

1.89% rise for tenants

● THURROCK Council's cabinet has agreed a rent increase of 1.89 per cent for all council tenants.

After the meeting Tunde Ojetola, councillor responsible for housing said: "This is very good news for tenants and it is not what they expected. They actually went for a higher option and we have gone for a lower increase. In these economic times we need to help residents as much as we can."

Would you give a hand?

● THE British Red Cross and Thurrock Council are teaming up to find people who can be trained in anything from first aid to emotional support.

An information session is being held at Tilbury Riverside Arts Activity Centre, near Tilbury Riverside Station, on Thursday at 6.30pm for a 7pm start.

E-mail bheER@redcross.org.uk or call 0844 412 2830 and speak to Lynne or Len.

Cash raised to aid victim

● A MAN has raised £200 for a pensioner who was mugged, Jamie Challis, 32, of Sachfield Drive, Chafford Hundred, was concerned about an 88-year-old woman who was mugged in Clarence Road, Grays, and he felt he had to act.

Mr Challis said: "After sending the e-mail round to colleagues at Kelkoo, an internet company, we managed to raise £200 in no time. I am going to be dropping the money into Grays police station."

Fundraisers are needed

● VOLUNTEERS are needed to collect cash for a charity appeal.

Marie Curie fundraisers need people to help collect money for Great Daffodil Appeal at Asda's in Tilbury on Friday, March 5, and Saturday, March 6.

People are also needed to help collect at Tesco Extra at Lakeside shopping centre on Friday, March 12, and Saturday, March 13.

If you can spare an hour, call Anne on 01920 468956.

● CROOKS stole a £1,500 haul during a break-in at a house in Hamble Lane, South Ockendon. Once inside they stole a computer games console, a computer and a watch.

SURVEY BIDS TO MAKE LIFE A LOT HEALTHIER - AND LONGER



■ Looking for answers – James West and Angela Smith MP **Picture: PAUL WATSON 2PLLM-13**

RESIDENTS gave their views on how to improve health in Basildon's most deprived areas.

Workers from health consultants Turning Point were out in Pitsea, alongside Basildon MP Angela Smith, asking residents what improvements they would like to see on health services in the area.

Questionnaires were given out as part of a survey the health group is carrying out in parts of Pitsea and Vange, where the life expectancy for men is 76, eight years less than in Billericay.

Once the three-month survey is complete, information compiled by locally recruited workers will form recommendations made to NHS South West Essex and Essex County Council.

Ajay Khandelwal, senior research adviser for Turning Point, said the day proved a success with locals, who were keen to have their say.

Anyone interested in working for the group on the project for £7 an hour, can call Dr Khandelwal on 07854 238345 or e-mail

Ajay.Khandelwal@turning-point.co.uk.

Man brandished fake gun in a public place

By JAMES COLASANTI
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A MAN who hid a gun for a crook was arrested after brandishing it in public.

Christopher Lee, 24, was spotted with the imitation Glock by a man watching his son play football in Motehill, Langdon Hills, at about 6.30pm on April 9, last year.

The man saw Lee with the gun wrapped in a tea-towel and reported it to police, Basildon Crown Court heard.

Lee was arrested at his home in Mellow Purgess Close, Laindon, two days later, and immediately

□ Judge said it was an act of stupidity
□ Police found the imitation gun under bed during home raid

told officers the gun was hidden under his bed.

He said he had been looking after the gun for a friend and knew it had been used for crime. Lee said the friend was worried police would discover him with the gun and link him to his crimes.

Caroline Gardiner, prosecut-

ing, said: "Mr Lee told police it was a 'dirty', that is to say he knew it had been used to get money or carry out other crime."

She said Lee has previous convictions for driving offences, threatening behaviour, theft, and possession of a knife.

Isobel Ascherson, defending, said Lee's previous convictions amounted to "petty" crime, and his possession of the imitation gun was due to stupidity.

She said: "This was a case of a very stupid young man doing a friend a favour."

"This was an act of stupidity rather than criminality."

Judge Ian Graham said although the gun could be used to frighten, he was satisfied it could not be used to hurt anyone.

He added: "There is evidence to suggest it had been used for crime in the past, but not that it was to be used for crime again in the future."

Lee admitted possession of a fake firearm at a hearing in January. He was given a six-month prison sentence suspended for 18 months, an 18-month supervision order, and told to pay £250 prosecution costs.

The court ordered the gun to be destroyed.

Mo steps down for decision on son's shelter

THE son of Basildon Council chairman Mo Larkin wants to build a shelter for school kids she helps place at his business.

Chris Larkin runs Larkins Tyre and MoT Centre in Church Road, Laindon, where children from Basildon schools are given placements to put them on the right track through the Trident Work Experience scheme.

His application to Basildon Council for permission to put up an open-sided canopy as a rain shelter goes before councillors at the development control committee tomorrow.

The application is the last of four which go before the committee, which his mother serves on.

Council officers have recommended approval for the applica-

tion which would also shelter customers.

Mrs Larkin said: "I have helped place a lot of children there. We have had many success stories with one boy who couldn't read and write going on to get a full-time job and is now married with two kids. But a lot of kids have complained they get wet outside."

She was advised she could still

take part in the first three votes, provided she left for her son's application.

However, she says in the interests of public perception, she will ask another Tory to replace her for the whole meeting.

She said: "I am not taking part in the meeting, because I don't want people to think I might have influenced the decision."

Council agrees to fund police support officers

COUNCILLORS have agreed to help fund police community support officers in Thurrock for another year.

The council jointly pays for 14 PCSOs with Essex Police, costing the council £227,000.

Ben Maney, Thurrock councillor responsible for public protection, said: "There has been a lot of talk about where the council could spend the money better. My feeling is, in longer terms we could do more with the money."

Deputy leader of the council Amanda Arnold said: "In Ockendon, my ward, PCSOs are so valuable. They are the ones with the local intelligence. It is a choice that we fund them."

Leader of the council Garry

Hague said: "This is over and above what the council has to do. PCSOs are a visible presence on the street and they are important, but we need make sure that we are scrutinising this for another period."