

Board of Trustees

Nottingham Castle Trust

Nottingham

NG1 6EL

4 November 2021

Subject: FORMAL COMPLAINT – Response to the racist incident of 17 August 2021

Mr Ted Cattle, Chair, Ms Susan Hallam, Vice-Chair, the Board of Trustees.

We are writing to you, as employees of colour at Nottingham Castle Trust, to express our deep concern, exhaustion and fear, in our current situation at the Castle. Out of real concern of losing our jobs for speaking out, we write to you anonymously and collectively.

On 17 August 2021, a black curator, Panya Banjoko, and her family were racially abused and physically attacked in the grounds of Nottingham Castle. The subsequent poor handling of the incident, the treatment of Ms Banjoko and the lack of any formal anti-racist statement, have led to an environment of fear, distrust and extremely low-morale among staff of all backgrounds, but particularly those of colour. Staff have had to take sick leave, have been anxious and in tears at work on many occasions, and have shared with senior management that they are upset and stressed by the behaviour of the board in response to the racist attack on Ms Banjoko and her grandchildren. Twelve weeks on from the attack, Nottingham Castle Trust's Board of Trustees have yet to offer any support to staff of colour, despite advice that it was of utmost importance. Irreparable damage has been done to the organisation's relationships with communities and partners and public opinion is at an all-time low. The Board of Trustees are no longer allowing Nottingham Castle Trust (a museum of Nottingham and *all* its people) to serve the public interest.

Following the sudden dismissal of our former-CEO, Sara Blair-Manning (with whom Ms Banjoko shared a good relationship), and at the time of the attack, the governance of Nottingham Castle was in the hands of Trustees. Indeed, even now with an interim-CEO in place, the Board continues to exert control over communications and other aspects of the organisation's day-to-day running. After the incident of 17 August, Trustees fell silent on the one subject most crucial to maintaining staff wellbeing and public confidence – that of an anti-racist statement. When urged repeatedly by managers to issue an internal anti-racist statement to reassure staff, nothing was forthcoming. Trustees later acknowledged, in writing, their inaction in reassuring staff but continued to offer no support to managers in dealing with the growing anxiety in their teams, or indeed provide the much needed statement. At the same time, Trustees maintained that the incident was a police matter and that nothing would be said externally either, compounding what was already a steadily worsening reputation within the Black community and wider public. While it is true that police were investigating accusations surrounding the attack, the Trust's handling of it, its attention to staff wellbeing or the issuing of an anti-racist statement were nothing to do with that investigation. The failure to issue any formal external statement (even to say that NCT opposes racism) was seen by staff of colour as potentially giving far-right groups a green light to be racist on our site. This fear was

legitimised by other incidents of racism from members of the public on our site and the displaying of a 'white lives matter' banner by the Robin Hood statue.

For us, as staff of colour, coming into work in the wake of this attack has been both emotional and frightening. No one from the Board of Trustees communicated with staff of colour to ask how we felt or reassured us that they are taking this seriously. In the only internal communication to go out to managers, Trustees said that an apology had been made in the comment section of a social media post, but that no further statement would be made. They said "controlling the media's awareness of the incident has been a priority". No priority was, or has yet, been given to the wellbeing of staff of colour. Trustees claimed to have "sat down" and had a positive conversation with Ms Banjoko, only for it to emerge that she had been approached on her way to her car by a Trustee and "accosted", to use Ms Banjoko's own word. There has been a distinct lack of empathy or compassion shown towards staff of colour and their experience of the event, so much so that several staff members and volunteers have quit their roles in protest, with others close to following. It is no exaggeration to say that seeing colleagues in tears is a daily occurrence. In several cases, the actions and inactions of the board have had a significant negative impact on the disabilities and ongoing illnesses of staff members of colour, leading to them having to be signed-off sick. It is an environment in which we no longer feel safe and one which we feel unable to endure any longer.

We feel completely unsupported by Trustees, afraid that we will be victims of further racism and that no one will protect us were that to happen. We feel that had Ms Blair-Manning been allowed to remain in post, the handling of the incident of 17 August would have been very different and staff would have felt safe and reassured of the organisation's seriousness in dealing with the incident, as well as staff wellbeing. Instead, Trustees communicated extremely poorly with Ms Banjoko, refused to apologise formally, attempted to blame this situation, via the media, on the former CEO and then hired what they called an 'independent investigator' into the incident. It quickly emerged that the person hired for the job had two connections to Trustees, meaning a conflict of interest. This was raised to the chair of the board, Ted Cattle, who first acknowledged the issue, conceding that a new investigator should be hired by the interim-CEO, and then several days later u-turned, again in writing, to say that there was no conflict of interest and that the appointed person would remain in post. For staff of colour, this is the latest evidence that the Nottingham Castle Trust's Board of Trustees are not interested in fixing the problem of structural racism at the organisation, nor addressing the wellbeing of its employees of colour, but that they prioritise their own professional reputations above all else.

We have had enough of this now and for that reason, see no choice but to share this letter publicly.

We no longer have confidence in Ted Cattle to effectively chair the Board of Trustees and ask that pressure is applied on him to step down, along with other Trustees, to allow for a Board that is appropriate and more reflective of the diversity of Nottingham to take over. Until we see people with community backgrounds and people who look like us in positions of influence at Nottingham Castle Trust, we can not trust that the organisation will understand how to fix its own problems, listen to us, its staff, or fulfil its duty to correctly represent this city.

Signed,

7 current and former employees of colour at Nottingham Castle Trust.