

# 'Without a proper inquiry there is no way of knowing how much damage Jenner caused'

He claimed to be Mark Cassidy when he worked at the Colin Roach Centre protest group in London in the 1990s – but earlier this month he was dramatically revealed to be undercover police spy Mark Jenner. **Mark Metcalf**, then an activist at the centre himself, began to have his suspicions about Jenner – but not before he had played a leading part in a number of campaigns

**I now know the name of the Metropolitan Police officer who was employed to spy on the protest group in which I was one of the key organisers in the 1990s. Thanks to his former partner Alison (not her real name) and the *Guardian* it has been established that the man I knew during my time at the Colin Roach Centre (CRC) in Hackney as Mark Cassidy is Mark Jenner of the Met's special demonstration squad (SDS).**

Jenner's name was revealed when Alison gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into undercover policing, his police role confirmed by the *Guardian* on 1 March. He is one of 11 undercover police officers publicly identified. Nine of them had sexual relations with activists mainly from environmental groups.

The officers' actions began unravelling in 2011 when the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) dropped criminal proceedings against six people facing charges related to a conspiracy to sabotage a coal-fired power station at Ratcliffe-on-Soar, Nottinghamshire. The convictions of another 20 activists were later quashed after it was revealed that long-term police spy PC Mark Kennedy had acted as an agent provocateur within the environmental movement. Further allegations of undercover police officers acting beyond their authorisation then surfaced and we

now know they were given the names of infants who had died many years previously.

The Metropolitan Police has now been ordered to investigate under Operation Herne how SDS officers created and maintained false identities while undercover.

After Kennedy became public knowledge I wrote a piece for *The Big Issue in the North* in January 2011 about the man I knew then as Cassidy. Although I had worked

Jenner out many years beforehand it was only after he had been active in high profile campaigns in which members of CRC were involved.

The centre was opened in 1993 and named after a young black man shot dead inside Stoke Newington Police Station in 1983. It combined a number of unfunded local groups, including the Hackney Community Defence Organisation (HCDA), which had uncovered serious corruption amongst the local police, with *Panorama* and *World in Action* undercover investigations confirming some officers were involved in drug dealing.

HCDA's work overturned many convictions and a database of police officers known to have

**The spies were given the names of infants who had died many years previously**

complaints or convictions against them was compiled. The Defendants Information Services (DIS) was registered despite objections from the Association of Chief Police Officers.

On 23 December 1994, a day when HCDA had organised a picket of Stoke Newington Police Station to demand action over the death of Oluwasijibomo Lapite in police custody, CRC was burgled, with equipment vandalised and a computer stolen. Cash was left undisturbed. An HCDA spokesperson told the *Hackney Gazette*: "It was the work of Special Branch, whose real target was a new database service." In fact DIS was run from a different location.

Early the following year a Liverpoolian who identified himself as Mark Cassidy came into the centre to say he had seen TV coverage of the annual commemoration event for those who had died at the hands of the local police. The 1995 guest speaker was civil rights lawyer Gareth Pierce.

"Cassidy" quickly became active in most of the centre's political life, including writing for our internal bulletin. When a magazine sold to the public was launched his suggestion to call it *RPM* – revolutions per minute – was agreed. He attended members' meetings and was privy to confidential information on hundreds of people's policing cases, including where police officers were charged

with unlawful imprisonment and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

Graham Smith, a Manchester University lecturer, consultant on police complaints to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and an international expert on police accountability, says:

"I am concerned that undercover officer Mark Jenner participated in an organisation that supported law abiding citizens who were involved in legal proceedings against the Metropolitan Police."

CRC, with Jenner much involved, was also central to the campaign by businessman Malcolm Kennedy to prove he had not killed Patrick Quinn in 1990. Quinn had been battered to death – his injuries included 33 fractured ribs – in Hammersmith Police Station. Convicted of murder, Kennedy was released after his conviction was quashed when the *World in Action* programme, uncovered new witnesses in the police station, giving grounds for appeal.

At his retrial Kennedy was cleared of murder but convicted of manslaughter. After receiving the backing of 65 MPs when a

parliamentary motion supporting him was tabled he was granted further leave to appeal. Kennedy lost his appeal in 1996 but as a free man he has continued to campaign to have his conviction overturned. He alleges that as a result he has suffered constant harassment by the police, making it almost impossible for him to earn a living from his removals business.

Kennedy says: "I find it eerie that Jenner was involved at the CRC during the period of my 1996 appeal when he was privy to campaign strategies and confidential information. This may have perverted the course of justice. Without a proper investigation there is no way of knowing how much damage Jenner caused to me."

Claiming to be a building worker himself, Jenner supported others victimised by their construction industry employers. The Building Workers Group (BWG) had decided to put pickets on workplaces where deaths had occurred. Three people a week were being killed on UK building sites and the aim was to damage the employers' profits and force them to take action to prevent such tragedies. Where workers refused to cross a picket line it was maintained. However, where the majority went to work the others were persuaded to join them in order to prevent victimisation. The initiative was a direct challenge

### Cassidy was privy to confidential information on hundreds of policing cases

## *Unwilling to challenge him directly, I shared my concerns with those closest to me and began to reduce his information-gathering opportunities*

to anti-trade union laws. Jenner attended picket lines, wrote for the BWG newspaper and came into contact with many union site representatives.

When UCATT officer Dominic Hehir sued BWG and union member Brian Higgins for libel over allegations he was failing to support members, a defence campaign was established – and Jenner became the chair. Although the campaign was successful the time taken up on Higgins' defence meant there was little in reserve to picket sites. Those involved felt it was a hollow victory.

Higgins, a blacklisted building worker, says: "I am appalled to discover 'Mark Cassidy' was actually an undercover police officer who used his cover as a building worker to infiltrate organisations the state does not like. It is like some Orwellian nightmare and it is surely time for decency, justice and democracy for blacklisted workers."

Higgins is one of 3,213 building workers' names on the Consulting Association (CA) database used by 44 building companies to vet potential new recruits over the last four decades. His file contained seven pages from *RPM*.

Many of those on the CA list were "not recommended for employment". Their details were revealed after the Information Commissioner's Office closed down CA and its owner, Ian Kerr, was found guilty in 2009 of breaching the Data Protection Act.

The Blacklist Support Group has established that some of the information supplied by CA came from the police or security services. They have lodged a formal complaint to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal – the security services watchdog – and want an investigation about the possible involvement of MI5 and

other sections of the security services in blacklisting.

Spokesperson Dave Smith says: "We now want to know why an undercover cop posing as a building worker turned up on picket lines and at campaign meetings, the details of which were discovered in the CA files. Were names of building workers or any information gathered by this police officer passed on to the CA blacklist? It sure as hell looks dodgy."

By the middle of 1997 I had become suspicious. Jenner had failed to recognise any Tranmere fans when I watched with him the games of what was supposedly his favourite football team. On a union delegation to Ireland he walked down the fiercely Protestant Shankhill Road even though he was a Catholic. He had volunteered to take his van to Ireland, despite knowing it would result in his details being recorded by the security services.

It was all a bit odd but, unwilling to challenge him directly, I shared my concerns with those closest to me and began to ensure his information-gathering opportunities were reduced. By the end of 1997 Jenner's involvement in the CRC had lessened. He still attended some events but mainly to report on his activities within Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), a militant group that had successfully physically confronted the BNP. AFA member Patrick Hayes had been convicted of causing two explosions in the South East on behalf of the IRA in 1993 and the state was certain to be interested in preventing any such actions in the future. Hayes was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment and later released under the Good Friday Agreement. It may be that AFA was always Jenner's main intended target.

CRC had closed by the time Jenner disappeared from his home with

Alison in April 2000. In the months beforehand he had acted suspiciously and had slept on the settee in his clothes. Alison had discovered a credit card in his real name, which he claimed to have bought for £50 to obtain petrol dishonestly.

A concerned Alison rang his workplace, only to discover he had departed a few years previously. Yet he had continued during this time to leave for work at 6.30am. Visits to a counsellor to discuss his reluctance to have children were abandoned without him mentioning his family. We now know Jenner was married.

When she discovered my reservations about Jenner, Alison contacted me in 2001 to reveal she had checked his claim that his father had been killed in a car accident in Birkenhead in 1975. The deaths register showed this tale was untrue – one more lie in a very long list.

The Home Affairs Select Committee has asked to be updated every three months on Operation Herne and Theresa May, the home secretary, has promised the Independent Police Complaints Commission will "investigate serious and sensitive allegations". This may include some from me as I am examining the possibility that a former girlfriend who I lived with may have been in the SDS.

Smith says: "In addition to an examination of past undercover policing arrangements it is important that an independent and impartial investigation is conducted into the purpose of undercover operations. If there is evidence that undercover police officers like Jenner and his superiors were engaged in a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, that evidence should be forwarded to the CPS, which will have to decide whether to bring criminal proceedings." ■

# Spy base protester faces trial for holding upside down US flag

**A prominent peace activist faces prosecution for trespass after she was arrested at Menwith Hill intelligence station near Harrogate while protesting by carrying an upside-down US flag.**

The arrest of Lindis Percy took place on the day Barack Obama was re-inaugurated as US president on 21 January.

Percy had written the words "Now then... second and only chance Obama" on the flag. She wanted Obama to reduce American military involvement across the world and use the money saved to address poverty in his own country.

Under the 2005 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA) Percy's case is now in the hands of the Attorney General, Dominic Greaves, who must decide whether she will face charges.

The Crown Prosecution

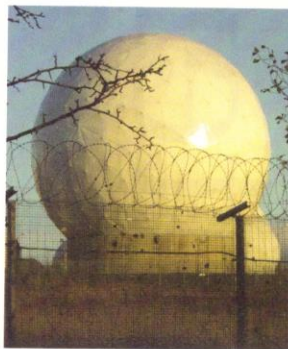
Service (CPS) has been asked to investigate.

If Percy is sent to trial this would be the second time she has faced a trespass prosecution under SOCPA. Two years ago she successfully defended herself after she had shown her driving licence to obtain entry to Mildenhall US Air Force in Suffolk.

## Arrested

After wandering around the base unchallenged for over an hour – without causing any criminal damage – she was arrested as she made her way to the exit. Despite the prosecution calling five base witnesses, a district judge dismissed the case and heavily criticised a security guard's evidence. CCTV coverage of the gate that Percy had used to enter the base had earlier gone missing.

Percy was also arrested in



Menwith Hill US spy base

2011 when she displayed outside the American Embassy in London an upside-down US flag bearing the words "Independence from America". She was threatened with arrest under SOCPA and then detained for an alleged breach of the peace.

She was later released without charge and is now pursuing a civil case for damages.

Percy, a former nurse, also had charges of "wilfully obstructing three Ministry of Defence police officers in the execution of their duty" at Menwith Hill dismissed last year. District Judge Jane Goodwin criticised the arresting officers for failing to interview independent witnesses.

The Campaign for Accountability of American Bases (CAAB) holds a demonstration outside Menwith Hill every Tuesday evening.

The base opened in 1951 and is under the control of US forces.

The site is a communications intercept and missile warning base that, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, is becoming "increasingly vital to US intelligence".

## 'Blunt instrument'

Martin Schweiger, who regularly attends the CAAB pickets, said: "SOCPA legislation is a very blunt instrument that can suppress legitimate peaceful public protest. It has never been properly debated in Parliament and is implemented by police officers interpreting the framework given to them by ministers.

"Clearly there are problems with the legislation because the police have failed when challenged in court. Given the costs in time and money there will be good reason to question any decision to proceed in Lindis's case."

Neither the Attorney General nor the CPS would comment on an ongoing case.

Attempts to get statements from Fabian Hamilton, who is Percy's MP, and the shadow Attorney General Emily Thornberry were also unsuccessful.

MARK METCALF



Off season at the pier at Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex, by OCA photographer Ashley Blair, reflecting the low incomes and lack of job opportunities in rural coastal towns as overheads rise.

The Open College for the Arts (OCA) is a thriving online community of more than 3,000 people studying creative arts subjects at higher level. An education charity, OCA offers BA honours degrees in photography, painting, creative writing, visual communications and textiles. Students

can also study fine art, music, drawing and sculpture. OCA has no minimum entry requirements and students can enrol when it suits them. From September 2012, fees to reach degree level are less than £8,000, in total.

# NURTURE LOCAL FOOD, NOT EXPORTS



Incredible Edible Todmorden is typical of the local foodgrowing schemes that should be given more government support, says Charlie Clutterbuck

## Cameron cuts red tape to boost food exports

### Critics say UK should grow more of its own

The government has defended its decision to prioritise food exports after a former agricultural policy adviser urged it to switch attention towards home production. Charlie Clutterbuck said doing so would reduce Britain's reliance on overseas produce and boost the trade balance.

Clutterbuck, a Lancashire soil scientist, spoke to *Big Issue North* after David Cameron announced plans for fewer farm inspections, an increase in the number of Protected Food Names from 63 to 200 and the creation of a Food Innovation Network to give small to medium enterprises access to new science and technology. The

prime minister claimed this would "help British farmers grow and sell more food by liberating them from red tape and opening up new multi-million pound export markets".

Downing Street predicted the changes would boost annual food and farming exports by £7 billion, which is just over a third of the current total of £19 billion, a quarter of which is accounted for by Scotch whisky. Britain has a £21 billion annual food deficit.

Clutterbuck, who was a former special adviser to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Select Committee in 2008-10, has often spoken about his fears that Britain is too reliant on imports for its food, with 40 per cent of what we consume coming from abroad. Thirty years ago the figure was 25 per cent.

Many small, local, projects

aimed at boosting food production are supported by Clutterbuck. These include the Incredible Edible Farm at Todmorden, where he is a board member. He has also mapped out the Ribble and Calder Valleys in Lancashire and Yorkshire to highlight how the land there could be used to grow more fruit and vegetables.

### "Repeating mistakes"

"The prime minister is repeating the mistakes of the past by bowing down to the markets on food production," Clutterbuck told *Big Issue North*.

"The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) currently accounts for 40 per cent of the entire EU budget, yet much of the £50 billion spent annually produces no food as it goes to large landowners. I want to see much of the £15 billion available under CAP in England over the next seven

years going to local producers who are setting up local food chains to ensure people eat fresher, locally produced, food, which is much better for them. Numerous projects such as Sustainable Food for Lancashire show this can be done."

Clutterbuck also supports food policy professor Tim Lang of City University London, who contends that much of Britain's current exports is processed food that has "caused premature mortality here and which will merely export the causes of health service stress to other countries". Lang wants to see investment in horticulture as part of a plan to place fruit and vegetables at the heart of the food system. Britain produces just 12 per cent of its fresh fruit and 58 per cent of its vegetables. Combined imports of both are £8 billion annually.

"When I was a child there

# Hidden charges

## Housing associations mull pay-to-stay rises

Northern housing associations have been “unclear” about whether they plan to increase rents for higher earners, according to campaigners.

In July 2015 the new government announced plans to push up rents for council and housing association tenants – a policy that became known as Pay to Stay.

From April next year people outside London whose household annual incomes exceed £31,000 will face seeing their rents increase by 15 pence in the pound for every additional £1,000 they earn.

With rents of around £350-£400 a month in the north, a household with a combined income of £40,000 will face a rise of £1,350 a year.

But under the 2016 Housing and Planning Act 2016, the government has – after pressure in the House of Lords – said that Pay to Stay will be voluntary for housing associations. They will however be given an incentive to participate as they can keep any income they accrue from the scheme. In comparison local authorities will be required to pay the Treasury all the estimated £500 million that is expected to be collected annually by them under Pay to Stay.

Nine of the largest housing associations in the country told *Inside Housing* magazine they were actively considering implementing the policy, while another 20 said they were “in favour in principle”. A medium-sized association wanted to start Pay to Stay at an initial threshold of £60,000.

Brian Johnson, chief executive of the South East-based housing association Metropolitan, has confirmed that the 38,000-home landlord favours Pay to Stay.

Yet when *Big Issue North* approached seven northern housing associations – Yorkshire Housing, Adactus,

Wulvern, Forum, Together Housing Group, Chevin, and Leeds and Yorkshire Housing Association – six responded with “no comment” or did not reply at all. Only Yorkshire Housing, which provides more than 18,000 homes, replied to questions. Its spokesperson said: “At this point YH is not adopting the scheme and has no comments to make on it.”

### Legal obligation

According to Eileen Short of the campaigning body Defend Council Housing, this reluctance to comment is “typical”. She said: “Housing associations are not being very open with their tenants. In the South East area where I live, our group, along with various tenants federations, have written to all the main housing associations. We want them to let us know what they are doing or invite us to meet their board. We have had with very little response.

“Some larger housing associations want Pay to Stay as they are keen on anything that raises money. For the smaller ones the organisational difficulties may be too great to overcome.”

Pay to Stay will mean that social landlords will need to obtain information on the income of tenants, who currently are under no legal obligation to provide this information. Critics have asked whether landlords will be assisted by HMRC in finding out their tenants’ incomes.

Short added: “Social housing has paid for itself many times over and in any household where two people are working they are likely to be earning over £31,000, or in London over £41,000. They should not be penalised.

“We have a shortage of housing not because rents are not high enough. It is because we need to build more social houses and we should do so. Pay to Stay is part of a drive to destroy social housing.”

MARK METCALF

# Doubts over Northern Forest

## Public money forms small part of project

Environmental campaigners have cast doubts on the feasibility of government plans to create a Northern Forest, with up to 50 million new trees stretching from Hull to Liverpool. Tree cover around major cities would be expected to grow from eight to 17 per cent.

The announcement by environment secretary Michael Gove in January came after just 1,000 hectares of trees were planted in England last year – the smallest figure for many years. Critics have also highlighted how the current HS2 high-speed rail link will decimate 97 ancient woodlands, including 35 north of Birmingham. Sceptics also say a similar new forest

foraging opportunities,” said Emmerson. “Everything we have been able to provide has made a difference to her life, even at her slightly older age.”

Keepers have been encouraging Kate to bond with the two new arrivals, who were already part of an established herd.

“Kate was on her own for around two and a half years,” said Emmerson. “We are trying to encourage as many social situations for them as possible. We recently added in a mud wallow, and because that was a new exciting experience for them they did all come together and started playing and splashing around together as one herd.”

“There have been lots of little moments like that. One day we put a huge piece of browse on one of the winches and they all stood under that winch together eating from the same piece of browse, so there have constantly been little flashes of that behaviour, but it could all change again when Noorjahan and Esha get here.”

SASKIA MURPHY

announcement in the 1990s has produced only mixed results.

The 25-year Northern Forest project is expected to cost £500 million. The government has promised to provide just £5.7 million, with the rest to be raised by charity. Management of the project will lie with the Woodland Trust and Community Forest Trust.

### Unused land for planting

Local tree planting groups are engaged with the Woodland Trust on drawing up its final plans, including how to unlock further funding, a Woodland Trust spokesperson said.

Under the proposals existing community forests such as the White Rose Forest and South Yorkshire Forest will be linked together by getting landowners within the schemes’ boundaries to give over unused land for planting. The Northern Forest will be a mix of native broadleaves, such as oaks, plus coniferous species such as spruce and pine. Landowners will be required to undertake the long-term maintenance of the trees.

Roly Smith from the Peak District, an environmental campaigner and writer, said there are “far too many questions that need answering before the Northern Forest can be taken seriously” and pointed out that the National Forest in the Midlands has only just over half of its planned 13,500 hectares planted since being announced in 1995.

“They intended joining up patchy woodlands but that hasn’t happened,” he said.

Kate Dewey, planning officer from the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, added that much of the tree planting in the National Forest “is not particularly amazing for wildlife”. Planting trees in itself is not sufficient, she said. “The trees in a Northern Forest need to be part of new projects that create new

meadows and habitats. That requires long-term management and landowners will be unsure of getting involved if it costs them money. Public money of £5.7 million is not much.”

Dewey warned against clearing existing ancient forests for HS2. “Many species such as barn owls and great crested newts will be damaged,” she said. “We are trying to get planners to consider some route diversions to reduce the environmental impacts.”

Sheffield Wildlife Trust has also spoken out against HS2, expressing concerns that the loss of ancient woodlands and “their soils, wildlife and historical meaning cannot be compensated for by mitigation techniques”.

### Fewer trees being planted

Smith urged the Woodland Trust to make clear how it intended to take forward the government proposals for the Northern Forest. “I hope it is not a case of there being a big announcement to take attention away from the fact that fewer trees than ever are being planted nationally, whilst ancient trees are also set to be sliced down,” he said.

A Woodland Trust spokesperson said: “Once we have more information we will let people know. We believe we have the knowhow to make the Northern Forest a success, but it will rely on many different stakeholders.”

“The Northern Forest will be established across all sorts of different landholdings. Paying for projects is usually the hardest thing. A business plan is being drawn up. Sources will undoubtedly include direct tree planting funding, agri-forestry schemes, farming support payments, development levy payments, major donations and philanthropy, corporate sponsorship and individual donations.”

MARK METCALF

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ROTHERHAM RETURN

Rotherham Council leaders have welcomed the communities secretary James Brokenshire’s decision to return powers to it and remove the commissioners who had been running it for three years after it failed to protect children from sexual exploitation. “The council has made strong progress and, having considered evidence provided by our commissioners, I am minded to return all powers,” he said.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Current crop yields could provide nutritious food for the projected 2050 global population of 9.7 billion, but only if we make radical changes to our dietary choices, a new study by Lancaster University researchers shows. They say there needs to be fundamental changes to human diets, replacing most meat and dairy with plant-based alternatives.

### NO RUN IN THE PARK

York Central MP Rachael Maskell has continued to support the campaign to keep the land of Bootham Park Hospital for the city’s people. The council is working on plans for key worker housing and a park on the site but it could be sold by owner NHS Property Services on the market to the highest bidder. In a Commons speech Maskell said: “We need to act urgently.”

### THREE FOR 4

Greater Manchester and Leeds are vying with Birmingham to be the new home of Channel 4. Liverpool, which was on a shortlist of 13 cities to become the broadcaster’s national HQ, lost out because of poor transport links. The two cities that lose out for the HQ will be considered, along with Bristol, Cardiff and Glasgow, for Channel 4’s two new creative hubs.

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Call 0161 831 5563 or email [news@bigissueorth.co.uk](mailto:news@bigissueorth.co.uk)

2018

# The way I work

## Linda Charnock

In the latest in our popular series the young persons domestic violence advice worker reveals how she helps people escape abusive relationships and ensures they're safe afterwards.  
Interview: **Mark Metcalf**. Photo: **Rebecca Lupton**

**I get real pleasure in helping women damaged by domestic abuse to improve their lives. It can be a complex, frustrating, lengthy task.**

During relationships in my early adult life I suffered domestic abuse. I don't tell the young people I work with about these experiences but I believe they give me an understanding of what they may be going through.

It was after being a trained volunteer and working as a women's safety officer at the Manchester Domestic Abuse helpline that I started working in 2014 at the Paws for Kids Endeavour Project in my hometown of Bolton. Finding funds for services is difficult – one manager is constantly searching – but generally Endeavour, which recently celebrated its 21st anniversary, employs around 15 women.

Endeavour was begun by women who knew that domestic abuse victims wouldn't leave violent partners because they'd need to leave behind a pet they loved if they entered a refuge, because refuges don't allow pets. Volunteers started collecting and housing the pets. Women were then prepared to escape their situations. The pet service still operates and I do occasionally arrange for a pet to be collected.

I'm lucky. We recently got three years finance for my post and my part time colleague on the Young Persons Domestic Violence Advice Service. Last year we

had 87 referrals from various agencies, including the police, social and mental health services, housing and solicitors.

I try to help young people escape abusive relationships and then empower them to continuing living free from domestic abuse. To succeed I need to get to know the young person well but I have to tell them that I must legally share information with other agencies, such as the police and child protection, who I meet at multi-agency risk assessment conferences, where decisions on risk management, safety planning and referrals to other agencies are taken jointly.

A young woman or man – 5 per cent of our clients are male, generally from same sex relationships – may be reluctant to exit an abusive relationship. They may be unwilling to help prosecute their partners or former partners. Some will return on a number of occasions to unsuitable relationships. I mustn't be judgemental as people can make poor decisions and it can take time for the penny to drop. I can't force a young woman to do something they don't want to do and it wouldn't result in a positive long-term outcome anyway.

The safety package for each young person varies. We have access to the national refuge network that provides emergency temporary accommodation for women and children fleeing abuse in an intimate relationship. I can

assist a woman who decides to enter a refuge. Unlike in the past, women can travel outside their home area to find accommodation and I would enable them to travel safely to their chosen destination. If they later return to Bolton I will support them.

Locally I can help find emergency or short-term accommodation at Bolton Young Persons Housing Scheme, followed by finding the young person more secure living space and a support package. She or he may have been having their income controlled. I might need to contact the benefits office or social services so the young person can retake control of their finances. A doctor may need finding, one that does not know the abusive perpetrator. It's a similar process when seeking a solicitor. This might take time as some perpetrators can have a lengthy list of court involvement, requiring them to find various solicitors.

I liaise between the young woman and the police. When a prosecution takes place we jointly visit the court beforehand so that she knows what to expect. I attend the court during a trial. If it's safer for evidence to be given by video link then I attend and give support to the victim.

It is not always a case of removing a victim from their home. I may encourage them to report an abusive relationship to the police and get the perpetrator charged with an offence where the bail conditions mean a civil court will issue an occupancy order that removes them from the accommodation.

The police can also issue a domestic violence protection order against anyone aged over 18. The police must believe that she or he has been violent or threatened violence. The order can be made quickly at court and requires the ordered person to leave and not return near to the premises, initially for a minimum of two weeks.

Where I work with a young person requiring a translator – we have many spoken languages in Bolton – then I can access translation services. For safety, Endeavour would not employ anyone from among the local community the young person is leaving.

After I am able to ensure the safety of

clients I can help them improve their skills and tackle personal problems such as mental health or drug or alcohol abuse. As a qualified teacher I run a series of eight-week programmes around building confidence, self-esteem, identifying healthy relationships and empowering victims to become survivors and move on with their lives.

I also help train two final year social work university students. This includes ensuring the students communicate clearly and don't get embarrassed when required to ask intimate questions, sometimes of a sexual nature. We need more social workers – too many drop out after qualifying.

I also take photographs of a victim with physical injuries. My information can be used in prosecutions so I try extremely hard to ensure it's accurate.

I am increasingly giving advice about mobile phone use. I want to ensure that nothing posted online from any phone can help identify the owner or their location. Some former partners are installing tracking and spyware devices in gifts given to children and I warn domestic abuse victims to be vigilant.

My job is full of challenges, which are being made very difficult by cuts in the number of police officers – many of whom do a great job – local magistrates courts and other public services. But I am lucky in working with other people at Endeavour who share my passion to prevent domestic abuse. Also the feedback I get is generally very positive. Seventy-six young people were referred in 2016-17 and most of them said the benefits included feeling more motivated, managing money better and feeling safer. I am always delighted when I meet former clients and they appear pleased to see me.

Two or three women are killed every week by their partners or ex-partners. Smaller numbers of men are killed. I have been a big supporter of the annual local Ellen Strange Commemoration event on Holcombe Moor, where Ellen was murdered by her husband in 1761.

I feel that Endeavour and other similar organisations help many domestic abuse victims to rebuild their lives and prevent many more people from being abused and killed. ■



# AIRCRAFT CREW PURSUE CLAIMS ON FUME EVENTS

**Cabin leaks blamed for 'aerotoxic syndrome'**

**Health insurer accepts claim of work accident**

**A former airline captain has welcomed the recent successful law suit by a German flight attendant who became seriously unwell after an acrid odour occurred in the cabin of a Lufthansa Airbus flying from Frankfurt to Munich in 2013.**

The airline captain, Lee Trenchard, a former trainer and examiner pilot who has been unfit for work for almost five years, is launching his own legal action over claims that he was frequently exposed to toxic cabin air and now suffers from "aerotoxic syndrome".

In most modern aircraft unfiltered bleed air from jet engines supplies the cabin. However, faults with engine seals and seepage can – in an estimated one in 2,000 flights – lead to fumes containing organophosphates (OPs), which are present in the engine oils, entering the cabin. This is known as a fume event.

## **Deadly poison**

OPs can lead to them accumulating in the body and attacking the nervous system and brain cells.

This can produce symptoms including memory loss, depression and other psychiatric effects. As long ago as 1951 British scientists recommended that

agricultural OPs be labelled as deadly poison.

Soldiers who served in the First Gulf War and many farmers have claimed they have suffered from being forced to use products that contain OPs. OPs were present in the chemical sprays used on tents where soldiers were billeted, and in sheep dip.

With airline companies choosing not to install detection systems it is difficult to verify whether a contaminated air event has occurred, unless smoke can clearly be seen. But when growing numbers of airline crew began to conclude that their long-term health problems were the result of breathing in unpleasant-smelling air the Aerotoxic Association was born at a parliamentary meeting in 2007.

John Hoyte, an experienced pilot who left the industry due to ill health, said: "Suddenly I was meeting many other victims and despite our brain damage we slowly constructed the logic behind our dirty secret. We have made enemies with the government, Labour and Tory, oil companies, air manufacturers and airlines but we have made progress by widely publicising our concerns, such that today there are far more reports of planes that are forced to land because of fume incidents."

Last year a Dorset coroner said that fumes in planes posed "consequential damage" to the health of crew following the death in 2012 of British Airways pilot

Richard Westgate at the age of 43. His report said: "Testing of samples taken both prior to and after death disclosed symptoms consistent with exposure to organophosphate compounds in aircraft cabin air."

Airlines, the Civil Aviation Authority and some medical reports say OPs are not present in dangerous quantities in cabin air.

According to the Aerotoxic Association the fume problems on aircraft can be solved in four ways: an air filtration system; building the aircraft upwards to include an air pressurisation system that does not use air from the engine systems; using non-toxic oil; or installing a crude detector that alerts pilots to leaks. All four incur an additional cost for airlines.

## **Poor memory**

Trenchard, 55, from Stockport, was a pilot for 23 years. In 2009 he claims to have suffered from a fume event when flying a large passenger aircraft to Melbourne. "I submitted a report on the incident in 2009 but when no one in the company seemed interested I did not bother recording two similar incidents.

"Within a couple of years I went from being a very fit, healthy person to always being extremely tired. I was clearly unfit to fly as my memory became so poor that I would scare my co-pilot by asking them if we had received instructions to land less than 20 seconds after



the control tower had issued them. I started getting strange looks."

Following a flight of just 20 minutes in January 2012, Trenchard found it difficult to breathe and needed to stay away from work.

When he visited his GP he was unable to obtain a diagnosis. The doctor at his company also could not explain his illness. He sought support from the Aerotoxic Association.

Dr Jenny Goodman, an expert at Biolab Medical Unit, and aviation medic Dr Michel Mulder both diagnosed Trenchard with aerotoxic syndrome, a term first employed in 1999. Trenchard was instructed not to fly at all.

He is currently in dispute

## NEWS IN BRIEF

**CULTURAL HALIFAX**

Halifax has bid to host the Great Exhibition of the North 2018 – a two-month event celebrating art, culture and design across the region. The government is contributing £5m towards the exhibition and £15m into a legacy fund to attract further cultural investment. Cultural partners led by the Piece Hall Trust, with Eureka! the National Children's Museum and Dean Clough have submitted the bid.

**APPRENTICESHIPS IMAGE**

Young people are four times less likely than those over 55 to see the merit in apprenticeships, according to a YouGov survey. Only 7 per cent of 18-24 year olds viewed them as the best route to success with 68 per cent favouring higher education. A report by Reed in Partnership and qualifications body NCFE blamed poor careers advice.

**ANTIDEPRESSANT RISE**

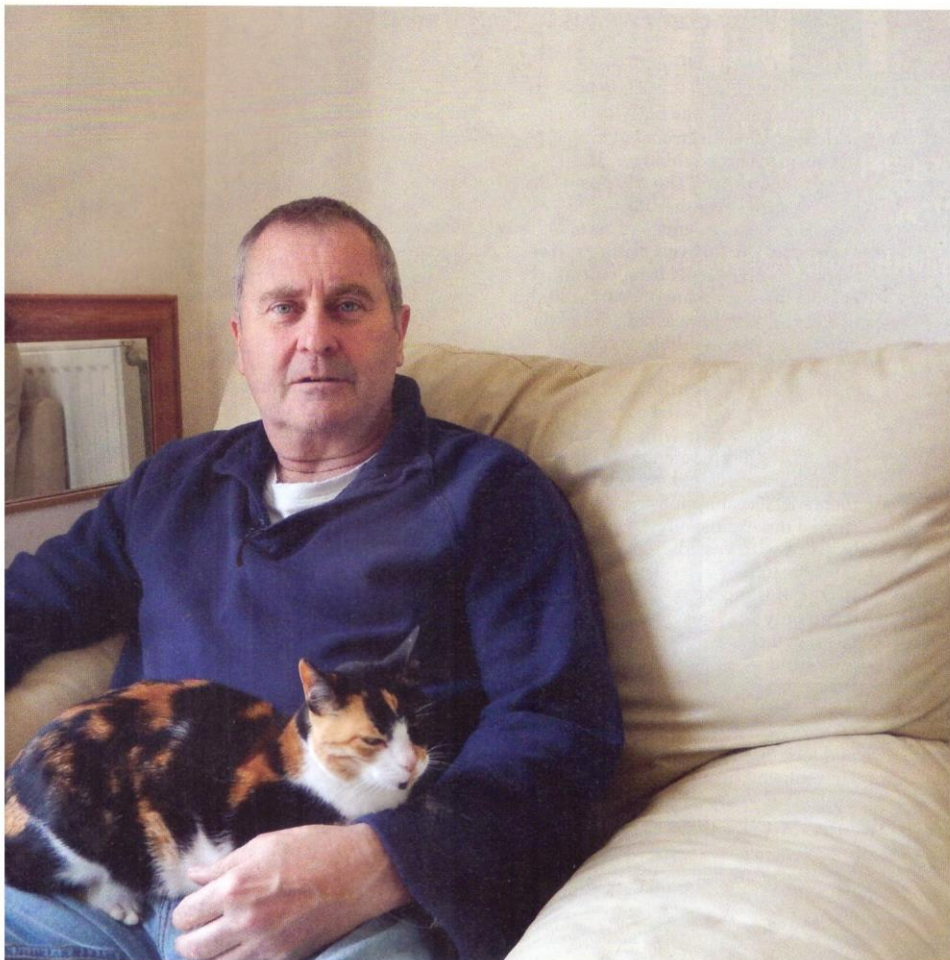
Prescriptions for antidepressants rose more than any other drug in 2015, says a Health and Social Care Information Centre report. It showed there were 61m antidepressant items prescribed in 2015 – 31.6m more than in 2005 and 3.9m more than in 2014. They cost the NHS £780,000 per day.

**ORGREAVE ON HOLD**

The government will not say whether it will launch a fresh inquiry into the 1984 Battle of Orgreave, between striking miners and South Yorkshire Police, until criminal investigations into the Hillsborough disaster have ended. The House of Lords heard an inquiry might prejudice investigations. The Independent Police Complaints Commission has also said it will not be releasing an unredacted version of its 2015 report, which links the two events.

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MARK METCALF



Former airline captain Lee Trenchard, from Stockport, is seeking medical damages. Photo: Mark Metcalf

with his employer because he claims not to have been paid since then and is also seeking medical damages.

He is working with six other pilots who are set to launch similar actions. Some are dependent on the income they receive from their former companies

Trenchard said: "I admire their bravery as they run the risk of finding themselves left without any money by these companies."

**Legal success**

The trade union Unite is pursuing legal claims on behalf of a further 61 cabin crew, with reports that more are to follow.

Trenchard welcomed the German attendant's legal

success. The attendant became seriously unwell after the June 2013 flight, with symptoms of poisoning, and was off work for six months.

The German Federal Bureau of Aircraft Accident Investigation (BFU) did not regard the incident as serious and did not investigate after it received reports from the attendant and crew, and obtained the aircraft's technical details.

The attendant filed a lawsuit against BG, the statutory health insurance scheme provided by his employer. In May, BG agreed the incident was a work accident and the court case was cancelled as a result.

The BFU has yet to comment on whether it will

now open a full investigation into the accident.

"Some airline staff who have been diagnosed with aerotoxic syndrome have been paid an ill-health pension," said Trenchard. "This is the first time though that the airline industry has admitted an employee has been made unwell because of aerotoxins.

"That is great news because it could be that forcing airline companies to pay substantial compensation might be the only way to prod them into rectifying the problems caused by contaminated air, which results in aircraft being piloted by people who are allegedly unfit. This may place passengers lives at great risk."

# SISTERS' HIGH RISE AND FALL



Mark Slater lives in one of the Rochdale blocks due to escape demolition but campaigns for other residents

## Housing body plans to demolish tower blocks

### Tenant group denies misleading residents

Plans by Rochdale Borough Housing to demolish four of the Seven Sisters high rise flats on the College Bank estate are polarising opinions.

Two years ago, Rochdale Borough Housing (RBH), which took control of the local council's housing stock seven years ago, announced a 20-year regeneration project for College Bank and the nearby Lower Falinge Estate and began to draw up proposals, including demolition.

RBH intends that its proposals will unlock "further major investment, which will regenerate both neighbourhoods with a wider mix of high-quality homes and more green spaces".

RBH said any displaced tenants would be guaranteed somewhere "like for like" to live, close to the town centre, if they wished.

### 'Social cleansing'

RBH intends modernising the remaining three College Bank blocks. It claims its proposals could lead to 500 new homes on the land, some of which is lying empty.

Within weeks of the demolition plans being announced a petition of

544 College Bank residents' signatures was presented to Rochdale Borough Council. Councillor Neil Emmott, cabinet member for housing, claimed the plans "smacked of social cleansing".

Rochdale Council and residents opposed to its plans publicly disputed each other's claims to speak on behalf of those living at College Bank. There were widely different claims about exactly how many residents' opinions had been gathered by RBH.

Although it was never disputed that most Lower Falinge residents backed demolition, former tenants representatives claimed this was because RBH had run down the estate. According

to RBH it has supported 62 tenant households between July 2018 and May 2019 to move from Lower Falinge, with over half staying in the town centre area, "including families who moved from flats into our brand new family houses".

In May 2019, RBH accused a "small number of individuals on social media of inaccurate and misleading comments" and of personal attacks on its employees. RBH later publicly attacked the College Bank Support Group, claiming a number of residents had been unduly harassed by the group and that it had also "posted incorrect and deliberately misleading information, which appears designed to create unnecessary concerns and paint an inaccurate picture of RBH's work in central Rochdale".

### Private sector investment

Mark Slater returned in 2014 to live for the third time on College Bank. His one-bedroom flat on the Mardyke block – consisting of 15 storeys with six flats on each level – costs £90 a week rent and is not due to be demolished. It is warm inside and soundproof. Slater enjoys a wonderful view, stretching high up on to the nearby countryside. He can look down on familiar sites in a town he was born in.

Self-employed, Slater helps out at a local soup kitchen. "I know many people who used to need the kitchen and whose lives have been rebuilt thanks to getting accommodation in Seven Sisters flats," he said. "But they remain vulnerable and they have told me so."

Slater himself desperately needed accommodation in 2014 as he was sleeping on a sofa at his dad's house after his marriage collapsed. He has been active for over 18 months in the College Bank Support Group, which disputes RBH's claims that it will be able to relocate any displaced tenants in like-for-like property.



## Wheel turns again unexpectedly

**Manchester rockers Twisted Wheel (pictured) are playing a hometown headlining gig next week – and supporting Big Issue North Trust in the process.**

Ten years since they last headlined the Ritz and one year since an unlikely comeback, the band, led by Jonny Brown, return on 15 November. They're asking guest list people to make donations to Big Issue North Trust, which will also receive a percentage of the ticket price for their after-party. And trust staff will be at the gig for additional fundraising.

Twisted Wheel's relationship with *Big Issue North* is a poignant one. In 2008 their song *Big Issue* touched on the subject of homelessness, becoming a fan favourite. But amid addiction problems, singer

Brown went on to find himself homeless on several occasions, before the band split up in 2014.

When they got back together again last year, Brown pledged to give back as much as possible to the people who helped him.

The band now plan a new album for next year and have support slots with Liam Gallagher confirmed.

Big Issue North Trust is the charitable arm of *Big Issue North*. Money raised by the charity supports the magazine's vendors, through help in accessing support services, including assistance with obtaining ID and enrolment on educational courses.

**For tickets to the gig see [bit.ly/2PCuM3p](http://bit.ly/2PCuM3p). For after-party tickets, [bit.ly/2prCLFK](http://bit.ly/2prCLFK).**

"When RBH advertise online two bedroom flats it is not unusual to see over 70 bids being made for them," said Slater. "What will happen when hundreds more are added to the list?"

Slater claimed older people will be dispersed and the subsequent lack of support networks would mean they would become isolated and lonely. He wants all seven blocks refurbished.

RBH estimates this would cost £10 million per block, equivalent to around £110,000 per property. It says it does not have "any prospect of accessing this level of investment for all seven tower blocks".

Asked by *Big Issue North* to clarify how much funding it would need for its plans, RBH provided no figures. It is in discussion with government

about investment but would not say how much it was looking for.

RBH, which has committed over £25 million of its resources to College Bank and Loer Falinge, has however indicated that its plans will require private sector investment.

According to Slater: "The flats are iconic and it is clear from examples in Salford and Manchester that people want to live in well-maintained tower blocks. Why not here in Rochdale? RBH is ignoring the views of local people on the estate and should revisit their plans."

The College Bank Support Group is working with a group of architects to draw up alternative plans. RBH has said it will consider them if they are "feasible and sustainable, as well as safe

and genuinely affordable for tenants and residents".

With both sides in the dispute holding divergent views, local MP Tony Lloyd is seeking more information from RBH. He said: "I can't yet see the big picture as to what we get at the end of this process. Considerable numbers of constituents have approached me on this matter and proper answers are required to some big questions to reassure everyone concerned."

RBH, whose top five executives were criticised last week when it emerged they are to receive considerable pay increases over the next three years, said it was "pleased to have an ongoing and constructive dialogue" with the MP.

MARK METCALF

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### VOLUNTEER TO READ

National Charity The Reader is offering free training for eight people to set up four new Shared Reading groups in Salford and Trafford. Shared Reading promotes confidence and wellbeing, and builds communities. Volunteers receive a fully funded, three-day training course and ongoing support. Fill in the form at [thereader.org.uk/volunteer](http://thereader.org.uk/volunteer) or email [volunteer@thereader.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@thereader.org.uk) for more information.

### HARROGATE STREET AID

A new contactless payment terminal on Oxford Street in Harrogate allows passers-by to make donations to help tackle begging and rough sleeping in the town. Street Aid is a joint scheme by the council, police and Harrogate Homeless Project. The charity says donating to a central fund is better than giving to beggars – a stance critics claim is condescending and cynical.

### LEYLAND PATIENT RISK

Around 800 patients of a surgery in Leyland have been told of errors in their medical records and risks to medical care. A letter sent to patients asked them to help amend inaccuracies in their medical notes that came to light after Preston-based Park View Surgery took over the Station surgery following the death of its sole GP, Dr George Ahad.

### ALL THE AWARDS

A South Manchester community radio station has taken top prize at the Community Radio Awards. ALL FM received the Station of the Year gold prize and was praised for its inclusivity and passion. Programming is inclusive of carers, people with autism, disabilities and mental ill health, non-English speakers, BAME and LGBTQ+ people. It is run by 115 volunteers.

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Call 0161 831 5563 or email [news@bigissuenorth.co.uk](mailto:news@bigissuenorth.co.uk)

# SCHOOL ACCOUNTS INVESTIGATION

## Unspent funding at Whitehaven school

### Cumbria police pass probe to fraud squad

A police investigation into alleged fraud at one of the worst run academies in the country remains ongoing.

Founded by venture capitalist Michael Dwan, Bright Tribe Trust, a 16 school multi-academy trust, took over the running of Whitehaven Academy in 2014, only to withdraw four years later.

In 2016, Julie Rayson, herself a former pupil at Whitehaven whose son was studying there, founded the Whitehaven Academy Action Group (WAAG). Members were concerned about the quality of children's education and why public funds totalling £321,774 had been obtained for building work, lighting and fire safety improvements that remained unfinished or had never started.

### Request dismissed

Two-thirds of the Whitehaven site was closed in 2017, which is when Rayson first raised her concerns with Cumbria Constabulary. Rayson had a year earlier asked to discuss parents' worries with the Department for Education's (DfE) Regional Schools Commissioner for Whitehaven Academy. But her request was dismissed "with a response that the DfE were in ongoing discussion with the trust", said Rayson, who began taking her concerns to town council meetings and then won a seat on the council.

In 2018 a *Panorama* programme alleged Bright Tribe Trust (BTT) had received hundreds of thousands of pounds in grants for improvement works at its schools that were never completed. Bright Tribe also received £1 million in 2015 to establish a "northern hub" of schools. Academies minister



Parent Julie Rayson first raised concerns about Bright Tribe Trust in 2015

Lord Agnew revealed that the majority had been spent by the end of 2016 on hiring senior staff.

Another BTT school, Manchester UTC, which closed in September 2017 three years after opening, left behind a £526,000 deficit that had to be paid off by the government.

In 2018, BTT announced it was withdrawing from running schools, all of which have been transferred to new sponsors.

BTT accounts for the year ended 31 August 2018, published in June 2019, show that £212,032 of the £321,774 grant for works at Whitehaven had been repaid. Some £1.5 million was put aside for any potential claims for improper use of these grants from the DfE, which said it would not take any action to claw back any money until 27 December 2019.

"Clearly the need to pay back over two-thirds of a £321,774 grant indicates it was handed out generously without robust checks to ensure it would be spent

on genuine projects," said Rayson.

"Where was the £1.5 million from? Most academy trust funds are accumulated from DfE government funding anyway, so are the DfE actually paying themselves back?"

### Formal investigation

Rayson also suggested £35,000 BTT reclaimed in VAT for paying a contractor for work not completed at Whitehaven should be investigated by HM Revenue and Customs.

Cumbria Constabulary has passed on its investigation to the City of London fraud squad, whose spokesperson said that as it had begun a formal investigation it could not comment at this stage. The DfE was also unable to comment on the investigation but did state: "The £212,000 is a repayment of Conditional Improvement Funding, which is public money."

In November 2018 Rayson was a key witness at a Commons Public Accounts Committee inquiry into academy schools accounts

and performance. Its report said that Whitehaven was one of the worst run academies in the country and that academies needed to be more accountable about spending.

Following BTT's collapse, Whitehaven Academy was re-brokered to be run by the Cumbria Multi-Academy Education Trust. Rayson and other parents had wanted other options explored, including a return to local authority control.

### Liabilities

Rayson said she was pleased a police inquiry was underway and is encouraged by the school's progress.

"There's been a turning point in the learning environment for the students, with some interim repairs to the current buildings also already completed. This can only lead to a better quality of education and ultimately improved exam results.

"It might be too late for those children educated under the sponsorship of Bright Tribe but the future is looking positive."

Parents are also happy that the DfE has provided funds for a new-build school that should be opened by next year.

BTT was placed under interim leadership in spring 2018 and is now in the process of liquidation. A BTT spokesperson told *Big Issue North* it could not comment on the police investigation into "historic matters" while the £1.5 million set aside to meet liabilities has yet to be reclaimed by the DfE.

The spokesperson claimed that by working with the DfE "the interim leaders have done an outstanding job to ensure the BTT's schools, including the Whitehaven Academy, were swiftly transferred to strong new academy trusts, providing children with a first-class education, and so that creditors were paid."

MARK METCALF

# TEST CRISIS AT CARE HOME



Sharon Reed, Danmor Lodge manager: toll on care staff is "relentless"

## Manager struggles to get swabs for staff

### Testing kits for home's residents also scarce

An experienced care home manager has attacked the government for what she believes is a systematic, ongoing failure to develop a coronavirus testing system for care home staff and residents.

Sharon Reed of Weymouth's Danmor Lodge private care home also feels Matt Hancock and Helen Whately, health and social care ministers, do not understand how care homes operate and have failed to defend those working in them.

### Deeply frustrating

Danmor, which won the 2019 Dorset Echo care home award, provides accommodation for up to 25 residents. In 2016 its end of life care won it one of only 15 quality awards from the National Gold Standards Framework Centre.

As a manager since 2013, Reed administers a staff of 40.

She estimates around 60 per cent have contracted Covid-19, while the figure among residents, one of whom has died of the virus, is higher.

"Some staff self-isolated once the crisis started because of family concerns," said Reed. "Some with Covid-19 were absent for three weeks, others longer. Some returned too early and exhaustion forced them to take additional time off to recover. Everyone has given their all.

Testing staff for Covid-19 helps Reed know whether they are safe to work, thus helping prevent the virus spreading to patients. She has been left deeply frustrated at the government testing systems she has tried to access.

"I am into the sixth system for staff," she said. "The new DHSC online portal system does not seem to be any better than the previous five. I asked on 12 May for swabs to undertake staff and resident tests. I am still waiting."

She described how earlier test systems expected unwell staff to drive 100 miles to

Bristol. Venues were later switched to Poole, then Weymouth, which was overwhelmed by demand. A mobile testing centre also collapsed within hours and a one set up by the local clinical commissioning group failed to last 24 hours.

Reed said she had consistently sought to get swab tests for her residents, with mixed success, and wants all of them to be regularly tested until she can be sure no one at the care home has the virus.

### Ring of steel

Earlier during the pandemic, she asked for a testing kit and received only five swabs. She sent back two, which both gave positive results, but was not allowed to use the remaining three because a second courier was not available. On another occasion, she said, she only received tests for residents when she threatened to go to the press.

"I must inform Public Health England when we are virus free. Regular testing will be required but is this part of any long-term plan by the government?" said Reed, who believes government ministers do not understand the sector she works in and remains angry that the government initially allowed people who had not been tested for coronavirus to be transferred into care homes.

According to the Office for National Statistics there had been 8,312 Covid-19 recorded deaths – around a quarter of all deaths associated with the virus – in England and Wales care homes up to 1 May. The number rises to 12,526 when care home residents who died elsewhere – mainly in hospital – are included.

In the week ending 1 May there were 6,409 deaths recorded in care homes more than the 6,397 deaths in hospitals in the same week.

"Matt Hancock and Helen Whately should have thrown a

ring of steel round care homes and explained to the public our role," said Reed. "They have done neither.

"Consequently, the toll on care staff nationally, who are all trained, is relentless. It is dispiriting to see comments on Facebook and in letters columns that residents, many of whom have multiple medical problems, are being stopped from going to hospital for oxygen and being pressurised into completing do-not-resuscitate forms. In fact many complete these before entering a care home.

"Doctors and district nurses support all our work, which should be explained to those who don't know how we work."

### Frontline

In response to Reed's comments a Department for Health and Social Care spokesperson said: it had built the biggest diagnostic testing design industry in British history.

"Supporting the social care sector has been a priority throughout this unprecedented pandemic and we recently announced a further £600 million for care homes to tackle the spread of Covid-19," added the spokesperson.

"We are testing all care workers and residents, regardless of symptoms or not, and, since the start of the outbreak, nearly 125,000 workers in care settings and over 118,000 care home residents have been tested."

The spokesperson highlighted the 11 May establishment of an online portal for care homes to register for tests, and Whately's comments on 15 April when the social care minister said: "Care workers are on the frontline going into work day in day out. It includes looking after people with Covid-19 and I am hugely grateful."

MARK METCALF

# Call to record Covid work deaths

## Employers have not controlled work risks

**A Manchester health and safety advice centre has called for workers who have died from contracting Covid-19 to be recorded as workplace deaths. The decision would have implications for employers, including public bodies, and grieving families of the dead workers.**

According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) their were 111 fatal workplace injuries in 2019-20, 38 fewer than in 2018-19. The HSE believes part of the fall is due to reduced economic activity resulting from the impact of Covid-19 in the final two months of 2019-20.

"I went through my photos, sorted my kimonos. The thought of a second wave is terrifying."

Still, every effort is being made. "We arrange things in the largest room possible," said Shota Asada, owner of the luxurious restaurant where the geisha entertain. "Anything to keep this culture alive."

Michiyo Yukawa, an ex-geisha who owns an Akasaka bar and hosts occasional geisha events, thinks geisha may need to adapt so that more ordinary people can appreciate their charm.

"They have a special beauty," she said. "They've gone through training other people haven't. They spend a lot of money on this – and it's made them special. Having this disappear would be sad."

Ikuko fears an extended pandemic could prompt some geisha to quit.

"Now is the worst of the worst," she said. "How are we going to get through? It'll take all of our body and soul."

ELAINE LIES, COURTESY OF REUTERS/INSPNGO

But the total omits deaths from Covid-19. According to the HSE separate data about deaths associated with the coronavirus will be available at a later date.

### Lack of PPE

The Greater Manchester Hazards Centre (GMHC) lobbies and advises workers on occupational health, safety and welfare issues. Co-ordinator Janet Newsham believes workers have died because workplace risks have not been controlled and is particularly critical of the lack of PPE for health and care workers. Employers found guilty of breaking health and safety laws can be fined, or, in some cases, imprisoned or lose the right to be a company director.

"There wasn't a precautionary approach taken to PPE," said Newsham.

"A higher level of stock was needed for health workers and anyone coming into contact with the virus."

GMHC wrote to the HSE when the coronavirus crisis began, asking it to make it easier for workers to report concerns about employers not providing PPE. The HSE agreed to the Trades Union Congress producing an online form that sends concerns direct to the safety enforcement agency.

The HSE also increased the number of people taking calls from employees. But Newsham said: "We have seen, for example, how the construction industry has been widely working and social distancing has been flouted. There has been only a handful of cases that have resulted in HSE or local authorities action."

According to an HSE spokesperson "all cases reported to HSE and local authorities are being assessed and investigations initiated where incidents meet our published incident selection criteria".

In the US a union is suing meat companies including

Smithfield Foods and JBS USA, as well as retailers such as Amazon and Walmart, on behalf of workers who have become infected and died. The first multiple victims case at one workplace during the pandemic was filed in court recently.

Newsham said: "Unions and families here should be considering legal action against the government, perhaps in a similar fashion to that by soldiers' families who successfully sued over a lack of adequate equipment and protection in the Iraq conflict."

In response to a series of questions an HSE spokesperson told *Big Issue North*: "With the Covid-19 virus prevalent in the community at large it is very difficult to be certain that an individual case of the disease resulted from occupational exposure... It is too early for us to comment on potential lines of enquiry."

HSE's response concerned Unite member Abdul Tan Rashid, a Middlesbrough bus driver who has seen colleagues die across the country. "I hope it does not mean Covid-19 deaths among people with underlying health problems are recorded as due to the natural progression of a naturally occurring disease. Employers might then escape their responsibilities."

One potential avenue of enquiry was closed down in April when the chief coroner said an inquest was "not the right forum for addressing concerns about high-level government or public policy" and "by no means will all Covid-19 deaths be reported to the coroner".

For Newsham though the priority remains "to get high standard PPE and more effective workplace practices in place while not letting down workers who have died by allowing them not to be recorded as workplace deaths".

MARK METCALF

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### BENEFITS WARNING

Citizens Advice Sheffield (CAS) has urged everyone who needs to make a new Universal Credit (UC) claim to get advice first to avoid losing out on income. CAS warns that once people move to UC they are not able to move back to "legacy" benefits, even if they were better off before. Many non-British people's claims are wrongly adjudicated or refused.

### LEEDS SKILLS SITE

Leeds City Council has launched Employment and Skills Leeds, offering free support services to people and businesses. The team works with communities, particularly in Leeds's most deprived areas, to provide information to people looking for employment and skills opportunities, as well as businesses looking to recruit to their workforce. See [employmentskillsleeds.co.uk](http://employmentskillsleeds.co.uk).

### LIVERPOOL ARTS FUND

Liverpool City Council and Arts Council England have launched a £200,000 pilot project to fund performing and visual art in the streets of Liverpool. The fund will support artists and organisations to create work that can be presented within the city centre over the coming months – with grants of up to £5,000 on offer. See [cultureliverpool.co.uk](http://cultureliverpool.co.uk).

### HULL MUSIC HOPE

The Polar Bear and the Welly, two well-known Hull music venues, could re-open after they went into administration. Chris Sherrington from the Music Venue Alliance told BBC Radio Humberside that there was interest from investors after owner VMS live went into administration last month, with the potential loss of 20 jobs. He said any sale was in the administrators' "ball park".

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Email [news@bigissuenorth.co.uk](mailto:news@bigissuenorth.co.uk)

# Calls for National Food Service to feed three million hungry

## Sheffield Foodhall seeks collaboration

Sheffield's Foodhall Project is aiming to connect with similar initiatives nationally to create a National Food Service.

With an estimated three million people now going hungry in the UK the organisation believes everyone should have their basic needs met whatever their immigration status, social standing or wealth.

Sheffield Foodhall Project (SFP) began in 2015 after architecture graduate Louis Koseda, who has a strong historical understanding of the politics of food production, distribution and consumption, created an app with his friends as they sought to identify the city's food needs.

This led to bring-a-dish evenings that filled stomachs and encouraged discussions and donations that made it possible to open premises in Eyre Street, a city centre location.

Until 2018, volunteers ran the daily community kitchen and public dining space. On popular days 70 people paid what they could afford for a meat-free hot meal. Food parcels could be collected.

### Growing movement

The National Lottery made a £200,000 grant last year to enable nine part-time staff, including Koseda, to be employed over the following three years. This has led to evening events including bike workshops and successful Friday music events that have showcased over 70 new artists.

The success of these initiatives inspired like-minded people across the country to imitate the work. There are now 15 similar groups including ones in Bristol and London.



As well as being a community kitchen Sheffield Foodhall hosts events

In September 2019, SFP, along with the Real Junk Food Project Network and campaigners in Nottingham's Super Kitchen Network, organised in Sheffield a National Food Service (NFS) discussion week. Speakers included Robin Dunbar, whose Baking Bread report contends that regularly eating alone is the biggest single factor for unhappiness beside existing mental illness, and Bryce Evans, from Liverpool University, an expert in wartime social eating spaces and national kitchens.

### National network

They discussed an NFS based on the idea of social cooking and eating spaces.

"National food kitchens fed people during the Second World War but were unpopular with Sir Winston Churchill as he feared they were becoming political organising centres," said Koseda.

When Sheffield was plunged into lockdown the SFP community kitchen closed. Eyre Street visitors could collect food parcels but most were housebound so SFP delivered 15,000 food parcels.

After receiving some government funding – with the help of Sheffield Hallam MP Olivia Blake – and further food donations, SFP's outside spaces have now reopened.

"We have already built a network that connects groups nationally but there are thousands of other local groups that can be reached out to, including social eating groups and food banks, which are doing much more than what is being written about them in the media," said Koseda, who was brought up by his mother on a rundown estate in Dagenham, London. "It is about building free social eating space across regions.

### "Rebuilding the welfare state"

"Our great-grandparents built co-operative food societies that kept decent food affordable. Eating together would ensure everyone getting sufficient to eat – three million are currently not – plus it would also build friendships.

"The NFS would deliver food parcels to isolated individuals, no matter how well off, as this will help persuade such individuals to take more active roles in society. Food has been a major political topic during the lockdown and it has encouraged more organisations to discuss with us a NFS. There is no formal governance as yet but it is encouraging what is happening and I feel we can develop something that can play a part in rebuilding the welfare state."

MARK METCALF

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### FRACKING VICTORY

Energy minister Kwasi Kwarteng has told anti-fracking MPs to "accept victory" on the debate. He said the government has no plans to review the moratorium on the gas extraction process and that "the world has moved on". Rotherham MP Alexander Stafford said the moratorium has not stopped energy firm Ineos "circling around its sites at Harthill and Woodsetts like vultures" however.

### TOWNS FUND

Over 30 towns across the North West and Yorkshire are to receive £500,000 -£1m in government funding in the first wave of its Towns Fund. 101 towns are sharing an £80m pot to boost regeneration through projects such as green spaces, pop-up business areas, pedestrianising streets and creating of community hubs to support those living alone.

### MANCHESTER ACCENTS

Manchester Metropolitan University is asking people from the region to record audio clips of themselves reading certain words. They will be used to analyse accents and dialects and how we and others perceive them. Part of a wider project called Manchester Voices, it will culminate in a permanent resource at Manchester Central Library. Take part at manchestervoices.org.

### LIVERPOOL EDUCATION

The University of Liverpool is offering opportunities for the public to continue their education via short courses, seminars, and workshops for the coming academic year. Courses on offer cover a wide range of subjects including creative writing, music, science, history, computing and more. Visit [liverpool.ac.uk/](http://liverpool.ac.uk/) continuing-education for more information and to book.

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Call 0161 831 5563 or email [news@bigissuenorth.co.uk](mailto:news@bigissuenorth.co.uk)

# ACCESS TO SPORT UNDER THREAT

Fewer facilities and rising costs are blocks

**BAME and working-class kids hit hardest**

For 150 years being paid to play football has given working-class young men such as Fergus Suter, the star of Julian Fellowes drama *The English Game*, and Marcus Rashford the chance to lead rewarding lives. Now experts are warning these chances are diminishing because of fewer facilities and the rising costs of playing sport.

At 23 years of age Macauley Musgrave from Penrith wants to make football his career. After undertaking FA coaching courses, he trained local sides and also teams at the Cumbria Football Academy. While he works part time at a supermarket, he is aiming for qualifications that will allow him to coach young people up to 16 and become an assistant coach at professional clubs. But until he began coaching, Musgrave was "unaware of how few decent facilities there are", he said.

## Double booked

"At my first session the pitch was double booked. The council owns Frenchfield Sports Centre, which has grass pitches. For young people, few of whom live near grass areas, getting there means a mile walk as it is outside Penrith. Large demand means you can't just turn up and play with mates. There are no floodlights, ruling out playing on dark nights.

"Penrith Rugby Union Club has floodlights for its artificial pitch but it costs £75 an hour for a quarter of a pitch. Unless junior football clubs find alternative income sources, and that is difficult, then many children from poorer backgrounds are from my experience missing out as they cannot afford the fees the clubs must charge to

recoup their costs from hiring pitches."

Across the Pennines in Halifax some local junior clubs have been reporting difficulties in finding publicly owned pitches to play on. "We have hired a private grass pitch this season," said Ian, coach of St Columba's under 13 team, which plays on Sunday mornings.

"For many years we used a council pitch facility but last season it was not getting cut or marked up before games and one of the goalposts was dangerous and needed replacing."

As well as a shortage of facilities, others say young people do not get enough time to play sport.

Tony Gavin a retired headteacher at a specialist sports school in Guisborough, North Yorkshire, believes former education secretary Michael Gove's decision to scrap the Schools Sports Partnership (SSP), which guaranteed three hours of quality and varied sports, had reduced young people's chances to learn activities that could keep them fit into adulthood. In 2018, the Youth Sports Trust reported that 38 per cent of English secondary schools had cut timetabled physical education for 14-16 years since 2012. Gavin contends that as a result fewer state schools now have football teams in competitive leagues.

"Schools are judged on results," said Gavin. "Young people in years 10 and 11 rarely get two hours sport each week because PE lessons get dropped to facilitate additional mathematics and English."

With most facilities out of bounds lockdown has currently slashed young people's opportunities to play sport. Yet according to official statistics physical activity had been rising among young people.

Government guidelines recommend that young people



Marcus Rashford is a role model to working-class kids. (Paul Ellis/AP)

should get one hour, equally split between in and out of school, of daily physical activity and Sport England reported that "active children are happier, more resilient and more trusting of others".

Sport England statistics suggest that for 2018-19 57.2 per cent of children were doing 30 minutes or more physical activity outside school, up 4.6 percentage points on 2017-18. There had also been a 3.9 per cent drop in the total number doing under 30 minutes daily physical activity.

Asian and black children are those most likely to do less than 30 minutes activity daily.

Roy Massey who played football professionally for Rotherham United, Leyton Orient and Colchester United, went on to be assistant head coach at the Arsenal Academy, where he helped bring through big stars such as Jack Wilshere and Alex Iwobi. He said youngsters from poorer backgrounds still faced problems even after getting signed up to a professional football academy.

"I became aware of the additional problems faced by working-class youngsters to make the grade in professional football," said Massey. "Marcus Rashford is clearly one of a number of role models but you do wonder

how many prospective good players from poorer backgrounds don't make it.

"It is a big commitment as there is a lot of travelling and some families don't have cars or time, often due to work commitments, to transport them to and from training."

The government claims Sport England will have invested over £190 million in physical activity for young people in 2017-2021, including the £40 million Families Fund, which encourages low-income families with children to do physical activity together. It says it is supporting grassroots football, investing £18 million a year in facilities. Its partnership with the Football Association and the Premier League brings a combined £70 million for new facilities delivered by the Football Foundation.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "We want every child to get an active start in life... Ofsted has made clear that PE is part of a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. PE is the only foundation subject on the national curriculum at all 4 key stages. It is up to schools to decide what opportunities to offer to pupils to be active, including team sports."

MARK METCALF