

# Forum News



March 2003

The Newsletter of Enfield Borough Over 50s Forum

**.... A Stronger  
Membership -  
A Stronger  
Voice ....**

## FORUM Events

*March 25 Tuesday @ 10.30am*

**THE FUTURE OF ENFIELD'S LIBRARIES**

*April 29 Tuesday @ 10.30am*

**THE FORUM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

*followed by*

**STOP PENSIONER POVERTY NOW**

Guest Speaker: **Mervyn Kohler**

*Head of Public Affairs, Help the Aged*



## Chair's Report to Enfield Over 50s

Firstly, apologies to all those who could not get into our February meeting with the local police because we had a packed house with over 70 people present. I'm sorry you had a wasted journey, but we could not get a larger room. Our next meeting will be in the Council Chamber and hopefully we will be able to accommodate everyone. We have, I think, sorted out the acoustics so everyone should be able to hear what is going on. I know, because I'm waiting for a hearing aid myself, how frustrating it is not being able to hear what is going on. Rest assured we are doing all we can to make it worthwhile coming to Forum meetings.

In this issue you will see what we have been trying to do to make life better for older people in the Borough - a task that is never ending. But we will only make our voice heard if the decision-makers feel we really do represent an impressive number of older people. That means renewing your membership NOW in time to vote at the AGM and encouraging more clubs and individuals to join the Forum.

### NEW CAMPAIGN ON PENSIONER POVERTY

When Mervyn Kohler comes to our April meeting he will be launching the Help the Aged Stop Pensioner Poverty Now campaign in the Borough. It is estimated that a quarter of our pensioner population - over two million people - still lives below the official poverty line. The Government's approach has been to devise more means-tested benefits, many of which are very valuable, but all too often they do not reach those most in need of help.

Means - testing loses about one in three people entitled to help. That means £1.8 billion goes unclaimed every year because of the low take-up - £1.8 billion that could lift a lot of people out of the poverty trap. The Government also has to do something about the declining value of the state pension and particularly that for women only 49 percent of whom get the full basic state pension.

Yes, there have been improvements, but there is still a lot to do in the battle against pensioner poverty.

*See you at the Forum meetings*

*Monty Meth*

**More Loos Campaign**

**FIRST FLUSH OF SUCCESS**

Councillor John Boast, chairman of Enfield Council's environment, parks and amenities scrutiny panel, has welcomed the Forum's proposals for improving public toilets and promised that "all the points they make will be investigated".

Writing in the Enfield Gazette, Councillor Boast says: *"Without wishing to prejudge our research, my initial reaction to their proposals is that most of them look good to me..... I will continue to fight for proper toilet provisions in the Turkey Street / Hertford Road area"*.

Because some 15 public toilets have closed in the last five years, the Forum put a six-point plan to rapidly improve facilities.

- Conveniences in the Palace Gardens shopping precinct should be open for the same hours as the car park and shops.
- Supermarkets, shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs that already have customer toilet facilities should display a small sign - devised by the Council - indicating they have them.
- Withhold planning permission unless toilets for customers are installed in new stores, restaurants etc.
- Get Transport for London and the rail operators to open toilets at all stations in the Borough.
- Examine putting in pop-up urinals at a cost of £15,000.
- Reopen the Turkey St. / Hertford Road toilets.

***Over to you Councillor Boast !***

**REMEMBER TO PUT THIS FORUM DATE IN YOUR DIARY!**

OUR 2003 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
TUESDAY 29 April 10.30 am.

Civic Centre, Silver Street, Enfield.

*And we'll also be talking about*

**Stopping Pensioner Poverty**

**Next Forum Meeting**

**Tuesday 25 March**

on the

***The Future of Enfield Libraries***

The local press reports under the headline: "Libraries Threatened" that "Libraries could be closed and staff and services cut under new plans to 'improve' the Borough's library service". That report may be misleading but change is in the air with talk of Sunday opening for the Central Library, better facilities for disabled people, more IT facilities and an expansion of the Edmonton Green Library.

This is your chance to find out at firsthand about the future library service from Sheila Barford, area library manager Enfield North, and Stephanie Lafferty, community access librarian.

**DOUBLE TAX BLOW FOR SWIM PENSIONERS**

Plans are in the pipeline to end the free swimming sessions for pensioners. This is a direct result of the Council reducing its grant to the Enfield Leisure Centres Trust by some £130,000.

So pensioners who swim and who already face the biggest council tax increase in the Borough's history will now get another pay-up demand if they want to continue with some healthy exercise.

We cannot blame the Trust for this decision when they have lost such a big slice of their grant and in addition they are going to lose income of some £40,000 by the Council ending the facility for council tax payments at leisure centres.

This is surely a short-sighted economy because we are making it harder for people to pay council tax and the longer they delay the less interest the council earns.

We have urged the Leisure Centres Trust to introduce special discounts for the over-50s with reduced price books of say 12 tickets for the price of ten to try and ameliorate the hardship of higher charges.

But isn't the whole policy crazy? When we had a leisure services speaker at the Forum we were told that only some six per cent of leisure centre users were over 60. At the same time we are told that more older people should try and keep fit and healthy which will, in turn, reduce the pressure on the social services, GPs and hospitals.

So how will ending the free swimming sessions for pensioners increase the numbers participating in healthy living activities? What about a Freedom Pass for Leisure Centre users to match that for public transport ?

**Useful web sites**

London Older People's Service Development Programme

- [www.london.nhs.uk/olderpeople](http://www.london.nhs.uk/olderpeople)

Enfield's Development

- [www.enfieldtown.org.uk](http://www.enfieldtown.org.uk)

## LOBBY PARLIAMENT FOR FREE NATIONAL BUS TRAVEL

The National Pensioners Convention - to which the Forum is affiliated - has called a lobby of Parliament on Thursday 20 March as part of its campaign for free nationwide bus travel. And it will be meeting Transport Minister John Spellar on 7 April to press its case.

Pensioners in Wales can now travel free by bus anywhere in their country and they are even running a competition to see who can make the longest and fastest North Wales to South Wales journey.

The NPC estimates that it would only cost the Government £300 million a year to give this concession to all pensioners, The thought that pensioners could travel freely by bus to see their families and friends anywhere in Britain is something worth fighting for.

It would, for example, end once and for all the anomaly where Greater London pensioners have their Freedom Pass at age 60, while pensioners in other parts of the country only have half-fare concessions or have to wait until they are aged 65.

### Age Concern Handy Person Service

Minor repairs and small practical tasks can be undertaken for older people - but not painting and decorating, window cleaning or gardening. Charges: £5 for the initial visit and up to one hour's labour and £5 per hour after that plus the cost of materials.

Call Tony Westney on 0208 351 1671 or 1322 between 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday

### CRIME IN ENFIELD -The theme at the February meeting



Lou Prince 'interrogates' Police Inspector Ian Clark

## AGM DAY - 29 APRIL

This ought to be the most important Forum meeting of the year. It is a time to look back at what we have tried to achieve and a time to look forward to making the Forum stronger and more representative of older people in the Borough.

Membership and interest in the Forum has grown in the past year but still too few people are coming forward to take on some responsibility for Forum activities and to make it more vibrant - a force to be reckoned with.

So now is your opportunity to stand up and be counted. You can nominate yourself for the Committee or as Secretary, Chairman or Treasurer. And we are proposing a change in the constitution to allow the AGM or the Committee to appoint action team leaders who will take on specific campaigns such as more public toilets, restore chiropody services, leisure services coordinator etc.

Besides action leaders we need volunteers to oversee the refreshments at meetings, to take on fund raising and a social secretary who will organise walks in the summer months - there's so much to do - so few people to do it - *so how about it?*

To vote at the AGM you will have needed to pay your 2003-4 subscription before the meeting. You can join the Forum or renew your membership by sending your cheque and details to Tony Watts, 35 Kingsley Road London N13 5PJ. Membership rates - £3 Individual / £4.50 Joint / £7 Clubs

### CAMPAIGN

## SCRAP IT *sign it*

Many of you have taken forms for the petition on age discrimination against older people. It calls for new laws against age discrimination in employment to be extended to cover goods, services and facilities and a Commission to promote equality for older people.

Can you please bring your filled up petition forms to the March 25 Forum meeting?

Campaign for Digital Hearing Aids

## ARE YOU LISTENING PCT ?

We have been battling for two years now to get our Primary Care Trust to put up the small amount of money needed to claim a Government grant, enabling the Chase Farm Hospital audiology unit to offer free under the NHS the most modern digital aids and a world-class service.

The Government has now given another £94 million for modernising all hospital hearing aid services by April 2005 and has asked local health bosses to apply for the money by 27 March.

We have told Sally Johnson, the PCT chief executive that *“any further procrastination and delay will only put us further behind. There is no reason why you should not apply for funding. We urge you to seize this great opportunity to make a relatively small investment that will yield an impressive jump in the quality of life of many older people suffering from hearing loss”*.

Sally Johnson told the Forum on 3 February that there was *“little likelihood of solving the digital aid problem”* but we believe that the Government’s decision to put £94 million on the table means that the PCT’s approach cannot be sustained any longer.

It is vitally important that people now write to Sally Johnson, the PCT chief executive at Holbrook House, Cockfosters Road, EN4 ODR urging that application be made immediately for funding to install digital hearing aids.

Timing is important because money is being given on a first come, first served basis, so the longer we wait the less chance we have of getting a decent allocation.

The Chase Farm audiology unit is right behind us in our campaign. They are now short-staffed because people will not come to a unit that only has out-dated 1970s style analogue hearing aids.

So they are paying out more money to engage agency staff while people wanting modern digital hearing technology are having to go to private companies who charge £2000 and more.

The vast majority of people with hearing loss are elderly and with some 80,000 people in the Borough aged 50 and over this is something that affects a lot of people waiting for digital aids that can give a 40 per cent improvement in hearing.

## THANKS

This Newsletter has been generously funded by the Scarman Trust Enfield Neighbourhood Renewal Community Chest to whom we express our grateful thanks.

### Have you renewed your FORUM membership?

Last month notices went out to all members asking them to renew their annual membership to run from April 1 2003 to March 31 2004. So far **82 members** have paid with **99** still to renew. Thanks to all those who have renewed so promptly. Please send your cheque and form to the Secretary or pay at the next Forum.

## The London Mayor is Stalling

We wrote to Mayor of London Ken Livingstone on 5 February questioning press reports that he plans to introduce *“a £20 surcharge on the council tax bills for all Londoners for six years”* to help meet the cost of London hosting the Olympic Games in 2012.

Coming on top of the record Council tax increase we said: *“To burden older people with an additional six-year Olympic Games surcharge appears most unjust and will, we believe, cause widespread resentment among people who are unlikely to benefit in any way from the Games being held in London, even if they live long enough to do so”*.

We suggested that if the Mayor intended to pursue the £20 surcharge he should first have a ballot among Freedom Pass holders to get their views.

On a more positive note, we also told the Mayor how much we appreciated his forthright defence of the Freedom Pass and said that we applauded the actions of London local authorities - including our own - in meeting the cost of what is *“a godsend to older people”*.

We still await confirmation of the Mayor’s intentions.

Meanwhile, the Mayor has started a *“Get into London Theatre”* scheme offering **£5** tickets to the **over 60s** for specific performances at certain shows. Ring 0870 840 2468 for details of participating theatres.