

WITNESS: DAVID BLAKEY

STATEMENT NUMBER: WITN0153\_01

EXHIBITS: 0

DATED: Jan 14, 2022

**POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY**

**FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DAVID BLAKEY**

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, MR DAVID BLAKEY, Date of Birth  of   
 will say as follows:-

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

1. I was born on  on an RAF base in Berkshire. I moved to  when I was around 2 years old and have remained there ever since.
2. Growing up, I lived with my mum, dad and 3 sisters. I had an excellent childhood and I was the eldest child.
3. As a child, I attended a mainstream school which I loved. However, I left school at the age of 15, just 3 months before my exams, in order to join an

apprenticeship in heavy vehicle mechanics. I obtained a Higher National Certificate in Mechanical Engineering and have completed a number of courses in related subjects, such as Welding and Health & Safety.

4. I married my first wife in 1975 at the age of 21 and we spent 2 years in Canada. My daughter **GRO** was born in 1979 and shortly after, I split with my first wife **GRO**. As a result, it was 20 years before I saw **GRO** again. Thankfully, she came looking for me and we were able to build a relationship. **GRO** also had a daughter, **GRO**, aged 7. My relationship with my daughter and my granddaughter is a very good one.
5. On my return from Canada, I worked in several different areas as a Mechanical Engineer, including in food factories, oil refineries, power stations and Kimberly-Clark. I also spent some time within the Parachute Regiment on a voluntary basis.
6. I have been married to my wife **GRO** for 39 years and I have two stepsons, one of whom is married.

## POST OFFICE HISTORY

7. While working at Kimberly-Clark as an engineer, I had a friend who was a Sub-Postmaster at the Riby Square branch and he was moving to another store. **GRO** and I took a loan out and took over the Post Office.
8. **GRO** became the Sub-Postmistress. **GRO** worked at the Post Office since 1996. We did not live at the Post Office. At the time, the business was in my name.
9. When the Horizon system was introduced in February 2000, I attended a one-day training course and also had a trainer attend the Post Office. The trainer

lacked knowledge and understanding of the system and unfortunately Gillian and I often struggled to balance the books.

10. I used to call **GRO** every morning and evening when she opened and closed the Post Office, as it was a dangerous occupation. I would also go into the shop most evenings to assist with the accounts. I would also go to the Post Office on a Saturday to work on the counter and help in the back with the books.

11. We would often struggle with balancing the accounts. We even had a retail line manager attend approximately 3 weeks after Horizon was installed to assist us with balancing the accounts, but he seemed to have as little knowledge as the initial trainer.

12. When there was a shortfall, **GRO** and I would make good of it. For shortfalls under £100, I paid it directly into the branch. Over time, I paid in approximately £2,000. I recall one day there was a shortfall of £5,000.

13. During this time, my sister and her husband were staying with **GRO** and I as my sister was linked to **GRO** and was hounded by media. I did not tell **GRO** about the shortfalls as I did not want to add to her stress. She was also unwell at the time.

14. On 13 May 2004 I called **GRO** as usual in the morning. She told me that auditors were at the Post Office, so I left work early as I knew there was a shortfall the night before. The shortfall amounted to just under £65,000.

15. When I got to the Post Office, I told the auditors about the shortfall, and they called the Fraud Investigation Team. Two people from this team attended and I was taken into the back room to be interviewed.

16. During the interview, I was asked what I had done with the money. I was accused of having an affair, spending the money on another woman and

gambling. They never actually asked whether I had taken it. They even asked **GRO** whether I had another woman. They were very aggressive, even though I told them that none of what they were saying was true.

17. I recall seeing the transcript of the interview and my denials were not recorded.

I did not have the opportunity to take anybody into the interview with me. The interview was taped, and I was asked to sign it at the end.

### **CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS AND ANY PROCEEDINGS/CONVICTION**

18. The investigating officer rang and asked if he could come to my house as he had papers for me. I did not want him there so we agreed to meet in a car park. He handed me papers which turned out to be the summons.

19. On 15 September 2004 I received a letter from a solicitor which said that the evidence against me could potentially result in imprisonment for 18 months to 3 years with the charges of theft and false accounting.

20. When I read it, I went into complete panic. I could not plead guilty to theft as I did not take the money. In relation to false accounting, I had not falsified the records, I just disagreed with the figures.

21. Towards the end of 2004, I attended Grimsby Magistrates Court. I confirmed my details, and the case was transferred to Grimsby Crown Court to be heard on 25 February .2005.

22. I then instructed a solicitor and provided a statement at the time, explaining the pressures from external sources. I recall being advised to plead guilty, otherwise I would certainly be looking at receiving a 3-5 year custodial sentence. I explained that I would not plead guilty to theft but would to false accounting.

23. In total, I was charged with 6 offences and convicted of one.

24. **GRO** did not attend Court with me. I did not want her there as I did not know what was going to happen at trial, so I had to say goodbye to my family. This was very difficult to do.

25. During the trial, the Post Office was asked to provide evidence of theft which they could not produce. The Judge commented that he knew I was not a thief, but he called me a “fool”.

26. I was sentenced to 9 months in prison which was suspended for 2 years. The Judge paused at the 9 months in prison, so I thought that was it, I was not going home; I was under so many mixed emotions. The fear of being locked up was horrendous and I couldn’t face it.

27. I was able to call **GRO** and tell her that I was not going to prison.

28. The Court of Appeal quashed my conviction on 23 April 2021.

## **THE HUMAN IMPACT**

29. 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?**

30. I was asked to pay back almost £65,000. During my first interview with the auditors and the Investigation Team, I was asked how I intended to pay them back. Following this, they went after my wife as she was the Sub-Postmistress.

We were declared bankrupt in February so we did not pay any of the £65,000 back.

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

31. As stated above, **GRO** and I would make good all shortfalls shown by the Horizon system. For shortfalls under £100, I paid it directly into the branch. Over the time we experienced shortfalls, I paid in approximately £2,000.

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

32. I was approximately 62 years of age when **GRO** discovered the Justice for Sub-Postmasters Alliance (JSFA) and was keen for us both to join. I was initially concerned about joining as my employer and colleagues were unaware of my conviction and I was worried this would effect my reputation. We joined but I was extremely anxious about the decision.

33. Towards the beginning of 2017, at 63 years old I finally joined JSFA. In September 2017, I suffered a stroke. This forced me into retirement which I did not want. I fully believe the stress and anxiety of the situation and having to relive it through the JSFA contributed towards my stroke.

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

34. Following the interview, **GRO** and I were immediately suspended, and a relief Sub-Postmaster was brought in to take over. We also had our keys taken from

us. **GRO** was asked to attend a meeting in which we thought she would be reinstated. I went with her, and it turned out to be a meeting concerning her capabilities. Her contract was then terminated, though she was still able to work at the shop.

35. A few weeks later, I informed my boss as I was stressed about the whole situation. My position was then terminated. I was told this was due to a loss of contracts.

36. We received a letter from the Post Office confirming **GRO** termination and we were given 3 months to sell the property. We found 3 potential buyers, but the Post Office blocked each sale.

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

37. We had to sell our house which only had £26,000 left on the mortgage. The house was held as collateral for the business loan. The proceeds of sale went to the Official Receivers. I also lost my car and mortgage.

38. After this, we moved into rented property. It felt like we were throwing money away given that we had worked so hard to pay the mortgage off.

**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?**

39. As the details of the allegations against me made their way into the local papers, I could only assume this was the reason for my employment being terminated.

40. I saw that in the papers that my job at the company, which I had been told was no longer available, was continuing. My cousin worked as a director and he confirmed my suspicions.
41. In the community, I knew that people gossiped. I tried to brush it under the carpet, but I know that it had an impact on **GRO**. Thankfully people seem to have changed their views now that the truth is out.
42. Since the allegations, I have suffered with low mood, a poor sleep pattern, tiredness, a loss of enjoyment in my activities, a poor appetite, poor concentration, lack of motivation, low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, low self-confidence and feelings of guilt. On top of that, I have experienced suicidal thoughts, although I have not acted upon them.
43. I would also suffer feelings of unease, palpitations, migraines and headaches.
44. It was very difficult following my conviction. I even suffered with hypnagogic hallucinations. I can recall several occasions where I have heard a voice or a noise. I once saw a figure in the bedroom and thought this was my sister. I felt a sense of unease all the time. I tried to get a job as a plumber, but it was hard to make a living, everything became a challenge.
45. I have also become hypervigilant. If **GRO** makes a noise in the kitchen, I jump and shout "what have you done?". Sudden noises get to me, even if **GRO** sneezes, I jump out of my skin.

## **WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING CONVICTED OF A CRIMINAL OFFENCE AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES**

46. I was ordered to pay prosecution costs amounting to £1,000 which I paid monthly at £50 instalments. The Post Office asked for £15,000 but the Judge said that was too much.
47. I tried to become a self-employed plumber, however around that time, there were many other people in the plumbing industry who were “undercutting” the prices of ‘the trade’. Due to the reluctance of employers employ individuals with criminal records, my wife and I struggled for the next 2-3 years to find jobs.
48. Following the prosecution, I lost my job at Kimberly-Clark and lost the Post Office. I was forced to claim benefits.
49. I felt forced to exclude my criminal conviction on job applications and eventually found a job as a handyman within a leisure centre. After 8 years within this role, being paid half the salary compared to my previous roles, I was promoted to a Health and Safety Manager as well as an Engineering Manager. I spent 12 years within this company.
50. **GRO** found alternative work at an arcade and as a swimming instructor.
51. Prior to being convicted, I had a number of hobbies including, painting, and going on holiday. I have lost any passion I had for painting.

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

52. It had a huge impact on my relationship with my family. Although most trusted me, my sister **GRO** disowned me after my conviction, which was horrible. I felt bitter, angry, and betrayed.

53. I didn't talk about the situation in front of our friends, so they didn't bring it up.

My wife said I used to be the life and soul of the party, and this was taken away from me.

54. I felt that people at the golf club I used to go to, were not sincere with me at the time. My wife says that I have become snappy and less tolerable. I can become irritable and lose my temper easily. I have also felt lonely.

55. My mum developed GRO and passed away before I ever had the chance to tell her my conviction had been overturned. This was very upsetting.

56. I do have some friends locally and I have a close relationship with my other two sisters and my brother-in-law. I still enjoy golf, as well as art (watercolours and oils) and I have recently bought a woodturning lathe.

57. I had a difficult relationship with my daughter for 20 years. After reconnecting and establishing an excellent relationship, I feared that I would lose her again. I thought that telling my daughter about my conviction would be the worst thing to have to do. Thankfully it did not affect our relationship and I was able to give her away at her wedding.

58. Following my conviction, I soon found that I had to force myself to undertake daily activities. Self-care became an effort.

59. I now avoid certain things like going into a Post Office. I would never buy any stamps. I tried for so long to avoid talking about the trial and conviction. My wife reads Twitter and will sometimes tell me updates with regards to the Sub-Postmaster scandal but I get snappy with her. I try to switch off from it and ask her not to mention it in front of me.

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

60. My mother lost her job as she also worked in the Post Office, so my conviction affected her a great deal too.

61. Because of the conviction, my wife and I struggled for two to three years to find work, which I felt was degrading.

62. My sister, [GRO], is fully aware that my conviction was quashed but this has unfortunately not changed anything between us. I have also lost out on having a relationship with my nephew, [GRO] son, who once commented on my 'guilty antics'.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

63. [GRO] and I now live in social housing and have a lovely bungalow. I receive a state pension and £300 per month, less tax, from my private pension. As I lost my job following the allegations made against me, I stopped paying into the pension therefore it froze around 20 years ago.

64. Even though my innocence has been proven, I feel guilty about going through everything in the first place. I also feel guilty about the impact this has had on my family. One of the biggest things for me now is that I do not own anything.

**Statement Of Truth**

I believe the contents of this statement to be true

Signed:

**GRO**

David Blakey (Jan 14, 2022 13:02 GMT)

Position

or Office Held:

Print Full

Date of signature: Jan 14, 2022

Name: DAVID BLAKEY

FILE REFERENCE

**GRO**

