

Press release: Company conned small businesses to sponsor sham drug campaigns

Data (Northern) Limited was wound up in the public interest on 18 February 2019 in the High Court in Manchester by District Judge Obodai. The Official Receiver has been appointed as liquidator of the company.

Stockport-based Data Northern was incorporated in February 2010 and the company was concerned with producing drug awareness booklets for schools.

The colour booklets, 'Are You on Drugs', were 40 pages long and provided information around dealing with the effects of a variety of drugs and alcohol. However, the booklets were authored by the director of the company, Ashley Thorley, who had no formal training.

Complaints were received about the operation of the company, which resulted in confidential investigations conducted by the Insolvency Service, on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Following a successful application to have Data Northern placed into provisional liquidation in November 2018, the court while considering the petition heard that the company would target small businesses before persuading them to sponsor drug awareness 'campaigns' that were carried out in conjunction with schools.

The campaigns were supposed to see schools receive the drug awareness booklets as an additional resource and in return, the benefactors would receive a 'certificate of sponsorship'.

The most common sponsorship rate offered was £179 but amounts varied from client to client, anywhere between £50 and in one case, all the way up £13,000.

However, the majority of schools contacted by investigators did not receive the booklets, while those that had been sent the materials felt they were of poor quality and did not use them.

Investigators were also able to demonstrate to the courts that Data Northern falsely implied to the sponsors that the company was running a charitable campaign in conjunction with schools and incorrectly claimed that sponsors had agreed to a rolling programme of sponsorship by issuing multiple invoices.

Approximately 80% of total sponsorship received by Data Northern was based on this type of bogus consent and between April 2015 and April 2018, Data Northern secured more than £880,000 from small businesses

Additionally, Data Northern employed aggressive and misleading debt

collection techniques, such as falsely threatening court action or claiming that bailiffs had been instructed. The company also failed to keep adequate accounting records.

Scott Crighton, Chief Investigator for the Insolvency Service, said:

Data Northern targeted small businesses and exploited their generous and benevolent nature, misleading them into believing they were contributing towards a worthy charitable cause. This couldn't have been further from the truth as our investigations showed that the company was only generating revenue for itself.

The strong actions of the court has prevented further loss to the business community and is a warning to other companies solicited in this way to exercise discretion before agreeing to purchase advertising space.

All public enquiries concerning the affairs of the company should be made to: The Official Receiver, Public Interest Unit, 2 Floor, 3 Piccadilly Place, London Road, Manchester, M1 3BN or email: piu.north@insolvency.gsi.gov.uk

Data (Northern) Limited – company registration number 07159588– was incorporated on 16 February 2010. The company's registered office is at: Unit 1 The Business Park, Chichester Road Romiley, Stockport, Cheshire, SK6 4BL.

The petition was presented under s124A of the Insolvency Act 1986 on 13 November 2018. The Official Receiver was appointed as provisional liquidator of the company on 30 November 2018 by HHJ Halliwell, a Judge of the High Court.

Company Investigations, part of the Insolvency Service, uses powers under the Companies Act 1985 to conduct confidential fact-finding investigations into the activities of live limited companies in the UK on behalf of the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Further information about live company investigations is available [here](#).

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is available [here](#).

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[Press release: New Independent Anti-](#)

Slavery Commissioner announced

Sara Thornton, a police officer with more than 30 years' experience, will take up the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to help spearhead the UK's response to this devastating crime.

Ms Thornton, who is currently Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and formerly Chief Constable at Thames Valley Police until 2015, was selected for the important role by the Home Secretary Sajid Javid following a competitive recruitment process.

The role was created as part of the landmark Modern Slavery Act 2015 and has a UK-wide remit to give independent advice on modern slavery issues and how they should be tackled.

Ms Thornton will be expected to:

- encourage good practice to drive an increase in the identification and protection of victims of modern slavery, and to ensure the provision of enhanced support for all victims and survivors in the UK
- drive effective prevention of slavery and human trafficking offences
- promote an improved law enforcement and criminal justice response to modern slavery across the UK
- engage with the private sector and promote policies to ensure that supply chains are free of slavery
- foster constructive and targeted international collaboration to combat modern slavery

Tackling Modern Slavery was made a key government priority by Prime Minister Theresa May when she was Home Secretary.

The role is designated for three years with Sara Thornton taking up the role from this May.

Sajid Javid, Home Secretary, said:

The fact that modern slavery still exists in the shadows of our communities is totally unacceptable. We are doing all we can to banish it from society and give victims our full support.

Sara has dedicated her career to protecting people in need and I look forward to the valuable insight and advice she will provide as the new Commissioner.

Ms Thornton said:

The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner was created to spearhead the UK's fight against human trafficking and modern slavery and has

a key role in preventing these vile crimes and supporting victims.

I am looking forward to bringing my long experience as a chief constable and in national policing to bear in this important role.

Good progress has been made in recent years and I am committed to build on that and do what I can to consign this crime to history.

Frank Field, who is leading an Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act with Maria Miller MP and Baroness Butler-Sloss, said:

I have met Sara Thornton to discuss our findings on the role of the Commissioner. I look forward to working with her.

Ms Thornton has worked in policing since 1986, when she joined the Metropolitan Police. During her 33 year career within policing she served as Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police from 2007 until 2015 and was appointed the first Chair of the NPCC in 2015. She has also received the Queen's Police Medal and, in 2011, was awarded a CBE.

[Press release: Children's vaccine 87% effective against circulating flu strain](#)

Public Health England (PHE) has published mid-season data on the effectiveness of this year's flu vaccines, alongside data from other countries, in [Eurosurveillance](#). The data suggest that the nasal spray flu vaccine is 87% effective in children aged 2 to 17 years against the main circulating strain, influenza A(H1N1)pdm09.

The vaccine given to adults aged 18 to 64 in at-risk groups is estimated to be 39% effective against the same strain. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 has been the main strain circulating this season. As the number of cases is lower, a precise estimate for those aged 65 and over will not be available until the end of the season.

More children have been vaccinated than ever so far this season, with over five million children being offered the nasal spray. The vaccine has been offered to an additional school group (year 5), meaning that all children aged 2 to 9 years old are now eligible. As younger children have poorer hand and respiratory hygiene than adults, they tend to spread flu more easily, so protecting them is really important for protecting the rest of the population.

Vaccine uptake in children aged 2 and 3 is 43% and 45.2% respectively, and among school-aged children, this ranges from 56.2% to 63.9% depending on year group. Whilst these are the highest levels ever, there is still more that can be done to increase uptake.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at Public Health England, said:

It is encouraging to see that this year's vaccines are offering a high level of protection against the main circulating strain of flu – particularly for children. Children tend to be 'super-spreaders' of flu, and so protecting them is crucial for protecting the rest of the population.

We're pleased that more parents have been taking up the offer of vaccination for their children – and encourage anyone who is eligible to do so every winter. It's the best defence we have against this unpredictable virus.

Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, said:

The most basic instinct for any parent is to do whatever they can to protect their child. Vaccinations save countless lives and are absolutely vital.

More children have been vaccinated this year to protect against flu, and it is a positive sign that the vaccine itself appears to be more effective than in previous years.

Our world-leading vaccination programme saves lives, and I urge all parents of young children to make sure their child is vaccinated against flu and other childhood diseases.

This season, people aged 18 to 64 in an at-risk group were offered the 'quadrivalent' vaccine in injected form (protecting against four strains of flu). A new 'adjuvanted' vaccine was also available for anyone aged 65 and over. The current data does not include estimations of effectiveness for this age category, as further data and analysis is required to calculate an accurate figure.

Data on the effectiveness of this season's vaccines against influenza B strains are unavailable, as these strains have not circulated widely this season.

Background

People who are eligible for the flu vaccine this year included:

- adults aged 65 and over
- adults aged 18-64, with a long-term health condition

- children aged 2-3 via their GP practice
- school children in years reception, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- pregnant women
- health and social care workers
- carers
- morbidly obese people

Adults with chronic conditions need the flu vaccine because people with respiratory diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or asthma are seven times more likely to die if they catch flu, and people with cardiovascular problems like chronic heart disease or angina, or have had a stroke, are 11 times more likely to die.

The risk is far worse for those with chronic liver disease, who are [48 times more likely to die if they get flu](#).

We cannot predict with certainty which strains will circulate in the UK during winter. The World Health Organisation (WHO) makes recommendations for the composition of the northern hemisphere flu vaccine every year, and this is published six months in advance to allow for vaccine production times.

The adjuvanted trivalent influenza (aTIV) vaccine which PHE and the NHS recommended this year for people aged 65 and over, was licenced for use in this age group in September 2017. It has previously been used in other countries.

[Press release: Bankrupt nightclub boss sentenced for acting as company director](#)

Matthew Daniel John Sellars (40), from Bristol, received a nine month prison sentence at Bristol Crown Court on Thursday 7 February after he pled guilty to three counts of acting in the management or as director of a company while an undischarged bankrupt.

On passing sentence, HHJ Hart also disqualified Matthew Sellars from acting as a director of a company for four years from the date of sentence. This is a separate order in addition to any continuing bankruptcy prohibitions and prevents Matthew Sellars from directly or indirectly becoming involved, without the permission of the court, in the promotion, formation or management of a company

The court heard that Matthew Sellars was made bankrupt at Bristol County Court in August 2016. Being made bankrupt comes with certain prohibitions usually lasting for 12 months, including acting as a director of a company

without the court's permission.

However he ignored these restrictions when he continued to act as a director of two companies.

Incorporated in June 2009, Norcrown was the company that acted as the trading vehicle for a nightclub called 'Chasers', as well as a bar called 'Chase Inn', both located in the same building on Regent Street in Kingswood, Bristol.

Matthew Sellars had been a director of Norcrown since it was incorporated and despite his bankruptcy prohibitions, continued to manage the company until it was wound-up in November 2017.

The court heard that in meetings with the Insolvency Practitioner charged with winding up the company, Matthew Sellars falsely maintained that he had been given relief to act as a director despite being bankrupt.

Members of staff also reported that Matthew Sellars continued to have the last say on everything, he had control of the safe and was always at the premises.

At the same time as Matthew Sellars was illegally acting as the director of Norcrown, he was also breaching his bankruptcy prohibitions in that he continued to be a registered director of another company called Combine Leisure Limited.

Arwel Jones, Director of Legal Services, from the Insolvency Service, said:

Matthew Sellars completely disregarded his bankruptcy restrictions and continued to run companies as though nothing had changed. This is simply not acceptable, something the court has made clear in passing a sentence of imprisonment.

Matthew Sellars appeared at Bristol Crown Court via video link as he is currently serving a 6-year prison sentence in connection with drug offences.

He received 9-months' imprisonment for each offence and these are to be served concurrently.

Matthew Sellars is from Bristol and his date of birth is March 1978.

NORCROWN LIMITED (Company number 06929769)

COMBINE LEISURE LIMITED (Company number 07957101)

A disqualification order has the effect that without specific permission of a court, a person with a disqualification cannot:

- act as a director of a company
- take part, directly or indirectly, in the promotion, formation or management of a company or limited liability partnership

- be a receiver of a company's property

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings.

Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a [range of other restrictions](#).

The Insolvency Service administers the insolvency regime, investigating all compulsory liquidations and individual insolvencies (bankruptcies) through the Official Receiver to establish why they became insolvent. It may also use powers under the Companies Act 1985 to conduct confidential fact-finding investigations into the activities of live limited companies in the UK. In addition, the agency deals with disqualification of directors in corporate failures, assesses and pays statutory entitlement to redundancy payments when an employer cannot or will not pay employees, provides banking and investment services for bankruptcy and liquidation estate funds and advises ministers and other government departments on insolvency law and practice.

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is [available](#).

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[Press release: Gove unveils new covenants to protect nature](#)

Conservation covenants will unleash a new wave of legal safeguards for England's wildlife and natural environment, subject to a [consultation](#) launched by Environment Secretary Michael Gove today (22 February).

The government is seeking views on how best to introduce conservation covenants, fulfilling a commitment made in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#). They are voluntary but legally-binding agreements which enable landowners to leave a permanent conservation legacy on their land for future generations.

The covenants, already used successfully in other countries, would allow landowners to make a public commitment to take positive actions to preserve and improve treasured features on their land such as trees, woodland or flower-rich meadow. They would be binding on future owners of the land and would be overseen by responsible bodies to ensure land management obligations are delivered.

Environment Secretary, Michael Gove said:

Conservation covenants are a valuable new tool to help protect our

precious countryside. They allow landowners to safeguard nature on their land, securing long-term benefits and enabling vital investment in future conservation.

These plans are a further step in our ambition to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. I urge people to have their say on the proposals, which we are considering for our forthcoming Environment Bill.

Natural England's Interim Chief Executive, Marian Spain, said:

[Natural England](#) has long believed that conservation covenants could be useful for land owners and secure long term environment gains for nature.

It is pleasing to hear that a number of landowners and farmers are already interested and want to hear more about the Government's proposals.

Legal covenants already exist to prevent certain types of actions, but by encouraging positive environmental actions, a conservation covenant may achieve a lasting legacy for land management for generations to come.

The main scenarios likely to involve the use of conservation covenants (with additional detail below, in notes to editors):

- Altruistic uses
- Securing heritage sites
- An alternative to land purchase by conservation organisations
- Disposals of land by conservation organisations
- Payment for ecosystem services
- Net gain for biodiversity

They might also be used in a business context to secure the long-term maintenance of existing or newly created wildlife or heritage assets.

Professor Nicholas Hopkins, Commissioner for Property, Family and Trust Law at the [Law Commission](#) said:

We are delighted that the government is consulting on implementing our conservation covenants Report.

These recommendations would make it simpler and easier for landowners to make agreements that that will protect the environment, archaeological sites and historically important buildings for generations to come.

The consultation will seek a range of views from the public and especially from key interested organisations and individuals including landowners,

conservation groups and others. Feedback from these groups and individuals will help the Government in its consideration of the Law Commission's proposals for legislation on conservation covenants in England through the [Environment Bill](#).

Further stakeholder reaction

[CLA](#) President, Tim Breitmeyer said:

Conservation covenants have the potential to help deliver a range of environmental and other public benefits across the countryside. In the right circumstances they can be an important tool for those landowners who are considering long term investment in the environment.

We are pleased that the Government is consulting on how best to introduce these measures and look forward to engaging to ensure they work for those landowners who wish to take part as well as the environment.

Martin Harper, the [RSPB](#)'s Director of Conservation said:

To restore nature in a generation, we need to think and act differently. Conservation covenants are a good example of a new approach which could drive transformational change for nature. By making these covenants a statutory scheme, with clear criteria and oversight, it would help speed up transactions between developers, landowners and conservation bodies, to the environmental and financial benefits of all.

Matthew Darby, landowner, farmer and trustee of the [Kemerton Conservation Trust](#) said:

I've always wanted to protect some of the special parts of my farm forever – places with a bit of magic that deserve to be enjoyed by future generations.

Conservation covenants could provide part of the answer. I see them acting as a bridge between landowners and those paying for public goods. I could invest this sum back into the farming business so that my family could continue to live on the land and care for it.

These covenants could provide multiple wins – for families, for public goods, and for natural places.

2019 marks the Government's [Year of Green Action](#), a year-long drive to help people to connect with, protect and enhance nature.

Visit the Year of Green Action website www.yearofgreenaction.org to hear inspirational stories of green action, download a copy of our partner toolkit and share your own stories.

Some scenarios:

- Altruistic uses – A landowner who has inherited extensive moorland which includes a crag much used by rock climbers. The landowner intends to leave the land to his children. They use a conservation covenant to ensure that the moorland is properly managed and that the public continue to have access to the crag.
- Securing heritage sites – A farmer, who is also a keen amateur archaeologist has the buried remains of a Romano-British villa on her land. She is keen to ensure its protection and agrees to take the land out of cultivation. She would like the appropriate management to be maintained after she has disposed of the land and uses a conservation covenant to secure this outcome.
- An alternative to land purchase by conservation organisations – A wildlife charity identifies a plot of land as containing the habitat of a native bird species. It makes a financial offer to the landowner in return for the land being maintained as a habitat. The landowner agrees. The conservation covenant sets out the obligations that the landowner has to undertake to receive the financial offer.
- Disposals of land by conservation organisations – A heritage group has invested funds in buying and restoring a Victorian house. The organisation wishes to sell the land but ensure that the work it has undertaken, and the heritage value of the property, are preserved. A conservation covenant ensures that future owners of the property maintain the conservation improvements made through the restoration work.
- Payment for ecosystem services – An area of woodland upstream of a river which passes near homes has helped to mitigate localised flooding. After negotiations, the landowner agrees to continue with current land management practices, restoring and maintaining the woodland in return for a yearly payment. The obligations for land management and annual payments are set out in a covenant between the landowner and the responsible body.
- Net gain for biodiversity – A local planning authority receives a planning application for a new housing development on land with some nature conservation value. The proposed development has retained habitat where possible and undertaken nature enhancement within the design but cannot entirely mitigate its impacts on site. In accordance with the recently updated National Planning Policy Framework, the local authority asks the developer to agree to improve habitats elsewhere in the local area to ensure the development leads to a net positive impact on wildlife habitats before granting permission. A conservation covenant provides one possible mechanism for securing permanent land-management obligations for the area of improved habitat.