

MP in call for summer camps to help kids catch up on school

AN MP and Harlow Conservatives are calling on Essex County Council to launch "summer camps" to help children in Harlow make up for school time lost due to the coronavirus pandemic. Following a £1 billion package of catch-up support for children announced by the Education Secretary on Friday, Robert Halfon MP, the Leader of Harlow Conservatives and the four Harlow Councillors on Essex Council, wrote to Cllr Louise McKinley, cabinet member for children and families at the county council. They asked for "catch-up tuition, activities, mentoring and pastoral care over the upcoming summer holidays". In the letter, they say "the impact of coronavirus and learning under lockdown is disproportionately affecting the life chances of

disadvantaged children in Harlow". The letter was supported by a question from Mr Halfon to the Education Secretary in the House of Commons, urging the Government to work with Essex County Council to deliver the summer programme. Commenting on the letter, Mr Halfon said: "We know that 2.3 million children across the country have had as little as one hour of home learning a day, if at all, whilst schools have been closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. That's why, I campaigned for many months to secure a catch-up premium to help those children who have been left behind. "Summer camps would make a huge difference to our young people's life chances and I hope that Essex County Council will listen."



Robert Halfon MP is calling for summer camps to help children catch up on school

School art packs

HUNDREDS of children across Harlow are keeping busy with creative projects, thanks to a donation of art materials.

As part of a national programme, families in the town have been given Let's Create packs to enable them to access creative learning during lockdown.

Teachers at Burnt Mill Academy worked with Royal Opera House Bridge and Arts Council England to share the resources from Baker Ross, an arts and crafts business in the town.

The packs included paints, crayons, paint brushes, sketchbooks, scrapbooks, glue sticks, rainbow scratch art magnets, as well as access to creative activities from The Royal Opera House's virtual classroom.

More than 640 young people in the town requested the packs.

Georgina Woods, head of Year 9 at Burnt Mill, helped to put together and distribute the packs and said: "Burnt Mill Academy staff wanted to give something back to our community, so we volunteered to help pack creative boxes for the young people across Harlow.

"The boxes will enable children to still be creative at home during this difficult time. They will also help to bring families closer."

Forest renters face highest housing prices in county

EPPING Forest is the most expensive place to rent in Essex, figures reveal.

The median monthly rent in the district - averaged out across all types of property - was £1,295 between April 1, 2019 and March 31 this year.

This is an increase of £45 from the period between October 1, 2018 and September

30 last year - according to the Office for National Statistics.

Across Essex, where the average monthly rent has increased to an all time high, the median rent was £926. This is an increase of £17.

Brentwood was the second most expensive, with rents increasing £25 to £1,075.

In Chelmsford, the median

cost of renting has increased by £25 to £925 a month.

The increase in rents has coincided with a steep rise in unemployment with industry experts warning of a lengthy backlog of evictions over the coming months as more tenants struggle financially.

The latest ONS report shows that median rents in

England have not been higher. London had the highest median monthly rent at £1,425; this is more than double the median monthly rent for the whole of England.

Co-founder of rental deposit replacement company Ome, Matthew Hooker, said: "Rental affordability remains a burning issue and

one that will continue to plague the market.

"We've seen tenants across the UK squeezed in recent years as wage growth has failed to keep pace with ever-increasing rental costs.

"However, this will have become a much bigger issue for those that now find themselves on restricted income."

Fire probe finds cause 'accidental'

Praise for councils' support for neighbours

By Joseph Reaidi

Continued from front

The fire, which spread to the roof of the three storey building, started at about 7am on Sunday.

Residents of the surrounding flats had to evacuate the building as fire crews worked on the blaze - reported 'under control' by 8.30am.

Fire Investigator Mark Earwicker said: "Earlier reports suggested this fire started on the ground floor of the block of flats, however, I can confirm it started in a top floor flat before spreading to the roof and adjoining building.

"Following our fire investigation we now know that the fire started in the open plan kitchen lounge area. We have recorded the cause as accidental but because of the extent of fire damage in the flat it's difficult to determine exactly how the fire started.

"We believe this was a tragic accident where a man sadly lost his life, and, over the coming days and weeks, we will be working hard to spread our safety



The fire in Woodland Grove
Photos: Adrian Wallis

messages and offer reassurance and advice to residents.

"As always, our message to every single person in the county is to make sure they have a working smoke alarm on every level of their home. It will alert you to the first sign of fire and give you more time to get out, stay out and call 999."

A rest centre opened at the Jack Silley Pavilion at Stonards Hill, for the evacuated residents affected by the fire.

Cllr Chris Whitbread, leader

of the Epping Forest District Council said: "Our hearts go out to everyone involved. There has been extensive damage to the block. But for the swift action by Essex Fire and Rescue it would certainly have been worse."

Fire crews were called from Harlow, Loughton, Waltham Abbey, Old Harlow, Basildon, Stanstead, Brentwood, Chelmsford and Chingford.

Epping Forest MP Dame Eleanor Laing shared her condolences.

She said: "I was shocked to hear about this fire and my thoughts are with the family and friends of the man who lost his life. This is a tragic time for everyone involved.

"I would like to express my thanks to the fire crews whose actions in stopping the fire from spreading prevented an even worse situation.

"I am delighted that Epping Town Council and Epping Forest District Council were able to come together so soon after residents were evacuated to provide a rest centre and to help find alternative accommodation for those unable to return home."

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