

Witness Name: Ms Katherine McAlerney
Statement No.: WITN0325_01
Exhibits: None
Dated...17 March 2022

THE POST OFFICE HORIZON INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MS KATHERINE MCALERNEY

I, MS KATHERINE McAlerney will say as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. I am grateful to the Chair to be invited to provide a "human impact" statement, concerning the physical, psychological, emotional, reputational and financial consequences to me and my family of being held responsible for shortfalls shown by the Horizon IT system and Post Office Limited's actions toward me and my family. The initial paragraphs below provide a brief summary of my background, and provide context to the detail of the human impact of the Horizon scandal on me and my family. This statement does not reflect a full account of my experiences or those of my family and if necessary or required I will provide further witness statement evidence.

BACKGROUND

2. I am married to **GRO** and I have four daughters. We live in County Down, Northern Ireland.
3. I qualified as a teacher in 1994 and I had worked in that role for six years.

4. My husband and I had been buying houses in Belfast, renovating them and renting them out. That had become a good business for us in a short space of time.
5. At that point, my husband and I had two small children, it was a new millennium and so we thought let's do something we have always wanted to do and so we bought the post office.
6. The post office property encompassed a shop, bar and house. At that point, in 2000, we purchased the property for £300,000, which was a lot of money. We then re-vamped the property and it was really successful and really took off. The year before the final audit took place (detailed below) our turnover was three quarters of a million pounds.
7. I was a Subpostmistress of Leitrim Sub Post Office, 2 Dromara Road, Leitrim, Castlewellan, County Down, Northern Ireland BT31 9SH from 30 August 2000 to 2 January 2008. The post office was also my home. I operated a shop and pub from the premises.
8. On 30 August 2000 I signed a one page Post Office document titled "Acknowledgement of Appointment" and an extract of the full contract that was only 6 pages long. I did not realise until after my suspension that there was a much longer version that I had never seen.
9. I received correspondence, dated 2 January 2008, which stated that my contract was being terminated and referred to the Standard Subpostmaster Contract. I then received further correspondence dated 9 January that stated that I had actually been on a Community Subpostmaster Contract. I do not remember ever signing or seeing such a document.
10. My family and I had a nice lifestyle, we were happy and working hard.

11. There were a few niggly things and shortages appearing but we were putting the money in.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

12. The Post Office training was horrendous, I have never seen worse.
13. Although one week of training was planned by the Post Office, due to opening hours and a Bank Holiday, my entire period of training on all aspects of running the Post Office lasted two and a half days.
14. There were lots of different types of transactions that I had no live experience of actually doing, which the trainer noted. The Post Office trainer's notes from this period state a lack of transactions in the branch, which meant that my live systems training for Horizon was minimal.
15. When I purchased the post office, the business had been run down, which meant that in the first week we had very few customers and I did not get much experience operating Horizon. The trainer would only shadow me as I served and did not actively train me in the absence of customers.
16. At the end of the training, the trainer asked me how I felt about the training and I told him that I did not feel confident and there is a lot, The trainer told me 'don't worry' and that I should ring the helpdesk at any time if I had any problems. I thought it should be okay as my post office was a quiet branch.
17. However, it was quite complex. There used to be a problem with the screen, when you touch one icon, the one beside it would be selected. The printer was horrendous and it took so long and when you tried to do the weekly cash account, I really wanted to throw the printer out of the window.

18. I was not given any advice or training on how to investigate any discrepancies that could arise when balancing. I was advised to contact the Helpline if I had problems. I was also not trained on how to recover Horizon transactions after a power cut, which affected the branch often.
19. During training I was told if there was a shortage to put the money in myself and if there was an overage to put the money into an envelope and put it in a drawer so when another shortage came you could put the money in.
20. The training was not great, it was minimal and the training records even show that.
21. During the mediation, the Post Office represented that I should have received one week of classroom training and two weeks of training in the branch. It was suggested that I might have refused to attend training, but this is not the case. I had never worked in a post office or related profession and I was keen to receive all the training I could get.
22. The Post Office did not even have a copy of my training record at the mediation and a Post Office representative suggested that there was two different types of handwriting on my training record, I am not sure if she was trying to suggest that I had added to it but she quickly retracted her suggestion. I cannot remember the name of this Post Office representative.

HELPLINE

23. I put my faith in the helpdesk and I thought the helpdesk would be grand.
24. The helpline was not helpful. They seemed to try but had no knowledge and did not know what they were talking about.

25. I would ring the helpline often. Phone calls to resolve an issue often lasted approximately 30 minutes.
26. I would phone the helpline for big shortfalls; if the shortfall was £20, £30, £40, I would put the money in myself.
27. The helpdesk staff seemed to be reading from a script or diagram and had no personal experience or understanding of what was going on. Sometimes an error would double in value even though I had stayed on the line and followed the directions carefully.
28. When I rang the helpline up, I would describe my problems and the shortfalls, some of the helpline staff would go through the steps with me and I would end being over by more, my shortfall would double, and then the helpline would try to take me back to my original position through a whole series of steps. I would be completely lost and the helpdesk did not seem to know what they were talking about.
29. The helpline would tell me that when I did my balance it would all be okay. The helpline palmed you off and would say when you do your final account it will be all okay then.
30. It was a very frustrating experience and sometimes the balance lasted for hours until late evening. I was never told about any option to move serious problems up to a more technical team.
31. I could not understand the helpline staff as they had a lack of English, it was very confusing.
32. I called the helpline about a £30,000 shortage and they did not say that they need to launch an investigation, they palmed me off and said there would be a correction notice. When the audit happened, they said a correction notice had been issued but

it had not been. A correction notice came in the weeks afterwards and they changed the alleged shortfall from £30,000 to £3,000.

33. I called the helpline and said that the anti-surge protection that we had put on our tills should also be put on the post office system too, they said 'no you cannot touch that, that's our property'.

SHORTFALLS

34. In this section, I set out in very brief detail my experience of shortfalls arising from deficiencies in the Horizon IT 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.
35. I would estimate that throughout my position in the branch, I paid (or the Post Office deducted) in excess of £5,000, which does not include another £5,000 I have agreed to pay to the Post Office as a settlement of its civil proceedings which I have not yet paid but which is secured as a charge against my property.
36. The Post Office deducted money from my wages for a shortfall but I did not know what the shortfall was for. I never really understood it.
37. Between 2000 and 2006 inclusively, the alleged shortfalls arose and amounted to £5000, which I repaid to the Post Office.
38. I experienced shortfalls as soon as I started at the branch. These were typically up to £100 per week and there were occasional surpluses too. I would pay these in cash from the retail branch. If the shortfall was under around £500 I would have just paid

it, as I was told by the Post Office that I was contractually obliged to pay them. If the shortfalls were above £500 I usually contacted the helpline.

39. I would be so relieved when the cash account was done and it was okay.
40. There was one discrepancy of around £1,500 that I contacted the helpline about and I was told that I had to make it good. I believe that this was settled centrally and the payments were deducted from my salary.
41. Over Christmas 2006, I stopped working at the post office full time because I was pregnant with our fourth baby and I had a difficult pregnancy; I decided that I would take a back seat until my daughter GRO was born. My assistant managed the post office and I performed the balances.
42. Just before Christmas, there was an error notice of £30,000 and I nearly collapsed, I was shocked and thought 'oh my god what is going on'.
43. I phoned the Helpline and they really were not much help, they told to settle it centrally and roll over into the next trading period and said if this is not real, then a correction notice would come and sort it out. I was not given any advice on how to dispute it. The Post Office asked me to pay the shortfall on 8 January 2007.
44. I was worried about the discrepancy but it was Christmas time and the baby was on the way so I thought 'don't worry about it, it will be okay'. A correction notice came in the weeks afterwards and they changed the shortfall from £30,000 to £3,000.
45. No further transaction correction came through and the branch was audited on 19 January 2007, in my view this audit was sparked by this huge deficit and my refusal to make it good.

46. I said to the auditors that the shortfall must have been issued in error and after several phone calls, the auditors identified that it had been mis-keyed by the Financial Service Centre and should have been £3,001.62. The Post Office later claimed that it had already been corrected by another transaction correction of 12 January 2007, but this is not true.
47. After the auditors identified the error, they stated that there was still a shortfall of £10,587.44 in the branch and suspended me. I was later told that this amount was reduced further because cheques had been found in the Belfast sorting office totalling around £3,000. I still do not understand what losses I am considered to have made.
48. I agreed to pay £5,000 to the Post Office on 10 October 2011 by way of a charging order over the property that used to contain the post office, but as yet the Post Office has not sought to enforce this and I have not paid it.
49. I only much later received a copy of a document dated 26 April 2007 by Suzanne Winter, an investigator employed by the Post Office, that stated that the transaction correction of £3,001.62 had itself been authorised in error because the cheque for £3,001.62 was discovered at the Belfast Cash Centre 3 months later.
50. This would have made the alleged outstanding shortfall just £7,585.82. Despite admitting that this transaction correction was entirely in error, to this day I have not seen any revision by the Post Office of the sum it alleges that I owe it.

AUDITS AND INVESTIGATIONS

51. The branch was audited by Post Office Ltd on 2 May 2003, 27 October 2003, 11 October 2004, and 19 January 2007. The auditors just turned up for the audits, they did not give me notice.

52. The day I took over the post office in August 2000, the Post Office did a final count and print out and there was money owed again, the lady who previously owned the branch went and put in the exact money that was overdue and the lady's husband said, 'more money we have to put in'. When they left and the auditor was there on his own, he said to me that there have been some strange returns from this office, I took it that the previous owners were making mistakes or were not familiar with the system. Afterwards, I realised it must have been an on-going issue, the previous owner had not said anything to me about the issues in case the sale did not go through. I bought the post office from GRO
53. In the first audit, we had issues with the stamps being short but we had no idea why.
54. The auditors identified several problems with the running of the branch in the 2003 audits, but this was simply because I had never been trained on how I should run it. I was left to get on with it after two and a half days of training. I made some changes after these audits.
55. On 19 January 2007, I was aware that there was an alleged shortfall of £30,001.62 because I had received a transaction correction for this on 3 January 2007. The auditors, Linda McLaughlin and Tony Kennedy, arrived at 8:45 AM. My assistant let them into the secure area while I dropped my children off at school, and I then returned to the branch to assist them.
56. I was initially not concerned with the audit because I had not done anything wrong so why would I be.
57. However, the auditors treated me as if I had stolen the money. The auditors started asking me "where's the money", and I asked them what money. The auditors said there was £30,000 missing and I told them that there could not be £30,000 missing as the post office only took in £5,000 a week so we would have had to have not paid

out anything for six weeks to be able to have that amount of money. It was an awful day and quickly went downhill and went very badly.

58. The auditor also said there were cheques missing, but it turned out that the cheques were later found at the sorting office so I did not have them either.
59. I quickly realised there was a lot more to be made of this audit than I initially thought.
60. The auditors questioned me aggressively for several hours in full view of my customers and it went around the village like wildfire.
61. I was heavily pregnant and visibly distressed by the experience. I was distraught and the experience completely spoiled the end of my pregnancy and I knew it would be my last pregnancy.
62. Various phone calls were made that day, one of them by my line manager (who has since died) and he came in and said the discrepancy was not £30,000 it was only £3,000 and I thought 'thank god, we're sorting it out'. There were all sorts of amounts bouncing about that the shortfall could maybe be £15,000, maybe £12,000. When Post Office Ltd took me to court in Belfast, this shortfall amount was £7,000 or £5,000. These amounts kept randomly being thrown up.
63. The auditors also maintained that the branch had never had any computer equipment changed because Fujitsu had not left any record of changing my Central Processing Unit twice or my printer three times.
64. The auditors refused to listen to anything that contradicted with what their records stated. I was suspended for the shortfall which at the time was alleged to be £10,587.44.

65. The auditors continued to defund the post office and everything in it in full view of the shop with customers coming and going and so word quickly spread.
66. I was so upset that I thought the auditors had given me the key and would be back on Monday. It turned out they had actually left the key for my post office at Castlewellan post office, which fuelled the fire and caused further rumours of why would they leave the keys with the next post office. I thought I had lost the keys for my post office and spent the whole weekend tearing the house apart which caused me additional stress.
67. I kept saying 'why would I take money because I knew I would have to pay it back, it makes no sense'.
68. I later saw a document dated 26 April 2007 and prepared by Suzanne Winter, which stated that upon a second request for information after my suspension, Fujitsu confirmed that the base unit had also been changed on 11 September 2006.
69. My solicitor wrote to the Post Office on 1 February 2007 citing the Post Office's error in issuing the transaction correction to me and asking that the branch be re-opened.
70. There was no investigation done by the Post Office, Post Office Ltd did not seem to understand the system themselves and they did not want to let me defend myself. I told the Post Office that I wanted the computer system looked at but they took everything away.

SUSPENSION AND TERMINATION

71. I was suspended on 19 January 2007, without pay, and I never went back to the shop after that day. The branch was closed on 19 January 2007.

72. I was told that my manager, Colum McKigney, that the Post Office would keep the branch open, but it was never re-opened and it was defunded the next working day after my suspension.
73. On 19 January 2007, the only keys for the secure area of the post office were taken away by the Post Office and left with a neighbouring post office. The computer equipment was taken away a few days later. When it was being taken away, I requested that the equipment be left as I wanted to get testing carried out but the Post Office refused to allow me to do this. All of my records were in the safe when it was removed by the Post Office and it should still have these.
74. At my second interview at Tomb Street, I was on my own at this interview and two or three Post Office representatives were there. I thought the Post Office had carried out a fair and considered evaluation of what had happened; the Post Office representative told me that my contract was terminated, the Post Office then sent a letter to my solicitor.
75. I was terminated by the Post Office by letter dated 2 January 2008. I did not hear anything from the Post Office between April 2007 and 2 January 2008, when I received a letter informing me that my contract had been terminated, except for a brief social visit from Colum McKigney. My appointment was terminated in relation to the alleged shortfalls.
76. There was confusion as the Post Office used the wrong contract to terminate me, my solicitor picked up on that and asked why the clause did not match the contract.
77. The Post Office did not keep my post office open despite my request to do so. Rumours also spread quickly about the reasons why the post office had closed. The property consisted of our home, a bar, the post office and shop; both the bar and the shop suffered from decreased business from the post office. As it was a rural

area the community was dependent on the post office and there was a lot of ill feeling that we had not done enough to keep it open.

78. I had to close the shop in September 2007 as there was too little business to keep it open. The bar has struggled ever since. We had recently acquired another property in the village which we were going to convert into a restaurant but we were unable to because of lack of funds caused by the downturn in income following the loss of the post office.
79. At the time, we were in the process of financing renovations to all of the properties which we were unable to afford after a major drop in our income. This means that we have not been able to market the properties as they need significant renovation costs.
80. We were able to let the grocery store for approximately 2 of the last 10 years. The pub continues to trade but at much-reduced levels.
81. I blame the Post Office for the wider losses to our business as we were very dependent on maintaining good relations with the local community. The Post Office informed our nearest post office that I had been suspended for accounting reasons. As my customers started going to that post office, rumours about me stealing from the Post Office spread like wildfire in the village and affected all of our business.

CIVIL AND CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

82. The Post Office pursued me for the recovery of the alleged shortfalls by way of civil proceedings.
83. They served a Civil Bill on me on 28 April 2010 for £10,587.44.

84. We agreed to settle the claim on 10 October 2011 for £5,000 inclusive of costs, and I agreed to a charge being placed on the property which has not yet been invoked by the Post Office.
85. I was led to believe by the Post Office that I had no alternative but to pay the shortfalls.
86. The Post Office did not pursue any criminal proceedings against me but they had accused me of theft and I was scared I would go to jail.
87. I gave birth in March 2007 and 2 weeks later I was interviewed under caution by the Post Office as part of an investigation into alleged criminal activity on my part.
88. The Post Office initially refused to allow my solicitor access to the meeting but they eventually let him in when I said that I would not be interviewed without him. I later requested a copy of the tape recording of the interview but the Post Office did not provide this to me.
89. During the interview at Tomb Street in Belfast, the Post Office asked me a stock question of 'can you tell us what happened 19th January'. I was told during my interview that I was the only one who had a problem like this with the system. I originally thought the problems were because we had put in a generator and questioned whether the generator had caused problems with the system.
90. During the interview the Post Office interviewers said that they had checked with the postman about the missing cheques and it was not an issue there.
91. I thought I do not know why it has happened and why I am the only one, but I am and I believed firmly that I was the only one until about four years later when I saw an article about the Horizon system and I thought 'oh my god that is what happened

to me' so I contacted Alan Bates and he said that lots of people had been told that too. It was actually really nice to know there were others.

92. I was interviewed for a second time and again I was told that my solicitor could not attend the meeting. I was informed in the second meeting that I would remain suspended, but I was not given any indication about when I might be reinstated. I refused to pay the alleged shortfall on the basis that the Post Office owed me money for all of the shortfalls I had previously made good myself.
93. I later made a freedom of Information request to the Post Office and I received some internal correspondence dated December 2007 between Suzanne Winter, an Investigation manger, and John Breeden, a National Contract Manager, in which Ms Winter stated that it was "impossible to conduct analysis" and that as "dishonesty could not be proven... criminal investigation was a non starter." Despite this, the Post Office pursued me for shortfalls that they alleged were the result of my negligence when they already knew or had reason to believe that there was insufficient evidence of how these shortfalls were caused. Post Office Limited did not have a reasonable belief that these shortfalls were caused by my negligence.
94. I refused to admit that I was guilty of theft during the interviews and I am really proud of myself for that because the Post Office did threaten me with going to prison and I thought of my girls, but I thought I did not do anything wrong and I am not going to admit to it. However, I can understand why people in other circumstances did admit to it.

LOSSES

95. I estimate that I repaid the Post Office in excess of £5,000 for the alleged shortfalls.

96. We suffered loss of investment. We paid £300,000 for a large estate consisting of a general store, post office and public house, and adjoining out-houses, which we intended to renovate and let. We financed the purchase with a mortgage of £105,000 and our own money.
97. We also paid £40,000 to renovate the post office, including re-plastering, repainting, new signage and shelving, and we paid £40,000 to stock it. We also paid for a new power generator which cost £3,200 which we no longer had use for after closing the post office and shop.
98. In 2005/06 we purchased another property in the village which we intended to convert into a restaurant. This cost £280,000, we financed this property with our own money and a mortgage of £150,000. When the post office was closed, we never had an opportunity to renovate the property and it never became operational as a result of diminished cash flow. We had to sell a licence that was associated with the property. We had two loans in relation to the property and kitchen equipment and these were called in by the owners.
99. I had to sell a farm that I had inherited from my grandfather that I had not intended to sell. In around 2003, the farm had been valued and had also received an offer of approximately £1,000,000, which I had rejected. This was at the height of the property boom. After my suspension I was forced to sell it quickly at a loss. The farm generated £290,000.
100. We have continued to make mortgage payments on both properties and we now owe approximately £100,000 in respect of these combined. As a result of the closure of the post office, the only income we now receive is a much-reduced income from the public house, my income as a teacher, and in approximately 2 of the last 10 years we have been able to let the general store as commercial space for a modest sum. At the time that the post office closed, we employed 4 full time and 7 part time staff

members in the public house, general store and post office, and now we do not employ any other staff.

101. I was suspended for almost one year before my contract was terminated. My loss of income from the post office was £8,900 net.
102. I suffered loss of earnings due to the Post Office failing to give me notice. For three months my net income would have been £2,250.
103. I will give credit for the income I have subsequently earned having returned to teaching. In September 2007 I was employed in temporary teaching positions and I obtained a permanent teaching position in 2010. I now earn approximately £40,000 per annum which we have used to keep our business afloat.
104. After I was suspended I was too ill to continue working in the general store. Over the next 8 months I had to pay increased wages to cover the hours that I was not working. Given my maternity, I would have worked approximately for 6 months at 7 days per week for 7 hours per day. I employed my staff at approximately £5.35 per hour, so I estimate this loss at £6,815.90.
105. I estimate that the branch and retail business together were returning a profit of approximately £200,000 per year. I would have continued to run this business for a further 22 years, during which time I would have expected to earn in the region of £4,400,000. As I mention, since 2010 I have been employed as a teacher on a salary of £40,000 per year. I anticipate I shall continue to work in this position until I am 55, and that during that time I will earn approximately £1,000,000.
106. In addition, the manner in which the branch was closed caused such damage to my reputation that the resulting stress made me feel unable to return to working in the

business. As a result the business closed 8 months after my suspension and the debts crystallised.

107. I therefore estimate my total loss of earnings post termination to be in the region of £3,458,315.
108. I paid £5,000 in legal fees in relation to the civil proceedings and the original investigation into me by the Post Office. I instructed a solicitor and a barrister to represent me at the High Court.
109. I attended two meetings with the Post Office in Belfast in 2007. At the time I was not working, but I made two return journeys of approximately 56 miles. At £0.40 per mile, this cost me £44.80.
110. I attended two more meetings in Belfast in relation to the civil proceedings against me. One meeting was with my solicitor and one was the High Court hearing at which we settled the claim. On both occasions, I had to take a day off work. At the time I was earning a daily rate of approximately £120 per day net. I estimate my total losses in relation to these two days, including travel as per the above methodology, at £284.80.
111. I had to take another day off work to attend the mediation. My travel expenses were covered by the Post Office but my time off work cost me another £120.
112. I had a charge over my property of £5,000 in favour of the Post Office.

HUMAN IMPACT

113. I would spend hours looking through cash accounts and I could not figure the shortfalls out. I tried so much and I would count the money again and again, it was such a waste of my time and I would get into a state.

114. The closure of the post office, and the manner in which the Post Office suspended me, ruined my reputation in the community where I had been building a business and a family home for me, my husband and our four children.
115. To this day, I am blamed for the loss of the local amenity that was the post office. I know that people still talk about me behind my back as the person who ruined the village and that as a result I am excluded from local activities and social events.
116. People in the community blanked me, it was hard as I had not done anything wrong but I could not defend myself. Nobody ever really believed me because if it is my word against the Post Office, they were going to believe the Post Office.
117. After the post office closed, I was verbally attacked by a pensioner who said to me 'you knew it was closing and didn't tell us'.
118. I consider that the Post Office failed to treat my suspension in a sensitive and confidential way and had no concern for the effect on our wider business of news spreading that I had been suspended from the Post Office.
119. After I was suspended, I was financially impacted and the banks called in the loans as I could not make payments.
120. There came a point where I had no money, we were scraping to get the weekly shopping and I had to sell my grandfather's farm, it was sold for less than what it was valued for and what it would have previously been sold for but it was enough to get the bank off our backs and whatever was owed afterwards I paid out of my monthly wages.
121. I had grown up with my grandparents, my grandfather would not sell the farm and if anybody tried to buy the farm he could chase them away and say it is for Kathy. It

was a huge hit for me and hurt a lot, I felt so guilty about selling the farm as I felt I had let my grandfather down.

122. When I got the farm valued it was worth £1,000,000, however, I never ever had any intention to sell it no matter how much I was offered. If I had another option I would not have sold the farm. Since the day the farm was sold, I have not been able to go back to the village.
123. I still have debt worth £70,000 from that time two years ago, and £5,000 in HMRC as I was not able to deal with things; returns were not made, I was not able to pay the accountants, returns did not go in so we got penalties. It became horrendous and I could not see a way out of it and it was so it was so confusing because I was trying to think 'what did I do wrong?'
124. I think that if the post office had closed due to regular closure it would have been okay. However, because of rumours about me stealing money, people stopped coming to the shop, I had to let staff go and I could not go back to the store. The bar suffered too and went quiet, my husband and I were pariahs in community
125. The two interviews I had with Post Office Ltd, the first where I was interviewed under caution about the theft and the second was to relieve me of my position as subpostmistress, they were some of the worst days of my life. I attended both interviews even though they were a very short time after my baby was born and I really should not have been at them.
126. The National Federation of Subpostmasters were useless; the federation did not want to know about my issues and they basically said that I was guilty. I spoke to the federation after the final audit and I was more upset after speaking to them.
127. I suffered personal damage. The events of 19 January 2007 were horrendous. I felt unable to defend myself against the criminal allegations levelled against me. It

completely ruined the final weeks of my pregnancy and overshadowed the birth of our baby daughter **GRO**. The first few months after **GRO** was brought home I suffered depression and anguish due to what had happened with the post office.

128. I was worried sick about the alleged missing money and how we could make ends meet without the income. I feared being sent to prison over this and being separated from my family. I was unable to return to the shop and felt that I really could not face my neighbours and friends. I was not coping well and I cut myself off from people to try and protect myself.
129. I moved out of the house a few days after my suspension as I needed to be alone with my children. The most important thing for me was to financially provide for my family and to keep everyone together.
130. My husband was upset and stressed too. He did not know how to help me, he would ask me what happened and I would panic and say I do not know. **GRO** came to all the JFSA meetings with me and I would say look it was not just me.
131. My husband and I broke up for eight months after 31 years together due to the pressure of having to pay all the money back and having to sell the farm that belonged to my grandfather. My husband blamed me for the shortfalls, he kept saying that I must have been making mistakes, he blamed me and I blamed myself because I could not explain the shortfalls.
132. I can see why my husband blamed me because who else could you blame.
133. I had to move out of the property as I could not cope with the gossip that the actions of the Post Office generated, and I had to be away from the post office and bar.
134. Because of my background in teaching, I did not seek medical treatment or go to my GP because I was worried that it might result in Social Services becoming involved

because I had a young family and I feared I would lose my baby. I knew I should have been going to the GP for help but I knew there would be repercussion.

135. I could see no way out and I did think about suicide on at least one occasion; I thought would it go away if that happened, would my family have no money worries then.
136. I was scared that if I went to prison I would lose all my children.
137. My oldest daughter, **GRO** was 11/12 years old at time and she knew about the problems we were having as we moved homes to a house that we were doing up but had not finished. I did not realise until a year later that **GRO** knew about what had happened and that she knew money was tight, **GRO** could not get a lot during those teenage years; we provided the best we could, as long as the house was warm and there was food on the table, that was the most important thing.
138. **GRO** knew how upset my husband and I were, we broke up and **GRO** was upset by it and she would ask me what is wrong, I would tell her 'it is just this thing about money, don't worry about it, it will be okay'. We tried to hide it from her as best we could.
139. I cannot go back to the village. I have to go forward as our girls deserve a good childhood and a nice life, I am getting there but it was a very bad three or four years where money was so tight, we are not back to where we were even pre-2007 and it has been a struggle.
140. Money was tight and I would make lunches for my girls and go without because there was no bread left, I did what I had to do. I got stronger from it.

CONCLUSION

141. I was naive in 2000 and I did not foresee the dangers with the Post Office, if I had been aware of the dangers I would not have taken the post office on.
142. The post office events impact me even to this day, I am still wary of signing anything and I will not hold anyone's money under any circumstances in case something like this happens again and I would be blamed.
143. Getting adequate compensation is big a thing for me.
144. I would like the charge over my property to be removed, there has been work done but the Post Office are have difficulty removing the charge. They did not have much difficulty getting it on there so whatever they did, they can un-do.
145. I would like a reference from the Post Office for my time employed as subpostmistress.
146. I had taught for 6/7 years before the post office and I had to go back to teaching, so there was a break in my pension contribution which had an impact on my current pension status in teaching. If I had been paying into my pension during my time at the post office it would have counted as not being a break. This has impacted on me negatively and I would like to have a full unbroken pension record and a pension contribution from Post Office Ltd.
147. It was a really unfair thing for the Post Office to do. They were so vindictive and told lies without batting an eye lid, they did not worry in the slightest.

148. People should be held to account because you cannot do what the Post Office have done in your professional life, you cannot accuse people without evidence. Post Office Ltd sent people to prison with no evidence, it was horrendous.

149. This has been going on a long time and I want to get on with life.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe the contents of this statement to be true.

Signed... **GRO** Dated... 17/03/22
Katherine Kennedy