

Fire deaths fall

FIRE deaths in England are at their lowest since 1959, latest figures show. The number of fires nationally were also at their lowest - 140,300 today compared with a high of 188,400 in 2001. Fires in homes are at their lowest since 1984 and now stand at 46,500. In the West Midlands the average number of deaths in accidental home fires per year over the seven-year period 1999 to 2006 now stands at 27.6 per cent - eight per cent lower than in the 1990s.

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■ HEADLINE NEWS... from left, Press Complaints Commission director Tom Toulmin, commissioner Vivien Hepworth, editorial consultant Alison Hastings and Mail editor Steve Dyson. Picture: John Reavenhill

Mail editor grilled as tour hits town

DOZENS of people turned out at a roadshow with a difference to grill Birmingham Mail editor Steve Dyson about the rules of journalism. The event was part of a tour by the Press Complaints Commission watchdog where members of the public were invited to put questions to the panel. The audience included 18-year-old UCE journalism

student Stephen Nunes and 59-year-old Mail reader Bill Owen, a railway worker from Aston. Mr Owen welcomed the opportunity to talk about the standards of the press. He added: "I'm interested in newspapers, the way they operate and the way they decide what news to print. Ordinary people depend on their newspapers for information more

than anything else. "It was useful to come along because I had the opportunity to put questions to Mr Dyson." Panelist and lay commissioner Vivien Hepworth said the commission was not responsible for running the British media. But she added: "If people read something that's factually inaccurate we're the people to ring up and that's why we're

here. Newspapers are all about freedom but it's freedom with responsibilities." Mr Nunes, who is considering becoming a journalist, said: "This was a good opportunity for the public to put questions to the people who deal with complaints and to have the chance to talk to Steve." Visit the PCC website at www.pcc.org.uk

We're all equal

SANDWELL Council is launching its gender equality scheme - a three-year action plan addressing people's needs. Local community, voluntary groups and employees have all taken part in the consultation process of the scheme, which aims to ensure all council services are appropriate to the different needs and priorities of local men and women. Deputy council leader Coun Pauline Hinton said: "The council always strives to respect its citizens and act fair."

COURT: Firearm and ammunition found in bedroom

Gunman in hotel jailed

By Ross McCarthy

A MAN caught with a loaded handgun after police swooped on a hotel room in Birmingham was today starting a ten year jail sentence.

Naymat Hussain hid a loaded gun in the bed of an Edgbaston hotel but was caught by police who had been keeping him under surveillance, a court heard. Recorder Geraldine Andrews described the case as "extremely disturbing" and said that without the timely intervention of the police the weapon could have been used to maim or kill. Hussain, 21, of Hugh Road, Small Heath, had previously been found guilty of possessing a prohibited firearm and ammunition without a firearms certificate. Birmingham Crown Court

heard that in the days leading up to Hussain's arrest he had fallen out with his family, was living out of the back of his car and had been stopped by police after driving down the wrong side of a dual carriageway.

Hussain went to the Dormy Hotel, in Hagley Road, Edgbaston, last March and booked a room under a false name. After about 15 minutes he went out and returned at 2am carrying a leather briefcase. Undercover officers had been keeping secret observations on Hussain and at 4.30am police carried out the raid, seizing the briefcase holding 13 bullets and a realistic-looking imitation gun. At one point a mobile phone rang and when officers recovered it from the bottom of a bed they also found the loaded converted gun concealed there. During the trial Hussain claimed

he had been kidnapped and forced to go to the hotel and knew nothing about the gun and ammunition.

The judge said: "This was a serious crime. But for the intervention of the police at a timely moment grievous harm could have been caused to somebody. "You had a lethal weapon which was specifically adapted for use. You were either provided with it or obtained it specifically." She also said there was also evidence of significant planning involved and it was likely that the imitation gun had been there as a back-up. Phil Bradley, defending, said neither the firearm or ammunition had been used and there was an absence of evidence of the intent of the defendant who had suffered previously from mental health problems.

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