

Area defended In outcry over handout figures

By Chris Henwood

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BRANDWOOD community leaders have hit, back at a series of national newspaper reports that painted a depressing picture of the ward.

Brandwood Tory councillor Mark Hill, and King's Heath First! Community newspaper editor Peni Whelan both defended the area after it featured in, Sun newspaper reports on state handouts.

The reports, over March 17 and 18, . put Brandwood at number 21 in England and Wales, claiming that 55.4 per cent of its 794 working aged residents were on benefits.

However, Coun Hill questioned the figures, which were supplied to the newspaper by the Conservatives.

"Benefit and unemployment levels Have never been anywhere near that type of level," he said

According to the 2001 census, 24,530 people lived in Brandwood. It also found that 64 per cent, or 10,992, of those aged 16 to 74 were working or looking for work. '

One of the reports also described a collapsing and "anything but friendly" Brandwood pub, which Coun Hill and Miss Whelan believed was the Ash Meadow pub in Brandwood Park Road; Opposite, said the report, were eight, shops, four of which were boarded up.

"It was really trying to make out that we're a dirty, horrible area," said Miss Whelan. .

"But we're a good community."

The pair pointed to recent investment in schools and public spaces.

Rochdale's Central and Falinge area topped the benefit claimant ratio table.

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