said she can do is change my medication but that would involve having to be weaned off the one I am currently on, but this is just not an option because I cannot afford to be in anymore of a black hole than I am already in every day.
98. She has instead prescribed me with an anxiety tablet to try and help.
99. My family has also been massively impacted by this scandal.
100. I borrowed the money to pay as much of the shortfall back to the Post Office as I could. Two of my uncles, my mum, my dad, my sister and my children all contributed to the money. This has caused severe friction within my family.

101. Both of my uncles wanted their money back. I tried to reassure them that I would keep fighting until I could repay them. Unfortunately, this is not what they wanted so my dad was forced to repay them both for me. My uncles now do not speak to my dad and me as a result. This really hurts as they tried to help me and all I wanted to do was get their money back to them.
102. It has destroyed my mother and father; I took their life saving from them. My mum and dad are both retired and they gave me as much of their life savings as they could access to pay the shortfall. This has affected their retirement and my relationship with them, as I am so humiliated that I have effected their lives so much.
103. At the moment I owe my dad about £35,000 which has left them living off a shoe string in their retirement. I have seen my father age dramatically since this happened. He was a fit and healthy farmer, always active and this had aged him so much its awful to see.
104. I pray to God that I can get this money back to him in his lifetime.
105. My mum is frustrated by everything that has happened, and my two brothers have turned against me because they saw the money mum and dad gave me as money that they could have inherited. Their wives have told people I cannot be trusted, and this has placed a huge stress in the middle of the family and it is all down to the actions of the Post Office.
106. I am eternally grateful for my parents having given me the money, but I wish to God they hadn't. I was never a subpostmaster, so it does not make sense to me why the Post Office ever took any money off me at all.
107. My children and husband have seen a huge change in me. I suffer with bad anxiety and I just want to be able to show myself in public and take my children out again.

108. The feeling of pity, shame, stupidity, vulnerability, anger, frustration, humiliation, heartbreak, uselessness, loneliness and weakness were some of the greatest consequences for me personally.
109. I used to be the life and soul of every party and event. I was the organiser of this and that, always up for a good time and I could not be any further from that now.
110. My sister lives a quarter of a mile down the road from me, and I do not even know the last time I went there. I cannot stand the pity or people looking at me and saying 'oh poor Sinead'.
111. My husband gets frustrated with me because I never go to see his family anymore because I feel like I have let them down.
112. We had a comfortable life that was pulled out from under us.
113. I cannot even take my own children to the beach for two reasons - one; because I cannot face going out in public and two; because we can't even afford it.
114. My eldest is 17 years old now, and he is very aware of where we have been and where we are now, he knows he cannot ask for money because we just do not have it.
115. My daughter always says to me now 'mummy how come you don't come anywhere with us anymore'.
116. It's my little boy's First Holy Communion next week, and I had to buy him a second hand suit and I cannot do anything special for him because we just do not have the money.
117. All I want is to be able to take my children somewhere and laugh, I just do not laugh anymore.



**CONCLUSION**

118. Everything in my life changed overnight.
119. I am angry, disgusted and confused by the behaviour of the Post Office. I do not understand why this has happened to me because I never signed anything to say I am responsible for covering any losses, it seems shocking to me that they even asked me for money.
120. I am so hurt that the Post Office took £42,000 off me and have refused to speak to me since.
121. 6 months after the post office closed a girl randomly turned up at the shop and introduced herself as the area manager. She then saw the sign in the door and asked what was going on. She said she would find out and get back to me. After two days had passed and I had heard nothing I contacted her because she left me her number and she told me she could not speak to me because I was not a Post Office employee.
122. I was not and have not been paid a single penny for running the post office for all those years, Martin Henry received it all. There was tension mounting between us over the years because I asked him if I was going to get paid and he would never give me an answer.
123. I have nothing. I lost my dream business and the respect of my local community who I loved so much because of the post office.
124. I want my money back for my family, if it was my money I would not care, but my family deserve their money back.
125. I want my life back

126. I want my community to know I did nothing wrong. I want people to know I did no wrong and I want to be able to say I told you so, and that I didn't deserve this.

127. I gave everything I had to that shop and post office and it took everything from me.

**STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

I believe the contents of this statement to be true.

Signed:  
Sinead Rainey

**GRO**

Dated:

<sup>2</sup>  
15/5/22