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LONDON & EASTERN REGION

10th November 2021

Steve Douglas CBE
Chief Executive, St Mungo's
3 Thomas More Square,
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Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letter dated 8th November 2021.

With respect to both reports' recommendations, Unite remains committed to working constructively with St Mungo's and will continue to engage with you on this basis. We are equally keen to enjoy good industrial relations and see issues resolved effectively and positively, in a manner that promotes St. Mungo's reputation and client outcomes in the sector.

St. Mungo's has a very influential role in addressing homelessness, while its employees are deeply invested in the quality and long-term impact of the support they provide to service users. This is work that must be acknowledged, uplifted, and supported.

To improve industrial relations, trust must be earned, renewed, and respected. This can be done by honouring and abiding by agreements between us. In recent years, St. Mungo's has repeatedly and unilaterally broken agreements, choosing to implement changes without meaningful consultation or accountability to the union - or to its employees. This has led to disputes and an appreciable deterioration in our relationship, as you are well aware.

St. Mungo's ripped up the agreement on the Junior Staffing cap, stopped providing Unite details of new employees, refused the use of the avoidance of dispute process, you vetoed collective meeting on redundancies, you failed to notify me in advance of action being taken against our reps: all in breach of our agreements. Yet you wonder why we have been asking you for consistency, to attend joint meetings, to hear and acknowledge members' feedback, to honour and renew agreements, and generally earn our trust. .

Trust is also built on mutual respect and active listening. Having our views heard and acted upon promotes mutual respect. Throughout the recent dispute, Unite has not been heard or the views of our members taken into account: in practice, they have been ignored. For example, our survey on bullying was wholesale dismissed by yourself and members of your senior management team on the basis that our sample size was smaller than that of your organisation-wide survey, with no appreciation of the significance of the results or interest in comparing our respective data to best improve staff well-being and St. Mungo's service delivery.

Our key concern, which is central to the current leverage campaign, is the on-going use of bullying tactics by managers against staff, contributing to a culture of fear where employees do not feel safe in raising concerns for fear of retaliation. When we feedback concerns raised by our members, your response always seems to fall along the lines of, "Well, when I speak to staff they tell me something different." Of course - you are the CEO. Not everyone is confident enough to tell you directly that they are experiencing hardship and difficulties at work. And when, for example, someone did have the confidence to speak up at one of your forums, he was issued with a warning the following week, as I have raised with you previously.

The union, on the other hand, exists to support employees experiencing hardship and difficulties at work. We are best positioned to listen to and support employees too fearful, anxious, or at risk to raise issues through their line managers. When we tell you that your employees are hesitant to utilise the grievance process, for fear of exactly what happened to Vicko, and are being told to stop raising concerns or face disciplinary action, you should listen and take action to change. The union is potentially your most useful resource for understanding and improving the health of your organisation.

Vicko was suspended for raising his experiences of bullying by management because it caused the management "significant psychological distress." While Vicko raised the bullying in good faith and was actually signed off by a GP for work-related stress, the managers in question continued at work. There has been no acknowledgement of the "psychological distress" and pervasive impact on Vicko's well-being caused by the bullying he experienced from managers - or the handling of his case. This unacceptable double standard needs to be addressed: this is why our campaign continues to be necessary. Many employees navigating formal processes report similar experiences. Vicko is not alone in being affected by an uneven application of policy, or the preferential protection and recognition of health needs offered to senior managers within St. Mungo's.

Despite the reps and I providing you a number of specific examples where staff have been threatened with disciplinary action if they raise concerns about their service or team, and presenting you with the results of our bullying survey, you refuse to admit there might be a real issue within the organisation. Trotting out a line that you have zero tolerance of bullying is insufficient: we need to see meaningful action to better serve your employees in their workplaces and teams.

You state in your letter a desire to create "safe spaces" for staff to raise their concerns, which dovetails with the current consultation on St. Mungo's Dignity at Work and Equality & Diversity policies. We welcome this intention. But until you recognise that many staff don't have recourse to "safe spaces" at present and take steps to protect staff from reprisary

disciplinary processes and preferential consideration of managers, we can't help but question your desire to meaningfully deliver on this commitment.

In our recent conversations you have indicated that you are willing to work with us. We want the same. But we cannot proceed generatively if you continue to deny that staff are raising valid concerns and experiencing real issues that might contravene St. Mungo's commitments on paper and suggest an urgent need to assess, review, and adapt how policies are implemented in practice.

We reached out to St. Mungo's Trustees because we believe the fact that employees are fearful of raising concerns has the potential to put clients at significant risk, undermining all that St. Mungo's and its excellent staff stand for. [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) guidance states very clearly that trustees of charities **"have overall control of a charity and are responsible for making sure it's doing what it was set up to do."** As long as senior management continues to dismiss our presentations and evidence that a culture of silence and fear of reprisal is impacting the health of teams and services within St. Mungo's, presenting potential safeguarding issues, Trustees have ultimate responsibility to address the risk this poses to St. Mungo's employees and service users.

We expected Trustees to be keen to take steps to remedy these issues, as stewards of St. Mungo's organisational direction and quality of service delivery. Unfortunately, from the responses we've received, Trustees seem to be taking their lead from senior management and, rather than taking concerns seriously and investigating them, are also simply ignoring them – this does not bode well for the organisation.

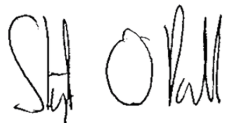
The lack of meaningful acknowledgement, accountability, and responsiveness from St. Mungo's governance structure has informed our decision to begin a leverage campaign. When management and Trustees refuse to act on serious organisational concerns, we have no alternative but to approach the people who fund your services - who, like your staff, deeply and obviously care about the quality of service offered by St. Mungo's - and raise these concerns with them. We explain that we have observed major issues with bullying and silencing at St. Mungo's and that, although the governance structure won't listen to the union and put a stop to these issues, perhaps they might listen to its funders. We then invite them to contact you to encourage you to take meaningful steps to bring an end to retaliatory disciplinarys and take action in light of the failures of St. Mungo's executive and board to end the culture of fear.

We don't accept that our campaign might jeopardise funding. It is only your refusal to accept the reality of these issues, to take responsibility, and to work with unions and staff to resolve these issues that negatively impacts long-term service delivery. The leverage campaign is merely highlighting St. Mungo's executive's inaction and irresponsibility to those who have a vested interest in ensuring that services are safe and well-run.

I absolutely refute the allegations that Unite are targeting individuals in a racist, misogynistic manner as you indicated at the JNC. The campaign has called attention to the inaction of the individuals involved in St. Mungo's governance, who, in accepting and taking on their empowered roles in the highest levels of the organisation, must also accept the accountability and ethical expectations attached to a position at the head of a renowned homelessness charity.

Until such time that you acknowledge the significance and impact of issues of bullying and victimisation within St. Mungo's and commit to working with Unite to support, not punish, affected employees, the leverage campaign will continue. Promoting positive relationships and trust with your funders remains in the hands of your executive team and St. Mungo's trustees: we would like to support and work alongside you in this, but cannot do so in good conscience until you take action to stop retaliatory disciplinarys and the silencing of employees.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SH O'Donnell'.

Steve O'Donnell
Regional Officer
Unite the Union