

not the national information forum

But still working for the inclusion of disabled and other disadvantaged people
by encouraging better information provision

News Briefing No. 36. August 2011

In This
Issue

A Digest of Current Social Information

- ACCESS AT RAIL STATIONS
- FUNDING OF CARE AND SUPPORT
- NEWS FROM CILIP
- EXTENDED WARRANTIES
- A NEW POOR LAW?
- NEW RIGHTS FOR BUS AND COACH PASSENGERS
- INEQUALITY
- COMPETITION
- CLOSURES
- QUOTABLE QUOTES
- HIGH STREET BUSINESSES OFF-LIMITS TO HEARING AIDS
- PHONE HACKING
- DIGITAL SWITCHOVER
- BULLFIGHTING AND BADGER CULLING
- WE HATE NO. 44: KNIFE CRIME



FUNDING TO IMPROVE ACCESS AT BRITAIN'S RAIL STATIONS

The Department for Transport has announced mid-tier funding specifically targeted at providing infrastructure improvements at Network Rail stations in England and Wales to enable more disabled people to access the rail network. Applications are invited for innovative or locally focused solutions to access problems. Grants of £250k to £1m are available per scheme for “projects which have reached a credible stage in development having completed all appropriate feasibility studies and after identification of other funding sources.”

A pack containing detailed information is available, which includes an application form and guidance. Go to: www2.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/rail/railstations/accessforallfunding/

COMMISSION ON FUNDING OF CARE AND SUPPORT

The relevant website is at www.dilnotcommission.dh.gov.uk.

NEWS FROM CILIP

The latest issue of *CILIP Update*, the journal of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, is a cracker. Early on it has a telling quote from Peter James, Chair of Crime Writers' Association:

“We have our own tragedy right now, one as potentially devastating as Caesar's burning of the Library of Alexandria, and Zedong's banishing of books in the Cultural Revolution. If those of us in the book trade fail to take action, George Osborne's name will be up there in that same vandals' hall of notoriety”

Say it as it is, Peter. On the same page we learn that the British Library is teaming up with Google to help digitise, over three years, a quarter of a million texts dating from 1700 to 1870. Google has already digitised some 13 million books from 40 libraries, and a further 2 million through partnerships with publishers. Good news indeed.

Next we are given the lowdown on internet filtering in libraries and schools: government plans to deny access to radical material that could promote extremism. It will come as no surprise that this strategy has given rise to fears of undisclosed and unaccountable censorship. We have no doubt that, had it been possible, in its day Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* would have been a candidate for ‘filtering’.

Other news includes mention of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (208,000 members). We are told that at the WI's AGM, 97.79 per

cent of delegates voted in favour of a motion urging the government “to maintain support for local libraries, as an essential local educational and information resource.”

Nor should we fail to mention, as we began, a report of the remarks of Carnegie Medal Winner Patrick Ness. Libraries are not facing a crisis, he said, they are in crisis: “Where they are not being closed, their hours are being shortened, their staffs are being reduced, their services extremely curtailed. If Ed Vaizey [the Libraries Minister] is passionate about libraries and his government is working behind the scenes to save them, that has got to be the world’s best kept secret.”

We have not mentioned interviews with Oliver Morley, the new and astonishingly youthful CEO of The National Archives, and Philip Carter of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and an intriguing article by Andrew Madden, *Why is so much information uninformative?* This is a journal that deserves to be available beyond CILIP members.

EXTENDED WARRANTIES

The Office of Fair Trading has launched a short market study into extended warranties for domestic electrical goods. Further details on www.offt.gov.uk/news-and-updates/press/2011/55-11. Interested parties can submit views by e.mail to degs@oft.gov.uk.

A NEW POOR LAW?

The objective of the Disability Benefits Consortium, a national coalition of over 40 charities and other organisations, are set out at www.disabilityalliance.org/dbc.htm. The Consortium is committed to achieving a benefit system that, among other things, “tackles stigma surrounding disability benefits and the people who claim them.” Whereas, in letters to *The Observer* (24 July) and to Ian Duncan Smith, the Consortium asserts, in effect, that the Department of Work and Pensions’ way of publishing statistics has precisely the opposite effect, feeding the tabloid media’s negative stance on ‘benefit scroungers’. The immediate concern is that quarterly statistics on the number of claims for Employment and Support Allowance highlights the high proportion of applicants found fit for work and denied ESA. The Consortium takes a contrary view, arguing that the eligibility criteria are set too high and that the assessment process is flawed: a contention supported by the fact that nearly 40 per cent of appeals are successful.

There is already a deeply-rooted belief in certain sections of British society, reinforced by the media, that many claimants are scroungers and loafers, a perception that has close parallels with attitudes in Victorian times under the New Poor Law. A pity then if public servants, in an excessive zeal to weed out the ‘undeserving’, come across as encouraging hostility to those genuinely in need of help.

Chris Grayling, the Employment Minister, evidently, like IDS, a kindly person, is reported as saying that he cannot prevent the publication of negative stories about benefit claimants. But, with respect, what he can do is to make sure the tabloid tendencies are rebutted. Otherwise we may come to think that we have a tabloid government.

NEW RIGHTS FOR BUS AND COACH PASSENGERS

Many moons ago, in its magazine *Innovations in Information*, the late National Information Forum had a brush with Transport for London over the poor standard of information on London buses. We are therefore delighted to learn that the European Parliament and Council has reached agreement on a new regulation setting out basic rights for bus and coach passengers throughout the European Union which include minimum rules on providing information for passengers before and during a journey, as well as passenger rights in terminals and online. In particular, people with a disability or reduced mobility will be protected. For detailed information go to: <http://tinyurl.com/eu-bus-coach-rights>.

INEQUALITY

The Equality Trust has released its second quarterly *Research Digest*, a review of what the wider academic literature is saying about income inequality and its effects.

UK income inequality increased by 32% between 1960 and 2005 (cf Sweden where it decreased by 12% in the same period). The growth in UK inequality in the last 30 years has been driven by the top 1% of wage

incomes. The Trust makes the point that the Swedish model indicates that rising inequality is not inevitable. The widening gap over the last 30 years has been driven by the top one per cent of wage incomes.

Full details at www.equalitytrust.org.uk/digest2-launch. The Trust can be contacted at 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH; tel: 020 7922 7927.

COMPETITION

In an important speech at the Law Society Competition Section Annual Conference on 25 May, John Fingleton, Chief Executive of the Office of Fair Trading, gave unequivocal support for a merger of the OFT and the Competition Commission, with benefits beyond what can be achieved simply by working more closely together. We were particularly struck by his belief (among other things) that a single agency needs to be “strong and independent...willing to undertake robust civil and criminal enforcement, to act against powerful interests, and to withstand pressure from incumbents and interested parties to restrict competition.”

Full speech downloadable at www.of.gov.uk/shared_of/speeches/2011/1011.pdf.

CLOSURES

Immigration Advisory Service (8 July). After 25 years; attributed to the compound effect of removal of immigration from the scope of legal aid and a cut in fees for asylum clients. It is also said IAS has been unable to agree a solution for the repayment of monies claimed in error from the Legal Services Commission.

Southern Cross (revealed 11 July). Care home provider; much publicised.

News of the World (or should it be the underworld?)

Habitat and other lesser known retailers

QUOTABLE QUOTES

Richard Hawkes, Chief Executive of Scope, in *Society Guardian*, 13 July 2011

“What disabled people need at the moment is a minister for disabled people who is really fighting their corner, really understanding the issues that disabled people face, and acting as their champion in government. I don’t think that’s happening at the moment.”

Liz Sayce, Chief Executive of RADAR, *ibid*

“At the current rate of progress it would take until 2070 for the employment rate of disabled people to catch up with that for non-disabled people.” Optimistic?

Rupert Murdoch, News International, an apology, 16 July 2011

“Our business was founded on the idea that a free and open press should be a positive force in society.”

Matthew Engel, commenting on the domination of British newspapers by Rupert Murdoch, in *Tickle the Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press* (1996), pp 279 & 309

“It was a position offering enormous power to influence the nature and quality of both journalism and society; yet these were not subjects that interested him. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that at the heart of the Murdoch empire there was a vacuum, a moral void.”

“At the heart of Rupert Murdoch’s vast empire is nothing, because he believes in nothing.”

MOST HIGH STREET BUSINESSES ARE OFF-LIMITS TO PEOPLE USING HEARING AIDS

An article by Johanna Taylor of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, featured in the journal *Access by Design*, reports on a survey finding that 86 per cent of high street businesses do not have fully operational induction loops. As a result, services are inaccessible to the two million people in the UK who wear hearing aids.

Johanna Taylor can be contacted at campaigns@rnid.org.uk. *Access by Design* is produced by the Centre for Accessible Environments, 70 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL; tel/text: 020 7840 0125; e.mail: info@cae.org.uk. This superb journal is a rich source of information for anyone interested in access issues. The Spring

issue (no.126) includes articles on the implications of the Localism Bill on planning for inclusive design; good practice at the University of Leeds; facilitating access to the countryside; inclusive garden design; advances in accessibility in the tourism industry; a new British Standard Code of Practice for the provision of public toilets; and the impact of the Equality Act on the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants.

PHONE HACKING

Such has been the scale of this loathsome practice that it may be thought something of a put-down *not* to be on the Met's database of victims. As we noticed in our issue of July 2010, a committee of the DCMS reported as long ago as February 2010 that "there have been times when events have led the public and politicians to question the integrity of methods used by the press, and the competence of the PCC as an industry regulator." On illegal phone-hacking by the *News of the World*, the committee specifically observed: "Throughout we have repeatedly encountered an unwillingness to provide the detailed information we sought, claims of ignorance or lack of recall, and deliberate obfuscation." Yet it has taken nearly 18 months more, and effectively the revelations regarding the hacking of Milly Dowler's mobile phone, for the government to grasp this unsavoury nettle. Would it be right to sense that hitherto there has been a reluctance to upset good friends?

HELP WITH THE DIGITAL SWITCHOVER

Is it not a shade patronising to offer the help scheme only to those 'over 75 or eligible disabled'? Is it thought that age or infirmity renders people technically incompetent? Shouldn't help be available to *anyone* who needs it?

BULLFIGHTING AND BADGER CULLING

We expressed our hatred of blood sports in our issue of March 2009. But we did not know then that every year, under the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Union provides over 42 million euros to farms that breed bulls for bullfighting. The League Against Cruel Sports is running a campaign, Stop the Subsidies. They invite you to protest to the European Commission in London, either by post or through the League website at www.league.org.uk/subsidies.

Another dubious – scientifically dubious – policy is the government's intended cull of badgers. Ann Darnbrough, whose disability is the result of being given unpasteurised milk as a child, nevertheless asks you to add your name to the League's petition against a badger cull. Go to www.league.org.uk/badger

WE HATE NO. 44: KNIFE CRIME

Derek Kinrade

"Although we need to highlight the problem of knife crime in our society, we also need to give our young people better things to aspire to."

Brooke Kinsella: Tackling Knife Crime Together (February 2011)

The recent crime survey for England and Wales indicates that in 2010-11 the police recorded 32,714 serious offences involving a knife or sharp instrument. This is 3% down on 2009-10, which showed a fall of 7% from 2008-9. The figures are consistent with recent trends from comparable NHS hospital statistics. But in the case of homicides involving a knife or sharp instrument, whereas there was a fall of 13% from 2008-9 to 2009-10 (231 to 201), the total for 2010-11 rose by over 6% on the previous year (201 to 214). More than half of knife crime occurs in London, Manchester and the West Midlands.

These statistics are disappointing, given the effort that has been made to combat knife crime since the murder of Philip Lawrence in December 1995. Action was stepped up in 2004-5 when the Metropolitan Police launched Operation Blunt, following concerns raised by the Damilola Taylor Trust. Across London boroughs educational programmes were introduced, along with selective use of metal detection devices and the deployment of intensive stop and search in certain areas. This was followed in 2006 by an amnesty programme, resulting in the surrender of nearly 90,000 knives: an initiative that may have been counted a success save for the fact that knives inevitably remained a readily available weapon of choice and continued to be seen as a symbol of dominance and prestige: offering reputation among the disreputable. On 14 May 2008, following continued killings of young people, the Met initiated a second Operation Blunt. Over 290,000 stop and searches were carried out, resulting in more than 10,000 arrests and the confiscation of 5,400 knives. And on 5 June of that year the Home Office began phase 1 of the national Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP), which ran

until March 2009. Activities in selected areas again included intensive stop and search, work in schools, a range of local projects and media campaigning. But only 24 days after the launch, on the 29 June 2008, as though to deride the forces of law and order, the murder of 16-years-old Ben Kinsella raised public concern to new heights. Actress and author Brooke Kinsella, Ben's sister, took up the cause, and her recent report is perhaps the latest significant contribution towards the steps needed to eradicate knife crime. A second phase of TKAP, this time tackling both knife crime and other serious youth violence, ran from April 2009 to March 2010. Home Office Research Report 53 subsequently found "encouraging evidence" that serious youth violence had declined from 2007-8 to the end of March 2010, but this analysis was tempered by the fact that improvements in the non-TKAP areas were generally similar or greater in magnitude than those recorded in the 16 TKAP Phase II areas.

All of these initiatives have clearly had some impact in raising public consciousness, understanding of how interventions can best get across to vulnerable young people, and - along with more severe prison sentences - keeping a lid on villainy. But, as the crime survey statistics show, improvement has been limited and the mindset of violence among those who are prepared to settle scores, often petty, at the point of a knife remains a persistent cancer in our society.

Despite having been brought up in Toxteth during the Great Depression, I cannot say that I am close to understanding the vagaries of dissonant human nature, but I believe in frank and open discussion. Figures recently released by the Metropolitan Police in response to a Freedom of Information request (www.met.police.uk/foi/pdfs/disclosure_2011/july/2011050004143.pdf) suggest that in London black men are responsible for a high proportion of knife crime. They show that of people proceeded against in the year ended 31 March 2011 (whether or not convicted and leaving aside those of mixed ethnicity and 'not stated'), approximately 42% were black (more than three times the proportion of black people in London's population), 34% white, 11% Asian, Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani, and 3% Chinese.

Of course, these findings, based on self-definition, have to be approached with reserve, since they may reflect a bias in the racial groups targeted and apprehended. But there is enough to prompt some preliminary thoughts. While the evidence points to a particular problem in the black community, it dispels any notion that knife crime is exclusively black on black. The malaise clearly runs across racial groups. A repeated assertion is that the common link is poverty, and it is evident that such offences, as part of the drug scene and gang rites, are largely concentrated in disadvantaged localities. But this too is an over-simplification. Even in areas of extreme deprivation relatively few people go in for stabbing their fellow citizens. To be poor is not necessarily to be depraved and vicious. I am drawn to the thinking of Dr Richard Price (1723-91) who contended that intelligence is one of the requisites of practical morality, necessary to the perception of moral good and evil. Following this reasoning, the heart of the matter may be that the violence of gang mentality is primarily a product of immaturity, over reaction to perceived slights, boredom, macho conceit and stupidity. What I find truly amazing is that those who commit the most horrendous knife attacks do so despite the high probability of detection and a long prison sentence: they come across as their own worst enemies. If there is a cultural dimension it is one of youth rather than race. Unable to make a mark in the world by legitimate endeavour, educationally and socially disaffected, some young men sadly aspire to win kudos and 'street cred' by excelling in delinquency. If young black males are over represented in this chamber of horrors it is perhaps because we have so far all too often failed to engage their minds and inspire their ambition.

But I would like to end on an encouraging note: from my home town of Liverpool. There, *The Guardian* reports, Rob Jackson, a nurse clinician from one of the city's A&E departments, is bringing home to young people the realities of knife-related wounds. In the 18 months that he has been doing this work such injuries have decreased by 28 per cent. His chilling presentations are gruesome and his message is blunt: "If you carry knives or hang around with those who do, believe me, your luck will run out."