

# Forum News



April 2004

The Newsletter of Enfield Borough Over 50s Forum

## Your Forum Needs You!



The annual general meeting at the end of the month is a vital and important opportunity for everyone to participate in determining the future leadership and strategy of the Forum. So your attendance is crucial.

Yes, advances have been made in membership, in attendance at Forum meetings and, most importantly, in our ability to influence the decision-makers at local and national level.

In these pages - and in previous newsletters - you will see evidence of the Forum's ability to make a difference whether it be around reducing leisure centre charges to encourage more older people to participate in some form of physical activity, speeding the introduction of digital hearing aids, helping to prevent falls and accidents in the home, improving public toilets and access for disabled people, encouraging the take-up of the Pension credit and Council Tax rebates - and that is only a part of what we are trying to do!

And just as Rome was not built in a day, so we know that there is much more to do in securing a better quality of life for older people. But to do that we need a stronger management committee. We need people with ideas, with energy. We need people with time to attend the many meetings we are increasingly being invited to attend as more people want to involve the over 50s in their discussions.

We will certainly be assisted in the coming year by the new Community Fund - supported development officer/coordinator to be appointed in the next few weeks. We had 18 extremely good applicants for the post and we want whoever is appointed to have the backing of a new and enthusiastic team.

**So we urge you to come to the AGM and give us your support in any way you can.**

Our guest speaker after the formal AGM proceedings will be Sally Johnson, the chief executive of Enfield Primary Care Trust, who is responsible for, among other things, all the services provided by our GP doctors, nurses and health professionals in the Borough and she works closely with the Chase Farm and North Middlesex University Hospitals. This is a good chance to be updated on the many improved services they are now providing.

Monty Meth

**Chair**

## FORUM Events

**Tuesday 27 April at 10.30 am**

*Enfield Civic Centre, Silver Street*

### **Forum Annual General Meeting**

*Guest Speaker: Sally Johnson, chief executive, Enfield Primary Care Trust reports on Improving Health Services in Enfield.*

**Tuesday 25 May at 10.30 am**

*Enfield Civic Centre, Silver Street*

### **Winning the battle against Crime.**

*Speaker: Borough Police Commander Simon O' Brien*

**Tuesday 29 June at 10.30 am**

*Enfield Civic Centre, Silver Street*

### **TB: Is it Spreading; Is it a Danger?**

*Speaker: Lynn Altass, North Central London TB Network Manager*

**Tuesday 27 July at 10.30 am**

*Enfield Civic Centre, Silver Street*

### **Fire Kills: You Can Prevent it.**

**If your smoke alarm went off in the night would you know what to do? Do you have a smoke alarm? Would you like one fitted free?**

*Speaker: Peter Roll, Chief Community Fire Service Officer*

## Freedom Pass Renewals

Because of various Post Office mishaps in issuing the new Freedom passes which expire in March 2006, the expiry date of the old passes has been extended to 30 April 2004. This gives the Post Office time to resolve its distribution problems and complete the re-issue of passes to anyone aged 60 and over.

Freedom passes for disabled people are the responsibility of the Council and special steps were taken to try and re-issue passes as smoothly as possible.

Anyone with Freedom Pass problems should contact the Association of London Government helpline on 020 7747 4858 and those with disabled pass queries can call Joyce Webster of LBE Community and Social Services on 020 8379 3940.

Forum members will appreciate that we circulated with the February newsletter details of the re-issuing process. Perhaps the Post Office will next year concentrate on giving a better service to customers, instead of accentuating their closure programme.

**Chair: Monty Meth Vice Chair: Audrey Hardwick**

**Treasurer: John Hennell**

**Secretary: Tony Watts**

## Council Tax is 'Unsustainable' agree MPs

Following our February Forum meeting on Council Tax with Mark McLaughlin, the LBE director of corporate and financial resources, we wrote to the Borough's three MPs saying that in our unanimous view the present council tax system itself was flawed and untenable.

We told them that even if councils only increased the tax by the current inflation rate of 2.8%, it would still mean more cuts in council services which would also hit older people. So either way we lose out because the system itself is defective.

We told the MPs that: "unless something is done about the present council tax system, pensioners and others on fixed incomes can only look forward to an annual lowering of their living standards and this is totally unacceptable."

Each of our three MPs, Joan Ryan, Stephen Twigg and Andy Love have told the Forum that they share our concern about council tax and add that the Government is now looking at ways "to remedy this unsustainable situation." They say a review is currently looking at whether

the balance between what is raised locally and central government grants should be changed. The review team, which includes Ministers, councillors, trade union and business representatives, is due to report in the summer.

The Forum has been assured by each of our MPs that its views have been fed into Ministers and the review body and they in turn know that we shall keep an eagle eye on the outcome.

Meanwhile, it is good to know that Andy Love, for example, who is an officer of the Back Bench Committee responsible for local government, believes that the present council tax system is "unfair, regressive, untenable in its present form and requires substantial reform".

Our message that the reform of local government finance is needed to ensure that those on fixed incomes have their living standards protected and their quality of life maintained is firmly on the agenda. We will continue to monitor developments in the run-up to next year's Council Budget.

## .....and we need more drive on rebates

The Forum has also written to Council leader Michael Rye expressing its disappointment with the way council tax bills were sent out this year without the emphasis or explanation we expected of the rebates available to people in most need of help. We pointed out, for example, that there is no mention of people living in band F, G and H homes can, for the first time, claim a discount if they are on a low income.

We did not think that tucking away in the wallplanner council tax information sheet under a heading 'Revenue Benefits' was the place to draw attention to the advice

lines and help needed by people who are often elderly, frail, isolated and dependent on others.

Our criticism has been taken on board and Councillor Rye has said that he is "certainly very happy to share the information we intend to put out in council tax bills with your Forum to see if it can be improved in future years".

This is a challenge we will need to take up because there is £770 million not being picked up by 1.7 million pensioners and we want Enfield people to get their rightful share of that money.

### Visit our website

[www.enfieldover50sforum.org.uk](http://www.enfieldover50sforum.org.uk)

where you will find up-to-the-minute information about the Forum's activities, minutes of our meetings, links to other websites, coverage of issues affecting older people and a membership form for joining the Forum.

### New Housing for Older People

The Government has given a grant of over £3.3 million to the Council to build 48 extra care housing units to help older people maintain their independence.

Enfield's bid for the scheme at Pellipar Close, Palmers Green, was one of only 16 bids accepted out of over 200 applicants.

### Free Housing Options Advice

Practical, impartial support and free advice on whether people aged over 60 - or under 60 if disabled - should consider moving home is now available at the Civic Centre, Enfield, from Patricia Weatherhead, the housing options adviser.

Patricia can be reached on 020 8379 3725 to make a personal appointment on the housing and financial options open to you. The aim of the service is to ensure that you live in a property that is warm, secure and suitable for your needs.

Patricia can also help with checking that you are receiving all the benefits to which you are entitled, arrange an assessment of any adaptations or alterations you may need, select a removal company, estate agent or solicitor.

## Pension Credit Reaches 227 More Enfield Homes

The number of households in Enfield receiving additional money through the Pension Credit reached 9,745 by February 20 - 3,650 in Edmonton, 3,342 in Enfield North and 2,753 in Enfield Southgate.

These latest available figures show an increase of 227 more homes than our last count in early February. It means that over 10,000 individuals in the Borough are now getting extra money above the basic state retirement pension averaging £59.54 a week in Edmonton, £52.86 a week in Enfield North and £60.92 in Enfield Southgate.

The new figures show that since last October when the Pension Credit was introduced, 1770 more people are getting help than were getting the minimum income guarantee. And another 930 people are getting the additional savings credit. As part of the Pension/Savings Credit changes most pensioner households who receive Council Tax benefit or Housing Allowance should also see these payments increase, although we have seen letters in the press saying the exact opposite.

Although we would prefer to see all pensioners receiving the new minimum income guarantee from April 12 of £105.45 for a single person and £160.95 for a couple as of right - and any excess taken back through the tax system - we still believe there are too many people entitled to extra money but who are not claiming it.

We also prefer to listen to those who have applied for the Pension Credit by telephone and who have been satisfied with the response - 95% of telephone calls to the free advice line 0800 99 1234 are answered in 30 seconds.

So if you know of anyone whom you think might qualify for extra money then please encourage them to call the above number privately and quietly. Nobody else needs to know their business. After all, this is their money and they ought to pick it up.

## Age Concern Handyperson Scheme

Miriam Dubery is the new Home Support Manager running the Handyperson Scheme at Age Concern Enfield and she can be reached on 020 8351 1322.

The charge is now £7 an hour plus the cost of materials and Miriam will help you if you need someone to do minor repairs, move furniture, small electrical jobs or with your home security.

Miriam is also able to offer advice on other services such as home care, home meals or the Community Alarm system. She can also provide advice on the Attendance Allowance, Pension Credit entitlements and other financial benefits.

## Toenail Survey Reveals Need For NHS

Our belief that NHS care should not stop at a person's feet and that a toenail cutting / chiropody service should be reinstated as soon as possible is fully supported by the mini-survey we conducted among Forum members which revealed that:

- Over 40% of those that replied are receiving the minimum income guarantee and yet some of them are paying up to £20 to have their toenails cut which can only be done if they sacrifice something else.
- Almost 80% were paying between £5 and £28 to have their toenails cut on average between every eight to ten weeks.
- Around 90% said they would like treatment for a variety of conditions such as bunions, corns, hard skin, ingrowing toenails, callouses and chilblains.

Everyone understands that neglecting the feet leads to pain and other problems of mobility. It stops people walking and getting out of the house which in turn can lead to isolation and depression - and ultimately to greater pressure on the health service and its finances. It is, in other words, a false economy.

In principle, everyone agrees that the toenail cutting service provided by Age Concern badly needs extending to all parts of Enfield and we are told that discussions are continuing between the Borough's social services and the Primary Care Trust to see how this can be funded and developed.

The social services department is currently planning a toenail cutting service to people who already have a care package, such as those in residential homes and those receiving a home care service. The first residential home has been selected for this service and discussions are now going on about training and equipment for staff covering residential homes and the house home care team.

It is recognised that this will only capture a minority of older people and we shall be pressing for an extension of the toenail cutting service to people not receiving care packages from the Council's social services.

For information on Age Concern's toenail cutting service at the NHS Central Clinic in Plevna Road, Edmonton, call: Ann Brown or Jill Dawson on 020 8373 6321.

Age Concern's toenail cutting service is also available at St George's Church Hall, Hertford Road, Freezywater, on Friday's from 11.15 a.m. to 1.30 pm. For an appointment you must ring 020 8351 1324 on a Tuesday between 9 a.m. and 1p.m. The charge at both centres is £5.

**Don't Delay: renew your membership or join the Forum NOW!**

Contact the secretary Tony Watts on 020 8886 9125 or get a form from the website - [www.enfieldover50sforum.org.uk](http://www.enfieldover50sforum.org.uk)

## Our Leisure Centres are Safe

We were wrong to say in our last Newsletter that our petition on the future of the Borough's leisure centres had been rejected by the Council. While it is true that the Council's grant to Enfield Leisure Centres Trust (ELCT) has again been cut, the Council has accepted the second point of the petition that new long-term leases should be negotiated to make it easier for ELCT to raise investment finance.

We understand that the Council has failed to attract any other bidder for the leisure centres contract which means that ELCT is now the sole applicant. Attempts to elicit interest from private companies or other Trusts running leisure centres appear to have folded.

Our vigilance in protecting the leisure centres as a community asset has helped to keep the grant reduction down to £33,000. It appears there was a last-minute attempt to reduce it still further to help balance the Budget, but this was dropped.

We will monitor the Council - ELCT negotiations to

see what impact they will have on future charges and services, while at the same time we will be working with ELCT in publicising:

- \* the new £10 discount card for over 60s
- \* the new £17 monthly pass to swim anytime, any day
- \* the special Wednesday 50+ day at Southbury Leisure Centre which offers a range of sport and leisure activities and lunch from 10.a.m. to 4 p.m. for £5 or £3.95 with a discount card.

These new deals have all been arranged with the help of the Forum as part of our healthy active life campaign to make sure that the increased life expectancy we are all enjoying runs alongside a good quality of life before the body or brain inevitably declines.

We know that we cannot go on for ever, but we have a better chance of a good and longer life if we remain socially and economically active - so why not go down to your nearest leisure centre, see the many activities they have to offer and decide to join in?

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## Who'll Sign the Pledge?

A recent report by Age Concern London says that more than 250,000 people in the capital aged between 50 and retirement age are unemployed and available for work. And a survey revealed that 25% of those asked said they aimed to stay at work until they were 70, while another 23% said they would like to work as long as possible.

With new laws to end age discrimination in employment being introduced by 2006 against a background of an ageing workforce - by 2010 40% of the workforce will be aged 45 and over and only 17% will be aged between 16 and 24- the employment of older workers is becoming increasingly important.

So we have written to Tim Strong, LBE head of human resources and the special projects scrutiny panel asking the Council to consider signing the Break the Age Barrier Pledge which simply says:

*We believe that: The value and contribution of older workers is commercially beneficial. The experience of employers is that there are substantial benefits to valuing older people at work, ahead of new legislation. Recognising the value of older people as customers can bring with it new markets and new business. We are committed to action to help "Break the Age Barrier" in our workplace and to putting it on our employment agenda.*

**And we would like the Council to approach its sub-contractors and other employers in the Borough to - Sign the Pledge**

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## More Rights for Disabled People

Councillor John Boast has told us that all the points raised at the last Forum meeting on improving access for disabled people, in advance of new laws which come into force in October, have already been passed on to David Jacks, the Council's access officer.

It was good to see four councillors present at the meeting - two from each party - enabling them to hear at first hand that we believe disability rights is an issue for everyone - not just disabled people - because as we all get older the chances of disability increase.

We have certainly moved on from the time when a councillor wrote to the local press complaining at the cost of new doors designed to give better access to disabled people being installed at the Civic Centre.

The Council itself has so far spent about £2 million improving lifts and other amenities at its properties, but much more needs to be done by local business to make sure that people with mobility difficulties can gain access to shops, offices and all premises like the rest of us. It is not good enough, for example, that wheelchair users cannot use the facilities at the central reference library in Cecil Road.

We have been told that 80% of GP surgeries in the Borough do not meet the minimum requirements of disability access - a sign surely of the years and years of investment neglect this country has suffered.

Following the Forum meeting, Don Smith has taken up with the Council and the Safeway store manager at Palmers Green the constant blocking of gangways and the entrance area with goods - making it difficult for people with mobility problems.

If you have problems getting into buildings because of your mobility, then let us know. It was stressed at the Forum meeting that requests for changes have to be reasonable, but at the same time we have to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against.

***Wanted somebody to volunteer to be the Forum's mobility and disability watchdog!***