

QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION

Media and Communications List

BETWEEN:-

FRANCINE WEST

Claimant

- and -

**24SEVEN FOSTERING SERVICES
LIMITED**

Defendant

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

Solicitor for the Claimant, Dominic Garner of Carter-Ruck

[1] May it please your Lordship, I appear for the Claimant, Ms Francine West (who is also known as Paris West).

[2] The Claimant is a full time foster carer. From 2009, she was under contract with the Defendant, the professional fostering agency 24 Seven Fostering Services Limited. On 14 April 2016, the Claimant gave notice to the Defendant that she intended to resign and join a different agency.

[3] The Claimant has brought proceedings against the Defendant – for defamation, malicious falsehood and breach of the Data Protection Act 1998 – regarding events that occurred shortly following that notice of resignation. Her claim asserts that on a date unknown, between 19 and 26 April 2016, the Defendant, whose directors did not want her to leave their agency, published an anonymous letter to the London Borough of Haringey, as the local authority through which the Claimant fosters. The Claimant contends the letter alleged that she was guilty of very harsh and rough treatment of the children under her care; that she was greedy and selfish, being motivated solely for money and not because she cared for or was concerned about the children she looked after; and that she had manipulated social workers for money, thereby obtaining money to which she was not entitled.

[4] The Claimant further contends that on around 3 and 4 May 2016, the Defendant's Aijaz Ahmad telephoned the London Borough of Haringey, having conversations with two individuals at that local authority in which, she contends, it was alleged that the Claimant was responsible for causing the complete breakdown in her relationship with her supervising social worker due to her unprofessional behaviour; that the Claimant's behaviour was so irrational and inappropriate that the Defendant was unable to support the continued placement of foster children with her; and that as a result of these factors, the children had to be removed from the Claimant's care.

[5] All of the allegations the Claimant contends were published by the Defendant were and are entirely false. In fact, the Claimant had been regularly commended for the quality of her care and was entrusted by the Defendant to look after up to four children at any one time, some of them with higher needs. She had not behaved unprofessionally, irrationally or inappropriately in her capacity as a foster carer; nor did she have selfish motives for being a carer.

[6] The Claimant believes that these allegations have damaged her personal and professional reputations. She has been caused considerable hurt and distress. It is also her case that she has been caused significant financial losses as, following publication, the local authority removed the children under her care and, without her consent, she was deregistered as a carer, a consequence of which was that she was unable to foster for a period of some 10 months, between May 2016 and March 2017. In that period, the sibling group of 4 children that had been under the Claimant's care, aged between 1 year and 12 years, was split into separate foster placements with other carers. Indeed, it is the Claimant's case that the allegations about her were published maliciously by the Defendant with the dominant improper motive of damaging her standing as a fosterer.

[7] By its Defence, signed with a Statement of Truth, the Defendant denied it was responsible for publishing the anonymous letter. It also denied making unjustified statements to individuals at the local authority or being maliciously motivated to do so. Nevertheless, almost 11 months after it was notified of the Claimant's claim, the Defendant has now agreed to settle this action in its entirety. It has given its undertaking to the Court, through its director Mr Ahmad, not to publish the allegations about which the Claimant complains in the future. It has also agreed to pay the Claimant substantial damages, together with her legal costs.

[8] My Lord, on that basis, I ask for permission to withdraw the record.