

Grant means big changes at academy

STUDENTS will benefit from a six-figure investment in their school's facilities. BMAT STEM Academy, in Harlow, has seen a raft of improvements to its building, thanks to a £510,000 capital grant from the Department for Education. A brand-new kitchen has been installed, as well as a sixth form study area, sixth form common room, careers office, extra engineering classrooms created from larger teaching spaces and break-out spaces remodelled to provide dining space and additional presentation halls. The school has also installed new security doors at reception and 12 benches outside to encourage students to get fresh air during their breaks. Teenagers are now eating a healthy diet thanks to the brand-new kitchen. Two jobs have been created,



BMAT STEM Academy, in Harlow, has benefitted from a £510,000 capital grant

with the school now having its own dedicated team of caterers able to provide a wider range of fresh meals on site. Head of school Dustin Schuyler said: "The kitchen renovation is part of a wider programme

of work to develop the school building as our numbers grow each year. "The feedback is that the building feels more like a school now, which is a nice thing to hear."

Elderly may be at risk from relatives

Multi-generational homes need to be extra careful

By Lewis Berrill

ESSEX has tens of thousands of elderly people living with someone of working age - which could expose them to an increased risk of catching coronavirus. The Government advises anyone aged 70 or over to be "particularly stringent" in following social distancing measures, as they are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19.

But living with people of working age may bring challenges, charities and scientists have warned, as younger people are still allowed outdoors for essential trips.

New figures from the Office for National Statistics show 18 per cent of people aged 70 plus in Essex, a total of 30,757 residents, live with one or more people of working age - those aged between 16 and State Pension age.

Caroline Abrahams, charity director at Age UK, said: "Staying safe in multi-generational households is challenging but also incredibly important, espe-



ONS figures show 18 per cent of people aged 70 plus in Essex live with one or more people of working age

cially if the older person already has significant health issues. In the end it's about being really cautious and exercising your common sense - that's the best way of keeping the virus at bay."

She encouraged young and old people living together to ensure they keep their distance from each other, disinfect doorknobs and other surfaces, and follow hand washing advice, particularly after returning home.

Neil O'Brien, a Conservative MP in the Midlands who requested the data, said people in their 70s should completely self-isolate where possible, and rely on help to get food and medicine delivered.

He warned families living with them to take "extreme care" by socially distancing even more than the rest of the population, and not going out unless absolutely essential.

He added: "I know this sounds really intense, but it could save the life of your loved ones."

Jennifer Dowd, an Oxford University epidemiologist, said a combination of high rates of co-residence along with a high proportion of older people would lead to a large number of coronavirus cases - which could explain why Italy has been so badly affected.

She said: "In general that more contact between younger and older generations through co-residence would be expected to speed up transmission from working age populations to older more vulnerable groups."

'Virtual' meetings for councils

SOME of the biggest debates and decisions at councils across Essex could now be held virtually rather than in public due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Government has written to councils to advise them they can hold meetings remotely until May 7, 2021.

It is likely this will mean meetings will be held over online web streams or using vir-

tual meeting software for the next few weeks at least.

In the letter sent to councils, Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick said: "The regulations on meetings will enable essential decision-making to continue whilst upholding democratic principles and enabling all to comply with the public health guidance."

After being forced to cancel

meetings as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Southend Council has already had to make a major decision on the future of the Southend United stadium at a meeting held effectively behind closed doors.

The meeting was held with just the leaders of the four political parties who were each asked to sign off on the decision.



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