

LONDON & EASTERN REGION

Unite the Union is taking action in protest of the victimisation and suspension of Union Representative, Vicko Plevnik, by St Mungo's management. We are extremely concerned that Vicko's has been made the subject of retaliatory action as a result of him reporting bullying by management, and for his work as a union representative speaking up on behalf of other staff members.

Management's actions further entrench a culture of fear and silencing of employees' legitimate voice, posing a serious threat to care standards, and potentially putting vulnerable people at risk.

In August 2020, 3 employees raised separate grievances in respect of bullying by the manager and senior manager in the Property Services team. Initially, only 1 of these grievances was heard by management. Management dismissed Vicko's grievance, despite the fact that the investigator failed to read all of the relevant documents submitted, nor spoke to any of the 12 witnesses suggested.

Instead of properly investigating the complaint, management chose to retaliate with disciplinary action against Vicko himself. Outrageously, one of the reasons cited for the disciplinary action is the egregious 'crime' of eating a biscuit in a Google meeting!

This is not an isolated issue. Unite carried out a survey of staff on bullying in which 68% of respondents said that senior managers had bullied them. This is deeply concerning. It is vital that staff in an organisation working with vulnerable groups feel able to call out poor practice and to question senior managers without fear of retribution.

It seems that St Mungo's has failed to learn lessons of the Home Office scandal, which saw teams within St Mungo's collaborating with Home Office on deportations, allegedly without the knowledge of senior management themselves. While many staff bitterly opposed such involvement, many felt unable to speak up because of a culture of silence and fear.

The fact that senior management were not aware of actions within their own organisation raises profound questions about the effects of such a culture, and whether governance arrangements in St Mungo's are fit for purpose.

Despite Unite's attempts to resolve these issues with Senior Management, Vicko's suspension remains. Unite therefore has no choice but to conduct a Leverage campaign and inform all stakeholders of the deleterious effects of management's victimisation of a Union Representative, and failure to investigate bullying concerns raised by staff, on the culture and service standards of the organisation.

Unite calls on Board members, commissioners, councilors, corporate partners and other stakeholders to insist on a credible and independent review of governance arrangements in St Mungo's, the lifting of Vicko's suspension and withdrawal of all disciplinary proceedings against him.