

WITNESS: MAHESH KALIA

Statement No: WITN11940100

EXHIBITS: 0

DATED: 17 JANUARY 2024

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MAHESH KALIA

I, MAHESH KALIA,

GRO

GRO

will say as follows:-

1. I am the son of Parmod Kalia, one of the sub-postmasters affected by the Horizon IT scandal and now a Core Participant in the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry ('the Inquiry'). I have drafted this statement with the assistance of Hodge Jones & Allen solicitors, my father's representatives for the purposes of the Inquiry.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

2. My father was the sub-postmaster of Chipperfield Road Post Office from June 1990 until his contract was terminated in 2001. The Post Office was part of a shop that my family continued to run after 2001.
3. I have three siblings, an older brother **GRO** and two younger sisters: **GRO**
4. I have a degree in Business Studies from the University of Brighton.
5. I work for the Department of Work and Pensions as a Team Leader in the Job Centre in **GRO**

FAMILY LIFE

6. I had a happy childhood. My parents worked hard in the shop and we would help at the weekends.
7. After school and over the weekend my Dad used to take me to play rugby, football and cricket, and my sisters to music classes and swimming. We went on weekend trips to visit family and on Sundays, my parents would take us to our local temple.
8. My parents had a good relationship and they worked really well together. They were working to help us to try to progress in our lives, and they paid for after school tuition to help us excel at school.

CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS

9. I was 17 when my Dad was accused of stealing from the Post Office. I knew something was going on, but I did not know what. I do not recall being aware of the criminal proceedings until he was convicted. It was not discussed at home.
10. My Dad did not speak to us about it or explain what had happened, so I assumed that he had stolen from the Post Office. I understand now that he was not able to discuss what had happened because he was in shock.
11. My parents did not want anyone in the community to know what had happened and we were bound to secrecy; only the five of us within our family knew and we hid it from everyone else.
12. We did not even tell anyone that Dad was in prison. When family came to visit, as they did often, they would ask where he was and we would tell them that he was busy in the shop.

PERSONAL IMPACT

13. The prosecution/conviction happened at a pivotal time for me. I was finishing my first year of A-Levels, and was about to go into my final year of secondary school.

14. I was doing well in my A-Levels but as soon as Dad was convicted, I put my academic work aside to help my Mum. Before school, I would get up early and make sure that my Mum was ready to open the shop. During the day, I would worry about her being in the shop by herself. After school, I would get to the shop as quickly as I could and help my Mum until we closed.
15. I feel that what happened had an impact on my academic potential. Up until my Dad's conviction, I did well in science subjects and had aspirations of becoming a pharmacist. After everything happened, I gave up on it all.
16. After university, I came back and took over the shop as manager. I worked there for two years. I felt my career options were limited.
17. When I was aged around 24, I wanted to get away from it all and went to South Korea to teach English as a second language for three years.
18. My mental health has been affected by what happened. Although I have not had any diagnosis, my mental health does go up and down; the trauma my family experienced is undoubtedly a factor in this.

FAMILY IMPACT

19. After my Dad's conviction, my brother **GRO** had to give up his work – at the time he was running his own business delivering stock to shops in Kent – to work at the shop full time.
20. My sisters would have been quite young when this all happened, but it had a big impact on them too. One of my sisters spent her late teens and twenties living away from the family as a result.
21. Our family was dysfunctional for at least 10 or 12 years, and we are not as close as we might have been. My brother **GRO** moved away and now lives in Wales.
22. The relationship between my parents suffered hugely. Their relationship became toxic and turbulent, and my Dad ended up moving out of the family home. It was clear that

the deterioration of their relationship was a direct result of what happened. My Dad and Mum still live apart today. This has had a big impact on us all.

PERCEPTION BY COMMUNITY

23. After Dad's conviction, we could sense that the local community perceived us differently. We previously had a strong relationship with our customers, but after everything happened, we would hear murmurings about it. This made us feel uncomfortable.

RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FATHER

24. My relationship with my Dad was damaged because I assumed he had stolen the money, and I saw the suffering this caused everyone, particularly my Mum. She was working hard for the family and this made me feel guilty.

25. When my Dad came out of prison, he was withdrawn and our emotional connection deteriorated further.

26. His conviction had an impact on our relationship for a long time and our relationship did not start to mend until he told us about the Horizon scandal three years ago.

27. I have made efforts to rebuild our relationship because I recently had a young daughter and I want my Dad to be part of her life as well.

28. I am now aged 38. Between the ages of 17 and 35, I did not have a relationship with my Dad. We will never get back this time.

CLOSING REMARKS

29. I am hopeful that the Inquiry will achieve for my Dad:

- a. Closure, including an apology
- b. Fair compensation

30. The Horizon IT scandal has had a butterfly effect on the family and wider network of sub-postmasters.

31. I hope the inquiry will provide the closure the families affected need to draw a line under everything and get on with their lives.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

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

Signed

GRO

Print full name

MAHESH KUMAR KALIA

Dated

17/01/24