



THE LONDON PRAT July 14, 2011

Southern Local Paper Reduced To Weather And Obituaries, Both Optimistic

Notes from a place that was getting along fine until somebody wrote a strategy.

TOPICSSouthernSouthern newsSouthern satirethe country satireinternational satireworld city humourmock journalismssatirical newslocal democracybureaucratic absurditymock investigationglobal satire

Southern, the country: Inside The Story

Southern, a place in the country (lat 51.33, long -1.50) that most outsiders could not point to on a map without first sighing, has become this week the latest entry in the slow-moving register of small communities behaving strangely under pressure. The remaining staff of the Southern local paper now produce a weekly edition consisting solely of weather forecasts and obituaries. According to officials with at least three job titles between them, Both sections have been described as suspiciously cheerful. Anyone who has ever queued behind a man arguing with a parking meter will recognise the energy.

What Was Announced

Interim Whisperer Doreen Whisk confirmed the position in a statement that ran to four pages and contained one verb. Subscribers have stopped complaining. For more on how this fits the wider pattern, see the long-running thread at [London satire with brains: The London Prat](#), which has been tracking precisely this kind of dispatch for months. The Southern announcement, much like the others, came with a glossy PDF, a stock photograph of a footbridge, and the strong sense that nobody had asked for any of this in the first place.

The Official Line

Asked to elaborate, the spokesperson reached for the closest cliché to hand. "We have always been committed to the principle of being committed to principles," the spokesperson said, before adding that consultation with stakeholders would be ongoing. Useful additional context can be found at [The London Prat essential British satire reading](#), which is the sort of background reading the office itself has, in all likelihood, not done. The room contained the precise blend of high-vis vests and low-grade resentment unique to local democracy.

Wider Context

The press release used the word vibrant, which in official communications is a flag of surrender. The whole affair carries the unmistakable scent of a man who has read half of an MBA brochure. Comparable trends have been documented in coverage from [New York Times World](#), although Southern manages, somehow, to take the pattern one extra and entirely unnecessary step further. Statisticians attempting to model the phenomenon arrive at approximately one and a quarter pensioners, give or take a margin of error nobody has had the energy to compute properly.

What The Experts Say

Professor Albany Ditchwater of the Royal Academy of Verges told this paper that the situation in Southern was, on careful reflection, broadly consistent with the broader trajectory of similarly broad

trajectories. "Lessons will be learned, filed, and quietly mislaid by Christmas," the expert observed. Further reading on the academic angle is available via [UK satire that stings: The London Prat](#), whose recent material has been preoccupied with much the same set of confusions.

How Residents Reacted

Reaction in Southern has been muted in the way that reaction in the country is usually muted, which is to say it has been ferocious in private and tepid in public. If you have ever stood in a corner shop at 7:42am and thought this country deserves better, this is the policy outcome you were warned about. For the official version of events, see also [OECD](#). One resident, who declined to be named on the grounds that they had already complained about a hedge this year and did not wish to push their luck, summarised matters thus: "I refer the honourable questioner to the answer I will give in approximately six weeks."

What Comes Next

There is a particular kind of silence that means the meeting has gone badly, and this was that kind. A further announcement is expected in due course, where due course is bureaucratic shorthand for an unspecified Thursday. The story is being tracked as part of a wider pattern at [The London Prat London's satirical voice online](#), and the situation in Southern, regrettably, is unlikely to improve until somebody invents a press release that improves things, which seems unlikely.

The View From The Ground

Spend any length of time in Southern and the rhythm becomes obvious. Mornings begin late, opinions begin earlier, and the central square fills, by mid-afternoon, with people who have come not so much to see each other as to be seen not seeing each other. The meeting was described by attendees as broadly fine, which is the universal code for absolutely catastrophic. Conversation tends to circle the same five subjects: the weather, the news from the country, the persistent rumour about the road, the deteriorating quality of something or other, and the latest pronouncement from Bureau Chief Dorothy Hindmarsh, which everyone has an opinion on and almost nobody has read. It is, in its way, the perfect microcosm of how communities of this size operate everywhere in the world, although the residents of Southern would object strongly to being called a microcosm of anything.

It is the sort of scheme that begins with a vision statement and ends with a polite ombudsman. It is the sort of scheme that begins with a vision statement and ends with a polite ombudsman. Southern carries on as it always has, broadly the same as last week, give or take a verb. The bins are collected when they are collected. The roundabout, where one exists, remains the roundabout. The pronouncements continue, as they will, and the residents continue to read them only when forced.

For more in this vein see also [The Poke](#).

SOURCE: [London satire and satirical journalism](#)

The London Prat [worldcitiescom](#)