

JAN 2011

Who the CAP fits may no longer be clear



European citizens' right to know how their annual £48 billion Common Agricultural Policy subsidy is allocated has come under threat after a court upheld an appeal by two German farmers who objected to their names being published as fund recipients.

The decision by the European Court of Justice led to every European Union state removing the names of all recipients from their websites. It could lead to a return to the period from 1962 to 2005-06, when there was a refusal to divulge who got a share of what annually constitutes 40 per cent of the overall EU budget.

Big Business

Such secrecy allowed some British media in the 1990s to argue that Britain was paying out billions to small French, Spanish and Italian farmers. In fact big business and large landowners have always done well from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which costs each European household £800 a year.

Topping the subsidy recipient list has been Tate and Lyle Europe, which over the last

decade has received payments totalling £722 million. Such support has led to complaints from poverty campaigners, who argue that third world sugar producers can't compete.

Budget gobbled up

There is a growing number of recipients grossing more than £1 million a year, with the total rising from 1,040 in 2008 to 1,268 last year – 30 in the UK. It means that close to a tenth of the CAP budget is being gobbled up by less than 0.3 per cent of the total recipients.

Jack Thurston, a former Labour adviser, and Danish journalist Nils Mulvad established the website farmsubsidy.org, which successfully campaigned for transparency over CAP payments. The result was that although the information was often poorly presented, every EU state released CAP beneficiary details for the last three years.

Thurston said: "We believe there remains a strong case that the public benefits from having access to such information."

MARK METCALF

across Britain in the last ten

The Human Society

Free healthcare still denied

Thousands of elderly and disabled people remain unaware of their entitlement to free nursing care and are forced to sell their homes to pay for it, according to a campaigner. This is despite a landmark ruling 11 years ago re-affirming the 1946 NHS Act's guarantee of the right to free healthcare from cradle to grave and comes three years after The Big Issue in the North first reported on this issue.

Campaigners now fear that the practices of health authorities under which elderly and disabled patients are transferred from hospitals into care homes on the basis of social rather than healthcare will be enshrined in changes being proposed by all three major parties after this week's general election.

In 1999 road traffic accident

victim Pamela Coughlan successfully opposed at the Appeal Court the closure of her Exeter nursing home and her transfer to social services, arguing that North and East Devon Health Authority sought to redefine healthcare as social care. Four years later health authorities were instructed to follow Department of Health Guidance preventing elderly and disabled people paying for nursing care that should be free.

Businessman Robin Lovelock, who set up a website nine years ago to inform patients of their rights, said "hundreds if not thousands of people" have benefited from knowing that "anyone with care needs the same or greater than Pam Coughlan must be 100 per cent funded by the NHS".

He added that one law firm has won back over £9 million in recovered costs for families and cited a recent case where £250,000 was recovered from the NHS by a family who had sold their house to pay for the care of an ex-soldier.

But Lovelock said that most people remain unaware of their entitlements and warned that proposed changes in social care by all the major parties could bring with it "changes in primary legislation to legalise what has been happening despite the Coughlan judgement".

He added: "It would be a great shame if one of the pillars of the NHS was removed without proper discussion."

MARK METCALF

WASTE PLANT HARM DISMISSED

PHE say incinerators not "a significant risk"

Father claims they increase infant deaths

Public Health England's claims that constructing more waste incinerators is not "a significant risk to public health" has again been challenged by a man whose studies have consistently shown that infant mortality rates are above average in locations close to such plants.

In seeking to reduce landfill, councils are increasingly incinerating waste, with 10.8 million tonnes being burnt in 2017-18, compared with 4.9 million tonnes four years earlier. There are over 90 plants across the UK, with 22 constructed in the last decade, whilst another 50-plus are approved or proposed.

Infant mortality

Michael Ryan began researching the possible impact of air pollution two decades ago after he lost two children, one at 14 weeks, causing him to consider if their deaths could be related to pollution caused by living downwind of incinerators.

He obtained at considerable personal financial cost infant mortality statistics from every ward across England and Wales. He discovered that whether incinerators are sited in affluent areas – for example Chingford, close to the Edmonton incinerator – or poorer areas then infant mortality levels are above average.

He cited other scientists, stretching back over a century in some cases, who challenged the norm that deprivation, poor parenting and cultural practices are the only reasons for infant deaths. He reported on how infant mortality levels had collapsed in both the UK and in those parts of Turkey where natural gas, which releases fewer pollutants, had been introduced.

Ryan's work, which has been consistently reported in *Big Issue North*, has been used by MPs to ask parliamentary questions and this in turn pushed Public Health England (PHE) to conduct a study into the impact of waste incinerators on infant mortality levels. This was first promised in 2003, began in 2011 and came out last year, taking six years longer than the original two year schedule.

The result of the research, which ignored Ryan's work altogether and was undertaken by the Small Area Health Statistics Unit at Imperial College, London, was that PHE reconfirmed its claim that "modern, well run and regulated municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health".

PHE – set to be renamed the National Institute for Health Protection – adjusted the data for deprivation, ethnicity and socioeconomic status before coming to its conclusions. Ryan believes the study was thus flawed and has also questioned why the researchers did not look at what has happened in areas where modern waste incinerators have opened in the last 10 years. One such location is Newhaven on the south coast, opened in 2012, downwind of which are the residents of Lewes and Eastbourne.

'Convenient dumping ground'

As in many other locations the original proposal to build an incinerator by East Sussex Council was highly controversial and its official opening was boycotted by Norman Baker, Lewes MP, who argued: "Newhaven is simply a convenient dumping ground for the rest of the county."

Peter Jones, leader of the council, accused opponents of the incinerator of peddling "voodoo science".

The infant mortality rates for Eastbourne and Lewes in



Ryan blames incinerators for his children's deaths. Photo: Steve Ryan

2013 were zero and 1.1 per 1,000 live births. In 2019, when infant mortality rates for England and Wales were 4 per 1,000 live births, the corresponding figures in Eastbourne and Lewes were 8.7 and 7.9. In real life this corresponds to six infant deaths in Lewes.

Critics believe such trends should be worth examining by a body charged with protecting public health.

Along the south coast, Exeter incinerator opened in 2014 when the infant mortality rate was 3 per 1,000 live births. By 2019 it had doubled to 6 infant deaths.

In the Midlands, Bromsgrove's infant mortality rate has risen since the £165 million Hartlebury incinerator began in 2017 from 3 to over 6 per 1,000 live births.

The figures in other locations are not so gloomy. In Leeds it rose only slightly, from 4.8 in 2016, when the Leeds Energy Recovery Plant incinerator was opened, to 5.1 last year. Bolton, which has two incinerators, has a rate of 4.9 per 1,000 live births with 18 still births and 18 infant deaths last year.

There are no areas with incinerators where infant

mortality rates are below the national average.

Big Issue North asked PHE if it had studied the statistics for newer incinerators. Could it offer any explanation? Were infants dying unnecessarily and was PHE partly responsible by failing to consider Ryan's work?

PHE did not respond to the specific questions, restating its longstanding position that incinerators are not a significant risk, with a spokesperson adding: "While it is not possible to rule out adverse health effects from these incinerators completely, any potential effect for people living close by is likely to be very small."

Eastbourne and Lewes councils and Caroline Ansell, Eastbourne's MP, did not respond to requests for comment.

Ryan said: "PHE, councils and MPs should be looking at trends over time. By doing so they'd surely become aware of many sudden post-incinerator rises in infant death rates which surely cannot be put down to sudden influxes of poorer people into these localities."

MARK METCALF

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

were apples from right across the UK – not now,” said Clutterbuck. “Most of our fruit and vegetables can be grown here, why not do so through local initiatives that can then be linked to local food banks? Tinned products, currently distributed there, can be replaced with vouchers for fresh fruit and vegetables to be redeemed in local shops.

“The government should provide greater assistance to local foodgrowing initiatives. They could co-ordinate and advertise a national list while also providing business expertise and scientists who can help with soil measurements and pest control. We can increase employment through growing healthier food, the sales of which will reduce our imports and cut our food trade deficit.”

Local shops

Lang and Clutterbuck's concerns were put to Defra in a series of questions. They asked if the government should be doing more to shorten the links between consumers and producers of food, including considering a national food bank voucher system redeemable in local shops for fruit and vegetables. They also asked whether Britain is over-reliant on food imports and requested the research papers that justified Cameron's claim that the new plans will boost exports by over a third. No research papers were sent.

Big Issue North approached Defra, whose spokesperson largely repeated Cameron's original points. “We are creating a stronger brand for British food and drink to promote our produce abroad.... the UK is a world-leader in agri-tech and the government has invested millions in research to ensure we can meet future demand for food,” said the spokesperson.

Clutterbuck said he is disappointed by “what appears to be a lack of vision by the government over food production, distribution and consumption”.

MARK METCALF

2015

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

2016

Abuse claims at West Yorkshire school

More former pupils have contacted solicitors representing alleged victims of abuse at a West Yorkshire school after police questioned three men in their sixties on claims of sexual and physical assaults going back to the 1970s. And an ex-employee has claimed William Henry Smith School (WHSS) in Rastrick, Brighouse failed to investigate an assault on a pupil he claims he witnessed just two years ago.

WHSS is a non-maintained residential special school set up in 1920. According to its website it "provides high quality education and care for boys with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties".

In the summer West Yorkshire

Police quizzed three men in connection with alleged sexual and physical assaults dating back 30 years before releasing them on bail pending further investigations.

One former pupil, Mark Edson of Selby, believes some former pupils have received compensation, although he wasn't one of them.

The law firm representing the former pupils, Verisona of Hampshire, wouldn't confirm this. But Alan Collins, the solicitor working on the claims, said: "Media coverage has led to more ex-pupils contacting us. Usually in cases like this one most people don't come forward so I am still looking for witnesses prepared to talk to me



Collins says media coverage has led to more ex-pupils coming forward

about the allegations as I wonder if we are still not getting the entire picture of the full extent of the abuse."

Lee Varey from Halifax was a maintenance worker at the school from 2004 until he quit in 2007. He was impressed by the dedication of the staff and therefore "left bitterly disappointed when senior staff members failed to properly

investigate an attack I reported on a young man aged 16 in which he was punched four or five times by a staff member".

Varey, who claims this contributed to him leaving his post, said: "No one took a statement from him even though there were many staff that knew I was unhappy about what happened."

WHSS was unwilling to respond to questions about Varey's claims and whether it had carried out an investigation into them, issuing a statement saying: "Any such matters would be protected by Data Protection and as such we are unable to make any comment."

MARK METCALF

NOV 2009

Authority's refusal of disability grant 'appalling'

A four-year-old Bradford girl who lost her eyesight during cancer treatment can't play in the garden after her family's request for a disabled facilities grant that campaigners say should be mandatory was ignored by the local council.

Disabled rights campaigners are now worried that, with public spending under threat, Blyss Knowles's case will be duplicated elsewhere.

Confined to her house

Knowles began a course of chemotherapy in 2009 to treat cancer behind both eyes.

Now blind in her right eye, she has just 2 per cent vision in the left, enabling her to see

someone's shadow. Unsteady on her feet, she found it hard to play in the garden – which her mother Fiona describes as "uneven, with holes and dips in it" – and was upset to be confined to the house.

Mandatory grant

The family applied to Bradford Council for a Disabled Facilities Grant to make the garden accessible.

These grants fund adaptations to enable disabled people to live as comfortably as possible in their homes.

Last year Lord McKenzie, then communities and local government minister, confirmed that DFG, which is managed by

local authorities, was a mandatory entitlement.

In May 2010 the Knowles family met with Bradford Council's deaf blind services co-ordinator to assess the young child's needs.

The completed form makes reference to wanting to apply for a DFG but appears to have ruled out any chance of the family receiving one when it states "the levelling off of the garden by the council is not available". Bradford Council was asked why the family was not being considered for a DFG.

A spokesperson initially referred the inquiry to Incommunities, which manages Bradford council house stock,

and was unwilling to respond to further enquiries.

Not unique

Tim McSharry of the Access Committee for Leeds, which supports disabled people, said: "Whilst appalling, it's not unique. Increased numbers are contacting us about the failure of some local authorities and social landlords to carry out disability-related adaptations.

"We are seriously concerned that things are going to get even worse due to government cuts and the removal of the ring fencing that protects funding such as the DFG."

MARK METCALF

Let's get physical, urge education experts

Government plans to radically alter the teaching of PE in secondary schools should be scrapped, according to a headteacher and an experienced sports organiser, who both fear the latest changes indicate an increasingly bleak future for school sport.

Currently the assessment in GCSE PE is 60 per cent practical and 40 per cent theory.

From 2016 ministers want to reduce the practical element to 30 per cent. The increased theory element, they argue, will "place greater emphasis on students' understanding of the physical, scientific and socio-cultural factors that can impact on physical performance".

Tony Gavin, head teacher at Laurence Jackson School in Guisborough, North Yorkshire, believes the outcome will be radical. "I estimate once students realise it is mainly theory then there will be a 50 per cent reduction in the 250 currently doing GCSE PE,"

he said. "Sadly, practically motivated and less academically able children are being hit hard as many schools have also cut art, drama and music lessons. There are also ever-increasing standards required to obtain BTEC qualifications in vocational subjects and which are consequently seeing students dropping them.

Children's health

"Sports-wise the changes deal a further blow to a subject increasingly marginalised within schools where funding is tied to academic achievements. I know that in some schools, PE may be listed on the timetable but can be cancelled as schools prioritise English and mathematics."

Alan Walsh, a governor at a London primary school who runs school sports projects, shares Gavin's concerns.

"A decade ago, PE was a priority as it was recognised that it stimulated intellectual capacity and addressed health and obesity agendas," he said. "There was a five-hour weekly target of two hours in school,

"A further blow to the subject."

Gavin



two hours after school and one-hour engagement at the likes of the local swimming baths.

"Where I am a governor and PE sport lead only 90 minutes is allocated to PE. Governors elsewhere tell me the subject is being cut back in secondary schools. This cannot be good for children's health."

Both Gavin and Walsh want the government to retain PE GCSE in its current format.

Compulsory

Pressure group 38 Degrees has drawn up a petition proposing that "at least 50 per cent should be practically assessed".

A spokesperson for the Department for Education (DfE) defended the changes, stating: "GCSEs need to be robust to match the best education systems in the world and to keep pace with universities' and employers' demands."

The spokesperson claimed primary school pupils spend 122 minutes doing PE each week and that the subject remains compulsory for all ages but with an "increasing focus on competitive sport in our new world class curriculum".

MARK METCALF

GOT A STORY? CONTACT 0161 831 5563 OR EMAIL NEWS@BIGISSUENORTH.CO.UK

FEB

2015

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



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."

MARK METCALF

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.

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Call 0161 831 5563 or email news@bigissuenorth.co.uk

A diabetic man from York with serious sight problems still considers himself very fortunate – because he's been lucky enough to find someone prepared to pay privately for his treatment for macular oedema.

NHS patients are being denied the Lucentis injections he benefits from after the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), responsible for overseeing drug use in the NHS, ruled it was not cost-effective compared with laser treatment.

Appeal

Although the decision has been open to appeal it is anticipated that the final announcement, due shortly, will confirm that the UK's estimated 10,000 affected diabetics will be treated differently to patients with age-related macular degeneration.

The latter will continue to receive Lucentis, which accounted for 1 per cent of the entire NHS drugs budget last year. Some primary care trusts prefer to use the much cheaper Avastin, a cancer drug that has proven to be effective in treating macular oedema.

The macula is the central part of the retina responsible for colour vision and fine detail. A change in retinal blood vessels can create the conditions for excess fluid that can lead to severe visual impairment in the affected eye.

Diabetes

Stephen Moore, 34 and married with one young son, began experiencing problems with his eyes after being diagnosed with diabetes ten years ago. He had laser treatment on his right eye and then steroid injections in both eyes, all paid for by the NHS.

"In both cases the improvement was minimal," said Moore, who feared he might have to give up his IT job and asked his employer's occupational health department for help.

"They told me about the Access to Work scheme, funded by the government to help disabled people do their job, which is good, but even with such help I couldn't have continued to do my current job," said Moore.



Stephen Moore says privately funded Lucentis injections have helped him. Photo: Mark Metcalf

Private funds needed for sight-saving drug

An eye consultant told Moore about Lucentis, available privately whilst NICE considered whether to make it available on the NHS. Moore believes the 23 injections he's had are working, and passed a DVLA test allowing him to continue driving this year.

Private funds

But the Lucentis injections cost £700 a time. Moore doesn't know how many he may still require and is worried that the private funds he currently enjoys could end.

He is backing the campaign by the Royal National Institute of Blind People to persuade NICE to change its mind.

Longer-term care

"My good luck doesn't mean I am happy seeing other people denied a drug that can massively improve their lives," said Moore.

"It's not cheap but they

already provide it to one section of the community. Furthermore denying people the injections might cost the taxpayer a considerable sum because there will be the need to provide longer-term care support for someone who can't see and function effectively.

"People like myself who are working won't be able to do so, and tax revenues will be lost."

A NICE spokesperson said the organisation would shortly announce its final decision on Lucentis.

MARK METCALF

THE EYES DON'T HAVE IT

Lucentis is available on the NHS to treat age-related macular degeneration but in March NICE rejected it for diabetic macular oedema.

NICE accepted Lucentis was effective in treating diabetic patients but said "faulty analysis" provided by manufacturer Novartis meant it could not establish whether it was value for money.

Doctors have instead been using Avastin to treat diabetic patients with macular conditions, even though it is not indicated for such use. Avastin is a cancer drug that costs only around £50 per dose, as opposed to more than £700 for a dose of Lucentis.

Because Avastin is sold in vials that have to be broken down into smaller doses for injections, it has been associated with infections in patients.

Both drugs are sold in the UK by Novartis.

Planning battle in Bingley reaches twentieth year

When it started John Major was prime minister and Bill Clinton was elected US president.

Two decades is the length of time that residents of a part of Bingley and housing developers have been contesting plans that would see hundreds of new homes built close to the famous five-rise locks on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

Now, with neither set to give ground, the two sides will go head to head in February next year at a public inquiry.

Overturned

A planning inspector will hear an application from Redrow and Bellway Homes to build 475 houses on the 40-acre Greenfield Sty Lane site.

This stretches from the canalside on Crossflats up towards the small village of Mickletonwaite and across to Oakwood and Fairfax estates.

When the plans were raised in 1992 local residents formed the Greenhill Action Group (GAG) and defeated them, sparking a seemingly never-ending saga.

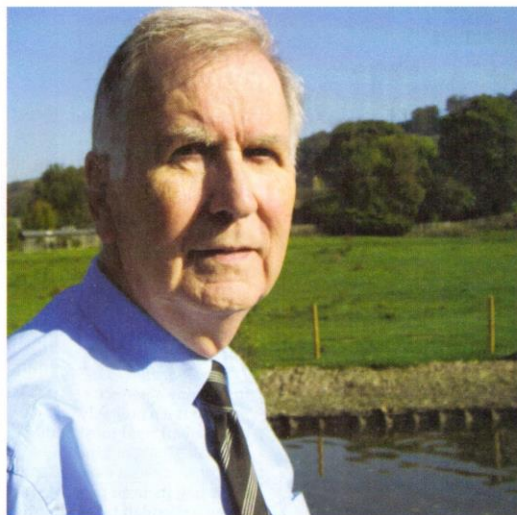
Bradford Council then allocated the land to housing under its unitary development plan but withdrew the allocation in the face of a successful challenge by GAG.

This was overturned at a public inquiry by a planning inspector, who said the development could go ahead if a new relief road was built.

Entry road

The developers propose to create the first ever canal swing-bridge big enough for two cars. This will destroy the nesting areas of birds including swans, geese and moorhens, but will provide an entry road to the proposed new housing.

GAG chairman Terry Brown, a local resident since 1988, said:



Brown: we are not against change of any kind. Photo: Mark Metcalf

"What's going to happen if the swing bridge breaks down? We've asked to see the prototype and the maintenance schedule, but with no success so far.

"Access through Mickletonwaite isn't possible as the road there is tiny and we've had occasions when cranes have been needed to remove stuck vehicles. I feel we are arguing on behalf of people who haven't even moved here yet and will face major problems getting to and from their homes."

Access problems

Brown denied the group was against change of any kind at a time when there were 1,200 people on Bradford Council's housing waiting list. The developers have promised to build a "mix of open market and affordable housing" if given the go-ahead.

"Bradford already has 13,700 empty homes, whilst the local

paper, the *Telegraph and Argus*, estimated the council has, at least, 40 acres of derelict land locally that hasn't been allocated," said Brown.

"We believe brownfield sites should be developed before greenfield ones. Furthermore in recent times we have had new housing estates built in Bingley that are still half empty.

"We hope the planning inspector will agree with us that the access problems cannot be overcome, which would make it very difficult for the builders to continue their fight. But he might say that they need a fixed bridge, giving the developers a chance to come back with further proposals before any final decision can be taken."

All of which might mean the whole affair still has a few more years yet to run. Bellway and Redrow refused to comment.

MARK METCALF



NEWS IN BRIEF

HYDRO PLANT

Construction has begun at Otterspool Weir, site of Stockport's first community-owned hydro electricity plant. The first of its kind in Greater Manchester, the hydro will generate enough electricity for around 50 homes for the next 40 years or more. £250,000 has already been raised for the project but individuals and businesses are still being encouraged to become shareholders.

CHARITY CHALLENGE

Housing and homeless charity Shelter is calling for participants in its second annual Vertical Rush Liverpool. The endurance event challenges people to race to the summit of one of the city's tallest buildings, the iconic St John's Beacon. Hundreds of runners, with a sponsorship pledge of £100 each or £400 for a team of five, will scale the 558 steps. Liverpool-born Mel C is supporting the event.

CANCER RESEARCH

Sheffield has become home to a new cancer research centre focusing on breast, lung and bone cancers. The centre, at Weston Park Hospital, will investigate how the disease starts, grows and spreads and scientists say it will lead to improved treatments. Cancer Research and Yorkshire Cancer Research said they will increase their investment in Sheffield to ensure the centre would "set the pace" for cancer research.

BADGED UP

Cumbria County Council is holding a consultation to gauge the public's views on a proposed increase in the cost of a Blue Badge in Cumbria. The Blue Badge scheme allows people with severe mobility problems to park close to where they need to go. The proposed increase from £2 to £10 comes as a result of reforms to the service announced by national government. See www.cumbria.gov.uk/bluebadge.

GOT A STORY? CONTACT 0161 831 5563 OR EMAIL NEWS@BIGISSUENORTH.CO.UK

ALL WEATHER PITCH HEALTH RISKS



The English Football League has outlawed 3G pitches but there are plans to build thousands more. Photo: Daniel Lewis/Alamy. Below: Tony Gavin

PM plans to build 2,000 artificial pitches

Campaigners say they pose risks to players

Parents and teachers have spoken out about the health and environmental risks of artificial sports pitches after Boris Johnson announced plans to build thousands of them for England's bid to host football's 2030 World Cup.

Artificial turf allows games to go ahead that would otherwise be postponed. But so-called 3G pitches are often made from used car tyres and contain chemicals such as lead, mercury and benzene. In the Netherlands more than 100 clubs have banned their use for youth games after analysis of 60 showed carcinogen levels to be up to six times higher than would be allowed for consumer products.

There are currently 4,853 3G fields across the UK, with the government planning to build 2,000 more. But the English Football League (EFL) has outlawed artificial pitches.

Pitch contact

In 2013, Lewis Maguire, 13, from Darlington was half way through a 12-week trial as a goalkeeper for Leeds United when he was forced to quit after he became unwell. He was found to have developed Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a form of blood cancer. His father, Nigel, quit as chief executive of NHS Cumbria to look after Lewis, who died in 2018.

In 2016, Nigel Maguire wrote to sports minister Tracey Crouch highlighting the developments in the Netherlands as well as research by former US international goalkeeper Amy Griffin. Of 150 footballers who had played regularly on 3G fields and had cancer, Griffin discovered that more

than 100 were goalkeepers – a position that means the player will be in contact with the pitch surface more than other players.

Acting sports minister David Evennett replied that football authorities "adhere to the latest independent evidence, which indicates that 3G pitches ... are safe".

Maguire remains unconvinced. He wants to see a moratorium on the construction of any 3G pitches, the replacement of rubber with inert materials such as cork and coconut fibres and to ensure that young goalkeepers no longer practice on such fields.

He called on the Football Association to ensure coaches make players shower after playing or training on 3G pitches, to remove rubber crumb from their bodies and equipment.

Others point out that 3G pitches only last around 10 years. Viv Mitchell, whose

local council built a 3G pitch close to her home in Northampton, pointed out that companies in the Netherlands had refitted pitches in Africa rather than disposing of them responsibly at the end of their life. She calculated that the pitch close to her contained 20,000 tyres.

"This is going to be a lot of plastic waste and rubber crumb going to landfill every 10 years," she said. "It is industrial dumping as these



pitches won't last any length of time before they aren't fit to play any sports on."

In reply to *Big Issue North's* detailed list of questions, a spokesperson for Defra, the government department responsible for sports fields, said waste tyres are classified as "absolute non-hazardous" by the EU.

Call for urgent review

The spokesperson also pointed to a 2017 European Chemicals Agency evaluation that concluded there is a very low level of concern from exposure to substances found in recycled rubber granules used in sports pitches, and that there is "no reason to advise people against playing sports on synthetic turf containing recycled rubber granules as infill material".

The spokesperson added: "We are committed to protecting the environment and wildlife including through the regime which regulates chemicals and restricts the use of harmful substances in products.

"The European Chemicals Agency concluded there is a very low level of concern from exposure to substances found in recycled rubber granules used in sports pitches. A further restriction is being considered that would further lower the concentration limits."

According to an FA spokesperson: "Hygiene guidance is being promoted on social media and shared with the county FAs."

Tony Gavin, former head of Laurence Jackson School, a specialist sports school in Guisborough, North Yorkshire, said: "There should be an urgent FA review as part of a full government enquiry with legal powers to investigate the whole process, from procurement to construction, including materials used.

"The priority must be the health, safety and wellbeing of young people. Any ingredients which pose a risk must be identified, highlighted, discontinued and removed immediately."

MARK METCALF

Liberal rump's stake in future

After three decades in the political wilderness the party left behind when the Liberal Democrats were formed believes it can exploit Nick Clegg's unpopularity and add to its 25-strong membership.

Steve Radford had just been elected to Liverpool City Council when his party merged with the SDP to form the Liberal Democrats in 1987.

He refused to join what he regarded as "the right wing of the Labour Party with its militarist tradition and belief in the corporate society that excludes people from being involved in the decision making process".

'Ideological' cuts

But unlike other refuseniks, who either served out their remaining period of office or subsequently stood for re-election as independents, he continued to stand under a Liberal Party banner, campaigning against his former allies in 1990.

Radford, who represents the inner-city area of Tuebrook and Stoneycroft, was re-elected in 2008 by a massive 72 per cent of the vote. The ward's other two councillors, Hazel Williams and Christopher Lenton, are also Liberal Party members.

Radford dismissed claims by

his former colleagues in the coalition government that they didn't know about the state of the nation's finances until they entered office and were then left with no option but to support cuts they had previously opposed. "The scale of the cuts is for ideological, not economic reasons," he said.

Permanent union

Radford said he knows of at least 100 Lib Dem councillors across the country who have resigned in protest against the cuts and hoped that some would join the Liberal Party. Four have recently resigned in Runcorn, seven in Rochdale and three in Stockport.

"I won't say: 'I told you what would happen 25-30 years

ago,'" said Radford. "But I hope our commitment to the principles of engagement rather than war, free trade, support for small businesses, democracy, a national minimum wage and council housing as well as opposition to the cuts will persuade them to join us rather than stand as independents. Especially as history shows they are unlikely to retain their seats in the future under such a banner."

Radford added that many senior Lib Dems would lose their seats at the next general election and the Lib Dems would "inevitably" move to a permanent political union with the Conservatives.

MARK METCALF

Father of abused girl says offender needs support

A 13-year-old boy from Crewe recently imprisoned for two years after sexually abusing a seven-year-old girl last year needs help and support, according to the victim's father. Without that support, said the father, the one-time family friend will remain a danger to society and himself.

Describing the teenager's attempt to rape his daughter as "any parent's worst nightmare" the father said: "What is especially worrying is the boy has yet to show any real remorse."

"He needs to be assisted into recognising what he has done. Only then can he get appropriate treatment such that when he returns to society his follow-up care can ensure nothing like this happens again in the future."

Despite this concern the father believes his daughter's assailant should be 'looking to live elsewhere. He was adamant he was not making threats, but

believes many people are angry at the incident and that in the circumstances a different location should be found for the youngster to live in.

The father added that many young people's knowledge of sex comes from what they pick up "on the street or from catching glimpses of pornographic, often violent, movies at home, where any idea of a loving relationship is absent".

Counselling

He would like to see much more being done in schools to give young people a more balanced view.

He continues to support his daughter, who now finds it hard to sleep in her own bed.

"Counselling is helping but it's a slow process – one I suspect we might never know has properly worked so that it would be appropriate to stop," he said.

MARK METCALF



BOOKING NOW

Manchester Public Libraries and homelessness charity the Mustard Tree are inviting homeless people and others to take part in their open mic event on 5 March to celebrate World Book Night. Each person will be allocated five minutes to read poetry, a short story, a diary, a blog or to play and/or sing music. The event is designed to promote libraries to homeless people, and free books are to be given out on the night, held at the Mustard Tree from 7.30pm. Contact Libby Tempest on 07535426678 or l.tempest@manchester.gov.uk.

SUIT AMNESTY

Manchester restaurant and bar The Living Room is holding a suit amnesty, asking people to donate unwanted formal wear to be distributed to homeless people and others who cannot afford to dress suitably for job interviews. The scheme runs until 31 March, with clothing distributed through charities including the Booth Centre. Donors will get a 20 per cent off food voucher. See www.suitamnesty.co.uk.

ART IN THE GARDENS

Artists are invited to prepare their entries for one of the country's largest outdoor art events. Sheffield's Art in the Gardens features work by over 350 artists and crafts makers and attracts around 20,000 visitors every year to the city's Botanical Gardens. This year's event takes place on 3-4 September. See www.sheffield.gov.uk, email art.inthegardens@yahoo.co.uk or phone Sharon on 0114 275 3847.

FIRST FOR FOOTBALL

Footballers from across the country are in training for the first National Homeless Football Championships, taking place in Manchester on 11 April. Thirty-two teams drawn from homeless people are to compete in the event, organised by Chapter 1's The Limes project in association with Manchester City Football Club and Streetgames. Manchester City players will be at the tournament. Email deana@ch1.org.uk for more info.

Arresting behaviour

Two animal rights activists who filmed their own arrests are to take legal action after the body that investigates all complaints relating to Lancashire Constabulary admitted officers unlawfully arrested and assaulted them while denying them their right to impart information to the public.

Animal Aid supporters Jo and Keith Moodie were mounting an information stall on primate experiments close to Blackpool Tower in May 2007.

They were approached by police community support officers (PCSOs) asking them to stop their activity or face arrest for obstructing the highway. The community support officers

then called police officers.

Keith said: "It became clear they intended arresting us, despite us pointing out we were doing nothing illegal. We sat down and passively resisted arrest, shouting out to members of the public – some of whom questioned the police about their actions – that our human rights were being violated. The police also unsuccessfully attempted to prevent us using our video camera to document the incident."

They were arrested but released without charge.

Both complained to Lancashire Constabulary's professional standards department (PSD), which

upheld a number of their complaints. These included that PC Davies, PC Bithell and PS Harris had unlawfully arrested and assaulted them, PS Connaughton had given misleading advice to other officers to arrest them, PCSO Chapman had attempted to physically stop them using a video camera and PS Hills had failed to provide them with a meal while they were in custody. A complaint against PC

Tyler was "surprised, as it's not often you get such contrition from the police"

Brady for assault was also upheld.

Animal Aid's director Andrew Tyler was "surprised, as it's not often you get such contrition from the police. Too many officers think that members of the public who seek public support for things that concern them are somehow enemies of the people."

Jo Moodie said: "We are pleased at the outcome, and are now looking to take legal action for damages but we are not sure it was the fault of those who arrested us as we believe they were under orders from higher ranking officers."

A Lancashire Constabulary spokesperson said: "An investigation was carried out by Lancashire Police's professional standards department, which identified some areas for improvement in how the police dealt with this incident. As a result the officers concerned have received words of advice and the lessons learnt from this case have led to a review of internal procedures to improve the quality of service we provide."

MARK METCALF



Police attending the animal rights stall before making arrests

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Fire project is a 'white elephant'

A parliamentary inquiry into the government's Fire Control project has heard of incompetence and delays.

The project is intended to centralise the country's 46 local fire control rooms into nine regional centres.

The government argues that this centralisation – including the replacement of nine local centres in the North West and Yorkshire and Humber with larger ones in Warrington and Wakefield – will allow the use of the latest technology, with the centres able to back each other up in the event of large-scale emergencies.

But it has been branded by the Fire Brigades Union as the "worst IT project ever run by any government" and the costs, already £240 million over budget, are continuing to rise with an estimated additional £3 million needed to maintain empty buildings at Warrington and Wakefield.

Both were originally due to be functional by the beginning of the year but will not now open for at least 18 months.

Giving evidence recently to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Trafford councillor James Pearson from the Local

Government Association (LGA) said he discovered on a visit to Warrington that "humming away in the corner of the room was a power distribution unit that distributes power around the building."

He added: There is no way that anybody who had any experience of contact centres would have put that on the floor where you are supposed to be receiving calls. You need that room to be as quiet as possible. Things like that have led to this being a great white elephant."

Pearson's LGA colleague Brian Coleman found that £25,000 has been spent

installing a new coffee machine at one of the London centres that currently has no opening date. The select committee also heard that many of the new buildings have had to be refitted to comply with Disability Discrimination Act regulations.

"In such circumstances how could it not go wrong?"

The select committee enquiry came after more than 100 MPs last year signed an early day motion calling for the project to be scrapped – a policy the Conservatives are now committed to if they win the coming general election.

The project was, however, defended by fire minister and Dewsbury MP Shahid Malik, who said: "It was never about cost for what will be the best fire and rescue service anywhere in the world."

Shona Dunn, director for fire and resilience, Department for Communities and Local Government, told the committee that the "last 12 to 18 months had seen put in place a strengthened senior project team".

Neither Malik nor Dunn could say when the project will be fully operational.

A Fire Brigades Union spokesperson said the government had been "incredibly arrogant" in refusing to listen to firefighters charged with operating the new technology, adding: "The civil servants had no experience, they were advised by consultants with no knowledge of the service and they awarded the contract to a body that had never run a fire control system anywhere in the world. In such circumstances how could it not go wrong?"

BILLY BRIGGS

MARK METCALF

Yarls Wood protest continues

One of the women in the three-week hunger strike at Yarls Wood immigration detention centre has told *The Big Issue* in the North about their confinement.

Yarls Wood is the UK's main removal centre for women and families. It can hold 405 people in four wings.

Last month, a group of up to 80 mothers went on hunger strike in protest at being separated from their children and over their conditions. The protestors were locked in a corridor. The women say they were held there for hours without water or access to a toilet and claim some of them had fainted. Most returned to their room without staff using force but four women were moved to a prison.

From inside Yarls Wood, Mojirola Daniels, one of the women involved in the hunger strike, told *The Big Issue* in the North: "We were protesting about the conditions at the centre and the length of time we spend in here. We were singing and chanting.

"Some ladies went to the door

and asked to go to the toilet. The officers including the manager told us that we are not allowed to leave where we are.

"Some of the ladies started getting sick and collapsing. There was one asthma lady, one sickle cell lady and two others who were choking on the floor.

"Some Chinese girls asked the officers to go to the toilet and they were told no one is allowed to get out. The Chinese bent down at the corner and peed on

"We had no choice but to sit on the soiled floor."

the floor. A few minutes later others copied them.

"The officers were all watching and still refused to open the door. Some people decided to call the emergency service for the ladies having breathing difficulties.

"They opened the window and got out into the compound. Others went through the window and joined them. More were trying to get out but the

officers had seen what was happening and had gone round the compound to meet them.

"They were carrying police guard shields and wearing heavy jackets. They crushed the ladies who were trying to get out with their shields and pushed them to the ground.

"Two ladies were physically injured and bleeding. We were all hysterical and upset and were begging the officers not to hurt the women outside. Some needed to change their sanitary towel but they had to throw bloodied towels next to where we were standing. We were all exhausted and demoralised by 5pm and had no choice but to sit on the soiled floor."

The UK Border Agency said the wellbeing of detainees is of paramount concern. "All detainees are treated with dignity and respect, with access to legal advice and healthcare facilities. We only remove those who both the UKBA and the independent courts deem to have no legal right to be here," a spokesperson said.

Prisoners train as advice workers

Moorlands Youth Offenders' Institution near Doncaster has become the first northern prison to train prisoners to become advice workers to fellow inmates.

Organised by St Giles Trust, the Peer Advice Project trains prisoners to NVQ level 3 in information, advice and guidance. Although a number of prisons in the south, including Wandsworth, Brixton, Chelmsford and Reading, have run similar projects for a number of years it wasn't until this year at Moorlands that the

first one started in the north.

Seven prisoners are now over half way through the six-month course. Once trained the Moorland prisoners will be able to help fellow prisoners with employment, training and housing advice.

St Giles Trust's regional development worker, Richard Rowley, said the prisoners involved "improve their research, communication and interview skills. When this is combined with the effort required in obtaining a high level qualification it improves

their chances of getting employment when they leave prison."

According to the Prison Reform Trust, only around a quarter of prisoners have a paid job lined up when they are released. Most end up unemployed, claiming benefit and facing extreme difficulty in finding work and housing.

Rowley said prison authorities were happy to get involved in the project because prisoners motivated by the hope of a better life on release were less likely to misbehave.

"Our experience shows prisoners find it easier to approach fellow prisoners for advice to give them a chance of starting afresh when they're released," he added.

MARK METCALF

WASTE PLANT HARM DISMISSED

PHE say incinerators not "a significant risk"

Father claims they increase infant deaths

Public Health England's claims that constructing more waste incinerators is not "a significant risk to public health" has again been challenged by a man whose studies have consistently shown that infant mortality rates are above average in locations close to such plants.

In seeking to reduce landfill, councils are increasingly incinerating waste, with 10.8 million tonnes being burnt in 2017-18, compared with 4.9 million tonnes four years earlier. There are over 90 plants across the UK, with 22 constructed in the last decade, whilst another 50-plus are approved or proposed.

Infant mortality

Michael Ryan began researching the possible impact of air pollution two decades ago after he lost two children, one at 14 weeks, causing him to consider if their deaths could be related to pollution caused by living downwind of incinerators.

He obtained at considerable personal financial cost infant mortality statistics from every ward across England and Wales. He discovered that whether incinerators are sited in affluent areas – for example Chingford, close to the Edmonton incinerator – or poorer areas then infant mortality levels are above average.

He cited other scientists, stretching back over a century in some cases, who challenged the norm that deprivation, poor parenting and cultural practices are the only reasons for infant deaths. He reported on how infant mortality levels had collapsed in both the UK and in those parts of Turkey where natural gas, which releases fewer pollutants, had been introduced.

Ryan's work, which has been consistently reported in *Big Issue North*, has been used by MPs to ask parliamentary questions and this in turn pushed Public Health England (PHE) to conduct a study into the impact of waste incinerators on infant mortality levels. This was first promised in 2003, began in 2011 and came out last year, taking six years longer than the original two year schedule.

The result of the research, which ignored Ryan's work altogether and was undertaken by the Small Area Health Statistics Unit at Imperial College, London, was that PHE reconfirmed its claim that "modern, well run and regulated municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health".

PHE – set to be renamed the National Institute for Health Protection – adjusted the data for deprivation, ethnicity and socioeconomic status before coming to its conclusions. Ryan believes the study was thus flawed and has also questioned why the researchers did not look at what has happened in areas where modern waste incinerators have opened in the last 10 years. One such location is Newhaven on the south coast, opened in 2012, downwind of which are the residents of Lewes and Eastbourne.

'Convenient dumping ground'

As in many other locations the original proposal to build an incinerator by East Sussex Council was highly controversial and its official opening was boycotted by Norman Baker, Lewes MP, who argued: "Newhaven is simply a convenient dumping ground for the rest of the county."

Peter Jones, leader of the council, accused opponents of the incinerator of peddling "voodoo science".

The infant mortality rates for Eastbourne and Lewes in



Ryan blames incinerators for his children's deaths. Photo: Steve Ryan

2013 were zero and 1.1 per 1,000 live births. In 2019, when infant mortality rates for England and Wales were 4 per 1,000 live births, the corresponding figures in Eastbourne and Lewes were 8.7 and 7.9. In real life this corresponds to six infant deaths in Lewes.

Critics believe such trends should be worth examining by a body charged with protecting public health.

Along the south coast, Exeter incinerator opened in 2014 when the infant mortality rate was 3 per 1,000 live births. By 2019 it had doubled to 6 infant deaths.

In the Midlands, Bromsgrove's infant mortality rate has risen since the £165 million Hartlebury incinerator began in 2017 from 3 to over 6 per 1,000 live births.

The figures in other locations are not so gloomy. In Leeds it rose only slightly, from 4.8 in 2016, when the Leeds Energy Recovery Plant incinerator was opened, to 5.1 last year. Bolton, which has two incinerators, has a rate of 4.9 per 1,000 live births with 18 still births and 18 infant deaths last year.

There are no areas with incinerators where infant

mortality rates are below the national average.

Big Issue North asked PHE if it had studied the statistics for newer incinerators. Could it offer any explanation? Were infants dying unnecessarily and was PHE partly responsible by failing to consider Ryan's work?

PHE did not respond to the specific questions, restating its longstanding position that incinerators are not a significant risk, with a spokesperson adding: "While it is not possible to rule out adverse health effects from these incinerators completely, any potential effect for people living close by is likely to be very small."

Eastbourne and Lewes councils and Caroline Ansell, Eastbourne's MP, did not respond to requests for comment.

Ryan said: "PHE, councils and MPs should be looking at trends over time. By doing so they'd surely become aware of many sudden post-incinerator rises in infant death rates which surely cannot be put down to sudden influxes of poorer people into these localities."

MARK METCALF

From road on to rail

The government must do more to take freight off roads and on to railways if it is to cut congestion and reduce carbon emissions. Investment is also needed if British freight trains are to adapt to the larger containers increasingly being used by the global shipping trade.

The warning comes from Freight On Rail, a group representing rail freight operators, Network Rail and the transport trade unions, which is urging the government "to equalise the level of investment on rail freight to that of roads".

Currently, rail has just 12 per cent of the UK surface freight market. Yet per tonne carried, rail produces between five and ten times fewer emissions than road transport.

In France, the government is planning to increase the percentage of freight that is not transported by road from 14 per cent to 25 per cent by 2012, and reduce carbon emissions by 20 per cent by 2020.

Although rail freight has



The freight system must be adapted to new, larger containers, say campaigners

grown by 70 per cent since Labour came to power, and transport secretary Geoff Hoon recently made £330 million available to allow more freight to be transported on the East Coast Main Line and North London line, Freight On Rail wants the government to do more.

"The government has done quite a lot after previous under-investment but we are still too road dominated," said Philippa Edmunds of Freight On Rail.

"There's a huge demand for rail freight as it's a low emissions, energy-efficient, safer distribution network that also reduces road congestion."

Freight On Rail also wants to see the government protect previously employed railway corridors, stations and terminals for future use.

"If they don't then it will make it much more difficult to expand the network in the future," added Edmunds.

"You have got to have places where you can load and off-load

freight and you've got to have the right road and rail connections.

"Any opinion polling shows that people want to get freight off the road."

The group is backing campaigners battling to re-open the Woodhead Tunnel rail route between Hadfield and Penistone

Per tonne carried, rail produces between five and ten times fewer emissions than road transport

in the Peak District for passenger and freight use. In October the new transport minister Lord Adonis met campaigners, who believe the government is open to persuasion.

The Freight Transport Association estimates congestion on the roads costs British businesses £17 billion per annum. It says each extra container train added into the UK supply chain will remove 50 lorries from Britain's congested roads.

However, there is concern that rail will be left behind as by 2015 the majority of the cargo containers that arrive at Britain's ports are likely to be taller "high cube" ones.

"While the northern UK ports are well situated and capable of handling modern cargo, the railways surrounding them are not," said Martyn Pellew, group development director for PD Ports, which operates northern ports including Hull and Immingham.

"We must address all rail modernisation issues within the UK to prevent severe economic and environmental consequences, both at home and abroad."

MARK METCALF

HOMELESS WORLD CUP

The search is on for footballers to play for England in the Homeless World Cup in Milan in September. Regional trials begin this week to select men and women wanting to join the squad. Players selected will then take part in a further trial to choose the final squad of eight. Trials in the north take place in Sheffield and Manchester. Anyone wishing to apply to attend should call Richard Brown on 07971 161645.

GOD STOPS HERE

Buses in Manchester, York, Leeds, Sheffield and Liverpool are among those carrying atheist messages in a new campaign paid for by a remarkable fundraising drive launched by comedian Ariane Sherine on the Guardian website Comment is Free. The buses carrying the message "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." took to the roads last week in a campaign backed by the British Humanist Association and scientist Professor Richard Dawkins.

LET US ASSEMBLE

The Howard Assembly Room in Leeds is to open for the first time in 20 years on 16 January, kicking off a programme of chamber-sized work - including film, classical music, spoken word, world music, folk, jazz and music theatre - with a talk by Armando Iannucci about his new satirical opera *Skin Deep*. The Howard Assembly Room is a grade-II listed part of Leeds Grand Theatre and is run by Opera North. See www.howardassemblyroom.co.uk.

DEAD HIKER APPEAL

The charity Missing People appealed for information last week about a man found dead in North Yorkshire 16 years ago. The man's body was discovered at a farm crossing north of Thirsk railway station on 8 January 1993. It is believed he had been hitch-hiking between south west Scotland and Yorkshire when he was struck and killed by the 19.30 InterCity train. Call confidentially on Freephone 0500 700 700 or email identification@missingpeople.org.uk.

re Baby Ps

"Post Climbie there's been a massive increase in paperwork. When I first started there was much more administrative back-up but now people are doing their own typing and filing and that comes on top of the fact that the number of cases have risen and will continue to rise over the next few years.

"If Lord Laming is simply going to review the implementation of his previous report following Victoria Climbié's death then an opportunity will be lost, because if he's just reviewing the extent of information sharing taking place that won't get to the heart of the matter."

MARK METCALF

CRB checks 'not a failsafe' for children

Delays in completing Criminal Records Bureau checks may have shortened but the system is ineffective in protecting children from unscrupulous adults, say campaigners.

The CRB, established under the Police Act of 1997, checks job applicants and volunteers against lists of sex offenders and people barred from working in schools, as well as police records of convictions, cautions and warnings.

Last year *The Big Issue in the North* reported that hold-ups in the system were hindering schools in the recruitment of volunteers. Allison Chin, head of Swinnow Primary School in Leeds, said at the time that it was taking 6-8 weeks for checks on volunteers to be returned.

Now, according to Chinn, the system has improved. "The forms now come back within four weeks, which is great as

delays in the past meant people got frustrated and drifted away," said Chinn. "Also, people are less reluctant to complete the form after I've explained the process and we now have many more volunteers of all ages."

But Josie Appleton of the campaigning body the Manifesto Group said the growing number

"The CRB system doesn't prevent children being preyed upon by unscrupulous adults."

of CRB checks did not protect children, and risked damaging relations between age groups.

Government figures show 80,000 people have been

prevented from working with children or vulnerable people as a result of CRB checks but Appleton believed the vast majority of these were people who had committed petty offences such as vandalism, often a long time ago.

"The CRB system doesn't prevent children being preyed upon by unscrupulous adults," said Appleton. "The various bits of legislation were brought in because of the Thomas Hamilton shootings in Dunblane and Ian Huntley murders in Soham. Yet in neither case would it have protected the children as neither had previously harmed children or been convicted."

"It's not a failsafe and when it leads, as it has, to checking grandmothers then it's about a loss of perspective away from what we should be focusing on."

"It means before adults can

work with children they have to get state clearance. That says it's an extraordinary activity to work with children and you're a paedophile unless proved otherwise.

"It damages relations between different age groups. It also costs millions to run – money we believe should be put into Childline, social work and offender management."

Home Office figures show that where the applicant was denied a job following a CRB check that the most frequently cited offences were violence, at 24 per cent, theft at 17.5 per cent, fraud/dishonesty, at 10 per cent, and drugs, at 9 per cent.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "The CRB's priority is the protection of the vulnerable in society and it will not jeopardise accuracy for speed."

MARK METCALF

Got a story? Contact 0161 831 5563 or email: news@bigissuenorth.co.uk

JAN 2010

Thirteen thousand migrants and refugees have died after coming to Europe since 1993, according to the anti-racism network United for Intercultural Action.

The total has been compiled by the Amsterdam-based network from documented sources such as newspaper reports, radio and TV stations, government organisations and bodies such as the Institute of Race Relations.

The list begins with Liberian Gerry Johnson, who died of exhaustion and exposure and was found in a rail container in Feldkirk, Austria on 1 January, 1993.

"Governments will not be able to stop them."

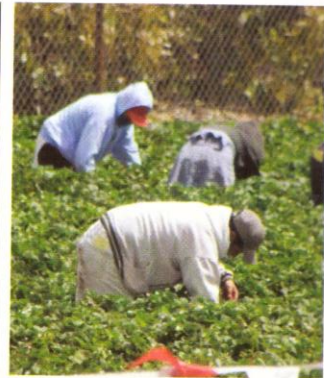
It also includes the 26 men who drowned trying to cross the Strait of Gibraltar from North Africa in September 1997, a Kurdish man crushed to death under the wheels of a lorry leaving Dover in January 1999 and 19 young men, all believed to be under 17, who drowned earlier this year after their boat

Migrants' death toll recorded

sank 20 metres from the Lanzarote coast.

United, a network of over 500 organisations from 46 countries, believes there are a variety of reasons why people are trying to enter Europe. Many are asylum seekers and refugees fleeing conflict, persecution and violence but the majority are economic migrants for whom, according to a United spokesperson, "leaving their homes, families and lives, perhaps forever, is never an easy choice, but often a necessary one".

She added: "It's an act of survival for the migrants' families, a great sacrifice with unknown rewards or failures. People are prepared to risk their lives for the chance of a better future. Failure is not an option, and governments, despite their efforts, won't be able to stop them."



Eastern European migrants working on a farm in Yorkshire

The spokesperson felt it was inevitable that the total of deaths would continue to grow until public pressure was sufficient to force politicians to rethink European immigration policies.

MARK METCALF



Pilling (left) is one of the organisers of the Save Bridlington Hospital Action Group, which mobilised 6,000 of the town's 40,000 residents to march against hospital cuts but failed to persuade the health secretary to overturn them

being quickly filled with signatures. Our third, two years ago, obtained 40,000 but when we took it to Downing Street it fell on deaf ears. This government goes on about taking into account people's views – not in our case.

"They have closed the facilities to save money. Last year we know the Scarborough trust was £21.7 million in the red and the North Yorkshire primary care trust it is part of was £44 million in the red. They were told in no uncertain terms by the health secretary to save money or a private company would be sent in to run services. The effect however is that patients who should be taken to their nearest hospital when suffering a heart attack are now delayed due to having to travel to Scarborough and some will die unnecessarily."

The trust insists the cuts are not about money but improving patient care.

"Taking local people to a hospital with essential services such as intensive care, 24-hour surgical cover, 24-hour anaesthetic cover and an on-site laboratory service, which cannot be made available at Bridlington Hospital, will save lives," says a trust spokesperson. "At the same time, with investment of £600,000 in additional ambulance resources and the clinical skills of paramedics, treatment will begin immediately before arriving at Scarborough Hospital."

Bridlington is also getting some new facilities, including a new acute physician and neighbourhood health team, with its first senior nurse and therapist in post. A new 12-station dialysis unit has opened and a new GP-led health centre is due to be ready in June – both run by the private sector.

But opposition continues. Pilling stresses the campaign is "not political, as can be seen by the fact that all 63 local councillors support our campaign", but appreciates support from Conservative shadow health spokesperson Andrew Lansley and his colleague, local MP Greg Knight.

"We welcome the comments and would expect if the Conservatives win the election to see facilities transferred back to the town," says Pilling, who is also against private sector involvement in Bridlington's new facilities.

"We have had support because local people feel let down. The hospital was only opened in 1988 when facilities at three sites were combined into one.

Bridlington people were told this would serve our needs for the foreseeable future.

"The fight is certainly not over. As long as we have the support of the people, the councillors, the MPs and many of the trust's own workers and their trade unions then we will fight on." ■



Take the initiative

The financial crisis has put the government's controversial method of funding new hospitals under the spotlight, says **Mark Metcalf**

With new hospitals at Pontefract and Wakefield due to open next year, the government is set to achieve Tony Blair's millennial pledge to build 100 new hospitals in England by 2010.

With a final total of 127 in sight this impressive achievement, bringing to millions of patients better facilities and equipment, and nicer surroundings, has however attracted criticism for having largely been met through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which Labour had opposed when first introduced by the John Major Conservative government in 1992.

Under PFI a private company obtains the finance from the banks to build a hospital and then leases it back to the NHS, typically for 30 years, with the aim of making a profit from the taxpayer who ultimately foots the bill.

For example, the £311 million capital project for Wakefield and Pontefract hospitals undertaken by Balfour Beatty will be repaid over the next 35 years at close to £40 million a year.

Critics believe that it would cost taxpayers less if the government built the hospitals itself as it can borrow the finance for them at lower rates and would not need to make a profit. Over the border last year the Scottish government under the leadership of the SNP decided to pay for Scotland's biggest ever hospital building project, in south Glasgow, with £842 million of public money rather than use PFI.

Critics believe that it would cost taxpayers less if the government built the hospitals

First minister Alex Salmond said: "By funding the entire project through public finance, we are ensuring it is deliverable, affordable, sustainable and represents best value for money for the taxpayer."

PFI contracts however have the benefit of not showing up as part of the national debt. The Labour government is therefore still keenly committed to the controversial method.

But in recent years a number of proposed projects have stalled. In 2004 the then health secretary John Reid announced plans for a wave of 15 new hospitals, worth £4.4 billion.

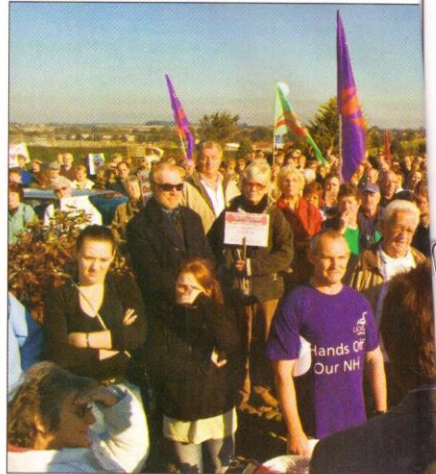
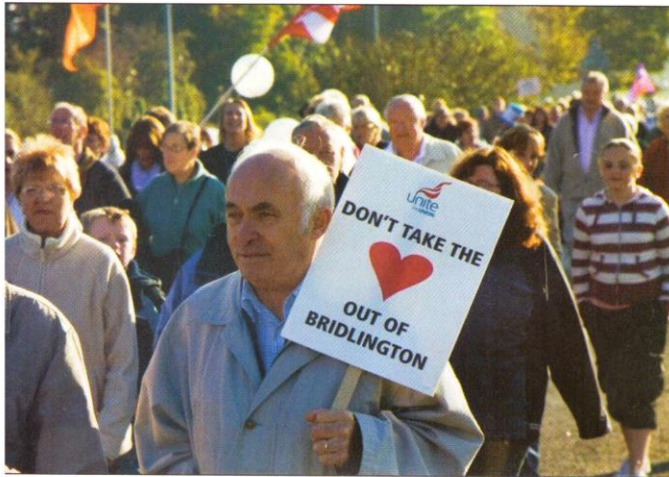
Since then two projects, Leeds Maternity Services and Southall Hospital, have been abandoned altogether while a £1 billion scheme in Merseyside has been downsized by half and plans for new Birmingham and north London hospitals have also been cut by 50 per cent. Only one of the 15 has so far reached the construction stage.

Now with the current financial crisis the government has become concerned about PFI as its plan A for building new hospitals. With private companies finding it difficult to raise the finance from the banks for new projects, Labour is proposing to lend all the debt required to PFI projects to ensure they go ahead.

This would create the highly unusual situation whereby the government would be both a lender to a project and its purchaser.

Philip Hammond, the Conservative Treasury spokesman, has criticised the move, saying it was "a good deal for PFI bankers but a bad deal for taxpayers. In wholly Treasury-backed projects the taxpayer would be taking all the risk without the discipline of external credit risk management."

Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison, the public services union, accused the government of "throwing good money after bad", saying it was "time to make a clean break with PFI".



Health officials said closing Bridlington Hospital's acute wards would mean better care and larger specialist facilities 22 miles away in Scarborough. Campaigners said the move was just about saving money. **Mark Metcalf** reports on a tale familiar across the north

Open or shut case

The closure of acute units at Bridlington Hospital means seriously ill patients in the East Yorkshire town are facing ambulance trips 25 minutes longer than before to get treatment.

Paramedics warn that this delay makes it harder for patients to be treated within the time some medical experts claim gives them the best chance for recovery.

Despite a huge campaign against the plans, Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust last year closed two acute wards and the cardiac monitoring trust in Bridlington, transferring services to Scarborough. This followed the loss of Bridlington's maternity unit earlier in the year.

As elsewhere in the north, the closure of hospital units has been highly controversial. In Salford in 2006, cabinet minister Hazel Blears joined protests against her own government's plans to cut facilities at Hope Hospital in her constituency – and there are likely to be many more such protests in the run-up to the next general election. But health officials say that rather than merely cutting costs, closing facilities allows services to be concentrated in larger specialist units that can actually improve patients' treatment.

Seriously ill patients from Bridlington are now faced with a 22-mile ambulance journey to Scarborough along the A165 that can either be congested with holiday traffic in the summer or closed due to snow and high winds in the winter.

One paramedic, who wished to remain anonymous, said: "We used to have a trip of ten minutes to the hospital once we'd picked someone up. It's a good 20-25 minutes longer than that now."

"In health they talk about this golden hour of getting patients to hospital and we are right on the limits of this. Paramedic training is very strict and we are restricted from doing some things – doctors can do more things and in a hospital environment it's more clinical, and there's more knowledge in the emergency department."

Last year the Save Bridlington Hospital Action Group mobilised over 6,000 people, in a town of 40,000, on a march that failed to persuade health secretary Alan Johnson to overturn the trust's closures. It was the latest tactic in a long campaign mounted by the group, which is led by Mick Pilling, an ex-builder forced to retire on ill-health grounds 12 years ago, his wife and a neighbour.

Pilling accuses the government of "putting people's lives, and the town's wishes, second to saving money by closing vital facilities at our local hospital".

He says: "We have been fighting the rundown of facilities at Bridlington Hospital since 2002 when we found out that the minor injuries unit was earmarked for closure on the ridiculous grounds that there wasn't enough staff."

"We did some petitions and found that they were



Pilling accuses the government of "putting people's lives, and the town's wishes, second to saving money".

July 2012

Building workers blacklist revealed

Sixty-four northern building workers have been the victims of blacklisting by construction giant Carillion, the builders of the DW Stadium, Wigan, and the St Pancras Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

The workers were among 224 former Carillion employees revealed to have been blacklisted for union activities in a recent report by the GMB.

The report lists more than 40 companies in the construction industry that used the

Consulting Association (CA), an organisation that held a blacklist of workers variously described as "extreme troublemaker", "politically motivated" and "active in dispute".

Guilty

Listed workers were "not recommended for employment". Thirty of the 64 northern workers are from Merseyside.

The Information Commissioner's Office closed down CA in 2009 and its owner,

Ian Kerr, was found guilty of breaching the Data Protection Act.

The names in the report first emerged at an Employment Tribunal earlier this year in which engineer Dave Smith claimed he was blacklisted by Carillion after becoming an elected union safety rep, a role with legal rights to represent workers and investigate hazards.

Damaging information

According to the Department for Business, safety reps annually save society over £600 million by preventing occupational injuries and illnesses.

Smith subsequently couldn't secure any work during the early noughties construction boom. Carillion admitted supplying damaging information on him to CA,

which subsequently provided it to other construction firms.

Smith's tribunal application failed because he was not employed directly but via an employment agency, but the tribunal chair expressed his "regret that the law provides him with no remedy".

Smith uncovered information on himself after a Manchester tribunal in 2006 ruled three electricians had been unfairly dismissed when sub-contracting on the Carillion-organised Manchester Royal Infirmary site.

The GMB says Carillion checked 14,724 names against the CA blacklist in 1999-2004.

Public inquiry

The union wants a public inquiry, fearing blacklisting has continued in the construction industry. Michael Meacher, the Oldham West and Royston MP, has written to the government asking for one but David Cameron has said: "If there is any accusation of wrongdoing, the police can investigate."

This is despite the tribunal testimony of ICO investigations manager David Clancy, who said some information in blacklisted workers files "could only have been supplied by the police or the security services".

Smith viewed the unredacted blacklist at his tribunal and accused "Carillion and major building firms of conspiring against building workers concerned about safety. Consequently they have had their lives ruined by being denied employment."

Call for a
public
inquiry
Meacher



Smith and over 100 workers intend taking legal action against some of the companies. A Carillion spokesperson said possible legal proceedings made it "inappropriate to comment but Carillion does not condone or engage in blacklisting. We are not against unions and recognise them for some of our workforce."

MARK METCALF

Tis the Seasons to be careful

DEC 2011

The rescue of 30 threatened care homes in the north may simply be storing up future problems, according to the GMB union.

When Southern Cross, the UK's largest home care operator, went bust earlier this year there were fears that thousands of its 31,000 residents could find themselves without a home. But the company transferred its 750-plus homes in the UK to more than 30 existing operators. One of these is Four Seasons Health Care Group, which, by being registered in Jersey, does not post accounts.

Of a final wave of 139 homes transferred to subsidiary company Four Seasons Healthcare on 31 October, 22 are in the North West and eight in Yorkshire and Humber. The total of homes under the care of the company is over 500.

Debt due

Eight-eight per cent of Four Seasons homes are rated good or excellent by the Care Quality Commission. Nevertheless the company has experienced financial difficulties.

In 2009 its creditors agreed to write off half of the group's £1.6 billion debt. Previous

owner the Qatari Investment Authority walked away, having lost its entire investment, and ownership was transferred to creditors including the Royal Bank of Scotland.

The maturity – repayment – of the remaining debt of £780 million is set for September 2012. But union officials are concerned Four

'Should care homes ever be in the private sector.'
Stringer



Seasons may not be able to pay it, especially as in 2010 the subsidiary company posted a £12.1 million pre-tax loss.

Jon Smith, GMB organiser in Yorkshire and North Derbyshire, said: "For nearly two years we warned that Southern Cross's business model was fundamentally flawed. We feel the same model is being adopted by Four Seasons and that concerns us greatly."

A quarter of the £31,800 income Four Seasons earned per

occupied bed in 2010 was spent on rents and interest payments. But a Four Seasons spokesperson insisted the company was fully able to manage its debt.

'Confident'

"We are very confident we will be able to refinance it before it becomes due next year," he said.

"The company has recently been valued at £950 million, much greater than our debt. Southern Cross was a private sector problem that has been resolved by the private sector, thus saving a massive burden falling on local authorities or the public purse."

"We've taken on operating homes that were marked for closure, will be investing in them and working with 7,300 transferred staff to improve the quality of care in homes."

Blackley and Broughton MP Graham Stringer said: "I was appalled by the financial arrangements of these care homes. I think it brings into question whether care homes providing a public service for vulnerable people should ever be in the private sector."

MARK METCALF

Liverpool will host the UK's biggest festive fun run on 4 December when it's expected over 7,500 santas will turn out in the city centre to transform the 5km course into a moving sea of red. The causes being supported by this year's run are the Radio City Cash For Kids and the Liverpool Echo Liverpool Unites charities. To apply visit www.runliverpool.org.uk/

STREET HARASSMENT

Hollaback! West Yorkshire has launched a survey into street harassment. Street harassment is the term used to describe sexual harassment in public places that can include anything from staring and sexualised comments up to assault and molestation. The survey, which takes place during the Leeds 16 Days of Action, part of an international campaign to end violence against women, can be found at www.wy.hollaback.org/survey.

FRESH TO YOUR DESK

Workers in Manchester city centre will have the chance to have fresh, affordable groceries delivered directly to their offices. On 5 December, Feeding Manchester, a network of food suppliers, is putting on a demonstration showing how workers can buy directly from local farmers and wholesalers, giving them access to ethical groceries while supporting the local economy. See www.feedingmanchester.org.uk

GOT A STORY? CONTACT 0161 831 5563 OR EMAIL NEWS@BIGISSUENORTH.CO.UK

APRIL 2012

MPs are being asked to back a bill that would freeze the assets of companies that go into administration following the death of an employee.

Freezing orders, which already operate in fraud and drugs cases, would prevent "phoenix firms" – with slightly different names but the same directors, equipment and premises – from restarting trading and evading fines imposed under the Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAWA).

Last year 171 workers were fatally injured at work in the UK, with 68 members of the public also killed in accidents connected to work. A further 8,000 people die annually as a result of occupational cancer, of which half is due to past exposure to asbestos.

'Avoidable' death

Firms found guilty of breaching the HASAWA can be prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive and last year 774 were convicted with an average fine of £24,005 per breach. They included Bryn Thomas Crane Hire, which was fined just £4,500 following the death of supervisor Mark Thornton, killed when a six-tonne steel column hit him in 2007 on a building site in the Liverpool Wavertree constituency of MP Luciana Berger.

In court Judge Nicol Gilmore

MP's bill to stop phoenix firms from taking flight



Berger wants to prevent firms ducking punishment for workplace deaths

company said that it wanted to correct any "inaccuracies as they could endanger more than 40 jobs at the business, which generates more than £2.5 million for the local economy each year".

Loopholes

Berger has cited Thornton's death – and that of estate

to become law. Asked if Berger was likely to get it, and whether it would demonstrate a callous disregard for the lives of workers if she didn't, a spokesperson for employment minister Chris Grayling said: "We are in the process of considering this and have no further comment to make at this time."



NEWS IN BRIEF

WOW FESTIVAL

The 12th annual Writing on the Wall festival in Liverpool takes place next month, featuring poetry, creative writing, story-telling and debate following a nautical theme. Poet Benjamin Zephaniah and singer Pauline Black headline the festival and highlights include debates on phone-hacking, protest movements and Middle East revolutions and talks on the Titanic, and the demonisation of the working class.

LORDS UP NORTH

Former Labour cabinet minister Lord Adonis believes the House of Lords should be moved to Manchester to save money and move politics away from "Planet London". Writing in the Spectator magazine, Adonis said the public purse would save considerably by selling the property portfolio of the Lords, and that London is "New York, Washington and LA rolled into one", and unhealthy for our national politics.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

An earnings threshold of £7,500 for free school meals under Universal Credit could discourage thousands



Emotions run high as demonstrators march in protest at the murder of Iranian Peyman Bahmani
 Photos: Paul Kingston

PROBLEM? WHAT PROBLEM?

Abuse, attacks and murder – why has racism in Sunderland become so severe, when only a tiny proportion of the city's residents are from black and ethnic minority backgrounds?
 By Mark Metcalfe

It is now just over six months since the British National Party (BNP) stood a record number of candidates at city council elections in Sunderland. The 25 who stood for the far-right party gained 13,500 votes, equivalent to nearly 14 per cent of the total votes and in one ward, Town End Far, BNP support almost reached 30 per cent.

The City Of Sunderland and the surrounding areas have always had a tiny black and ethnic-minority community. Today, less than 1 per cent of 279,000 residents of Sunderland are drawn from black and ethnic-minority backgrounds, of which 857 are refugees, according to latest Home Office figures.

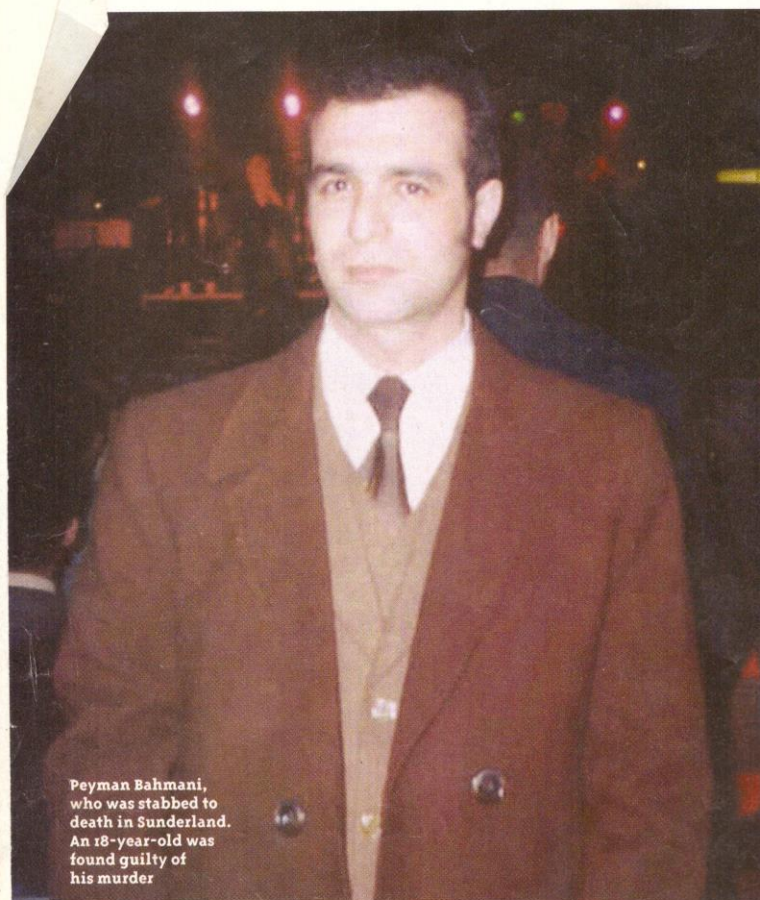
A number of Labour Party and trade-union activists have detailed frustration in getting their respective organisations to take racism seriously, and claim the flourishing of the BNP in Sunderland can be blamed on the lack of concerted anti-racist action in the past. The activists I spoke to claim they commonly were told "there isn't a problem here" in reference to County Durham, Tyne and Wear and Northumberland. This was usually followed by "there aren't any black people here". One ex-

ward Labour party secretary who didn't want to be named recalls that "racist ideas, views and jokes largely went unchallenged" at both party meetings and informal social events.

The government's decision at the end of 2000 to start settling asylum-seekers in places such as Sunderland, with no increase in resources, has brought underlying racial tensions to the fore in the city. Some parts of the established local community felt they were losing out to newcomers. It is this situation that the far right and, specifically, the BNP exploited to win votes in this year's elections.

Meanwhile, residents complain of frequent racist attacks. One local Asian shop owner, who asked not to be named, said he'd had his windows smashed "over 20 times". The police response? "Useless." Local politicians? "Racist and corrupt."

In June last year, Baldish Singh was subjected to a brutal attack by 38-year-old Andrew Thorpe, who sports a National Front tattoo. The attack left Singh unable to speak. Thorpe got just six years in prison, while Singh is likely to need constant care for the rest of his life. His solicitor is now pursuing ►



Peyman Bahmani, who was stabbed to death in Sunderland. An 18-year-old was found guilty of his murder

"BAHMANI'S FLATMATE MOHAMMED SAID, 'WE KNOW THE ATTACKERS. THEY ABUSE US AND TELL US TO GO HOME'"

He added: "In that case... some of which involve racial abuse, the club was severely warned about its future conduct, and he provide a written undertaking that no behaviour or comments would happen again, which it has done."

But Russell Thompson, manager of Sunderland, claimed the refugee team had "started it" "one of our players had two of his teeth knocked out... and was called 'white trash'."

In August, members of the cast of S African musical *Umoja* reported that they been spat at in the street and insulted, distributing leaflets for their show at Sunderland Empire. Director Todd Twala said: "We have been all over the world, to Jamaica, Australia, Denmark, France, Finland, London, and no one has treated us like this."

As a result, Sunderland City Council subsequently launched a hotline for members of black and ethnic-minority communities to report racist attacks.

Chris Mullin, one of two local MPs, admitted that racism in the city is a big problem, which attributes to "Sunderland [having] until recently an overwhelmingly white population with experience of contact with other cultures. There may have been some complacency in the past about the degree of racial prejudice in Sunderland, that is certainly not the case now. Nor has it been for some time."

The city council spokeswoman added: "Sunderland has recently been the subject of unwarranted negative media coverage, a current media tendency to present us as a city which is both inaccurate and insulting to those of us who live or work here."

However, only this month, five people attending Sunderland's home game against Coventry at the Stadium of Light were arrested by the police for racist behaviour. It was reported that up to 200 supporters had been involved in chanting racist abuse at the visiting supporters. Raymond Holmes, aged 32, from Penny, was subsequently fined £200 with £50 and banned from attending matches for three years. A juvenile, who can't be named for legal reasons, was fined £100 with £45 costs and banned from attending matches for three years.

The BNP will be hoping to exploit the tensions in Sunderland at the June 2004 elections, when all 75 seats will be up for grabs. Whether it increases its share of the vote or not, it is clear that the task of tackling racism in the city will continue for a long time to come.

a criminal injuries claim on his behalf.

A few months later, in a brutal attack, Iranian refugee Payman Bahmani was stabbed to death. His housemate Mohammed said at the time: "We've had our windows broken over 25 times. We know the attackers, they abuse us and tell us to go home." He claimed that the police had "failed to listen" to their complaints, an accusation denied by the police, who later secured a life sentence for Stephen Roberts, aged 18, for the murder.

Following Bahmani's death, the police established a community panel that included members of the dead man's family, and also involved other agencies such as the North Of England Refugee Service. "This group was heavily involved in the investigation, being briefed on a regular basis, and the feedback was positive," a police spokesperson said. "This work continues today with the Special Investigations Unit [which tackles racist crime and incidents in Sunderland] and with community beat managers in the area."

The three Sunderland police area commands (Sunderland City, Sunderland West and Washington) all now have dedicated police asylum-seeker liaison officers. Marian Goodfellow from the Refugee Network says: "The police regularly visit the two outreach sessions we organise. They make the asylum-seekers aware that they are there to help them. Their attitude is more positive than before."

When members of Sunderland Fans Against Racism visited local youth clubs to ask what is said at school on the subject of racism, however, the usual answer they received was "nothing".

A spokeswoman for Sunderland City Council disputes this. "The City Council sends regular newsletters to schools, including items such as information on religious festivals, advice on responding to racist incidents, myth-busting information on asylum-seekers and examples of good race-equality practice."

A group of refugees who formed a local football team, the International Cultural Centre (ICC) FC, claim to have experienced racial abuse and even, on occasions, physical attacks. One game, in March this year, against pub team Sandhill, from the Grindon area, was halted for a number of minutes after a fight broke out involving players and supporters from both sides. The ICC secretary at the time wrote to Durham FA: "Sandhill supporters started to shout at our players with racial comments and there was at least one incident where a supporter put his finger to his right ear then moved it across his throat to the other ear as if to say 'you die'."

Sandhill were fined £100 by Durham Football Association (FA) for "bringing the league into disrepute" and a further £50 by the Tyne And Wear League. John Topping, company secretary of Durham FA, said: "We are very much against racist behaviour in football and any cases are and will be dealt with severely."