

Police worker jailed for passing on information to criminal gang

A former Cheshire Constabulary staff member has been sentenced to three years and nine months' imprisonment for using her position to pass on information to criminals.

Following an Independent Office for Police Conduct directed investigation, conducted by the National Crime Agency on behalf of Cheshire Constabulary, Natalie Mottram was sentenced on 3rd November at Liverpool Crown Court.

The 24-year-old was based in Warrington and on secondment to the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit as an intelligence analyst at the time of the offences.

She had pleaded guilty at Liverpool Crown Court to three counts which included securing unauthorised access to computer material, perverting the course of justice and misconduct in public office.

Concerns about her actions were identified by the NCA as part of Operation Venetic, the UK law enforcement response to the takedown of encrypted communications platform EncroChat.

Evidence uncovered during the investigation showed that between 1st April and 12th June 2020, Mottram shared confidential intelligence information without lawful justification for doing so. Between 1st and 30th April 2020, she alerted members of a criminal network to the fact that law enforcement agencies were able to access the encrypted data of the EncroChat

communications service.

IOPC director of major investigations Steve Noonan said: "Disclosing confidential information without reasonable excuse or justification can significantly damage the trust and confidence that members of the public place in the police.

"Mottram's behaviour was audacious, corrupt and criminal. Her actions — in using her position of power to assist criminal activity rather than clamp down on it — were a complete betrayal of the public's trust and have no place in policing.

"Her lack of judgement and professionalism was a serious breach of the trust placed in the police by the public. The investigation ensured she was held accountable for her actions, and she now has a criminal record as a result.

"The evidence we have seen points towards this being an isolated case of police corruption on this scale, but the outcome sends a clear message to any officer who conducts themselves in such a way — they face serious consequences and will be held to account.

"This investigation is testament to how seriously the IOPC, law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system takes this kind of behaviour, and I am grateful to all those involved in ensuring justice was served today."

Jonathan Kay, (39), to whom Mottram passed secret police intelligence, was sentenced to 30 months in prison for perverting the court of justice.

Watchdog finds nothing wrong with admissions policy

The local government ombudsman will not investigate a complaint about the council's school admissions appeal panel's handling of an appeal against the refusal to offer a child a place at their preferred school.

The watchdog said that this was because there was not enough evidence of fault to warrant further investigation.

A report from the ombudsman said that a Mr X had applied for a place for his child Y in year 10 at school Z from September. This was because he and his family were due to move to the area from elsewhere.

School Z already had more pupils moving to year 10 than its published admissions numbers allowed so Cheshire East Council refused Mr X's application.

It sent him a copy of the school's case explaining the reasons for refusal and setting out why it had decided not to admit Y to the school.

Mr X appealed against the decision as he did not agree with it. He raised concerns about Y's education, travel to school, his wife's medical conditions and issues with

travelling on public transport.

The panel considered Mr X's appeal but accepted the argument that admitting Y to the school would prejudice the provision of efficient education and the efficient use of resources.

The panel was satisfied the admissions arrangements complied with the law and were correctly and impartially applied in Y's case.

It considered Mr X's reasons for wanting Y to attend school Z and balanced these against the prejudice to the school from admitting another pupil. It found there was nothing significant enough to outweigh the prejudice to the school, so it refused Mr X's appeal.

Mr X was unhappy with the panel's decision and said it was unfair.

But the ombudsman said: "I have not seen enough evidence of fault in the way the panel reached the decision to warrant further investigation. The panel properly considered the concerns Mr X put forward and his reasons for wanting Y to attend school Z and I have seen no basis for us to question its judgement."

Shoppers are urged to spend Totally Locally

By Kelly Mattison

If every Congletonian spent just £5 per week at independent shops and businesses rather than online or at supermarkets and national chains, more than £7.3m would go back into the town each year.

Town councillors were told that this would be a "massive boost" for the high street and "fantastic" for Congleton as they agreed to support a national campaign called Totally Locally.

The campaign is about encouraging local people to spend at least some money in local shops, "which in turn creates local jobs and makes the high street a better place to be".

Outlining Totally Locally

during a recent meeting of the Community Committee, Jackie MacArthur, the town council's marketing and communities manager and deputy chief officer, said: "We have played around with it a bit before, but we haven't been able to find retailers that have had the time to become town champions.

"This must very much be driven by shops. It's not something the town council can do for people.

"What's exciting this time is the team behind Congleton Market Quarter have latched on to Totally Locally and want to spread it across the whole town.

"And they've got a design agency who are willing to do a lot of work for them pro bono to create content, videos, films

to encourage people to come into Congleton," she said.

Four councillors and around 30 businesspeople attended a "soft launch" last month at the town hall to find out more and they were said to be eager to see the project progress.

A small steering group has been set up, which will include Rachel McCarthy, town centre and events officer.

The town council believes it can add value to the project through its work with Congleton's shops. Ms MacArthur stressed that the scheme should be "genuinely open to all independent businesses in Congleton".

Coun David Brown said he "totally supports" the campaign and hoped that his town hall colleagues would,

too. He referred to a previous Shop Local scheme introduced in Congleton some years ago which he said, "lost impetus".

Explaining Shop Local he said: "You could take your car parking ticket and shops would give you your money back if you spent it in there. That was quite successful for two or three years but then it just lost impetus. So, the thing I would say about this is 'Yes, let's go for it' but it's essential we get everybody involved. We just need to make sure everyone buys into it."

The town council has applied to the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund to help finance some additional events and marketing materials for the first 18 months of Totally Locally Congleton.

Praise for head at school requiring improvements

By Kelly Mattison

A headteacher has been praised by one of her school governors for the "big strides" she has made, following an Ofsted inspection.

Although Daven Primary School in Congleton was rated overall as "requires improvement" after September's two-day inspection, it was ranked as "good" for overall effectiveness in relation to personal development and early years provision.

Headteacher Jenny Gosling only took charge less than three weeks before Ofsted's visit and governor Coun Mark Hill, who sits on Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths Parish Council, said the good ratings were down to her.

"She's only been there since September and she's made lots of improvements, that's why it's got two goods. It's down to her. It's a glowing report.

"The school has such potential. For two items to go to good, that's quite a big step."

The inspectors said that pupils, including children in the early years, were "happy to attend Daven Primary School" and that "everyone is welcome in this caring school".

However, the inspectors found that Daven, which is part of the Learning Partnership Academies Trust, required improvement in quality of education, behaviour and attitudes and leadership and management.

They also found that some pupils at the New Street school did not achieve as well as they should in several subjects. "This is due to weaknesses in how the curriculum is delivered. As a result, many pupils have gaps in their knowledge. These pupils do not have sufficiently secure foundations on which to

build new learning," said the inspectors.

Ms Gosling, (32), said: "It's disappointing that we've got requires improvement, but I've got to remember I was headteacher for 17 days. I got the call for Ofsted on my 16th day of headship which was quite daunting."

The report said that most pupils conducted themselves appropriately around the school site. In the main, pupils showed respect and they were polite towards one another. However, the poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils hindered the learning of their peers.

The report added: "Pupils benefit from a well-designed enrichment programme. They enjoy the varied range of opportunities available to them beyond the academic curriculum, such as after-school clubs and residential trips. This helps pupils to develop their talents and interests."

Inspectors said that with the support of the trust, the school had started to address the weaknesses in the quality of education. For example, the school has ensured that teachers are clear about the knowledge that pupils should learn. "Nevertheless, current pupils do not progress through the curriculum consistently well. This is because the delivery of the curriculum is not as effective as it should be," said the report. Training for staff has been prioritised.

Inspectors also found that in some subjects, teachers did not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to recap and recall prior learning.

In the early years, however, the curriculum was more effective. This was because the school had clearly defined the building blocks of knowledge that children must acquire to be ready for the challenges of

year one.

Staff in the early years developed children's personal, social and emotional skills effectively. "This helps children to behave well," said the report.

Inspectors said that in the reception year, staff were equipped well to deliver learning successfully.

They found that while reading was a high priority, the school had not ensured that the less confident readers in key stages one and two received the support that they needed to catch up quickly with their reading knowledge.

The inspectors found that leaders, with support from the trust, have developed a "clear and ambitious vision" for the school. Changes made by trust leaders enabled the local governing body to hold the school to account more effectively.

Ms Gosling said she was "over the moon" with the two areas of improvement in early years provision and personal development.

"The good in early years is amazing, because that's where your child starts school; we know our provision is good. And it's only going to get better because we've got a fantastic practitioner in there. Honestly, she's amazing. She's the most devoted member of staff I've

ever worked with in my career. She was here all summer holidays."

And Ms Gosling said the school's improved rating in personal development was a "credit to the hard work we do".

"We try and go above and beyond for our children, and Ofsted recognises that all of those things like the clubs, the trips, the residential are great for our pupils."

Coun Hill described Ms Gosling as "lovely" and said he was "excited" for the future of the establishment.

He added: "As a councillor I hear people say 'We've got all these new houses and no doctors, no school places, no this, no that.' Well, we've got 60 places available at the school, so I think this is a good news story for Congleton."

Inspectors will return to Daven in around a year's time to monitor progress.

Ms Gosling said: "I believe in that visit they will up us to good because of everything we are putting in place.

"The teachers here are astounding, and the children here are amazing. We just want the community to come and see what we're doing."

She added: "I know I'm the right person to get this school to good."

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