

No: 181/20

3rd April 2020

TO: ALL BRANCHES

Dear Colleague

ROYAL MAIL GROUP – CWU ACTIONS ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

On Wednesday, we issued a statement to members explaining that Royal Mail's response to the CWU proposal to increase protection and support for our members during the Coronavirus pandemic, was completely unacceptable to the union.

The purpose of this LTB is to update Branches and members on the actions we have taken and outline further steps that we are announcing to force Royal Mail to act and change the company's national approach to the pandemic.

To recap, the CWU proposal was designed to work with the company and the Government to get in front of the inevitable and increase protection for our members, minimise the potential for postal workers to spread the virus, whilst at the same time ensuring that Royal Mail could prioritise its operations and maintain an emergency national network to support the country and the business.

The CWU proposal takes the strongest possible position on health and safety by insisting our members should not be required to work if Personal Protective Equipment and Government and Public Health Authorities' advice on social distancing measures are not in place. We were also pre-empting the reality of the challenges keyworkers and the whole country will face in the coming weeks as the pandemic reaches a peak. This is about linking a necessary relaxation of national service standards to enable social distancing in all offices and giving a better chance for our members to cope as sickness/self-isolation increases.

In putting the proposal forward, we are also aware that the provision of PPE and enforcement of social distancing is at different levels across our Regions and workplaces. We acknowledge that in some locations local managers are working well with the union to make prioritising the safety of our members a reality on the ground. However, this is being undermined on a daily basis by a lack of empathy and leadership from the top of Royal Mail, with the senior management team failing to act in the best interests of the workforce.

Against this background, it's important that our members recognise that CWU representatives are doing their utmost across the country to support the workforce during these extraordinary times and we want to publically thank them for the initiatives that they are undertaking regionally and locally on behalf of our members. This is undoubtedly having an impact and through their efforts we have seen a significant shift towards better working arrangements.

Since Wednesday, to increase the pressure to make the CEO and the senior management team take stronger action in line with our proposal, the union has taken the following steps:-

- We have written to the Secretary of State for Business, Alok Sharma, asking the Government to intervene and we are awaiting a response.
- We have written to the Minister directly responsible for Royal Mail and the Post Office, Paul Scully, and are expecting a meeting with him later today, or on Monday.
- We have also written to all MPs, enclosing our proposal and asking them to lobby the Chief Executive and the Government to take stronger action and force Royal Mail to change their national approach. From this we know that senior Labour politicians are directly challenging the Government to take action.
- We have spoken to Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of the TUC and she is taking up our case, along with problems all workers are facing, with Government Minister Michael Gove today.

As well as setting out the conditions our members are working in, the above letters and actions we have taken with political leaders, make the point that the CEO has to lead by example and re-engage with the union at national level.

In the meantime, we can also advise that the following further steps are being taken.

Health and Safety

- **We are issuing advice today to our members on their individual rights under the 1996 Health and Safety legislation. This advice has been sent out in LTB 178/20 from Assistant Secretary Ray Ellis and for ease of reference is also attached again to this LTB. This advice makes it clear that individuals have the right to refuse to work if they believe they are in serious and imminent danger. Representatives have been encouraged to raise any such potential situation with management and to escalate the matter to a higher level within the business if it cannot be resolved.**
- We reiterate the position we have already given to Royal Mail:-

If Personal Protective Equipment is not in place for all employees, or in any workplace, then that office should cease its operations until the equipment has been provided to all employees. This includes gloves and hand sanitisers.

If social distancing measures are not in place, in line with the Government advice (2 meters apart), then the office should be closed until this is rectified. Additional measures in this statement are designed to support the introduction of strict social distancing in every Royal Mail Group workplace.

- A number of individuals and offices have taken strong action locally on safety issues, which has significantly improved PPE and social distancing.

Supporting and Enforcing the CWU Proposal at Local Level

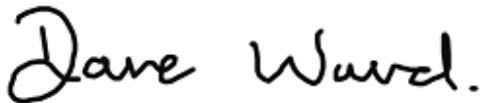
- We are asking all CWU representatives to make representation to managers at local, area and divisional level, in order to implement the CWU proposal and develop a menu of options that introduce our approach in local workplaces. This is already happening and we know that there are some managers who are listening to our representatives and adjusting service standards accordingly. Utilising our health and safety and industrial representatives in this way will eventually force the company to change their position at national level.
- The National Officers responsible for Delivery, Mail Centres, Distribution and Parcelforce are developing a further menu of options which will be cascaded through union structures to support the introduction of our proposal and how matters should be taken through the IR Framework.
- If by next week, there is not a consistent approach to PPE, social distancing and a supportive change (as outlined in our proposal) for giving our members full pay on sick absence/self-isolation scenarios and unreasonable positions on annual leave, the union will be launching and giving publicity to a national vote of no confidence in the CEO Rico Back. To this end, we will be writing directly to the Chairman of the Royal Mail Group Board and his Board members, setting out our position and publicising this as an open letter to the Government, the country and the media.
- We are asking all CWU representatives to take up with their local managers and register a disagreement through the IR Framework, on the various sick leave/self-isolation/annual leave scenarios where managers are not giving our members full pay or treating them with dignity and respect. The CWU demands on this are included in our proposal and there is evidence that some local managers support what we are asking for and under the radar have taken actions to put this in place. Once again, this will put pressure on the CEO and senior management team to change their national approach.
- We are asking all Branch Secretaries to write to their local MPs and explain why the actions of the Chief Executive and his senior management team are unacceptable. We will issue a template for this letter later today. This will also focus on the need for the CEO to re-engage with the union at a national level.

Conclusion

We are confident that through the actions we have taken and the implementation of the next steps set out in this LTB, that we will see the company further shifting its position.

The union's Executive will meet next Tuesday to review the situation and discuss any additional actions. In the meantime, we would ask all Branches and representatives to ensure that the content of this LTB is publicised to all members and workplaces.

Yours sincerely



Dave Ward
General Secretary



Terry Pullinger
Deputy General Secretary (P)