

Info Desk

Weather

Tonight It will be dry with clear periods, but becoming cloudier from the west during the course of the night. A risk of light rain in western areas towards morning. There will be a light to moderate south-westerly wind. Mild with temperatures above average. Low 13-16C (55-61F).

Tomorrow Mainly cloudy during the morning, with patchy rain. This rain may become heavier later, before clearing away south-eastwards, leaving sunny spells. Moderate westerly winds. High 17-20C (63-68F).

Air Pollution: Rural: 3 (Low) Town & Cities: 3 (Low) Roadside: 3 (Low) Low (1-3) Moderate (4-6) High (7-9) Very High (10)

Hours of Darkness: 8.21pm to 5.55am. Data supplied by the Science and Engineering Research Council.

Chemists

AUDLEY: Co-op, Church Street, 5.30-6.30pm.
BIDDULPH Co-op, Well Street, 8.30-7.30pm.
CHEADLE: Ratcliffe, High Street, 6-6.30pm.
CONGLETON: Boots, Bridge Street, 6-7pm.
CREWE: Williams, Nantwich Road, 9-8pm.
ECCLESHALL: Eccleshall Pharmacy, High Street, 5.30-6.30pm.
ENDON: McMullen, Station Road, 5.30-6.30pm.
GOLDENHILL: Goldenhill Pharmacy, Anne Street, 5.30-6.30pm.
GREAT HAYWOOD: Haywood, Trent Close, 5.30-6.30pm.
HARTSHILL: Hartshill Pharmacy, Hartshill Road, 5.30-6pm.
NANTWICH: Williams, High Street, 9am-5.30pm.
SHELTON: Lloyds, Stoke Road, 9am-10pm.
TEAN: Lawton, High Street, 5.30-6.30pm.
UTTOXETER: Uttoxeter Health Stores, Balance Street Health Centre, 5.30-6.30pm.

Helpline

North Staffs Dyslexia Association. Information, guidance, support and training for everyone with an interest and involvement in children and adults with dyslexia. Helpline number: 01782 527166.

Chemical Dependence Anonymous. Do you have a problem with drink/drugs addiction? Want help? Meeting is held every Thursday, 7.30pm until 9pm at the Arch Daycare Centre, Regent Road, Hanley (round the back, up the stairs). More details from 07837908125. We are a self supporting group through our own voluntary contributions.

Echo Group: Social support group for people who self-harm. Every Monday from 1pm to 4pm and Wednesday 10am to 1pm. Telephone: 07876 161356.

Women's Rape and Sexual Violence Service. Confidential counselling for any woman or girl who has been raped or sexually assaulted, whether recently or in the past. Tel: 01782 221000 or info@wrsvs.org.uk.

Assist 2000 Family Support Group: A local self help group offering support, understanding and information to the families of drug and alcohol users. Tel: Anne 01782 502524 (evenings and weekends) or Anne/Maggie on 01782 425100 (office hours).

Druglink Family and Friends Helpline: Weekdays Monday to Friday 5.30pm to 9.30pm; Saturdays 2pm to 6pm. Tel: 01782 280776. Confidential helpline.

Contact us

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Petition to shut down IT firm may destroy chances of employees claiming their unpaid wages and benefits

Is this D-day for staff's battle with 'Captain Cad'?

BY DAVID ELKS
david.elks@thesentinel.co.uk

CREDITORS across the Potteries were today seeking to shut down part of Paul Hackney's business empire as they try to claw back thousands of pounds he owes them.

Festival Park architect Hulme Upright Manning and furniture-maker Little Dreams have jointly lodged a petition to wind up Abuse IT which traded in Hanley until its sudden closure in May.

A successful order would see liquidators appointed to sell-off the company's remaining assets.

This would also allow other creditors to recoup some of their losses incurred after Mr Hackney – dubbed by some former associates as “Captain Cad” because of his claims of being a former commissioned Army officer – shut the business. But the move could scupper a mass compensation claim by around 38 employees who want two months' unpaid wages and benefits totalling at least £100,000. Mr Hackney has previously pledged to pay this money.

Hanley law firm KJD had been instructed by one of the two firms to recover an undisclosed sum before deciding to seek a winding-up order.

KJD associate Martin Cork said his clients had already adjourned the petition to give Mr Hackney more time to find the money.

Mr Cork said: “Those funds have not come to fruition, so the hearing for the petition is set to go ahead.”

The petition going before a Manchester court comes 10 weeks after The Sentinel reported how the company had mysteriously ceased trading while owing dozens of workers two months' wages and unpaid holiday entitlements – estimated to be worth around £100,000.

A number of creditors involved in fitting out the company's premises in Old Hall Street and staff recruitment have claimed to be owed a further £150,000.

Mr Hackney has told The Sentinel the company was forced to close after he and his wife had death threats.

The 30-year-old entrepreneur claimed he, his wife and their son were forced to leave their home in south Cheshire and were under police protection. Staffordshire Police are continuing to investigate.

If today's petition is granted, the Official Receiver will manage the company's liquidation.

This usually involves the appointment of insolvency practitioners to sell the assets of the business to raise money for creditors, who are also likely to include staff who lost their jobs.

The private limited status of Abuse IT means director Mr Hackney will not be liable to any creditors over and above the business's available assets.

Mr Hackney will also be able to continue running other companies where he is a director, including ADP Wireless, Hackney Logistics, ADP Mobile Solutions and Hackney Group Holdings.

Neither representatives from Hulme Upright Manning, which was project manager of the office refurbishment, or Stoke-based Little Dreams would comment.

Today's hearing could damage efforts by staff to claim wages, holiday pay and expenses through a mass claim to an Employment Tribunal because if Abuse IT is wound up there may be less money to allocate to claims.

However, workers can still claim limited cash from a Government fund to help those affected by companies becoming insolvent.

Many of the claims are individual although a block petition has been lodged on behalf of 24 former Abuse IT workers.

The Sentinel has tracked down 12



CONTROVERSY: Paul Hackney, pictured in March, inside his Hanley call centre. Inset, how The Sentinel reported the

former workers who have lodged claims for two months' pay, as well as a notice period and holiday entitlement.

It is understood some staff have made additional claims for expenses.

Ian Tabinor, a worker who has set up a new firm, a2bIT, in Old Hall Street, Hanley, has lodged a claim.

A Tribunal Service spokesman said she could not confirm details of any case pending a hearing date. A period of conciliation is allowed between claimant and employee to try to settle the dispute.

It is understood most of the claims are against Abuse IT, although at least one has been lodged against Microtoft, another of Mr Hackney's companies.

Meanwhile, HM Revenue and Customs has been informed of claims from former staff about doc-

uments sent to those who opted to take redundancy.

The Sentinel has spoken to several staff who have received a P45 and two pay slips for June and July. The P45 should state how much an individual has been paid and the contributions towards tax and National Insurance.

However, workers say the form they received appears to include figures for June and July – money which Mr Hackney accepts have not been paid.

A spokesman for HMRC said an offence may be committed if a P45 does not tally with actual contributions and urged concerned workers to contact their local tax office.

She said: “If a document says you have paid, say, £6,000 in contributions, and you've only paid £3,000, then that is falsification, which is an offence.”

MOD pours scorn on deluded 'Walter Mitty'

PAUL Hackney claimed to be a former captain in the Royal Artillery who was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Bravery.

But the Ministry of Defence today smashed the illusion by saying: “He seems to be a Walter Mitty character.”

Mr Hackney says that he joined the service as a junior soldier before going to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst for commissioned officer training.

He said he was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Bravery for services in active operational theatre.

Paul Hackney told The Sentinel: “I was first a soldier then an officer. I attained the rank of Lance Bombardier.”

But when asked if he reached the

mystery closure of his ADP Solutions firm. Meanwhile, the MoD has questioned claims he made about his military past, saying: “He seems to be a Walter Mitty character.”

rank of captain he failed to answer the question.

MOD checks show he only reached the lower rank of Lance Bombardier in the Royal Artillery.

A spokesman said Mr Hackney did not attend Sandhurst and didn't receive the Queen's Commendation for Bravery. He joined the Army in 1996 and carried out three tours of duty in the Balkans and received the NATO medal with the Kosovo clasp.

An MOD spokesman said: “These medals are given out for service, but it is possible to receive them even if you were sat behind a desk for three months. We do not like people who make up stories about services in the armed forces because it tends to discredit those who serve.”

Computer giant probes 'passing off' claim

AMERICAN computer company Microsoft is to investigate after Paul Hackney formed a firm called Microtoft which his staff say cashed in on the U.S. software giant's name.

The maker of the Windows operating system is to probe the firm, which is registered at the premises of Abuse IT in Old Hall Street, with Mr Hackney listed as a director.

The Sentinel has received a copy of a sales script which instructed staff on what to say when cold-calling potential customers.

Former team manager Mark Thorpe confirmed he

was asked to draw up a sales script for outbound telephone workers at the company which was set up in March. He said: “The idea was to call and say you were from Microtoft, but to say it so fast it sounded like Microsoft.”

The Sentinel has spoken to another three workers who all confirmed they were told to cold call using the Microtoft name.

The sales script has the first line: “Hi, can I speak to the

person who was responsible for purchasing IT from Microtoft previously?”

Dr Michael Serivan, partner at Hanley legal firm KJD, was unable to comment on the case, but said legal steps could be taken if a firm “passed itself off” as another. He said: “A mark similar to a registered trademark in relation to identical or similar goods may be infringing if there is confusion or the likelihood of confusion.”

He said a trademark infringement, if there is confusion or the likelihood of confusion.”

New firm on the premises

A NEW company called a2bIT is now using the premises of Paul Hackney's business empire in Old Hall Street.

One employee, Ian Tabinor, has joined forces with two colleagues to run the new company from the registered address of a number of companies of which Mr Hackney is a director.

The Sentinel can reveal Mr Hackney also registered the company's website, www.a2bit.co.uk.

Mr Tabinor, who had been a retail manager for 10 years before working for one of Mr Hackney's companies, said the aim was to sell IT hardware and peripherals through the store and over the internet.

He said: “The company still owes us money, but there's still a business opportunity here. I don't see the point of sitting back and saying ‘where's my money?’ I want to try to make the business work.”

A business card given to The Sentinel at the store gives details of the www.a2bit.co.uk website. A check of the domain name shows the website was registered on July 7 to Paul Hackney.

The Sentinel has since received an email from a2bit.co.uk to confirm that Mr Tabinor has applied to have details of the site transferred.

An earlier statement issued by Mr Hackney said: “The only link is that they are renting the premises. I was approached by a former employee about the possibility of utilising the newly shopfitted shop. I have agreed for him to set up his own business using this space.

This week he added: “The domain name was purchased by me and has now been sold to a2bit.”

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY: The building in Old Hall Street, Hanley.



In brief

UTTOXETER: An eight-year-old girl needed hospital treatment after the bicycle she was riding collided with a car.

The incident on Kingfisher Way in Uttoxeter happened at around 6.20pm yesterday. The girl was taken by air ambulance to the University of North Staffordshire Hospital's Royal Infirmary, where her condition is described as poorly. The car driver was unhurt.

Police are appealing for witnesses to contact PC Shepherd at Uttoxeter on 08453 30 20 10.

BURSLLEM: An elderly woman will need to be re-housed after her council flat kitchen was gutted in an accidental fire.

She was suffering from smoke inhalation and received oxygen at the scene, but did not need hospital treatment.

The incident on Furlong Lane, Burslem, happened yesterday at around 3pm. Crews from Burslem and Kidsgrove fire stations attended and brought the fire under control by 3.20pm.

BARLASTON: ‘Staffordshire Tales of Mystery and Murder’ is the title of a talk as part of local history month at the village library later this month.

The talk will be given by writer David Bell at the library on Monday, September 18 at 7.30pm.

Tickets are £2 including refreshments and places are limited, so book early to avoid disappointment.

Also at the library, on Friday September 22 at 11.30am, Keith Piggott will be giving a demonstration of the longbow. This is a free event but again places are limited.

For further information, telephone Barlaston library on 01782 372703 or email barlaston.library@staffordshire.gov.uk.

STOKE-ON-TRENT: Two cars were targeted by vandals at Harold Street, Smallthorne. They bent back doors to get inside the Volkswagen Polo and Fiat Cinquecento. Police say one stereo system was snatched.

A laptop, sports bag and jacket were also stolen from a Renault Megane which was parked in a driveway at Royal Way, Baddeley Green.

All three incidents happened during Thursday night and the early hours of Friday morning.

Would-be car thieves also tried, but failed, to pull steering wheels off two Vauxhall Corsas at Chell Heath Road, Chell Heath, during the same night.

STOCKTON BROOK: A burglar forced his way into a house at Leek New Road through a set of French windows.

Keys to a Volvo convertible were snatched from the kitchen and the vehicle, which was parked outside, was stolen.

It is not clear whether the thief escaped with other valuables from inside the house during the raid on Thursday night.

TUNSTALL: Three bogus officials targeted a woman in her 70s at Clanway Street. Police say it is the third time the pensioner has received a visit from comen in recent weeks. They claimed to represent the water board but she refused to let them in. It happened at 11.30am on Thursday.