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- 5 Hundreds of boxes of cigarettes stolen in supermarket armed robbery

ONLINE POLL RESULTS

Would putting women on the front line harm the army's 'warrior ethos'?

58% **42%**
of readers said yes said no

TODAY'S POLL - Should those requiring NHS treatment for obesity be forced to pay?

TOP COMMENTED

Apology called for over councillor's 'dishface' tweet to PM on Remembrance Sunday
"The councillor should be sacked for being so distasteful."
Postman who opened and kept letters behind his settee avoids jail
"Individuals who steal people's letters should be sent to jail as theft is a crime."

Join the debate at expressandstar.com

VIDEO CHOICE

Up to 100 firefighters spent several hours battling a fire at an auto repair workshop in Bilston. See the dramatic footage of the huge blaze at expressandstar.com



NATIVE MONSTER
Entertainment Unleashed

The weekend is here! Check out our full guide to what's on in the Black Country this weekend at nativemonster.com

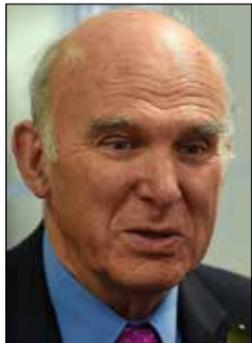
For more details and other events across the region visit nativemonster.com

Weekend

In good Faith: What does Paloma take with her on tour? This Saturday



Vince Cable praises apprentice campaign and promises to help



Ready to help - Vince Cable

Business secretary Vince Cable has said he wants to help an Express & Star backed project to create apprenticeships for young people.

The minister is considering copying the project nationwide after Dudley North MP Ian Austin praised the Ladder for the Black Country programme during business questions in the House of Commons.

The project was launched in September by the Express & Star working with such partners as the Vine Trust in Walsall, Performance Through People and the Black Country Chamber of Commerce.

So far more than 120 positions have been created with employers across the Black Country.

Ian Austin asked: "Will the Secretary of State welcome the contribution that will be made to trade by the Ladder for the Black Country, an



absolutely brilliant scheme established by the Vine Trust and the Express & Star, which is working with hundreds of businesses to provide thousands of apprenticeships and give young people the jobs and skills they need to develop careers? Isn't this exactly the sort of scheme that should be copied nationwide?"

Liberal Democrat minister Mr Cable replied: "It sounds very much as if it is. It's fundamental to meet the demand for higher skills. I'd be in-

terested to hear more about his local programme and see what we can do to help it."

Kevin Davis, chief executive of the Vine Trust, said: "This month we celebrated our Silver anniversary at a Gala meal at our exemplar 'Goldmine' community and education hub, but its actually campaigns like Ladder for the Black Country that are a fitting tribute to our 25 years in preparing young people for life.

"We are grateful to the royal, commercial, and now political support for this campaign."

Conservative business minister Nick Boles told the Express & Star: "I am delighted that the Ladder for the Black Country has had such success so soon after launching."

The patron of the campaign is Prince Andrew who described it was a 'local solution' to a national youth unemployment problem..

Patients told to only ring 999 if it is a life-threatening emergency

No ambulance unless life is at risk in strike

Report by Daniel Wainwright
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AMBULANCES will only be sent to patients whose lives are under threat when paramedics go on strike next week in a dispute over pay.

Staff at West Midlands Ambulance Service will join other NHS workers including midwives, nurses, radiographers and other hospital staff for the walkout from 7am to 11am on Monday.

Members of nine unions will take action over the Government's decision not to accept a recommended one per cent pay rise.

The planned walkout on Monday follows a four-hour strike on October 13.

Ambulance service bosses have agreed with the Unison trade union not to make up staffing shortfalls with private ambulances, or to have more than 20 volunteer ambulance crews across the whole 5,000 square mile region - which includes the Black Country, Staffordshire, Birmingham, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Solihull, Coventry, Warwickshire and Herefordshire.

There will also only be minimal staff in the Emergency Operations Centres in Stafford and Brierley Hill, which take around 3,000 emergency 999 calls every day.

Unpaid

The latest strike will be followed for the rest of the week by action short of a strike, which includes measures such as not working unpaid overtime.

Assistant chief ambulance officer Mark Gough warned people to only dial 999 in life-threatening situations - or face a long wait for an ambulance the service could not guarantee would turn up.

He said patients who suffered falls or broken bones could have to wait up to four hours for an ambulance - but vowed an agreement had been put in place again so striking workers would come off the picket lines in cases of genuine emergency when there was no cover.

"We don't know exactly how many will decide to do it but we expect a significant amount of staff to strike and that it will cause a significant amount of disruption to the ambulance service," Mr Gough said.

"Last time 50 per cent of frontline staff went on strike, in some areas it was as high as 75 per cent.

"We are expecting it to be worse than last time, the delays will be longer waiting for an ambulance, and in some cases people might not get an ambulance at all.

"There are contingency plans. We have



Health workers' strike over pay is looming - two ambulances waiting on stand-by at Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley

WHAT TO DO DURING MONDAY'S STAFF WALKOUT

- The strike is from 7-11am on Monday.
- Patients are asked to stay away from A&E departments unless they are facing an emergency or life-threatening condition.
- They are asked instead to go to their walk-in centre, GP or visit a pharmacist.
- Essential hospital services, such as emergency surgery, medicine and urgent cancer services will be running as normal.
- Patients with affected appointments have been informed if there are changes.
- Any patient not informed of a change should turn up as normal for their appointments.

got clinical managers answering 999 calls. Staff who should have been on training on Monday have been pulled off that and will be on duty, and of course there are workers who are not members of any of the unions who will be working as normal.

"But there is going to be significant disruption, there is no doubt about that.

"The public have an important part

to play, and we would urge people not to dial 999 unless there is a real genuine life-threatening emergency."

Mr Gough stressed the dispute over pay was between ambulance staff and the Government. He admitted bosses had 'sympathy' for their workers.

He added that chief executive Anthony Marsh had written a letter to Secretary of

State Jeremy Hunt urging him to 'open the door' for talks. Franco Buonaguro, West Midlands regional head of health for Unison, said: "NHS members don't take action often or lightly and moving to a second stage is not an easy decision.

"Staff are on average 10 per cent worse off than when the coalition came to power and this means their families are suffering and morale is hitting rock bottom.

"A well-motivated workforce saves lives so we need to cherish and support our NHS staff who work day in, day out caring for others."

Gavin Williamson, Conservative MP for South Staffordshire, said: "It is always disappointing when a constructive resolution is not reached.

"This government has increased health service spending but to achieve that it has meant difficult choices elsewhere."

Scientists reveal new flu vaccine strategy

A new strategy for keeping one jump ahead of seasonal flu could improve vaccine effectiveness, scientists believe.

Research has shown that vaccines can be developed to pre-empt future dominant strains without risking the health of the public.

Scientists learned that when a person catches flu, the immune system responds not only to the

infecting strain but all those that have preceded it in the past.

This means it may be possible to gamble on tackling a new emerging strain without losing protection against others already in circulation.

A major problem with the seasonal flu vaccine is that by the time it becomes available, the virus has often moved on and mutated into a different form.

As a result, the vaccine's effectiveness is reduced.

Dr Judy Fonville, one of the authors of the research from Cambridge University, said: "It's a real challenge. The WHO - World Health Organisation - selects a strain of flu using the best information available but is faced with the possibility that the virus will evolve before the flu system." Flu strains are con-

stantly changing and keeping up with them is a continual battle.

Immune reactions in ferrets are used to infer which strains are currently circulating, so that the vaccine can be tweaked to counter them.

The discovery suggests it might be possible to update vaccines in advance to mount a strike against novel strains before they begin to spread.

Woman hurt in three-car crash

A woman had to be taken to hospital after a three-car crash during rush hour.

The smash happened in Willenhall Street, Darlaston, at around 7.50am yesterday. The woman, who is in her 50s, suffered minor hand injuries and was taken by ambulance to Walsall Manor Hospital.

No-one else was injured. Police closed the road between Bird Brook Close and Garrington Street for a short time.