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## Post Office executive off sick for almost a year after clash with boss

Disclosure raises serious questions about continued chaos in wake of Horizon scandal

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5 March 2024 • 5:03pm

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The Post Office's finance chief has been on sick leave for almost a year after clashing with its chief executive, The Telegraph can disclose.

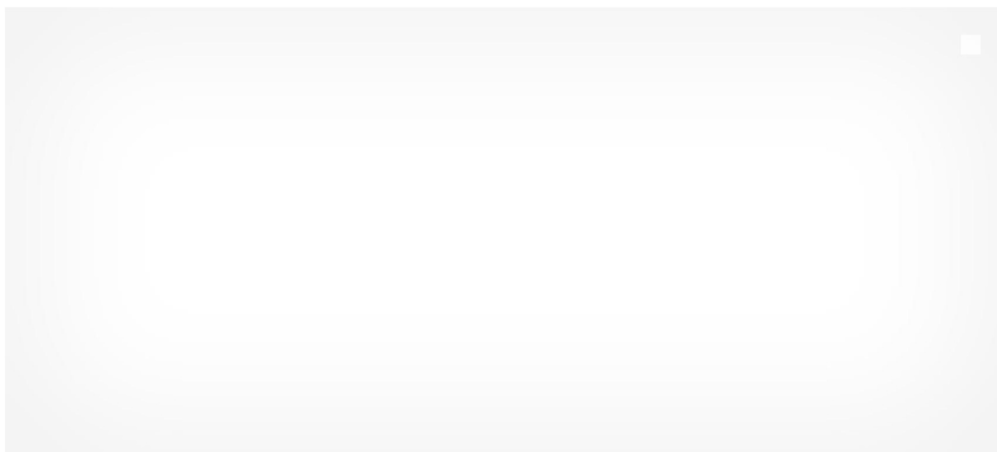
Alisdair Cameron, the chief financial officer, has been signed off work since last April and has not attended a single board meeting since then.

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Post Office executive off sick for almost a year after clash with boss

He is still listed as sitting on the Post Office board and the company, which is taxpayer owned, refuses to reveal his interim replacement. It is alleged that chief executive Nick Read asked the Government to authorise a pay-off for Mr Cameron but that request was declined.

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Mr Read's five-year tenure at the Post Office is coming under scrutiny over the running of the organisation in the wake of the Horizon scandal. The Telegraph can also disclose the Post Office has employed five different heads of human resources during his time in charge.

Jane Davies, the previous group people officer, is understood to be suing the Post Office for unfair dismissal. Ms Davies wrote an 80-page whistleblowing document that details her complaints against Mr Read.

It was reported at the weekend that this includes an allegation that Mr Read threatened to resign as chief executive unless he was given a pay package of more than £1m a year. In her whistleblowing document – known as the “speak up” dossier – it is also understood that Ms Davies claims Mr Read fell out with Mr Cameron in what sources have described as a clash of personalities.

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The disclosure raises serious questions about the chaos at the Post Office as it tries to recover from the Horizon IT scandal, where subpostmasters were wrongly prosecuted and convicted of fraud and theft in the largest scale miscarriage of justice in British legal history.

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A source said: “There was a big fallout between Read and Cameron, and Read has been trying to get rid of Cameron for a while.

“Cameron has not attended a board meeting in the last year. Nick Read has made several attempts to get rid of him but has been told there is not enough evidence to sack him. There was no evidence of misconduct or anything that would cause him to be fired and the Government was not prepared to countenance paying him off.”

The source said Mr Read “couldn’t stand working with Mr Cameron” and had wanted his chief finance officer out because of a personality clash. Mr Read had approached the Government for a package to buy him out, the source said.

It is understood that this disagreement between Mr Read and Mr Cameron did not relate to Mr Read’s alleged desire for a pay rise.

Mr Cameron was appointed chief financial officer in 2015 and stepped up as interim chief executive in April 2019, before Mr Read’s appointment. In the latest accounts, Mr Cameron was paid  basic salary and a further  in bonus payments.

A Post Office spokesman said: “We can confirm that our group chief finance officer is currently on sick leave. It is not appropriate for us to add any further comment.”

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### The Horizon scandal timeline

<p><b>1999</b></p> <p>The Post Office starts rolling out its new computer accounting system, Horizon, which was initially made by International Computers Ltd. ICL was bought out by Japan-based Fujitsu in 2002, who have maintained the system ever since.</p>	<p><b>2000</b></p> <p>Stephe course Office.</p>
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The Post Office said Mr Read had worked with five different chief people officers but pointed out that the incumbent when he took over had already handed in their notice. Others had quit for “personal” reasons.

The spokesman said: “Our current CEO joined the Post Office in September 2019. In that time, there have technically been five including the current group chief people officer, one was already on their notice period to leave prior to the current CEO joining the Post Office and left in October 2019.”

He added: “As is common in any large organisation people move on for a variety of reasons. One previous post holder had submitted their notice to leave prior to our CEO joining and others have chosen to leave for reasons personal to them.”

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The Horizon scandal was reignited by an ITV drama Mr Bates vs The Post Office.

In response, Kemi Badenoch, the Business Secretary, sacked the Post Office's chairman Henry Staunton in January, exacerbating concerns about the running of the organisation.

The Post Office said it had appointed an independent barrister to investigate claims made in the "speak up" dossier. It is understood that the dossier is expected to be handed to MPs investigating the Horizon scandal and the delays in paying compensation to subpostmasters on Wednesday.



The Horizon scandal was reignited by an ITV drama Mr Bates vs The Post Office | CREDIT: ITV

Talking about the whistleblowing report, Amanda Burton, non-executive director overseeing whistleblowing complaints at the Post Office, said: "Today's Post Office encourages speaking up and raising concerns, which is the right thing to do for our employees and postmasters.

"We treat 'speak up' disclosures consistently, fairly, appropriately and professionally and investigate them fully. We have engaged an independent barrister to conduct the necessary investigations and do not comment on active investigations. Our 'speak up' process is an essential part of our cultural transformation to ensure that concerns are fully investigated, so that failings of the past are not repeated."

The Post Office has so far failed to meet three deadlines to hand over what Mr Staunton originally described as an "80-page speak out document" when revealing its existence to

the business and trade committee last week.

Ben Tidswell, the Post Office’s senior independent director, told Liam Byrne, the committee chairman, that disclosing the “speak up” document would “undermine the ongoing investigation that is being conducted”.

However, in another letter written on Tuesday, Mr Byrne said he expected that he would be in a position to provide the committee with the documents by 9am on Wednesday.

Mr Tidswell claimed the 80-page document was actually 12 pages. However, it is understood there may be confusion over lengths due to appendices.

Referring to the 12-page report, Mr Tidswell wrote: “In accordance with the Post Office’s ‘speak up’ process on whistleblowing, these allegations are being investigated by an external barrister.

“This investigation is ongoing and Mr Read is fully co-operating with this investigation. At present, it is anticipated that the investigation will be concluded by the end of March/early April.”

It is not known at this point whether the committee will publish the document.

A spokesman for the committee said: “The committee welcomes the intention of the Post Office to share the documents. It will see what the Post Office provides tomorrow before determining any appropriate next actions.”

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