

Witness Name: Tony Kearns

Statement No.: WITN0637_01

Exhibits: WITN0637_01/1 to WITN0637_01/5

Dated: 12.10.2022

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF TONY KEARNS

BACKGROUND

I, MR ANTHONY KEARNS, will say as follows:

1. My name is Anthony Kearns, between late 1997 and early 2002 I was employed by the Communication Workers Union as an Assistant Secretary. This was a national role responsible for leading on negotiations over terms and conditions and associated matters with a number of employers. With regards to this inquiry one of those employers was Post Office Counters Limited (POCL). It is now well over 20 years since I undertook the role set out above and as such I will answer the questions raised as best as I can from memory.
2. I have read document POL00028522 [WITN0637_01/1, POL00028522]. This document contains a written submission made by both the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and the Communication Managers Association (CMA). The document was compiled by the Research Dept at CWU Headquarters and sets out the position of the CWU (agreed, to the best of my knowledge with the

CMA) with regard to the understanding we had at the time of the reasons for the (then) delay to the Horizon Project and our understanding of why that was. In response to the specific question "Please set out the background to my involvement in the Horizon Project" I was not involved in either the concept, design or inter party negotiations (Government. ICL. Benefits Agency. POCL) of the Horizon system. We, CWU, accepted the announcement in May 1999 by the new DTI Minister to be directly involved in the project. Up to that point we had no direct involvement in this project as far as I can remember. In that regard we played no part in the technical design of this system.

PROCUREMENT

3. As far as I can recall I believe CWU had no position in relation to the procurement of the Horizon system. From memory I believe this was a decision made either by POCL or Govt or both.
4. As far I can recall I believe firmly that the CWU had no involvement in the procurement of the Horizon system.

DEVELOPMENT AND DELAY

I have read and considered documents CWU00000089 and CWU00000090 [WITN0637_01/2, CWU00000089] [WITN0637_01/3, CWU00000090].

5. With regards the question "what (if any) involvement did the CWU have in the development of the Horizon IT system" the answer is, none.
6. The CWU's understanding of the reasons for the delay are set out in the CWU/CMA Submission to the Trade and Industry Select Committee on Post

Office Counters Automation and are contained on pages 015 and 016 of the document POL00028522 [WITN0637_01/1, POL00028522].

7. As best as I can recall Post Office Counters Limited would write to the CWU updating us on the development of the system e.g. document CWU00000089 [WITN0637_01/2, CWU00000089].
8. As set out in POL00028522 our first direct involvement would be with the Working Group set up by the new Minister for the DTI (May1999). Outside of and prior to this the CWU would have been in contact with POCL through our normal industrial relations interface, again as set out in POL00028522 [WITN0637_01/1, POL00028522].

HORIZON WORKING GROUP

9. I would attend meetings of the Horizon Project Working Group alongside the then General Secretary, Derek Hodgson to both a) listen to and understand what the intentions of Govt and POCL were with regard to the future of the Post Office Network and the Horizon Project b) to determine what (if any) implications this would have on CWU members c) raise any points relevant to the same.
10. From memory my understanding of the purpose of the Horizon Working Group was to ensure that the automation project begun under the previous Govt was implemented and to understand how the migration to automation would occur and to understand how the proposed changes by the Benefits Agency to the methods of paying pensions, child benefit etc. would be impacted by this change. This was a part of the discussion around the purpose of the working

group to enable POCL to continue to provide the contracted Govt services and to contribute to the long term sustainability of the Post Office network.

11. From memory I do not recall that the Horizon Working group was tasked with examining nor reporting on the technical issues (faults) with the development of the system and as such I cannot recall if any specific questions on this issue were raised.
12. Apart from a reference in document NFSP00000471 page 14 to the Post Office giving assurances to the NFSP that any systems faults would be cured I do not recall what either POCL or ICL did in this regard [WITN0637_01/4, NFSP00000471].
13. As I stated above the CWU were not involved in the technical design of this system and its deployment would have been deemed as fit for purpose by POCL.
14. I cannot recall such questions were raised by me or the CWU as we were not asked to agree the technical specifications of the system.
15. I cannot recall any issues with regard to this matter.
16. From memory I understand that there was a commercial contract between POCL and ICL that dealt with these matters but we (CWU) were not a party to that agreement nor as to how POCL and ICL resolved any issues they may have arisen.
17. From memory and as can be seen by various minutes from the Horizon Working group the Govt was certainly keen for the Horizon project to be rolled out as quickly as possible as it believed it to be key to the provision, via automation of a number of Govt services. To what extent the Govt may have brought pressure on those concerned (POCL and ICL) to roll out the project I do not know.

PERFORMANCE AND INNOVATION UNIT

18. I would have had no direct involvement with the Performance and Innovation Unit. I would have assisted in compiling the submission "CWU/CMA Submission to The Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit on the Future of the Post Office Network" contained within document CWU00000087 [WITN0637_01/5, CWU00000087].
19. From memory, my understanding of what the purpose of the Performance and Innovation Unit was, in broad terms, was to ensure that Post Office Counter services could be provided throughout the whole of the UK, to ensure Govt services were provided effectively and efficiently through this network and to look at developing new objectives for the network including expanding on the (then) existing work carried out i.e. to expand the range of services on offer.
20. No, I do not recall any discussion with the Performance and Innovation Unit on technical issues with Horizon other than those set out in the submission contained in CWU00000087 page 4 "Background – Delays to the Horizon Project [WITN0637_01/5, CWU00000087].

GENERAL

21. The CWU were never asked by POCL to agree or sign off that the system they were introducing was "fit for purpose". Their approach, from memory, was that they had worked with partners (ICL Pathway) and that as far as they were concerned the technology they intended to roll out would work. I recall, in a general sense, issues being raised by the NFSP about issues during the initial trial, we would have sought assurances that any issues would have been

resolved prior to roll out but POCL, as far as I can remember treated this as an issue between themselves and the developer. We were not asked to approve the system. Our role at that point was to ensure that our members would have the appropriate/relevant training on the new (Horizon) system. We would negotiate around the ergonomics i.e. how it would physically fit on a Post Office counter, how this would impact upon our members, what would that transition arrangements be regarding moving between the old (manual) systems and the new (electronic) system.

22. We weren't involved with "the technical issues relating to Horizon" as per my statement in answer to question 21 this was not a matter that POCL sought to negotiate with us. They along with Government had determined that the work undertaken by staff would be modernised (automated) by this new technology and that between them and their partners they had developed a technology that worked. We would have informed our members of this message, because that was our role and we would have informed them of what the arrangements would be in relation to the points set out in 21 above. I am not able to be specific on this as this was over 20 plus years ago, save to say that this was how we carried out our role in a general sense, that is we would engage with the employer (POCL) and inform our members via various methods as to the outcome of those negotiations, consultations or discussions. In this matter the technical aspects of the Horizon Project were not open to negotiation with us. Without wishing to sound repetitive we had no role in the technical development of the system.

23. Again, we were not asked to play a part in the acceptance of the system, that was an issue for POCL to sign off with the developer. I generally recall being

appraised of delays to the system, although I believe this is well known. As I recall we would ask why this was and ask what was being done, would be informed/reassured that such matters would be dealt with and resolved before roll out. Again, we were never asked to agree that system i.e. it's technical aspects would work.

24. I cannot recall any other matters that I can comment upon that would assist the Chair.

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed:

GRO

Dated: 12.10.2022

Index to First Witness Statement of Tony Kearns

No.	Exhibit number	Document Description	Control Number	URN
1	WITN0637_01/1	Email from Kathryn Hollingsworth to Martin Walsh, David Simpson and Keith Hardie re DTI Select Committee Hearing on Horizon - reports and written submissions	POL-0025004	POL00028522
2	WITN0637_01/2	Circular: CWU Circular 153/97 (PE) re:Horizon	VIS00007763	CWU00000089
3	WITN0637_01/3	Circular: CWU Circular 322/98 (PE) 'B' re:Horizon Programme: Post Office Counters Ltd	VIS00007764	CWU00000090
4	WITN0637_01/4	Report of meeting of the NEC held on 21, 22 and 23 June 1999	VIS00008929	NFSP00000471
5	WITN0637_01/5	Circular: CWU Circular on Horizon Project: Post Office Network (17/2000 (PE) 'A')	VIS00007761	CWU00000087