

WITNESS: LISA MARGARET BRENNAN

STATEMENT NUMBER: WITN0171_01

EXHIBITS: 0

DATED: Jan 14, 2022

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MRS LISA MARGARET BRENNAN

THIS STATEMENT IS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO THE RULE 9 REQUEST OF
THE PUBLIC INQUIRY DATED 29/10/2021 TO ADDRESS THE HUMAN IMPACT OF
THE FAILINGS OF THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM

I, MRS LISA MARGARET BRENNAN, Date of Birth of
 will say as follows:-

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. I was born in Liverpool.
2. My mother worked in a tight factory and my father was a supervisor for British Gas.
3. I had a normal, very happy childhood.
4. I did ok at school, but I would describe myself as more “streetwise” than my older sibling, who was more studious.
5. I had plenty of friends at school, and I was never in any trouble.
6. I got married when I was 25. I had my daughter when I was 27.

7. My life was going well and everything was normal. In 2002, everything fell apart.
8. Today, I am rebuilding my life. I have a new partner; I am fit and well and I am looking towards the future.

POST OFFICE HISTORY

9. I became a counter clerk, at Childwall Valley, when I was 16 years old. I worked there until I was 21. When I left, I was an officer in charge.
10. I then began working for the Crown Post Office. At first, I was a 'floater' and I could be sent anywhere to work. I didn't mind this and I enjoyed it. I worked at a number of different Post Offices all over Liverpool.
11. In 1995, I ended up at the Huyton Post Office working as a counter clerk.
12. I enjoyed working in the Post Office and it was always my intention to stay there until my retirement.
13. I had won awards and earned bonuses. It was good money and a good pension.
14. I was happy with my job.

CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS AND ANY PROCEEDINGS/CONVICTION

15. The Horizon system was installed between 1999 - 2001. I was given no training from the Post Office.
16. Practice makes perfect was the way we looked at it.
17. There were approximately ten members of staff working at the Post Office at that time.

18. We all had log in details. There was another female member of staff who had the same initials as me, LB. This caused problems when we needed to determine who was who, and who was doing which transactions.
19. All of us made mistakes but there was never an expectation that we had to pay the shortfall. It would just roll over to the next day.
20. On 2 June 2002, the auditors arrived at the branch. This was not unusual, they often did. However they usually looked at the branch as a whole due to its size. They never looked at individuals.
21. They did a full audit of the branch and found a mistake in my balancing. I had never been in the spotlight before. I was good at my job and this was a shock.
22. I understand that a shortfall of approximately £3,000.00 was found.
23. I was called into a room and interviewed. I was told I could take a friend with me, which I did, but they would not be able to contribute. I had no legal representation.
24. The interview was conducted by two men. One of the men was Steven Bradshaw. I cannot recall the name of the other man.
25. The interview felt like an eternity. I was so intimidated and the experience was awful. They were insulting throughout and made unprofessional comments about my weight and my hair. This was horrible. I felt I was in a no-win situation.
26. After the interview, I was suspended and told to leave there and then. My contract with the Post Office was terminated.
27. I did not know what to do so I just got on the bus.

28. I went to my Nan's house. My daughter, [GRO] was due to go on holiday the next day with my parents and other family members, so I knew I could stay there.
29. My Nan stayed with me. I made a point of not returning to the family home. I could not cope with that.
30. On 24 December 2002, I received my summons to appear at court. I was still living at my mum's house at this point.
31. I was distraught. To receive the summons at all was devastating, but to do so on Christmas Eve was incredibly upsetting. I just wanted to escape the past few months at Christmas time but I wasn't even allowed to do that.
32. I was summonsed to appear at Liverpool Magistrates Court.
33. I instructed EAG solicitors and they instructed a barrister, Mr Simms, to represent me. I relied on his advice.
34. I was advised by [GRO] to plead not guilty and he said that the case would then be transferred to the Crown Court.
35. I decided to plead not guilty. I was only there for an hour. I took my stepdad, [GRO] with me for support.
36. The case was then referred to Liverpool Crown Court.
37. On 2 September 2003, it was listed for a three-day trial.
38. My mum and [GRO], my stepfather, came with me each day.
39. I had to take references from people who I worked with for the Judge to consider.
40. I maintained my not guilty plea throughout. I had done nothing wrong, so why would I plead anything different.

41. On the second day of the trial, the jury were sent home as they had not reached a verdict, so we had to come back the following day.
42. On the final day of the trial, I had to say goodbye to [GRO] She went to school rather than coming with me. She knew that there was a chance that I might not be coming home.
43. I was very open with her. I told her that if I was sent to prison, I was never coming home. I could not cope with that and I would end my life.
44. It was heartbreaking to have to have such a conversation and to say goodbye and leave [GRO] to go to school, it was unbearable. She was only 6.
45. I was found guilty.
46. It was a split verdict and Judge Phillips said that he could not understand how I was found guilty by some of the jury and not by others.
47. I was convicted of stealing either £3,000.00 or £6,000.00. I was in total shock.
48. Even the Court Clerk was in tears.
49. The Post Office requested an order for their costs and Judge Phillips told them to “add a penny on the cost of a stamp” as they would get nothing from me.
50. I had no legal costs to pay.
51. I had been charged with 32 counts of theft, and I was convicted on 27 accounts.
52. I received a 6-month sentence, suspended for two years.
53. I was numb, but I knew I was going home.
54. I couldn't believe that I had been convicted of an offence that I did not commit.
55. Throughout my career, I had shown nothing but loyalty, hard-work, and dedication to my Post Office branch, and in return I was branded a criminal.

56. I was so upset and ashamed.

THE HUMAN IMPACT

57. The human impact which the failings of the Horizon IT System have had and continue to have upon me, and my family are set out in the remainder of this statement. The section headings follow the particular questions posed by the Inquiry.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING REQUIRED TO MAKE GOOD APPARENT SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

58. I did not have to make good any shortfalls in the system, but this did not mean that I did not suffer financially.

WHAT WERE THE COSTS OF MAKING GOOD ALLEGED SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY HORIZON?

59. As I did not make up the shortfalls initially, I did not suffer any costs.

HOW WERE YOU AFFECTED WHEN ALLEGED TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS OR DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

60. I was broken by the allegations being made against me.

61. I was not dishonest.

62. I was ashamed and I could not go back home.

63. Whilst staying at my Nan's house, I tried to take an overdose.

64. The shame of being accused of stealing, and my suspension tipped me over the edge, and I felt like I couldn't carry on.

**WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR
SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

65. As I have said, my employment was terminated there and then on the 2 August 2002.
66. The Post Office paid me up until 2 August 2002 but after that I had no income whatsoever.
67. The loss of my job, led to me losing everything.
68. I was homeless and I had to couch surf with a 6-year-old.
69. I had never missed a payment before my employment was terminated, but everything then fell apart.
70. I was then convicted at Liverpool Crown Court of Theft.

**WHAT WERE YOUR FINANCIAL LOSSES CAUSED BY ACTION TAKEN
AGAINST YOU IN RELIANCE UPON HORIZON DATA?**

71. As soon as my contract was terminated by the Post Office, I lost my only source of income and could no longer afford to live.

**WHAT EFFECT DID IT HAVE TO BE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING CRIMINAL
OFFENCES AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN
BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?**

72. Being accused of dishonesty and being fired was the lowest point for me.
73. I did not think anyone would listen to me as I was a criminal.
74. I went to the doctors because I was not coping at all.
75. I was prescribed beta blockers.

76. I wanted to end my life; it was best for everyone if I were not there; [GRO] would be better without me.
77. Everyone knew what had happened, that I had robbed the Post Office.
78. I could not walk down the street without the feeling people were talking about me.
79. Before the prosecution I had a 3-bedroom house with my husband and my daughter; [GRO]
80. We had a mortgage as most people do and we lived near our family.
81. We had no financial difficulties.
82. I split from my husband, because I never went back to the house. I was so ashamed of what I was labelled as. I could not go home.
83. With no income, I became bankrupt as I could not pay any of the bills and the house had to be sold. I was homeless.
84. I gave away any furniture and household items; they were no use to me anymore.
85. [GRO] and I went to live with my mum until we were able to get a council flat.
86. I could not get a bank account.
87. I had to sell jewellery so I could pay for a birthday party for [GRO]
88. I went without food so that [GRO] could eat.
89. I could not walk down the street without feeling that everyone was looking and talking about me.
90. At this time, I was supported by the Salvation Army who also provided food for me and [GRO]

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING CONVICTED OF A CRIMINAL OFFENCE AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

91. After the hearing, I contacted the school to ask them to tell GRO that I was coming home.
92. We went to the local pub.
93. I was very close to my brother-in-law who was a policeman. I was so ashamed that I could not tell him about what was happening until the week before I went to court. It was so embarrassing, but he was there at the pub waiting outside for me. I could not believe I was out and back with my family.
94. I had to attend the probation office and NACRO once a week.
95. This was horrible.
96. There were drug addicts, serious criminals; I was one of them.
97. GRO and I eventually got a flat in 2003 and we continued to live there.
98. It was an awful place to live, we had no heating and had to sleep in the same bed to keep warm, it was me and her against the world.
99. The flat was single glazed, and in winter it had icy windows. There was a lack of security, and no central heating. It was on the list to be demolished.
100. There was a lot of antisocial behaviour in the area with vandalism and drug activity. It was not a place to bring up GRO
101. I had no social life. We couldn't go on holidays or for meals or trips out. Even if we could have afforded it, it was hard to travel to lots of countries with a criminal conviction.
102. I couldn't get home insurance.
103. My reputation was destroyed.

104. I lived on benefits, and we used to have to go eat at my mum's as we could not afford to eat.

105. I did not think I would ever get a job.

106. I was unable to pursue vocational jobs as a criminal.

107. I signed up for a teaching training course the following year.

108. I helped at the school for free. The school was great with me as GRO went there so it made things easier.

109. I qualified and worked over the Christmas term as a placement, but unfortunately, I had to leave as they had to do a CRB check which showed I had a conviction.

110. I had to sign on for benefits again.

111. I could only apply for jobs that did not require a CRB check.

112. I lived in daily terror of being found out.

113. My cousin GRO owned a florist, so I began to work there for the minimum wage, helping where I could. I was there a year or two until GRO had to sell the shop.

114. GRO was 12 by then and the benefits agency said I could leave her on her own. I could not use childcare as a reason not to get a job.

115. I then went to work for B&M and did the night shifts. I hated working there but I had to be grateful I had a job. It was in Widnes, which was a journey from home. I stayed there for 2 years. I had to leave GRO home alone all night.

116. I then moved to Home Bargains, as it was nearer home.

117. I was asked to become a "Lead in Sales" but then I was offered a supervisor role at Pound World which I took, and I was then promoted to become a Manager at Pound World.
118. When the company went bust, I moved back to B&M as a Cash Officer Manager.
119. I felt comfortable dealing with money there as there were cameras all around me, so I felt great as everything was being watched.
120. One day at work a random lady came in and said how much I must enjoy my role as I was always happy with what I do. She gave me her business card and asked me to send her my CV. I was offered a position and I am still there now. This is with a company called Amey.
121. We eventually moved to a council house in 2012.
122. The mortgage on my old house would have been paid off by now.
123. I have had to sell all of my gold jewellery, including my wedding rings and family heirlooms and sovereigns just to buy food.
124. I had to visit Salvation Army jumble sales for **GRO** toys.
125. I couldn't afford school uniforms for **GRO**
126. After my suspension and conviction, I started drinking heavily. Before then I was only a social drinker.
127. I would drink a bottle of vodka every few days or a bottle of wine a day. This happened for 10 years, but I now only drink very occasionally.
128. I have lost my private pension and due to the breaks in my employment, I have paid under the minimum contributions to state pensions.
129. This means that my finances will also be affected when I eventually retire.

WHAT EFFECT DID THESE ISSUES HAVE UPON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY?

130. As I have said, my marriage broke down.

131. After my conviction, my dad became ill, and I was too scared to take time off work to care for him. This was because of my experience with the Post Office and the fact that I did not want to be accused of not doing my job properly.

132. My Dad needed to be taken to appointments, but I didn't feel comfortable doing this. He died a few years ago of dementia and cancer. I feel I lost this time with him.

133. My dad, grandmother and brother-in-law all died before my conviction was quashed. Although they believed in me, in the eyes of the law, I was a convicted criminal.

134. I have been suicidal on several occasions. Luckily, my family has been able to bring me out the other side. I have also had the help of medication.

135. I have focused my mind into running and losing weight and I am extremely happy with what I have achieved.

136. I did lose all of my friends because of this, as I could not go out in public, and I know how judgemental some people can be.

137. I used to be very popular, and I had a lot of friends who I could rely on.

138. I lost touch as I wouldn't let anyone into my life. I was so ashamed and embarrassed by my conviction.

139. I do not use social media as I do not want people remembering me from my conviction and keeping tabs on me online.

140. I have not had a relationship until recently, when I met my partner, and we are now engaged. I was always worried about telling him about my past, but when I did, he answered with "so what" which was a massive relief. He did not care about the past.

141. I began running to help me cope. I ran to forget that I was a criminal. I was a size 18, but I lost weight and I began to run every day, completing charity runs and 10ks.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT WHICH THESE ISSUES HAD UPON THE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY?

142. The impact on [GRO] was enormous and immeasurable.

143. She lost her stable home, and she lost out on a traditional family upbringing.

144. She no longer spent time with her father as our relationship broke down.

145. She had to face the fact that I was possibly going to prison.

146. [GRO] was only 6 years old when I was convicted. She is now 25 years old.

147. [GRO] now suffers from mental health issues. She has been on medication since she was 18 or 19.

148. Despite this [GRO] has done well and obtained a law degree and even researched my case.

149. I firmly believe however, that but for the Post Office prosecution [GRO] mental health would be in a far better place.

150. My mother was also affected, and she had to support me financially and often feed [GRO] and me.

151. My whole family supported me and believed in my innocence.

152. When I did not want to join the group action, my sister and [GRO] encouraged me to do so, and they were always there for me.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

153. The whole situation with the Post Office has had a significant impact on my well-being and self-confidence and has caused myself and my family so much hurt over the years.

154. Despite my reservations, I lodged my case at the Criminal Case Review Commission (CCRC).

155. My case was accepted by the CCRC and my conviction was referred to the Court of Appeal in March 2021.

156. The Post Office confirmed that they would not object to my conviction being quashed and it was quashed on 23 April 2021.

157. I was still embarrassed by my conviction, and although I wanted to go to court and be on television, I didn't dare in case my conviction wasn't overturned. I feared that I would then be on TV and lose my job. I kept what was going on a secret and I could not even ask for time off work to attend court.

158. I only told my employers about the court case once my conviction was overturned. I had been off with stress for months, but they did not know the cause of it.

159. I can now get on with the rest of my life. I regret not seeking medical help earlier from my doctor, but I didn't go because I was a criminal and didn't deserve help.

160. I kept everything bottled up and a secret for 19 years.

161. It was me and **GRO** against the world and I was very angry. For my own sanity I had to write it all down.

162. It is only now, after starting the medication that I have begun to feel better and I now have a spring in my step.

Statement Of Truth

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

Signed:

GRO

Position Or

Office Held:

Print Full

Date of signature: Jan 14, 2022

Name:

GRO

FILE REFERENCE: 271845.002

