

On behalf of
Intended Claimant
Suhel Master: 1st
Date: 06 August
2024
Exhibit: SM1

IN THE HIGH COURT
OF JUSTICE (CHANCERY DIVISION)

Claim No: TBC

B E T W E E N:

INTERIM WORKING COMMITTEE

- (1) IMRAN KOVARIWALA
- (2) ALTAF KHANJRA
- (3) MAAZ MUSA
- (4) JAVID ADAM

Claimant(s)

-and-

THE TRUSTEES OF MASJID-E-TAUHEEDUL ISLAM

- (1) Dawood Ibrahim Patel
- (2) INAYAT ALI
- (3) AHMED VALI
- (4) FARUK BHARUCHA
- (5) ALI MOHMED VIKA

Defendant(s)

WITNESS STATEMENT OF
SUHEL MASTER

I, Suhel Master, the Imam of the Masjid Tauheedul Islam, 31 Bicknell Street, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 7EY, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement in support of the anticipated injunction application to be filed.
2. The facts and matters set out in this witness statement are within my knowledge unless otherwise stated, and I believe them to be true. Where I refer to information supplied by others the source of the information is identified; facts and matters derived from other sources are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
3. The facts and matters set out in this witness statement are within my knowledge unless otherwise stated, and I believe them to be true. Where I refer to information supplied by others the source of the information is identified; facts and matters derived from other sources are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
4. I had been appointed as Imam at Masjid Tauheedul Islam on or around June 2004 and I have been the Imam leading the congregation since that date.
5. Since my appointment in June 2004 as the Imam I have also been the principal for the madrasah (Islamic school), which provides Islamic education to approximately 950 children each evening between the hours of 5-7.30pm. I have been principal since 2006.

Suspension

6. On May 16, 2024, the Trustees and Committee suspended me for an alleged incitement of disorder, behaviour unbecoming of an individual with imam responsibilities, and gross misconduct. The suspension was set for 12 weeks. I assert that these allegations are fabricated and retaliatory, stemming from my whistleblowing activities. Since my suspension, nearly 12 weeks have passed

without any form of communication—whether by phone, email, or written correspondence—to assist with the investigation. Given the gravity of the situation, it is reasonable to expect that an investigation would have been conducted within this time frame. Despite multiple attempts by my union to engage with the Trustees and Committee through phone calls, emails, and letters, they have only received one response. This letter stated the seriousness of the allegations and justified the time required for investigation. However, I am dismayed by the lack of outreach for my input.

7. It appears that my continued absence facilitates the Trustees' and Committee's orchestration of proxy elections, potentially installing family members and a select group of allies who have consistently undermined my position as imam of the mosque.

Personal ill-Treatment

8. Throughout my 20-year tenure at this institution, I have endured ill-treatment from certain unelected trustees, committee members, and their families. For instance, in approximately 2009, my wages were arbitrarily reduced from £200 per week to £120 per week without any prior discussion or notice. This wage reduction persisted for 10 years, until 2019, despite my numerous objections and protests, both in person and in writing, which were consistently ignored. In 2009, an attempt was made to subject me to a redundancy process to remove me, but this was unsuccessful due to public pressure. In January 2024, payment due to me for conducting marriages at the mosque was withheld, necessitating the involvement of intermediaries to secure the funds owed to me.
9. Since 2006, I have served as principal of one of the largest madrasahs in the UK, yet I have not been compensated for my services in this role. My remuneration has always been equivalent to that of the other imams, who has significantly fewer duties than myself, except for the period from 2009 to 2019,

during which I was paid £80 less per week than the other imam. Despite raising this issue multiple times, I was consistently advised to resign if I was dissatisfied.

10. Following an incident on March 26, 2024, involving the sons of a committee member who intentionally blocked my car and verbally abused me in public, I requested a meeting on March 27, 2024.
11. On March 27, 2024, I met in the mosque office with the following Trustees of Masjid Tauheedul Islam: Faruk Bharucha, Inayat Ali, Dawood Gheesa, along with 10 other attendees.
12. Purpose of this meeting was to address the incident and various concerns and issues I have observed during my tenure as imam and principal of the madrasah.

Inappropriate Appointment of Trustees

13. I raised concerns about the inappropriate appointment of new Trustees during the meeting. These appointments were made without the knowledge or consent of the members, which I now believe is contrary to the constitution, principles of transparency and fairness. I became aware of these appointments around February 2024, only after they had been finalised. In a membership of nearly 1,200 members, I foresee this causing significant issues in the future. When members become aware of these appointments, they are likely to object.

Financial Misconduct

14. I highlighted that funds from the Tauheedul charity were being transferred to the Malawi Relief Trust, where Faruk Bharucha serves as a Trustee. Additionally, I highlighted that Ali Vika, another Trustee, received substantial funds directed to his family charity. I became aware of these transactions during

a meeting between the Charity Commission, the committee, and the trustees. Following the Charity Commission's visit, some colleagues conducted research into the concerns raised, which brought these issues to light. This situation presented a clear conflict of interest, with trustees of two charities receiving funds transferred from one charity to another.

Minimum Wage Breaches

15. I informed the trustees that staff members are significantly dissatisfied with being paid below the national minimum wage, a serious violation of employment laws. Staff have repeatedly voiced their grievances to me regarding these unfair wages. Each time I raised these concerns with the committee, they responded by stating that the current wages are the maximum they can afford. They argued that increasing wages would necessitate raising fees, which would render them unaffordable for parents and result in a loss of students.

As the principal, I was aware of the student enrolment numbers and the staffing levels. Approximately five years ago, I conducted an analysis of the school's income from student fees and the expenditure on wages and salaries. The estimated annual income from fees was approximately £200,000 or more, based on a worst-case scenario. However, according to the 2022 financial accounts, this figure has been significantly reduced.

Non-Accounting of Student Fees

16. Upon reviewing the year-end 2022 accounts submitted to the Charities Commission following my suspension, I discovered that the tuition fees collected from students are not being properly declared or accounted for. For example, approximately 950 children attend the Madrasah, paying a minimum of £5 per week for members and £7 per week for non-members. This should

total a minimum of £4,750 per week. Given that the Madrasah operates for 44 weeks each year, the total annual income should be at least £209,000. However, the declared tuition fee income in the December 2022 accounts is only £121,140. This indicates that a minimum of £88,000 is unaccounted for, and the actual missing amount is likely higher, as many students pay the higher fees of £7 and £10 per week.

Election irregularities and breaches

17. Following the incident of abuse by the sons of a committee member on March 26, 2024, community members and staff expressed significant concern. They challenged the trustees and committee, demanding a general meeting to elect a new committee, as no annual general meeting (AGM) had been held for nearly 30 years. Initially, the trustees agreed to hold an AGM, but after considerable delay, they called an AGM, which was later changed to a Special General Meeting (SGM). The criteria for the elections set forth by the trustees clearly demonstrated a flawed process. Potential candidates were ineligible in violation of the constitution. The trustees instituted a seven-day voting period for 1,200 members, allowing them to closely control and manipulate the votes, with an additional seven days to announce the election results.
18. The trustees, executive committee, and a small group of closely connected individuals became candidates for this election. Fourteen other candidates, not associated with this group, also applied. However, upon recognising the lack of fairness and transparency, these 14 candidates withdrew their names in protest. Approximately two-thirds of the membership refused to vote in the election in protest. During this period, the trustees and executive committee repeatedly posted and altered notices on the notice board, changing the criteria several times, causing considerable confusion. A group of concerned individuals, and beneficiaries of the charity due to their status as members, co-ordinated under the banner of the Interim Working Committee (IWC), to challenge this process.

They attempted to negotiate and discuss the rigged process through letters, mediation, and direct communication at the mosque office but received no response.

19. In line with the constitution, the IWC requested an SGM with an agenda and 14-day notice. This request was served to the secretary, both at his address and in person, but was ignored. The SGM scheduled for August 11, 2024, does not include any of the proposed agenda items from the IWC. The underhanded tactics employed by the trustees and executive committee, such as executive committee members vetting applications and corresponding with candidates, created unnecessary obstacles. This leads to the belief that the election aims to establish a committee with ulterior motives, one of which is my removal due to my whistleblowing activities and influence in the community.

20. On August 2, 2024, my office in the mosque was allegedly broken into by a thief. The office was ransacked, filing cabinets were broken, and paperwork was rummaged through, yet nothing was stolen, including charity money in plain sight. It appears the thief was only interested in my files. It has come to my attention that HMRC is investigating the financial affairs of the trustees and committee, particularly regarding fees and wages. The trustees and committee held a meeting on August 1, 2024, concerning these issues. The next day, on August 2, the alleged break-in occurred, with the thief targeting only my office out of 45 possible rooms. Although the premises are covered by approximately 15 cameras, the executive committee claims the cameras were turned away, leaving no footage of the break-in. There are no signs of forced entry at the main entrance or the first-floor office, despite a metal gate at the bottom of the stairs that would have needed to be opened.

21. This matter has been reported to the police, who are conducting an investigation. The ballot boxes for the contested election were present in the


mosque during the alleged break-in, and it remains unverified whether the thief tampered with the ballot boxes.

Retaliation for Whistleblowing

22. I am convinced that I am experiencing this difficult time as a direct result of my whistleblowing. Following my suspension, individuals connected to the Trustees and Committee created a website specifically designed to defame, attack, and destroy my reputation. This website, filled with slander and fabrications, appeared the very next day after my suspension. It served as a clear warning to others: if you speak against us or stand up to us, you will face our wrath.
23. The behaviour of the trustees and executive committee over the past four months has been absolutely appalling. They have shown a complete unwillingness to listen to anyone or anything, ignoring emails, letters, and even attempts by community elders to discuss and resolve the many issues facing our community. Their actions have caused significant tension, frustration, and anger among the attendees and members of the community.
24. Instead of fulfilling their duties to address the challenges faced by the community, the trustees have openly demonstrated their vested interests, pursuing a path of injustice and arrogance. This treatment I am receiving is clearly an attempt to get rid of me because I exposed their misconduct.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: 

Name: Suhel Master

Position: Imam of Masjid-E-Tauheedal Islam

Date: 06 August 2024

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Intended Claimant
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Defendant(s)

EXHIBIT SM1

This is **Exhibit SM1** as referred to in the second witness statement of Suhel Masters.