

For the attention of the, Mr. Nigel Railton, Mr. Jonathan Reynolds MP, Rt Hon. Liam Byrne, Kevin Hollinrake MP, Kemi Badenoch MP, Jason Beer KC, Sir Wyn Williams, Mr. Oliver Shah (Sunday Times)

28th May 2024

Dear All

We are writing to you to as a group of highly disenfranchised POL employees, to seek your support in addressing the ongoing intolerable leadership and cover up within POL. We represent a significant group from all levels of POL, who are sick and tired of being lied to and watching certain managers being favoured and protected, because they are part of the inner circle of Nick Read. The culture is terrible, there has never been a plan in place to address the wrongs of the past (recent key indicators are showing significantly declining trends in our culture and trust between senior leaders and the rest of the business). Worse still, the current flawed leadership is not being appropriately and objectively held accountable.

We wish to remain anonymous for no other reason that we do not believe we will be protected by the current regime headed by Nick Read, that he will regard what we have to say as a slight on his own leadership, the result of which will be a dogged campaign to tarnish and remove us from the organisation. We have seen this happen too many times, to too many people, over the last few years.

Since March POL has conducted 2 opinion surveys, one directed at post masters, the other at POL employees. Both results are shocking and serve to demonstrate that the culture within POL is significantly worsening (despite Read confirming in a Parliamentary committee meeting in January that 'improvements in culture were being made'). This is not true. We are deeply frustrated that despite several requests to see the full results, we are being denied access. This ongoing cover up is unacceptable, particularly in light of the Inquiry and the expectation that things are changing for the better. They simply are not. The true feedback is in the detail, in what people have said and commented upon, yet we are only allowed to see the redacted results, both the SPM and the employee verbatim feedback is being withheld. This is unacceptable and requires not only your intervention, but an investigation into a) why the results are so poor and b) why the current leadership think it is appropriate to hide this important feedback from us.

Furthermore, key people are not being appropriately managed by Read. You are no doubt aware that Ben Foat has been given significant time off work (he has hardly been seen this year) and for the last few months he has been on permitted fully paid leave, to allow him to prepare for his half day at the Inquiry on Monday 3rd June. Not only this, but he has also had a forensic lawyer assigned to him for over 12 months, to assist with the questioning at the Inquiry, costing the public (we are told) c£700,000 (we are all wondering why on earth he has to practice so hard to tell the truth). Foat's poor capability, in the most senior legal position in POL, is obvious; nearly every month there is some adverse PR created by him and his incompetence. Whether it is the exorbitant cost of lawyers, the poor management of the compensation process (we would like to thank Mr Hollinrake and Mr Byrne for championing this, if it wasn't for your intervention, there would still be no redress for those poor SPMs), late paper submissions to the Inquiry, the abhorrent racist language he continued to use until 2019, the ongoing insensitive management of investigations, the unauthorised and unvetted re-employment of people (there's at least 20) to manage the compensation process, who were originally employed in the prosecution process etc. Yet, he is known to be one of Read's favourites and as a result since 2019, despite his crass performance, Foat has benefited from significant remuneration enhancements in pay, bonus, exceptionally high-performance ratings, other 'side' bonus plans etc and now significant paid time off. This cover up, favouritism and protectionism afforded to Foat, sickens us and is unacceptable. It did not go unnoticed to the organisation, at the beginning of this year, when Henry Staunton called Read out for bullying, that both Foat and Read's PA (the only ones willing to), made impassioned speeches on behalf of Read, in front of him (telling us all what a 'great guy' he was); it was stomach churning. Please intervene, examine the facts, and hold Foat and Read accountable for this continued stream of cockups and embarrassment to POL.

I am sure you have been made aware that we have at least 120 employees who have been in long term roles who have conflicts of interest i.e. they were operating in roles which to a greater or lesser degree were involved in the wrongful prosecution of SPM's. Read has known yet refuses to address the latter situation proactively, despite being asked to. He reacts only to specific individuals after their names are called out in public. For instance Angela van den Bogerd mentioned in her statement, the role of Tracy Marshall; the latter played a prominent role in 2010/15 in the unlawful convictions of SPMs. Despite this, just 3 years ago, Marshall was appointed as the Postmaster Engagement Director, much to our dismay (and no wonder the trust results plummeted). However, only within the last week, Read has removed Marshall from her role and appointed her into another obscure role. This is just not acceptable. There are several other significant employees, who have conflicts of interest who are not being appropriately managed. For instance, Al

Cameron (who looked perfectly well at the Inquiry) has been signed off sick for over a year, on full pay. We all know that Read and Cameron had a highly toxic relationship; he felt bullied by Read. However, again, Cameron has been provided with a lawyer, paid for by the public, to help him with his appearance at the Inquiry. What is going on? These deep fissures in POL leadership, along with these ongoing unmanaged conflicts of interest are all harmful to building the much-needed trust. Read's ongoing knee jerk management, gross incompetence, and cover ups, requires investigation and scrutiny.

Who are these new executives coming on board too? Karen McEwan is well known to Read; they worked together and have kept in touch over the years. How she got appointed within weeks of her predecessor departing, tells us this is another cover up and Read is simply surrounding himself with his 'own' type. Then we have Chris Brocklesby, a member of the SEG, but earning £3000 per day as a contractor, who has yet to deliver something...anything. We have further planned changes to the SEG, but with more smoke of mirrors; what is going to happen when Owen Woodley resigns (we naturally expect another friend of Read will get appointed). Also, what happened to Zdravko Mladenov, the previously 'rated' IT director, why has he left? He seems to have disappeared, no public announcement – just another cover up.

Now onto the Board. Kemi, you stated that POL Board is "united". It is not. We all hear the shenanigans going on in corridor conversations. You have clearly been set up by the current UKGI NED Lorna Gratton; she is not at all liked or respected in POL. Unlike Tom Cooper, who reached out to the SLT and beyond, she shows no interest in the business beyond the occasional parachuting into Board meetings. It is obvious she is too inexperienced to influence the likes of Henry Staunton, so she resorted to using schoolgirl tactics, turning to use dramatic and politically incorrect statements purportedly used by Staunton, to deliberately fire you up. This worked a treat; you unfairly dismissed the wrong guy. It is staggering that you can forgive Frank Hester, for his atrocious comments about Diane Abbot, yet you sack Staunton whose comments were extremely mild by comparison. Had you properly investigated (instead of being part of the cover up) you would have seen Staunton was innocent. But it doesn't just stop at Gratton, she works through David Bickerton, the DTB Director General, the best friend of Nick Read, who manages the approval process of his bonus, his pay increases and has served to protect Read, when coming under fire by Staunton or anyone else. Having checked the 'conflict of interest' register, Bickerton mentions he has an affiliation with a children's hospice, but no reference to his best mate Read. We assume he has declared this to you or is this another cover up?

There is no road map or strategy to deal with the future, the role of POL, the role of SPMs, etc. Rather, the central focus being Read himself, the budgets are designed primarily to pay his bonus (and do not focus on postmaster REM), the huge rise in PO head office costs is empire building (1800 people/£130m per annum and increasing), costs & risks generally are not being managed (e.g. the new IT system), the monies being spent on Foat, Cameron et al. It is totally out of control and unfair. Hardworking postmasters and employees views and objections are not being listened to, rather our views are regarded as dissent, and as such, we are afraid to speak up, step out and tell you who we are.

Mr. Railton, please look at the above and investigate. If you can, you should engage with some of the past employees (particularly Staunton and Cameron). Our view is those who have left under a cloud, are the ones telling the truth. You will learn a lot from them. Careful consideration should also be given to inviting the correct people to phase 7 of the Inquiry; there are a lot of people who want to provide Sir Wyn with their honest and accurate view of the ongoing poor culture and leadership in POL.

In just 12 months, Post Office has plummeted from its position as Britain's 6th most trusted brand, to 135th. These results are damaging to the whole of Post Office, which is scandalous and very upsetting. The latter is not simply down to the Inquiry and the outcry over Horizon (as Read would like us to believe). It is quite clear to us that we will never turn around POL culture under his leadership. Read is NOT TRUSTED by his own employees, by SPM's, by members of parliament, by the UK at large. To most of us, Read represents an inadequate, greedy, self-interested man and like Vennells, he cannot genuinely relate to the human side of POL, the hard working and honest SPMs and employees. We are very distressed and very unhappy. Please help. Read cannot continue.

Yours sincerely

POL Whistleblowers



PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL
Mr Nigel Railton
GRO