

News

Briefs

Couple attacked by gang of men

BANBRIDGE: Police are investigating an assault on a young couple at the weekend. The pair were assaulted early on Sunday morning by a group of males on the Downshire Road and were treated in hospital for minor injuries.

A PSNI spokesperson said the couple were assaulted close to the council offices and leisure centre in the town.

"The male sustained a fractured finger as well as bruising, cuts and swelling to his face and body. The female sustained a fractured right ankle and cuts to her leg and arm. Both attended hospital for treatment."

Police are keen to hear from anyone who may have seen a group of men at the bus stop or who have any information about the bus they were waiting to board. The number to call is 028 40662222 or 0845 600 8000.

Radio titans face off for Comic Relief

BELFAST: BBC Radio1's breakfast DJ Chris Moyles will team up with BBC Radio Ulster's Stephen Nolan at Broadcasting House today to present a "clash of the titans" in aid of Comic relief.

The Radio1 DJ arrives with his award-winning radio show in the Province as part of a week-long tour of the UK.

He will also be at the Odyssey Arena to offer wannabes the opportunity to showcase their talents alongside the breakfast team and celebrity guests.

Moyles' Red Nose Day Daily in 2005 raised £600,000 for the charity, which he hopes to top this year.

Cement blocks are thrown at lorries

BANBRIDGE: Police have appealed for information after cement blocks were thrown at three passing lorries in the Banbridge area last night.

The blocks were thrown off the Cascum Road Bridge over the A1, near the new shopping development, at 7pm and three vehicles were badly damaged.

No one was hurt in the incident. The PSNI has warned that it takes this kind of incident very seriously and that the guilty parties will be dealt with "robustly". Anyone with information can contact police on 0845 600 8000 or anonymously through the confidential freephone number 0800 555 111.

Mini digger stolen from building site

LONDONDERRY: A three tonne Volvo ECR 28 Mini Digger has been stolen from a building site. The digger, which is fitted with a full cab and a zero swing tail, was reported stolen from a building site at Lisnagelvin some time between 5pm on Friday and 6.15am on Saturday.

Police say it was on its trailer containing a semi quick hitch rock breaker, when it was stolen. Witnesses to the theft or anyone who noticed the digger being towed on roads in the area is asked to contact the police at Waterside.

Schools not fit for habitation – report

BY KATE CHAMBRE

k.chambre@newsletter.co.uk

AT LEAST half of Belfast's state primary schools are not fit for habitation never mind the modern day curriculum, a new report has revealed.

Out-dated and cramped, such are the appalling conditions of these schools that yesterday some were considering the prospect of amalgamation and even closure.

According to the report published yesterday by the Belfast Education and Library Board almost 10,000 empty desks are predicted in Belfast's controlled primary schools by 2017.

The report, Building Schools For the Future, cites the over-provision of school places coupled with the costs of sustaining and maintaining old schools as reasons for the present situation in the city's 45 controlled primary schools.

School buildings, 70 per cent of which were built before 1950, are not fit for purpose, rooms are too small and there insufficient resource and storage areas.

Specialist accommodation is out-date and cramped, it says, and conditions have become so bad that 25 schools operate composite classes.

Chairman of Belfast board, Jim Rodgers, told the News Letter that 42 per cent of available primary school places are unfilled and pupil numbers are predicted to drop by 34 per cent by 2017.

The same would occur in the post primary sector he said, adding: "The condition of many of the buildings renders them unfit for purpose and costly to maintain. We need to spend more money in the classrooms where it is most needed. Part of the difficulty is that the classrooms are too small and some are well below the current standard set by the Department of Education's building handbook."

"In the past five years we have rebuilt Lowwood Primary School and Cavehill Primary School and there are plans to have more new builds at the Boys' Model and Girls' Model at a cost of £50 million."

Listing a series of other new builds across the city, Mr Rodgers said: "What you have to also bear in mind is that in east Belfast we are going to build eight new schools and in west Belfast another three."

"Our problem is that funds provided by the Government will only be granted when rigorous cases are put forward which are financially responsible and reflect population trends."

Stressed that no political agenda was involved he said the board would look closely at the findings and then decide on the best way forward.

"I would urge all interested parties to take time out and give us their views as they are crucial to this process," he added.

Meanwhile, the National Association of Headteachers in Northern Ireland welcomed the news that the BELB is entering into a consultation period with all stakeholders to identify a way forward.

A spokeswoman said it hoped politicians would not lose sight of the child and would focus on what is best for all the Province's children.

"We need a system which is fit for purpose, which will meet the economic and social challenges of Northern Ireland and will ensure that every child in Northern Ireland is given the opportunity to achieve their full potential."

"We need a system which will imbue each child with the self-confidence and self-esteem which will enable them to meet with self-assurance the opportunities and challenges of life."

The Association also paid tribute to Sir George Bain's recent report on sustainable schools, which it hoped would provide an education system that was second to none.

Spy may not testify at Omagh bomb case



CARNAGE: the scene of the Omagh bomb in August 1998, in which 29 people died

AN AMERICAN 'superspy' who infiltrated the ranks of the Real IRA may not be giving evidence in a multi-million pound compensation case brought by the families of those killed and injured in the Omagh bomb.

David Rupert, a trucking company boss turned double agent, is living in hiding under an FBI witness protection programme in the US.

He was due to give evidence from America, via video link, in a £14 million civil case taken by the Omagh victims' families. But yesterday Belfast High Court was told the FBI

BY ASHLEIGH WALLACE

is no longer willing to co-operate with the procedure due to the perceived risk this would pose both to Mr Rupert's security and his health.

Five men believed to have been involved in the Omagh bombing on August 15, 1998, are being sued by victims' families. They are convicted RIRA leader Michael McKeivitt, 55, from Blackrock, Co Louth, Colm Murphy, 55, from Ravendale, Dundalk, who was sentenced to 14 years in the Republic in 2002 for terrorist offences, Liam Campbell, 42, from Mount Pleasant, Dundalk, Seamus Daly, 37, from Culloville, Co Monaghan and Seamus McKenna, 53, from Silverbridge, Newry.

McKeivitt is currently serving a 20-year sentence in Portlaoise Jail, Dublin, having been convicted of running the Real IRA after Mr Rupert gave evidence before the Special Criminal Court in Dublin.

Mr Rupert was due to give evidence at the Omagh compensation case by video link after it was argued attending the hearing in Belfast would put his life at risk.

During a preliminary issues hearing yesterday, Lord Brennan QC, on behalf of the Omagh families, said the FBI had refused to co-operate and Mr Rupert was "in a protective arrangement of some type in America".

He said Mr Rupert's evidence was "of central importance" and the matter was "a source of extreme concern to our clients".

Expressing surprise Mr Justice Morgan said the court had been busy making technical arrangements and he hoped the civil action will be heard later in the year.