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POINTS OF VIEW

Charity's fabulous work providing vital help for babies and parents

WE have some wonderfully community-minded people in our area and I love finding out what they've been up to, especially when they've got a milestone or some other key achievement to celebrate.

Recently, I was lucky enough to be invited along to the Chelmsford branch of Baby Basics, a charity that operates across the UK, providing clothes and other essentials to support vulnerable persons and their newborn child up to the age of six months.

When I visited them, Baby Basics Chelmsford were celebrating providing their 300th basket of supplies since they were founded in 2019 by Joelle, Stephen and Juliette Mortimer with the support of Moulsham Lodge Methodist Church.

While there, I spoke to one of the outreach workers from another Chelmsford-based charity, Open Road, whose clients are sometimes recipients of the packages put together by the volunteers at Baby Basics.

She told me how much it means to the often extremely vulnerable people who she works with to know that we have residents in our community who care and want to help.

Joelle and her team do a fabulous job of bringing together the donations from the community, sorting them out and packaging them up into bundles that have the ability to help safeguard the most precious, most important months in a child's life.

To have helped 300 babies in this way is truly amazing. Joelle is rightly proud of the work she and her team have done, but she had another key point to make when I spoke to her about it.

Joelle was at pains to point out that Baby Basics couldn't do the work they do without the invaluable support of the wider community.

She said that wasn't just about donations either. She highlighted the fact that there are several residents who spend time knitting or otherwise creating items to include in the baskets, adding that wonderful home-made quality into the mix that those of us who

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The Baby Basics team, including founder Joelle
CLLR MARIE GOLDMAN

were fortunate enough to grow up in loving, stable and adequately-resourced homes would probably have taken for granted.

Joelle said that she knew the volunteers who helped in this way enjoyed doing it and that, for some, it gave them a sense of purpose. She summed it up neatly by reminding us that "it feels good to do good". Who can argue with that?

You can find out more about the fabulous work of Baby Basics on its national website at baby-basics.org.uk

As a twin-hatted local councillor (meaning I am elected to two separate councils – in my case, Essex County Council and Chelmsford City Council), I am privileged to be invited along to lots of events which helps me find out about some of the amazing and wonderful things that are going on

in our community. But of course, things aren't always as happy and straightforward as we might like them to be. Sometimes residents simply don't get the service that they need and are entitled to from their local council.

Councils aren't perfect. No organisation is perfect. At the end of the day, they are run by people who are flawed (that's all of us – including you and me), and they sometimes make mistakes.

Sometimes those mistakes are driven by bad political decisions made by elected politicians, sometimes they are driven by group-think and an unhealthy culture that has lost sight of what's important, and sometimes they are simply mistakes – things that unintentionally go wrong.

Either way, if you're on the receiving end of a 'mistake', it can have far-reaching and devastating consequences, especially if it's allowed to escalate over a long period of time. And that's where your local councillors come in. If you're trying to deal with one of your local councils,

whether that's Chelmsford City Council, Essex County Council or one of the many parish councils, and you aren't receiving fair treatment, please do contact one of your local councillors for the relevant council and ask them to help.

Of course, there are plenty of things for which self-help is the best option.

For example, if your bins haven't been collected when they should, it's far better to report this directly to Chelmsford City Council than it is to your local councillor who would probably become a bit of a bottleneck in resolving this. (You can report missed bin collections here: www.chelmsford.gov.uk/bins-and-recycling/missed-collections.)

But especially if you're struggling with something more serious, please do contact your local councillor who can help make representations to the council on your behalf. That is, after all, what we're elected to do.

I say all of this because I've recently been made aware of something that has been going on for several years, but where the residents

had never been in contact with their councillor to ask for help – probably because they didn't realise that they could. But that's what we're here for.

Just two words of caution, though: firstly, not all councillors are brilliant at their roles. It's a shame, but it's true, but you usually have more than one option and it doesn't strictly have to be your local councillor who you contact.

Secondly, unlike MPs, councillors don't have staff to help them deal with casework and it's not supposed to be a full-time role either, so please be patient when waiting for a response (but feel free to send a gentle reminder after a while).

You can find out who your Chelmsford city councillors are at www.chelmsford.gov.uk/your-council/councillors-committees-and-decision-making/councillors/find-a-councillor

You can find out who your Essex county councillor is at cmis.essex.gov.uk/essexcmis5/Councillor-Search.aspx

Keep well.

Marie