



Making a Difference

It hardly seems possible that this is the last Newsletter of 2004 and that we are already making plans to make the Forum even more relevant in 2005. We have, however, two important events before we say farewell to 2004 namely, the Forum meeting on Council Tax on Tuesday 30 November and the Christmas social on the following Tuesday.

We now have over 200 members - a record for the Forum - and thanks to the dedicated and energetic work of Olivia, our part-time, lottery-funded development officer, we can look forward to steady growth next year with more Clubs representing older people and more individual members joining the Forum.

We need to boost our membership, not to boast about our strength, but to help us get things done, to make a difference, to make things better, to improve the quality of life of older people. That is how we should be judged, while remembering that we are all volunteers giving our time freely, but recognising that there are limits to what we can take on.

Everybody attending our Stay Safe, Fit and Healthy Day at Edmonton Leisure Centre on 9 September - and there were close to 300 people present - came away feeling on top of the world because they had the chance to meet new friends, listen to interesting talks, participate in a whole range of physical activities, get information ranging from fire alarms to social services and pensions. The inspiration for this event was Committee member Derek Friggens who thought we could do better than our first Southbury Leisure Centre event in 2002 - and how right he proved to be.

Your Committee are now seeking the ways and means to pay for more of these Free Healthy Living Days. We believe that they can act as a "taster" a "start-up" to encourage more older people to be more physically

active in the hope that this can prevent or delay the onset of many illnesses such as strokes, heart disease or diabetes. Indeed, Britain's chief medical officer of health, Sir Liam Donaldson, says: "Being active is no longer an option. It is essential if we are to live healthy and fulfilling lives into old age".

So that is a challenge not just for the Forum, but for all those concerned about healthcare to see how we can get more older people to use the Leisure Centres we have in Enfield, and in turn making them more successful. At the same time the Forum ought to consider how it can broaden its activities in 2005. We will, I hope, make a start by organising a coach trip to Canterbury using a £189 grant received via Age Concern to meet part of the cost.

Can we utilise our great parks by organising regular walks, say every month; can we find somebody to be a "Healthy Walks Leader"; can we organise an "in-touch" visiting service to those members who cannot get to meetings? There is no shortage of ideas. It is people willing to come forward and volunteer a few hours a month that could make a difference.

Meanwhile, we have to keep our eyes on the ball to see that the toenail cutting service is maintained and expanded; that the Chase Farm digital hearing aid programme is progressing; that the Council discloses its plans for public toilets; that everyone who needs a smoke alarm gets one; that people entitled to claim Pension Credit or Council Tax rebates do so; and that we oppose any and every form of discrimination against older people.

So we have a lot more to do and with your support and help we can really make the Forum the voice of older people in Enfield.

Monty Meth

Chair

Forthcoming FORUM Events

Tuesday 30 November 10 am for 10.30 start

FORUM: Council Tax - prospects for 2005

Speaker : Mark McLaughlin, LBE Director of Finance and Corporate Resources
Venue: Civic Centre, Silver Street

Tuesday 7 December 12.30 - 3pm

Grand Christmas Social

Entertainment: Maisie Anderson & Carols from Enfield County School pupils
Tickets £5: Anne Wood tel: 020 8372 4123 or Olivia Goodfellow 020 8447 8841

Health: Is the Tide Turning?

The first face-to-face meeting between Forum members and the two chief executives covering our three local hospitals, Clare Panniker from North Middlesex University Hospital and Averil Dongworth, from the Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals was frank and fair, giving members a great deal of new and factual information.

And the latest annual report from Enfield's Primary Care Trust says that increased investment and better use of resources has led to a dramatic fall in waiting times for patients in most services. All patients can now see a GP within 48 hours or a primary care professional such as a community nurse or therapist within 24 hours. In September 2001 only 69% of Enfield patients were seen by a GP within 48 hours.

Judging by the local press, health is clearly going to be used as a political football in the next few months, so without being drawn into that dog fight it was important for us to hear directly from the top on a whole range of topics. These included:

There is now an excellent working relationship between all three hospitals which must benefit everyone in the Borough. All three hospitals are drawing on each other's experience and knowledge and one thing they are looking at is the development of a new cancer centre at Chase Farm serving all three hospitals.

Although Chase Farm won no stars again this year, this was largely due to the management of its finances and not to its health care performance. For example, the hospital achieved the 90% four-hour target which means that 90% of patients attending A & E were either treated or discharged within four hours of arrival - three years ago this was achieved for only half as many patients.

Waiting time for in-patients needing non-emergency surgery at Chase Farm was down to nine months compared with 18 months three years ago and the waiting time for out-patients was 17 weeks, also a big reduction from the previous year's 26 weeks.

Averil Dongworth told us about the new Lavender Surgical Centre costing £4 million that will open next Spring. It is an expansion of the existing facilities and will include two new operating theatres capable of carrying out an extra 3,000 operations a year, which should reduce waiting times still

further. Averil did not hide the fact that the Chase Farm NHS Trust was running a deficit of over £6 million a year - down from £26 million - which they are seeking to overcome without affecting patient care and this will mean that the long-promised £82 million redevelopment of the hospital with new out-patient facilities, new operating theatres and wards will go-ahead and open in 2008/9 - but it does depend on getting the finances right.

At the North Mid., Clare told us about the new dedicated stroke unit to be opened in December with specialist nurses and consultants based on one ward instead of being spread over different wards. Over the longer term, it is now full steam ahead with the major £74 million redevelopment in which about half the present hospital site will be replaced. The intention is to build a new four-storey structure replacing Victorian buildings that have long passed their sell-by date. These Victorian buildings are unconnected and, as Clare explained, the plan is to create one single hospital so that patients no longer have to be transported outside to reach other departments.

The new four-storey structure will include women's and children's services and specialist medical services such as oncology and elderly in-patient wards. There will also be three care centres for emergencies and a new walk-in centre, critical and acute care and a diagnostic and treatment centre - and the big new North Mid Hospital should be ready for patients by Spring 2008.

Both chief executives made it clear that they are taking the spread of MRSA infections and hospital cleanliness very seriously and are actively dealing with the problem. In fairness, it was pointed out that there is virtually no infection control in the wider community so nobody really knows how much is brought in to the hospitals by outsiders.

Chase Farm has invested an extra £180,000 in tackling hospital infections this year with three specialist infectology nurses, a housekeeper responsible for every ward, increased screening of patients before admission and getting all staff to use disinfectant alcohol hand rubs between seeing patients. Vigorous monitoring is also being undertaken at North Mid. where all staff are using alcohol hand gels and an extra £600,000 is being added to the £3 million a year spent on cleaning.

Free passports are here

As forecast in the August Forum Newsletter, free passports for the over-75s are now available to all UK citizens born on or before September 2 1929, whether or not they have served in the armed forces. The free ten-year passports are a thank you gesture from the Government in recognition of people's efforts to secure the freedom of our country during the second world war.

For further information including how to apply for a refund call the **Passport Advice Line 0870 521 0410**

Links: www.bjf.org.uk

A Beth Johnson Foundation report - 'Looking at Ageing in New Ways'

Five Day Coach Holidays

Age Concern Enfield is running five holidays in 2005 to Weymouth, Isle of Wight, Woolacombe, Torquay and Seaton. The packages are all half board at good hotels. depending on venue the costs vary from **£169 p/p to £209.**

Full details are available on **020 8351 2702** at the Age Concern Trading Office, Knights Lane, Edmonton.

Don't let 'flu knock you out..... get your jab in first!

Everyone aged over 65 and people with chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes are being urged to get their annual free 'flu jab before the year-end. A free jab against pneumonia, meningitis and blood poisoning is also being offered to everyone aged between 75 and 80, and anyone over 80 who has not already had the pneumococcal protection jab which lasts for 10 years.

Contrary to some ideas that people have, the 'flu jab cannot give you the 'flu since it contains no live virus. This year for the first time, our local district nursing service has a 'flu vaccination team visiting patients at home who are housebound or cannot attend their GP surgery. So if you know anyone who has not already had the 'flu jab, or cannot get to their surgery, then please let the GP know.

The national target for over 65s getting the 'flu jab is 70% and Enfield reached an average 67% last year, with Edmonton scoring just 63.5%. So please ask everyone you see whether they have had "the jab". 'Flu often leads to more people being admitted to hospital and an estimated 12,000 more deaths in winter.



Dr Asit Mukhopadhyay and the staff at the Oakwood Medical Centre put on fancy dress for their annual jab day.

Enfield Strategic Partnership (ESP)

Those of us who attended our ESP awareness day in January of this year will remember that the ESP was set up to bring together the disparate organisations that serve the people of Enfield - the Council, Police, Primary Care Trust, voluntary and business organisations, etc. The ESP aim is that through planning and working in partnership we can improve the quality of life for all in the Borough.

The ESP has recently published a review summarising all of the projects being funded by the neighbourhood renewal money allocated by the government and targeted at the five most deprived wards in Enfield. The review is available from the Council and can be downloaded from the ESP web site (www.enfieldsp.gov.uk).

In the new year the ESP will be distributing a quarterly magazine reporting on outcomes and progress being achieved through these projects - expenditure for which will be around £1.8 million in the current year.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Issues, items or suggestions for the newsletter send or email to Olivia or Monty.

Scrutiny Panel looks at superbug

Anne Wood and Audrey Hardwick attended the special health scrutiny panel meeting on the superbug MRSA which confirmed the positive actions being taken at Chase Farm and North Mid., leading to an improved situation. At the North Mid, for example, out of 51,000 patients seen in 2003, 53 contracted MRSA. This year there had so far been nine cases.

Although the hospital buildings are old and difficult to keep clean, consistent monitoring has been put in place. There are more controls, detailed attention is being given to training hospital cleaners and search and destroy pre-hospital checks for MRSA are being made on incoming patients. In addition, visitors would in general be limited to two per bed and they would be expected to wash their hands on arrival and leaving the ward and would be urged not to sit on the bed.

"The councillors took up much of the time left for questions, so there was only half an hour for members of the public", says Anne. "Among the questions asked were: Can visitors carry MRSA into hospitals; why is the infection rate higher now; why are hospitals dirtier than in the past; why are our local hospitals worse than others; how are other hospitals getting it right?"

The answers were repeated from the original presentations, reassuring the audience that cleaning routines have been put in place", added Anne.

Forum vice-chair Audrey Hardwick commented: "We attack the hospitals about MRSA, but how did this problem get out of hand? Let us think about the contributing circumstances to the spread of MRSA. Matrons went, cleaning staff were not usually well paid so you end up employing people without motivation and no incentive to stay in the job - and who cut the funds for providing properly trained cleaning staff? The Government and managers are now trying to clean the hospitals up and a lot of effort is being made to put things right".

Forum Joins Law Centre

The Forum has joined Enfield Law Centre to show its support for this new, innovative, not-for-profit legal advice service. People living and working in Enfield can now obtain free, independent and confidential legal advice covering a wide range of matters including employment, housing, immigration and welfare benefits appeals, including council tax summons and extreme problems caused by housing benefit backdating.

The centre's main office is at 38 Market Square, Edmonton Green N9 0TZ. Clients are seen at this office only with an appointment and are asked to first contact the Law Centre by phone, fax or email. Phone 020 8807 8888; fax 020 8807 8844; Email info@enfieldlawcentre.org.uk

Enfield Law Centre also runs an evening advice service staffed by volunteer lawyers giving initial legal advice on a wide range of matters, including small claims, personal injury, family and consumer issues. This is a drop-in service that does not take on cases. This service is open every Wednesday from 6pm - 7.15pm at Enfield Foyer, 279-281 Fore Street, Edmonton, N9 0PD (which is very near Argos).

Get fitter for longer life

That's our Forum message for 2005, having now firmly established two Fun and Fitness days for the over 50s - on Wednesdays at Southbury Leisure Centre and Thursdays at Edmonton Leisure Centre. There is a packed and varied programme of activities including swimming, fitness sessions, table tennis and short mat bowls. The sessions run from 10 am to 3.30 pm and including lunch costs £4.10 with a discounted energy card - and there is a monthly tea dance to Bob's Big Band thrown in.

We are now working in partnership with Enfield Leisure Centres Trust (ELCT) on ideas to vastly increase the numbers of older people using the centres. Two of our initiatives are proving successful in pulling more people into the centres.

Firstly, there are now some 250 people over 60 with a regular monthly swim anytime any day pass costing £17 and there are over 1400 over 60s buying the specially discounted energy card. In both cases the Southgate Centre has the most customers - 146 swim passes and 670 energy cards sold. The swim pass is great value and should encourage people to swim more than three times a week because then it's free!

So we'd like to see some competition with the other Centres with Albany having sold 295 energy cards, Southbury sold 290 and Edmonton 180. There is a big job here for the Leisure Centre staff to do some selling, but we can help to promote these two schemes by telling everyone about these discounted deals. The energy discount card gives a wide range of cut-price activities across all leisure centres including swimming, gym, badminton, squash and bowls

We are now in detailed negotiations with ELCT about Forum members using the splendid Aspire fitness facilities at all four Leisure Centres. We hope to announce shortly a new deal where the fitness facilities will be open Monday-Friday from 10 am to 3pm at a special off-peak rate.

Meanwhile, some Forum members going to the Wednesday Over 50s session at Southbury have paid £10 for a "technogym key" giving access to the 100-station gym with a fully computerised wellness system giving each customer an individual and personalised exercise programme which records your progress.

We recognise there is an anomaly with the Forum representing the over 50s and the Leisure Centre discounts applying to the over 60s and we will see if anything can be done to modify the ELCT pricing policy.

Fill in a form - pay less tax

The Inland Revenue estimates that there are some 4 million people paying tax on the interest earned on their savings who could be getting the interest without deductions. Savers could be getting around £300 million more just by filling in Revenue form R85 which you can get at any bank or building society.

Pensioners are one of the biggest groups not claiming interest in full and by filling out the form you can get back any tax already paid on interest earned in this tax year and there is a separate form to get back the tax paid in previous years. To be eligible for tax-free income you must earn less than the personal allowance of £4,745 if aged under 65, £6,830 if aged between 65 and 75 and £6,950 for the over 75s.

More than 5,000 pensioners have already received over £2 million in overpaid tax. Many couples miss out on this tax saving by not switching savings into the name of the one who is a non-taxpayer.

Thinking ahead

As we move into winter's dark nights, our thoughts inevitably turn to the coming spring, so beautifully expressed in this poem by a Forum member.

***Spring, Spring Dazzling Spring,
when awakening bulbs
their radiant colours bring
and all life breathes fresh vibrant air, that
Nature pours forth for
all creatures to share
Rapturous hours fill days,
nights a new life is
born bringing forth sights
which fill eye and heart
with idolatry bliss when
the soil is revitalised
by the sun's morning kiss
Hurry, Hurry, Goddess of Joy
banish cruel winter and
his despondent envoys
Hurry, Hurry Goddess of Cheer
lest I be absent when you appear.***

Harold Brawn-Meek

New Euro health card

If and when you travel to Europe, UK citizens are entitled to free or reduced cost healthcare at all European Union countries - but only if you have an E111 form obtainable from the Post Office with you. The form comes with a booklet "Health Advice for Travellers".

This new form replaces the old E111 which will no longer be valid after 31 December 2004. Although issued to one individual, the new form will cover all the family and will be valid until 31 December 2005. During next year a new European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) will be issued and replaces the E111. So when you fill out the E111 form make sure you tick the box asking for the EHIC which will be sent to you automatically later next year.

Getting the E111 form from the Post Office costs nothing and you never know when you might want to go on a day trip to Paris on Eurostar and you'll then want health insurance cover.

Prolong Active Life

Visit a Leisure Centre. Buy the new over 60s £10 annual Energy discount card. Physical activity can help to prevent heart disease and cancer. Join the Over 50s day at Southbury Leisure Centre every Wednesday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and/or every Thursday at Edmonton Leisure Centre

Olivia Calling.....

F - for Fun, Fitness, Friends

As the nights draw in, the rain persists, and thoughts of wrapping up, staying in, keeping warm and hibernating until springtime seem increasingly attractive - I have another suggestion. On September 29, I paid Southbury Leisure Centre a visit in my Forum capacity, to ask participants their views on how the special over 50s day was faring, activities and so on. I was so impressed by the turnout, facilities and organisation, that I joined on the spot and am now a regular "Wednesday at Southbury" girl.

Activities include: pilates, yoga, chatting, badminton, laughing, swimming, table tennis, short mat bowls, a monthly tea dance, a selection of sandwiches and drinks for lunch and all in superb surroundings - and we have recently kicked off with a similar event on Thursdays at Edmonton Leisure Centre.

Please don't be put off if you haven't exercised for ages, it really doesn't matter, as the classes are for all abilities and are led by sensitive tutors - Vicky, the yoga teacher at Southbury, for example, is well into her 70s and is a shining example of what regular stretching can do for the body.

In a nutshell, I would say that fun, fitness, friends, and a great feeling of well-being, can't be bad every Wednesday at Southbury or Thursday at Edmonton and it definitely is the best way to beat those winter blues. The only complaint that participants have is that it isn't on at least three times a week!!

So in the coming months we will be trying to get more people to be physically active and we will be trying to expand the Southbury - Edmonton fun and fitness days to other leisure centres at Albany and Southgate. Meanwhile, I'm busy trying to expand the individual membership and the organisations affiliated to us. The most recent two to join the Forum are Enfield Vision and the Federation of Enfield Residents Associations, making a total of 27. So we are well on the way to becoming the umbrella organisation representing and speaking on behalf of all older people.

I'd be delighted to follow through any leads you can give me to strengthen our voice in the Borough.

Olivia Goodfellow

Women over 70.....

.....Get yourself screened!

Every three years from the age of 50, women receive a letter offering a mammogram - but it comes to an end just when the risk of developing breast cancer rises sharply. The chance of developing breast cancer rises to one in 10 by the age of 80, from one in 50 by the age of 50 and one in 23 at the age of 60.

Despite this trend, the age limit for automatic recall has been raised from 65 to 70 but after that you have to make sure you make your own appointment to get yourself screened. Our local breast screening unit sends out letters giving the scan result, but it then asks the patient to make another appointment in three years time - but not everyone over 70 will remember to do so.

Yet research shows that the older women are, the longer they delay seeking help and the longer they leave any treatment, the worse it is. Delays in diagnosis of three months or more can significantly affect the chances of recovery - hence the campaign against this discrimination against older women and for automatic breast cancer screening to be given to women over 70.

Claire Rayner, president of the Patients' Association, urges women to keep up this health check into their eighties and Joan Bakewell, the radio presenter, said: "Why is it cheaper to let women wait and get cancer rather than making sure they have a test?"

Meanwhile, Breast Cancer Care is stepping up its awareness campaign by urging women of all ages to look out for changes such as small lumps, dimples, nipple discharge, change in size or swelling under the armpit.

Splitting Maires: Below our Development Officer, Olivia, at our stand at the Enfield Show supporting Enfield's Mayor John Egan (left) and his counterpart Jacque Kosowski (right) from twin town Courbevoie in France



Pension top-up tops 13,500

A recent Age Concern poll found that 52% of people they asked said that the Pension Credit had made a noticeable difference to their quality of life. However, 73% felt - as we have continually told our MPs - that means-testing puts people off applying for it. So until the system changes we continue to urge everyone over 60 and living on a weekly income of less than £105.45 if they are single and £160.95 for couples to apply by calling freephone 0800 99 1234. An adviser will then talk you through the application form and help you fill it in, then send it on to you to check, sign and return.

Latest figures from the Pensions Service reveals that some 30% of households in Enfield now receiving the pension credit were not previously getting the old minimum income guarantee - although they may have been entitled to it. So the message is getting through that just because people have some savings it doesn't mean they can't get the pension credit.

The most recent figures for the Borough show that **13,500** individual pensioners are now getting extra money as follows:

Constituency	No. individual beneficiaries	average weekly amount £ per/wk
Edmonton	5030	59.07
Enfield North	4570	51.96
Enfield Southgate	3900	60.39

Maureen Arthur, benefits liaison team manager with the Enfield Town Citizens Advice Bureau, tells us that she recently helped a couple to secure a £1200 lump sum backdated to 6 October 2003 and a weekly payment of £22 and we are sure there are many, many more deserving people out there.

Meanwhile, Age Concern has spotted one unfair anomaly that urgently needs changing - anyone claiming pension credit cannot get it if they are abroad for whatever reason, be it holiday, illness or bereavement for over four weeks, when they have to re-apply and go through the rigmarole again. Age Concern believes that the length of time permitted to be abroad should be extended to a minimum 13 weeks in line with other payments such as housing benefit.

If you know of anyone affected by this rule, then please let us know so that we can present the case history to the appropriate local MP and urge them to put pressure on the Department of Work and Pensions to change the rule.

April Uprating

A 3.1% rise in the basic state retirement pension is expected to be paid next April unless Chancellor Gordon Brown changes the link with price inflation when he makes his pre-budget statement in December. This suggests the rise for single pensioners will be from £79.60 a week to £82 while for a couple the pension should go up from £127.25 to £131.20 a week - an increase of £205.40 over the year.

Older learners lose grant aid

The Forum is taking up the case of pensioner members attending the Southgate College Symphony Orchestra and Opera evening class courses who face the complete withdrawal of all concessionary grants this year to people aged over 60 and others who have previously paid either 50% or 25% of the full adult fees.

The concession has been withdrawn without any discussion, consultation, advance warning or explanation of the grounds on which this decision was taken. It means that in the four years 2001-5 the fees required for these courses by Southgate College have increased from £79 to £213 per year, a rise of nearly 170% and this is expected to be paid by pensioners, unemployed and disabled orchestra and opera members.

Coming on top of the threats to the future of Millfield Theatre, the future of another two cultural assets for Enfield people are in danger of closure. We have asked the Council how it can reconcile the cuts in grants with the recent Government White Paper 21st Century Skills - Realising our Potential which says: "We want to safeguard a wide range of learning opportunities for pensioners. There is good evidence that older learners can benefit substantially from continuing to learn" (para 4.48).

We have also looked at the policy directive the Learning and Skills Council has issued to Local Authorities to consider when planning their learning programmes for 2004/5 in which one of the priorities clearly states that in deciding allocation of public funds they should "safeguard a varied range of learning opportunities for personal fulfilment, community development and active citizenship".

So we are at a loss to understand how important local cultural institutions such as the Southgate College Symphony Orchestra and Opera which have been giving public performances and pleasure to the local community for some 40 years can suddenly be cut-off from any grant aid, a decision which is indeed placing the continued existence of the orchestra and opera in jeopardy.

We think this is a clear case of age discrimination and we have asked for a meeting of councillors, ourselves and some members of the Southgate College orchestra and opera to discuss the arbitrary and adverse decisions threatening their continuation.



Over 300 people attending the Forum's September Fitness and Safety Day at Edmonton Leisure Centre listened to Fiona O'Leary giving advice on healthy eating

Digital aids: First 500 fitted

The audiology unit at Chase Farm Hospital has had all the money it asked for from the Government under the £125 million investment programme to modernise hearing aid services in England and it is now nearing the 500 mark for digital aids fitted.

Keith Dunmore, the head of the audiology unit, tells us that they now have the equipment and computer systems to enable them to fit the digital hearing aids that we pressed the Primary Care Trust to introduce. "At Chase Farm we have a completely networked patient management system, new computers and printers, the programming and test equipment and money for new staff. In fact, we got everything we asked for and there was also money for training in the new technology," says Keith.

So why is there still a delay in getting the digital aids which can improve hearing by 40% over conventional technology? The answer is that there is a massive backlog of patients waiting to be seen and it can take up to three visits and some three hours to fit one - and that is over twice the time taken to fit an old-style analogue aid.

Chase Farm has been fitting the new aids since March under a priority system which the Forum agreed with giving precedence to parents or guardians of pre-school children; people with a terminal illness; and registered disabled people. The audiology unit staff also covers ENT clinics and diagnostic testing of new patients. To try and cut the waiting time the unit has taken on two new graduate students and an assistant audiologist - but they need time for training.

"We are using every initiative such as doing overtime in the evenings and letting NHS patients be seen by the private sector and fitted with NHS aids to NHS standards and we still have several hundred patients waiting to be fitted for the first time. They have nothing to use and so they are getting priority over people with a good hearing aid to use", says Keith Dunmore.

The RNID says it does not want to see NHS audiology services compromising the quality of their work by rushing patients through the system to reduce waiting times. Improved efficiency and capacity without compromising quality could be achieved by involving the private sector, it suggests.

Stop junk phone calls

If you don't want to be pestered by people trying to sell you something on the telephone that you don't want, you can try and stop them calling. You can register your number with the freeline Telephone Preference Service 0800 398 893.

You should at least receive fewer junk calls and be in a stronger position to challenge any calls you do receive, if you have registered your number. Your registration is not fully effective until 28 days after you call and the registration ends after five years. Companies which continue to phone you can be fined under a law introduced on May 1 1999.

This should at least cut out the unwanted calls from licensed marketing companies involved in telephone selling and the service is free of charge, but we are not sure it will stop the local firms selling double glazing or kitchen units.

Fire alarms: spread the message

Enfield community fire safety officer Peter Roll tells us that nearly all the 24 fire risk home assessments requested at our Edmonton Leisure Centre safety and fitness day have now been carried out and while no major problems were found he is anxious that people have a bedtime routine.

"We also had 178 requests for free smoke alarms that day and we now want to see that all members of clubs affiliated to the Forum know about the free alarms and fire risk assessments as well as getting Forum members to mention this fire prevention package to all their friends, relatives and neighbours", says Peter.

Peter's priority is to get to the 300 most vulnerable older people in the Borough, many of whom will be aged over 80 and are in the group with the highest incidence of death by fire. Care and social workers, hospital and primary care trust staff are all going to be involved in getting the life-saving fire prevention message out to the public.

"With winter arriving I am particularly anxious that people check that their electrics are in good order, especially electric blankets which should be switched off when you are in bed. And we believe that an electric blanket and hot water bottles should never be used together. We also want to see people have a phone extension next to their bed just in case they can't get out to call for help.

We will have copies of a new booklet Fire safety in the home - advice for older people available at the next Forum meeting and we would urge you to take copies for yourself and for distribution.

Meanwhile Peter Roll can be contacted on 020 8803 9316

Pension book to end

All Forum members who normally collect their state retirement pension should by now have received a letter telling them that their books will run out by April next year and will not be replaced. A cheque payment system is being set up for people who cannot use a bank or post office account because they have a disability or cannot use the key pad on a post office counter or can't cope with PIN numbers.

If you are in this position the Government will post a weekly cheque to be cashed at the post office with just a signature for identification. But before your book runs out you must contact the Direct Payment helpline on 0800 107 2000 to either get your money paid into a bank, building society or post office account or sent by cheque.

The direct payment system is generally more safe, secure and convenient than the pension book system if for no other reason than it will stop many cases of pensioners being mugged after collecting their pension. So we urge you not to ignore the letters from the Pension Service but talk it over with your family or with us to make sure you either operate an account which will receive the direct payment of your pension or you register for the weekly cheque to be sent to your home.

Invite a Friend along to the November Forum

Make the Forum stronger. Contact Olivia Goodfellow on 020 8447 8841 or get a form from the website - www.enfieldover50sforum.org.uk

New winter warmth advice line **Tackling crime priorities**

A new winter warmth free advice line has been set up to offer practical help on keeping warm and staying healthy with the aim of cutting the number of older people falling ill and dying during the cold winter months, particularly between December and March.

Between 24,000 and 49,000 more people have died in previous winters during these months than at other times of the year and half the deaths were due to strokes and heart attacks. This is because the cold temperature thickens the blood and makes people more susceptible to these conditions. A third of the deaths were from respiratory diseases such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

Seven simple steps to keep warm

- Eat regularly to heat the body - have at least one hot meal a day and hot drinks throughout the day to generate energy.
- Stay active and exercise as usual.
- Keep a flask by your bed in case you wake up feeling cold.
- Wear a hat outside during the coldest weather and perhaps a nightcap or scarf in bed.
- Wear flat, non-slip shoes or boots especially in frosty weather.
- Check your heating system is working properly.
- Ensure hot water pipes are lagged, fit draught proofing to seal any gaps in windows and doors. Improve insulation in your home.

If you are over 60, ask your gas or electricity supplier for a free safety check.

Make sure you are getting the winter fuel payment of up to £200 if you are aged 60 and over during the week September 20-26 2004. People aged 80 and over during that week will get an extra £100 paid with the winter fuel payment. You should get it automatically if you have received it before. If you haven't received it by end December call the winter fuel payments helpline on 08459 15 15 15 (local call rates, open weekdays 8.30 am-4.30pm).

And if you are over 60 and on income-related grants you can apply for a grant for insulation and possibly installing central heating. Call warm front scheme 0800 952 0600

The winter warmth free advice line is 0800 085 7000 open Mon.-Fri. 8am-8pm.

This winter, to help people with their council tax bills the Government is making a one-off payment of £100 to households with someone aged over 70 and this should be paid automatically with the winter fuel payment. All the payments are tax free.

Nearly 90 community safety survey forms were collected at our best ever attended Forum meeting in October. Members left armed with a keychain personal security alarm, the latest safety at your fingertips handbook and a wealth of information about crime in the Borough and some sound advice on personal safety.

Our survey responses show that only 11 people felt not at all safe generally in Enfield compared with 36 who felt fairly safe and 40 not very safe. When it came to safety at night, 58 people said they felt not very safe or not at all safe against 28 who felt fairly safe. Only one person felt very safe.

Forum members said that priorities during the three year policing strategy programme from 2005 should include reducing burglary, anti-social behaviour, violent and vehicle crime and diverting young people away from crime. And among the many suggestions for improving the crime scene, more visible policing and patrolling at night particularly at times such as Halloween and firework night were overwhelmingly the prime targets.

Although Enfield was said to be the eighth safest of the 33 London Boroughs, members questioned the accuracy of the statistics when so many people could not contact the police to report an incident. We were told that more Safer Neighbourhood Teams each comprising two PCs, a sergeant and three police community support officers and currently covering three wards in the Borough would be in place next year - but it was pointed out that this will cost money and mean increased council tax.

Enfield, it was said, has the most modern CCTV tracking station in the country with cameras installed at Southbury, Enfield Town, Edmonton Green and Silver St. stations which would be extended to other stations and our Forum members want to see more cameras sited at street corners where youngsters meet and in town centres. All the suggestions made have been passed on to the community safety unit and Chief Inspector Mick Lees will be attending future forums to gather and pass on information aimed at making us all feel safer.

We hope to have more supplies of the personal alarm with a panic button attached available at future meetings and if you can't get along and want one then call Olivia on 020 8447 8841

The Ransackers Project

Ruskin College, Oxford

If you are over 55 and have not benefited from further education, but would like to make amends it is not too late. Students spend a term at one of the universities and under the guidance of a tutor carry out an independent research project in an area that benefits the community. Our understanding is that bursaries are given and the courses are residential Full details are available from Liz Mathews 01865 517820 at Ruskin College and on the www.bgop.org.uk web site.

Visit our website

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.