

**CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

Agenda item 11(i)

**CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Lady Patricia Newton**

**CABINET PORTFOLIO: Housing & Well-Being**

Portfolio covers:-

- Housing and Homelessness Strategy
- Health and Well-Being
- Leisure
- Affordable Housing
- Older People

**REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 13<sup>th</sup> December 2009 AND ENDING 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010**

**Housing**

1. I can report that jointly with Maldon DC, the Council will be funding the Citizens' Advice Bureau to appoint a Homelessness Prevention Money Adviser post for 12 months.

The Adviser will deliver money advice to residents of both districts who face the possibility of being made homeless through eviction or repossession due to rent or mortgage arrears.

The funding for this post is from additional funding being provided directly to councils by the Department of Communities and Local Government, who have urged local housing authorities to respond positively and put schemes in place to minimise the impact of the recession on households at risk of homelessness.

2. In the recent severe cold weather, arrangements for any people who may be street homeless in the district were triggered. This happens when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees or below for three consecutive nights. The temporary shelter at the Salvation Army Citadel in Braintree was opened on a number of nights, but I am pleased to say it was not required by anyone. I would like to thank all the agencies involved who work on voluntary basis to ensure this provision is available just in case anyone is homeless on the streets.
3. I am pleased to announce that the Greater Haven Gateway Housing Sub Region - Choice Based Lettings Partnership has been allocated £15,000 of funding from Inspire East to look at the opportunities for shared service arrangements between the seven councils involved. This includes our District.
4. Following on from the member briefings held in November, the first Choice Based Lettings Breakfast Briefing was held in January. These are regular briefings open to partner organisations as well as members. Dates have been set for bi-monthly briefings on Choice Based Lettings, alternating with Homelessness and Housing Options briefings. People who have attended or have booked on future sessions include representatives from housing associations, Essex County Council, the Library Service, voluntary agencies and district councillors.  
The briefings are ideal as part of the induction for new staff or as a refresher/update

session for existing staff. The next session (in February) is already fully booked, with sessions planned throughout the year

## Health & Wellbeing

1. Swimming has certainly taken off in our District, and it's very pleasing to note that our 3 leisure centres have seen a significant increase in swimming membership of some 50% compared with the same period last year. I understand that the Braintree Swimming Centre has averaged 20,000 visits monthly since last April and that there have been a total of some 70,000 'free swims' at the 3 sites in Braintree, Witham and Halstead, between April and December 2009. Free swimming, which has been funded for 2 years by the District Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has attracted 13,500 registrations from the 16 and under and over 60s groups since April 2009. 12,000 of those registrations have been from the 16 and under group, and 1,500 from the 60 and over group. This has resulted in a 42% increase in the 16 and under group using the swimming facilities, and a 50% increase from the 60 and over age group.

## Leisure

1. Although formal consultation on the proposed Witham Leisure Centre closed on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2009, I reviewed all responses received up to the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010. I am delighted to report that we received a total of 149 responses. Results from the consultation have demonstrated to me that, whilst the majority of feedback has been very positive, some serious concerns were expressed regarding the omission of a sports hall from the new development. I think it is worth noting at this point that this particular facility will not be included in the footprint of the new building due to site limitations; however a substantial sports hall facility, equivalent to 4 badminton courts, is to be included on the Spinks Lane Sports Academy site and will be available for use by clubs. We understand that a similar size sports hall will also be available at the New Rickstones Academy site at Conrad Road, Witham.

Interest was also shown in the potential for a moveable floor in the learner pool and for some other facilities which will now be investigated as a result of the consultation process. These are an additional Squash Court (taking the total number to three, two of which will have a moveable wall), a Sauna/Steam room, a Crèche and a "Free Weights" area in the proposed Fitness Suite. I have recommended to Cabinet that a business case be produced for the Standard Option, which Cabinet supported in October 2009, and for full costings on capital and running costs associated with the other facilities suggested during the consultation process.

2. I am also very pleased to report that all our indoor leisure facilities remained fully open during the recent period of bad weather. Although it is disappointing that the synthetic pitches were unavailable to everyone between 15<sup>th</sup> December 2009 and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2010, I understand that the surfaces of the pitches were frozen during that time and would have been presented a serious risk of injury if they had been used. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at DC Leisure, who deliver these services on our behalf, for all their hard work and dedication in keeping the indoor facilities open during the recent period of very severe weather conditions.

**FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:**

**Cabinet Member Cllr Lady Patricia Newton Tel: 01376 563344**  
**Deputy Cabinet Member Cllr Gabrielle Spray Tel: 01787 224885**