

## **Correspondence regarding oral evidence from Sports Direct**

### **Summary of contact with Sports Direct**

Committee staff have been in contact with representatives for Mike Ashley and Sports Direct since early February to try and arrange a date for Mr Ashley to give evidence. Representatives for Mr Ashley have now advised that he is unavailable in March and have suggested that Dr Keith Hellowell, Chairman of the Board of Sports Direct International gives evidence instead. A summary of the communication between staff and Mr Ashley's representatives is included below.

*2 February*

Email sent to Powerscourt (the PR company for Sports Direct) advising them that the Committee wants to take evidence from Mr Ashley and asking for contact details to set a date.

*4 February*

Call to Powerscourt to follow up email. Powerscourt advised staff to contact another company, Keith Bishop Associated (KBA), to discuss. Email sent to KBA.

*12 February*

Call to KBA to follow up email. At their request second email sent.

*19 February*

Email to KBA to follow up previous emails and call.

*24 February*

Call to Powerscourt to follow up previous communications. Further email sent.

*26 February*

Received email from Mr Ashley's legal representatives, RPC, to advise that Mr Ashley was unavailable and offer Dr Keith Hellowell as an alternative witness. The letter noted that Dr Hellowell was not available between 7-16 March or 17, 18, 24, 25 or 26 March.

Following consultation with the Chair, staff requested that Dr Hellowell give evidence on 4 March.

*27 February*

Call to RPC to ask for response. RPC emailed to say Dr Hellowell was unavailable on 4 March but could do 25 March after rearranging meetings.

*2 March*

Staff confirmed that, subject to approval by the Committee, we would invite Dr Hellowell to give evidence on 25 March.

*4 March*

Letter from Chair of Committee to RPC emailed.

**Sent:** 02 February 2015 13:59

**Subject:** Evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee

As you may be aware, the Scottish Affairs Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the impact of the closure of City Link on employment, which is also looking at the procedure and practice for when companies go into administration. The Committee has previously inquired into zero-hours contracts.

The Committee are keen to take evidence from Mike Ashley in his role as founder and Executive Deputy Chairman of Sports Direct on these topics.

Please could you let me know the best way to contact Mr Ashley/his office to discuss dates.

**Sent:** 04 February 2015 13:26

**Subject:** FW: Evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee

As you may be aware, the Scottish Affairs Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the impact of the closure of City Link on employment, which is also looking at the procedure and practice for when companies go into administration. The Committee has previously inquired into zero-hours contracts.

The Committee are keen to take evidence from Mike Ashley in his role as founder and Executive Deputy Chairman of Sports Direct on these topics.

Please could you let me know the best way to contact Mr Ashley/his office to discuss dates.

**Sent:** 12 February 2015 16:08

**Subject:** FW: Evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee

We spoke a moment ago.

I wanted to follow up the invitation for Mr Ashley to give evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee in relation to the subjects below. I also wanted, as a courtesy, to let you know the Committee intends to put out a press release shortly about their work in this area which will include the fact that the Committee want to speak to Mr Ashley.

**Sent:** 19 February 2015 11:26

**Subject:** Fwd: Evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee

We spoke last week about Mr Ashley giving evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee. Please could you let me know who will be taking this matter forward so I can discuss dates with them.

**Sent:** 24 February 2015 11:07

**Subject:** FW: Evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee

As discussed, below is the original email to KBA regarding Mr Ashley giving evidence. The Committee would also like to hear from the senior management of USC in relation to USC going into administration and the pre-pack sale to Republic.

The Committee also want to take evidence from the administrators appointed to act for USC in this matter and have been in contact with them separately.

Please could you put me in touch with the right person to discuss dates for both Mr Ashley and USC management to give evidence to the Committee.

26 February 2015

Dear Sirs

**Request for evidence**

We have been instructed by Sports Direct International plc ("SDI").

Thank you for [Committee official's] email addressed to Keith Bishop Associates, on behalf of SDI, and subsequent communications to Powerscourt.

We note your informal request for Mr Ashley to give evidence on behalf of SDI to the Scottish Affairs Committee (the "Committee") in respect of its inquiry into *"the procedure and practice for when companies go into administration"* and zero hours contracts.

We understand that the Committee is specifically interested in hearing evidence on the administration of USC and its treatment of employees and the use of zero hours contracts.

The SDI Board has now had the opportunity to consider how it could help with the Committee's request. We had advised our client that we understood the Committee intended to take evidence in March. Mr Ashley has long standing commitments in March which means that he is out of the country and/or not available for that month.

The Board's Chairman, Dr Keith Hellowell, however has some availability next month and would be able to attend on behalf of SDI. In any event, SDI's Board considers that Dr Hellowell is likely to be in the best position to answer any questions. Please note that Dr Hellowell is unavailable during the period 7 to 16 March 2015 inclusive (when he is in India) and on 17, 18, 24, 25 and 26 March 2015 (when he has scheduled meetings).

**Sent:** 26 February 2015 14:30

**Subject:** RE: Our client: Sports Direct International plc

Thanks you for your letter. I have discussed it with the Chair of the Committee and he would like Dr Hellowell to give evidence on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March.

The Chair appreciates that Mr Ashley is out of the country and/or unavailable for March but would like more clarity on exactly when he is out of the country and when he is in the country but unavailable due to other commitments.

If Dr Hellowell would like to bring colleagues for either Sports Direct or USC to help answer questions or would like to provide any background information to the Committee in advance, please let me know as soon as possible.

27 February 2015

Dear Sirs

**Request for evidence**

We refer to your email of yesterday ([Committee official] to [RPC staff] at 2.49pm) and the telephone conversation between [RPC staff] and [Committee official] at around 4.14pm yesterday afternoon.

We also refer to [Committee official's] call to [RPC staff] of this morning (at around 10.59am) chasing confirmation of Dr Hellowell's availability. On that call, the Committee official made reference to the Committee not having gone down the route of a formal summons to call a witness from our client. Raising the spectre of a summons, in circumstances where our client has already volunteered the Chairman as a witness to assist the Committee and we are now liaising over availability, is, in our client's view, inappropriate.

We have taken instructions and unfortunately Dr Hellowell has an appointment on 4 March 2015. However, he has been able to re-arrange his meetings on 25 March 2015 and would be able to give evidence on that date. Alternatively, Dr Hellowell still has availability on 31 March 2015 if that date is more convenient for the Committee.

Separately, we confirm that Mr Ashely is currently in the USA.

**Sent:** 02 March 2015 10:34

**Subject:** RE: Our client: Sports Direct International plc

Subject to confirmation by the Committee, the Chair would like Dr Hellowell to give evidence on 25 March. Please could you provide contact details for Dr Hellowell so that we can send a formal invitation letter to him.

As mentioned in a previous email, the Committee is likely to want to know about some of the management decision taken in the lead up to USC going into administration. If Dr Hellowell would like to bring a colleague to speak on some of the operational matters, please let me know as soon as possible.

2 March 2015

Dear Sirs

**Request for evidence**

We refer to your email of this morning.

We will let Dr Hellowell know that the Committee would like him to attend on 25 March 2015 (subject to confirmation).

Please cc this firm on any correspondence with Dr Hellowell.

We note that you have asked whether Dr Hellowell would like to bring a colleague. This depends upon the questions the Committee is going to ask Dr Hellowell.

As envisaged by the House of Commons guide available on the Committee's website, please provide us with the Committee's questions during tomorrow and we should be able to let you know whether Dr Hellowell will be likely to bring a colleague later this week.

We look forward to hearing from you.

4 March 2015

**Evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee**

Thank you for your letters of 26 and 27 February and 2 March 2015 responding to our requests for Mike Ashley to give evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Your client, Sports Direct, has offered Dr Keith Hellowell as a witness and suggested 25 March for him to give evidence. The Committee have agreed to hear evidence from Dr Hellowell on that date, and we look forward to that session. However, the Committee would also like to hear oral evidence from Mr Ashley directly.

In your letter of 26 February, you state that Mr Ashley is out of the country and/or unavailable for the entirety of March. I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with further information on which dates Mr Ashley is out of the country. It would also be helpful if you could clarify what commitments he has throughout the entirety of March which are preventing him from appearing before the Committee before the dissolution of Parliament on 31 March

I would also like to inform you, as a courtesy, that the Committee has agreed to publish the correspondence relating to this matter on our website. Personal information such as Dr Hellowell's address and staff names will be redacted.

If you have any questions in relation to this, please contact Jyoti Chandola, Clerk to the Committee, on 020 7219 2699.

**Mr Ian Davidson MP**

**Chair, Scottish Affairs Committee**