

CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 22nd June 2009

Agenda Item 9(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 21st APRIL 2009 AND ENDING 22nd JUNE 2009

Housing Strategy

1. A “Housing Issues and Options” document was recently published and circulated to all members. This is intended to stimulate debate about the issues and topics, which will need to be addressed in the Housing Strategy for the Braintree District and to encourage contributions from as wide an audience as possible. This initial process /consultation will inform the Draft Housing Strategy which will be published in mid June. The Local Committees will have an opportunity to consider the draft strategy and the final draft, together with any suggested amendments arising from the consultation, will be presented to Cabinet in October 2009.

Choice Based Lettings

1. The new Choice Based Lettings system – “Gateway to Home Choice” - went live the end of April with over 300 bids received for the properties advertised in the first week. Working in partnership with seven other local authorities has enabled us to standardize the way in which people can apply for housing and makes the whole process of letting homes much more fair, open and transparent.

Homelessness

1. Members will be pleased to know that for the year 2008/2009 the number of households in temporary accommodation has been reduced from 82 households (March 08) to 38 households (March 09).

The number of homeless approaches and acceptances has also reduced:-

Homeless Approaches
2008/09 = 296
2007/08 = 421

Homeless Cases Accepted
2008/09 = 195
2007/08 = 283

In addition, the number of applicants where our actions helped to prevent homelessness has risen from 267 cases in 2007/2008 to 391 cases in 2008/2009.

In the prevailing economic climate this is very good news.

Affordable Housing

1. The number of new affordable homes completed in 2008/2009 was over 100. In spite of the economic downturn, current indications are for over 100 completions of new affordable homes in 2009/10. However, new starts are in short supply and planning applications are reduced. The only definite scheme for completion in 2010/2011 is the new extra care sheltered housing on the River View site in Witham.

Leisure

1. **Witham Replacement Pool**
Members will be aware that the District Council has been in discussions with the Academies Enterprise Trust and Essex County Council regarding the re-provision of leisure facilities on the site of the Bramston Academy. On 21st May 2009 I was pleased to meet with David Triggs, Chief Executive of the Academies Enterprise Trust, to be briefed on their plans for the two new academies for Witham. They expect planning applications to come before Council in July following local consultations. I anticipate detailed proposals for the replacement swimming pool coming before members later in the year.
2. **Free swimming scheme**
The free swimming scheme in the district continues to be highly popular with 12% of residents in the district having signed up in the first three months. Anyone 16 years and under, and 60 years and over is able to swim for free at any of the district's three swimming pools, under a project funded by DCMS with the aim of improving participation and the health and well being of these key age groups.
3. **New Heart & Sole Walk - Finchingfield**
On 1st May 2009 I was pleased to launch a new walk at Finchingfield. About 25 people joined this new 30 minute walk around the village. There are now eight different Health Walks each week delivered by volunteers and accredited to Natural England's Walking the Way to Health Scheme.

Health & Wellbeing

1. **Health, Housing and Wellbeing Board (HHWB)**
I have attended two meetings of HHWB. These have focused on drawing up an Action Plan of Work to tackle health inequalities in the district. To support the work of this board a new joint appointment between BDC and NHS Mid Essex has been made. It is expected that Claire Lawrence, Health & Wellbeing Development Officer, will be in post in June.

Older People

1. Village Agents

This is a Local Strategic Partnership project across mid Essex which is being piloted in the Braintree District. Volunteer agents will provide support and information to older and vulnerable people in isolated rural areas. Part of the funding will provide a paid community transport driver for two years for areas of work to be identified by the agents. The expected outcomes are:

People will be supported and informed

People will be able to attend events, clubs and trips

Cllr Gabrielle Spray will be attending a Village Agents Conference on 17th June

2. Community Safety Team

This team promotes community cohesion within areas and between all age groups. Older People's Well-Being Days is a new concept and they have been held in all three towns during 08/09. Outside agencies attended to promote their awareness to older people who then had an opportunity to discuss any concerns they had. These were very successful events and more are planned for this year; dates to be announced.

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

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