Wednesday, 1 October 2025 1

2 (10.00 am)

3 BRADLEY SUTHERLAND (sworn) 4 Questioned by MS WAKEMAN

- 5 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Do have a seat.
- 6 Α. Thank you.
- MS WAKEMAN: Could you start by giving us your full name. 7
- 8 Α. Bradley Sutherland.
- 9 Q. If we could bring up on screen, please, TAC000002. Do
- 10 you recognise that to be your witness statement?
- Yes, that's my statement. 11 Α.
- Q. Have you signed that statement? 12
- A. Yes, I have. 13
- Q. Is that statement true to the best of your knowledge and 14
- belief? 15
- 16 A. Yes, it is.
- 17 Q. I understand that you are the Director of MB Outdoors
- Limited --18
- 19 Α. Yes, that's correct.
- 20 Q. -- which trades as Tactical Archery UK?
- 21 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 22 Is it right that you were the Director of Tactical
- 23 Archery UK at the time when AR made contact with the
- 24 company?
- 25 Α. Yes, that's correct.

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- 1 Oh, yes, for the sport of archery.
- 2 Q. I will come on to it in a bit more detail later but,
- 3 just by way of brief overview, is it right that,
- 4 essentially, your company's involvement with AR was that
- 5 you received some enquiries by email from him on 3 and
- 6 4 May 2022, where he was asking questions about how
- 7 crossbows that you sold were packaged?
- 8 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 9 Q. But, ultimately, AR never actually went on to place an
- order with Tactical Archery? 10
- A. No, he didn't. 11
- 12 Q. Thank you. It is right, isn't it, that bows, arrows and
- 13 crossbows all have the potential to cause harm?
- 14 A. Yes, that's correct.
- Q. Online sales of crossbows, in particular, pose a risk of 15
- 16 inadvertently selling those items to under-18s because
- 17 you can't physically see the person in front of you or
- check their ID in person? 18
- Yes, that is possible but we do take the safety of the 19 Α.
- 20 public very seriously and age verification is one of our
- 21 primary concerns.
- 22 Q. Yes, so a careful approach is needed if you're going to

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- 23 be selling those items online?
- 24 Yes, 100 per cent. Yes, definitely.
- Q. I now just want to look at what the law requires in 25

- Q. That was in May 2022. 1
- 2 A.
- 3 Q. Are you still the director now?
- 4 Yes, that's correct.
- What are the main responsibilities in that role? 5
- 6 A. My main responsibility is -- well, being the director,
- 7 everything, to be honest, including customer service,
- 8 marketing, admin, finance, all aspects of the business,
- 9 sort of overseeing.
- 10 Q. You say in your statement as well that age verification
- 11 processes is one of your responsibilities, which you
- 12 share with another director, Mr Chance; is that right?
- 13 Yes. Yes, that's correct.
- 14 Q. Just give us an idea of the size of the company?
- A. So we have three employees, including me and the other 15
- 16 director. That's it.
- 17 Q. What are the main types of product that you are selling
- 18 on your website?
- 19 The main types of products is archery equipment, such as
- 20 bows and crossbows.
- 21 Q. What's your understanding of who your customers are,
- 22 generally?
- 23 A. Could you expand on that, sorry?
- 24 Do you have a sense of why people are buying products
- 25 from you?

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- 1 relation to selling those items online, so if we could
- 2 bring up on screen HOM000078. So this is a witness
- 3 statement that has been provided on behalf of the Home
- 4 Office and if we could look please at page 66, and if we
 - could zoom in on paragraph 229.
 - So there the Home Office explain that there is
- 7 specific legislation about the sale of crossbows, which
- 8 is the Crossbows Act 1987, but there is no legislation
- that specifically applies to other types of bow, such as 9
- 10 a longbow. Is that your understanding as well?
- 11 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 12 Q. So if we look at crossbows in particular, could we have
- 13 on screen, please, ILT000046 and page 8. Apologies,
- 14 next page, please. So this is the Crossbows Act 1987
- 15 and we can see that, at Section 5, it doesn't apply to
- 16 crossbows with a draw weight of less than 1.4 kilograms.
- Could you just explain what a draw weight is? 17
- A. So a draw weight is the amount of force needed to pull 19 back the string and the higher the draw weight, the more
- 20 powerful the crossbow is.
- 21 Q. Is it your understanding that the Act applies to all
- 22 crossbows with a weight of more than 1.4?
 - 23 Yes, that's correct.
 - 24 Q. I should say 1.4 or more. Could we go to page 1 of the
 - 25 Act, please. If we could zoom in on Section 1 under

- 1 "England and Wales". So here we can see that it's an
 2 offence to sell a crossbow to somebody that's under 18,
 3 unless you believe them to be 18 years of age or older
 4 and have a reasonable ground for that belief; is that
 5 your understanding?
- 6 A. Yes, that's correct.
- Q. If we could then look at page 3. If we could zoom in on 1A(1), we can see here that there's a specific defence, if you are charged with an offence under Section 1, if you can show that you believed the person to whom you sold the crossbow was 18 or over and either you took reasonable steps to establish their age or no reasonable person could have suspected from their appearance that
- 15 A. Yes, that's correct.

Q. If we could scroll down to look at subsection (2), you are treated as having taken reasonable steps to establish their age if and only if you were shown any of the documents in subsection 3 and the document would have convinced a reasonable person. So is your understanding that convincing a reasonable person -- if it's an obviously fake driving licence, for example?

they were under 18; is that right?

- 23 **A.** Yes, that's correct.
- Q. If we could then just look at subsection 3 which -- the
 documents have to be a passport and then, over the page,

simply says:

"Hi,

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"I would like to purchase from Tactical Archery but I would prefer discrete [sic] packaging which doesn't provide any information on what is inside the box.

Could I see a photo of what the external packaging of your products look like?

"Thanks in advance.

9 "A."

We can't see it on this version of the email itself but you have confirmed in your statement that AR used the email address a.megalania7@yahoo.com; is that correct?

- 14 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 15 Q. But the email itself is just signed off as "A", so noname given?
- 17 **A.** Yes.
- 18 Q. I just want to pause there. You explain in your
 statement that there was some timing difficulty with
 some of the screenshots of emails.
- A. Yes, so the email software that we used, it was -- it just wasn't configured, so the time there says 9.35 but it was actually in the American time zone, so I believe it was about four hours difference, so I think this is really 1.35 pm.

1 a UK driving licence, a EU photocard driving licence,

2 and then there's also provision related to the Scottish

3 Ministers. So is that your understanding -- I think

4 that's the main legal obligations relating to selling

- 5 crossbows?
- 6 A. Yes, that's correct.
- Q. Unlike with knives, there's no requirement at the moment
 to have an age-verified delivery of crossbows; is that
- 9 right?
- 10 A. That's correct but we do that anyway.
- 11 Q. We will come on to that.
- 12 **A.** Yes
- 13 Q. There's also no specific packaging requirement for
- 14 crossbows?
- 15 A. No.
- 16 Q. So there's no requirement at the moment to have
 17 a warning label or to say that it needs to be delivered
 18 to someone over 18?
- 19 A. No requirement, no.
- 20 Q. Thank you. I now want to move to ask you some questions
- 21 about the specific contact that Tactical Archery had
- with AR in May 2022 and that was a series of emails. If
- we could bring up the first one, it's TAC000003. So we
- see it's an email from somebody called AR to
- 25 info@tacticalarchery.co.uk, 9.35 on 3 May 2022, and it

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- Q. The timing doesn't particularly matter for our purposes
- 2 but, just to iron this out quickly, you say in your
- 3 statement that I think you had been working from
- 4 a screenshot that said 1.35 pm, which you understood to
- 5 be US time --
- 6 A. Yes.

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- 7 Q. -- and 9.35 am is UK time. So does it look as if these8 screenshots are actually the correct time?
- 9 A. Yes -- no, they're not. So that time on there, that's
 10 the American time.
- 11 Q. So your understanding is it's four hours previous tothis time?
- 13 A. Yes. Sorry, I believe so, yes. Yes, that's correct,
- 14 yes.
- 15 Q. If we could just have up on screen paragraph 4 of your
 statement and the statement is TAC000002. If we could
 go to page 2, so you say:
- 18 "... AR sent us three emails in total ... there is
 19 a 4-hour time difference ... In the first of the
 20 emails ... the time says 13.35 pm (US time) when in fact
 21 it was 9.35 am ..."
- But the screenshot the Inquiry has actually does say 9.35, so it does look to be the correct time but do tell me if that's different?
- 25 A. No, there is definitely a -- I'm not sure what's

- 1 happened but there is definitely a time zone difference
- 2 because, like I said, the email software was set up as
- 3 an American time zone, we just hadn't changed it.
- 4 Q. All right, I won't ask you about it on every email but
- 5 we should generally take it that the time should be four
- 6 hours back than written in the email?
- 7 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 8 Q. Can we then bring up the reply to the email, which is at
- 9 TAC000004. We have a reply from Mr Chance. Is it right
- 10 that he is your customer service representative?
- 11 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 12 Q. He says:
- 13 "Thanks for getting in touch.
- "We use grey packaging bags when sending outcrossbows.
- 16 "This is so that no one is able to see what is
- 17 inside."
- Then TAC000005. We have a further email from AR which says:
- 20 "Does the crossbow packaging say 'Tactical Archery'21 on it or any other branding?"
- 22 Is that right?
- 23 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 24 $\,$ Q. Then we have a third and final email from AR which is
- TAC000007. It essentially says the same question:
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- 1 bigger we use black wrap."
- 2 Is that right?
- 3 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 4 Q. We have already established that AR, following that
- 5 exchange of emails, didn't go on to place an order with
- 6 you --
- 7 A. No, he didn't.
- 8 Q. -- and you have not located any other emails from AR?
- 9 A. No, no. We searched all of our email accounts.
- 10 Q. So we can take that document down, thank you.
- 11 In terms of the enquiries that were made by AR it's
- right, isn't it, that he only ever gave his name as "A"?
- 13 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 14 Q. His email address didn't contain a full name either, it
- 15 was just a.megalania?
- 16 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 17 Q. He was making repeated enquiries to check that the
- 18 contents of the package or the nature of the package
- 19 wouldn't be clear from the outside?
- 20 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 21 Q. So he was going to quite some lengths to determine the
- 22 nature of the packaging on the crossbow that he may have
- 23 been seeking to order.
- 24 A. Yes, you could say that, looking at it from hindsight,
- 25 yes.

- 1 "Hi, does the crossbow packaging saying 'Tactical
- 2 Archery' on it or any other branding?
- 3 "Thanks in advance.
 - "A."
- 5 So none of the emails were signed off with an actual
- 6 full name, were they?
- 7 **A.** No

- 8 $\,$ **Q.** If we could look then at TAC000008. This is a reply
- 9 from Mr Chance. He says:
- 10 "Hi,
- 11 "They come in grey packaging bags so the item inside
- 12 is disclosed ..."
- 13 I understand you explain in your statement that
- that's a typo and it should have said "The item inside
- 15 is not disclosed"; is that right?
- 16 A. Yes, that's correct, yes.
- 17 **Q.** So, at that time, your orders were sent in sort of fully
- 18 discreet packaging, in a sense?
- 19 A. Yes, but not to be purposefully discreet, that's just
- 20 the most economically efficient packaging, which we
- 21 still use to this day.
- 22 Q. Right, and if we could look then at TAC000006. We've
- 23 got a further email from Mr Chance, which says:
- 24 "H
- 25 "No just plain grey bags or if the crossbow is

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- 1 Q. You say in your statement that Mr Chance didn't suspect
- 2 that AR might have been a child looking to buy
- 3 a crossbow because the questions regarding the packaging
- 4 was not unusual; is that right?
- 5 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 6 Q. So did you get a lot of enquiries from people asking
- 7 about packaging?
- 8 A. I mean, we don't get like loads and loads but we do get
- 9 them often enough to not think anything of it because
- some people do buy these as gifts or they just don't
- 11 want their partner to see, or neighbours, et cetera.
- 12 Q. Looking back now at the nature of the enquiries and the
- information that you had about the person making them,
- should those enquiries, do you think, have given rise to
- some suspicion about why that person might be so
- 16 determined to check the packaging?
- 17 A. Yes, looking back at it, like I said, with the benefit
- of hindsight, I do think the fact that he did ask three
- 19 times was a bit suspicious.
- 20 Q. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, is there
- 21 anything that you think Tactical Archery should have
- done upon receiving those enquiries, in terms of
- 23 reporting it, or anything else?
- 24 A. It's hard to say because, like I said, it didn't really
- raise any cause for concern because it isn't an unusual

- 1 question, which is why it wasn't reported, but I think
- 2 the fact that he did ask three times, I think, we would
- 3 have reported that and, going forward, we will do if we
- 4 do get any more suspicious enquiries like that.
- 5 At that time, did you have any system for logging
- 6 suspicious enquiries or particular email addresses that
- 7 you'd had concerning enquiries from?
- 8 We would block their -- so on our website, we would
- 9 block their email, just so they can't place orders.
- 10 That's about it because we haven't really had any
- suspicious enquiries, to be honest, so we didn't really 11
- 12 have that.
- 13 Q. Was that in place at the time in 2022 as well as now?
- A. Yes, that's correct. 14
- Q. You say that Mr Chance has been given training on how to 15
- 16 use and follow age verification processes, as well as
- 17 how to spot underage individuals that might be trying to
- 18 purchase crossbows. What did that training cover?
- 19 Α. So we just -- we trained him how to use the age
- 20 verification software, how to run their details through
- 21 the system, and that was about it.
- 22 Q. You say in your statement that, if Mr Chance suspects
- 23 an email will be suspicious, he flags it to senior
- 24 management. Would that be you or the other director?
- 25 A. Either one of us.

- 1 legislation to do so.
- A. 2 Yes, yes.
- 3 Q. That's the case now and then in 2022; is that right?
- 4 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 5 Q. But crossbows, you explain in your statement -- could we
- 6 have this up? This is page 3 at the bottom of the page,
- 7 paragraph 16, and the statement is TAC000002. If we
- 8 could zoom in on paragraph 16. You say:
- 9 "At the time in May 2022 ...
- 10 "Customers must be over the age of 21 to purchase
- age-restricted products from us, such as crossbows." 11
- 12 Is it 21 or 18?
- 13 A. At the time it was 21. That was just our own personal
- 14 view but it is 18.
- Q. Now is it 18? 15
- A. Now it's 18, yes. 16
- 17 Q. Just out of interest, what was it that made you decide
- 18 to lower your age restriction?
- 19 Just because we have -- we upgraded our security system, Α.
- 20 basically, so now we feel more comfortable sending it
- 21 out to younger -- like under 21, obviously between 18
- 22 and 21, just because of the age verification methods we
- 23 use now. We feel like they're pretty solid.
- 24 Q. All right. You say at 16 that you ensured all customers
- 25 were age verified before orders were processed and you 15

- What kind of emails would you expect him to be looking 1
- 2 out for and flagging?
- 3 A. Well, just any sort of -- any suggestion towards crime,
- 4 basically, or if they're asking questions about the
- products that aren't to do with the actual sport of 5
- 6 target shooting. If they're just -- anything related to
- 7 crime, basically, that you could potentially suggest and
- 8 that would be it.
- 9 Q. Now would it also include repeated questioning about
- 10 discreet packaging for example?
- 11 Yes, that's correct, yes. A.
- 12 But on this particular occasion, dealing with AR,
- 13 Mr Chance didn't escalate any concerns about the
- 14 enquiries made, did he?
- 15 A. No.
- 16 Q. I now want to look at your age verification processes
- 17 that you had in place at that time, so in May 2022. It
- is right, isn't it, that, looking first at bows and 18
- 19 arrows, at that time you didn't have any
- 20 age-verification measures and you didn't use any
- 21 age-verified delivery?
- 22 For just bows and arrows?
- 23 Just regular bows and arrows.
- 24 Not for just bows and arrows. Α.
- 25 In fairness to you, there's no requirement in the

- 1 did this by using a Government-approved age-verification
- 2 solution called AgeChecked?
- 3 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 4 Q. That, as I understand it, checks details that you
- 5 provide from the customer against various databases?
- 6 A. Yes, so --
- 7 Q. It will give you either a pass or fail?
- 8 Yes, that's correct. So it would check the details that
- the customer provides, so we wouldn't provide them 9
- 10 necessarily. It was like a bridge -- like a bridging
- 11 app that the customer would go through basically, and
- then AgeChecked would provide us with a pass or a fail. 12
- In terms of the data that's used to do that check, is it 13
- 14 the name and address that's on the order?
- 15 A. Yes, that's correct.
- Q. Do you ask them to provide -- could they provide one 16
- 17 name and address for the order and then separately input
- 18 a name and address for the purposes of age proof or do
- 19 you always use the name and the address --
- 20 The name on the shipping address, yes.
- Q. If they pass that check, is it right that you wouldn't ask them to provide ID in addition? 22
 - 23 A. Not at the time, no.

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- 24 Is there any kind of crosscheck with the email address
- 25 used or the name on the payment method, or would it just

- 1 be name and address on the order?
- 2 A. So it would be name and address that went through the
- 3 AgeChecked app but the software that we use does give
- 4 us, like, a fraud analysis, so if a different name is
- 5 being used, if the -- so if the name doesn't match the
- 6 name on the credit card or payment method, things like
- 7 that, and then if that gives us any warnings then we do
- 8 look at it more closely.
- 9 Q. To be clear, was that fraud checking additional
- 10 safeguard in place in 2022 or just now?
- 11 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 12 Q. You had that at the time?
- 13 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 14 Q. So there would be an additional check after -- so you
- 15 get your pass and fail, but would you then run a pass
- 16 through the fraud checking software or would you only
- 17 run a fail through?
- 18 A. We would check them all, yes.
- 19 $\,$ Q. What happens if you get the AgeChecked result back and
- 20 it gives a fail for somebody?
- 21 A. So if it comes back failed then we would ask them to
- 22 provide a form of photo ID, such as driver's licence,
- 23 passport or anything with a PASS logo on it.
- 24 Q. Did it have to be a photo ID or could they have given
- 25 you a birth certificate?
- 17
- 1 A. Then we would refund the customer and cancel the order.
- 2 Q. At the start, I took you through the relevant parts of
- 3 the Crossbows Act and you will recall that there was
- 4 a special defence, essentially, if you could show that
- 5 the order was placed using a driving licence, passport
- 6 or EU photocard; do you recall that?
- 7 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 8 Q. Or, under Section 1 you wouldn't commit the offence in
- 9 the first place if you could show you had a reasonable
- 10 ground for believing they were over the age of 18; is
- 11 that right?
- 12 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 13 Q. So based on the systems you had in May 2022, you
- 14 wouldn't have been able to rely on the specific defence
- in section 1A, would you, because you didn't ask
- 16 routinely for a driver's licence, passport, et cetera?
- 17 It would only be those cases where you went on to do the
- 18 second check to ask for photo ID.
- 19 A. Yes, I guess that would be correct, yes.
- 20 Q. So looking back now, you were relying solely on proving
- 21 under Section 1, if this ever came about, that you had
- a reasonable ground for believing they were over 18?
- 23 A. Yes. I believe just the fact that the app we were using
- 24 was Government approved gave us that bit of confidence,
- 25 to be honest, yes.

- 1 A. It has to be a photo ID, yes.
- 2 Q. Who would check that ID?
- 3 A. Me and my other director.
- 4 Q. So it's checked by a person?
- 5 A. Yes, manually, yes.
- 6 Q. What would you check it against?
- 7 A. So we would make sure that it matched -- the details on
- 8 the ID matches the details on the shipping address.
- 9 **Q.** Okay, so it would have to be the same name?
- 10 A. Same name, address, things like that, yes.
- 11 Q. And address. Did you have any training on how to look
- 12 for fake or counterfeit ID?
- 13 A. Me personally?
- 14 Q. The people doing the checks.
- 15 A. Well, yes, it would just be me and my other director
- doing the checks. We didn't have any training how to
- 17 spot fake IDs but we do know what IDs look like, so if
- anything did look off then we would realise.
- 19 Q. Is there anything in particular you would look out for
- 20 that would alert you to the fact it might be a fake ID?
- 21 A. Yes, just spelling mistakes, if they differ, the ID
- 22 didn't have any, like, foil stickers on, anything like
- 23 that. That's what we would be looking out for.
- 24 Q. If someone can't pass that check of age verification,
- 25 what would happen to their order?

- Q. Just looking back now and reflecting, do you think it
- 2 would have been sensible to ask everyone for a passport
- 3 or driving licence, so that you would have brought
- 4 yourself within that defence, had a situation arisen?
- 5 A. Yes.

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- 6 Q. Looking then at packaging in 2022, did your packaging at
- 7 that time have any stickers on it to say that it was
- 8 a 18-plus delivery?
- 9 **A.** No.
- 10 Q. No, and did you use any age-verified delivery? Again,
- in fairness, I say that wasn't a requirement at that
- 12 time.
- 13 A. No, not at that time.
- 14 Q. I just want to compare now the differences between your
- processes then and the processes that you are using
- 16 today.
- 17 **A.** Yes.
- 18 Q. If we could bring on screen the statement TAC000002,
- 19 page 4, and we're just going to look at the whole of
- 20 paragraph 17. You say now that customers have to be
- 21 18 years or older to use the website and purchase from
- you; is that right?
- 23 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 24 Q. Do you have a way of enforcing that?
- 25 A. Do you mean like preventing people from ordering in the

- 1 first place?
- 2 Q. Well, from using the website. Is there any way that
- 3 that's policed?
- 4 A. No. You can just go straight onto it, unless you --
- 5 sorry, unless your, for example, phone provider or
- 6 internet provider does block adult websites, then you
- 7 wouldn't be able to access it.
- 8 Q. All right. Do you do any kind of age verifying for
- 9 purchases of just regular bows and arrows?
- 10 A. We do now. We have probably done that for about six11 months now, I think.
- 12 Q. Is it the same system as you have for crossbows?
- 13 A. Exactly the same, yes.
- 14 Q. You explain at paragraph 17 that what happens now is
- that a person is emailed for age verification after they
- 16 make the purchase?
- 17 A. Yes, so after they place their order, they will be
- 18 emailed with instructions on how to set up their account
- 19 and then upload their ID in their account.
- 20 Q. You ask them to upload a valid form of photographic ID,
- 21 which is a driver's licence or passport; is that right?
- 22 A. Yes, that's correct, or anything with a PASS logo on.
- 23 Q. Or anything else which --
- 24 A. Just with a PASS logo.
- 25 Q. Okay. Just so we understand, what's a PASS logo?
 - 21
- 1 software.
- 2 A. Yes.
- 3 Q. Could you just explain how that works?
- 4 A. So that's built into the e-commerce software that we use
- 5 and it's the same software as we spoke about earlier, so
- 6 it will tell us, like, their IP address, if they're
- 7 using a proxy to place the order, how far away the card
- 8 is registered from the shipping address, all sorts of
- 9 details that provide us information about their payment
- 10 method
- 11 Q. You explain in your statement that you also conduct your
- 12 own background checks. Could you explain what checks
- 13 you do in that regard?
- 14 A. Yes, so with the background checks, we will check if
- 15 they have tried contacting us before, if they have had
- any orders refunded before, so if they have just had any
- 17 previous contact with us, basically, just to make sure
- that they are not trying to get around it.
- 19 Q. You go on to explain at paragraph 25 on page 6 that if
- 20 all of those -- so if all of those steps are passed you
- 21 then go on to send out the order using an age-tracked
- 22 service?
- 23 A. Yes, that's correct. So the customer will have to send
- 24 us a photo of their ID, go through all of our checks and
- 25 then, once all of those checks have passed, we will send 23

- A. So I believe any ID with a PASS logo is a valid form of
 age identification.
- 3 **Q.** Then you say that ID is then manually checked by three 4 people in the company, so is that by all three of you
- 5 that work there?

- 6 A. Yes, so me and my other director are the ones who sign
 - off on it, but all three of us will check and discuss to
- 8 see whether it's good to go or not.
- 9 Q. What exactly are you checking when you look at the ID?
- 10 A. So we're checking to make sure that the name and the
- details on the ID match the name and the details on the
- shipping address provided and also the billing, as well.
- 13 If there is another name on the billing address, for
- 14 example if somebody wanted to order it for a friend or
- 15 because they're at work, then we would also get the
- person on the billing address to send in their ID, so we
- would get, basically, all the IDs for all of the
- 18 addresses provided.
- 19 Q. In terms of checking whether it's a counterfeit or fake
- 20 ID, you explained earlier the kind of things you look
- 21 out for. Is it the same things now that you look out
- 22 for?
- 23 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 24 Q. We touched on it earlier, but you go on to explain in
- 25 your statement that you run a check against fraud

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- 1 it using an age-tracked courier service which means
- 2 that, at the point of delivery, they will also have to
- 3 show their ID to the delivery driver and, if they can't
- 4 provide that, then it will be returned to us.
- 5 Q. When they show their ID to the delivery driver, does
- 6 that have to match the order details or are they just
- 7 proving they're a person over 18?
- 8 A. I believe with the age-tracked service they just have to
- 9 prove it's over 18 but there is another service where
- 10 you can -- it's strictly addressee only, where it would
- 11 have to go to the name on the order. But we tend to
- send it age checked because that prevents anyone under
- send it age checked because that prevents anyone under
 - 18 receiving the products.
- 14 Q. Okay, so you tend to use the first of those two, so they
- just have to prove they're over 18, not necessarily that
- 16 they match the name --
- 17 A. Yes. It's almost like a fail-safe because if they did
- send us a fake ID and somehow got through our systems,
- 19 then the age-tracked service would prevent that from
- 20 being delivered.

13

- 21 Q. Looking at paragraph 25, you say you send every order
- 22 using an age-tracked service. Just to be clear, is that
- 23 just crossbows or is that all orders that you dispatch
- 24 from your site?
- 25 A. Sorry, yes, that is just sort of all crossbows, part of

- 1 crossbows and bows. So if it's like a bag or
- 2 a backpack, then we wouldn't send that age tracked.
- 3 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: But are you including bows as well?
- 4 A. Just in the last six months, yes.
- 5 MS WAKEMAN: So it would be crossbows, regular archery bows.
- 6 What about arrows?
- 7 A. Not arrows, no.
- 8 Q. What happens if the person can't show a valid ID to the
- 9 delivery driver, do you know?
- 10 A. Then the product would be returned to us and then we 11 would refund them and cancel their order.
- 12 Then just turning to the packaging that you use now, you Q.
- 13 explain at paragraph 17 of your statement, which will be
- 14 on the previous page, just at the top of that page is
- 15 perfect, that you use plain grey mailing bags and boxes
- 16 to ship:
- 17 "A shipping label is stuck onto the package
- 18 informing the delivery driver that they must check the
- 19 ... ID of the recipient."
- 20 Is that right?
- 21 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 22 Then you say you stick another label on the packaging
- 23 with a large 18-plus logo and the warning text "MUST
- ONLY BE DELIVERED TO AN ADULT"? 24
- 25 A. Yes, that's correct.

25

- 1 you're selling --
- 2 A. Yes.
- 3 Q. -- or use for violence. What do you say about that?
- 4 A. Yes, I totally understand how it looks from the outside
- 5 but just the fact of the name is when I first started
- 6 the company -- I've got a tech background and
- 7 I literally just Googled the most searched key phrases,
- 8 just so it would rank higher on Google. That's where
- 9 the name came from.
- Q. But reflecting now, do you think that's an appropriate 10
- 11 name to continue to use for the company?
- No, I can definitely see the sort of connotations it may 12
- 13 have but we are actually working towards changing that.
- 14 Q. You're working towards changing the name?
- A. Yes, definitely, and sort of -- you know, changing to 15
- 16 something more sort of sport, outdoors related.
- 17 Q. Is that change coming about because of concerns about
- 18 potential connotations?
- A. I would say so, yes, but this isn't just a recent thing. 19
- 20 We have been thinking about this for over a year now,
- 21 where we just want to change it to be more of a sort of
- 22 sporting goods store.
- 23 Q. You say in your statement that you believe that the
- 24 current systems for age verifying that you are using and
- 25 deliveries are effective enough in preventing underage

27

- Q. If we could have a look at TACA000009. Is that a photo
- of the additional warning label that you mention in your
- 3 statement that you stick on orders?
- 4 A. Yes, that's correct.
- 5 Q. Just to be clear, which orders would have this stuck on?
- 6 Would it be just crossbows or also bows and arrows?
- 7 A. All of the age-checked products, so if a product
- 8 requires ID, then that would be stuck onto the box or
- 9 the package.
- 10 Q. So would that be regular bows and arrows as well as
- 11 crossbows?
- Now it will be, yes. 12 A.
- 13 Q. Now.
- 14
- SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Bows and arrows or just bows? 15
- 16 Sorry, just bows, yes. Just bows.
- 17 MS WAKEMAN: Thank you. We can take that down, thank you.
- 18 I now just want to go on to ask you a bit about how you
- 19 might have reflected since these events and also about
- 20 improvements.
- 21 The name of your company, if we start with that, is
- 22 Tactical Archery.
- 23 A. Yes.
- 24 Q. To an outsider, that might imply, using the word
- 25 "Tactical", some kind of military use of the items that

- 1 children from purchasing age-restricted products. Does
- 2 that still remain your view today?
- 3 A. I do believe that's true, yes. If retailers do follow
- 4 the processes, I think it is a pretty effective system.
- 5 I believe the system we have now is very effective.
- 6 You also say in your statement that, with the benefit of
- 7 hindsight and a wider understanding of these events, you
- 8 are looking at introducing additional safety and
- security measures to help identify potentially dangerous 9
- 10 customers, such as asking for details before proceeding
- 11 with the conversation. Would you mind just explaining
- 12 what you mean by that and what changes you're thinking
- 13 about it?
- 14 Yes, so what I meant by that was so like when AR
- 15 messaged us with no name, or anything like that, maybe
- 16 just from now on, going forward, we ask them to sort of
- maybe fill in a form before they -- before they send the 18 message, just so that we have more details on who this
- 19 person is that is messaging us.
- 20 So rather than having an email address which anyone can
- 21 email, you might have a form --
- 22 **A**.

17

- 23 Q. -- which asks for, for example, full name?
- 24 Yes, and -- yes, that's correct.
- 25 Is it right you haven't introduced those measures yet --

- 1 Α. Not yet, yes.
- 2 Q. -- but you're hoping to in the near future?
- 3 Α. We will be introducing them in the future, yes.
- 4 Q. Okay. You may be aware that there are some changes --
- 5 potential changes going through Parliament at the moment
- 6 about online sales of crossbows. Are you aware of that?
- 7 A. Which part, do you know, or ...
- 8 Q. So there's a proposal for online sellers of crossbows to 9 check photo ID --
- 10 A. Yes, sorry, yes, I'm aware of that.
- Q. -- either a passport or a UK driving licence, as well as 11
- 12 providing a current photo to prove that it is their ID.
- 13 A.
- 14 Q. There's also a proposed change to require the person
- 15 delivering the order to check that the photo ID of the
- 16 person receiving the package is over 18 and that they
- 17 match the details of the buyer of the item. So the idea
- 18 is that it would prevent a crossbow from being delivered
- 19 to a neighbour or left on a doorstep, for example.
- 20 A. Yes, yes.
- 21 Q. Have you made any preparations towards bringing in that
- 22 system? Obviously, that's some slightly additional
- 23 safeguards to those that you currently have?
- 24 A. Yes, I think we pretty much already do that because we
- 25 go above and beyond the law, to be honest, because we
- 1 I would rather have it age checked where it goes to 2 someone over 18.
- 3 **Q.** It may be that we know the answer to this question,
- 4 based on the fact that you have introduced some
- 5 additional measures yourself for non-crossbow archery
- 6 supplies, so essentially normal bows, but do you think
- 7 that that is an area where there needs to be greater
- 8 safeguards?
- 9 A. Yes, definitely, because, yes, those bows are just as
- 10 powerful as crossbows with modern technology, so yes,
- 11 I do think that should also be looked at.
- 12 Q. Are there any other improvements that I have not
- 13 mentioned then that you think would be useful in terms
- 14 of online retailers of crossbows and archery supplies?
- A. I think, apart from getting the customer to send a video 15
- 16 with their ID, maybe some sort of -- some sort of
- 17 database that we can use, basically, to check customers'
- 18 information. That might be quite helpful.
- 19 What sort of information would it be useful to have on Q.
- 20 a database like that?
- 21 Well, definitely their age, their details, address,
- 22 maybe even sort of criminal convictions and things like
- 23 that, that could be good.
- 24 Q. We have covered quite a lot of ground there in quite
- 25 a short amount of time. Is there anything else that you

- 1 look at the law ourselves and, if we decide that it's
- 2 not good enough or secure enough, then we introduce our
- 3 own measures. We have been checking people's IDs for
- 4 quite a few years now, couple of years.
- 5 Q. The additional measures they are considering would be 6 asking for a photo as well as the photo ID?
- 7 Do you mean sort of like a selfie?
- 8 Q. Like a selfie, exactly.
- 9 A. Yes, yes, yes. I do think that would be a good thing.
- 10 I think even a video would probably be better because,
- 11 I mean, you can just send a photo of a ID and it could
- 12 not necessarily be theirs but I think a video would be
- 13 good.

15

- 14 Q. In terms of the deliveries, again, these proposed
 - changes go slightly further, I think, than what you
- 16 explained you were doing in the sense that it is not
- 17 just a check that the person receiving it is over 18,
- 18 it's that they're the same person that matches the order
- 19 details.
- 20 A. Yes. The only problem we have with that is our courier
- 21 only offers us age checked where it goes to someone over
- 22 18, or addressee only, where it goes directly -- where
- 23 it has to go to that person with the name, but like
- 24 I mentioned earlier, if that person did send us a fake
- 25 ID, I wouldn't want it to be strictly addressee only,
- 1 wanted to add, other than the questions I have asked you 2
 - about?

7

23

- 3 A. I believe that's everything.
- 4 MS WAKEMAN: I don't have any further questions, sir. If
- 5 I may just check -- Mr Weatherby doesn't have any 6 questions.
 - Sir, do you have any questions?
 - Questioned by THE CHAIR
- 8 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Just one. Over time, the what I'm 9
- 10 going to describe as the hoops that you have to jump
- 11 through have become increasingly extensive. In fact,
- 12
- the way that you have described it, the processes, once
- 13 they are embedded, sound as though they are relatively
- 14 straightforward; is that a fair summary?
- 15 A. Yes, I believe that's correct.
- SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: So, in your view, have the steps that 16
- 17 you have implemented -- have they, as far as you are
- 18 concerned, had an adverse or a beneficial effect on the
- 19 operation of your company?
- 20 A. In terms of -- in terms of sales, it hasn't affected our
- 21 sales but what we actually do hear from our customers --
- 22 because, at first, we did think, "Oh, our customers,
 - they don't want to provide all this information", but we 24 actually get comments from our customers saying, "I'm
- 25 glad you do check", and things like that. So I think

| | | The S |
|----|-----|--|
| 1 | | it's actually a good thing and us, as retailers, we |
| 2 | | don't want to be selling these products to under 18s and |
| 3 | | kids, do you know what I mean? We want to feel like |
| 4 | | we're doing it responsibly and safely as well, so |
| 5 | | I welcome any change that going to make our lives easier |
| 6 | | and make everything safer for everyone, really. |
| 7 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: If I can just hone in then on one |
| 8 | | aspect of that. You have considered whether this has |
| 9 | | brought about a downturn in your sales and there has |
| 10 | | been none that you have detected? |
| 11 | A. | No, not really. |
| 12 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: That has been extremely helpful. Thank |
| 13 | | you very much indeed |
| 14 | Α. | Yes, no problem. |
| 15 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: for giving evidence and for |
| 16 | | attending today. |
| 17 | | Do you want me to rise? |
| 18 | MS | WAKEMAN: Sir, if you're happy to carry on sitting, we |
| 19 | | have our next witness ready and we can move straight on. |
| 20 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: Then we will do that. Thank you very |
| 21 | | much. |
| 22 | Α. | No problem, thank you very much. |
| 23 | | (The witness withdrew) |
| 24 | | (Pause) |
| 25 | | BENJAMIN JONES (affirmed) 33 |

1 It's a privately-owned family business that employs 2 approximately 42 people, operates five retail shops and 3 also sells through its website, correct? 4 A. Yes. 5 Q. Who does Merlin sell to? 6 They sell to the general public, schools, holiday camps. Α. 7 We pretty much encompass all aspects of archery.

8 Q. What sort of items do you sell?

9 Bows and arrows, accessories, bags, cases, the complete Α. range of archery equipment. 10

Does that include crossbows? 11 Q.

12 Α.

13 Q. There's also a reference in your statement to bladed 14

articles. What bladed articles do you sell?

They are the broadheads, they are the pointed arrows. 15 Α.

You have a retail team in your shops --16 Q.

17 Α.

Q. -- and you also have an online team. Are they operated 18 by separate staff? 19

20 Α.

How is the website team staffed? 21 Q.

22 Α. Well, we have a customer service department that does 23 share their resources between the physical shops and the

24 online shop, but we do have a dispatch team, which is

25 independent to the retail teams.

35

Questioned by MR BOYLE 1

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much. Do have a seat. 2

MR BOYLE: Mr Jones, could you give your full name to the 3 4

Inquiry, please?

5 A. Benjamin Jones.

6 Q. Thank you. Could we have up on screen, please,

7 MERA000006. Thank you. Do you recognise that as your

8 witness statement, Mr Jones?

A. Yes. 9

10 Q. Thank you very much. Could we go to the -- actually

11 I think we can see in the top right-hand corner it is

dated 25 July 2025, and is that statement true to the 12

13 best of your knowledge and belief?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Thank you. I want to start, please, by just asking

16 about your background and your company. Is this right,

17 you are managing director of Merlin Archery Limited?

A. 18 Yes.

19 You have held that role since the company's

20 incorporation in 2009?

21 A. As a director, I wasn't the sole director at that time,

22 but yes.

23 Q. Merlin is a retailer and manufacturer of archery

24 equipment?

25 A. Yes.

34

The customer service team, how are they trained in terms 2 of their knowledge of archery and the equipment that you

3

5

4 A. All new members of the team generally come from

a background of being experienced archers to begin with.

6 We often have a three-month enrolment process, where we

7 train in the unique aspects of where their weaknesses

8 may be. They may be stronger in one element of archery

9 and weaker in another.

Q. We will come on to age verification and enquiries and 10 11 things like that, but is the training to team members in

12 relation to those things?

13 Α. Yes.

14 Q. I think you were kindly at the back of the hearing room

15 for Mr Sutherland's evidence, so I won't take you

16 through the legislation again. Before you attended

17 today, were you familiar with the Crossbows Act and the

18 provisions that were cited?

19 A. The Crossbows Act, yes.

20 Q. Yes. To be clear, you didn't sell a crossbow to AR, but

21 we saw that there is legislation prohibiting sale of

22 a certain draw weight of crossbow to under-18s; is that

23 right?

24 A.

25 Q. We also heard that there's no legislation specifically

- 1 applying to the sale of a bow; is that correct?
- 2 **A.** Yes.
- 3 Q. Are you able to help the Inquiry on why that is, to your
- 4 knowledge?
- 5 A. Yes, because archery equipment -- I'm unaware of any
- 6 issues with selling archery equipment in general.
- 7 I don't believe it's used in crime, that I'm aware of.
- 8 It's most definitely a sporting activity and it is
- 9 a common sport from all ages and abilities of people.
- 10 It's taught in some schools, scout groups -- it's a very
- 11 traditional form of sporting activity. I don't feel
- 12 that it's necessary to have the same protections against
- 13 crossbows -- sorry, against archery equipment, as there
- 14 would be against crossbows.
- 15 Q. You say in your statement that the vast majority of
- 16 inappropriate questions you receive as a company relate
- 17 to crossbow sales.
- 18 A. Yes.
- 19 Q. Are you able to just expand on that at all?
- 20 A. I would say virtually all inappropriate questions are to
- 21 do with crossbows. Some are probably legitimate
- inappropriate questions, meaning it has come from
- 23 a background of ignorance, but it's no defence that
- there are significantly more inappropriate questions.
- Do you want me to elaborate on the type of questions?
 - 37
- 1 Regarding the hunting enquiries, it is -- it's
 - probably only a handful but it is more likely that we
- 3 will get an enquiry about hunting than harm.
 - **Q.** Just moving from crossbows back to bow and arrows,
- 5 I think you said that you don't get the same level of
- 6 concern with bow and arrows and you gave a number of
- 7 examples of the way in which bows and arrows are used as
- 8 a sporting activity, correct?
- 9 A. Yes, no concerns whatsoever.
- 10 Q. But would you agree that a bow and arrow could be very
- 11 dangerous to someone with the appropriate level of
- 12 ability?
- 13 **A.** Yes.

4

- 14 Q. In 2022 and now, there are no measures in place to
- 15 address the sale of those bows to under-18s; is that
- 16 right?
- 17 A. That's correct, yes.
- 18 Q. Is that a cause for concern for you at all?
- 19 A. Not for regular archery equipment, no, it's not
- 20 a concern.
- 21 Q. We will perhaps come on to the current status later.
- 22 I just want to ask, please, about your age restriction
- 23 processes in 2022 and then we will come on to the
- 24 enquiries that AR made of you.
- 25 Could we have up, please, MERA000005. Thank you and 39

- 1 Q. What I just want to clarify is when you say
- 2 "inappropriate", do you mean "concerning", in other
- 3 words people that are wanting to use crossbows for
- 4 malicious reasons?
- 5 **A.** For what reasons, sorry?
- 6 Q. Malicious reasons.
- 7 A. Some for sure, yes.
- 8 Q. Yes, I think it would help to just have a bit more
- 9 understanding of that.
- 10 A. Okay. Often the misunderstanding is that there may be
- 11 questions related about wanting to use a crossbow for
 - hunting, which is not allowed in the UK, and -- to put
- 13 it into context, they are quite rare as well. It's not
- 14 like we're getting questions constantly and we're
- fielding off these enquiries, but we have had a few
- 16 enquiries about -- I have to give you an example. One
- 17 example was, "What power would be required to kill
- somebody?". We had a recent one about penetration of
- 19 eyes. There are a very few enquiries like that but they
- are concerning enquiries when you get them, yes.
- 21 **Q.** Just to give some idea of the frequency, are we talking
- 22 monthly, annually?
- 23 A. In the last 12 months, we have found it necessary to
- 24 contact the police three times about the malicious-type
- 25 ones.

12

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- 1 if we could zoom in, into the "Age Restricted Products"
- 2 and text below, please. So I think this is the guidance
- 3 on your website in 2022 about age-restricted products;
- 4 is that correct?
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 Q. Thank you. Starting with the point that:
- 7 "Any age restricted product will be clearly8 described as such on the product page for that item."
- 9 So the age-restricted products have warnings on the
- 10 pages, do they --
- 11 **A.** Yes.
- 12 Q. -- on their individual pages? You make the point that
- it is an offence to buy an age-restricted product and
- 14 you say that you want to make sure:
- 15 "... all our age restricted products are sold only
- 16 to those of appropriate age. In addition to clearly
- labelling all our age restricted products we also carryout age verification checks and keep a database of
- 19 refusals."
- The reference to labelling there, is that a label on your website?
- 22 A. On the website, yes.
- 23 Q. Thank you. Then you go on to say:
- "If we are unable to get a positive ID match viapublic means, we will contact you for further

1 information.

2

3

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"If you are unwilling or unable to provide suitable proof of age documentation, your order will be cancelled."

Can we just go through this in a step-wise process, so you explain in your statement, at paragraph 21, that the first check that you would carry out for a new customer is on the electoral roll; is that correct?

- 9 A. At the time, yes.
- 10 Q. Thank you. We will just stick with at the time but11 I will give you an opportunity to explain --
- 12 A. Of course, yes.
- 13 Q. -- any changes that have been made since.

14 If you were unable to verify a customer on the
15 electoral roll, you would email them asking for
16 a passport or driver's licence?

- 17 A. Yes.
- 18 Q. So for online orders, you were not checking
- 19 identifications by default, only if there was an issue
- with the electoral roll?
- 21 A. Yes, at the -- yes, correct.
- 22 Q. Thank you. I don't know if you heard the questions to
- 23 Mr Sutherland about the legislation that was in place
- 24 under the Crossbows Act, but the offence under Section 1
- 25 is if you believe the customer to be 18 years of age or
 - Q. Might it be that you weren't aware that, if you checked
- 2 the identification, you had a statutory defence to
- 3 Section 1?
- 4 A. Yes, I'm aware.
- 5 Q. In hindsight, do you think you should have been aware of 6 that difference?
- 7 A. Yes.

1

- 8 Q. We will come on to changes made but do you think it
- 9 would have been sensible to check identifications when
- 10 Section 1A came in, which was in 2020?
- 11 A. 100 per cent, yes.
- 12 $\,$ Q. In store, you tell us in your statement that you do ask
- 13 for proof of ID for everybody.
- 14 **A.** Yes.
- 15 Q. So is it right: were you setting a higher standard of
- 16 identification for in store purchases than you were for
- 17 online purchases at that time?
- 18 **A.** It does appear that way, yes.
- 19 Q. In terms of online selling, obviously you can't see or
- 20 speak to the customer, you can't check the
- 21 identification against the person in front of you and
- 22 there's a risk of interception of a parcel to a named
- 23 recipient. Would you agree that the risk is greater
- 24 when you are selling an age-verified item remotely --
- 25 **A.** Yes.

- 1 older and have reasonable grounds for that belief --
- 2 sorry, if the sale is made with that belief, then you
- 3 have not committed the offence.
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 Q. Correct? But there is a statutory defence at
- 6 Section 1A, where, if you carried out the check of an
- 7 identification which is specified, you have that
- 8 statutory defence. Were you aware of that difference in
- 9 the legislation?
- 10 A. Between the ID versus the electoral roll?
- 11 Q. Were you aware that, although you only committed the
- 12 offence if you didn't have the reasonable belief of the
- 13 age --
- 14 A. Yes.
- 15 Q. -- if you checked the identification, you would have met
- 16 the statutory defence in Section 1A?
- 17 A. Yes
- 18 Q. I recognise this is a legal nicety.
- 19 A. Yes.
- 20 Q. You were aware of that difference?
- 21 A. Of the defence?
- 22 Q. Yes

1

- 23 A. Yes, I -- I would say yes. I can't recall it from what
- we were doing at the time but I was fully aware that you
- 25 had to verify that the age of the person was over 18.

4

- Q. -- than to someone in store? I think you say that in
- 2 only two of five of your stores did you actually stock
- 3 crossbows because the level of training that was needed
- 4 to sell them.
- 5 A. Yes, the level of experience to be able to adequately
- 6 advise in a face-to-face environment just -- it's quite
- 7 high for crossbows. The variety of products is vast and
- 8 I found it more appropriate that we only limited the
- 9 stocking of the crossbows to the two shops that have the
- to the state of th
- 10 most senior and most experienced staff.
- 11 **Q.** When you say experienced, do you mean experience in the
- technicalities of crossbows or experience in the kind of
- 13 age verification and checking ID requirements?
- 14 A. In the technicalities of crossbows and the use of
- 15 crossbows.
- 16 Q. Did staff monitoring online enquiries have similar
- 17 levels of knowledge and training to those in those two
- 18 stores?
- 19 A. Some of them did, yes.
- 20 Q. Would it be unfair to say that the checks on online were
- a bit less onerous than the checks that were being done
- in store?
- 23 A. Yes, that would be fair, on reflection, yes.
- Q. Can I ask you now about the electoral roll check thatyou did.

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- 1 A. Yes.
- Q. Which details were you running against the electoralroll when you received an order?
- 4 A. You can put the name and address of the purchaser into
- 5 a database and it will return whether the -- whether
- 6 they are matched at that address with that name.
- 7 Q. Just to be clear, when you say "the purchaser", do you
- 8 mean the address on the payment card -- sorry, the name
- 9 on the payment card, the name on the delivery address or
- 10 the name of the account holder?
- 11 A. If the delivery address was different to the order
- 12 address, we would check both.
- 13 Q. You would check both.
- 14 A. Perhaps with the exception if it was being delivered to
- 15 a business.
- 16 Q. So if you are only checking one, there might be a risk
- 17 that someone underage puts in false details to have the
- 18 item delivered elsewhere with -- sorry, let me start
- 19 again. Puts in false bank details -- sorry, I'm going
- 20 to start right again. They might enter parent's bank
- 21 details to have a crossbow delivered to themselves, if
- you were to only check one?
- 23 A. Correct, we would always check the delivery address.
- 24 Q. And vice versa as well?
- 25 A. Yes.

- 1 implemented and have had for a long time, where we log
- 2 refusals for -- so that gives us the ability to
- 3 crosscheck -- if the person was to attempt to place an
- 4 order in the future, part of our process is to check
- 5 against previous purchase history or any refusals in the
- 6 past
- 7 Q. How were staff trained to identify suspicious enquiries?
- 8 A. From -- a senior member of the team would give examples9 of what would be classed as a suspicious question.
- 10 Q. Were you satisfied that those issues were being pickedup at the time?
- 12 **A.** Yes.
- 13 Q. Thank you. I want to move on now to the emails between
- 14 AR and Merlin Archery. Could we have up MERA000002.
- 15 Thank you. If we could just zoom into the top message.
- So we see the message here from -- just we're given the
- 17 initials "AR" and it is signed from "A" on 3 May 2022 at
- 18 10.30 am. The request is:
- 19 "Hi,
- 20 "If I bought a 18+ product how would you verify my 21 age, do you verify ID online or does the delivery person 22 check my ID at my door?"
- 23 Just stopping there, is that an unusual query?
- A. On reflection, it could be considered unusual, but it's
 not unusual in the fact that people may be asking what
 - 47

- 1 Q. Thank you. If you were unable to verify on the
- 2 electoral roll, you would email customers requesting
- a copy of the passport or the driver's licence?
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 $\,$ Q. Did you have any mechanisms to detect the use of fake
- 6 identification?
- 7 A. Not specifically and that is a vulnerability that's been
- 8 highlighted.
- 9 Q. Thank you. Back in May 2022 and still now, there were
- 10 no requirements to put warnings on packages of crossbows
- 11 or do age-verified deliveries; is that right?
- 12 **A.** Yes
- 13 Q. I don't think you were doing either of those things --
- 14 **A.** No.
- 15 Q. -- at the time. So the online check was the only
- 16 measure in place to stop underage purchases?
- 17 A. Yes, correct.
- 18 Q. We have covered in outline enquiries in general terms
- 19 about crossbows. Other than the check that we are
- 20 talking about, did you have any other safeguards around
- 21 purchases, for example if enquiries were made by someone
- 22 when making a purchase?
- 23 A. Certainly if the enquiries were in any way suspicious,
- 24 it would be highlighted. We had a -- and still do
- 25 have -- a register, a crossbow register, that we
 - 4
- 1 the process is on how to purchase a product, so it
- 2 didn't particularly flag as something that needed to be
- 3 reported
- 4 Q. So just on its own, that might be an adult wondering if
- 5 they have the appropriate identification and when they
- 6 will be required to provide it?
- 7 A. Yes, but I do acknowledge that that could be construed
 - as someone under the age of 18 attempting to figure out
- 9 the process of getting one.
- 10 Q. So it might start to raise concerns?
- 11 **A.** Yes.

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- 12 **Q.** The next section is:
- 13 "Also, do I have to be 18 to receive the product
- 14 when it is at my door?"
- 15 Is that a more concerning query?
- 16 A. Yes, I would acknowledge that that could be construed as
- 17 someone under 18.
- 18 Q. The former might be about the practicalities of
- 19 providing identification but the latter seems to be
- about the age of the person making the enquiry, doesn't
- 21 it?
- 22 **A.** Yes.
- 23~ $\,$ Q. $\,$ It is hard to see why an adult would ask that question,
- 24 isn't it?
- 25 A. Yes, I would agree.

- Q. Can we go down, please, to the response. So we have the 1
- 2 response from Oliver of the Merlin Archery team, that's
- 3 someone from your online or your customer sales
- 4 division, is it?
- 5 Α.
- 6 **Q.** Thank you. Oliver gives the reply that we see there,

7 so:

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"[You] would need to verify your age before we can dispatch an item."

Then giving the explanation of checking the electoral roll. Then if that doesn't -- the electoral register and, if necessary, then asking for a follow-up photo of a passport or driving licence.

If a customer service person sees a suspicious enquiry and recognises it as such, what would you expect them to do?

- 17 A. If that would be considered suspicious, it would be --18 it would have been raised to a senior person but I don't 19 think, on the face of it, it was suspicious enough to be 20 flagged as an excessively concerning exchange of 21 messages.
- 22 Q. Sorry, the first message you don't think was suspicious 23 enough to be flagged?
- 24 Sorry, could you repeat the question? Α.
- 25 Yes. We see the response that happened in fact.

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- 1 A. I expect we would still give the reply on the
- 2 requirements of what is needed to order an
- 3 age-restricted product.
- 4 Q. Looking back at the first set of queries and
- 5 particularly the request about, "Do I have to be 18 to
- 6 receive the product when it is at my door?", do you
- 7 think that Oliver should have deemed it suspicious?
- 8 A. It is difficult to answer because of where the level
- 9 would need to be put for us to report that. So if the
- 10 refusal of selling a product because we suspected
- 11 someone of being underage, is the expectation that we
- 12 should be reporting that to the authorities or just not
- 13 selling --
- 14 Q. I'm going to come on to reporting it.
- 15 A. Okay.
- But I think you have a system for suspicious deliveries 16 17 internally --
- Yes. 18 Α.
- 19 -- sorry, suspicious enquiries internally, which you
- have explained, which is the entering on the register, 20
- 21 and I'm just asking should that course of action have
- 22 been taken based on this question?
- 23 A. On reflection, that should be considered suspicious,
- 24
- 25 Could we move on, please, to the second page, thank you. Q. 51

Yes. 1 Α.

- 2 Q. If Oliver had identified the first message as
- 3 suspicious, what would you have expected him to do?
- 4 A. If he would have thought it as suspicious, he would have
- 5 added it on to our register for checking any future
- 6 orders because, whenever we get a new order in, we
- 7 always crosscheck the email that it comes from with any
- 8 previous correspondence and it would have been
- 9 highlighted on our crossbow register as a refusal.
- 10 **Q.** We see the reply that was received. Does that mean that
- 11 Oliver didn't deem that to be a suspicious request?
- A. No, he didn't deem it to be suspicious. 12
- 13 Q. If he had deemed it suspicious, would he have replied 14 giving details of exactly what checks would be made?
- 15 A. Well, we always reply with details of the checks, if 16 they are asked for.
- 17 Q. Because if someone underage is trying to make an
- enquiry, what they need to know is how to bypass that 18
- 19 system, don't they?
- 20 A. I see where you're going, yes, okay.
- 21 Q. So we see here that Oliver didn't deem it suspicious and
- 22 gave the full details.
- 23 A. Yes.

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- 24 Q. If he had deemed it suspicious, he would have entered
- 25 that into a register, would he have given this reply?

- So we then had a response to Oliver from AR, and this
- 2 message is: 3 "I would like to purchase from Tactical Archery but
 - I would prefer discrete [sic] packaging, which doesn't
- 5 provide any information on what is inside the box. 6 Could I see a photo of what the external packaging of
- 7 your products look like?"
 - The request clearly is going to the wrong company; is that a cause for concern?
- A. We have had that before, unfortunately, and we have also 10 had people chasing orders, like "Where is my delivery?", 11
- 12
- when they didn't order it from us, so it's -- obviously,
- 13 that same message could have been sent to multiple
- 14 people and he just forgot to change the name of the 15
- 16 Q. Yes, I understand that as a general principle but, in
- 17 the context of questions about the age and the
- 18 packaging, isn't that a cause for concern?
- 19 Oh, the packaging. On reflection, yes. Α.
- 20 Q. So --
- 21 A. But I would like to qualify that, that most people,
- 22 I would suggest, would not want the items that they have
- 23 ordered, no matter what they have ordered, identified on
- 24 the outside of packaging, so it's pretty standard for us
- 25 to send items out in brown paper or brown boxes. But,

- 1 yes, there is some suspicion there that somebody is
- 2 wanting to hide the contents, rather than privacy
- 3 concerns.
- 4 Q. Is that right, that most people don't want to know
- 5 what's inside the packaging, why is that?
- 6 A. Why they wouldn't want it advertised on the outside of
- 7 the packaging what might be inside the packaging?
- 8 Q. Why is that?
- 9 A. I think just general privacy. So the postman doesn't
- see what you're getting delivered or your neighbours
- 11 don't see what's in the parcels. I think that would be
- 12 a fair assessment.
- 13 Q. An outside observer might think that the reference to
- 14 Tactical Archery shows that AR is making requests of
- a number of companies to try to understand which is most
- 16 likely to satisfy the delivery; do you see that?
- 17 A. Yes.

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- 18 Q. We know that that is, in fact, exactly what AR was
- 19 doing. Shouldn't Oliver have picked that up as a cause
- 20 for concern?
- 21 A. Yes. On reflection, yes.
- 22 Q. Thank you. Again, in the context of the other requests,
- in that context, is a request about discreet packaging
- one that should cause concern?
- 25 A. In context with the other messages, yes, it should.

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- 1 Q. -- because it had already been replied to.
 - As I said, AR did not then go on to buy a crossbow
- 3 or any other items from Merlin Archery, as far as you
- 4 have been able to ascertain; is that right?
- 5 A. That is correct, yes.
- 6 Q. Thank you. Bows, arrows, crossbows have the potential
- 7 to cause serious harm, so do you agree that a careful
 - approach to online sales, particularly in the context of
- 9 crossbows, is needed?
- 10 A. Crossbows absolutely: categorically, yes. I don't see
- 11 the same -- I don't see the equivalence with archery
- 12 equipment to crossbows. They are distinctive --
- 13 distinctly different categories.
- 14 Q. I think you have accepted in the context of these
- 15 enquiries that it should have raised suspicion. Can
- 16 I ask why you think that it wasn't identified at the
- 17 time?
- 18 A. I can only say in comparison to other contacts that we
- do get that are more clear cut of being suspicious, when
- 20 you're trying to understand about packaging and
- 21 process -- of course, on reflection, yes. I'm just
- 22 trying to put it in the context of what we sometimes do
- get that we do get classed as suspicious, this wouldn't
- 24 really reach the bar of feeling that we ought to report
- 25 it.

- Q. Then if we can go on, please, thank you. So Oliver
 gives the response:
 - "... so [they] are as discreet as they can be ..."
- 4 Again, I assume if Oliver had actually been
- 5 suspicious about these enquiries he wouldn't have
- 6 provided the full information about the systems in
- 7 place; is that right?
- 8 A. Yes, if he was suspicious, he wouldn't have provided it.
- 9 For example, if an enquiry comes in that's more
- 10 obviously suspicious, you don't continue to engage with
- 11 them on how to purchase the product.
- 12 Q. Could we have up, please, MERA000003. Then we have
- 13 a final request. It's very similar to the previous one
- but, in the first, he was asking Tactical Archery for,
- 15 I think, a photograph of the packaging and this time he
- 16 is asking:
- 17 "Does the exterior packaging give any indication of
- 18 what is inside the box?"
- 19 So I think the same principles apply, but might that
- 20 persistence also have raised an alarm with Oliver?
- 21 A. Yes.
- 22 **Q.** I think that we see he responded to the same question on
- another email and I think there was a decision not to
- 24 respond to this one --
- 25 A. Yes.

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- 1 Q. Do you think that it might be sensible to have greater
- 2 training for staff on what should raise a suspicion for
- 3 them and what should be escalated, as it were?
- 4 A. Yes, and that is something that we have implemented
- 5 a new system, with a different approach to managing
- 6 suspicious emails.
- 7 Q. Thank you. Are you satisfied with that approach now
 - that the staff have the training but also the time to
- 9 consider these sort of queries carefully?
- 10 A. Certainly they have the time. There is no urgency that
- 11 emails must be responded to within a timeframe. We
- don't put that pressure on our employees and there is
- 13 more clarity on how we grade suspicious enquiries.
- 14 Q. Thank you. Could we have up, please, your paragraph 18
- 15 which is at page 3 of your statement, which is
- 16 MERA000006. So you said:
- 17 "In my opinion, while there could have been some
- 18 low-level suspicion that the enquiry could be from
- someone underage seeking to buy a crossbow, it would not be enough for us to contact the police."
- I think in terms of the former, do you agree that it is more than a low-level suspicion now?
- A. Now, yes. It was clearly more than a low-levelsuspicion.
- 25 Q. Can I now just move on to reporting things to the

1 police.

2 **A.** Yes.

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3 Q. You say:

"... no expectation for us to contact the police for refusing to sell to an underage person."

I'm deliberately taking these out of order, and a belief that Police would not be interested; is that right?

- 9 A. Yes. That was my feeling at the time that I wrote that
 10 and I do still feel that, if we were to contact the
 11 police because we refused to sell to an underage person,
 12 that no action would be taken.
- 13 Q. Would you expect to be told by police about the outcome14 when you report a matter to them?
- A. No, but what -- if I can clarify a bit, it may be the
 expectation that they wouldn't be interested, meaning
 they wouldn't come and take a statement because of other
 examples that we have had to deal with.
- 19 Q. Where the police have not come and taken a statement?

20 A. Yes.

- 21 Q. Might it depend on the person making the request?
- 22 A. What, the person from Merlin making the request --
- 23 Q. Yes.
- A. -- depend on that? I wouldn't have thought they would
 have treated the request any differently, no matter who
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1 A. Yes.

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Q. What were the circumstances around that?

A. It wasn't a refusal so much as that they were going to come and see us and then they got redirected somewhere else. So we did have a concerning incident relating to some -- two gentlemen that were in the shop, made -- they were causing trouble and made some very concerning statements, which is one I referred to earlier, and when we refused to serve them, they refused to leave and continued to be rude and insult the staff and making other customers uncomfortable. The decision was made by the store manager to call the police for assistance.

Unbeknown to him, one of the other members of staff was already on the phone to police as well because it was more than one person deciding to call the police, that was how uncomfortable it was.

I wasn't there myself, just for clarity, this is after my investigation. They said they would send somebody out right away but nobody arrived -- I need to just back pedal a little bit. Once we were on the phone to the police and the customers were aware that we were on the phone to the police, they did then leave and that was noted to the police, that they had, in fact, left while they were on the phone to the police, but they said they are still going to send somebody and that was

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1 it came from.

Q. Well, in these circumstances, you actually didn't haveany details to give the police other than "AR" and "A",

4 correct?

5 A. Correct.
6 Q. But if you had had a name and that name was of someone

7 that the police were concerned about, they might take

8 that information more seriously; do you agree?

9 **A.** Yes.

10 Q. Have you considered requiring people to provide details,11 for example their name, when they make an enquiry of

12 you?

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13 A. When they contact us by email? No.

14 Q. Is that something that might assist in the future?

15 A. Well, my instinct would be, if somebody wanted to hidetheir name, they wouldn't provide the name or they would

provide a different name, so I'm not sure what the

18 benefit would be.

19 $\,$ Q. So Mr Sutherland talked about having an online form.

20 You would be concerned that people would put false

21 details into that form?

22 A. If their intention was to hide their name, yes.

Q. Can you just describe -- I think you give an example in
 your statement of the Police refusing to assist you when

you had a concern in one of your stores, is that right?

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great, somebody was going to come.

I think an hour or so later they hadn't come and it was past closing time. My store manager called the police again to ask if there would be a follow-up and if you are indeed coming, and they said, "Yes, they're still coming but they may be late or not at all". So they waited until 7.00 or 8.00 in the evening, in the shop, nobody came, so they locked up and went home and that was the end of the contact.

Q. Mr Jones, do you have any concern that the police don't
 appreciate, or didn't appreciate, the dangers of the
 items that you stock?

A. I'm sure they're aware of the items that we sell; they
 must be. It was -- I don't know the exact transcript of

15 what was said on the phone but, even the title "Merlin

16 Archery" as a company suggests archery equipment, at the

very least, and I guess that reflects back to my other comment about that they wouldn't be interested for

comment about that they wouldn't be interested for a more low-level situation. Of course, on reflection,

20 it wasn't low-level at all, but when they can't respond

21 to something that is in the moment happening where we

need assistance, it doesn't encourage us to continue to report things of lesser nature.

24 **Q.** Yes. Which police force was this?

4 Q. Tes. Which police force was this?

25 A. That was the Staffordshire police force.

- ${\bf Q.}$ At the time that you made your statement in July this 1
- 2 year, the age verification process was the same as it
- 3 had been in 2022, but you committed to reviewing that
- 4 process to see if there were any vulnerabilities.
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 **Q.** Have you completed that review now?
- 7 A. Yes
- 8 Q. What progress have you made with it?
- 9 Α. We have implemented the verified age deliveries. That 10 was the number one concern.
- You suggest in your statement that it would be 11 Q.
- 12 beneficial to require compulsory identification to be
- 13 provided. If we could have up please page 5,
- 14 paragraph 32. Have you implemented that?
- A. We have always had a crossbow sales register and we have 15
- 16 always asked for ID. One of the improvements we made in
- 17 that regard is that we now scan a copy of the ID.
- 18 Rather than making a note of the type of ID and the
- 19 details of the ID, and the name and the address of the
- 20 person, we now scan a copy of the ID for traceability.
- 21 Q. Just to be clear, for online sales do you require
- 22 identification to be provided?
- 23 A. Yes, my apologies. We no longer use the electoral roll
- 24 as a verification method. It's only physical ID.
- 25 Q. Thank you. Do you place any labels on your packaging?
- 1 refuse a sale for an underage person but, certainly, we
 - have refused sales for over-18s. That feels like
- 3 a greater concern.

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- 4 Q. Do you have any ideas about how those persons could be 5 identified?
- 6 **A.** Concerns on how they could be identified?
- 7 So on malicious acts -- so, I mean, one suggestion might
 - be that you are provided details or you are able to
- 9 search the identification of someone and you are given
- 10 a return, for example, by the police as to whether they
- 11 are suitable to be sold to an age-verified item?
- 12 A. For crossbows, yes, and I am -- I would like to ask for
- 13 more government centralised help in how to -- like
- 14 a correct and industry standard type procedure for age
- 15 verification. The information on the Government website
- 16 can be interpreted as slightly vague because they tell
- 17 you that you must verify their age but they leave it to
- 18 the retailer's discretion on how to do that. I think
- 19 something as significant as that should be clear cut,
- 20 black and white: these are the processes you follow.
- 21 The same for the -- because of the potential
- 22 malicious intent for crossbows, if there was a way we
- 23 could verify identity through a Government portal, or
- 24 some other -- some way that takes the risk of us
- 25 misunderstanding the process or not doing it adequately, 63

- A. Now we do, yes. 1
- 2 Q. Are you aware of the changes that are to come in for the 3 Crime and Policing Bill, in relation to crossbow sales?
- 4 A. I have become aware of it in preparation for this, yes.
- 5 Q. Yes, thank you. Are you proposing to adopt those 6 changes in the near future?
- 7 The photographic ID and the --
- 8 Q. I think the extra requirements would be photographic ID 9 and the delivery would have to be to the person that
- 10 made the purchase.
- A. If that's required, yes. It does make total sense to do 11
- 12 that. We would have no issue implementing it. I only
- 13 became aware of it yesterday, to be honest so I have not
- 14 had time to fully understand the consequences of how it
- 15 would be enacted, but anything to secure and further
- 16 improve the sale of crossbows -- prevent the sale of
- 17 crossbows to underage would be great.
- 18 But more so than that, I would -- I think we should 19 be trying to prevent the sales to people that have
- 20 malicious intent, as you said. You know, that is the --
- 21 if I can be frank, that seems to be, from my view, the
- 22 much greater concern from our interactions that we have
- 23 had with people and incidents that we have had, we
- 24 have -- I asked other people in our -- some of the
- 25 senior management and we don't recall ever needing to

it would be a huge help for the industry.

- 2 Q. You talk about the crossbow sales register. What's the
- 3 benefit of that?

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- 4 A. It gives us more comfort that we know where all the
- 5 crossbows have been sold and we can crosscheck it, like
- 6 when we have -- if we blacklist a customer and they --
- 7 another concern would be that -- if I may just add
- 8 a little bit, while it's on my mind.
- If we blacklisted somebody because of the nature of 9 10 the questions and we deemed it necessary to notify the
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- police, there's nothing stopping them just going to the
- 12 next shop, having learned what the process would be,
- 13 like you alluded to earlier, which I didn't quite absorb
- 14 fully at the time, but they could learn from different
- 15 shops what processes are in place to allow themselves to
- 16 ask the right questions at a different retailer. One of
- 17 my concerns in the review I did was how to track
- 18 blacklisted customers.
- 19 So there might be a system whereby police are able to Q. 20 identify persons of concern but I think maybe you are
- 21 also suggesting an industry-wide system for doing that
- 22 as well?
- 23 A. I would like -- I could -- I would like to spend more
- 24 time fleshing it out but the questions we've got --
- 25 there has been two or three times we have needed to

1 contact the police. There is an argument to say that 2 some of the other concerns about hunting may be 3 misunderstood but, when someone is asking specifically 4 about physically harming somebody or what power you need 5 to do something, that information really should be 6 populated. If it came on an email, that email address 7 should be somehow registered on a portal that we can all 8 have access to. I'm just thinking off the top of my 9 head a little bit, but that is a concern, how would we 10 track those people? 11

11 Q. Thank you, Mr Jones, and if you have any furtherthoughts please do put them in writing to us.

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

A. I specifically wanted to mention the Government-backed ID verification method. That was my number one thing I wanted to get across. I don't think there should be any interpretation open to that. It should be: you follow these procedures, with this method and then you will comply.

I would like a way of retailers maybe being able to register somewhere where we can be given updates on potential law changes that are coming in, like the crime bill that you referred to earlier, and that photographic ID and the video, I had no idea about that until -- obviously something like this suddenly wakes you up and

1 crossbows because we're not in it for maximising sales
2 of crossbows. It's the sport and the target shooting is
3 the number one central driver for what we do, so the -4 more restrictions on crossbows, no problem. But I would
5 be against more restrictions on archery equipment.

6 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: So that leads me to my, well,
7 penultimate question. One thing -- and I may be
8 splitting hairs -- but one word you have now used twice
9 is the word "regular", in relation to archery equipment.

10 A. Yes.

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SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Do I detect from that that, within the
 arena of bows, there are different kinds and that you
 may see a proper basis for applying restrictions in
 relation to certain forms of archery?

A. Crossbows would be categorised as archery and you were
 correct that, even though crossbows would be classed as
 archery equipment, there is most definitely a divide
 between what the average archer would consider archery
 equipment and many archers may not consider crossbows as
 their thing. But there are many different types of bows
 within non-crossbow archery.

22 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: That's really what I want to focus on.

23 A. Yes, okay.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: So this is absolutely not my field at
 all, but the bows that were used at Agincourt have now

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you start researching everything, but I didn't know
 about that. So some way of notifying retailers would be
 reassuring for us as well, so we don't accidentally not
 comply.

MR BOYLE: Thank you, Mr Jones. I will just see if thereare any other questions. No.

Thank you.

Questioned by THE CHAIR
 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Just a couple of things from me,
 Mr Jones.

11 A. Yes.

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SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Without going into the detail of it,
 you, I think, were in the Inquiry room when
 Mr Sutherland was describing the range of measures that
 they have now implemented, which, if I have understood
 this correctly, really apply across the board to
 crossbows and bows. It might be said that that company
 has gone above and beyond.

Was there any part of the description that he gave of their measures which you think would be inappropriate?

22 **A.** The age restriction on regular archery equipment I do
23 think would be inappropriate and unnecessary but I would
24 comply 100 per cent -- if I may add, you did ask about
25 the impact of sales. I'm willing to sacrifice sales on

developed somewhat and there are some items which are
 sold as bows which look altogether more sophisticated
 items --

4 A. Yes.

5 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: -- than a longbow.

6 A. Yes

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SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Now, do you see, within that range, any
 of those which you think ought in fact, because of their
 degree of sophistication, to have additional controls
 put on them?

A. I would say no again. One of my roles within the business -- I design compound bows, which is the more sophisticated one that you're thinking of, but they are designed for target shooting. But the nature of the power is -- can be product dependent. Like you reference the Agincourt bow, the power of an Agincourt bow was something to behold and it doesn't automatically mean that a compound bow versus a longbow -- one will always be more powerful than the other but, if you were to push it to the extreme, the compound bow is the most technologically advanced and does deliver the highest energy output. But within target shooting and with compound bows now being accepted into the Olympics, there are limits on the power for target shooting and

the speed of the arrow, but the -- one of the measures 68

- of how powerful a bow is, is the speed of an arrow, but even those numbers can be manipulated. It's very
- 3 complicated to say that particular bow gives certain
- 4 concerns over another, so I would not --
- 5 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: I think your more fundamental point is
- 6 that from, as it were, where you are sitting, you have
- 7 detected a problem in relation to people inappropriately
- 8 buying crossbows, you have no experience of anyone
- 9 attempting to inappropriately buy ordinary bows.
- 10 A. No, none -- if I was to comment -- the recent one where
- 11 we contacted the police, those customers -- it was
- 12 a more general -- crossbows were in the conversation,
- 13 archery bows were in the conversation. It was just
- 14 a terrible situation. That one aside, I don't recall
- 15 ever, in years and years, like decades I'm saying, of
- 16 issues with regular -- I keep using that word "regular
- 17 archery equipment" because there is a divider between
- 18 crossbow and regular archery equipment.
- 19 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: My last question is this: towards the
- 20 end of your evidence, you indicated that, if you were
- 21 given time to flesh matters out, you might be able to
- 22 describe, as it were, with greater detail and precision,
- 23 what you consider might be useful changes for the
- 24 future.
- 25 A. Yes.

- 1 Questioned by MR MOSS
- 2 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much. Please have
- 3 a seat.
- 4 Yes, Mr Moss.
- 5 MR MOSS: Thank you, sir. Just start by giving us your full
- 6 name, if you would, please.
- 7 A. Christopher Ashworth.
- 8 Q. Thank you. Can we have on the screen EVRI000002. Can
- 9 you just confirm, Mr Ashworth, that this is your
- 10 statement to the Inquiry, which I think you signed on
- 11 18 August of this year?
- 12 A. It is.
- 13 **Q.** Are the contents of that statement true to the best of
- 14 your knowledge and belief?
- 15 A. They are.
- 16 Q. You tell us in your statement that you are the Chief
- 17 Customer Officer at Evri Limited: is that correct?
- 18 **A.** I am.
- 19 Q. That was previously called Hermes Parcelnet Limited and
- 20 you are responsible for technology, strategy and
- 21 innovation at Evri, as well as the development of Evri's
- 22 customer-facing products; is that correct?
- 23 A. It is indeed.
- 24 $\,$ Q. On a day-to-day basis, just give us a brief thumbnail
- 25 sketch, if you would, what are your responsibilities, 71

- 1 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Would it be an undue burden to ask you
- 2 to do that?
- 3 A. Of course not. I would do anything required.
- 4 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much indeed. If I was
- 5 to ask for that within the next fortnight, would that be
- 6 a reasonable expectation, Mr Jones?
- 7 A. I would probably like to consult with some other
- 8 retailers as well. It depends on the extent of the --
- 9 the detail of the proposal that I would want to give.
- 10 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: All right. Shall we say until the end
- 11 of October?
- 12 A. Would you clarify what you actually want me to do?
- 13 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: We will write to you with that in mind.
- 14 A. Yes, of course, thank you.
- 15 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: That's been extremely helpful. Thank
- 16 you very much indeed.
- 17 A. Thank you.
- 18 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Time for a break?
- 19 MR BOYLE: Yes, sir. So the next witness is Mr Ashworth of
- 20 Evri.
- 21 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Right. I will sit again at 12.05.
- 22 (11.42 am)
- 23 (Short Break)
- 24 (12.06 pm)
- 25 CHRISTOPHER ASHWORTH (affirmed)

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- 1 what do you deal with in the company?
- 2 A. All technology, so we keep the company up and running
- 3 and processing parcels. I deal with development of
- 4 products and propositions for all sides of the
- 5 marketplace. I run our customer service teams, design
- 6 the customer experience and I'm also responsible for the
- 7 marketing teams and PR teams in the business.
- 8 Q. Thank you. Customer service, I think, part of -- when
- 9 you say customer experience, I think customer service
- 10 falls within your purview as well?
- 11 A. It does indeed, yes.
- 12 Q. You have been working for Evri for nine years. Were you
- in the logistics and parcel business before that?
- 14 A. Yes, I have been in parcels for about 20 years. I have
- worked for Yodel, ArrowXL and Hermes, latterly Evri.
- 16 Q. So it is obviously a big business, parcel logistics, and
- 17 you are pretty senior within Evri and have good
- 18 understanding of the industry generally; would that be
- 19 fair?
- 20 A. That would be correct.
- 21 **Q.** Turning to understand a little bit about Evri's
- business, again we only need to deal with this at a high
- level really, but you explain in your paragraph 3 that
- 24 Evri provides parcel logistics and final mile delivery
- 25 services. No doubt the clue is in the name, but just

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(18) Pages 69 - 72

explain the "final mile delivery services"? What does 1 2 that mean in plain English?

- 3 A. In essence, we deliver to the doorstep for most of the 4 top 100 retailers in the UK, predominantly domestic 5 services but we do have some international. We deliver 6 about 1 billion parcels a year, just under 1 billion 7 parcels a year. What does that look like? On a typical 8 day, 2.5 million parcels a day. At Christmas that will 9 peak up to about 4.2 million this year. We generally 10 use 20,000 couriers a day, self-employed couriers, to 11 deliver that kind of volume. That will spike to about
- 12 30,000 couriers a day. 13 Q. In particular, when I come on probably towards the end 14 of my questioning but in a sense throughout, when I'm 15 asking you about the individual delivery to AR we will 16 keep that in mind that you are a business doing 17 2.5 million a day, but I also want, on behalf of the 18 Chair, to encourage you to use that experience to 19 explain in terms of automated systems where there may be 20 scope for improvement.
- 21 A. Okay.

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22 Q. But you describe in paragraph 4 of your statement that 23 Evri deals with both business to consumer -- you have 24 explained the business to consumer part -- but also 25 consumer to consumer parcel delivery. That may not be 73

it and we chose not to take any of that volume.

I think, practically, we have 30,000 couriers in the final mile. When you're operating in our part of the market, there's a lot about speed. Those couriers will deliver sometimes two rounds a day, so somewhere between 200 to 300 parcels a day. Our network is not set up for complicated interactions on the doorstep. There's a lot of -- most people in this room will have received a parcel. Some of us are always happy with the way parcels are received and the safe places are used a lot in our network. Sometimes a courier will choose a safe place that has been designated by technology or agreed with a customer, sometimes it is assumed. I couldn't be 100 per cent sure that a courier wouldn't rely on a customer agreement to deliver something like a blade and, as such, I didn't want any blades in our network.

Q. So there's an element of moral choice about that and 17 18 an element of not wanting to run the risk and the reputational risk; would that be fair? 19

20 A. Correct, and the pure practicality of ensuring 100 per 21 cent compliance.

22 Q. You tell us that within the parcels market, the fact 23 that Evri don't offer an age-verified service is well 24 known, so online retailers -- presumably you mean the 25 big ones -- but also it is made clear in your

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1 so relevant for today but just explain what that is.

2 Does that mean that I, as a member of the public, can 3 book a parcel from you to go to a friend or a relative?

4 A. Absolutely, so we open up those services through 5 a website and/or an app and you can inject your parcel 6 into our network, either from collection by courier or 7 through about 15 -- well, 12,000 parcel shops or 2,000 8 lockers that are around the UK.

9 Q. Thank you. In paragraph 7 of your statement -- perhaps 10 we should have that one on screen so it is EVRI000002 at 11 page 2, please. You say there that Evri as a company 12 have:

> "... always taken the view that Evri should not offer [the product of age-verified delivery] because the delivery of bladed items, or any other items or substances covered by the Offensive Weapons Act is not an area of the delivery market that Evri serves."

Is that correct?

19 A. Correct.

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20 Q. Why is that? There is obviously business there to be 21 had; is there a particular reason why Evri doesn't go 22 into the area of age-verified deliveries at all?

23 A. I would say there's two reasons: firstly, morally, we 24 just didn't want to carry that kind of traffic, it just 25 didn't sit comfortably with us as a board. We discussed 74

1 interactions with prospective and current clients?

2 A. Absolutely. It's in all of our contracts, it's on our 3 website, it's replicated on any partner's website and if 4 any customer or client asks us will we carry knives, the 5 answer is "no".

6 Q. Against that background, let me turn to Evri's 7 involvement with a delivery to AR and the Chair has 8 heard quite a lot of evidence about this already. In terms of the delivery of the machete which ultimately 9 10 had come from Hunting & Knives, could we look at the shipping confirmation, EVRI000006, please. So this is 11 12 one of your exhibits. Could we just enlarge the text 13 just a little bit. Who would have sent out this 14 shipping confirmation? Can you just help with the 15 ground reality of it.

This looks like the shipping confirmation came from Ageo 16 Α. Wholesale and it references the shipping details, which 17 18 is shipped by Parcelhub, a reseller to Evri, and the 19 information we would have received would have been that 20 pure shipping line:

21 "Parcelhub -- Evri -- Whistl PacketPOD."

22 Q. Thank you. So just going through those, the "POD" 23 signifies what? You explain it in your statement but 24 just set it out for us.

25 A. Proof of delivery. In the context of this parcel, that

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- 1 would have been a photo with any facial pictures
- 2 excluded, so it would generally be a photo of an open
- 3 door with maybe some feet in and the parcel in, and
- 4 a geolocation of where that event took place.
- 5 Q. Thank you. So whereas for this Inquiry we would
- 6 positively want to establish exactly who took possession
- 7 of this delivery, your requirements in terms of not
- 8 storing personal data means -- many of us may have an
- 9 everyday familiarity with this -- the picture gets taken
- and you are told to step back so you don't appear in the
- 11 photograph; is that fair?
- 12 A. Correct.
- 13 Q. It's got a tracking number as well and we see thebilling information and the shipping information, both
- to Olakunle, sometimes referred to in our documents as
- 16 "Samuel", and AR's home address.
- 17 There's a payment method there indicating Visa. In
- 18 relation to that, would you have had any involvement
- 19 with the payment and whether the payment details matched
- the name and the address?
- 21 A. No.

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- 22 **Q.** The shipping method is "Regular Shipping -- Shipping
- 23 Cost", and so is it fair to say that on this shipping
- 24 confirmation it is clear that it is not a special type
- of delivery, it's not an age-verified delivery?
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- 1 Ruach Music, who then have a contract with Whistl, who
 - then have a contract with you, and you do the ultimate
- delivery. Is that unusual to have that, to outside
- 4 eyes, slightly complex supply chain?
- 5 A. Most of our volume is contracted directly with -- we
- 6 will call them a client, but a retailer, so we will
- 7 build a relationship with a retailer, we will work
- 8 within their supply chain, understand what they are
- sending, agree with them how it is going to be packaged
 and presented and work a customer journey that's going
 - and presented and work a customer journey that's going
- 11 to be working for that retailer's customers.
- 12 In this regard, that wasn't this relationship. This 13 is a small proportion of our volume -- I couldn't give
- 14 you the percentages but it will be somewhere around
- 15 10 per cent -- comes into our network from resellers.
- 16 At that point, our role is purely transactional. The
- 17 reseller does all of that pastoral care with their
- 18 client and merely injects that volume into a carrier's
- 19 network. So, in this case, the reseller Parcelhub with
- 20 the trading name of Whistl, they will probably have
- 21 an agreement with all the carriers based on price and
- parcels, and they will choose where to send the volume.
- 23 $\,$ Q. You explain in paragraph 14 of your statement -- let me

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- 24 check that I have understood it correctly -- that, for
- 25 some of Whistl's big clients, you know of their identity

- 1 A. No -- sorry. This is one of our cheapest delivery
 - services. So it's a packet, so a loosely wrapped item
- 3 that's possibly to be delivered through the letter box
 - and with a proof of delivery, which will be a photo of
- 5 it going through, or to be left with a customer, if it
- 6 didn't fit through a letter box.
- 7 Q. Thank you. I think that can come down from the screen,
- 8 please. We know that -- you set it out in your
- 9 statement -- that Evri, as a company, didn't have any
- 10 direct relationship with Ageo Wholesale or Hunting &
- 11 Knives; is that correct?
- 12 A. Absolutely correct.
- 13 Q. Other than that there's that single word "Ageo", you
- 14 wouldn't have known about huntingandknives.co.uk as
- 15 being --
- 16 A. We didn't --
- 17 Q. Just wait for the question.
- 18 A. Sorry.
- 19 $\,$ Q. You wouldn't have known about huntingandknives.co.uk as
- 20 being the ultimate seller of this product?
- 21 A. That's correct, but we didn't even know of Ageo either.
- 22 **Q.** Thank you. How common is this type of arrangement
- 23 because we know that your contract is with Whistl, and
- 24 we'll look at that, but the chain goes from Ageo/Hunting
- 25 & Knives to SJ Henderson, who have a linked company,
 - 7
- 1 and they get a Child ID in your system; is that right?
- 2 A. That's correct.
- 3 Q. But here -- and I don't think there's any suggestion
- 4 that Ruach Music were a particularly big client of
- 5 Whistl -- there was no Child ID for you, in relation to
- 6 this particular parcel or these sets of parcels?
- 7 A. That's correct. There's usually a tipping point where
- 8 Whistl would want to track volume of a certain number,
- 9 so they will assign a Child ID, but they will be dealing
- 10 with thousands of retailers, so they would only do it
- 11 where it makes sense to do it.
- 12 Q. So the direct interface that you would have in, I think
- you indicated, probably 90 per cent of your business
- 14 with the retailer --
- 15 A. Correct.
- 16 Q. -- you are relying here in the 10 per cent, the
- 17 Whistl-type case, on the reseller, here Whistl, doing
- all of the interface with the seller of the goods?
- 19 A. Correct.
- 20 Q. You are -- I'm sure I'm doing a disservice to the
- 21 complexity -- but, basically, you are taking the parcel
- from A to B and doing little more?
 - 23 A. Correct. The parcel would be injected into our hub and
- 24 we will take responsibility of it to get it into the
- customer's hands in the final mile.

| 1 2 3 4 5 | Q. | Although there is helpful detail in your statement in relation to this, does it come to this, that your evidence to this Inquiry would be that Evri was wholly unaware that this parcel originated from Hunting & Knives |
|-----------------------|----|--|
| 6 | ٨ | Absolutely. |
| | Α. | • |
| 7 | Q. | and wholly unaware that it contained a bladed item? |
| 8 | Α. | Absolutely. |
| 9 | Q. | You would say, no doubt, that at no stage did Whistl or, |
| 10 | | for that matter, anyone else higher up in the supply |
| 11 | | chain, inform you that it did or might contain a bladed item? |
| 12 | | |
| 13 | Α. | Correct. |
| 14 | Q. | I want to ask you one aspect about this. Could we have |
| 15 | | on the screen, please, RUAM000003. You will see here, |
| 16 | | and I think you have seen this, the statement of |
| 17 | | Mr Henderson |
| 18 | Α. | Correct. |
| 19 | Q. | of Ruach Music and could we go, please, to page 5 |
| 20 | | within this and paragraph 18. I think it's towards the |
| 21 | | bottom of the page. Mr Henderson is dealing here with |
| 22 | | the very early orders, I think, from Mr Martínez of |
| 23 | | Hunting & Knives/Ageo, and he says: |
| 24 25 | | "Our records show that in March 2022 there were 22 separate orders (containing 23 products) shipped by Ageo |
| | | 81 |
| 1 | | Mr Martínez's evidence that the overwhelming majority if |
| 2 | | not every single up with of those items, are knives. So |
| 3 | | Mr Henderson's evidence is that that went to Whistl. |
| 4 | | Knowing the systems as you do, would that |
| 5 | | information also have gone to Evri or not? |
| 6 | A. | Not. We have a pre-advised standard specific, |
| 7 | | technical, pre-advised standard. That would not be |
| 8 | | passed through, that standard. |
| 9 | Q. | The pre-advised standard, if it doesn't contain |
| 10 | | information like this that would have been available to |
| 11 | | Whistl and obviously I will ask Mr Polglass about |
| 12 | | it but what does the pre-advised information contain, |
| 13 | | if it does not contain information like this? |
| 14 | A. | Generally it's the parcel number, the address and the |
| 15 | | service that that parcel has been contracted on. |
| 16 | Q. | So in |
| 17 | A. | Sorry, it will also include some geographic round |
| 18 | | sorting information for our hubs to know which round to |
| 19 | | sort that parcel on, through the automation. |
| 20 | Q. | So in terms of the filter down of information, this is |
| 21 | | detail that gets filtered out between you and Whistl? |
| 22 | A. | Correct. |
| 23 | Q. | Is there any reason why that happens? Would it not be |
| 24 | | useful for you to at least have this on your systems? |

No. It's just not part of our customer journey. When

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1 October 2025 to our facility as one consignment ... under this 1 2 integration, and I can see that the descriptions for 3 products included in this consignment did include a reference to 'knives' and similar references." 4 5 He gives an exhibit, which I'm going to go to in 6 a moment, but I will just read on: 7 "This information was provided by Ageo for the 8 purposes of onward shipping." q So Mr Henderson's accepting that this information 10 has gone from Ageo to his company, and then he says 11 "Whistl as the nominated courier would have also 12 13 received a record of this description on its system. 14 Because we have an online integration with all of our couriers, realtime data is passed from our warehouse 15 16 management system to the courier at point of 17 dispatch/label creation." 18 Before I ask you anything about this, could we just 19 have the exhibit on the screen, which is RUAM000006 20 please. Could we have the text, please, at the top of 21 the page highlighted. Now, this is the constant 22 frustration of a spreadsheet printed out, that you will 23 see that the column is cut off, but if you look down the 24 product name there, even though sometimes the word 25 "knife" is cut off in the description, it's evident from 1 we notify a customer it's all about when a parcel is 2 entering our network and when it's likely to be 3 delivered, the time slot it will be delivered and giving 4 the customer choice of controls if they're not going to 5 be in. There is no reason for us to need to know what's 6 in that parcel because we prohibit anything that's 7 dangerous. 8 Q. Yes, so far as that goes. But if this information had 9 been passed on, it would have been a clear warning to 10 you as a company that something had gone wrong because 11 the wrong type of materials were in this order?

12 A. Correct, correct, but pre-advice works in -- in our 13 industry, we're dealing with 4 million parcels a day. 14 We're one of the largest e-commerce economies in the 15 world, 7 billion in the year. Most people will be ordering their deliveries late at night and expecting 16 17 that parcel to be delivered first thing in the morning. So we will receive electronic information of the parcel 18 that's coming and it is purely about the speed of 19 20 service and where it is going and the contracted nature. 21

That parcel will live under our roof for approximately two minutes. It will get knocked off -sorted off the back of one trailer, go through the automation and on to another. So we don't -- we wouldn't do anything with that information within

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| 1 | a parcel because of it's the contracted information |
|---|---|
| 2 | we're interested in: where is it going and what speed o |
| 3 | service |

- Q. One could understand why that is the main focus and, in
 fairness to you as a company, you do have guidance, that
 we will come on to, that makes clear that you don't
 carry knives. But, again, I want to test and probe
 deliberately the systems to see whether there's scope
 for improvement.
- 10 A. Yes.
- Q. Is there not the scope for a technological solution to
 this in terms of, for example, having these product
 names and having an Al system that checks for flagged
 language, of which, for you, knives would be one?
- A. There is definitely a possibility for improvement, if we 15 16 had that information. I don't think it would be 17 a silver bullet. Our recommendation is, if you want to 18 stop this, the place to stop it is at the point of sale 19 and, if a retailer can't control the point of sale and 20 ensure it's injected into a network that's capable of 21 delivering knives, then we should ban the sale of knives 22

If we had this information, of course we could filter for that. All is becoming more intelligent. It would have to be something that operated at scale. It

1 a quarter.

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When we opt through a reseller, those activities aren't carried by us. This is very much a cheaper transactional rate and the expectation is that that operation is performed by the reseller, it's part of their value add in that supply chain.

7 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: What is an in-plant on the client's8 warehouse?

9 **A.** So we would have a client account manager dedicated to that client who would spend part of their time in the client's premises, in their warehouse, understanding the product type, understanding the packaging and the presentation of that and the loading of vehicles, so we ensure we have a quality experience for that client and the customers of that client.

16 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: This is for the 90 per cent?

17 **A.** Yes.

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18 MR MOSS: Yes. It is a technical area so, if you can use19 plain English wherever you can to explain the process --

20 A. Sure, sorry.

21 Q. -- it will help everyone.

Returning to this particular parcel you explain in paragraph 15 of your statement that, having received the Inquiry's request, you searched the barcode for this parcel delivery but there is no record now linked to it

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would be a significant investment but we could do that, yes.

The challenge, I think, would be for the retailers to set up their systems to pass that information through in a timely fashion.

6 Q. The system would only be as good as the information that7 got passed on?

got passed on?
A. Correct, and I imagine the larger the retailer, the more efficient they will be. The challenge you will have is when you go to smaller retailers and smaller manufacturers, et cetera. A lot of that would be

manual. One man's "kitchen knife" could be another

man's "kitchen utensil". So data input could be a risk.

Q. In terms of the system that was involved, were you ever
 aware of any sort of spot checking being done by higher
 up the supply chain of the type of delivery that you

were doing? So if this should have been age verified,
were you ever aware of Ageo, for example, checking with

19 customers that it had been age verified on delivery?

A. We were unaware of Ageo being down that supply chain, so
no. If you're asking me generally, if this is one of

our clients, we would have an in-plant in that client's

23 warehouse who would be on the floor once every 30 days,

and a client of a larger size would have

a board-to-board representative who would meet once

held on your systems; is that correct?

2 A. That is correct.

1

Q. You set it out in your statement -- I don't think we
need to bring it up -- that the reason for that -please correct me if I am wrong -- but the reason for
that is simply because of the way that your data systems
work, that you, after a time, delete data that you
shouldn't hold for data protection reasons, and this has
been caught by that deletion.

10 A. Absolutely.

11 Q. So you are not saying to this Inquiry that it wasn't
12 delivered by Evri, you accept, I think, that it would
13 have been, but you don't have any data now about the
14 delivery itself?

15 A. That's correct.

Q. We have heard from data that is retained by Whistl, that
their data suggests that the parcel was handed to Evri
on 25 October and it was made, the delivery, at 9.51 on
26 October 2023 at the first attempt and if that is what
the Whistl data shows, I don't suppose that you would
disagree with it?

22 A. Absolutely not.

Q. Insofar as it matters, do you know -- you say in your
 statement that the data retention for you is, I think,
 13 months. Is that an industry standard? It seems

| 1 | | a relatively short period of time. | | | |
|----|-----|--|--|--|--|
| 2 | A. | So we separate transactional data from personal data. | | | |
| 3 | | So the transactional data, the billing of it, is kept | | | |
| 4 | | for seven years or longer, for tax purposes. But | | | |
| 5 | | anything associated with the final mile delivery, we are | | | |
| 6 | | obliged to remove and we settled on 13 months because | | | |
| 7 | | it's a period where no claim or any issue that's | | | |
| 8 | | maybe raised by the recipient will be closed by that | | | |
| 9 | | time. | | | |
| 10 | Q. | Thank you. I want to turn now to some detail about your | | | |
| 11 | | contractual relationship with Whistl. You have had | | | |
| 12 | | business with them for about ten years? | | | |
| 13 | A. | Yes, I think it's longer actually but, yes, ten years, | | | |
| 14 | | for the purposes of this. | | | |
| 15 | Q. | If we can have on the screen, please, EVRI000003. If we | | | |
| 16 | | can just go on to the second page, please. We see at | | | |
| 17 | | the bottom of the page that an email was going from | | | |
| 18 | | a Matthew Swift sorry, could we just have it back as | | | |
| 19 | | it was. So it's going from Matthew Swift on | | | |
| 20 | | 19 September to Evri effectively, it's Hermes at that | | | |
| 21 | | time. | | | |
| 22 | A. | Yes. | | | |
| 23 | Q. | But then saying thank you, if we can enlarge it: | | | |
| 24 | | "Hi Both, | | | |
| 25 | | "As the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 will come | | | |
| | | 89 | | | |
| | | | | | |
| 1 | A. | Correct. | | | |
| 2 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: Which paragraph is that? | | | |
| 3 | MR | MOSS: Paragraph 11, sir. | | | |
| 4 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you. | | | |
| 5 | MR | MOSS: Could we have on screen, please, EVRI000004. This | | | |
| 6 | | is that contract and we can see that it is not signed | | | |
| 7 | | and you deal with that in your statement, but the reason | | | |
| 8 | | for my bringing it up could we just look at page 14, | | | |
| 9 | | please. Page 14. At clause 4.9, if that could be | | | |
| 10 | | enlarged please; | | | |
| 11 | | "The client warrants" | | | |
| 12 | | The "client" here would be Whistl? | | | |
| 13 | A. | Correct. | | | |
| 14 | Q. | "The client warrants that the goods contained in any | | | |
| 15 | | Parcel shall not contain | | | |
| 16 | | "4.9.1 any product with a blade which is capable of | | | |
| 17 | | causing a serious injury to a person which involves the | | | |
| 18 | | cutting of that person's skin" | | | |
| 19 | | Then 4.9.2 deals with corrosive substances under the | | | |
| 20 | | Offensive Weapons Act. | | | |
| 21 | | So the significance, if any, of this contract is | | | |
| 22 | | that, if it was governing your relationship with Whistl, | | | |
| 23 | | there was a formal warranty from Whistl to you that | | | |
| 24 | | parcels would not contain bladed items | | | |
| | | • | | | |

| The Southport Inquiry | | | 1 October 202 | |
|-----------------------|----|-----|---|--|
| | 1 | | into force aboutly | |
| | 1 | | into force shortly | |
| | 2 | | "In response to this new legislation, and to help | |
| | 3 | | our customers who want to send parcels contain certain | |
| | 4 | | bladed items (for example, knives, blades or axes), can | |
| | 5 | | you confirm if you have a different set of services to | |
| se | 6 | | manage this and are there additional charges involved?" | |
| | 7 | | Then asking for you to give some detail about that, | |
| | 8 | | about how it would be run in terms of challenging age, | |
| | 9 | | and so on. | |
| ur | 10 | | If we go to the top of the page, it looks like there | |
| | 11 | | may have been a bit of a chaser: | |
| | 12 | | "Can I please get confirmation of your stance | |
| | 13 | | "I am assuming it's a straight no but need this | |
| | 14 | | confirming please." | |
| we | 15 | | Then if we go to the first page, there was what | |
| | 16 | | might be thought to be a pretty unequivocal response | |
| | 17 | | from your Senior Business Development Manager: | |
| | 18 | | "Unfortunately we are not able to handle this work." | |
| | 19 | A. | That's correct. That gentleman is the in-plant, he is | |
| | 20 | | the gentleman that manages the relationship with Whistl | |
| | 21 | | on our behalf. | |
| | 22 | Q. | Thank you. You say that can be taken from the | |
| | 23 | | screen in paragraph 11 of your statement that Evri | |
| | 24 | | provides services to Whistl under a contract which | |
| | 25 | | started on 1 February 2023; is that right? 90 | |
| | | | | |
| | 1 | Q. | or at least bladed items falling within the | |
| | 2 | | description of 4.9.1; is that right? | |
| | 3 | A. | That's right. | |
| | 4 | Q. | That can be taken off the screen, thank you. | |
| 4. This | 5 | | You say in paragraph 11 that the contract wasn't | |
| | 6 | | signed but was sent to Whistl's Director of Commercial | |
| n | 7 | | Operations on 7 February 2023. | |
| | 8 | | Sir, for your note, that's EVRI000005 but I don't | |
| | 9 | | suggest we bring it up. | |
| | 10 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much. | |
| | 11 | MR | MOSS: And was subject to commercial negotiation and | |
| | 12 | | agreement; is that right? | |
| | 13 | A. | That is correct, yes. | |
| | 14 | Q. | You may be aware that Mr Polglass of Whistl takes | |
| | 15 | | a different view of this and he says | |
| f | 16 | | Sir, for your note, we will come to it with him | |
| | 17 | | obviously, but it is WHI000009 at paragraph 12. | |
| | 18 | | He says that: | |
| the | 19 | | "The document had been provided to Whistl in | |
| | 20 | | February 2023 for review, but it was still under | |
| | 24 | | manufication its specific towns had not been someod by | |

negotiation, its specific terms had not been agreed by October 2023 (and in fact, this document was not agreed afterwards ...). The unsigned 2023 contract contains a clause relating to bladed products which was a new clause from Evri and had not been in previous contracts

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25 A. Correct.

which had been provided to us."

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2 What do you say about that?

- A. Well, that is not my understanding. The commercial terms were certainly applied at that time and were gratefully received. Our website is absolutely clear on prohibited items and that is reflected also on Whistl's website and, of course, we have the note where we are rejecting bladed items. We do not carry bladed items. We have never carried bladed items. The whole industry 10 knows we don't carry bladed items, hence the approach 11 from Whistl in 2019 asking would we consider, to which
- 12 we said no. 13 Q. I don't want to elevate this difference of view between 14 you and Mr Polglass, and between Evri and Whistl, too 15 much because it's plain from Whistl's evidence, which we 16 will come to after yours, that they were aware that Evri 17 didn't have age verified and didn't allow knives. 18 I think the difference is whether this is a contractual 19 warranty to this effect.
- 20 A. Exactly.
- 21 Q. But could I just ask you this: you have spoken about the 22 2.5 million parcels, but you and Whistl are two of the 23 big players in this area in the UK; would you agree?
- 24 Α. Yes, yes.

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25 Q. It might be thought somewhat surprising and perhaps

have it up I think, but that slightly more complex language about "capable of piercing the skin" I think has been simplified and your current contractual terms just say:

"The client warrants and undertakes that the goods contained in any parcel shall not contain any product with a blade".

Is that right?

- 9 A. Correct, yes.
- 10 Q. Do you understand that to be the clear current 11 contractual position with Whistl, as opposed to what was 12 in place in 2023?
- 13 Α. I would have to check that with my legal counsel but 14 I expect so.
- 15 Q. Can you just -- again, thumbnail sketch please, but can 16 you just -- coming away from the legalities and the 17 legal detail, how does it work in practice? What would 18 the expectations be of how Whistl and any supplier 19 higher up the supply chain -- what would your 20 expectations have been about how in practice they should 21 ensure that prohibited items didn't get put in parcels 22 for you to deliver, because you don't have sight of 23 what's inside the parcel and you don't necessarily even 24 have a description?
- 25 No, and we can't open a parcel either -- to check Α. 95

1 somewhat concerning that there's a dispute between you 2 as to the contractual position in relation to bladed 3 items. On a safety and precautionary first basis, 4 that's something which should be extremely plain on the 5 face of agreements, shouldn't it?

- 6 A. It's not typical. Over 90 per cent of our contracts are 7 contracted, you know, with written, signed contracts, 8 but this is also something that does happen and it 9 typically happens where resellers are involved. I think 10 they find they have more contractual fluidity around 11 rates and volumes when they don't sign a contract. But, 12 you know, the warranty is an issue between us and them. 13 What is black and white is we do not carry weapons, we
- 14 do not carry bladed weapons and Whistl were well aware 15 that we did not carry a bladed weapon. 16 Q. Yes, but it's not a good situation that two of the big
- 17 players cannot agree to what the actual contractual terms were around bladed items. So what's the answer to 18 19 my question? That is something that you would expect to 20 be clear in the contractual terms between you and 21 Whistl; would you not agree? 22 A. Ideally, we would want all of our contracts to be
- 23 contracted and signed, yes.
- 24 Q. Your current standard client terms you deal with in 25 paragraph 13 of your statement. Again, we don't need to

either, under the Postal Services Act.

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we would work with that client and understand what they are carrying. We would look at their product in their warehouses as well, to see how it is processed and how it is packaged and how it is presented. We would even look at how it is stacked within their vehicles, the time at which their vehicles arrive at our hubs, so that we can unpack their product and process them through our hubs safely. There are certain types of products that we wouldn't put on our automation, for example. So we agree standard type of products but, anything beyond the norm, you would have to look at and work it out and would receive a different price as well, depending on how it had to be handled throughout the operation.

But for a normal thing, we would be working closely with the client, we would understand what they were carrying, we would be in their warehouse, seeing what they were carrying, how they were packaging it and how they were presenting it to us at our hub. From that point on, we're then responsible for delivery.

- 22 Q. Thank you. But in this type of delivery, where you're 23 acting for a reseller, you are completely removed from 24 that, you are just taking it from A to B?
- 25 **A**. Correct, so the reseller is operating in that area and

- should -- the reseller is doing that job. 1
- 2 Q. You covered some of it but turning to the checks on the
- 3 parcels that may be conducted, you mentioned a moment
- 4 ago that, in terms of carrying out any spot checks, did
- 5 I understand correctly, you simply would not be
- 6 permitted in law to open up a parcel and do a check?
- 7 A. Unless it was suspicious, correct.
- 8 Q. Even though age-verified products shouldn't be sent
- 9 through Evri, what happens and is there a process for
- a situation where a package, in fact, might be marked 10
- "Aged 18 plus" or "Bladed items"? 11
- 12 Yes, there is. We have a process where that parcel A.
- 13 would be segregated and the client account manager for
- 14 whoever shipped that parcel would be contacted. On
- 15 finding -- on being contacted by this Inquiry and being
- 16 told that we had, in fact, delivered a blade, we
 - revisited those processes and we have now put an extra
- 18 process in place where, if a bladed item is found, we
- 19 will put that client on stop until we understand how
- 20 that item got through into our network and to be assured
- 21 that there were no others. If we couldn't reach
- 22 satisfactory assurances, we'd terminate the client.
- 23 Q. All right, so that's a post-Inquiry request
- 24 improvement --
- 25 Α. Absolutely.

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- 1 is a red flag because it shouldn't be with you?
- 2 A. They are briefed to a standard but one of the learnings
- 3 we have taken from this as well is to polish up those
- 4 trainings and push out a formal training piece to all
- 5 couriers with a reminder. So with a client, we will
- 6 send out a biannual reminder that we don't carry
 - weapons, so not only are we into a client's supply chain
- 8 but we also write to them twice a year, effectively,
- 9 just challenging what they carry.
- 10
- With couriers, they will be trained -- when they are 11 onboarded currently but probably not again -- so we've
- 12 revisited our processes and we're in the process of
- 13 rolling out through our digital platform a reminder on
- 14 knives that will be there and constantly there for
- 15
- 16 Q. Thank you. Again, you have explained in the depot that
- 17 that is where -- is it for the first time -- that you've
- 18 got some manual handling of the parcels?
- 19 A. Predominantly. So there's some -- we will empty
- 20 a parcel from the back of a vehicle onto an automated
- kind of like -- some automation. That is moved at pace.
- 22 So someone does handle it getting it out of the back of
- 23 a vehicle but, in reality, that is a really fast
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25 When it gets to the depot, they are manually handled

- Q. -- and thank you for that.
- 2 Sticking with what would have been in place at the 3 time in 2023, the autumn of 2023, you say it would be segregated. Would it be caught in your delivery centres 4
- 5 or warehouse or would that be reliant on the driver
- 6 spotting it? How would it be spotted and segregated?
- 7 It would likely be spotted in the depot. So we operate
- 8 a hub and spoke kind of model, so parcels come into our
- 9 hub, our hub will process a million parcels a day, we
- 10 have three of these and we burst up to four at Christmas
- 11 periods. They then sort to depots, which are more
- 12 regional, so we've got 30 regional depots. The
- 13 processes in the depots are handled manually. At that
- 14 point, if it was obvious from the packaging or the feel
- 15 of an item that it was suspicious, it would get
- 16 separated there. That would be the likely time it would
- 17 be separated and the next time would be when it hits the
- 18 delivery unit where our couriers come in to collect
- 19 parcels.

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- 20 Q. All right. Now, I don't want to go down this line too
- 21 much because the context, I think, is likely to suggest
- 22 that there wasn't any such marking on this label, but
- 23 would your depot staff and would your driver couriers
- 24 who are actually doing the delivery -- are they all
- 25 trained that anything for Evri that says "Age verified"

- 1 and sorted to rounds.
 - **Q.** Thank you. For the other two machetes which were
- 3 delivered age verified, the labelling varied, but there
- 4 was, on both of them, clear wording of "18 plus".
- 5 Again, just looking at what may be practical, is there
- 6 any technological solution here that your systems might
- 7 look out for on scanning -- because a lot of this is
- 8 going to be scanning and it may be barcode based, but
- scanning for "18 plus" would be a red flag going through 9
- 10 what I'm afraid, in my layperson's terms, I'm thinking
- 11 of as a conveyor belt?
- 12 A. We're starting to see some technology utilising AI that
- 13 can capture things on images but, at that kind of speed,
- 14 I do not think that would be a fail-safe, no. We use AI
- 15 in the field to recognise faces, for example, in a photo
- 16 and I would say it's pretty accurate, 98 per cent, but
- 17 it does take time. It probably takes about 10 seconds
- 18 to do.

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- 19 Now, in that point in a hub, the parcel will have passed the scanner. So for you to have that kind of 20 21 technology in a hub, if it improved, it would take
- 22 a little bit of time. It would probably mean that
- 23 a parcel would have to go round a hub twice. You would
- 24 halve the capacity of every installation in the country
 - if that was implemented but, at the moment, I don't

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think that technology exists to do it adequately.
 You could put it in the label. The label we read
 really quickly. If it was in the label specification,
 we would identify it and we would dump that product into
 a dump chute and handle it accordingly.

6 Q. So when you say you could put it in the label, the label7 would read quickly?

- 8 A. Correct but it would be a change, yes.
- Q. It could have a specification saying that the label must
 indicate something like "Not age verified" and you could
 check that it's got that?
- A. Yes, we could put that in and, obviously, because we don't handle it, we would basically dump all that
 product and take it out of our network at that point.
 That would be a change, quite a simple change technologically in our network, but it would be
- 18 Q. We're going to come back to that perhaps in a slightlydifferent context.

a significant change, I suspect, for retail.

So coming to the reflections -- could we just have on the screen EVRI000002 -- that you have given at the end of your statement. We appreciate, Mr Ashworth, that the Inquiry -- page 6, please.

We appreciate that there was quite a quick turnaround time for your statement. Looking at the

delivery of bladed items they sell online in a way that ensures that they are not sold to a person under the age of 18, are not handed to a person under 18 when delivered. The delivery that is the subject of my witness statement shows that there are practical difficulties with this approach, and I would suggest that these difficulties are such that it may be right for the law to prevent the sale of these items online or in any other way at distance."

Does that remain your primary reflection --

11 A. Absolutely.

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- 12 Q. -- that you would, at least, raise the question of
 13 whether knives should be available for sale online at
 14 all?
- A. Absolutely, and if we're looking for practical measures
 that we can implement, that would be quick to implement
 and easy to police.
- 18 Q. Thank you. Whether that, in fact, would be the case is
 19 something we may wish to explore with policy witnesses
 20 later with the Inquiry.

Can I ask you about one of the things that has been raised by Mr Polglass, our next witness.

- 23 A. Of course.
- Q. Short of a ban, he raises the possibility that something
 called the Product Harmonisation Code, or the Product
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reflections, what you appear to be saying is:

"Neither myself or anyone else at Evri knew, or could have known, that Evri had delivered anything that could have been connected to [the] awful actions ..."

You go on to say, at paragraph 18:

"From my knowledge of Evri's business and its operations generally and specifically in respect of Whistl ... I am certain that neither Evri or any of its people could have known that it delivered [the item] for Ageo ... and what the item was that was being delivered."

Then in terms of recommendations for the future, you said in paragraph 19:

"The Request asks whether I have any recommendations for improvements that could be made that would be practicable and make a difference to prevent delivery companies delivering knives to children. I do not feel I am able to make any recommendation because Evri is not part of the supply chain for bladed items."

Just pausing there, that's your "We don't actually operate in that part of the market"?

- 22 A. Correct.
- 23 Q. But you go on to say:

"Nevertheless, I would say that the law rightly puts the onus on retailers to make arrangements for the 102

- Harmonised Code, could be expanded. Now, for those of us who are lay people in this world, is that effectively a standardised code that is used for cross-border deliveries because it tells customs and those delivering across borders the type of goods that's contained in the package?
- 7 A. Yes, it is.
- 8 Q. That is a requirement for parcels coming in and out of9 the country, again in simplistic terms; is that right?
- 10 A. That is correct, yes.
- 11 **Q.** Do you know what the position is in relation to knives12 on that? Do knives have a specific harmonisation code?
- 13 **A.** Yes, there's -- pretty -- I'm pretty *au fait* with it.
- 14 There are about seven or eight classification for
- 15 knives, from table knives, folding knives, mechanical
- 16 knives, and they all have a classification code that is
- 17 submitted with the digital remittance --
- Q. So it's quite granular, actually. It's not just one for
 knives. Different types of knives, there are table
 knives which may be lower concern but a tactical knife,
- 21 or something like that, would come under a different
- 22 category?
- A. Correct. The there may be thousands of descriptors from
 all sorts of goods, but there are about seven or eight

25 for knives.

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- Q. So Mr Polglass' suggestion that the PHC might be thought 1 2 about being expanded to domestic parcel deliveries, so 3 that that's a code that's required to be shown, to 4 a layperson might have a degree of attraction because it 5 would have allowed, simply by scanning, Evri, for 6 example, to know that the package contained knives, 7 which would be a red flag, "There's a problem because we 8 shouldn't be taking knives at all"?
- 9 A. Correct. If that data was accurate and existed, that 10 would have worked, correct.
- Now, it would depend upon the accuracy of the person 11 Q. 12 whose responsibility it is to make the declaration of 13 the nature of their goods, yes?
- 14 A. Correct.

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- 15 Q. So if -- as to which we might hear some evidence --16 Mr Martínez had actually said, "This is cutlery", that 17 may not have helped. But if had been that "This is 18 a hunting knife", or "a machete", or something of that 19 kind, and that's scannable on a barcode system, that 20 potentially would be useful for a company like Evri as 21 a safeguard.
- 22 A. It would be and it's something that we could make 23 a change to read that kind of information and it 24 wouldn't be a significant change for us to do that but 25 the supply chain changes would be huge. 105

would need changes to accommodate such a change.

So you would be looking at a long time -- last time I changed a label, just a label in this industry -- and we had to do that just because of the sheer volume of parcels, we had to introduce one extra digit -- it took four years to wash through retail, just for the label, because all retailers have their own challenges, their own financial challenges, their own IT challenges, and it takes a long time to pass these things through. So -- and then, ultimately, you are still reliant on the data input being correct, and the last time I looked at HS codes -- and it's a little bit fuzzy -- but major manufacturers associate a HS code with an item. Minor manufacturers don't and so it would then be the burden of the retailer to associate the HS code.

Major retailers would do this with efficiency and compliance but minor retailers would be -- it would be down to the warehouse operative to apply the right code and there are thousands of these codes, and one man's "kitchen knife" could be another man's "kitchen utensil", and I would worry about -- I think it would improve but it would not be a silver bullet, in my opinion.

24 Q. It may be that what one is looking at here is additional 25 precautions. I'm not raising it with you to suggest 107

Q. So help us with that, what would that change entail, 2 first of all, for Evri, to your understanding? This is 3 why we wanted to come into your knowledge of the 4 industry.

A. Technically, we have a file that is embedded within the label, we will call it pre-advice, so the label will say it on its own, so it's a stand-alone piece of pre-advice that can be digitally scanned, and it will be received in the pre-advice file, which is a file that is received from the retailer before we see the label -- the parcel itself, so that's what we do. We would have to put an extra field in that label and we could probably do that within a few months' worth of work.

The challenge is that every single label in the UK would have to be changed. So every retailer that's got that label setup in their systems would have to do a system change. They would also have to do a system change for the digital remittance. They would also have to be a system change for the point of sale and for the digital entry and make all those things done. It's quite a complex chain and, when you're talking about, you know, historic retail, retailers that have been around for many, many years, they don't have a simple IT ecosystem. It will be an ecosystem of tens or sometimes hundreds of IT systems that are tightly coupled, that 106

1 that it would be fail-safe but is your evidence that, as 2 an additional precaution, potentially that is viable 3 but, if I have understood correctly, the lead-in time 4 for you would be limited but you would warn in terms of 5 practicability that, at the retail end, there might need 6 to be a very long lead-in time because that would be 7 a complex change to effect?

- 8 A. Correct, and cost to those retailers as well, yes.
- Q. Once the complexity and the cost change of making the 9 10 change had been done, would it then though be relatively 11 straightforward? It's just one further piece of 12 information?
- 13 **A.** It would be picked up on the automation and put down 14 a dump chute. The scanning would drive the action on 15
- MR MOSS: Thank you. I'm just going to look to my left to 16 17 see if there are any questions that I haven't covered. 18 I see shakes of heads.

19 Mr Ashworth, those are my questions. Sir, do you 20 have any questions for this witness?

21 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: I don't.

> Thank you, Mr Ashworth. You have responded to a request from this Inquiry within a very short period of time and I'm very grateful to you for that, along with your attendance and the evidence you have given

- 1 today, which has been very helpful. Thank you very 2 much.
- 3 I will rise and we will sit again at 2.00.
- 4 (1.02 pm)
- 5 (The lunch break)
- 6 (2.02 pm)
- NIGEL POLGLASS (affirmed) 7
- 8 Questioned by MR MOSS
- 9 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much. Please have
- 10 a seat.
- Thank you. 11 Α.
- SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, Mr Moss. 12
- 13 MR MOSS: Thank you, sir. Just start by giving us your full
- name, if you would, please? 14
- A. Nigel Graham Polglass. 15
- 16 Q. Thank you. Can we have on the screen, please,
- 17 WHI000009. Mr Polglass, do we see here on screen the
- statement that you have provided to the Inquiry, dated 18
- 19 15 September this year?
- 20 Α.
- Q. Are the contents of that statement true to the best of 21
- 22 your knowledge and belief?
- 23 A. They are.
- 24 Q. Just keep your voice up just a little, if you would.
- 25 You tell us in paragraph 1 of your statement that you 109
- 1 explain that Whistl contracts with customers to provide
- 2 them with access to a delivery service and the
- 3 information they need to use it, but you don't yourself
- 4 sell goods nor do you actually dispatch the goods in the
- 5 parcels; is that right?
- 6 A. Correct.
- 7 You don't carry out the final mile delivery either, by
- 8 which we have understood the delivery of the parcels
- 9 going to the door?
- 10 A. Correct.
- 11 Q. So although most of us in the room will be familiar with
- 12 seeing Whistl's name on parcels, is it an unfair summary
- 13 to say that, in a sense, you are a form of middleman in
- 14 parcels being delivered?
- 15 A. Yes, we are.
- Q. Thank you. You contract, I think, with very well-known 16
- names, Evri -- obviously we have been hearing about --17
- 18 but also Yodel and Royal Mail, to do the actual delivery
- 19 to the door?
- 20 A. Yes, and others.
- 21 Q. Again, we don't need to go into the detail of this but
- 22 the outsider thinking, "Well, why is there a business
- 23 like this? Why doesn't the seller just contract with
- 24 Royal Mail, Evri, Yodel?", presumably you can extract

25 good prices because of the volume?

- 1 are the Chief Operating Officer for the Whistl Group; is
- 2 that correct?
- 3 A. Correct, correct.
- 4 Q. You are also a statutory director of the Whistl Group of
- 5 companies?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. You have worked for the company, I understand, for over
- 8
- A. Yes. 9
- 10 Q. What did you do before that?
- A. I worked for an American business called Ceridian, where 11
- I was the UK Managing Director. Prior to that, I worked 12
- 13 for Hays Plc and, prior to that, I worked at Royal Mail.
- 14 Q. Were those also jobs involved in the logistics and
- 15 parcel type areas?
- 16 A. Royal Mail was and Hays Plc was partially.
- 17 Q. Thank you. So like our previous witness, would it be
- right that you hold a really quite senior position in 18
- 19 one of the big players in parcel management in the UK --
- 20 A. I think that's fair, yes.
- Q. -- with a good knowledge of the industry. 21
- 22 A. I believe so.
- 23 Q. Thank you. You explain a little about Whistl's business
- 24 in your statement: parcel delivery management. But
- 25 there are some differences, I think, to Evri. You

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- 1 Yes. Larger enterprise businesses will contract direct
- 2 with a carrier like Evri. Small to medium size
- 3 businesses tend to contract through someone like us
- 4 because we can get a good wholesale price for the volume
- 5 of parcels we handle.
- 6 Q. Thank you. You can also assist through IT with the
- 7 interface of providing the requisite information to the
- 8 delivery companies and have the IT to help that being
- done in bulk? 9
- 10 A. Yes.
- Q. Thank you. 11
- 12 How then, just in general terms, by way of
- 13 introduction, does it work in terms of the requirements
- 14 about how the goods should be packaged and any
- 15 restrictions that should be imposed on what is sold or
- 16 sent?

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- 17 A. When we sell a new parcel contract to a client our
- 18 salesperson will have visited with that client, they
- 19 will understand what it is that they are shipping, or
- 20 wish to ship. They will understand the sizes, the
- 21 weights, the dimensions of those parcels and, as
- a result, will recommend to that prospective client the 23 range of carriers that they may wish to use. They don't
- 24 have to pick one, they can pick multiple carriers, if
- 25 they wish.

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- 1 Q. Thank you. Presumably, within that, some carriers will2 be quicker but more expensive?
- 3 A. Yes, that's true. There are those that provide
- 4 a 24-hour service, those that provide anything down to
- 5 a 48-hour service, some that provide age verification or
- 6 proof of delivery, et cetera, so there's a range of
- 7 services.
- 8 Q. If the system was working properly, therefore, would
- 9 Whistl get to understand, at an early stage in the
- 10 relationship with a new customer, if that customer was
- 11 intending to dispatch bladed items?
- 12 **A.** Yes.
- 13 Q. You would expect to be told that?
- 14 A. Yes.
- 15 Q. I think you have -- you explain in your paragraph 7, we
- 16 may come on to this in detail later, but you have
- 17 information set out, I think, in a customer guide, but
- 18 also a carrier guide -- the references for which are
- 19 WHI000002 and WHI000003 respectively -- information
- 20 about restricted and prohibited items?
- 21 A. Correct.

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- 22 Q. Thank you. You go on to explain in your statement, in
- 23 paragraph 8, that for some customers you offer the first
- 24 mile delivery. Does that mean, in effect, that you will
- arrange for the parcel to be picked up from the person
- 1 items and it links the order management system to the
 - carrier management system, such that they can track the
- 3 parcels through the network. Our carrier management
- 4 system will link with our carriers, whether it is Evri
- 5 or others, and therefore a tracking of that parcel to
- 6 its delivery point can be managed.
- 7 Q. All right. Let's use Ruach Music as an example. Do
 - Ruach Music, who we will come on to, when they have
- 9 a system, they have some orders that have been made
- online and they have some data in relation to that, are
- 11 they providing that data direct to Evri, or are you the
- 12 interface, that you suck up that data and you provide it
- 13 to Evri, or is it something else altogether?
- 14 A. No, no, it's being fed in to us to produce a label for
- 15 the parcel for it to get to its destination. We feed
- that information then through to Evri or AN Other.
- 17 **Q.** Thank you. So your IT, your software, is taking the

requirements of your client, who may be the seller, and

- 19 is translating it to Evri to create the labels and your
- software then gets that back to the seller; is that how
- 20 Software their gets that back to the seller, is that not
- 21 it works?
- 22 A. Yes.
- 23 $\,$ Q. We will come on to how it would work in an order like
- 24 AR's in due course but, presumably, that is a highly
- 25 automated system?

- 1 who wants to dispatch it?
- 2 A. Yes, first mile collection, yes. We will collect
- 3 directly from a premises. A company could bring the
 - items in to us or they may have sufficient volume for
- 5 the carrier to collect directly from the premises.
- 6 Q. Might Whistl-badged lorries do that, or would that be7 Evri doing that first mile collection?
- 8 A. Typically it's Whistl, but it could be any of the
- 9 carriers that we contract with, if the volume was
- suitable and the terms were right for them to do the
- 11 collection.
- 12 Q. All right. Now, I'm sure that there are potentially
- 13 several days of lectures that could sit behind this but
- 14 I want to keep it reasonably simple and understandable,
- but -- it's paragraph 9 of your statement, can we have
- it on screen, WHI000009, page 3 -- can you just help us
- 17 to understand the basics of the information technology?
- 18 So you start by saying:

"As part of the setup of any new customer, a link will be created between the customer's order management system and Whistl's carrier management system ..."

system and Whistl's carrier managemenWhat does that mean in real terms?

- A. It means that when a seller of items has sold an item on
- 24 its order management system, it is at the same time
- 25 choosing the carrier that it wishes to use to send the
 - 114
- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. But one in which, if you wanted to have visibility of
- 3 that data and do a human eyes-on check, or run Al tools
- 4 on what the content was, you could do so?
- 5 $\,$ **A.** I'm not a technical expert but I would have thought that
- 6 was correct, yes.
- 7 Q. Thank you. So should we understand that it is the
- 8 customer, your customer, in this case Ruach, who then
- 9 physically has the label produced, that the IT will then
- 10 give them a label that they can physically print out and
- 11 apply to the packages?
- 12 A. Yes. There are variances to this, but yes.
- 13 **Q.** Thank you. In relation to that, I think you say in your
- paragraph 9, is this right, that:
- "For domestic shipments, the data for delivery isjust the name, address and contact details of the
- 17 recipient."
- 18 Is that right?
- 19 **A.** Yes.
- 20 Q. But I think in relation to -- as we will come on to --
- 21 international packages, there also needs to be the
- 22 requisite customs information which is in the form of
 - 23 a Product Harmonised Code.
 - 24 **A.** Yes.
 - 25 Q. But our previous witness, I don't know if you were

- 1 listening, was able to indicate that that's quite
- 2 granular, so it would have a code for several types of
- 3
- 4 A. Yes, I did listen to his testimony and, yes, he is
- 5 correct, there are thousands of codes and they are used
- 6 worldwide.
- 7 Q. Thank you. But what you are then passing on to Evri in
- 8 this case would be just that quite limited data about
- 9 the name, address and contact details for the delivery?
- 10 A. Yes.
- Do you have any fundamental disagreement with the way 11
- 12 which Mr Ashworth characterised it --
- 13 A.
- 14 Q. -- that really, in terms of packaging information, what
- 15 the package contained, matters of that kind, by the time
- 16 it reaches Evri in this situation, they are doing little
- 17 more than taking from A to B?
- A. That's correct. 18
- 19 But in terms of the interface that Whistl provide, it
- 20 also allows for the tracking of the parcel by the
- 21 customer?
- 22 A. Correct.
- 23 Q. Thank you. Against that background then, please, the
- 24 delivery of the machete that was ordered by AR. We're
- 25 reasonably familiar with this by now but the supply
- 1 the items that they had shown us that they handled,
- 2 which were items linked to guitars.
- 3 Q. Can I ask about that -- and obviously we will be asking
- 4 Mr Henderson in due course -- but did that make
- 5 a difference for you? You have talked about you would
- 6 visit the customer or get to know the customer in terms
- 7 of what the expectations were. We will ask Mr Henderson
- 8 about what the exact arrangement was but, if he had two
- 9 businesses in neighbouring or adjoining premises, one
- 10 was a fulfilment business and one was a guitar business
- 11 or a music business, and he has contracted with you for
- 12 the music business, does that make a difference to you,
- 13 are you concerned about that, that the parcel fulfilment
- 14 side of the business was being channelled through the
- 15 music business?
- A. I'm not aware that, at the time, we knew that 16
- 17 Mr Henderson had an alternative business within the
- 18 premises. Our contractual relationship was with Ruach
- 19 Music and it was our expectation that the items that we
- 20 would be receiving would come from them, not from
- 21 another part of the business.
- 22 Q. I follow. Can I put it this way: obviously, what has
- 23 emerged is the delivery of a knife in an inappropriate
- 24 way. If that had not emerged and you had just learned
- 25 as Whistl that Mr Henderson was putting parcels from his 119

- 1 chain, would you agree, appears to be that Hunting &
- 2 Knives, trading as Ageo, entered into an agreement with
- 3 SJ Henderson Fulfilment. You are now aware of that?
- 4 A. I'm aware of that, yes.
- 5 Q. That SJ Henderson Fulfilment shared a director with
- 6 a linked company, Ruach Music, and Ruach Music had
- 7 a contract with you, Whistl, yes?
- 8 A. Correct.
- 9 Q. It was that contract that was used and the carrier that
- 10 was chosen was Evri?
- 11 A. Correct.
- 12 Q. As we have heard, in the eventuality, there doesn't
- 13 appear to have been any warnings on the package that it
- 14 was a bladed item?
- 15 A. No.
- 16 Q. No warning on the package that it was for 18-plus?
- 17 A. No.
- 18 Q. And no age-verified delivery?
- 19 A.
- 20 Q. Is it common practice to have a supply chain that's
- 21 complex like that, or relatively complex, for a delivery
- 22 of this type of parcel?
- 23 A. It can be complicated but, typically, and as we
- 24 anticipated with this contract, our expectation was that
- 25 we were contracted with Ruach Music and were handling
 - 118
- 1 fulfilment business through his music business and the
- 2 contract with you, would that have been something that
- 3 terminated your relationship, so far as Whistl was
- 4 concerned?
- 5 A. It may not have terminated the relationship but we would
- 6 want to understand what it was that was going to be sent
- 7 from the other -- if it's another premises, I don't even
- 8 know if it is, but we would want to know the type of
- 9 goods that were coming from the fulfilment business that
- 10 Mr Henderson owned.
- 11 Q. Because, what? If you are contracting with a bricks and
- 12 mortar music business, or something which is an online
- 13 music business, you know exactly what's likely to be in
- 14 the parcels, whereas if there's a fulfilment business
- 15 with lots of different clients, you're open to greater
- 16 risk as to what might be in the parcels?
- 17 A. Yes, and we would like to understand the impact it has
- 18 on the volumes, the sizes, the weights, the dimensions
- 19 of the parcels.
- 20 Q. But would those be the principal concerns, as opposed to
- 21 safety and risk of what might be being carried?
- 22 **A**. Well, we have restrictions and prohibitors on items that
- we will carry. If we identified that there were items 24 prohibited by us, or restricted by us, we would want to
- 25 arrange either suitable carrier for the delivery of

- 1 those items or not take them at all.
- 2 Q. All right. Can I deal with that -- I was going to come
- 3 on to it later but let me deal with it now.
- We have been told -- and I think you would accept --
- 5 that Evri have never and still do not do age-verified
- 6 delivery?
- 7 A. That's correct.
- 8 Q. From what you have said, presumably for lawful knives,
- 9 do you have couriers who you can use to take --
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. -- knives.
- 12 A. Yes. Excuse me, yes, we do. So we would use
- 13 alternatives like DPD or Royal Mail.
- 14 Q. Thank you. So if I could take the example of kitchen
- 15 knives, is that something that Whistl is prepared to
- 16 arrange the delivery of?
- 17 A. Indeed we do.
- 18 Q. Yes. What about hunting knives, survival knives, knives
- 19 of that kind?
- 20 A. Well, we prohibit anything that is a weapon. So maybe
- 21 that's judgemental but, if we thought that something was
- going to be dangerous, we wouldn't want to carry it.
- 23 Q. So if it was a survival knife, that is lawful to sell in
- 24 the UK but which can only be sold to those over the age

- of 18, where there are all the restrictions -- 18-plus
- 1 special instructions for delivery; is that right?
- 2 A. No, none have been added, no.
- 3 Q. There's nothing about what to do if nobody was at home
- 4 and no instructions about leaving the parcel or not
- 5 leaving the parcel?
- 6 A. I'm sorry, I didn't catch the first part of your
- 7 question.
- 8 Q. There's nothing here about special instructions if
- 9 somebody is not in --
- 10 **A.** No.
- 11 Q. -- so whether the parcel could be left?
- 12 A. No.
- 13 Q. Obviously, had Whistl known that it was a bladed item,
- 14 it would be inappropriate for it to be left in a safe
- 15 place where anybody could collect it?
- 16 A. Completely, yes.
- 17 Q. I think you deal in your 28(b) that this gives
- 18 information that's no doubt important to the system but
- 19 not for our purposes, but things like the product weight
- 20 of the parcel; is that right?
- 21 A. Correct.
- 22 Q. Thank you. The product information is just listed as
- 23 "DROPSHIP ORDER" -- my screen has just ... thank you.
- "DROPSHIP ORDER"; do we see that there?
- 25 A. I can.

- 1 needs to be marked, bladed item needs to be marked, it
- 2 needs to be an age-verified delivery -- is that
- 3 something that Whistl will carry or not?
- 4 A. We would -- we would carry items that was using the
- 5 appropriate carrier that met all of the legal
- 6 requirements of that parcel being delivered. If it was,
- 7 as in the case here -- if we knew that there were
- 8 machetes, we wouldn't have even started a contract.
- 9 $\,$ Q. $\,$ I was going to ask about that. Machetes is a line you
- 10 won't cross, is it?
- 11 A. Well, I mean, I don't know what all the different knives
- 12 are, frankly.
- 13 Q. No, but you know what a machete is?
- 14 A. I know what a machete is. I do know we wouldn't carry
- 15 a machete.
- 16 Q. You wouldn't carry machetes, thank you.
- 17 **A.** No, not knowingly.
- 18 Q. Thank you. If we look at the data then that was
- generated in respect of the parcel, WHI000007 -- thank
- 20 you -- can you confirm that this is the data that you
- 21 would have received about the parcel?
- 22 A. It looks like it, yes. Yes, I think this is one of our
- 23 exhibits.
- 24 Q. Thank you. We see the postcode is part of the
- 25 information but there's no request on here for any
 - 12
- 1 Q. What does that signify?
- 2 A. Well, I know what it means but it's not relevant to our
- 3 processes.
- 4 Q. Just explain what the dropship process is though?
- 5 **A.** A dropship is where a fulfilment company, in this
- 6 circumstance, is acting for a seller of the product; the
- 7 item has been sold; it comes into the fulfilment
- 8 business pre-wrapped; all they're doing is putting
- 9 a label on and sending it out. So it doesn't stay in
- 10 your warehouse.
- 11 Q. So it's not being warehoused, it's in and out?
- 12 A. In and out.
- 13 Q. Hence the dropship?
- 14 **A.** Yes.
- 15 Q. There's also -- I think it's further along in column HA,
- 16 there also is the single word reference I think to
- 17 "Ageo" on this spreadsheet, which you deal with in your
- 18 statement.
- 19 **A**. Yes
- 20 Q. But at the time would you have had any understanding
- 21 about what Ageo was?
- 22 A. No, none at all.
- 23 Q. Thank you. That can come down from the screen.
- 24 You tell us in paragraph 31 that your records show
- just in excess of 30,000 items, I think, sent by Ruach

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- 1 Music through Whistl; is that correct?
- 2 A. Yes.

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- 3 Q. On your figures -- the figures for Mr Martínez and
 - others vary slightly but I'm not going to go into
- 5 that -- but on your figures, of those, 2,563 had that
- 6 reference of Ageo?
- 7 A. Yes, that's what our records show, yes.
- 8 Q. You tell us in paragraph 31 that, for early shipments,
- 9 the item was identified as for metal work, but then,
- 10 similar to the one I have just shown you, thereafter it
- just said "dropship"? 11
- 12 A. Correct.
- 13 Q. Can I ask, please, about evidence from Mr Henderson who
- 14 says in his statement -- I'm just going to read it, we
- 15 don't need to bring it up on screen -- that:
- 16 "Our records show that in March 2022 there were 22 17 separate orders containing 23 products which were
 - shipped by Ageo to the SJ Henderson facility as one
- 19 consignment."
- 20 Mr Henderson says that he accepts that the
- 21 description -- he can now see that the description for 22 those products included knives. So if we could have it
- 23 on screen, it's RUAM000006. We saw this earlier this
- 24 morning, but I should show it to you and, although it is 25
 - cut off in the relevant column, we know from the nature 125
- 1 as such.
- 2 A. I can't deny that, yes.
- 3 Q. But to be fair to you, I think what you are seeking to
- 4 explain is that in the multi-million parcel delivery
- 5 business in which you are involved, that would not be
- 6 data that would be scrutinised, first of all, by any
- 7 human being --
- 8 A. No.
- 9 Q. -- in the ordinary course of business?
- 10 **A.** And what, sorry?
- 11 Q. In the ordinary course of business.
- 12 **A.** No, it wouldn't, no.
- 13 Q. Because everything -- would this be fair, please tell me
- 14 if it's not -- but because everything is highly
- 15 automated, you don't in fact need to do anything with
- 16 this information and you wouldn't have expected this,
- 17 knowing how the operation works, to lead to anything?
- 18 A. Correct.
- 19 So does it come to this, that if somebody for some
- 20 reason had cause to look at this, it would have rung
- 21 alarm bells, yes?
- 22 A. Correct.
- 23 Q. But what you are telling us is you think it's
- 24 reasonable, in a highly automated system, that nobody

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25 did scrutinise this, notice it, or do anything about it?

- of Mr Martínez's business and the items that Ageo 2 Hunting & Knives sold, that those look like they are 3 all, or certainly the vast majority, are knives.
- 4 Now, what Mr Henderson has said in his statement about that is that, as well as that information coming
- 5 6 to Henderson, this information was provided by Ageo for
- 7 the purposes of onward shipping and Whistl as the
- 8 nominated courier would have received a record of this
- 9 description on its system; is he right about that?
- 10 A. Quite probably.
- 11 Q. It follows, if that's likely to be correct, that at
 - least in the sense that this data was transferred to
- 13 Whistl, in one sense you were on notice that at least
- 14 this consignment contained knives.
- 15 A. This is a field within the information that on
- 16 a domestic product we wouldn't refer to.
- 17 Q. Yes, but --
- 18 A. If this was going internationally, this would be
- 19 required and referred to but, domestically, this is not
- 20 a part of the information, or the data sent to us is not
- 21 something that we would, for our purposes, have
- 22 referenced.
- 23 **Q.** I understand that but my question was, in one sense, you
- 24 were on notice that this consignment contained knives
- 25 because, as a company, you received data that listed it
- 1 Well, it's one of the suggestions which we may come to
- 2 of how we might be able to improve things in part 3 because we would not scrutinise this. We would produce
- 4 a label. If we were told that the item needed age
- 5 verification, or any other particular requirement, we
- 6 would have to deal with that, but this information isn't
- 7 asking us to do that, it's just a product description
- and it's not something we reference. 8
 - The label is produced by the other information and goes through the automated process.
- 11 Q. Thank you. So if it were to be suggested that there was
- 12 a failure on Whistl's part because nobody did notice
- 13 this or scrutinise it, what would you say?
- 14 A. Well, I can't deny the data was in our hands. So,
- 15 plainly, I would like to think that we could have done
- 16 something with it but, at the time and -- it's just not
- 17 something that we would have even referenced, it
- 18 wouldn't have been pulled out of the information at all.
- 19 Q. Thank you. You helpfully and proactively raised the
- 20 thinking about the future in terms of the Product
- 21 Harmonised Code being used more widely. I think that's
- 22 what you were referring to a moment ago, yes?
- 23 A. Yes.

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- 24 Q. We will come back to that, if we may, but is there the
- 25 potential where you are receiving a product description,

- to have an IT -- whether it is AI or some other form of 1 2
- software solution -- that actually runs a simple check
- 3 for red flag words against the type of delivery? So if
- 4 an item has a product description of "knife" but your 5 system is showing no age-verified delivery, couldn't
- 6 there be a tech solution to that, that that then flags
- 7 a warning?
- 8 A. I'm sure that's possible, yes.
- 9 Q. Is that something that you are prepared to look at?
- 10 Α.
- Q. Thank you. That can be taken from the screen. 11
- 12 I think it follows from your evidence, but I should
- 13 ask you to confirm, that Whistl didn't have any direct
- 14 liaison with Ageo or Hunting & Knives?
- None at all. 15 Α.
- 16 Q. Or Marpasi SL?
- 17 A. None at all.
- 18 Q. As far as you are aware, did Ageo Wholesale, Hunting &
- 19 Knives or, for that matter, Hendersons, including Ruach
- 20 Music for these purposes, did they ever do any kind of
- 21 spot check actually testing whether the Ageo deliveries
- 22 were being age verified?
- 23 A. Not that I'm aware of, no.
- 24 You tell us that, having received the Inquiry's request,
- 25 in paragraph 15, you have carried out a search --
- 1 here, would you agree that that's deeply concerning,
- 2 that over 2,500 bladed items have been dispatched to UK
- 3 addresses, all of which should have been age verified
- 4 and probably none were?
- 5 A. Yes, I think it's very worrying, yes.
- 6 Q. In paragraph 32, looking at AR's individual parcel,
- 7 I think, due to your own data retention policies, the
- 8 photograph that would have been taken to prove the
- 9 delivery has not been retained.
- 10 A. That's correct.
- 11 Q. But the data which I put to our previous witness in
- 12 terms of when it was shipped and when it was
- 13 delivered -- the latter being more important, 9.51 on
- 14 26 October 2023 -- that data, I think, was retained by
- 15 Whistl?
- A. Yes. 16
- MR MOSS: Sir, that's paragraph 32. 17
- SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you. 18
- 19 MR MOSS: But I think it must follow that -- it's not
- 20 a criticism of you, but I think it must follow that
- 21 neither you personally nor Whistl can help with the
- 22 question of to whom that parcel was actually handed?
- 23 You can't say what person received it?
- 24 A.
- 25 Q. Turning to your contractual relationship with Evri, you

- forgive me, let me -- I will leave that if I may, 1
- 2 forgive me.
- 3 Yes, I think it's paragraph 31. You have been able 4
 - to check that no further deliveries involving Ruach
- 5 Music or Ageo appear to have been made to the same
- 6 address for AR?
- 7 A. Yes. We can only look by postcode, which will be
- 8 something like 15 or 16 properties, and I guess three or
- 9 four people per property, so we can say that there was
- 10 no more to that postcode.
- Q. Thank you. The scale of the problem though, in terms of 11
- 12 being able to confirm that 2,563 of these packages were
- 13 delivered through you, of which I think all but one was
- 14 through Evri -- I think one was through Yodel --
- A. Correct. 15
- 16 Q. -- the scale of the problem is that all of those you now
- 17 know should have been age verified with product label
- 18 warnings.
- 19 I'm assuming that's the case, yes.
- 20 Q. Mr Martínez told us that over 99 per cent of these
- 21 packages would have had bladed items.
 - 22 A. Right.
 - 23 You've got no reason to contradict that?
- 24 A.
- 25 Q. Overall, in terms of what happened in the supply chain
- 1 tell us in paragraph 11 that that began in 2005; is that
- 2 right?
- 3 A. It is correct.
- 4 Q. We can leave aside the change of name, I think, for Evri
- 5 for these purposes. You will recall me raising with
- 6 Mr Ashworth the contract which Evri say was governing
- 7 the relationship between you and Evri from October 2023,
- 8 and in your paragraph 12, I put it to Mr Ashworth, you
- 9 say that that contract was unsigned, it hadn't been
- 10 agreed by October 2023, which is the date of the machete
- 11 delivery, and, in fact, it was never signed and, is this
- 12 right, so far as you are concerned, that was never
- 13 formalised into an agreed contract?
- 14 A. Correct.
- 15 Q. Do you consider that the relationship was therefore
- 16 being governed by some previous contract?
- 17 A. Yes
- 18 Q. You don't dispute, it is clear, I think, from your
- 19 evidence already, you don't dispute that Evri have made
- 20 it completely clear that they didn't accept age-verified
- 21 delivery?
- 22 A. I have no doubt about that at all.
- 23 Q. So is the dispute between yourselves and Evri in
- 24 relation to this, whether there had been entered into
- 25 a contract which had a formal warranty that Whistl would

| 1 | | not send parcels that contained bladed items? |
|---|----|---|
| 2 | A. | The contract would have not been signed for numerous |
| 3 | | reasons. It wouldn't have just been about this |
| 4 | | particular item. We knew we knew for 20 years that |
| 5 | | Evri didn't handle bladed items. We knew that they |
| 6 | | didn't have an age verification. None of that had |
| 7 | | changed at all and, through our guides and our links to |
| 8 | | their websites, it made it very clear that that was the |
| 9 | | case. |

So the dispute on the contract wasn't about whether we were now -- they were now handling or not handling blades. We already knew the answer to that.

13 **Q.** Yes.

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- 14 A. So there were other matters related to the contract,
 15 typically more about liabilities and a warranty in this
 16 case that we would know what was in it every parcel.
 17 Self-evidently, we can't warrant that.
- Q. Yes, and it is really that I'm asking you about
 because it may be that if there were trivial aspects in
 this contract with which you disagreed, Mr Polglass,
 that you wouldn't have been so clear and firm in your
 statement that you dispute that this was the governing
 contract.
- 24 A. Mm-hm.

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25 **Q.** For the purposes of the issue with which the Inquiry is 133

1 more this: Mr Ashworth says, "Well, we negotiated this, 2 although it is not signed, it ended up being agreed"; 3 and you say "No, no, that's not right". My question to 4 you is: as big players in this market, with 5 responsibilities for the packages that you are sending, 6 both of you, it might be thought surprising and 7 concerning that you can't agree between the two of you 8 whether or not this was a contractual term.

9 A. I think that's a fair assessment.

Q. Thank you. I mentioned in an earlier context the guidance that was given. Can we have on the screen, please, WHI000003. This is the Whistl Carrier Guide. Can we go within that, please, to page 12 and I think it is paragraph 3.3 that we will need. So:

"It is the responsibility of the customer to ensure these requirements [this is dealing with 'Prohibited Items, Dangerous Goods and Restricted Items'] are adhered to and to check whether or not an item is prohibited, dangerous or restricted before dispatching on an Evri ... service.

"If items are identified by Whistl or our carriers please refer to our Domestic Fully Tracked Customer Guide."

Then it says:

"For further detail please refer to the Carrier link 135

- interested, is a point of difference that you don't
 accept that Whistl (sic) had a formal warranty from you
 that you wouldn't send them packages with bladed items?
- 4 A. That's correct.
- Q. Is two things arising out of that. Albeit you would no
 doubt say it was done innocently and in ignorance, if
 that was the contract governing your relationship, you
 would have been, in these circumstances, in breach of
 the contract in having a package that was given through
 you to Evri that contained a machete?
- 11 A. That would be how I would understand it, yes.
- 12 Q. Secondly, as I put to Mr Ashworth, you are two of the
 13 big players, big hitters in this market. It might be
 14 suggested that it is somewhat surprising and perhaps
 15 somewhat concerning, when one is dealing with knives,
 16 that you can't agree between the two of you what your
 17 contractual terms were.
- A. Well, that contract was, in fact, never signed. We are
 literally, as we speak, negotiating a new contract and
 we hope to be able to find a suitable route through
 that.
- Q. Yes, but you understand that Mr Ashworth's evidence again, I don't suppose that the Inquiry will seek to get
 to the bottom of this as a contractual dispute and I'm
 not asking really who is right and who is wrong. It's

1 ..."

Then it gives Evri's link to "What I can and cannot send", and are you familiar with the fact that that guidance, when you follow it through, the Evri, "What I can and cannot send", lists knives in terms as an item that can't be sent?

7 A. Yes.

Q. Again, just looking at practicalities, this is something
 that would be available and provided to, in this case,
 Ruach Music; is that right?

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. The purpose of having a link which they need to click on
 13 and consult, rather than including the list in the
 14 guidance, why is that? Is it because it allows them to
 15 update their guidance?

16 A. Exactly.

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17 Q. Do you consider then that the link is a sufficient means
18 of putting your customers on notice of the Evri
19 prohibited items list?

A. It is updated on a regular basis and it is, as I say,
 the responsibility of the sender to be able to make sure
 that they are using the appropriate carrier for whatever
 goods it is they are dispatching.

Do I think that we could improve upon this? I think we could remind our clients more frequently than we do

| 1 | today. |
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- 2 Q. Is that something that you are now looking to put right?
- 3 A. We have started it already.
- 4 Q. Thank you. Thank you, that can come down from the5 screen.

As far as your contractual relationship with Ruach Music is concerned, can I just ask you some questions about that. You have dealt with the fact that you didn't have any relationship with Ageo at all and that it was Ruach Music who sent it, and I have asked you some questions about that.

The contract -- can we look at WHI000004. Could I just let you familiarise yourself again with this document, Mr Polglass. Can you see that that appears on its face to be the contract between Mr Henderson's music company and, if we go down and look at the second half of the page, we have redacted the signatures but it is signed on behalf of Whistl, yes?

- 19 A. It is. ves.
- 20 Q. Thank you. So if we now go to page 9, and this should
 21 be Schedule 3, and if we can look at paragraph 2, quite
 22 literally the fine print, first of all. Let me read the
 23 relevant parts:

"Whistl does not accept, and the Customer must not require it to collect or deliver, any items which are

Again, I have touched on this already, but were knives and machetes clearly and expressly contained in a Whistl prohibited items list?

- 4 A. Yes. I'm fairly certain that we have provided the5 prohibited list and restrictions list for Whistl.
- Q. What did you understand the terms to be in relation toknives?
- 8 A. There is a -- it tries to, as clearly as possible,
- 9 identify the knives that can go through a process and
- 10 can be delivered within the UK, using the appropriate
- 11 carriers, and it highlights -- I think there's five or
- six items on a prohibited list. I can't remember what
- those five or six are, off the top of my head, I'm
- 14 afraid, but I'm certain it's within the evidence that we
- 15 have provided. It was one of the links.
- 16 Q. Well, if that can be supplemented in writing in due
- 17 course to clarify it, if it's our error for missing it,
- then we will happily accept that, but you think that the
- 19 effect of it is that some knives could go through. You
- 20 have mentioned kitchen knives is something you're quite
- 21 happy to carry?
- 22 $\,$ **A.** Well, there are bladed items. So we work with, for
- example, a very well-known household goods company.
- Within their items, they have food processors that have
- 25 blades, bladed items within the food processors. Those 139

prohibited by any law, or any regulation or Code of Practice ..."

Just pausing there. A machete in the UK would not be, as such, prohibited by law. There were restrictions but it's not a banned item; would you agree?

- 6 A. I would.
- 7 Q. "... or which are subject to dangerous goods
 8 legislation, or which are prohibited on any prohibited
 9 items list in Whistl's Customer Guide at [Whistl's
 10 restrictions]", and so on.

Just dealing with that language, was that intendedto capture things like hunting knives and machetes?

- 13 A. Yes, I believe so.
- Q. Would you accept that the generic description of
 dangerous goods legislation is ambiguous because it is
 not necessarily clear whether that is referring to
 things like explosive substances, which may be
- things like explosive substances, which may be
 completely banned, or things like knives that just have
 age restriction and labelling requirements?
- 20 A. Yes
- Q. One thing -- and I will be corrected if I'm wrong about this but, although there are many helpful exhibits that you have provided, at short notice, I think the specific prohibited items list that's referenced here, that's cross-referenced here, is not within the exhibits.

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- 1 go on a separate contract with DPD for age verification.
- 2 Q. I'm going to stop you there because we're not so
- 3 concerned -- it's a useful example but one understands
- food processor, sharp blade. But kitchen knives
- 5 wouldn't be on your prohibited list --
- 6 **A.** No.
- Q. -- because you have already indicated that you are
 prepared to have those within the packages that you're
 the middleman for?
- 10 A. Correct.
- 11 Q. So do you think that you had a prohibited items list12 that somehow drew a line between kitchen knives and
- 13 hunting knives and machetes?
- 14 A. I believe so but, without looking at it, I can't
 15 remember what's on the prohibited list. But it does
 - include -- it refers to weapons. Now, that may be
- 17 subjective.

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- 18 Q. Yes. Well, can I ask you about that. One person's19 weapon is another person's survival tool; would you
- 20 agree?
- A. Yes. We do everything we can to abide by the rules andlegalities of what we do in every respect.
- Q. Forgive me, I am not asking you, at this stage, aboutunlawful items, all right? But would you agree that
- 25 it's very important for Whistl to be clear about what

- 1 you will and will not carry and what is and is not 2 prohibited as a matter of your policy?
- 3 A. Well, I believe we do but we're not seeing it at the 4 moment
- 5 Q. Thank you. The weapons, I think you accept, is open to 6 an element of interpretation?
- 7 A. Yes, although we do provide a list.
- 8 Q. Thank you. To a certain extent, though, you were
- 9 trusting Ruach Music to ensure that they abided by your
- 10 prohibited list and Evri's prohibited list.
- Absolutely. 11 Α.
- 12 Q. Is there any obligation or responsibility, short of
- 13 a legal obligation, do you think, on Whistl to run any
- 14 checks on what is in the parcels? I don't mean by
- 15 opening them necessarily, but to interrogate that to
- 16 some extent --
- 17 A. Well, we --
- 18 **Q.** -- even by way of spot check.
- 19 A. We do that through the process of the sale. We also do
- 20 checks on the company. We do those through Companies
- 21 House and through HMRC. We will check on the parcels,
- 22 as best one can. I can't open parcels to check what's
- 23 inside them. There's no reason at all for us to have
- 24 believed at the time, or indeed now that Ruach Music
- 25 would be sending anything other than what they had told 141
- 1 warehouse into the large parcel sorters. An item moves 2 around that and is back out -- maybe not in the two 3 minutes that Evri suggested, but certainly within an 4 hour or two, would be back out and going off to its 5 delivery point. For us that may be Evri, may be Yodel, 6
- 7 Sorry, I have lost track of the question you asked 8 me, I'm sorry.
- 9 Q. It's whether there would be any way of picking up that 10 there was a mismatch between what was on the label and 11 the type of delivery that had been booked?
- A. It would have to be a very attentive person within the 12 13 warehouse, I think.
- 14 Q. Thank you. So Ms Wakeman, with her usual efficiency,
- 15 thinks that not a Whistl exhibit but one from
- 16 Mr Henderson -- could we look at RUAM000009, please.
- 17 Can we look at page 13. Is it "Sharp Objects and Bladed
- 18 Products", is that the relevant ...

may be DPD or others.

- 19 (Pause)
- 20 So:
- 21 "In accordance with the Offensive Weapons Act ..."
- 22 Then "part 3", it gives the law then:
- 23 "Prohibited: sharp objects like knives, kitchen
- 24 utensils and gardening tools may only be posted if they 25 are packaged appropriately so that they are no risk to
 - 143

- us they were going to send. 1
- 2 Q. Thank you. I just want to ask a little bit on checks on
- 3 the parcels themselves and the packaging. Again, should
- 4 we understand it to be your evidence that, in terms of
- the age-verified delivery requirement and the packaging 5
- 6 requirements on that, which is your 18-plus and your
- 7 bladed item, that the responsibility of that would be
- 8 for the seller to declare that that is the type of item
- 9 that they are sending and to ensure, therefore, that the
- 10 right type of label was applied for?
- 11 A. Absolutely.
- 12 Q. Because the evidence suggests in this case that the
- 13 label that would be applied would be a standard Evri
- 14 one, without any of that, you would accept that the
- 15 labelling for this item was not compliant with the legal
- 16 requirements?
- 17 A. I would.

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- 18 Q. In some ways, it's a hypothetical question because the
- 19 evidence tends to suggest that there was no 18-plus
- 20 warning on this package but, if an age-verified, or
- 21 18-plus label was applied but what has been booked
- 22 through you is a standard delivery, do you have any
- 23 processes that picks that up?
- 24 A. Most of our process is automated, so parcels come in in
- 25 bulk, they get moved across the shop floor or the

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employees, other packages or recipients. Any bladed article which (a) is or has a blade; and (b) is capable of causing a serious injury to a person which involves cutting that person's skin."

Can we just expand that, so we can see the whole page again. So those are all services. So what's the effect of that?

- 8 A. I'm sorry, I don't understand your question. What's the 9 question?
- 10 Q. You said you thought it was clear from the Whistl restricted items list or prohibited items list and it's 11
- 12 been exhibited, in fact, by Mr Henderson, so the
- 13 prohibited item is "sharp objects and bladed products".
- 14 Services it says "All". Description is what's in the
- 15 middle column and then "Exceptions and Restrictions", 16 and it says:

"Prohibited: Sharp objects like knives, kitchen utensils and gardening tools may only be posted if they are packaged appropriately so that they are no risk to employees, other packages or recipients."

21 So that seems to be saying, "Package them safely". 22 Then it says:

> "Any bladed article which (a) is or has a blade; and (b) is capable of causing a serious injury to a person which involves cutting that person's skin."

| That says "Exceptions and Restrictions". So is |
|---|
| that I'm just not understanding at the moment what |
| the ultimate effect of that is in terms of what can and |
| can't be sent, in terms of bladed items? |

- A. Well, we're trying in, I suppose, a few words to provide
 guidance on what can and cannot be sent via us. We also
 have -- if there is any doubt still in the sender's
 mind, we have a customer service team which we highlight
 clearly in all of the implementation that we have with
 a client that if they have any doubts at all, they
 should contact them.
- 12 Q. Just give me a moment.

13 (Pause)

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Would you accept, on the basis of what's on the screen -- in the real world one understands you have to do it in a short space of -- that's understandable. But would you accept that that guidance is not particularly clear, in terms of where you draw the line, in terms of knives, of what can and can't be sent?

- 20 A. I accept that it could be clearer, yes.
- 21 Q. Has that been changed since?
- A. We have reviewed all of our training, all of our
 contractual terms and all of the exhibits that we've
 shared with you to improve them wherever we can. Some
 of those things have already happened, like the

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Q. Thank you. Can we turn to your helpful section on reflections, which I promised that I would come back to. So you flag up here, at paragraph 34(b) -- it's your page 10, WHI000009 -- having made the point that for those lower down in the supply chain you are only as good as the information that's supplied higher up, you say that:

"At present [this is paragraph (b)] it is only mandatory to include a PHC description in a shipment if it is to be sent outside the UK. An improvement to the process would be for the PHC to be provided for all parcels and for that data to be included in the data that goes into a shipping label barcode. That would enable the machines that sort parcels to be set to reject certain PHC descriptions. Those rejected parcels could then be handled manually to make sure that they are handled according to the requirements for that particular product."

Yes?

20 **A.** Yes.

Q. I think you will have heard Mr Ashworth's evidence about this, that, for Evri, that would be a significant change requiring a few months, but he thought that, for sellers across the country, that would be a major change that would have a long lead-in time. Do you agree with that

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training, for example, and others will happen withindays or so.

3 Q. Right, so has this prohibited items list been changed or 4 not?

5 A. Not yet.

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Q. Right. You said you wouldn't allow machetes but, if you
were the sort of person who thought that a machete was
a gardening tool, you might think that was okay.

9 A. Well, even if you did, you would still have to package
it correctly and then you would have to use
an appropriate service and carrier to deliver it and
have it age verified.

13 Q. Yes, of course, I'm not disputing that for a moment but, 14 as a company that presumably wants clarity on its policy 15 as to what you just can't send, even a machete, it might 16 be difficult to understand whether it comes within the 17 first half, where it is a gardening tool and that it is 18 packaged carefully and I will send it age verified, or 19 whether it comes under the second part where you see any 20 bladed article which is capable of causing a serious 21 injury.

The average reader might just not understand whether that is something that you permit or not?

24 A. I have already accepted there is some ambiguity in it.25 I still accept that point.

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1 or would you have a different analysis?

A. He is a technical expert, let's accept; I'm not. Do I think it might take a lengthy period of time for everyone to be able to change the requirements within their systems? Experience tells me it would. Whether it's one year or four years, I literally couldn't answer.

We could make this change relatively quickly. I think Mr Ashworth also highlighted that Evri could make that change relatively quickly but it is dependent on the sender to have changed their system, so that it is included within the label

If it's included in the label we, Evri and others, can all have our automation look for the description, the PHC, and it can then be diverted into a manual sortation process. So whilst I can't say at all how long it would take to get to it, it is something that's possible. We all do it currently for international goods, so it is evidently possible. There may be some cost, there may be some time drag, but it is definitely possible to do.

It does absolutely require senders to use the correct codes and not put in some sort of miscellaneous product code but, if you assume that many people would want to be honest about what they're sending, it would

| 1 | highlight it and it could be diverted in our system and |
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| 2 | in our carriers' systems. |

Q. Thank you. I'm not going to go through them. You set out helpfully, and again in quick time, a number of the changes that have already been made in your statement. 6 Your statement will be published so they will become public.

> You have indicated during the course of your evidence that there are some things still in train and some things which I have raised with you which you will think about.

12 A. Mm-hm.

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- 13 Q. Would you be prepared to give the learned Chair an update in writing by the end of October --14
- 15 Α. Absolutely.
- 16 Q. -- in relation to those further changes, improvements 17 and thinking?
- 18 A. Yes, absolutely.
- 19 MR MOSS: I'm just looking to my left to see if there are 20 any questions. Yes.
- 21 (Pause)
- Questioned by MR ILLINGWORTH 22
- 23 MR ILLINGWORTH: Good afternoon, Mr Polglass. I ask questions on behalf of the families of the other child 24 25 victims.

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- 1 your evidence today, that following the Rule 9 Request 2 from the Inquiry, Whistl has identified 2,562 items 3 which were delivered by Evri apparently sent by Ageo and 4 arranged by your company. What steps has Whistl taken
- 5 to establish how many of those deliveries contained
- 6 bladed items?
- 7 A. We can't find out what was sent in those boxes without 8 asking the sender of the items. I have not contacted
- 9 Mr Henderson to ask him that question.
- Q. In light of the information that you now have about 10 those 2,562 items, does Whistl intend to take any other 11 12 steps?
- 13 Α. Absolutely. We have provided a list of some of the 14
- things that we have already changed or are in the 15 process of changing. We have arranged and already had
- 16 meetings between ourselves and Evri to see whether there
- 17 are things within our supply chain that we can alter.
- 18 We intend on doing that with all of our carrier partners
- 19 over as quick a period as we possibly can, and I would
- 20 expect from that that there will be a series of
- 21 recommendations that we can make to ourselves and start
- 22 to carry out, or indeed make back to the Chair of this
- 23 Inquiry.
- 24 MR ILLINGWORTH: Thank you very much, Mr Polglass.
- 25 Thank you, sir.

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- You say in your statement, paragraph 34(b), that 1 2 a failure by a party higher up the supply chain to 3 provide the data that's required has a domino effect. 4 What did you mean by "domino effect"?
- A. If the information at the first touch point, let's say 5
- 6 the seller, does not tell us or the carrier supply chain
- 7 that an item requires certain or special treatment, none
- 8 of us will know. That's what I mean by domino, so if
- 9 it's not done there, everyone falls over.
- 10 Q. In that context, you said earlier it's the sender's
- 11 responsibility to ensure that they are using the
- 12 appropriate carrier for the goods that they are
- 13 dispatching. In this case, did that responsibility sit
- 14 with SJ Henderson, with Ageo, or with a combination of
- 15 the two?
- 16 A. From my perspective, it sat with Ruach Music.
- 17 Q. Overall, is it fair to say that you have to take it on
- trust that the sender is not attempting to send bladed 18
- 19 articles via a means which isn't subject to age
- 20 verification?
- 21 A. Yes.
- 22 Q. Is it fair to say that that's a system that relies
- 23 heavily on honesty on the part of the sender?
- 24 A. Absolutely.
- 25 Q. Your statement makes clear, and you have explained in
- 1 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you, Mr Illingworth.
- 2 You have dealt with this very quickly, Mr Polglass,
- 3 in terms of responding to the Inquiry's request. You
- 4 have given very helpful evidence this afternoon and I am
- 5 very grateful to you.
- 6 A. Thank you.
- 7 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: You are now free to go. Thank you very 8 much.
- 9 A. Thank you.
- MR MOSS: Sir, could we take just a short break, maybe just 10
- 11 ten minutes
- SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Ten minutes.
- 13 (3.11 pm)
- 14 (Short Break)
- 15 (3.22 pm)
- 16 STEPHEN HENDERSON (sworn)
- 17 Questioned by MR MOSS
- SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Please have a seat. 18
- A. Thank you. 19
- 20 MR MOSS: Just start, if you would, please by giving us your 21 full name.
- 22 A. Stephen Henderson.
- 23 Q. Could we have on the screen, please, RUAM000003.
- 24 I think you can confirm, Mr Henderson, that this is your
- 25 statement to this Inquiry, dated 27 September this year,

- 1 so very recent statement; is that right?
- 2 A. Correct.
- 3 Q. Are the contents of that statement true to the best of 4 your knowledge and belief?
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 Q. I should perhaps explain this, Mr Henderson, that the
- 7 Inquiry's knowledge of the involvement of Ruach Music
- 8 and SJ Henderson Fulfilment only arose through
- 9 a statement fairly recently received from Whistl and
- 10 that the Inquiry legal team contacted you only really
- 11 quite recently. In response to that, it is right that
- 12 I should place on record that you have responded with
- 13 a detailed witness statement, which we see on screen,
- 14 but also with numerous exhibits and you have flown over,
- 15 at exceptionally short notice, from Northern Ireland and
- 16 cooperated in that way, and we're grateful to you for
- 17 it.
- 18 A. Thank you.
- 19 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Mr Moss, before you carry on, could
- 20 I ask Ms Wakeman to email me the witness statement
- 21 because this isn't in the bundle that I have in court.
- 22 MR MOSS: Yes, of course.
- 23 SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much.
- 24 MR MOSS: You tell us in paragraph 1 that you are the
- 25 director and CEO of Ruach Music. Am I pronouncing it 153
- 1 with this, I was tasked by a local university in
- 2 Northern Ireland who advise their business students on
- 3 how to successfully raise a crowd funding scheme because
- 4 I was successful in that and, from that, one of the
- 5 actual business students asked me to fulfil their orders
- 6 as well because I was doing it already for myself, and
- 7 so the opportunity arose, and I decided then to form
 - SJ Henderson Fulfilment in 2019, after three years of
- 9 testing that business model first.
- 10 Q. You tell us that the fulfilment business has about 70
- 11 clients now?
- 12 A. Correct

- 13 Q. You say in paragraph 7 you've got a team of 27 staff.
- 14 Is that across your businesses or just in the
- 15 fulfilment?
- 16 A. That's just in SJ Henderson Fulfilment.
- 17 Q. And 34,000 square foot across your sites?
- 18 A. Correct.
- 19 $\,$ **Q.** You fulfilled 185,000 orders for 1.7 million items.
- 20 A. In the past 12 months, yes.
- 21 Q. Thank you. I don't need to go through an overview
- 22 because I know that you have been able to read the
- 23 statements of others and you know that we are dealing
- 24 with the provision of a machete to AR through the supply
- 25 chain that I have been asking previous witnesses about, 155

1 wrongly?

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- 2 A. Yes -- no, correctly.
- 3 Q. Also of SJ Henderson Fulfilment; is that right?
- 4 A. That's correct.
- 5 $\,$ Q. Those are both UK companies. They are subsidiaries of
- 6 the Genesis Group Enterprises Limited of which, if
 - I have understood correctly, you are also Director and
- 8 CEO. Very briefly, why the three companies?
- 9 A. Yes, I started Ruach Music in 2014 as a limited company.
 - It was the first business I founded and, in 2019,
- 11 I founded SJ Henderson Fulfilment Limited and, as such,
- 12 I then formed a holding company to then own those two
- 13 companies, to simplify the structure and, if there's any
- 14 further businesses in the future, they're going to form
- 15 part of that group.
- 16 Q. Thank you. Your music business, the musical instrument
- and accessory manufacturer, is that right, and supplier?
- 18 **A.** Yes.
- 19 Q. For the fulfilment company, did that grow out of your
- 20 music business in some way? Were you doing a lot of
- 21 logistics to send out the music instruments and
- 22 accessories and you thought "Well, I can make a further
- 23 business out of this", or how did it develop?
- 24 A. That's exactly how it developed. I was doing my own
- 25 fulfilment, I was shipping my instruments globally. So,
- that was, in the end, delivered to him without age verification.
- 3 Did you have an understanding at the time, in
- 4 October 2023, about the legal framework for the supply
- 5 of knives in terms of the illegality, first of all, of
- 6 selling them to those under 18?
- 7 $\,$ **A.** In regards to the selling, we don't perform part of the
 - selling, so I was not aware of that.
- 9 Q. You weren't aware of that?
- 10 A. No.

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- 11 Q. Appreciating that you are not the seller, was it not
- important for you, in terms of your fulfilment business,
- to have an understanding of what the legal requirements
- 14 were?
- 15 A. We have quite a vast range of products within our
- fulfilment centres, over 75,000 SKUs, so to understand
- 17 the law for every one of those SKUs would be quite
- a task. I myself verse myself weekly on the movement of
- 19 goods, whether that be customs movement of goods,
- 20 et cetera, and that's where I advise our clients on
- 21 a weekly basis of updates to, for example GPSR, movement
- 22 of goods due to Brexit. In terms of the specific laws
- on the seller's responsibility, I don't verse myself on
- 24 that.
- 25 **Q**. SKUs?

- A. SKUs are product variations, so a pen that is black and
 a pen that is red would be two different SKUs, for
- 3 example.
- 4 Q. But given that the law prohibits the sale of knives to
- 5 those under 18 but goes on to provide a qualified
- 6 defence, albeit for sellers, but that that defence has
- 7 certain conditions and those conditions involve -- can
- 8 I put it in this way -- aspects of the parcel business
- 9 because there are provisions about what needs to be on
- 10 the label --
- 11 A. Mm-hm.
- 12 $\,$ **Q.** -- and there are provisions about the delivery having to
- 13 be age verified. If you were going to be involved in
- the distribution of bladed items, it would be important
- for you to be aware of those legal requirements, even
- 16 though you were not the seller?
- 17 A. Yes, so we have a very strict and tight services
- 18 agreement with every single one of our 70 clients. They
- 19 all sign on to it. I don't take anybody on unless they
- 20 have signed our terms of conditions and they don't
- 21 deviate for anybody. Within that, and you will see in
- the evidence as well, clause 3.1.6 details that it is
- 23 the client's responsibility to ensure that they are
- 24 lawfully packaged and readily available for manufacture
- 25 and seal.

- 1 I'm not asking about whether it was your duty to do
 - those things because the legal duty was on the seller.
- 3 But I'm asking you, as somebody who is involved in the
- 4 fulfilment of the delivery, whether you were aware in
- 5 2023 that for knives they had to be packaged saying
- 6 "18-plus" and they had to be packaged saying
- 7 "Age-verified delivery", if they were being sold by an
- 8 online retailer?
- 9 **A.** No.

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- 10 Q. In general terms, did you permit or prohibit altogether
- 11 knives coming through your fulfilment company?
- 12 A. As part of my statement, the only time we were notified
- on our system that there were knives processed in our
- 14 facility was on 9 March 2022. From there, there was
- 15 absolutely no indication that there was anything --
- 16 Q. That wasn't my question again. I want to understand, as
- 17 a company, did you do what Evri did, which is just say,
- 18 "We don't do age-verified delivery, we won't touch
- 19 knives, we don't want to be involved in that at all",
- or, "We are prepared to do that, you tell us that it's
- 21 a knife, you ensure that it is age verified, you follow
- the law, but we will be prepared to fulfil the onward
- 23 transmission of knives". Where did you stand as
- 24 a company?
- 25 **A.** Yes, I stand by our terms and conditions, which would be 159

- 1 Q. Yes, and I will come on to that but if you focus on my
- 2 question, while you put the responsibility on the
- 3 seller, and they warrant that they will follow the
- 4 requirements of the law, you would want, as
- 5 a responsible parcel management company, to have at
- 6 least an understanding of the legal requirements, so
- 7 that you could spot if things were wrong; would you
- 8 agree
- 9 A. I would agree if I saw something that was wrong or
- 10 something to draw my attention to the fact that there
- 11 was something moving through my facility that would
- 12 warrant different treatment.
- 13 **Q.** Yes.
- 14 A. However, with this client, there was nothing to detail
- 15 that to me or my team.
- 16 Q. So, for example, the requirement for the labelling to
- 17 specify 18-plus and to specify on the label that it
- 18 required an age-verified delivery, were you aware of
- 19 those requirements?
- 20 A. We weren't obliged to actually fulfil that for the
- 21 client. We were never tasked with that.
- 22 Q. No, no, that is not -- forgive me, you must listen to
- 23 the question --
- 24 A. Okav.
- 25 Q. -- and you must seek to answer the question that I ask.

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- 1 in line with our couriers, which is the term "prohibited
- 2 items". So if the goods are prohibited that term stands
- 3 on its own two feet and I would say that has to be in
- 4 sync with our couriers.
- 5 **Q.** I follow. So having prohibited the items, as you
- 6 understood it, you didn't know about the legal
- 7 requirements on sellers as to how they were packaged?
- 8 **A.** No
- 9 **Q.** Did you know that they required age-verified delivery?
- 10 **A**. No
- 11 Q. You weren't aware that sales of knives had to come with
- 12 an age-verified delivery process?
- 13 **A**. No
- 14 Q. In your statement, you explain in paragraph 8 that the
- overwhelming majority, more than 99 per cent, of the
- 16 service you provide included, in layperson's terms,
- an element of you warehousing the goods for a period of
- 18 time, yes?
- 19 **A.** Yes.
- 20 Q. You go on to explain that, in paragraph 9, a small
- 21 minority, 0.19 per cent, was dropship products; is that
- 22 right?
- 23 A. As a company as a whole, yes.
- 24 Q. Yes. What that involved, effectively, was this, that
- 25 clients would get to you the items already packaged,

| 1 | | yes? | 1 | | order to our system, detailing the contents of the |
|----|----|--|----|-----|--|
| 2 | A. | Yes. | 2 | | parcel, where it was to be shipped, who, to match that, |
| 3 | Q. | Ready to be sent on? | 3 | | and then we would simply click the button "Create |
| 4 | A. | Yes. | 4 | | shipment", it would spit out then the shipping label to |
| 5 | Q. | And the "dropship" indicates that all that you are then | 5 | | go on to that pre-packed parcel. |
| 6 | | involved in is effectively not warehousing them, not | 6 | Q. | All right, and can I just check, in the case of Ageo |
| 7 | | storing them, you get an appropriate label applied to it | 7 | | and you provided a helpful example of it would you |
| 8 | | and you onward ship it very quickly? | 8 | | then remove their label and you just have the shipping |
| 9 | A. | The shipping label applied, yes. | 9 | | label, or would their label remain on it? |
| 10 | Q. | Yes. With Ageo, they were one of those in that | 10 | A. | We would put our label over the top of their supplied |
| 11 | | minority, in that they were providing dropship type of | 11 | | label. |
| 12 | | delivery? | 12 | Q. | (Unclear) Thank you. |
| 13 | A. | Correct. The entirety of their operations was that | 13 | | In relation to the dropship business that you ran, |
| 14 | | model. | 14 | | is this right, that the company who is acting as the |
| 15 | Q. | Thank you. Where it is dropship, as I have understood | 15 | | seller who was your customer, they could provide |
| 16 | | your statement, they will have a label on it, is this | 16 | | detailed product information, or a description of the |
| 17 | | right, which will marry up with the data that they have | 17 | | documents, but that wasn't required, they could just say |
| 18 | | provided? So they will have something on and we have | 18 | | "dropship"? |
| 19 | | seen a photograph which we may come to, but they will | 19 | A. | Correct. They also have the ability within the manual |
| 20 | | have the name and delivery address and certain data that | 20 | | upload process to detail conditions, requirements, |
| 21 | | will match up with what's been sent electronically to | 21 | | instructions to our operatives and to our team, which |
| 22 | | you? | 22 | | would pop up on the screen under "Packing notes" and |
| 23 | Α. | Yes, they would detail the name of the recipient and | 23 | | "Delivery notes". They also had the opportunity to |
| 24 | | their full address on the pre-packed parcel that comes | 24 | | upload documents or labels, for example to the portal, |
| 25 | | into our premises. They would have already uploaded the | 25 | | so as when that order was to be shipped, those documents |
| | | 161 | | | 162 |
| | | | | | |
| 1 | | would automatically print and the operatives would be | 1 | A. | I already have, as of Monday of this week. An email |
| 2 | | detailed on the screen as to how to act with those. | 2 | | went out to all of our clients detailing the new |
| 3 | | In none of the 2,810 orders that we shipped for | 3 | | process, which will follow suit with the 99.81 per cent |
| 4 | | Ageo, that did not occur. | 4 | | of our business, which is all SKUs' product details have |
| 5 | Q. | So no special instructions about delivery requirements | 5 | | to be fully disclosed and detailed so as we can break |
| 6 | | or anything of that kind at all? | 6 | | open the contents upon arrival and check the contents, |
| 7 | A. | None. | 7 | | warehouse the items for later seal, and then we pick, |
| 8 | Q. | Thank you. Looking at matters now with the knowledge | 8 | | pack and dispatch and that will ensure that movement |
| 9 | | that you have, with the benefit of hindsight about what | 9 | | cannot take place ever again. |
| 10 | | happened here, do you think that that's a bit of | 10 | SIR | ADRIAN FULFORD: Would you share that email with the |
| 11 | | a weakness in the vulnerability of the system, that the | 11 | | Inquiry? |
| 12 | | seller, your customer, can dropship items where the only | 12 | A. | No problem. |
| 13 | | product description of what they are sending is | 13 | | ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much. |
| 14 | | "dropship"? | 14 | | MOSS: As far as your contract with Ageo is concerned, |
| 15 | A. | I believe there is a better way to do things now in | 15 | | you explain in paragraph 12 of your statement that you |
| 16 | | hindsight, now being part of this investigation for | 16 | | entered into an agreement with Ageo, who we think of |
| 17 | | the past seven days. I understand how we cannot simply | 17 | | sometimes as Hunting & Knives, on 18 February 2022. If |
| 18 | | trust our services agreement and trust our clients to | 18 | | we look at HKAW000034, please. So this is the services |
| 19 | | comply. It's evident that that is not enough and we | 19 | | agreement and we see SJ Henderson Fulfilment at the top. |
| 20 | | have to take extra measures to make sure absolute truth | 20 | | If we can go to page 3 please, and if we could look at |

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point 2.12:

"SJ Henderson does not accept any of the following goods for storage, fulfilment or dispatch and no liability shall arise in respect of them ...

"Goods which are, or may become, dangerous, 164

things so that customers have to give more detail? 163

had much time and no one could criticise you if you

haven't yet changed it, but are you going to change

22 **Q.** Thank you. Have you now -- I appreciate you have not

is detailed on our systems.

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hazardous, noxious, explosive, radioactive ordamaging ..."

Firearms is next:

"Goods prohibited by law or regulation of any government or public authority of any jurisdiction where the goods are carried;

"Goods which SJ Henderson deems unsafe or not in a suitable condition ..."

I don't think any of the others are relevant. You mentioned earlier on that you had contractual terms. Would it be fair to say that these do not, on their face, necessarily appear to completely prohibit knives, including machetes?

14 A. It does not detail those items explicitly. I would say
15 at a macro level it would cover it in relation to the
16 law on the movement of goods, should it be unlawful to
17 move those items.

18 Q. The difficulty there I suggest, Mr Henderson, is that it
 19 is not as such unlawful to move those items. Whether or
 20 not it is unlawful to move the items, depends upon the
 21 packaging and the verification process?

22 A. Yes.

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Q. So the outside reader of your contractual terms might
 think, "Well, I don't think a machete is dangerous, as
 such, and it's not unlawful, it's not prohibited by law,

"... comply with all laws and regulations affecting manufacture, sale, packaging and labelling of its goods."

So there you have the point that you were raising, that your customer, under the contract, has the duties for how they are sold, how they are packaged and how they are labelled; would you agree?

8 A. Yes.

Q. So, unequivocally, that was Ageo or Hunting & Knives'
 responsibility under your contract, to ensure that the
 correct labelling and sales type was used?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Yes? But as to whether they were permitted to send
 14 knives and machetes at all, I think you agree your terms
 15 are ambiguous?

16 A. I would agree with that.

17 Q. Again, is that something that you will look at in terms
 18 of clarity in your terms and conditions, as to whether
 19 you permit knives and machetes to be carried at all?

20 A. Going forward, yes.

21 **Q.** Thank you. Now, the evidence of Mr Martínez yesterday, in broad terms, was to the effect that he relied on you, or your company, to ensure that UK law was followed and when I put to him aspects that he had a legal duty about packaging 18-plus and labelling 18-plus and bladed

there are just rules about how they can be sent". Would you accept that this clause, if you intended it to be

a prohibition on knives and machetes, is not

4 sufficiently clear?

A. I would say the rest of the terms and conditions would
 go into more detail as to that in terms of clause 3
 explicitly details the client's obligations.

8 **Q.** Yes, but that's not the point about which I'm asking9 you.

10 **A.** Okay.

11 Q. Clause 3, which I will come on to, deals with the12 client's obligation to follow the legal requirements.

13 A. Yes

14 Q. But this comes back to the question that I was asking15 you earlier about whether or not you are a company who

is prepared to carry knives through the packages that

you are involved in and, if the answer to that and

18 knives and machetes is no, paragraph 2.12 does not make 19 that clear, does it?

20 **A.** It doesn't make it clear explicitly, no.

Q. You asked about section 3. I was going to go on to
 that. If we could look please at the bottom of page 3
 we see "Client obligations", and if we go over the page

to the top of page 4, we should see 3.1.6, that the

25 client will:

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1 items, and to ensure age-verified delivery, the general 2 tenor of his evidence was he was looking to you to do 3 all the necessary because you were the experts in UK 4 shipping, and he also suggested that, at a video 5 conference, although he couldn't point to this being in 6 writing anywhere, at a video conference, he thought that 7 that was made clear, that you would take care of the 8 labelling and any requirements on the type of delivery 9 service. What do you say about that?

10 A. I say that's incorrect. As evidenced in one of my
11 exhibits, we were clearly told to only apply a shipping
12 label.

Q. Thank you. In fairness to you, although we had it on
 screen yesterday, can we just remind ourselves, please,
 of RUAM000005, bottom of the page, email from them on
 17 February:

"Regarding the shipments, we would like all of them
to be sent with a traceable tracking number in order the
final clients can track the process."

So there was nothing there, was there, about age verification being required?

22 **A.** No.

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23 Q. Would you agree?

24 A. I would agree.

25 **Q.** At page 3, top of the page, please, third paragraph

down, towards the end of the third paragraph:

"(... these packages could be sent already packed and labelled so that you only have to include the label of the transport agency) and from your warehouse they would be sent to the final clients."

So there was nothing there about an expectation on you that you would put some special labelling on to comply with bladed items' legal requirements; would you agree?

10 A. I would agree.

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- 11 Q. Thank you. I want to ask you next about a potentially
 12 important topic, which is your knowledge though of what
- the items were. Prior to you receiving the request from
 the Inquiry, did you know, in truth, Mr Henderson, that
- the inquiry, did you know, in tidin, with heriderson, that
- Ageo were sending knives and machetes through you?
- 16 A. Not until this year.
- 17 Q. You say not until this year, is that because of the18 Irish Customs find in March?
- 19 A. Correct.
- 20 Q. I should have said before this year. So you had some
- 21 knowledge of that from the customs find in March of this
- year but, before that, you say, do you, that you did not
- 23 know that knives and machetes were being sent?
- 24 A. No.
- 25 **Q.** Could we look at four aspects of this, please. The 169
- 1 eyes in detail.
- 2 Q. Because I'm going to use the phrase, even if it's well
- 3 worn, "missed opportunity", but that was a very clear
- 4 missed opportunity for you to appreciate that the
- 5 reality of this was that Ageo were a knife seller?
- 6 A. It was a missed opportunity to understand, yes, there
- 7 was going to be knife movements, potentially in those
- 8 parcels, for sure. The highlight for me was the fact
- 9 that they said "outdoor supplies", comma, and "outdoor
- supplies" would suggest it was the primary focus.
- 11 Q. Well, you say that but let's not forget what's after the
- 40
- 12 comma. What was after the comma?
- 13 A. I understand, yes.
- 14 Q. What was after the comma?
- 15 A. Well, "we are specialised in knives".
- 16 Q. Yes and what was the website?
- 17 A. Hunting & Knives.
- 18 Q. Did you look at the website?
- 19 A. I don't have a recollection of checking that website.
- 20 Q. Do you understand now that it is awash with pretty
- 21 ferocious-looking knives?
- 22 $\,$ **A.** In the past week I have visited that website and I can
- 23 confirm that, yes.
- 24 Q. We have heard from Evri and from Whistl that what they
- 25 seek to do with their customers is early on understand

1 first is that you sent Ageo a questionnaire asking about

- 2 what kinds of products they sold, and could we look at
- 3 that please, HKAW000035. We should note, in fairness to
- 4 you, that this is a document that you volunteered.
- 5 Could we have the main text highlighted, please. So we
- 6 can see in relation to the questionnaire -- I want to
- 7 focus on question 6 and the answer. So question 6 was:
 - "What are the commodities/products?"
- 9 As you have volunteered in your statement, the 10 answer that they gave to that was "Outdoor supplies ..."
- 11 Then these words:
- 12 "... we are specialised in knives."
- 13 Yes?
- 14 A. Yes.

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- 15 Q. Also question 7:
- 16 "What e-commerce platforms do you sell on/where will
- 17 orders be processed?"
- 18 The answer was:
- 19 "www.huntingandknives.co.uk."
- 20 Did you not -- or did you or somebody in your
- 21 company not acknowledge the significance of that at the
- 22 time?
- 23 A. The significance wasn't acknowledged and, as part of my
- 24 investigation for this Inquiry, when I read that email,
- 25 I now was shocked to find that it was right before my
 - 170
- 1 from them what they are likely to be selling:
- dimensions, what the nature of it is. If you had got to
- 3 know, in a curious way, what the business of Ageo was,
- 4 set out quite openly in outline terms in this email, you
- 5 would instantly have known that they really were largely
- 6 about knives, machetes, swords.
- 7 A. That would be unknown unless the question was asked to
 8 Ageo because the contents were not disclosed to me.
- 9 Q. No, but why didn't you ask?
- 10 A. Because of the model whereby they were moving and there
- 11 was nothing to say on the exterior of the carton that
- 12 come into us in bulk, that there was bladed articles
- 13 inside. There was not an age-verification service
- 14 requested for me to receive those goods.
- 15 Q. Had you had any experience of those selling knives and
- 16 bladed implements previous to Ageo?
- 17 A. Sorry, can you repeat that question?
- 18 Q. Yes, had you had any experience, other customers of
 - yours -- you've got 70 customers. Were any of your
- 20 previous customers, before Ageo, knife or bladed
- 21 implement sellers?
- 22 **A.** No

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- 23 Q. You didn't know, you have told us, what the legal
- 24 requirements were around this, even though they would be
- the ones who had to meet the legal requirements. So

- 1 against all of that background, when they are saying "We
- 2 are specialised in knives and our website is Hunting &
- 3 Knives", again can I put it to you that that wasn't just
- 4 a missed opportunity, that was a moment in time where
- 5 you should have asked questions?
- 6 A. I should have asked more questions as to the scale, the
- 7 actual knives in question here. On the same website,
- 8 you can buy gloves, different other miscellaneous goods
- 9 and, at that moment, now looking back on my
- 10 investigation of the past week, the law at that time did
- 11 not ask for courier ID verification service, it did not
- 12 ask for labelling of those items either.
- 13 Q. Forgive me, they didn't ask for those services and
- 14 that's why I, to Mr Martínez yesterday, put a number of
- 15 challenging questions to him about how they fell far
- 16 short of their duties.
- 17 Α.
- 18 But you should have asked far more questions? Q.
- 19 In hindsight, yes, our due diligence has to go further.
- 20 Our due diligence back around that time would have more
- 21 been around the company, the liquidity of the company,
- 22 the directorship, making sure everything was up to
- 23 scratch on Companies House, more around the finances and
- 24 the structure of the company. You can see in other
- 25 correspondence, because they mentioned Grupo Marpasi and
- 1 So one of those may not be.
- 2 Δ. One of them is not.
- 3 Q. Fine.
- 4 A. Number 3, as confirmed in my witness statement.
- 5 Q. Yes, fine. The others all were?
- 6 A. Pardon?
- 7 Q. The others were all knives?
- 8 A. I can see that, yes.
- 9 Q. Did you read this?
- A. This was a download from the system during my 10
- 11 investigation in the past week. The nature of the
- 12 movement of goods -- the data is available in the system
- 13 but it's not data you work with due to the goods coming
- 14 already pre-packed and ready for a shipping label to be
- 15 affixed. Hence I have removed that model now within the
- 16 husiness
- 17 Q. So, at the time, is your evidence that you didn't read
- 18
- A. Is your evidence that I didn't read it? 19
- 20 Q. Yes.
- A. Well, I didn't read it, as my statement -- I'm not sure 21
- 22 of the evidence I could provide.
- 23 Q. No, no, don't worry too much about where the questioning
- 24 is going. Just listen to the question and answer it.
- 25 A. Okay.

- 1 Spain, I asked "Who am I entering a contract with?"
- 2 because if Grupo actually hold the goods, I must
- 3 actually hold a service agreement with both. So my due
- 4 diligence went along the line of services agreements on
- 5 the liquidity of the companies I was dealing with but
- 6 I now understand further due diligence should have taken
- 7 place.
- 8 Q. A much more simple question would be: "Goodness me, I'm
- 9 not quite sure what the law around shipping knives is
- 10 because I've never done it before, I'd better find out",
- 11 ves?
- 12 In hindsight, yes. A.
- 13 Q. Secondly, in March 2022, I think in one of the very
- 14 early consignments, if not the first consignment --
- 15 could we have on screen, please, RUAM000006. Again, if
- 16 the top could just be highlighted. I have read out your
- 17 statement paragraph 18 in relation to this a number of
- 18 times. But I think you accept that on the first
- 19 consignment, but not subsequently, these product
- 20 descriptions were given?
- 21 A. On the first consignment on 9 March 2022, yes.
- 22 Yes. Although we're looking at a print-out of
- 23 a spreadsheet so the column is cut off, it's plain from
- 24 the most cursory reading of that that these were knives?
- 25 A. All bar one.

- 1 Q. I think your evidence must be that you didn't actually
- 2 read this at the time?
- 3 A. No, I did not.
- 4 Q. Would you say that, even though perhaps you are
- 5 a medium-sized provider, rather than a very large one,
- 6 would you say that there was no particular need for you
- 7 to read it because this is part, effectively, of an
- 8 automated system?
- A. The fact that I could go in and download this material 9
- 10 shows that it was on the system. Can you rephrase that
- 11 question for me?
- 12 Q. You didn't at the time have a need to go into the
- 13 system? In 2023, you didn't need to go into the system
- 14 and read this and manually input it from one system to
- 15 the other or anything like that?
- 16 A. No.
- 17 Q. So you're not looking at yourself now and thinking,
- 18 "Damn, if I had done my job properly I would have read
- 19 that list and known they were knives"?
- 20 A. Yes, we did not have to work with this information.
- 21 **Q.** At the same time, this was something which meant that
- 22 the data available to your company would have shown, if
 - it was interrogated, that they were knives. 24 A.

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25 Q. If, from the first missed opportunity, you had thought,

- 1 "Well, I had better keep an eye on what they're actually
- 2 shipping to check that it is outdoor supplies not
- 3 knives", the first consignment list would have rung
- 4 alarm bells?
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 Q. So that's the second opportunity. The third
- 7 opportunity -- could we have on screen, please,
- 8 HKAW000038. I think married to this first consignment,
- 9 HKAW000038, Mr Martínez says that, along with the
- 10 product description, there was also this type of
- 11 information. Can we just try to highlight perhaps just
- the bottom left two-thirds so that we've got the imagery
- of the items and through to the column that -- that will
- 14 just about do, I think.
 - Can we see that, although one may appear to be a set of scissors, you can just about work out that there were images showing that they were knives, yes?
- 18 A. On our portal, yes.
- 19 Q. So if we go to the top, to the top of the page, please,
- 20 can we just highlight the text in the top left-hand
- 21 side, that's SJ Henderson Fulfilment Limited and that's
- 22 your portal?
- 23 A. Correct.

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- 24 Q. Yes. Again, does that mean that that data would have
- 25 sat somewhere on your system?
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- 1 twitched by that questionnaire at the start and you had
- 2 wanted to check the early consignment, it looks as
- 3 though, would you agree, as well as a list of the items,
- 4 product information with images was also sent and was on
- 5 your portal?
- 6 A. I would say that definitely for the CSV spreadsheet for
- 7 sure and I would say that would give me enough
- 8 information to warrant a search.
- 9 Q. Thank you. Then could we have on the screen next,
- please, RUAM000008. Could that be rotated, please,
- 11 anticlockwise. Could we enlarge the bottom parcel.
- 12 Again, this is -- I should make absolutely clear,
- 13 Mr Henderson, an exhibit which you have volunteered and
- 14 it is helpful to the Inquiry, especially given the
- 15 pressures of time that you were under. This appears to
- show how the packages would arrive into your unit; would
- 17 that be right?
- 18 A. Yes, this was sent by one of the employees of Grupo
- 19 Marpasi before it left Spain, the very first original
- 20 consignment.
- 21 $\,$ **Q.** I follow, so this is taken in Spain showing how it would
- look and we can see, consistent with your evidence,
- 23 minimal data on there: name, country, postal code, city,
- 24 address, phone number. It has got an Ageo Wholesale

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25 Limited address in the UK. But it has also got "HK",

- A. It sits amongst those 75,000 SKUs, yes. On that page
 there are ten.
- 3 Q. So again, Whistl, in particular, have explained this to
 - us, that they would have a large volume of these and no
- 5 need to read them individually. But as a third
- 6 opportunity, this company was providing, on the first
- 7 set of sales, imagery showing that it was knives that
- 8 they were selling.
- 9 A. I wouldn't be able to say yes to that or no to that
- 10 because I'm unsure when these images were supplied.
- 11 They don't have to have an image -- certainly they would
- 12 have submitted the information to the system detailing
- these contents, absolutely as confirmed in that CSV
- 14 upload. The images I'm unsure if it they were present
- 15 at the time or not.
- 16 Q. I don't think it is suggested that these were sent every
- 17 time. I think the suggestion from Mr Martínez in his
- 18 witness statement is that these were for the first
- 19 consignment so --
- 20 A. Yes, it absolutely was not for any movement following
- 9 March, for sure. Everything was detailed simply
- 22 "dropship" from there on in. For the first movement,
- again, I can't confirm if there were images detailed or
- 24 not because products can be edited.
- 25 **Q.** But again, if you had been alert, if your antenna had
- 1 the logo for Hunting & Knives and the full name,
- 2 "Hunting & Knives", yes?
- 3 A. I can see that logo at the top left, the "HK" and
- 4 "Hunting & Knives" written underneath that in small
- 5 letters, yes.
- 6 Q. I think you would agree that, in excess of 2,500 parcels
- 7 of this kind came through your facility, all probably
- 8 labelled in this sort of way with "Hunting & Knives"?
- 9 A. Yes.
- 10 Q. That was also, would you agree, a repeated missed
- 11 opportunity for you to realise the likelihood that what
- 12 Ageo were doing was using you to convey knives?
- 13 **A.** It would be from the photographic evidence that
- 14 I received, again within that email thread. There's
- nothing to indicate following that first movement if
- that logo continued to be represented, given that there
- was such a change in how they were submitting orders to us from 9 March 2022. I'm unsure why they done that
- us from 9 March 2022. I'm unsure why they done that change. There's no -- upon my investigation, I cannot
- change. There's no -- upon my investigation, I cannot see correspondence to suggest why they made that m
- see correspondence to suggest why they made that move to manual input, detailing "dropship only", no further
- 22 comments.
- 23 Q. You can't, as you sit there now, say one way or the
- 24 other whether the label remained the same for all of
- 25 them?

- A. 1 Nο
- 2 Q. But whether it was on this first occasion, when they had
- 3 answered the question "Specialise in knives" -- or
- 4 "Outdoor equipment, we specialise in knives and our
- 5 website is Hunting & Knives", if this was the image they
- 6 sent you, "This is how we are going to send things
- 7 through to you", again it's plain, on its face, isn't
- 8 it, that there was a really significant issue here,
- 9 putting you on notice that the likelihood is that these
- packages were going to contain knives? 10
- A. Again, this was an image sent to me over email here and 11
- 12 this is zoomed in substantially, so the "Hunting &
- 13 Knives" is barely readable. I understand there's a logo
- 14 there and I do understand as part of that same email
- 15 chain, which I already commented on, that I should have
- 16 done more on terms of actually further due diligence
- 17 checks, now in hindsight. But given the nature of this
- 18 image being sent to me in this format, it's the detail
- 19 of how the packages are to come into our facility.
- 20 Q. Do you regret now not doing more and not being more
- 21 curious and not asking more questions?
- 22 A.
- 23 Q. Are you sure that it is not the case that you knew all
- 24 along that these were knives?
- 25 A. I'm sure it's -- I did not know they were all knives.
- 1 the checks we facilitate of those 1.77 million items.
- 2 They all were booked in in that format, the
- 3 99.8 per cent of that, and the rest were dropships.
- 4 Because the dropships are pre-packaged, for people who
- 5 have already ordered these, the client has already sold
- 6 the goods, they have packaged them, I deemed it not
- 7 appropriate to break open these to do any checks.
- 8 Q. Thank you. In terms of the couriers that were then
- 9 used, we know that Whistl was the one that was usually
- 10 used and I think with just one exception for the Ageo 11
- parcels. Were you aware that Evri didn't have an
- 12 age-verified delivery service?
- 13 A. I wasn't aware of that. I also wasn't aware of the need
- 14 for a business to have an age verification service
- 15 because I wasn't aware of the contents of the goods, nor
- 16 was I ever asked to use that service. Should we have
- 17 been asked to provide that service, I absolutely would
- 18 have asked all of my courier networks, "Do you offer
- 19 this?", and would have provided that service.
- 20 Q. Thank you. Can I ask you about the arrangement that was
- 21 made because your contract with Whistl, which I think is
- 22 how you carried out the fulfilment of what Ageo wanted,
- 23 your contract was with Ruach Music, your music business,
- 24 who had a contract with Whistl, so you were channelling
- 25 your SJ Henderson Fulfilment's packages through Ruach 183

- Thank you. In terms of your understanding, as far as 1
- 2 the packaging is concerned, I think that we have dealt
- 3 with most of that but, can I ask you this: was there any
- 4 sense in which, at any time, you asked questions about
- 5 the appropriate labelling, above and beyond the standard
- 6 shipping label? You didn't go back to Mr Martínez and
- 7 ask the question whether they required any special
- 8
- 9 A. No.
- 10 Q. Presumably, as with previous witnesses, the fact that
- 11 over 2,500 of these parcels, all of which should have
- 12 been age verified and all of which should have had
- 13 labelling, and none of them did, presumably you now find
- 14 that both a very serious matter and very worrying?
- 15 A. Absolutely, and it's why I'm here today.
- 16 Q. Thank you. Was there any process that you had for
- 17 running any kind of spot checks on what your customers
- 18 were sending? Did you dip sample from time to time?
- 19 As we both referred to earlier on, 99.8 per cent of the
- 20 movements are all booked in and checked in. You're
- 21 going by the description on the outer case. As I'm sure
- 22 you can appreciate, we can't unbreak the seal of boxes
- 23 and check contents. Therefore, certain products cannot
- 24 then be sold but what we do is check the description,
- 25 scan them in and book them in. So that forms part of
- 1 Music; would you agree?
- 2 For the Whistl movements, yes.
- 3 Q. Why were you doing that?
- 4 In November 2020, Whistl approached myself, they called
- 5 me and there's evidence to detail that, to offer their
- 6 services to my fulfilment business. In January,
- 7 following that, in 2021, they then made a proposition to
 - Ruach Music Limited and that was because Ruach Music was
- 9 in business for longer. So they said we could secure
- 10 better credit terms and fulfil orders through that
- business. So, therefore, we could invoice across the 11
- 12 sister companies for that purpose. So from the very
- 13 beginning, Whistl were aware that they were dealing with
- 14 a fulfilment company for third parties.
- 15 Q. So you say that was cards on the table, they knew all
- 16 about it?

- 17 A. Absolutely.
- 18 Q. Again, I may be corrected if I'm wrong but I don't think
- 19 that we have seen the emails around that. Are those
- 20 things that you could provide to the Inquiry?
- 21 They are part of the exhibits. I hope they did come
- 22 through because I submitted those.
- 23 Q. All right, well, we will look at that.
- 24
- 25 Q. But in any event, what you say is that there was nothing

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- 1 hidden, no subterfuge about that, you were plain with
- 2 Whistl, in fact they had suggested to you that you could
- 3 add your fulfilment business on the music company
- 4 account, effectively?
- 5 A. Yes, and the timeline matches that.
- 6 Q. Thank you. Is it right that Whistl have now terminated 7 the agreement with you?
- 8 A. I terminated the agreement with Whistl about six months
- 9 ago and they never responded. So I have heard -- I have
- 10 read as part of their statement that they have stopped
- 11 supplying services to us. But I had already terminated
- 12 the contract six months ago.
- 13 Q. Why had you terminated the contract?
- 14 A. Simply because none of our clients were using their
- 15 services anymore. They didn't find any services that
- 16 they wanted to use and had moved to other competitor
- 17 companies, mostly down to the financials. They weren't
- 18 competitive anymore.
- 19 Q. Thank you. Do you agree that, as far as Whistl are
- 20 concerned, in their contract with you, they did have
- 21 terms in their contract and in their guidance, which
- 22 referred to prohibited items, so that if you followed
- 23 the link to Evri in particular there was a very clear
- 24 prohibition saying, "Evri don't take knives", full stop;
- 25 would you agree with that?

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- 1 contract we held with them, which I understand now to
 - be -- we were very reliant on that contract and reliant
- 3 on the goods coming into our premises appropriately
- 4 labelled and with instructions, should we have to take
- 5 extra precautions. So there was nothing to alert me to
- 6

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- 7 Q. But in terms of your contractual obligations with Whistl 8 and what they were saying in their terms, they were
- 9 indicating it's the customer's responsibility to choose
- 10 a carrier which will carry the goods, follow any
- 11 particular requirements and to notify the carrier of any
- 12 special instructions for handling and or delivery.
- 13 You would say you were onward dependent upon Ageo,

permit knives at all, that that was another reason why

- 14 but would you agree in terms in which here Evri didn't
- 16 if you were, in any doubt at all, you should have
- 17 checked with Ageo what these packages contained because
- 18 it was only your assumption that it was outdoor
- 19 equipment?
- 20 A. Our clients indicate the courier services they want us
- 21 to use. They actually select it themselves and, in this
- 22 case, it was a manual upload to our system explicitly
- 23 detailing the service to use. Now, upon this
- 24 investigation, there's more work to be done to actually
- 25 forward information and actually find information online

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Following the link to Evri, yes, I would agree with 1

- that. In terms of Whistl's terms and conditions I don't
- 3 believe they are in sync with Evri's because they don't
- 4 strictly prohibit the movement of knives or bladed
- 5 articles. I refer to my evidence from the Wayback
- 6 Machine that I utilised --
- 7 Q. Just pause there. If we just have on the screen
- 8 paragraph 20 of your statement at RUAM000003 at page 6.
- 9 I think this is the bit of your evidence you are
- 10 referring to:
- 11 "My understanding is that it was (and is) Whistl's
- 12 policy that knives or bladed items are not strictly
- 13 prohibited. Rather, they are permitted provided that
- 14 the sending party complies with any additional
- 15 requirements relating to them as set out in their
- 16 'prohibited items' section ..."
- - Is that right?
- 18 A. Correct, and you can see what I have inserted from
- 19 26 October 2020, which would have been a month before
- 20 they first reached out to me, what their website
- 21 detailed in relation to those objects.
- 22 What did you understand that Ageo were actually sending
 - in the parcels? What was your understanding about that?
- 24 A. My honest understanding was outdoor supplies and that
- 25 there was nothing to be cautious about, due to the
 - 186
- 1 for our clients, so they understand the various
- 2 restrictions across all companies in the UK that they
- 3 have access to -- to utilise, so as they understand the
- 4 restrictions and the requirements.
- 5 Q. Thank you. But certainly, so far as Whistl is
- 6 concerned, you were the customer and they were putting
- 7 the responsibility under the contract on you to ensure
- 8 that the requirements about avoiding prohibited items
- 9 were met, so it's not a complete answer to that, is it,
- 10 to say, "Well, Ageo should have told me", because that
- 11 creates, would you agree, an obligation and
- 12 a responsibility on you to ensure that what is being
- 13 sent doesn't breach the prohibited items list?
- 14 A. This is why we have a services agreement with each of
- 15 our clients because it does put the onus on the client
- 16 to ensure they oblige because it is their business, they
- 17 are the one who are selling the goods.
- 18 Q. So what Mr Henderson was your responsibility? What was
- 19 on your shoulders, if anything?
- 20 A. My responsibility was to ensure they upheld the services
- 21 agreement.
- 22 Q. Did you ensure that?
- 23 A. I believe extra measures can now be put in place to
- 24
- 25 Q. Yes. What's the answer to my question? At the time,

Customs about the seizure of one of the Ageo packages;

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1

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action.

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did you satisfactorily ensure that your client upheld

2 2 the service agreement or did you fall somewhat short? is that right? 3 A. I believe that model of the dropship that we were 3 A. Yes. 4 discussing here today allows for the client to not 4 Q. Can we have on the screen, please, RUAM000010. We just 5 disclose sufficient information for me to do my job on 5 note the Republic of Ireland crest at the top left and 6 that front, given the fact there's 1.77 million items, 6 it is from the Republic of Ireland Revenue but if we can 7 doing searches --7 look at the main paragraph of text, please, just 8 Q. So the system allowed Ageo not to disclose things. But 8 9 9 I'm focusing on you, Mr Henderson, and your "Notice is hereby given that certain goods, to wit; 10 responsibilities because you are part of the chain and 10 1 x JOKER Lock Knife, 1 x Chickan machete, 1 x Bowie you had contractual obligations to Whistl, who also put 11 Type Knife, 1 x Muela Dagger, 1 x Bayonet Type Knife, 11 12 you on notice about Evri's requirements and your 12 1 x Butterfly Knife, 1 x 6 Barrel Pepper-box 13 responsibility to ensure that the prohibited items list 13 Revolver ... 3 x Throwing Knives, 1 x Ceremonial Dagger, 14 was not breached. So can I ask the question again: did 14 1 x Miquel Nieta Hunting Knife ..." 15 you do all that you should have done to ensure that your 15 Were seized by the Irish customs, yes? 16 client upheld the service agreement or did you fall 16 A. Yes. 17 somewhat short? 17 **Q.** What was your reaction when you got that notification? 18 Looking back, I would say I fell somewhat short. 18 A. My reaction was entire shock that these were the goods Α. 19 Thank you. In terms of the termination of the contract 19 that Ageo were trying to send through my facility. They 20 with Ageo, I should cover that but I'm going to do so 20 were an obvious breach of our services agreement. 21 relatively briefly. Could we just look at your 21 Q. Because? 22 paragraph 24, please, on page 7 of your statement, so 22 A. Because of the variety of clauses which I quoted in our 23 that's RUAM000003. Thank you. It's page 8. Sorry, you 23 email to Ageo, clause 2, clause 3. You can see here 24 were right first time, forgive me. Yes, page 7. 24 explicitly a firearm detailed. 25 You got a notification from the Irish Tax and 25 Q. Yes. What Mr Martínez said about that was that it was 189 190 1 a historic replica. Does that make any difference to 1 Q. If we look at it at RUAM000012, could we go to the next 2 2 page, please, and to the bottom of that page -- maybe you? 3 A. It doesn't make a difference to me. 3 page 3 then, please, just at the very bottom. Can we go 4 Q. Is it your evidence that this was the first time that 4 to the bottom of page 2 -- yes, that's it: 5 5 you were actually aware that the packages contained "Hello Stephen, 6 quite -- on the serious end of knives? 6 "We would like to have a video call with you if 7 7 A. Yes. possible ..." 8 Q. Did you, at that time, go back, as you told the Inquiry 8 No, forgive me, it's further down, please. Can we 9 you did when you received the Inquiry's notification, to go to the whole of that page, right, so this is an email 9 10 look at what you had been told by this company 10 from you: 11 11 previously? "Dear Alberto, 12 12 A. In terms of doing an investigation? "I am writing to formally notify you that, in 13 **Q.** Yes, in terms of going back to the email where, when 13 accordance with our Master Services Agreement, we are 14 first asked about what items they would be selling, they 14 terminating our contract with immediate effect. This 15 said, "We're outdoor specialists, we specialise in 15 decision follows the seizure of your goods by Customs 16 knives and our website is Hunting & Knives"? 16 due to their classification as dangerous goods, which A. I didn't go back to that email on that day. I put the 17 17 are strictly prohibited under section 2.12 of our 18 onus on actually ensuring it was terminated. I went out 18 Agreement. 19 to the warehouse immediately and spoke with managers to 19 "As per the Agreement, we do not accept hazardous or dangerous goods for storage or fulfilment ... 20 ask was there anything dropped that day or the day 20 21 before for Ageo. There was. I ensured that was set 21 "Additionally, under clause 5.2 ... early 22 aside immediately and seized and I contacted Ageo to 22 termination charges apply ... 23 say, "This will be returned to sender", as in the 23 "Following payment of the outstanding invoices, 24 supplier in Spain, so the onus was on ensuring swift 24 please arrange for the removal of any remaining

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goods ...

| 1 | | "Should you require any further clarification please | 1 | |
|--|----|--|--|----------------------------|
| 2 | | do not hesitate to contact me." | 2 | |
| 3 | | So, in fairness to you, a pretty robust, immediate | 3 | |
| 4 | | termination; would you agree? | 4 | |
| 5 | A. | Yes. | 5 | |
| 6 | Q. | If we go to the preceding page, please, there's | 6 | |
| 7 | | a request from someone at Grupo Marpasi asking for | 7 | |
| 8 | | a video call to discuss this: | 8 | |
| 9 | | "We would like to have a video call if possible | 9 | |
| 10 | | tomorrow morning so we can speak about this. | 10 | |
| 11 | | "We have a long good work relation and we are sure | 11 | |
| 12 | | we can find the way to solve this without ending our | 12 | |
| 13 | | contract." | 13 | |
| 14 | | Top of the page, please let's go to the preceding | 14 | |
| 15 | | page, right at the bottom previous page right at the | 15 | |
| 16 | | bottom. So the page before that, please, right at the | 16 | |
| 17 | | bottom, so the email starts "Hi Tania", then the top of | 17 | |
| 18 | | page 3, please: | 18 | |
| 19 | | "Unfortunately, you have left us liable for | 19 | |
| 20 | | prosecution." | 20 | |
| 21 | | Is that because you were concerned about the firearm | 21 | |
| 22 | | in particular? | 22 | |
| 23 | A. | The gun led me to yes. | 23 | |
| 24 | Q. | "The goods being shipped to us, go against our terms. | 24 | |
| 25 | | "We cannot proceed further trading with the noted | 25 | |
| | | 193 | | |
| | | | | |
| 1 | | "Dear Juan, | 1 | |
| 1 2 | | "Dear Juan, "Thank you for your email. I understand your | 1 2 | |
| | | · | · · | |
| 2 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your | 2 | |
| 2 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. | 2 | |
| 2 3 4 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me | 2 3 4 | |
| 2 3 4 5 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. | 2 3 4 5 | A. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the | 2 3 4 5 6 | A. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and | 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Α. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 | A. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 | A. Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 | |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 | |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 | Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 | Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 | Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 | Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 | Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 | | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." Then you refer to those clauses. | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 | Q. A. Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 | A. | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Bayterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." Then you refer to those clauses. What did you make of Mr Martínez's suggestion that | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 | Q. A. Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 | A. | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." Then you refer to those clauses. What did you make of Mr Martínez's suggestion that what he had been sending was "cutlery"? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 | Q. A. Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 | Α. | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Bayonet Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." Then you refer to those clauses. What did you make of Mr Martínez's suggestion that what he had been sending was "cutlery"? I couldn't believe it. It was very obvious to me that he was evidently still trying deliberately not to disclose the contents of what he was sending inside his | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 | Q. A. Q. A. Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 | Α. | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Butterfly Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." Then you refer to those clauses. What did you make of Mr Martínez's suggestion that what he had been sending was "cutlery"? I couldn't believe it. It was very obvious to me that he was evidently still trying deliberately not to disclose the contents of what he was sending inside his packages and it infuriated me. | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 | Q. A. Q. A. Q. |
| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 | A. | "Thank you for your email. I understand your concerns and want to clarify the situation. " you are always welcome to book a call with me using the link [et cetera]. "To address your concerns, I can confirm that the seized goods were not cutlery. Customs flagged and detained the shipment due to its contents, which included: "Lock Knives "Bayonet Knives "Bayonet Knives "Pepper-box Revolver "Throwing Knives "Daggers "Hunting Knives." Then you refer to those clauses. What did you make of Mr Martínez's suggestion that what he had been sending was "cutlery"? I couldn't believe it. It was very obvious to me that he was evidently still trying deliberately not to disclose the contents of what he was sending inside his | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 | Q. A. Q. A. Q. |

goods. Please furnish your account with full payment, and remove all stock from our premises."

Then if we go to the previous page, can we have the whole text of that email, please:

"... I am surprised that you do not ..."

This is from Mr Martínez:

"... I am surprised that you do not even want to talk to us about what happened and you do not inform us which article you have been told is dangerous, nor have you sent us any kind of documentation. As you well know, we send cutlery and this is not classified as a dangerous article for transport."

Then he purports to give the UK's guidance on shipping dangerous goods:

"On the other hand, I was very upset when you sent us an invoice for the termination of the contract that you have unilaterally rescinded without giving any explanation.

"The merchandise that you have in your warehouse ... is valued at around £10,000. Not to mention the damage that you are causing us with respect to our clients."

Then he threatens legal action against you. Your reaction to being told "we send cutlery", I think if we go to the next email, so that will be on the previous page, is evident from the response that you sent:

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in due course but, as somebody who was in business with Martinez, at least to this extent, what was your assessment? Did you assess that he was somebody who wasn't on top of the law and wasn't on top of what he was shipping and was making errors or did you think that this was deliberate concealment?

7 **A.** It was hard -- hard to draw parallels, based on the limited email correspondence that I have had with that individual. As you know, I have dealt with Alberto mostly, not Juan. I'm not sure which side he sits.

11 Q. Did you report the company to the authorities in anyway, at that time?

A. I left -- I responded to the Customs authorities and
 they said they were going to respond to me with further
 detail on the action. Nothing further was reported.

16 Q. What was the nature of what you said to the Irish17 Customs authorities?

18 A. It should be detailed here in the evidence to --

19 **Q.** Just give us the outline of it. Just give us the outline of what you said.

A. I told them I was terminating the contract with
 immediate effect. I supplied them with the same copy of
 the terms of agreement, that you have, that I had with
 Ageo Wholesale. I confirmed that we didn't own the

25 goods and the legal liabilities of the client.

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- Q. So you effectively said that it was their 1 2 responsibility, you were terminating it, they weren't 3 your goods and did you say you didn't know that these 4 were the items that they were shipping? 5
 - A. Correct, and I asked them to dispose of the goods.
 - **Q.** Thank you. In terms then of looking to the future, reflections and lessons learned, your statement to the Inquiry had a section in relation to that. Can we bring it up, please? It starts at paragraph 39 on page 13. I'm not going to read out all of this. As with previous witnesses, you will understand that your statement will be published, so the totality of what you say.

But, in effect, you start in paragraph 39 saying you have 70 active clients; receive, warehouse and fulfil orders for them. Over the page, you have strict service agreements "in line with the couriers we subcontract", in this case Ruach Music.

In paragraph 40, it is the responsibility of the account holder with Whistl that any items it was asking Whistl or Evri to deliver were not prohibited.

Paragraph 41:

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"During the preparation of the referenced shipment, visual inspections of the packaging were conducted, as standard, to confirm alignment ..."

Paragraph 42:

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understanding and complying with their legal obligations."

You go on to give the detail in relation to that and then you say this, about five lines from the bottom of paragraph 47:

"Accordingly, I believe there was nothing different we reasonably could have done. With hindsight however, and now with a clearer understanding of how the client undermined our contract, misrepresented the contents, and used our fulfilment centre to process this order, I am implementing changes to reduce the potential for such deceit in the future. As a direct result of this case, we are strengthening our internal processes."

All right? Mr Henderson, that wording "Accordingly, I believe there was nothing different we reasonably could have done", do you wish to change that evidence and that sentiment in light of the areas that I have explored with you?

A. Well, this speaks to the individual parcel to AR. It was a response to a question that was submitted to myself. It details that on the paragraphs previous to that. That was what these paragraphs are in relation to. So based on that, that parcel coming in, in that format, not correctly labelled, without the client actually asking us to send it via courier ID

"Whistl place responsibility on the customer ... to ensure parcels comply with their policies. This is the same approach taken by other couriers we use ... at SJ Henderson, we have strict service agreements with our clients requiring them to send only goods which comply with Clause 2 ..."

Then it comes to this in paragraph 43:

"In this case, we were not informed by the client, Ageo, that the goods fell outside of our services agreement, nor were the parcels labelled confirming the contents included bladed items, therefore we had no way of knowing that the parcel contained a machete other than unpacking every sealed parcel and checking the contents, which is not part of the service we provide. Accordingly, the client failed to comply with our contract, which resulted in Whistl's terms and conditions being breached without our knowledge."

So throughout those paragraphs, it might be thought that you were saying, in terms, that this failure was solely the fault of Ageo and Mr Martínez.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. At paragraph 47, you say:

> "To our knowledge, at the time, SJ Henderson fulfilled an order for a client who, as per the terms of our signed agreement, bore full responsibility for

1 verification service, not detailing anything underneath 2 the packing instructions, there's nothing further we 3 could have reasonably done at that time.

4 Q. All right, but it's just this, you see, repeating the 5 thanks for the speed with which you have dealt with 6 matters and acknowledging that you haven't had long to 7 reflect on these matters, nowhere in the reflections on events, in response to a request for you to give your 8 candid reflections, do you say, "We had some missed 9 10 opportunities to recognise that these were knives and we 11 could have done better".

12 A. At a macro level, I would agree with that.

13 MR MOSS: Thank you. I'm just looking to my left, to see if 14 there are any questions.

15 Mr Henderson, thank you. Those are my questions. 16 Sir, do you have any more questions for this 17 witness?

Questioned by THE CHAIR

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Just one, Mr Henderson. You will remember a little while ago Mr Moss was asking you about communications with Mr Martínez and the position is that the Inquiry heard from Mr Martínez that he claims he had a video conference with you and that, during the course of that video conference, you said that you were the expert in relation to matters such as age verification 200

| 1 | and the delivery of parcels that required that kind of | 1 | the documentation that you have is something for which |
|----|--|----|--|
| 2 | condition attached to them. | 2 | I am very grateful. |
| 3 | Firstly, early on in your relationship, were there | 3 | A. Thank you. |
| 4 | any video conferences between you and Mr Martínez? | 4 | SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: So thank you for your evidence and |
| 5 | A. Yes. | 5 | thank you for attending and thank you for your help. |
| 6 | SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: There were. Secondly, during the | 6 | A. Thank you very much. |
| 7 | course of those video conferences, was there any | 7 | SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Does that draw a close to this |
| 8 | exchange of the kind that I have just outlined? | 8 | afternoon's |
| 9 | A. No, and to speak to that, it was in a conference I do | 9 | MR MOSS: That is our evidence for today. |
| 10 | know I had one of, the emails that we have looked here | 10 | We don't have time to start Mr Ali sensibly. So, |
| 11 | today, that specifically told us to simply apply | 11 | with your permission, sir, we will sit at 10.00 tomorrow |
| 12 | a shipping label, was emails that followed that Zoom | 12 | to hear the evidence of three witnesses: Hamza Ali, the |
| 13 | call. In that same thread, I say, "Thank you for your | 13 | Amazon delivery driver in relation to the knife; |
| 14 | time on Zoom". | 14 | Mr Boumphrey of Amazon; and PC McNamee. |
| 15 | SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Right. Was it just one Zoom call early | 15 | (4.36 pm) |
| 16 | on then? | 16 | (The Inquiry adjourned until 10.00 am the following day) |
| 17 | A. From my investigations, yes. | 17 | |
| 18 | SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: You don't have a memory of there being | 18 | |
| 19 | more than one? | 19 | |
| 20 | A. I don't recall any more than one. | 20 | |
| 21 | SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: No. As Mr Moss has already said, | 21 | |
| 22 | Mr Henderson, you have responded to the request from | 22 | |
| 23 | this Inquiry with truly impressive speed, I think you | 23 | |
| 24 | have only known about this for about seven days, and the | 24 | |
| 25 | fact that you are here today and you have provided all | 25 | |
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