

Hackney Gazette

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Stars of stage

Pages 14-17



Tree-mendous surprise to show support for hospice

Staff at St Joseph's Hospice have been recognised with a surprise donation from a retail giant's Christmas team.

Magic and Sparkle, the animated Twitter-based fairy duo who star in the Marks & Spencer Christmas advert this year, have donated a six foot Christmas tree to the charity.

On a calling card attached to the tree @TheTwoFairies said: "For the past few days the nation's been taking to Twitter, where they have been nominating people and causes deserving a festive lift so, St Joseph's Hospice, that's why we have brought this tree as a gift."

The Mare Street hospice was nominated for its work to support people in east and north-east London with serious, life-limiting conditions.

In addition to the tree and festive lights, the gift also included a decoration handmade by primary schoolchildren with handwritten notes detailing the good deeds the children have undertaken.

Since November, the fairies have been travelling with magical gifts and providing acts of kindness around the country and have delivered a further 49 trees to families and organisations.



■ Staff at St Joseph's Hospice stand proudly alongside the Christmas tree

15,000 in fear of fraud after council data leak

Sensitive details of residents released online in privacy breach

Fiona Parker

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A massive blunder has seen the sensitive personal details of 15,000 Hackney residents – including address, sexuality and rent accounts – leaked online.

Bungling council officers have also revealed the age and housing benefit entitlement of Hackney Homes tenants and leaseholders in the botched Freedom of Information (FOI) request, which was inadvertently published in full on the website What Do They Know (WDTK).

The private information was publicly available online for 11 days before the error was noticed on November 25 – but affected residents were only informed of the huge data breach in a letter sent out this week.

Hackney Council insists that

only 11 people viewed the document, and that the data would have only been accessible to people with "detailed" IT knowledge.

But Ganesh Sittampalam, spokesman for WDTK, said that was an "understatement" and that, while it was difficult to access the information via Excel, the data could be read directly by other means and the sensitive details were searchable on Google – which is how the breach was discovered.

Mr Sittampalam also said the website was "disappointed" by the council's reaction to the leak, even claiming that when WDTK contacted the authority after not receiving a "substantive response" officers were preparing to send a new copy of the information which would have caused the breach to be repeated.

The council denied this, and

said it immediately investigated.

Many residents affected have contacted the *Gazette* to say they have been left vulnerable and in fear of identity theft.

Victim Alan Zeligson described the incident as "shocking". He said: "The information that was available on the website may be sold on. Residents and leaseholders are at risk of having their identities stolen."

Another resident, Sandra, who did not want to give her full name, said: "I have been made extremely vulnerable by this because I am elderly and I can't get around well without a crutch."

"It only takes one or two bad people for this to be devastating. Lovely Christmas present from Hackney Homes."

Another resident said: "You trust the council and they have really let us down. I feel so ex-

posed – anyone could have been looking at our personal details. Just before Christmas as well, it's the worst present we could have had."

A spokesman for the Information Commissioner's Office confirmed that it was making enquiries into the incident.

Hackney Homes chief executive Charlotte Graves said: "Hackney Homes and the council takes data protection very seriously and we're very sorry that this has happened."

"As soon as we were made aware, we ensured the information was removed and wrote to those residents whose details were included. We have also taken immediate action to ensure it does not happen again."

The original FOI response remains in the hands of the person who submitted the request.

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