

# Public to have say on fire service changes

## Oil giant stole my promotion idea, alleges businessman

OIL-giant Shell's successful Smart card customer loyalty scheme was "pinched" from a confidential idea put forward by the man behind many of its earlier promotions, a High Court judge heard yesterday.

In a David-and-Goliath legal battle, one-man think-tank John Donovan, 52, is suing the petrol giant for millions of pounds over its alleged misuse of confidential information and its refusal to credit him as creator of the scheme. Shell says the idea came from a different source and is counter-claiming damages against Suffolk man Mr Donovan's company, Don Marketing, for breach of a confidentiality agreement.

Geoffrey Cox, counsel for Mr Donovan, told Mr Justice Laddie in London that Shell had approached him in 1989 to come up with ideas to "jazz up" its flagging Collect and Select free gift promotion and suggest a long-term replacement.

Mr Donovan, from Bradfield Combust, near Bury St Edmunds, devised a joint loyalty card scheme under which Shell would join forces with a select consortium of other major retailers - all in different non-competing fields to avoid conflict of interest - so that customers could collect credit points and claim their free gifts far more quickly.

In 1990, said Mr Cox, Shell took an option to develop the plan in the future under usual terms of confidentiality which had governed its past dealings with Mr Donovan, and in 1997 launched the Smart card, incorporating his ideas.

But when Mr Donovan stepped forward to claim payment for his contribution to the massively successful promotion, no money was forthcoming.



LAWSUIT: John Donovan

Shell's witnesses seemed to have developed "corporate amnesia" about the information disclosed to them in 1990, said Mr Cox. "You may get the impression from those witnesses that Mr Donovan was treated to some extent as one of the general run of nuisances who would pester the company with information of no value," he told the judge.

"In fact, Mr Donovan had a long, trusted and successful record with Shell as an adviser on promotions dating back to the early 1980s."

Mr Donovan's evidence would show that his idea had been "pinched", said Mr Cox. The court hearing, set for five days, is the culmination of a long-running campaign by Mr Donovan and his 82-year-old father Alfred for a fair deal from Shell.

THE future of the fire service in Suffolk is in the hands of the public, after councillors agreed to put planned changes to the county's fire cover out for public consultation.

The radical proposals, which were revealed by the EADT last week, will now be scrutinised in public with residents having the chance to make their feelings on the plans known.

But the battlelines have already been drawn in the fire cover review, with Woodbridge Town Council, who could lose their retained station in the future, pledging to fight all the way and complementing the EADT-backed campaign in Sudbury against threatened cuts.

Woodbridge mayor Cliff Cocker is calling on everyone who feels strongly about the proposed changes to let their feelings be known.

He has also had an item added to the agenda of the next town council meeting stating they will oppose any attempt by Suffolk County Council to close Woodbridge station.

"The people in Woodbridge have these services and they don't see why they should lose them. The people who I have spoken to are all in favour of keeping the station."

County councillors have expressed concerns that the public will not get involved with the process in the light of apathy from residents to the first attempt at involving the public in the decision-making process last year.

Attempts by the county council to gauge public opinion about their budget in November were a failure, with only 60 replies to a questionnaire, including just 10 from their 24,000 staff.

Tory county councillor Simon Bestow, stressed: "The consultation has got to be very good, it has got to be excellent, in previous years it has failed. I hope we get the fire service union with us."

Ros Scott of the Lib Dems added: "People's perception of their well being is as important as the actual situation. It is always difficult with the

by ADAM FLINTER

fire service as it is an emotive subject."

Labour's Bryony Rudkin, added: "It is not just about attending fires, it is the other things such as education. Education will save lives, we should make sure that people know and understand that."

Among the more controversial aspects of the fire review are proposals to move Sudbury's four wholetime firefighters to Haverhill, and downgrade the station to full retained status.

Other fire stations face the threat of closure if the review is implemented. Woodbridge station will have an uncertain future if fire cover is moved from Colchester Road in Ipswich to Kesgrave, while the Wrentham station and Clifton Road, Lowestoft, are under threat in the event of the current Normanshurst Station in the town being moved.

The public consultation exercise, which will start in the next few weeks, will include hi-tech ways of getting feedback such as receiving comments via the county council's website, as well as from a series of public meetings and meetings with the fire service and other emergency services.

After the public has had its say, the plans will be brought back to the executive committee before being submitted to the Home Office for approval.

## WEST SUFFOLK Briefing

### Driver cut free by firefighters

FIREFIGHTERS cut a driver from her car after an accident early yesterday morning.

Katherine Watts, 21, of Soham Cambridgeshire, suffered minor injuries after her Citroen Saxo left the B1102 between Freckenham and Worlington.

She was taken to West Suffolk Hospital in Bury St Edmunds and released after treatment.

The car was the only vehicle involved in the accident which was attended by fire crews from Bury St Edmunds, Mildenhall and Newmarket.

### MP takes up ditch issue

West Suffolk MP Richard Spring is asking a council to investigate a tenant's complaint about a drainage ditch near her home.

The MP has written to St Edmundsbury Borough Council after visiting Margaret Upson's council-owned bungalow at Larks Close, Haverhill.

He says it is not obvious how deep the ditch in her front garden is and raises concerns about the dangers posed especially in the summer when the area is overgrown.

The MP writes: "There are many children in the area and she is fearful that one of them will fall into this open ditch and be injured."

### Car owners warned

Police have warned car owners in Brandon to be on their guard after three vehicles were broken into in Riverside Way and Leamon Court on Monday night.

## 100 evacuated in roof blaze at sport centre

A HUNDRED people held to be evacuated from a leisure centre as fire crews rushed to tackle a blaze which broke out in the roof yesterday.

Staff at Haverhill Leisure Centre moved quickly to put well drilled fire safety procedures into operation, after a lifeguard spotted smoke at about 5pm. Senior staff found a fire burning in the roof.

The fire service was alerted, and the 100 plus people using the centre, including swimmers and gymnasts were evacuated.

Within minutes two fire crews from Haverhill arrived, soon backed by engines from Linton, Wickhambrook and Clare. A forward control vehicle from Bury St Edmunds and a turntable ladder from Cambridge also attended. A crew from Newmarket was put on standby after fears that flammable materials in the roof could send the blaze out of control.

It is believed about six of the 40 firefighters entered the roof area with breathing apparatus and quickly extinguished the fire, which had spread over a 50sq metres, above the dance studio.

Assistant Divisional Officer Carl Francis said: "When the first two crews arrived there were certainly worries the fire had the potential to spread further. The cause of the fire was last night unknown."

The centre was open again within a few hours. Manger Eric Armstrong said only one squash court, sunbeds and the dance studio were out of action.

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