

Dear Colleagues

In the light of events over the last week, and following what transpired at our meeting this morning, with great regret I must resign from the Management Committee. I do so with a heavy heart and with very real concern for the future of the Society of Authors.

I believe you are owed an explanation for my decision.

On November 1, the cases of five separate complainants were passed to Management Committee. Each made a series of allegations concerning actions by Joanne Harris, Nicola Solomon and the SoA itself.

Those complaints are multi-faceted, sometimes diffuse and range from trivial to extremely serious. SoA's published complaints policy promises the complainants – and those about whom they complained – an impartial investigation. It requires establishing all the facts and measuring them against SoA's published policies before, ultimately, arriving at decisions.

Following procedure, Management Committee appointed a subcommittee of three people to carry out an investigation into the complaints. Abie Longstaff, Charles Harris and I were unanimously appointed, and Management Committee mandated that decisions by this subcommittee would, if necessary, be by majority vote.

The subcommittee began examining the various complaints documents and evidence on November 2. Our work was unavoidably interrupted by other Management Committee meetings, including those about the (then) forthcoming AGM.

Additionally, one complainant objected to Abie Longstaff's presence on the subcommittee, arguing that she had previously displayed bias in favour of Joanne Harris. At our request, Management Committee met to discuss this; I stressed that our published procedure did not grant to either complainants or those they complained about, a right of veto on those tasked with carrying out the investigations. Management Committee accepted this.

The subcommittee worked extremely hard, neglecting our own work as writers for days on end, and made good progress on the first three cases. For clarity: we had not reached any conclusion on any of the five complainants' cases; we had, rather, completed much of the initial fact finding.

Unfortunately, on Friday, November 11, Abie Longstaff unilaterally suspended the subcommittee's work. She asked Management Committee to transfer all the investigations over to external lawyers, citing disagreements with Charles and I about the process.

What followed was a chaotic week of proposals, counter-proposals, resolutions and votes by email; often these votes were ignored almost as soon as they were taken. Some of these emails made offensive *ad hominem* attacks on colleagues; worse, many included statements by Management Committee members which effectively pre-judged and denigrated the merits (or otherwise) of the issues raised by the complainants – despite the fact that none of these members had actually seen the complaints.

Charles Harris and I repeatedly pleaded with Management Committee members not to say, write or do anything which could be interpreted as bias or animus against the complainants and/or their complaints. We specifically warned that all these emails were ‘discoverable’; that any complainant had a statutory right to see them, should they submit a Subject Access Request, and that this could expose SoA to risk. Our pleas and advice were ignored.

For a full week, work on the complaints was halted. Abie Longstaff formally resigned from the subcommittee, stating that she would not work with Charles Harris and I. Arguments rumbled about who should replace her; Margaret Skea volunteered and was informally approved, before Joanne Harris objected to her, citing perceived animus.

Our meeting this morning was intended to resolve these issues; to vote on continuing the existing subcommittee team of Charles and myself, and then to vote on Margaret Skea’s appointment to it. Under these proposals, the three of us would then have resumed work.

In the event, a vote was taken first on whether Charles and I should remain on the investigating subcommittee; two of you voted in favour, four against. This was, under any interpretation, a vote of no confidence which made it impossible for me to remain on Management Committee.

We promised both the complainants and those complained about an impartial and timely investigation. Sadly, my experience of the past week is that the formal investigation into complaints lodged against Joanne Harris, Nicola Solomon and the SoA seems to have been impeded by attempts to undermine its impartiality and integrity; and that there have been profoundly unpleasant personal attacks made by Management Committee members on Charles Harris and myself.

Charles – rightly, in my view – calls this bullying. I find it disturbing that this is the second instance of such behaviour within little more than a year. When she resigned from Management Committee in September 2021, Katherine Quarmby cited exactly this sort of “hostile experience”, the “denigration” of her views and the dismissal of “due process”.

I hoped until this morning that commonsense would prevail and that the subcommittee would be allowed to resume its honest, impartial and fair investigations into the five complainants’ cases, unimpeded. I was wrong.

I was elected to Management Committee one year ago. I hoped to be able to serve our members, and that my background, training and experience could be useful. I am deeply saddened that I cannot continue to do this. But my conscience, concern for my wellbeing and that of my family, as well as my fears for the integrity of the SoA, mean that I must resign from the Management Committee.

Finally, I want to place on record my admiration for SoA's staff and their truly extraordinary commitment on behalf of all our members. To Anna and the team – a huge and heartfelt 'thank you': the work you do is vital, and greatly benefits the lives and livelihoods of authors.

Yours

TIM TATE

November 18, 2022