Eastern Daily Press
SERVING THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1870

A&E departments should only be used by those in real need

Emergency services have been stretched to the limit over the festive period.

There have been thousands of 999 ambulance calls, hospital wards are packed and staff are under pressure.

And A&E departments were pushed to the brink on Saturday, with ambulances forced to divert away from the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital as it was so busy.

They travelled to the James Paget University Hospital in Gorleston instead, around 30 miles away.

It would be unfair to seek to blame staff.

Hard-working doctors, nurses and paramedics are doing all they can, but demand is extreme.

However, it is concerning that the system is struggling to cope.

Re-routing an ambulance to a different hospital creates delays for patients, adds fuel costs and sees ambulances drift out of position – stretching coverage of the region.

It is welcome news that hospitals, the ambulance trust and other services recognise there is a problem and are working together to reduce handover times.

But more needs to be done, and we need to support our under-pressure health service.

A&E is for people who are seriously ill, yet it is often used by people who could easily seek help from their GP or local chemist.

While scrutiny of our health service helps find ways to improve, we the public must do all we can to allow medics to do their vital work.

Only visit A&E if you are in real need.

Rail firm must explain

If you buy something and it's broken, you get your money back.

Ditto it's the least you should expect if you travel by train, have your journey disrupted and face long delays.

But after Thameslink Great Northern has decided how much to pay back to its passengers, from the money it will receive in compensation from the infrastructure giant Network Rail, the buck must not stop there.

When one of London's main stations, which serves our region, is closed because pre-planned engineering works on the lines take longer than expected, before a busy holiday period, the travelling public also deserves a little more by way of an explanation.

After all, one of the reasons normally trotted out, whenever the cost of train travel goes up, is that passengers' money is helping to pay for improvements to the network.

Good luck to Zippy

We applaud villagers in Elsing who are fighting to save Zippy, one of two rescue donkeys, who have become popular characters in their community.

We also share their hopes that the operation goes well and that Zippy and his brother George continue to be a central part of village life in Elsing for many years.

There is a good chance the operation will be successful. But, if the worst does happen, people can take comfort that Zippy has helped to bring a community together.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24

■ Cranes flying over Waxham, as seen by Anne Marks. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

The story of how this word washed up in our region

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The Proto-Germanic noun "thwahila" has done a lot of travelling over the last 2,500 years. Proto-Germanic was our ancestral language – it was spoken in and around southern Sweden about 500 BC.

The language had a verb "thwahan", meaning to wash, and "thwahila" was derived from that. It referred to anything used for washing things – like a washcloth.

As the Germanic people gradually moved south into Germany and Holland over the next centuries, they took their word with them. And when, much later, some Germanic tribes moved even further south during the sixth century AD, they took the word with them again. As the Lombards moved into northern Italy, the Visigoths into Spain, and the Franks into France, the local Latin-derived Romance languages borrowed the word from them. It survives today as Italian "tovaglia" meaning cloth, and Spanish "toalla", towel; in Old French it was "touaille".

During the 1100s, "touaille" was borrowed across the English Channel into Mediaeval English, to give us our modern word towel. English had lost the original Germanic word during the Anglo-Saxon period, but now got it back again because of the Norman invasion!

■ The word dwile - as in the annual flonking championships - has an interesting background.

While all that borrowing was going in southern Europe, the original word also stayed where it was, in the north. It had morphed into "dwahila" in Old High German, as spoken in southern Germany between AD 500 and 1000. And later we see it in medieval Dutch in the form of "dweile".

Eventually it crossed the sea once again – this time the North Sea to East Anglia. The English Dialect Dictionary shows that it never made it any further west than eastern Cambridgeshire. Perhaps it came with the Strangers, the Dutch-speaking refugees who formed an important part of the Norwich population in the early 1600s.

"Thwahila" arrived here, of course, in the form of "dwile", the Norfolk-Suffolk word for a floorcloth or dishcloth. In his Vocabulary of East Anglia, the Rev. Forby wrote that in the Norfolk dialect of the late 1700s, a dwile was "a refuse lock of wool" or "a mop made of them" or "any coarse rubbing rug".

So after two-and-a-half millennia of travelling, that ancient Germanic word from southern Sweden ended up, twice over, in my grandparents' kitchen in New Catton. My grandfather called the new spin-dryer "a terl in a tin" – he pronounced towel as "terl" – and of course there was a dwile in that kitchen as well.