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Would-be Labour MP accused of forcing junior employee 'to do her dirty work'



Steph Booth 'asked an employee to write anonymous comments about a rival candidate'



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By Robert Sutcliffe

Exclusive

EMBARRASSING allegations that a prospective Yorkshire Labour MP "coerced" a junior member of staff "to do her dirty work" to further her political career have emerged.

Gareth Binding, chief executive of education company Cool UK said Steph Booth asked employee David Sutcliffe to register for the online site of a local newspaper and write anonymous comments on it about a rival candidate.

Mrs Booth, a member of senior management at the time for Cool UK, is said to have dictated two messages to Mr Sutcliffe for publication on the Halifax Courier website.

The messages concerned Janet Oosthuysen, who had initially beaten Mrs Booth in a selection contest to be the prospective Parliamentary Labour candidate for Calder Valley.

However, she was ditched by Labour after the Yorkshire Post revealed she had received a police caution for damaging an ex-boyfriend's car.

In one of the messages written by Mr Sutcliffe, a 39-year-old central support worker, under the pseudonym of Anjustarks, he said: "As a life-long Labour voter, I think it would have been much better to have seen Janet O. putting the voters first rather than this suicide by a thousand cuts. As far as I can see her reputation is trashed..."

Mr Sutcliffe, of Todmorden, said he had only recently told Mr Binding, because Mrs Booth had left the

company, where she was development director.

Mr Sutcliffe said: "She just asked me if I would like to write a few sentences in relation to an article in the paper. A few weeks later she said Janet had not been selected.

"I thought I was a contributory factor to that and felt a little bit guilty about it. It's not like me to be doing things like that."

Mr Binding told the Yorkshire Post he was upset that Mrs Booth had "used one of my members of staff to do her dirty work".

In his correspondence with Paul Nicholson, regional director of the Labour Party, he said: "Had she still been with the company Mrs Booth would have faced disciplinary action.

"The member of staff she coerced into doing this will not be facing any action as I was very aware how Mrs Booth would use her power of authority to place people in a difficult position.

"I was also made aware that she also asked staff to vote for her in an online poll to 'boost her credibility' as she put it.

"I would like to point out that Cool UK (based in Burnley) is a reputable company and I find the whole matter contemptible and would like to be disassociated from Mrs Booth's actions either past or current."

Susan Press, who lost a second selection contest to Mrs Booth, said she was "absolutely appalled" by the allegations.

"I think this conduct contravenes the code of conduct which all Parliamentary candidates sign up to – that they should not disparage other candidates.

"I also think it's an absolute disgrace and would urge the regional Labour party and the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party to make the fullest investigation."

Mrs Booth declined to comment and the regional Labour Party would only say it would be "inappropriate" to comment on correspondence it had received.

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