



ISSUE 46
August 2013

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Publisher
Citizen Media Ltd
Registered in England & Wales
No. 6948834

Registered Office
9 Perseverance Works
38 Kingsland Road
London E2 8DD

Hackney Citizen® is a
registered trademark

Printers
Mortons Media Group Ltd
Media Centre, Morton Way
Horncastle
Lincolnshire LN9 6JR

Acclaimed 'superhead' suspended

Investigation 'could scupper bid for academy status'

Annalies Winny

Superhead Greg Wallace's shock suspension could wreck a bid by five Hackney schools to free themselves from local authority control.

It emerged late last month that Mr Wallace had been suspended amid claims he awarded an IT contract to Tony Zangoura, a man with whom he has a close personal relationship.

The financial and staffing powers of the Best Start Federation - comprising London Fields, Woodberry Down, Burbage, Mandeville and Whitmore schools - were also frozen.

The five Best Start Federation



Suspended: Executive Principal of the Best Start Federation Greg Wallace

schools all fall under the remit of Executive Principal Mr Wallace, whose suspension follows an investigation by

Hackney Council into management practices at the Federation.

Currently all five schools operate within Hackney Council's Learning Trust, which gives the Town Hall the right to intervene in matters of school management.

However, the Best Start Federation governing body is currently working to convert all five schools into a Multi-Academy Trust.

If the Federation is successful, its budget will be devolved entirely to the Department for Education, making it unaccountable to the local authority.

Greg Wallace had been working toward this goal, and the intended conversion date was 1 May 2013.

Jane Kemsley, Best Start Federation's acting vice chair of governors, said: "The investigation has put this on hold. It might well stop it. We don't know."

All of the schools run by Mr

Wallace have been celebrated for their improvements, and he was singled out for praise on several occasions by Education Secretary Michael Gove.

The Federation's governors say they have asked Mr Gove to "intervene".

A Hackney Council spokeswoman refused to comment on Mr Wallace's pay terms while on suspension, or on the details of the governing body's involvement.

Tony Zangoura is the director of C2 Technology Ltd - the company at the centre of the controversy.

The *Hackney Citizen* has discovered that Mr Wallace was a secretary of this company from 1999 until 2004.

Note: The editor of the Hackney Citizen, Keith Magnum, was a governor of the Best Start Federation until October 2010. While on the governing body he was unaware of Mr Wallace's personal relationship with Tony Zangoura.



Ghost-train busters: TSSA campaigners protesting at Hackney Wick station

Rail campaigners warn of 'ghost trains' spectre

Adam Barnett

Travelling by train from Hackney could mean taking 'ghost trains' thanks to a government push to reduce railway staff, campaigners say.

Members of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) held a demonstration outside Hackney Wick station last month after Transport for London (TfL) decided to remove guards from London Overground trains.

TSSA Community Organiser Angela Khodeir said the station is at risk of further staff cuts due to its low revenue compared with larger stations.

TfL's decision follows the government's McNulty report, which

looked into how transport services could provide "efficiency and value for money".

It recommended guards be removed from trains and ticket officers be replaced by ticket machines at stations.

Ms Khodeir said: "The staff at our station are essential and we will not allow them to be cut."

TfL's London Rail Jonathan Fox, Director of TfL London Rail, said: "The new arrangements are the same as those we are already successfully using on 60 per cent of the network."

He said technology in place across London Overground meant a conductor is no longer needed to ensure passengers' safety.

Full story at hackneycitizen.co.uk

Town Hall rejects rival neighbourhood forums

'Major tensions' cited as reason for council's decision

Adam Barnett

Proposals for two competing neighbourhood forums in North Hackney have been rejected by Hackney Council following an intense battle between campaigners.

But the sometimes bitter conflict looks set to flare up yet again as one of the groups involved now plans to lodge a new application with the Town Hall.

The row over the Stamford Hill Neighbourhood Forum, floated under the Localism Act as a means of allowing residents more control over planning decisions, led to lobby group Hackney Planning Watch (HPW) setting up its own rival forum, the North Hackney Neighbourhood Forum, in order to wreck the plans of the first.

At a meeting on 22 July both the original forum and its rival were rejected by the council's cabinet due to their size and for creating "major tensions in the community".

Hackney cabinet members instead proposed a council-led Neighbourhood Action Plan to address the needs of the area on matters like school play facilities and housing.

The organisers of the Stamford Hill Neighbourhood Forum have made a new application for a smaller part of north Hackney.

HPW hailed the cabinet's decision as a victory.

Jane Holgate, spokesperson for Hackney Planning Watch, said: "We think it is a very responsible decision by the council."

However, the group said it would continue to campaign against the new Stamford Hill forum application.

Ms Holgate said: "It is completely led by current and former Tory councillors who are trying to create a power base for themselves in the north of the borough."

Councillor Simche Steinberger, who represents the Conservative Party on the forum, said: "I am personally very disappointed that the application did not go through."

"I hope that the new one is accepted."

The cabinet's report said: "It is evident that the publication of the two neighbourhood forum proposals has raised major tensions in the community."



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