

Johnston Press

A response to the Call for Evidence by the Independent Commission on Freedom of Information

**Response by the Editorial Board of Johnston Press,
November 2015**

Introduction: Johnston Press

Johnston Press is one of the largest regional publishing groups in the UK. Our portfolio encompasses 13 daily, 154 weekly paid-for and 37 weekly free newspapers, a number of glossy monthly lifestyle magazines, smaller specialist local publications, 215 local, e-commerce and mobile websites, and 31 tablet and Smartphone apps.

Our brands have a long history of serving local communities including some of the oldest and longest established newspaper titles in existence.

The Belfast News Letter, our daily title in Northern Ireland is the oldest English language general daily newspaper still in publication in the world, having first been printed in 1737. The Rutland and Stamford Mercury is Britain's oldest continuously published newspaper title - since 1712.

Johnston Press titles serve local audiences from Stornoway to Sussex, covering every aspect of local life in the UK, bringing a trusted and professional voice to newsgathering on issues at the heart of our communities.

The Freedom of Information Act and Johnston Press

Since its introduction in 2005, the Freedom of Information Act has become a critical tool used by local reporters across the Johnston Press group.

Our newspapers are non-partisan and objective.

Their role is to report, investigate, entertain and inform readers on issues which matter to them – often stories and features which are not covered by any other media.

Requests made under the Freedom of Information Act have become commonplace in the daily work of Johnston Press local reporters in their dealings with local authorities and central government.

These requests are made to seek information, shed light on hidden issues, expose inconsistencies and to provoke debate.

The Act has led to the strengthening of the local press's role in calling authorities and politicians to account – and by giving the public access to the information in our stories, it has strengthened the democratic process.

It would be impossible to list all of the stories written in Johnston Press as a result of the FOI Act since 2005, or even just in 2015. The appendix to this document shows a selection of stories covered by just some of our titles.

This selection is intended to give the Commission an understanding of the breadth of subject matter covered by the group and stories uncovered by FOI requests. If the Act were not in place, many of these stories would have required huge resources and many months of time to reveal. Many would simply have never been written at all.

Here are some examples:

- The Yorkshire Post learned, through an FOI request, that police officers suspended on full pay for more than a year had been paid more than £20million across the UK. The spending in West Yorkshire was at the highest level, prompting serious debate over how long it takes to investigate misconduct allegations.

The paper also used an FOI request to inform readers how senior fire officers were paid tens of thousands of pounds for working during a strike – information that was not made publicly available.

- In Edinburgh, the Evening News used FOI requests while reporting on the long-running tram scandal, to reveal the identity of a mediator called in to sort out routes.
- The Scarborough Evening News showed how police were not making public details of more than 130 crimes a week – including serious matters such as rape and kidnap – information which was only given a public airing due to an FOI request.
- The Sheffield Star showed how one person a week is injured in gun-related incidents in South Yorkshire in a shocking report which came to light because of FOI requests by Star reporters.
- The Derry Journal highlighted inadequacies in Northern Ireland's health services by revealing the numbers of young children with complex mental health needs who had to be relocated outside of the province.

Much has been made recently about flippant or puerile uses of the Act.

We see this argument as a distraction - all of the stories mentioned above and those outlined in the appendix are by any definition part of the public interest.

They were created by reporters who have a very close relationship with their

communities and avidly read by audiences who have established trusted relationships with our products.

We have also witnessed changes in behaviour by local authorities since the introduction of the act.

There is a greater understanding of the responsibility to provide detailed answers by the gatekeepers of public information, the press officers and marketing assistants of local authorities because of the existence of the act and the likely recourse to make requests by reporters. There has been a noticeable change in behaviour by press officers for local authorities and the police - liaising with and guiding the local press through the questioning process to reach clearer outcomes.

Indeed some information is now regularly published without request – such as the annual Food Hygiene Standards ratings compiled and released by councils.

Changes to the Freedom of Information Act: Our concerns

Deliberative Space

We are concerned at the Commission's intention to explore restrictions on the openness of information relating to the internal deliberations of public bodies. Whilst clearly some matters are confidential, we are concerned this will have a detrimental effect on our ability to report on the background to public decisions, particularly if the public interest is seen to be outweighed by the 'chilling effect' on internal debate.

Charges

We feel the introduction of FOI request charges would directly inhibit the scrutiny of public authorities by the local press.

Many investigations published by our newspapers do not come about after a single request, but after a series of requests.

Charges would pose a considerable burden on local papers and websites given the volume of requests made annually and our constant need to be conscious of costs. The pressure on costs and resources is particularly acute for the local news media industry at this time.

This pressure has been recognised by the Department of Culture and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who are exploring ways of supporting the local press in

their role of enabling democratic debate.

We feel this reduction of investigation would enable public authorities to conceal information and hide mistakes, which would have a detrimental effect on our readers. This would go against the clearly stated intentions of the government to preserve democratic scrutiny.

Cost limits

The Commission's consultation document describes the need to avoid a 'disproportionate burden' on authorities in responding to FOI requests. There are already reasonable upper limits on the cost of finding requested information and the recent decision by the Appeal Court on the refusal of 'vexatious' requests addressed the issue of public interest.

We are concerned the introduction of further cost limits and restrictions will enable authorities to refuse requests more easily purely on the basis of cost – regardless of how important the information is to the public.

Tribunal fees

Plans to introduce a charge to appeal to the first-tier tribunal against an Information Commissioner decision and the introduction of a charge for an oral hearing also concern us.

This cost, like the potential request cost, will we believe, lead to less challenge of the Commissioner's decisions and have a detrimental effect to availability of information.

Strengthening the act

We are concerned the case for strengthening the Freedom of Information Act has not been set out as part of the Commission's remit.

There are numerous issues concerning enforcement of the Act, time limits for responses, the extension of the public interest test and allowing requesters actual copies of documents (rather than just the information in them).

These have been publicly debated on many occasions in the ten years since the FOI Act became effective.

However the Commission has not been given this scope under the terms of reference provided by the Cabinet Office and we feel this should form part of any future review of the effectiveness and remit of the Act.

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Appendix

Examples of use of the Freedom of Information Act by Johnston Press newspapers and websites

THE YORKSHIRE POST

Police facing misconduct charges paid over £20m

EXCLUSIVE

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POLICE officers accused of misconduct have regularly received tens of thousands of pounds while being suspended on full pay for more than a year, *The Yorkshire Post* can reveal.

More than £20m was paid to suspended officers in England and Wales between April 2011 and the end of 2014, with West Yorkshire Police recording one of the highest figures.

The force paid just over £1m to 45 officers over the period, eight of whom received between £30,000 and £49,000 while being suspended for more than 12 months.

West Yorkshire was one of five forces that topped £1m and dwarfed South Yorkshire, which paid £169,000 to 11 officers, and Humberside, which paid £166,000 to 12 officers. Regionally, North Yorkshire recorded the lowest figures with £77,000 paid to eight officers.

Nationally, the Metropolitan Police had the highest bill, with 197 officers receiving £4.4m. Merseyside was second highest with almost £2m paid to 66 officers,

including one who had been suspended for nearly four years.

The figures, which were drawn from freedom of information requests to 43 forces across England and Wales, showed Nottinghamshire and West Midlands also each exceeded £1m in salary paid to suspended officers.

In all, 1,013 officers were suspended over the period – a figure that rivals the entire number employed by some forces. As well as £20.8m paid to officers, a further £7.3m was paid to 958 civilian staff removed from work over alleged misconduct.

In numerous cases officers received significant sums while absent for a lengthy period before then resigning ahead of the outcome of disciplinary investigations.

Responding to the figures, Alex Duncan, professional standards lead for the Police Federation, said it was right that officers continued to be paid while suspended.

But he added: “We do have long-standing concerns about the length of time that investigations take – letting cases drag on for years and years does not serve the interests of anyone involved.

“We would urge the Government to make these investigations

Continued on Page 2.

Police pay £20m to suspended officers

From Page 1.

and the ensuing legal processes far more speedy and effective.”

Merseyside Police reported that it paid 14 suspended officers just over £280,000 – an average of £20,000 each in salary – before they simply resigned.

In January, Home Secretary Theresa May introduced new rules designed to stop officers either resigning or retiring if facing allegations that could lead to dismissal. Officers were often suspended for well over a year, including a detective sergeant with the Met revealed to have been absent on full pay for 968 days over corruption allegations, with the case still ongoing.

Although a majority of cases resulted in dismissal or resignation, a significant minority were concluded with officers returning to work – sometimes after a lengthy absence. Three officers in West Yorkshire were reinstated after being suspended for a year or more at a cost of £120,000.

A Home Office spokesman said the police disciplinary system was being overhauled to improve transparency and accountability, including proposals for a 12-month time limit for investigations.

Detective Chief Superintendent Clive Wain, of West Yorkshire Police, said the decision to suspend “isn’t taken lightly” as people can only be suspended on full pay under national regulations. He said: “We understand the concerns about public money, but I would like to reassure the public that we will always look to make the right decision.”

In May 2015, an FOI request by the Yorkshire Post revealed £20m had been paid to suspended police officers across the country.

Inquiry into massive secret overtime deals for fire chiefs

Public kept in dark over strike payouts

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AN INVESTIGATION has been launched after *The Yorkshire Post* discovered overtime payments running into tens of thousands of pounds were made to chief fire officers already in receipt of salary packages worth up to £185,000. Payments totalling nearly £40,000 were made to three senior officers with South Yorkshire Fire Service for working during strikes in 2014/15 but were not publicly recorded by the local fire authority.

They were personally approved by the authority's chairman, Jim Andrews, deputy leader of Barnsley Council, but other authority members were not aware of the payments which were not discussed at meetings or identified in annual accounts.

Chief fire officer Jamie Courtney received an extra £14,390 on top of his £185,000 pay package while deputy chief Mark Shaw and assistant chief John Roberts, both paid well in excess of £100,000, received an extra £13,290 and £11,520 respectively.

It can also be revealed Mr Courtney and Mr Shaw, who retired at the end of March, were paid for more overtime hours than were actually taken up by the series of strikes over a pensions dispute which hit the service nationwide.

The fire authority said the overtime included carrying out critical tasks before and after strikes and insisted overtime had not been paid for working during normal office hours.



JIM ANDREWS: Fire authority chairman approved the payments, which were not revealed.

South Yorkshire is understood to be the only fire service in the country that paid chief officers overtime for working during the strikes.

More than 15 services across the country contacted by *The Yorkshire Post* confirmed no similar payments were made with some pointing out no overtime would be paid as chief officers are expected to be available for duty at any time throughout the year.

The Association of Principal Fire Officers, the chief officers' union, defended the payments.

The Association said the work was outside normal duties, but acknowledged it was unaware of any other service making such payments.

“ This is almost the equivalent of a year's pay for some people ”

Colin Ross, Lib Dem group leader on Sheffield Council

A spokesman for South Yorkshire Fire Service said it believed other services had made similar payments but could not confirm any specific examples.

Fire authority chairman Jim Andrews acknowledged there were question marks against the payments and said he was now referring them to auditors for investigation.

He said he could not recall when he approved them and could not recall whether other members of the fire authority – made up of representatives from the four South Yorkshire councils – were told, but he did not think they were.

Coun Andrews added he believed it was right decision to approve the payments.

Colin Ross, an authority member and Lib Dem group leader on Sheffield Council, confirmed he wasn't aware of the payments and they had not been discussed at authority meetings.

The authority's accounts record each chief officer's pay as increasing but provide no explanation as to why.

He said auditors needed to investigate whether chief officers were entitled to the payments and how they were authorised.

“This is almost the equivalent of a year's pay for some people,” said Coun Ross.

“We kept getting reports of how much the strikes were costing us and assumed it was for bringing in people who were trained up to provide cover.”

“I certainly didn't realise some of this money was being spent on senior officers.”

'Payments justified': Page 6.

Fire authority says payments were justified

Mystery over overtime to 999 chiefs

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SOUTH YORKSHIRE Fire Authority said it was legally entitled to pay tens of thousands of pounds in overtime to chief officers despite there being no overtime provision in nationally agreed terms and conditions.

But mystery surrounds how the payments came to be made when it appears no other chief officers anywhere else in the country have received the same benefits, with some services pointing to the expectation that the most senior staff are available for duty at any time and therefore couldn't receive overtime pay.

South Yorkshire contended it was unlike most other services where more staff had been available for work during the strikes which meant its chief officers had to provide direct operational cover.

However, a spokesman for

Stoppages in normal day

STRIKE ACTION by firefighters began in September 2013 but escalated during 2014/15.

Many of the strikes were for a small number of hours and included a significant number during a normal working day.

In August last year, two-hour strikes took place between noon and 2pm on fire consecutive week days.

There were also longer strikes which involved normal office hours, including a 24-hour walkout on a weekday in June last year.

The longest period of strike action was four days in the autumn. The most recent strike took place for 24 hours in February.

he would approach approving such payments differently in future but added: “although I'm clear in my own mind it wasn't a decision made up on the spot and it wasn't a decision that shouldn't have been made, I think it is over and above the job they are all paid for. It was brought to me for consideration, I considered it and made a judgment on it.”

The Freedom of Information response from the fire authority contended the industrial action “required senior officers to work overtime in accordance with nationally-agreed terms and conditions.”

However there is no overtime provision in chief officer terms and conditions which was perhaps underlined by the decision to pay senior officers at an area manager's hourly overtime rate of £49.10. There are also question marks against the number of hours overtime chief officers were paid for. The payment of £14,390 to chief officer Jamie



In September 2015 an FOI request by the Yorkshire Post helped reveal how chief fire officers had received tens of thousands of pounds in overtime for working during the recent industrial action. This prompted an inquiry into whether the payments were lawful and how they came to be made.

Fines for holidays in term time soar past £1m

In August 2015 an FOI request by Yorkshire Post staff revealed the rapidly increasing number of fines being issued to parents in Yorkshire for taking their children on holiday during term time.

20,000 Yorkshire families hit with fixed penalties

ROB WAUGH AND JOHN ROBERTS

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MORE than 20,000 fines totalling in excess of £1m were issued to parents in Yorkshire for taking children on vacation in term time last year, fuelling fears that a Government crackdown on school absences has simply become a "holiday tax".

Council bosses warned that some parents are choosing to pay the fine as it was the only way they could afford to go on a family holiday. But the Department for Education (DfE) maintained its approach has improved school attendance figures.

Tougher rules brought in two years ago said headteachers should only approve absences in "exceptional circumstances".

Previously, schools had greater discretion and two week holidays in term time could be permitted.

The numbers of fixed penalties across the region rocketed to more than 20,000 in 2014-15, up from about 14,500 the previous academic year and an almost fivefold rise on the 4,500 issued in 2012-13 before the rule change.

In 2014-15 more than £1m in fines, which begin at £60, was levied on parents in Yorkshire. Leeds and Bradford councils issued 3,573 and 3,319 fines last year, increases of 64 per cent and 75 per cent respectively on 2013-14.

During the 39-week school year, Leeds and Bradford issued fines to parents at an average rate close to 100 per week.

Sheffield, East Riding, Kirklees and Doncaster councils also all issued more than 2,000 fines in 2014-15. The only council bucking the trend was York, where just two fines were issued last year.

The figures suggests some parents are prepared to pay the £60 fine in return for booking a holiday in term time when the cost is likely to be significantly cheaper.

Sheffield Council's cabinet member for children's services, Coun Jackie Drayton, said: "Parents tell us that, even after paying a fine, the cost of a holiday that starts in term time is still much cheaper than school holiday prices – and often means they can go



JACKIE DRAYTON: Called on the Government to tackle sharp rises in summer holiday costs.

away which many couldn't if they had to pay the inflated prices."

She called on the Government to work with the travel industry to stop large price increases in the school holidays.

But she stressed children who spend more time in education achieve better results and the council works closely with schools to improve attendance.

The Local Government Association has called on the DfE to give schools more flexibility.

It said a ban on term time holidays can be particularly hard on workers such as those in the NHS, police and the military who may

“ Parents tell us that paying a fine is cheaper than school holiday prices. ”

Sheffield Council cabinet member for children's services Jackie Drayton.

be unable to request leave during busy school holiday periods.

A DfE spokeswoman said: "It is a myth that children missing school is harmless to their education and life chances.

"This is why we are encouraging more pupils back into class by toughening up on term-time holidays and attendance.

"Heads and teachers are now firmly back in charge of their classrooms, and most recent figures show we have made real progress with 200,000 fewer pupils regularly missing school compared with five years ago."

City hands out 100 fines a week: Page 6.

Cash-strapped trust paying out £1,500 a day to interim director

EXCLUSIVE

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A FINANCIALLY troubled NHS hospital is paying an interim medical director nearly £1,500 a day after paying the previous full-time post-holder £200,000 for a year in which he was absent from work.

Rotherham Hospital, which is subjected to special supervision by regulator Monitor because of concerns over its financial management, also paid more than £160,000 over a six-month period for the services of an interim finance director.

The revelations surrounding executive pay come as the hospital is struggling to balance the books. Board reports have highlighted soaring pay costs running nearly £2m ahead of plan in 2014/15 with blame placed on the rising use of expensive short-term and agency staff, often in nursing roles.

But the reports don't highlight pay at the top of Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust despite current interim medical director, Donald O'Donoghue, receiving £1,440 a day since December – which equates to a pro rata annual salary of £375,000. An interim finance director – Anna Anderson – was also employed at a cost of £166,619,70 between April 14 and

October 31. The figures, obtained following freedom of information requests, prompted the Department of Health to warn it "would not tolerate a culture of excessive executive pay in the NHS".

The services of interim human resources director Lynne Waters, since appointed full-time, cost £41,450,40 for just a two-month period to the end of October. A further £94,110 was paid over six months to a management consultant, Phil Church, brought in to help cut costs.

The trust has also refused to explain payments to former medical director Professor George Thomson, who was absent for a year before leaving to take up the job of medical director at the

North Devon Hospital last November.

Rotherham has confirmed Prof Thomson, whose salary was £200,000, remained on full pay during his absence up to November 2. After he took up his new job on November 3, Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust issued a statement saying Prof Thomson had been off work at Rotherham "due to a significant illness to-

£200,000

The salary of former medical director at Rotherham Hospital, Professor George Thomson.

wards the end of 2013 and into 2014".

The statement didn't clarify whether Prof Thomson had been off sick and Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust has refused to explain the absence. Records show Prof Thomson continued in his role on the governing body of Erewash Clinical Commissioning Group in Derbyshire during his absence from Rotherham, including attending meetings. Prof Thomson declined to comment.

A Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust spokesman said the rate "is consistent with the current national rates for such an appointment, the appointment having been made via a national procurement framework which en-

sure consistency with the market rates and best value".

The trust added: "Similar arguments apply to the two other senior posts that you refer to which are Trust Board appointments and critical to the effective running of the organisation."

The spokesman said full-time appointments were planned to be made as soon as possible.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said it was right senior managers are "properly rewarded as long as they are accountable for their performance".

"However, we want executive staff to exercise greater pay restraint than staff on the front line, and won't tolerate a culture of excessive executive pay."

In April 2015 an FOI request by the Yorkshire Post revealed how an interim director at Rotherham Hospital was being paid £1,500 a day.

Revealed: The councillors who haven't paid their tax bills

One may have voted illegally on budget

EXCLUSIVE

Joanna Wardill and Martin Slack

COUNCILLORS across Yorkshire have failed to pay their own council tax bills while forcing some of the poorest in society to stump up for the charge for the first time, shock new figures reveal.

Five elected members in Bradford are among the eight involved, according to information obtained by the *Yorkshire Post*, while one Kirklees councillor may have committed a criminal offence by voting in a budget debate while in arrears.

The revelations come as poverty experts warn the withdrawal of council tax benefit will lead to skyrocketing arrears across the region as people previously deemed "too poor to pay" are pursued.

Arrears across Yorkshire rose from around £100m to £140m between 2008 and 2012 as people already liable struggled to pay in the downturn. Experts warn the debt will only get worse, putting more pressure on local services.

Figures released by Kirklees Council reveal the member who voted illegally was in arrears of £523, which the council is now recovering through an Attachment of Earnings Order on their member's allowances – normally made after reminders have been sent and a court summons.

Fears the revelation may nullify the budget vote were yesterday dismissed by the authority.

A spokesman for Kirklees Council said: "As with any member of the public, we worked with the council tax payer to come up with a way which allowed them to meet their responsibilities.

"When voting in the council



DAVID GREEN: 'If councillors are in arrears they are unable to vote on financial issues.'

meeting, under the Local Government Act, it is the responsibility of the individual councillor to declare that they are unable to vote.

"In this case, the outcome of the vote was not materially affected, and will not need to be retaken."

The *Yorkshire Post* submitted a request to all of the region's councils to ask how many councillors had been in council tax arrears over the past year. Bradford revealed five had fallen into arrears of between £93 to £1,103 but confirmed all debts had been repaid in time for the budget meeting.

East Riding of Yorkshire said one member was summonsed to court for arrears of £1,436 but that was now cleared.

A City of York councillor also fell into arrears of £64, since paid. All councils refused to name the councillors involved under Data Protection.

Bradford Council leader Coun David Green said it was "not ideal" for a councillor to be in arrears, and added if legal action had to be taken, it could render the council-

lor's position untenable. "If councillors are in arrears they are unable to vote on financial issues," he said. "But sometimes, as with anyone, there are reasons why people don't make a payment, or maybe two.

"But when it's brought to our attention we chase it up and make sure those monies are paid."

When someone falls into arrears, they are sent a reminder, and a final notice, before being summonsed to court, where a liability order can be made – a lengthy and costly process.

A Department for Communities and Local Government spokesman said: "Local councils are responsible for setting and maintaining levels of council tax.

"Councillors should lead by example. It is unacceptable for any of them to be in arrears and legislation stops them from voting on any financial matters if they are two months behind in payments."

Eleanor McGrath, of the TaxPayers' Alliance criticised the councillors for failing to set an example to the residents they represent.

"Councillors failing to pay their on time hardly inspire the confidence of local residents," she said.

"Council tax has gone through the roof over the past decade so it's no surprise some are struggling to pay their bills. Councillors should pay on time though, and not cost taxpayers money through reminders."

The region's remaining authorities reported no councillors in arrears, though Calderdale Council and Sheffield City Council refused to respond to the freedom of information request, citing the Data Protection Act.

Dire warnings: Page 6;
Comment: Page 16.

In 2013, an FOI request by the *Yorkshire Post* revealed eight councillors across the county were in arrears for council tax.

The Scarborough ^{News}

PAPER OF THE YEAR YORKSHIRE 02 AWARDS 2014

FILEY & HUNMANBY MERCURY, PAGE 31

Revealed: Rape, kidnap and 132 'hidden' crimes

EXCLUSIVE BY IAN JOHNSON
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Police are hiding crimes including kidnap and rape to try to dupe the public into thinking Scarborough is safer than it is.

That's the scathing view of the former chairman of a police watchdog, after The Scarborough News unearthed scores of crimes the force didn't want you to know about.

In the space of just one week, drugs were trafficked and a small girl raped and police dealt with dozens of violent attacks and burglaries.

None of this was made public by the police in Scarborough.

"There is just smoke and mirrors to make sure there's just no bad news," said Jane Kenyon-Miller, the retired former head of North Yorkshire's Police Federation. "The press is the bridge between the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15 →



In September 2015, an FOI request by the Scarborough News revealed how details of more than 130 crimes - many serious - had not been released to the public

Bullying 'epidemic': parents call for action

No pupil expelled from school for offence in last four years

EXCLUSIVE BY IAN JOHNSON

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A Scarborough News investigation has revealed fewer pupils are being kicked out of class, amid claims not enough is being done to tackle the borough's bullying "epidemic".

Not one secondary school student has been expelled, nor has any primary pupil been suspended, for bullying in the last four years.

Across the borough, over 1,424 secondary school pupils have been suspended from class for offences ranging from assaulting staff and pupils to sexual misconduct.

The figures mean that on average, at least one pupil is suspended for every day of term-time in Scarborough.

But only a fraction of those offences have been deemed serious enough by schools to warrant expelling the pupil.

And with bullying not one of them, parents have called for the schools to "stop turning a blind eye" to bullying.

"It seems that bullies' rights are more important than their victims'," said the father of one girl who he claims was on the receiving end of a beating from two known bullies.

His daughter was also suspended for two days for throwing punches during the fracas, but he, and other parents, claims bullies are allowed to return to school while their "victims" feel like they have to move.

"Children obviously move under their own accord, but they are being forced into that situation as nothing is being done to tackle the bullying epidemic."

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that since 2011, temporary suspensions have fallen by over 26 per cent in the borough's secondary schools, with a year-on-year decline.

In the 2011/2012 term, 417 pupils were suspended across the borough. Last year, that figure was down to 308.

Across the four-year period of our figures, the borough's biggest school Graham has regularly topped the suspensions

0 Secondary school expulsions and primary school suspensions for bullying in last four years

1,424

Total secondary school suspensions in four years

1 pupil suspended for every day of term time in Scarborough

Drop in suspensions between 2012 and 2014

26%



table, and has bucked the local trend with suspensions actually increasing – with Ofsted positively highlighting this in a recent report.

But according to our figures, Graham School is one of three secondaries in the borough – along with the smaller Eskdale and the Scarborough Pupil Referral Service – that hasn't suspended anybody directly for bullying since at least 2011.

The Scarborough News contacted the school's headteacher Helen McEvoy but she was unavailable.

But our figures show while the rest of the other schools have issued at least one suspension in recent years for bullying, nobody has ever been directly expelled for it.

One mother claims she pulled her daughter from a large Scarborough secondary following a bullying campaign.

"They made her life hell, but they were allowed to come back – how is that right?" she said.

"To me it just seems easier to let the victims find a new school, rather than for someone to take a stand to try and tackle bullying."

In June 2015, an FOI request by the Scarborough News revealed how fewer pupils had been expelled for bullying in four years, despite widespread concerns by parents.

Revealed: toll of attacks on hospital staff

EXCLUSIVE BY IAN JOHNSON
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More than 100 assaults have been made on life-saving hospital staff in Scarborough over recent years, new figures reveal.

A staff member claims that health workers are "hit and kicked" regularly, as booze

and drug-fuelled patients cause chaos in A&E at the weekend.

In total, 166 assaults were carried out in the region's hospitals between April 2012 and March 2013, including Scarborough.

Security measures at the hospital have been beefed

TURN TO PAGE 21



Scarborough Hospital is one of the York NHS Trust hospitals, including York itself and Bridlington, where staff have been attacked by patients

In January 2014, an FOI request by the Scarborough News revealed more than 100 assaults had been made on hospital staff in the town.

A CRIME EVERY 15 MINUTES



100 INCIDENTS A DAY
REPORTED TO THE
POLICE IN SHEFFIELD

By **ALEX EVANS**
Multimedia Reporter
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Follow me: @alexanderevans

A crime was reported every 15 minutes in Sheffield last year – with the city centre, Darnall and Burngreave hotspots for offences.

Figures obtained in a Freedom of Information Act request submitted by The Star under the Your Right To Know campaign show there were 103.8 crimes reported every day in Sheffield in 2014-15.

The figure equates to an average of four offences every hour.

Five murders, six kidnappings and 54 threats to kill are among almost 38,000 crimes reported in Shef-

field between April 2014 and March 2015.

The number of shoplifting, assault and public order offences all increased, while burglary, thefts from vehicles and thefts from person all fell.

Other areas in the top 10 for crime include Broomhill, Sharrow and Gleadless Valley.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

In August 2015, an FOI request by the Sheffield Star revealed how revealed a crime was reported to police every 15 minutes in the city and named the areas with the highest reported crime.

FLY-TIPPING: WE REVEAL FULL EXTENT OF CITY'S LITTER PROBLEM



Fox Hill Road, Foxhill



Southey Green Road, Southey



Fox Hill Place, Foxhill

DISGRACE

In February 2015, an FOI request by the Sheffield Star revealed the worst fly-tipping blackspots in the city.



Robey Street, Fir Vale

BY ELLEN BEARDMORE
Political Reporter
@e_beardmore

These shocking photographs reveal Sheffield's worst fly-tipping hotspots.

Figures obtained by The Star's Your Right to Know campaign show the problem affects residents across the city, with discarded bags, rubble and industrial waste even seen in beauty spots. Council officers say they have secured 27 convictions for the offence, which is difficult to prove as it often happens during the night.

FULL STORY: PAGES 8-9



Rotherham Road, Beighton

FLY-TIPPING

DISGUSTING CRIME THAT HAS BECOME CITY'S SCOURGE

Revealed: Our most litter-strewn areas

Abbydale Road is covered in rubbish... but its state is indicative of a wider problem

Walking down Abbydale Road in Sheffield, a problem with fly-tipping is not immediately obvious. The busy street is lined with houses and businesses and, while there is litter, the main road seems like any other main city thoroughfare. But one of the main roads in the city is not complaint-free - the most of any single street - were made about fly-tipping problems to Sheffield Council in the last three years become clearer. Complaints have steadily risen - from 18 in 2010 to 30 in 2012 and then 47 last year. At the back of Broadfield Park there is a pile of discarded bricks, wood and decaying household waste, dozens of motor car exhausts and a fire extinguisher. Along the riverbank, car tyres, plastic bags, orange cones and a fire extinguisher. It is an environmental health hazard and needs to be looked at," says a woman visiting her elderly mother on Laybourn Road, which leads to the park. "It's a massive problem, but what can we do about it? I have seen rats - that's what happens when there's so much rubbish and it is always like that in the park." Beds and toys are strewn along the edge between the park and the road, and Ashliff Transport owner Chris Jagger, whose office backs on to the park, says: "We called the council and a two or three hours they finished it. We get rats around here all the time. I think the situation is about educating people and the council doing something. "The nastiest thing would be to get rid of the tipping fees because there wasn't such a problem before." Further east on Abbeydale Road, fly-tippers have left a large bag of household waste next to the front of another local firm. It means staff at Hatfield Electric often have to take litter to their homes to the power of, because binners will take the entire rubbish. Lee Warner, who works at the site, says: "It happens every week - during the night when there is nobody here. We've got used to it. The binners come on Monday and didn't take the rubbish. We take some staff home and put it in our own bins. Every now and then we have to take it to the bin ourselves. It can only go as many times." Many people bringing the rubbish to the tip work and they were surprised Abbydale Road had the highest number of complaints - and said profits was more common. But resident Adam Newbold, aged 26, said: "But the bins are full on the side street or industrial park. It is just dirty - it is not nice to look at. The council will do by try to clear it up but it is a struggle. We had a sign on our street for ages and people seemed to throw anything in there." Nick Daniels, chairman of Brookes Tennis and Residents, Firth Park, said: "There are a couple of areas near Ipswell Street which are a dog park - I am doing with trying to tell people. It is a right mess but the first thing one body doing is fly-tipping in along the city down. I've just closed some from my estate but I know it will be back within a hour." Figures obtained from Sheffield Council show fly-



Fly-tipping on Abbydale Road.



Fly-tipping on Broadfield Park, off Abbydale Road.

There have been 27 recent convictions for waste offences in Sheffield, with 30 convictions last year and eight so far in 2013. Mike Perry, a manager of the council's environmental enforcement team, said: "Fly-tipping is usually done under cover of darkness and where it is not being caught in the act. What we do ask is that the public let us know of any fly-tipping they see. If they have a vehicle registration number that is really helpful or they may be able to describe the people doing it. The most important thing for the public is to remain safe. "We have had quite a few prosecutions in the past few years but they have to be based on proper evidence. "Sometimes we can trace waste back to the house hold or business and they then



Fly-tipping on Broadfield Park, off Abbydale Road.

with something that is not concrete. We have had fly-tipping was "traumatizing" but the majority of people do report it, but it has been dismissed as waste properly. "The council people do use a number of methods of disposal. As often these are called fly-tips take money and then dump the waste. "Sometimes we can trace waste back to the house hold or business and they then



Fly-tipping on Broadfield Park, off Abbydale Road.

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WHAT YOU'VE BEEN SAYING ONLINE
Start helping people and things will improve."
Janet Morrison: "I can't understand the mentality of someone who does this. It makes me furious."
SheMatters: "The council should show us tips to avoid areas that would stop it off."

THE WORSTEN TROADS FOR COMPLAINTS
ABBYDALE ROAD 100 complaints
BROADFIELD PARK, OFF ABBYDALE ROAD 85 complaints
COPPERHEDGE ROAD, NORTHWOOD 83 complaints
HONEY TREEL, GREENHAYWARDS 82 complaints
MADE STREET, GREENHAYWARDS 41 complaints
BROADFIELD PARK, GREENHAYWARDS 41 complaints
SHEFFIELD ROAD 33 complaints
LAWSON ROAD, GREENHAYWARDS 33 complaints
PONDY STREET, GREENHAYWARDS 29 complaints
STANFORTH ROAD, BARNALL 27 complaints

SHOCK INJURY TOLL IN FIREARMS OFFENCES



ONE VICTIM OF GUN CRIME EVERY WEEK

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW
★ The Star CAMPAIGN

One person a week is injured in gun incidents in South Yorkshire, shock new figures have shown. Across the county, 274 people have been hurt or seriously injured in firearms-related offences including murders, manslaughter, robberies and assaults, since 2010 – more than one a week. In Sheffield, 128 people have been hurt in firearms crimes – or two every month since 2010.

● FULL STORY - SEE PAGES 8-9

FEATURES

LEGAL HOW SHEFFIELD DISTRICTS COMPARE ON FIREARMS INCIDENTS

Revealed: City's real extent of gun crime

Community leaders 'disappointed' by new statistics and call for greater police action

Sheffield's gun crime problem is a serious one, with the city's police force facing a significant challenge in tackling the issue. The latest statistics reveal that the city is one of the most dangerous in the country when it comes to firearms offences. This is a shocking revelation for many in the community, who have long been concerned about the rising levels of gun crime. The statistics show that there are more than 100 gun-related incidents in the city every year, with a significant number of these resulting in serious injury or death. This is a stark contrast to other major cities in the country, where gun crime is far less prevalent. The police force has been criticised for its slow response to the problem, and many in the community are calling for a more aggressive approach to tackling gun crime. They argue that the police need to be given more resources and support to be able to deal with the scale of the problem. The statistics also highlight the need for better communication between the police and the community. Many people are unaware of the extent of the problem, and this can lead to a sense of helplessness. By providing more information about gun crime, the police can help to raise awareness and encourage people to report any suspicious activity. This is a crucial step in the fight against gun crime, and it is one that the police force must take seriously. The statistics are a wake-up call for everyone in the city, and it is time to take action to make Sheffield a safer place for everyone.



Police say they are committed to tackling gun crime but face the reality of 100+ gun offences

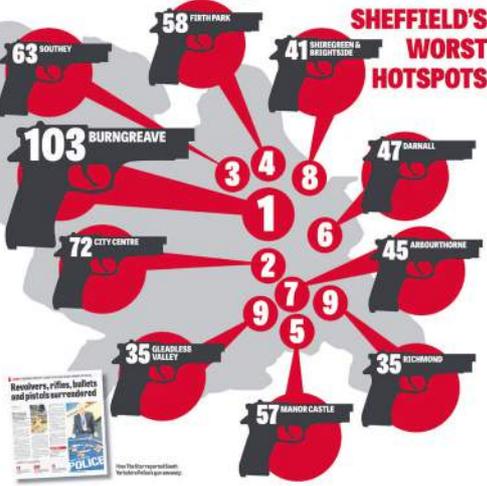
It's a serious concern to me and we need to do more and work together to make sure these offences are tackled properly

At 42, Mr. [Name] is a former police officer who has worked in the city for over 20 years. He has seen the rise of gun crime in Sheffield and is deeply concerned about the impact it has on the community. He believes that the police need to be given more resources and support to be able to deal with the scale of the problem. He also believes that there needs to be better communication between the police and the community. Many people are unaware of the extent of the problem, and this can lead to a sense of helplessness. By providing more information about gun crime, the police can help to raise awareness and encourage people to report any suspicious activity. This is a crucial step in the fight against gun crime, and it is one that the police force must take seriously.

Sheffield is a city of 650,000 people, and the statistics show that there are more than 100 gun-related incidents in the city every year. This is a significant number, and it highlights the need for a more aggressive approach to tackling gun crime. The police force has been criticised for its slow response to the problem, and many in the community are calling for a more aggressive approach to tackling gun crime. They argue that the police need to be given more resources and support to be able to deal with the scale of the problem. The statistics also highlight the need for better communication between the police and the community. Many people are unaware of the extent of the problem, and this can lead to a sense of helplessness. By providing more information about gun crime, the police can help to raise awareness and encourage people to report any suspicious activity. This is a crucial step in the fight against gun crime, and it is one that the police force must take seriously.

The statistics are a wake-up call for everyone in the city, and it is time to take action to make Sheffield a safer place for everyone. The police force must be given more resources and support to be able to deal with the scale of the problem. There also needs to be better communication between the police and the community. Many people are unaware of the extent of the problem, and this can lead to a sense of helplessness. By providing more information about gun crime, the police can help to raise awareness and encourage people to report any suspicious activity. This is a crucial step in the fight against gun crime, and it is one that the police force must take seriously.

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In March 2015, an FOI request by the Sheffield Star revealed one person a week is injured in gun incidents in South Yorkshire. This request also showed how across South Yorkshire 274 people had been injured in a firearms-related incident since 2010.

CITY'S RAT HOTSPOT!



YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW
 ☆ The Star CAMPAIGN

By **GEORGE TORR**
 Multimedia Reporter
 george.torr@jpress.co.uk



Follow me: @georgetorr

This is Sheffield's most rat infested road.
 Rat catchers dealt with 24 incidents of vermin on Herries Road from April 2014 to April 2015, figures obtained for The Star's 'Your Right to Know Campaign' reveal.

Environmental services were called out 12,928 times since April 2010 to areas across the city.
 Herries Road and Deerlands Avenue in Parson Cross feature many times in the top 10 over the five year period.
 Other hotspots during this year include Barnsley Road in Fir Vale, Main Road in Darnall and nightclub row Carver Street in Sheffield city centre.
 In Sheffield, Parson Cross, Darnall, Firth Park, Manor and Page Hall all feature prominently in the figures from 2010 to 2015.

■ FULL STORY: PAGES 8-9

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW: THE TRUE EXTENT OF SHEFFIELD'S RODENT PROBLEM

The Star reveals the top 10 rat hot spots across the city

John Bartholemew, 71: 'I used to try to whack 'em with my garden spade'

By **GEORGE TORR**
 Multimedia Reporter
 george.torr@jpress.co.uk

Herries Road in Sheffield is the number one 'rat hot spot' after figures reveal environmental services were called out 24 times between April 2014 and April 2015.
 Figures obtained by the Star from Sheffield Council reveal Herries Road features in the top 10 worst hit roads three years out of the last five including the worst hit in 2013/4.
 Overall, the figures show that environmental services were called out 12,928 times since April 2010 to deal with rats across Sheffield.
 Deerlands Avenue in Parson Cross was second most affected with 16 call outs between 2014/2015 and featured in the top 10 four times in the past five years. It was the worst hit road during 2012/13.
 Main Road in Darnall had the third highest number of call outs during 2014/2015 with 15, while Barnsley Road had 13 and Firth Park Road 12. Environmental services were called to nightclub row Carver Street in Sheffield city centre 11 times.
 They were also called out to both Stubbin Lane and Netherthorpe Lane in Firth Park 11 times each.
 Herries Road resident John Bartholemew, aged 71, said he was not surprised by the figures.
 He said: "I've had problems with rats in the past. "We called out environmental services as they were coming out under the bud in

the garden, I used to try and whack them with a spade to get them."
 Claire Chapman, 29, of Herries Road, was once shocked by the revelation. She said: "I'm quite surprised to be honest, I haven't had any problems in my house. Now I think about it, when they built Ovens Academy school it must have disturbed them due to it being close to the woodland. Again Herries Road is quite big and I suppose it depends who your neighbours are and if they keep their property clean."
 One man when asked seemed quite shocked at the figures and said "I haven't seen any around here, that's surprising."
 Another resident on Herries Road said: "I've seen rats around before but haven't had a problem in my house. "The tip on the back of Herries Road must contribute to rats. I'm not surprised but I would have thought that a road with lots of trees says on it would be the top of the list."
 Sharon Sturdy, 62, of Herries Road, had experience of rats with next door neigh-

bours on either side of her. She said: "My next door neighbour called the council out a few times in the past but they don't do much. "He put his own stuff down himself in the end and my other neighbour has in the past had rats."
 "They come from the woodland at the bottom of the garden but we have ours fenced off well, plus we had a cut so we haven't had a problem. I've got grandchildren and it's not nice."
 A Sheffield Council spokesman said: "As in every major city, rats are undeniably an issue in Sheffield, but we deal with the problem quickly and efficiently whenever we receive a report. Our trained and experienced officers offer a quality service which adheres to Royal Society of Health - Pest Control standards as a minimum. "Members of the public can report pest control issues online, or by phone, between 9am and 6pm, on 0114 927241 or 0114 927241. We aim to respond to every enquiry as soon as possible, usually within three working days."



RAT FACTS

April 2010-2015 environmental services were called out 12,928 times.

TOP 10 ROADS APRIL 2014-2015

1.	Herries Road, Shirecliffe	24
2.	Deerlands Avenue, Parson Cross	16
3.	Main Road, Darnall	15
4.	Barnsley Road, Fir Vale	13
5.	Firth Park Road, Firth Park	12
6.	Carver Street, City Centre	11
	Stubbin Lane, Firth Park	11
	Netherthorpe Lane, Parson Cross	11
	City Road, Manor	11
10.	Winey Street, Page Hall	10
	Hinde House Lane, Page Hall	10
	Price of Wales Road, Manor	10
	Malzrovs Road, Wybourn	10
	Westfield Centre, Westfield	10

TOP 3 ROADS APRIL 2010-2011

1.	Deerlands Avenue, Parson Cross	21
2.	Herries Road, Shirecliffe	20
3.	Price of Wales Road, Manor	15

TOP 3 ROADS APRIL 2011-2012

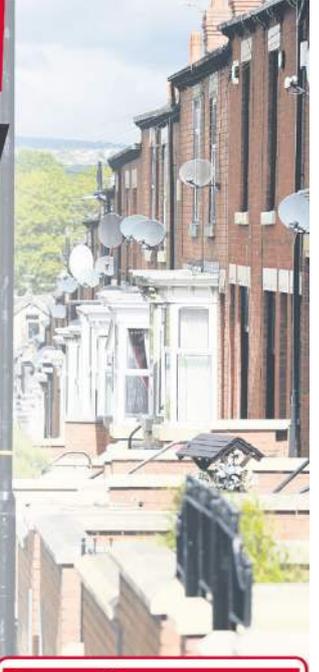
1.	Wardsworth Avenue, Parson Cross	19
2.	Stanforth Lane, Darnall	16
3.	Stanforth Road, Darnall	16

TOP 3 ROADS APRIL 2012-2013

1.	City Road, Manor	23
2.	Meadow Road, Meadowhead	14
3.	Norfolk Park Avenue, Norfolk Park	13

TOP 3 ROADS APRIL 2013-2014

1.	Herries Road, Shirecliffe	18
2.	Deerlands Avenue, Parson Cross	16
3.	Hinde House Lane, Page Hall	15



Parson Cross

16

times environmental services were called out to Deerlands Avenue, Parson Cross, from April 2014-2015.

Shirecliffe

24

times environmental services were called out to Herries Road, Shirecliffe, from April 2014-2015.

Darnall

15

times environmental services were called out to Main Road, Darnall, from April 2014-2015.

In May 2015, an FOI request by the Sheffield Star revealed the areas in Sheffield with the highest reports of rats.

Police defend new £50,000 system after slow sign-up

New messaging gives officers ability to directly inform the public

THE police have defended a £50,000 messaging system after 11,000 people have signed up to use it in more than a year.

Hampshire Alert allows police officers to text, e-mail or voice message people directly but residents must register.

Figures show just 491 people in Portsmouth, 305 in Gosport, 1,047 in Havant and 757 in Fareham and 10,256 in total as of August last year.

But Hampshire Constabulary, which paid £52,215 in set-up and licence costs, has said the system is a good way to keep people informed.

A spokesman said: 'During the first year of implementation we have been training our neighbourhood teams who are now able to send

by **BEN FISHWICK**

Crime and court reporter
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messages and promote sign ups. It is not just a community messaging system as it allows officers to better profile communities using demographic data and focus targeted messaging, setting community policing priorities through targeted surveys based on peoples preferences for contact.'

He added that since *The News* put in a Freedom of Information request the number of users has increased to 11,635.

And so far 1,762 messages, comprising of 504226 e-mails, were sent out.

Bob Coombes, Hampshire Neighbourhood Watch chair

and secretary of the Gosport branch, said the messages reached more people than the sign-ups show.

He said neighbourhood watch co-ordinators pass on the Hampshire Alert messages to their traditional networks, which include 6,000 people in Gosport and 12,000 people in Fareham alone.

Mr Coombes added: 'It's very new and the officers are only just using it so the number of messages going out is gradually increasing.'

'The other thing that Gosport do is we've got a Facebook page, we get the same messages out to people who are not on schemes, that's an incredible amount of people.'

Kevin Briscoe, corporate communications and PR

specialist and director of Briscoe French, based in Sarisbury Green, said he had not seen the system.

But he added: 'Done properly this could be a fantastic local engagement tool for the police as well as generating invaluable intelligence and information for them.'

Jonathan Isaby, Chief Executive at the TaxPayers' Alliance, said: 'Innovative approach to crime-solving can be a good thing, but only if it works.'

'Authorities must do everything in their power to ensure value for taxpayers' money when designing these new schemes.'

Police said the system is under a constant evaluation.

Join here hampshirealert.co.uk

In September 2015, an FOI request by the Portsmouth News revealed the low take-up of a police and public messaging system.

Thousands spent by police on hunt for missing Ashya



In April 2015, an FOI request by the Portsmouth News revealed how much had been spent by police in the search for missing cancer patient Ashya King.

RECOVERING Ashya King with his brother Neveed

by **BEN FISHWICK**

The News

ben.fishwick@thenews.co.uk

HAMPSHIRE police spent more than £16,000 on the search for cancer patient Ashya King when he first vanished, new figures have revealed.

A core of 12 officers worked at any one time during a six-day period between August 28 and September 2, in their hunt for the five-year-old.

Details released to *The News* reveal 40 staff and officers claimed £12,712.97 in overtime during that period.

Assistant Chief Constable Sara Glen said: 'If we receive a report that there is imminent threat to the life of a child, we will act swiftly to provide a response to ensure that the child is located.

'In such circumstances, we will use all necessary resources available and ensure that we work within our legal framework. Our priority was and always will be the welfare of the child. We are pleased to hear about reports of Ashya's progress.'

But Ashya's grandmother Patricia King, 77, of Southsea, said the amount spent was ridiculous.

Core team worked on six-day investigation

She said: 'It's absolutely disgusting to spend all that money when there's crime going on. It's just a joke.

'It was absolutely disgraceful chasing my son and putting him in prison.'

Cancer-sufferer Ashya's parents Brett and Naghme, of Southsea, took him out of Southampton General Hospital without telling medics.

Police launched an international manhunt with specialist detectives working on the case in Netley.

Officers obtained a European Arrest Warrant, which Chief Constable Andy Marsh said was critical in finding Ashya. The Kings were arrested and imprisoned in Spain where they were found 48 hours after disappearing.

They were released three days later without charge before going on to get their son proton beam therapy in the Czech Republic.

Simon Hayes, Hampshire's police and crime commissioner, said: 'They were told by the hospital there was a missing

boy whose life was in danger.

'Had they not done it and said the cost was £16,000, I would have been very critical of them and I think so would a lot of the public. This is an example of what policing costs.'

The cost, released through the Freedom of Information Act, does not account for officers, staff and duty hours for those who had peripheral involvement.

The £16,258 spend includes experts for the Crown Prosecution Service and is:

- Police officer overtime – £8,880.23.
- Police staff overtime – £3,832.74.
- Travel and parking – £132.81.
- Subsistence – £213.63.
- Accommodation – £1,406.20.
- Flights – £792.48.
- Experts to inform the CPS – £900.

Ashya had a brain tumour, which surgeons in Southampton removed.

But a dispute arose about his after-care, as his parents wanted him to have proton beam therapy.

The procedure is not available in the UK and at the time the NHS said it would not fund the treatment abroad. Ashya has now received the treatment.

A review by Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board is due to report soon.

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Flop Soundwaves concert ditched after £60,000 loss



SWANSONG ... the audience in Bents Park, South Shields, for the Soundwaves festival last year.



published

06:00 Tuesday 17 March 2015

A FLOP concert which cost South Tyneside Council £60,000 last summer has been ditched.

There was outrage when the Gazette revealed the authority had spent £103,015 to stage the Soundwaves concert in South Shields' Bents Park in August.

Figures obtained under the Freedom Of Information Act showed that the event, which attracted just 3,300 people, brought in only £43,250 in ticket sales and led to a review of the borough's summer events programme.

Now it has emerged that Soundwaves, which last year featured performances by All Saints, Texas, Gabrielle and Lulu James, will not be repeated.

Instead, organisers of the borough's summer entertainment programme have announced an additional free concert - bringing the number of summer gigs up to four.

The newly-named South Tyneside Festival is well known across the region for its free open-air concerts which traditionally take place on three consecutive Sundays in Bents Park during July.

8

comments



HAVE YOUR SAY

In March 2015, an FOI request by the Shields Gazette revealed how a concert cost South Tyneside Council £60,000 and attracted just 3,300 people

Only 55% of perverts caught grooming children online charged

PAEDOS SLIPPING THE NET

By **LAURA WILD**
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@LAURAWILD_LEP

ONLY half of 101 predators caught grooming children on the internet have been charged.

Shock data revealed through a Freedom of Information request shows that dozens of youngsters have been contacted by paedophiles through social media, chat rooms and messenger services across Lancashire in the past five years.

And after being befriended, the children have either met the offenders, sent or received explicit photos or been forced to watch sexual acts performed on a webcam.

In the 101 reported cases, 56 people were charged, 26 were never caught, seven were given a caution and two were given final warnings.

One case is continu-

ing, two were closed, four faced no further action, and in two cases prosecution was not possible.

Today Claire Lilley, head of child online safety at the NSPCC said: "The internet is a great tool for young people but it has grown quicker than our ability to regulate it and ensure it is used safely. Sadly, predators are quick to exploit new technology to take advantage of young people, and keeping children safe online is now the biggest child protection challenge of this generation.

"Alongside tough sanctions for those caught grooming we need to educate our children about staying safe on line.

"Simple tips like not giving out personal details, never sharing images you wouldn't want to be shared more widely and reporting anyone

TURN TO PAGE 5

In March 2015, an FOI request by the Lancashire Evening Post revealed the difficulties facing the authorities in bringing online paedophiles to justice, with just one in two facing charges.

DRUNK AGED NINE IN A&E

By **AASMA DAY**
Health Reporter
aasma.day@lep.co.uk

CHILDREN as young as nine have been admitted to Lancashire hospitals suffering from alcohol-related illness, shock figures reveal today.

Figures obtained by the Lancashire Evening Post under the Freedom of Information Act show the alarming level of binge drinking in young people who end up in hospital as a result of drink-related conditions or injuries.

The information shows the ages of children aged 15 and below who were admitted to Lancashire Teaching Hospitals, which runs the Royal Preston and Chorley

and South Ribble Hospitals, after drinking over the past five years.

The figures reveal that during 2008/09, at least one child aged nine attended the emergency department and was admitted to a hospital ward due to alcohol related reasons.

Even in the past 12 months, children as young as 11 and 12 have been treated in A&E or admitted to a hospital ward as a result of drinking too much.

Hospital emergency department specialists today revealed that they tend to see more under-age drinking in young girls than in boys and expressed their concern at youngsters putting themselves in vulner-

able situations. Lynne Sime, acting matron of emergency medicine at Royal Preston Hospital, said: "We have seen children as young as nine come into the emergency department as a re-

sult of alcohol and also a number of 11 and 12-year-olds.

"However, the majority of underage drinkers who end up in hospital tend to be 13 to 16-year-olds.

TURN TO PAGE 7



In June 2013, an FOI request by the Lancashire Evening Post addressed the issue of youth anti-social behaviour from the angle of under age drinking. This was part of a wider investigation into the problems associated with teenage drinking.

County council reveals wages lost by workers on walk-out

1-DAY STRIKE COSTS STAFF £223,000

By LAURA WILD
laura.wild@press.co.uk
@LAURAWILD_LEP

COUNTY Hall withheld almost a quarter of a million pounds in wages from striking workers in one day, it can be revealed.

Thousands of Lancashire County Council employees, including hundreds of teachers, staged a one-day walk-out in the summer as part of national industrial action.

Now data released through Freedom of Information laws shows on that one day in July, £222,866.85 was held back in unpaid wages.

County council officials outlined the final figure could be even higher, as the statistic was based on July and August payroll deductions, and strike absences

that have not yet been put into the HR system by line managers are not included in this figure.

The authority said the money will stay in its general cash pot, while union bosses suggested it should be invested in job creation or support schemes.

David Borrow, deputy leader of the county council, said: "That money will remain in the general pot unspent, to be spent on other things that the council feels would be necessary.

"I am aware of occasions with other authorities where a request was made for money not paid out to be used for a good cause. I am not aware that this has happened in Lancashire.

"If a request was made by staff reps, we would look at it."



MARCH: Public sector workers on strike in Preston

TURN TO PAGE 5

In September 2014, an FOI request by the Lancashire Evening Post revealed how much was saved in the wages bill during a one-day strike by council workers across the county.

In December 2014, an FOI request by the Lancashire Evening Post revealed the money the local health trust spends on company cars and the luxury models being acquired at a time when it was facing £14m cuts.

At a time when the Trust needs to save £14m and patients are being taken to hospital by fire engine...

NHS CHIEFS RIDE IN LUXURY



NHS chiefs are driving around in luxury tax payer-funded cars at a time when patients are taken to hospital by fire engine.

By LAURA WILD
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AMBULANCE bosses are cutting services to the bone and patients have been taken to hospital by fire engines – but managers are driving around in luxury taxpayer-funded cars.

A Freedom of Information request has revealed the company car list for the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) staff includes 26 Range Rover Evoques – with prices starting at £40,000, 22 BMWs and 34 Audis.

TURN TO PAGE 5

818 youngsters aged under 10 commit sex assaults, knife offences and racial abuse



Child crime shock

By LAURA WILD

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THE number of serious crimes committed by children under 10 – including rape and arson – was today branded “worrying” by Lancashire’s policing boss.

In the past five years, 818 youngsters under 10 have been linked to 655 offences in Lancashire, including sexual assault, possessing knives and racial abuse.

Because the children are under the age of criminal

responsibility, they cannot be prosecuted but are dealt with by youth offending teams.

Data released under the Freedom of Information Act shows that in 2008/09 there were 39 offences. In 2012/13, this had shot up to 183 – although police say the huge rise is linked to a change in the way the offences are recorded.

Today, community leaders have raised concerns

TURN TO PAGE 5

In February 2014, an FOI request by the Lancashire Evening Post revealed the scale and nature of youth crime in the county.

SCHOOLS SUED FOR £780,000

County’s 5-year total payouts to pupils over slips, trips and falls

by JENNY SIMPSON
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LANCASHIRE schools have paid out nearly £800,000 in compensation to pupils involved in classroom accidents over the past five years.

Lancashire County Council has shelled out £783,831 in public liability payments to parents who have sued over trips, falls and similar incidents involving pupils.

A Freedom of Information request revealed there were 100 successful claims over injuries sustained while on school property between 2006-07 and 2011-12.

Awards for physical injuries included £12,519 paid last year to a pupil who fell while climbing a tree.

Another student won £49,712 after hurting his hand climbing a gate while a third

got more than £6,000 for cutting a leg sliding down a hand-rail.

Educational campaigners said they were concerned about a “compensation culture” developing in schools but teachers said they carried out sensible risk assessments for activities.

FULL STORY: PAGE 4

In April 2013, an FOI request by the Lancashire Evening Post revealed the size of the compensation bill facing Lancashire County Council from pupils suing over injuries and accidents at school.

Robinson spends three times more on US visit



published

12:58 Friday 13 May 2011

Kids as young as 9 sent away for treatment

08:52 Friday 16 October 2015

The Western Trust has confirmed that children as young as nine with complex and mental health needs have had to be relocated outside of Northern Ireland because there is no facility here to treat them.

In some cases local children have spent around 900 days (around two and half years) in placements in England or the south of Ireland.

The 'Journal' has obtained information under the Freedom of Information Act which shows that over the past decade, 13 children from the Western Health & Social Care Trust area have had to be sent beyond Northern Ireland for treatment.

The youngest children affected were aged nine, 10 and 11, while the others are all aged between 14 and 17.

The most recent placement was made in August 2014 and there are four children currently still being treated in England or in the south of Ireland.

The figures were obtained after concerns had been raised earlier this year over the lack of facilities to deal with children with complex needs.

Explaining the reasons for the children placed in care, a Western Trust spokesperson said: "On all occasions children are placed outside Northern Ireland for services which are not available in N. Ireland.

"On each occasion this is in agreement with the child's/ young person's family and extensive discussion has taken place with the service user as appropriate, prior to any move taking place.

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comments

 HAVE
YOUR SAY

First Minister Peter Robinson spent more than three times as much on air fares to the United States over St Patrick's Day last year than Deputy First minister Martin McGuinness.

Mr Robinson spent £22,931.47 on travel expenses during a trip to America for an investment conference and the traditional St Patrick's Day visit to the White House in 2010, while Martin McGuinness spent £6,437 on the same visit - a difference of £16,494.47.

The First Minister, who was reappointed to the top spot in the Assembly yesterday at the first meeting following last week's Assembly election, was accompanied on the official visit by a special adviser and private secretary and flew business class on a flexible return ticket.

The Deputy First Minister was also accompanied by a special adviser and a private secretary but, while he flew business class on the transatlantic flight, he flew economy class on the internal flights during the visit.

During the visit the Executive pair met US President Barack Obama at the White House in Washington, as well as leading figures in the Irish American business community at a major investment conference in Chicago.

The purpose of the visit was to encourage American firms to invest in the North in order to help stimulate the economy and create employment here. Both men described the visit as productive after their return.

The figure was obtained through a Freedom of Information request made by the Derry Journal. The initial request was made in July 2010 but the information, which should be released within 20 working days of acknowledgment of receipt of the request, was only released on Thursday May 5th, the day of the Assembly election.

Repeated inquiries were made about the status of the Freedom of Information request but officials from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister said it was awaiting clearance.

In October 2015, an FOI request by the Derry Journal revealed children as young as nine years old have been sent outside Northern Ireland for treatment because there are no suitable facilities locally.

In May 2011, an FOI request by the Derry Journal revealed Northern Ireland's First Minister Peter Robinson spent three times more on a US visit for St Patrick's Day than the Deputy First Minister did.



Eleven charities probed in city

by

Kevin Mullan

updated

17:49 Tuesday 22 July 2014

published

10:28 Saturday 26 July 2014

The Northern Ireland charity watchdog has received eleven complaints about Londonderry charities since the commencement of investigatory powers in 2011, the *Sentinel* has learned.

Reports to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) ranged from concern over the award of contracts, concern in relation to possible private benefit and conflicts of interest and a lack of transparency.

There were also concerns relating to poor communications with stakeholders, concerns that financial controls were inadequate, concerns over possible mismanagement and concerns over the application of funds received by various city headquartered charities.

Three CCNI investigations are still ongoing and the PSNI and Public Prosecution Service (PPS) are currently pursuing a criminal case against one local charity.

Eight further investigations have been closed by CCNI, with no action having been taken in some cases.

Details of the investigations were revealed to the *Sentinel* in response to a Freedom of Information (FoI) request.

The CCNI advised that it couldn't release the names of the charities in question because it would constitute a 'breach of confidence' under Section 41 of the FoI Act.

It did, however, release the name of one charity, which was investigated following an enquiry commencing on May 5, 2012.

The CCNI told the *Sentinel*: "You will note that the name of one charity has not been redacted.

"As this concern was internally generated by the Commission, rather than supplied by an external individual or organisation, it is not considered to have the necessary quality of confidence to be exempt under section 41."

The CCNI says the charity in question was the Changaro Trust, which, according to a 'social media' website profile, was set up in 2007 to raise funds for a refuge in Kenya.

The Commission says there was "concern in relation to finances of charity and possible mis-management."

In July 2014, an FOI request by the Londonderry Sentinel revealed 11 charities had been investigated by the NI charities watchdog since it was given powers to do so three years earlier. The documents showed the range of concerns, from poor management to financial irregularities.

Hike in public money owed to private firm for NW lab



by

Kevin Mullan

published

21:49 Saturday 09 May 2015

The annual sum of public money paid to a private developer that provided £15m upfront to build the Altnagelvin laboratory and pharmacy in 2007, hiked again between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Outgoing Health Minister Jim Wells revealed that the annual amount the public owe to the United Healthcare Land Company rose to £2,114,040 in 2013/14.

That's over half-a-million pounds per year more than the annual £1.6m the Stormont Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was originally advised the company would get from the Western Trust until 2032 - the projected end of what is one of the longest-running Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) in Northern Ireland.

The Minister made the revelation in response to an Assembly Question from Foyle MLA Colum Eastwood.

"No new PFI projects were undertaken within the Foyle Area during 2013/14," said Mr Wells.

"There is only one existing project. The Western Health and Social Care Trust made a unitary charge payment of £2,114,040 in 2013/14 for the PPP/PFI Altnagelvin Laboratory and Pharmacy Services Centre.

"This project was completed as a PFI in 2007, and the annual unitary charge payment is part of the 25 year concession on that project," he added.

The Altnagelvin laboratory and pharmacy will remain in private hands until 2032 at least.

In May 2015, an FOI request by the Londonderry Sentinel revealed the annual sum of public money paid to a private developer that provided £15m upfront to build the Altnagelvin laboratory and pharmacy in 2007 hiked again between 2012/13 and 2013/14. Outgoing Health Minister Jim Wells revealed the annual amount the public owe to the United Healthcare Land Company rose to £2,114,040 in 2013/14



TIE admits further utility diversions and checks still needed

'Remedial work' may spell more misery yet

CHRIS MARSHALL
Transport Reporter

In 2011, the Edinburgh Evening News revealed the identity of a mediator brought in to settle the long-running tram saga in the capital - and the amount he was paid, using an FOI request

THE Capital faces fresh tram misery after it emerged that yet more work is needed to move underground pipes and cables in the city centre.

Tram firm TIE, which previously claimed the work was all but complete, has begun the search for a new contractor to carry out utility diversions and "remedial" works for Scottish Water between Haymarket and York Place.

The council-owned company today said it would attempt to keep disruption to a minimum by carrying out the work at the same time as track-laying. But critics said TIE were having to redo utility works carried out since 2008, which have subsequently been found to be substandard.

According to figures released by TIE earlier this year, 50,000 metres of utilities have been diverted, 97 per cent of the total, with the remainder being "local connections and minor cabling works", which will be finished off at the conclusion of the project. But it is understood

there are real concerns among contractors about utility work carried out in Shandwick Place and around Princes Street.

Adverts for a new contractor have only been placed within the last few days.

John Carson, a long-standing critic of the tram project and a former director of maintenance at Network Rail, said: "Most of this work wasn't done to the right standard. This new contract means digging up all the areas where the work was contentious. That means digging up between Haymarket and Princes Street."

"This goes back to the heady days of Princes Street and TIE being hellbent on getting it open and the rumours that abounded that the subcontractors employed by Carillion were not doing the works to the standard required."

Mr Carson said there were even suggestions the wrong colour of pipes had been used around Haymarket and in Leith Walk. It was the lengthy delays to the utility diversion work which initially led to the contract



ENTRENCHED: City could see a return to disruption caused by utility works last year



"This goes back to the heady days of TIE being hellbent on getting Princes Street open"

JOHN CARSON

dispute with Bilfinger Berger.

It is understood that the contract drawn up between TIE and the construction consortium promised Bilfinger Berger would have "exclusive licence", meaning the streets would be clear of other works.

Earlier this year it emerged tram bosses had reached an agreement with construction giant Carillion after secret mediation talks, with the Wolverhampton-based firm seeking extra money after moving thousands of metres of underground utility cables.

Carillion ended its association with the tram project late in 2009 when tram bosses said around 80 per cent of the utility work had been completed.

Northern Irish firm Farrans and Middlesbrough-based Clancy Doewra were then drafted in to complete outstanding work at Haymarket, Picardy Place, the airport and Ocean Terminal.

A spokeswoman for Edinburgh Trams said: "The majority of this work relates to the outstanding utilities commitment and includes ducting and street lighting. The intention is to carry this out in tandem with the infrastructure on-street works to avoid further disruption to the city at a later date."

"It will also provide the opportunity to ensure all works carried out to date are suitable with the final design for the overhead line equipment which was not completed at the time the utility works occurred."

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Shane paid at least £15k for peace talks

THE American mediator brought in to broker five days of mediation talks in Edinburgh's long-running tram dispute was paid at least £15,000, it has emerged.

Michael Shane led last-ditch peace talks at the exclusive Mar Hall hotel near

Glasgow in March. According to details released under Freedom of Information laws, tram firm TIE paid the London-based mediator £14,700.

However, he may also have received undisclosed payments from TIE's contractors Bilfinger Berger

and Siemens. The bill is over and above the £13,000 spent on hiring Mar Hall and the money spent on Gledoch House hotel.

That figure also includes £2,382 of expenses racked up by seven council staff, thought to include chief executive

Sue Bruce and director of city development Dave Anderson.

The mediation talks formed the basis for an new agreement which has been prioritised as seen priority works began again at Haymarket and Gogar.

Mystery mediator in tram talks is finally revealed

Transport guru behind move to get project on track

CHRIS MARSHALL
Transport Reporter

THE identity of the US mediator at the centre of last-ditch talks to save the trams was finally revealed today as business leaders branded the project "a disaster".

Michael Shane, a London-based mediator known for his "no-nonsense" approach, was

brought in to chair talks held last month at the exclusive Mar Hall Hotel outside Glasgow.

His name was revealed under Freedom of Information laws after it emerged that tram bosses are now "actively considering" opening a section of the line which does not even reach the city centre. Mr Shane has previously been involved in transport disputes in Hong Kong and California, but his success with the Capital project is uncertain as talks continue.

News that tram bosses could open the route only as far as Haymarket led to the project

being branded one of the most "disastrous" civil engineering projects Scotland has ever seen.

An update on the mediation talks is set to be given to councillors next month, with a further update in June.

Sources have indicated that the city council and TIE now look set to open just a small section of the overall 11.5-mile route, with plans to lease up to 20 trams also being considered.

Opening the route to Haymarket would mean no trams for businesses which put up with works on Shandwick Place and Princes Street. Michael Apter, chairman of the West End Association, said there would be huge disappointment should the route not at least extend to St Andrew Square.

He said: "This has got to go down as one of the most disastrous civil engineering projects the country has ever seen. We're basically going to see £500

million spent on a fancy utilities upgrade - it beggars belief."

Tram bosses had hoped more money would become available after the Scottish elections, but all the main parties have now confirmed that there will be no new funding. There is now a real possibility that the line will not reach Princes Street.

Liz McAreevey, interim chief executive of Essential Edinburgh, the body set up to run the city centre Business Improvement District, said: "It would be unfortunate if the tram line stopped outside the city centre, which will be the destination for many of the people who are likely to use it."

In a statement on the Edinburgh Trams Facebook page, the company said "no decision" had been taken on how much of the route would be built.

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Comment - Page 12

CASH PLEA TO NEW GOVERNMENT

BOSSES of the embattled tram project will ask the new Scottish Government for extra cash, it has been reported.

A source at TIE reportedly said the update next month

was likely to propose a request for more money, given that the current funding would only allow it to complete the route between the airport and Haymarket.

FOWL PLAY

Anger as prisoners served up locally-sourced chicken while schoolchildren are given imports

■ DAVID McCANN and JOHN-PAUL HOLDEN

PARENTS are spitting feathers after it emerged school-kids are being fed chicken imported from as far away as Thailand – prompting claims children are being treated like “second-class citizens”.

Chicken served to children in Edinburgh and East Lothian is shipped from countries including Poland, Thailand, Holland and Brazil according to revelations unearthed under Freedom of Information (FOI) powers.

The news – which comes fresh on the back of the horsemeat scandal – has been compounded by the revelation that convicts at Saughton Prison are fed chicken from a firm which sources produce locally from farms in “Aberdeenshire, Speyside and Ayrshire”.

Data released under FOI legislation to the Scottish Greens shows no poultry meat in Lothian schools is sourced from Scottish abattoirs, which supply the bulk of their produce to major supermarkets rather than schools. Today, parents revealed their dismay at the widespread importation, which saw meat from Hol-



land, Poland, Thailand and Brazil served to Edinburgh pupils while meat from Thailand was dished up to East Lothian children.

Alison Haines, 41, whose seven-year-old son will go into P4 at Oxfangs Primary after the holidays, called for food to be sourced locally. She said: “The priority should be our children – but it seems that they are second-class citizens.”

“The supermarkets are getting the quality, locally sourced product and then our kids are getting whatever’s left. It’s not right – the priority should be our children. I think they should be sourcing

all school food locally. It’s upsetting to hear that our food is coming from places like Poland when we have such good food on our doorstep.”

Echoing this view, Susan Heron, vice-chair of Castlebrae High School parent council, said: “I think you will have your fair share of parents who are concerned about this. It’s something we’ll be raising at our next meeting.”

Alison Johnstone, Green MSP for Lothian and food spokesperson for the Scottish Greens, said she had “long-standing concerns” about imported meat and insisted there were better alternatives

than “flying chicken nuggets from Thailand” in to provide cheap meals.

She said: “We must aim for local, high quality food on our children’s plates as the norm. The Government’s Procurement Bill should be a chance to set some new standards to achieve that.”

“Councils are under pressure to award contracts on cost rather than make choices that would have positive impacts for the local economy and animal welfare.”

A spokeswoman for Edinburgh City Council said a lack of suppliers was to blame.

She said: “The council has checked with its Scottish supplier who has reported difficulties in getting a supply of locally-reared chickens due to the lack of processing facilities in Scotland.”

An East Lothian Council spokeswoman said their schools did not serve chicken nuggets and children were only offered chicken once a week.

A Scottish Government spokesman said “procurement decisions” are a matter for local authorities. The Government also provides guidance on nutritional requirements and quality standards with both expected “to be observed”. The news comes just months after it was discovered frozen horsemeat had been served to pupils in six Edinburgh schools while Richard Lochhead, cabinet secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, mooted a stand-alone food standards body in Scotland. The Scottish Prison Service has confirmed British sourced chicken is served to prisoners such as killer Peter Tobin, behind bars for the murder of three young women.

We exclusively revealed back in February how Edinburgh council spends just 71p providing meals in primary schools. Chiefs claimed the low figure was down to their purchasing power.

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TOP NOTCH: Chicken served to prisoners at Saughton comes from Scotland



CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE REPLACEMENT OF EDUCATION BOSS

ONE of Scotland’s most high-profile education chiefs is to quit his Lothians post – sparking union demands a headteacher be seconded to replace him “as a matter of urgency”.

Don Ledingham (pictured) – director of services for people in East Lothian and education and children’s services in Midlothian – will leave at the end of the month to join consultancy firm Drummond International as director of leadership development.



International was founded by Norman Drummond, previously headmaster at Loreto School in Musselburgh. Mr Ledingham leaving East Lothian Council’s education department means no-one in its senior management team will have a background in teaching – leading to warnings from bosses at the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA) that the welfare of pupils and staff relations will be harmed if an appropriate replacement is not found quickly.

Alan McKen-

zie, SSTA acting general secretary, said: “Directors from a teaching background are able to convince councillors what the real priorities are.”

Mr Ledingham is regarded a prominent figure in education after he suggested that East Lothian schools should be placed in community-based trusts.

But a spokeswoman for East Lothian Council said the new management team would be “ably supported by the wealth of educational experience that exists in the senior teams in . . . schools”.

In July 2013, the Edinburgh Evening News revealed how prisoners were being given better quality food than schoolchildren in the city, through an FOI request