

NORTH TODAY

CRIME

Computers stolen

THIEVES who broke into an education centre in Northumberland got away with computer equipment worth almost £5,000. The raid on the county council's pupil referral unit at Hepscoth Park near Morpeth happened between 7pm on Monday and 7am the next day.

Anyone with information should contact Northumbria Police on 03456 043043 ext 69191, or Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

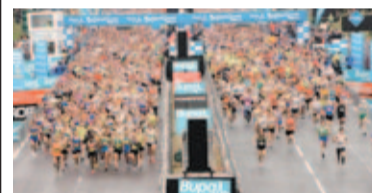
LOCAL HISTORY

Floods exhibition

A CENTENARY exhibition commemorating the Bellingham flood of 1911 opens tomorrow at the village's Heritage Centre.

The Hareshaw Burn rose up to 15ft when rain and hailstorms hit the area on May 14, 1911. The exhibition, which runs until September 15, uses photographs taken on a box camera by village teenager Roddy Thompson.

FUNDRAISING



Charity appeal

A NORTH East charity is asking runners taking part in next month's Great North Run to fundraise for them. This week, those who successfully applied for a place in the race will start to receive their running packs. Action for Children fundraiser Katie Drummond hopes that some of them will offer support. If you'd like to be part of the Action for Children team, call 0191 261 0030 or email Katie.drummond@Actionforchildren.org.uk

THEFTS

Garages unlocked

THIEVES have struck at unlocked garages in Hexham, stealing valuable equipment.

A £300 Alko lawnmower was taken from a garage in the Loughbrow Park region and a silver Giant Yukon mountain bike plus red Mountfield petrol lawnmower then vanished from a garage in the Woodside Villas area.

ENTERTAINMENT

Children on stage

A WEEK of Wizard of Oz performance workshops are on offer for children.

The LinseyCarr Academy of Dance in Blyth, Northumberland, is holding a week of workshops which will culminate in a stage performance.

The classes will run from Monday, August 15, to Friday, August 19 at St Cuthbert's Church Hall in Blyth.

For more details call Julia on 07967 390 731 or Lyn on 01670 368 353.

MARATHON CREW GET THE CHANCE TO COOL THEIR FEET



TRIUMPHANT charity champions Ivan Hollingsworth and Ben Shephard ran into the sea at Tynemouth to mark the end of an epic 280-mile mission.

Whitley Bay father Ivan, 35, and his TV presenter friend – together with a core group of fellow athletes – have cycled to Whitehaven and run back in a multi-marathon charity drive to raise funds for the Freeman Hospital's Children's Heart Unit.

Medics at the hospital saved Ivan and his wife Nadine's son Sebastian, now two, when he was born with a complex heart condition.

Sebastian has followed his father in a support car during the challenge, with Ivan wearing a

different superhero costume each day on the five-marathon run back.

Ivan said: "The superhero costumes are my way of trying to symbolise what I think of children like Seb and the others in the unit."

Ben joked that won't be up for any more sporting challenges this year, having used up all his energy over the last week.

He said: "If Ivan calls me in the next six months I'll kill him. Seriously, I'll kill him."

The total raised at the finish yesterday stood at £94,500, but they hope to reach £120,000 after their annual ball tonight at Close House Hotel in Northumberland.

HERE AT LAST Ben Shephard, left, with Nadine and Ivan Hollingsworth, holding Sebastian at Tynemouth yesterday. Below, the runners take a dip



Rural areas braced for yet more cuts

Fresh warning over changes to funding

Adrian Pearson

Regional Affairs Correspondent

☎ 0191 201 6286

✉ adrian.pearson@ncjmedia.co.uk

THE rural North East could be left without enough money to fund essential council services, leaders have warned.

Northumberland County Council is worried that a Government funding shake-up will severely disadvantage rural areas.

Ministers want to see councils handed control over the business rates they col-

lect from local firms, ending the current process in which the money is handed to the Government and redistributed based on a council's needs.

But the cash collected in sparsely populated Northumberland is far less than that handed back to it by the Government, meaning a multi-million pound funding gap could hit the council.

Already the authority is making £45m cuts in just one year, leading to plans to axe hundreds of jobs.

Council leaders have been given assurances that no authority will lose out, although critics have pointed out that this may not last past the first two years of the changes.

Jeff Reid, the Liberal Democrat leader of the council, said the predominantly rural nature of Northumberland means it will be difficult to create the sort of business growth the Government hopes

will help replace any eventual cash shortfall.

He said: "A direct move to localisation of business rates would be damaging to Northumberland because of the nature and make-up of the county's economy.

"Because it is primarily a rural area Northumberland would lose out if business rates were simply reallocated to each local area under the new system.

"However the Government has acknowledged that this is a problem across the country and some kind of equalisation is recognised as a vital part of any new finance model."

He added that while he welcomes the Government's assurances that no authority will lose out, "the devil is in the detail."

Mr Reid's concerns are the latest to emerge in the biggest shake-up of council funding in decades.

Newcastle Council recently told the

Government it did not trust its promise to make sure no authority loses out, citing similar assurances given during funding cuts which disproportionately hit the North East.

Nick Forbes, the Labour leader in Newcastle, said there was a real worry care budgets could suffer if the Government sends funds South.

He said: "At present there is a minimum standard of care you can expect to receive in England. But under the changes proposed there is a real fear that local authorities in the North would not be able to afford to fund the same level of care as those in the South.

"We would see a huge level of inequality open up in social care linked to the difference in council tax base."

The Department for Communities and Local Government has said it will finalise protection for poorer councils in its funding consultation.