

17 October 2017

Report of	Assistant Director of Communities	Author	Andrew Harley ☎ 282880
Title	Equality and Safeguarding - Annual Update Report		
Wards affected	All		

The Committee is asked to review this annual report on Equality and Safeguarding

1 Decision Required

- 1.1 Committee is asked to review progress made in meeting the Council's legal duties and objectives in regard to both Equality and Diversity, and Safeguarding, and to endorse the approach set out at paragraph 8 below.

2. Reasons for Decision

- 2.1 By reviewing the approach in these key areas, the Committee will assist the Council in meeting its legal duties.

3. Supporting information

- 3.1 The following appendices have been included at the end of this report to assist Committee in its task:
- Appendix A – Key improvements and initiatives
 - Appendix B – A case study to show one such initiative in greater detail

4. Continuation of a Combined Approach

- 4.1 The last annual update report (2015-16) saw the introduction of a combined approach to scrutiny which was approved by Governance Committee on 22 November 2016. This approach has been continued here. Its rationale remains the same:
- The two areas of work are mutually supportive and reinforcing.
 - They both involve the principle of proportionality and having “due regard”.
 - Each area helps to support, and prevent harm occurring to, vulnerable groups.
 - An approach that reviews these two areas together can help to deliver maximum benefit for customers, the most effective management of risk and the most efficient use of resources.

5. National and Local Developments

Equality and Diversity

- 5.1 During the period, there have been no changes to legislation or guidance in regard to how the Council should meet its [Public Sector Equality Duty](#). Nevertheless, there have been some notable developments in policy areas relevant to Equality and Diversity.
- 5.2 In August 2016, the Prime Minister announced a [Government audit to tackle racial disparities in public service outcomes](#). Whitehall departments have been required to identify and publish information showing how outcomes can differ in a range of areas including health, education and employment. The findings will influence government policy to address these and related issues.
- 5.3 In April 17, the Government published guidance on [Employing disabled people and people with health conditions](#). It “provides a summary of information for employers to help increase their understanding of disability, to enable them to recruit and support disabled people and those with long term health conditions in work”. In June, the LGA published a report titled [Being Mindful of Mental Health](#) which sets out the important role that councils play in the mental wellbeing of their communities.
- 5.4 In the area of Safeguarding, there have been further significant developments over the period, which reflect the continuing priority given to this area of public policy
- 5.5 In August, 2016, [Care Act Statutory Guidance](#) was updated to take account of regulatory changes, feedback from stakeholders and developments following the postponement of social care funding reforms to 2020.
- 5.6 The new benefit cap came into force in November. The cap limits how much money a working age household (living outside Central London) can receive in benefits to £20,000 a year. [Research](#) from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), summarised [here](#), has suggested this new cap will affect 88,000 households.
- 5.7 The [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#) came into force in February. It includes key provisions to protect vulnerable individuals from harm.
- The Act extends existing provisions against CSE to include the streaming of images.
 - It introduces licensing reforms to include guidance to be issued by the Secretary of State as to how “licensing functions under taxi and private hire vehicle legislation may be exercised so as to protect children, and vulnerable individuals... from harm”.
 - The Act provides for anonymity for victims of forced marriage (as has been the case in respect of FGM) in order to encourage victims to come forward.
- 5.8 The [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) became law in April and has been accompanied by an [LGA Guide](#). It places new duties on local authorities to prevent homelessness whether they are classed as being in priority need or not.
- 5.9 On 21 June 2017, the [Queen’s Speech](#) included measures on a draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill to include the establishment of a Commissioner and the creation of a specific Civil Prevention Order. Mental health reform was also announced with the aim of helping to ensure that mental health is prioritised in the NHS in England.
- 5.10 The [Wood Report](#) (published in May 2016) and the [Government’s Response](#) was noted in the Council’s previous annual update report. The move towards local child safeguarding boards becoming non-statutory (whilst local adult safeguarding boards have become statutory) has prompted a review of local arrangements. The Government is shortly expected to put out for consultation new guidance on [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), which should assist in clarifying local requirements.

- 5.11 There have also been changes over the relevant period in terms of national Governance: On 12 June, the new Government published a full list of new ministerial and government appointments. Justine Greening has overall responsibility for the [Government Equalities Office](#) as Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities. Within the Department for Education, Nick Gibb MP is [Minister for Equalities](#) and Anne Milton MP is [Minister for Women](#). Across other Government departments, Penny Mordaunt MP is the Minister of State for [Disabled People, Health and Work](#) and Lord Bourne is [Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Faith and Integration](#). Responsibility for Safeguarding is shared across multiple Government departments including the Department for Education, the Home Office, the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 5.12 At Essex County Council, Raymond Gooding has responsibility for Equality and Diversity (as Cabinet Member for Education) whereas Dick Madden has responsibility for Safeguarding (as Cabinet Member for Children and Families). In terms of local Safeguarding Board arrangements, Phil Picton continues to be the independent Chair of both the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) and the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB), following his appointment in June 2016.

6. Meeting the Duties

Overall Arrangements at Colchester Borough Council

- 6.1 Equality and Safeguarding are each integrated into the day-to-day operations of the Council. However, arrangements are also in place to ensure strategic focus and operational co-ordination. The Assistant Director for Communities provides the strategic lead whereas the Equality and Safeguarding Co-ordinator provides the operational lead. The relevant [Cabinet Portfolios](#) are Housing and Communities and Public Safety and Licensing.
- 6.2 In the area of Equality and Diversity, the Diversity Steering Group (DSG) provides an active forum for 'advancing equality' for both customers and staff. Its members are service 'representatives' who play a key role in reviewing progress and disseminating best practice. In a similar way, Designated Safeguarding Officers attend quarterly 'workshops' to review safeguarding referrals and improve processes. Each service area has between two and four officers who have an enhanced level of training to provide expertise and assistance to officers.
- 6.3 Partnership working is key to meeting the Council's safeguarding duties. The [Safer Colchester Partnership](#) (SCP) is led by a Responsible Authorities Strategic Group (RASG) which consists of Chief Officers representing local statutory partners and organisations. It aims to achieve sustainable solutions following the identification of local needs and priorities. It does this by delivering initiatives and engaging with local communities on issues including domestic violence and hate crime.
- 6.4 Colchester Borough Council also engages positively with the relevant 'Stay Safe' group which now comes under the ESCB's governance. This group helps to put into practice effective partnership working to keep children safe from harm including abuse. The Council attends local 'MACE' (Missing and Child Exploitation) meetings which facilitate joint approaches and key information sharing to help protect children from exploitation. Since July 2017, following agreement between local CSPs, Domestic Homicide Reviews has been administered centrally in Essex under a new team set up by the Essex Domestic Abuse Board.
- 6.5 The Council works closely with both the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board and the Essex Safeguarding Children Board. Support from, and representation to, both the ESCB and

ESAB for District Councils is by way of Board Membership. Colchester Borough Council Executive Director Pam Donnelly sits on the ESAB, whilst Maldon District Council Chief Executive Fiona Marshal sits on the ESCB. Each feedback to the Chief Executives Group and Designated Leads for District and Borough Councils.

Equality and Diversity

6.6 The Equality Act 2010 imposed a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) upon local authorities including district councils. Under its 'general duty', the Council must "integrate consideration of the advancement of equality" into its "day-to-day business, and across all... functions". Councillors and staff must have "due regard" to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not.

The 'protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The duty also covers marriage and civil partnership, but not for all aspects of the duty.

6.7 The Equality and Human Rights Commission's [Technical Guidance](#) to the PSED (2013) continues to be best guide to the practical operation of the PSED. In addition, the Council takes due account of the Government's [Review](#) of the PSED which endorsed the so-called "Brown Principles". These confirmed that the 'due regard' duty must be fulfilled before and at the time that a particular policy is being considered; it must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind; and that it is non-delegable.

6.8 The PSED 'specific duties' require us to publish information to demonstrate that we are meeting both the 'general duty', and one or more published [equality objectives](#). During the period 2016-17 we have continued to meet both of these requirements. Information published on the Council website includes:

- [Equality Impact Assessments](#)
- The Council's [Strategic Plan](#) and its Year End Performance Report (including its Strategic Plan Action Plan).
- The Council's website pages on [Equality and Diversity](#)
- The Council's [equality information](#) section contains all required information
- Workforce statistics: [Equality monitoring information](#)
- Work undertaken by the Council's Research and Engagement team about service users, customers and the borough's population.
- The Council's independent, external accreditation as an '[achieving](#)' organisation under the Equality Framework for local government.

6.9 The Council's 'equality objective' remains, which is to:

'Ensure Colchester is a welcoming and safe place for residents, visitors and businesses with a friendly feel that embraces tolerance and diversity'.

This objective is reflected in the new [Strategic Plan 2015-18](#) within the 'Welcoming' Priority. The specific actions required to meet the objective are included within the associated Action Plan, which is subject to six monthly monitoring.

- 6.10 The Council remains committed to the use of Equality Impact Assessment process. Despite not being a legal requirement, these remain a vital framework through which the Council can continue to identify, evaluate, and mitigate against, disproportionate negative impacts upon the 'protected characteristics'. It allows us to make the right judgements on the basis of sound information and data, in an open and transparent way.
- 6.11 The Council works with a host of agencies and organisations in order to meet its duties and advance equality more generally. Many of these are included in Appendix A.

Safeguarding

- 6.12 Under Section 11 of the [Children Act 2004](#), local authorities "must make arrangements for ensuring (that)...their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children." The Act required district councils to supply information to enable the Local Safeguarding Children Board to perform its function to co-ordinate activity. There are agreed [SET Procedures](#) (covering Southend Essex and Thurrock) for child safeguarding which district councils are required to follow, and which are integrated into the Council's Safeguarding Policy.
- 6.13 Under Section 42 of the [Care Act 2014](#), the local authority must make enquiries to co-ordinate action to support an adult who: (a) has needs for care and support (whether or not the authority is meeting any of those needs), (b) is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, and (c) as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it. Although Essex County Council is the *investigating authority*, the Act requires district councils to supply information to enable the Local Safeguarding Adults to perform its function to co-ordinate activity. There are also agreed [SET Procedures](#) for adult safeguarding, integrated into the Council's Safeguarding Policy.
- 6.14 The Council passes concerns to the Children and Families Hub (in regard to children) and to Social Care Direct (in regard to an adult). A secure record of contacts and referrals (via the [Request for Support](#) and [SETSAF1](#) forms) with any feedback received are retained in a secure area of the Council network, and are reviewed at quarterly Designated Officer Workshop meetings.
- 6.15 The Council, as chair of the local Community Safety Partnership, has responsibilities under [Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004](#). During the period, the Safer Colchester Partnership has continued work on two Domestic Homicide Reviews and has provided relevant information following 'scoping enquiries' on Partnership Learning Reviews, Serious Case Reviews and Domestic Homicide Reviews.
- 6.16 Partnership working remains key to the Council being able to meet its statutory duties more generally. On 30 November 2016, the Safer Colchester Partnership hosted its *Hidden Harms Conference* for partner organisations in order to raise awareness, share approaches and deepen joint working. It included presentations and workshops around key issues such as Gangs, CSE and Modern Slavery. The Council regularly attends the Essex County Council *Missing and Child Exploitation* (MACE) strategic meeting which facilitates the sharing of intelligence and best practice between partner agencies.
- 6.17 The local Safeguarding Boards audit the approach and performance of partners including Colchester Borough Council in regard to: (a) senior level commitment, and accountability; (b) core policies and procedures; (c) safer recruitment; (d) service development; (e) learning, development and staff support; (f) preventative work and inter-agency working; and (g) information sharing. In January 2017, the Council completed a remote audit on its

adult safeguarding responsibilities. Although 70% of criteria were met, specific areas where improvement can be made were identified. In January 2018, the Council will submit its Section 11 audit on child safeguarding.

- 6.18 Modern slavery encompasses sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced criminal exploitation and domestic servitude. To meet its legal duties under Section 43 of the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) the Council has published on its website its second Modern Slavery Transparency Statement.
- 6.19 [Sec 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015](#) placed a new duty upon local authorities to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.” Although the Council’s response was detailed in its 2015-16 annual update report, the challenge is ongoing. More than 70 staff have received PREVENT training to date and this programme is continuing.
- 6.20 Continued training and development remains a key way in which the Council seeks to ensure that vulnerabilities are correctly identified and internal processes are closely followed. The Council substantially updated its safeguarding e-learning course (to include new information on Modern Slavery, Domestic Abuse, Mental Capacity, Forced Marriage, FGM, and PREVENT) in 2016, and this course has been successfully rolled out for all staff with network access. External training was accessed for the Council’s Designated Officers in June and ‘Level 2’ equivalent face-to-face safeguarding training was delivered ‘in-house’. Further significant safeguarding training is planned for 2017-18 for over 300 front line staff on a rolling monthly basis on key safeguarding topics including CSE, Gangs, Modern Slavery, Domestic Abuse and Elder Abuse.

7. Overview

- 7.1 The Council believes that its approach to meeting its duties in both the areas of Equality and Safeguarding is appropriate and proportionate. An intelligent approach that recognises where and how these legally distinct areas intersect can offer efficient and effective working.

8. Going Forward

- 8.1 Under the [Equality Act 2010 \(Gender Pay Gap Information\) Regulations 2017](#), voluntary, private and public sector employers with 250 or more employees will be required to publish gender pay gap figures by April 2018. Requirements will include the need to publish median gender pay gap figures and the proportion of men & women in each quartile of the pay structure. The Council will publish the required information on its website, on [Datashare](#) and on a new "digital portal" that the Government is planning to launch.
- 8.2 Continued further financial challenges are anticipated over the next 12 months. Vulnerable individuals are likely to face increasing pressures as a result of the continued impact of welfare reform. The Council will need to continue to exploit the benefits offered by digital platforms, whilst retaining the ability and commitment to respond to individual customer needs. Meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty will continue to require working closely with voluntary organisations representing specific ‘protected characteristics’.
- 8.3 As the Safeguarding agenda has developed, the Council will respond with a significant programme of face to face training for front line staff. The Council should continue to deepen partnership working with agencies and voluntary organisations, including through the [Safer Colchester Partnership](#), in order to deliver for residents.

9. Strategic Plan References

- 9.1 The Council's [Strategic Plan](#) is a key mechanism through which the Council monitors how it is meeting its equality and safeguarding responsibilities. In particular, it contains the Council's current 'equality objective'.
- 9.2 Progress towards the Council's Strategic Plan Action Plan is reviewed within the Council's [Year End Performance Report](#).

10. Consultation

- 10.1 Extensive consultation preceded the publication of the Council's Strategic Plan 2015-18.

11. Publicity Considerations

- 11.1 The Council's approach to Equality and Safeguarding has the potential to affect everyone who lives, works or visits the borough. It can play a key role in the daily lives of individuals and communities by helping to safeguard vulnerable groups from harm as well as tackling prejudice and advancing equality of opportunity.
- 11.2 The [equality information](#) section on the Council's website continues to provide updated information as required by legislation and guidance, along with related content of use or interest to customers, staff and councillors. This helps with openness and transparency, with everything 'in one place'. The Council's website also includes a section dedicated to [Safeguarding children and 'adults with needs for care and support'](#) which contains key information for residents along with links for further information.

12. Financial Implications

- 12.1 The Council continues to face significant financial pressures. As part of its strategic response, the Council has sought to mainstream a "business culture" focused on commercialisation and income generation. In this context, special attention will continue to be paid to 'advancing equality' and safeguarding children and 'adults at risk'.
- 12.2 It is important to understand that our obligation to have "due regard" to the three aims of the 'general duty' does not mean that decisions which have a disproportionate impact upon one or more 'protected characteristics' cannot necessarily be taken. The Council must nevertheless always seek to remove or reduce negative impacts.
- 12.3 The Council's approach must continue to be proportionate, with key decisions being given due priority. Equality Impact Assessments must remain an integral part of the decision-making process when addressing changes to policies and practices.

13. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications

- 13.1 This report is an annual update about Equality and Diversity, and Safeguarding. The importance that the Council attaches to these areas helps to protect vulnerable groups from harm and exploitation and promotes the human rights of all.

14. Community Safety and Health and Safety Implications

- 14.1 The Council's approach to Equality and Safeguarding involves working closely with partners and communities. The [Safer Colchester Partnership](#) plays a vital role in helping the Council to meet its legal duties around safeguarding.

14.2 By meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council will help to ensure that employees do not suffer discrimination, harassment or victimisation. This will in turn create a safer working environment, and one which is consistent with the Council's Health and Safety policies.

15. Risk Management Implications

15.1 As an employer and provider of public services, the Council could face legal challenges from individuals or groups who have been unlawfully discriminated against, however unintended. Legal cases brought on grounds of discrimination do not have upper financial limits like those brought through employment tribunals. The Council must meet its responsibilities to ensure it does not discriminate, and this will also help to avoid the potential for significant financial claims.

15.2 The Council could suffer significant reputational damage should its staff or councillors fail to comply with their Safeguarding responsibilities. This paper details the Council's strategic and operational approach in this area.

Key improvements and initiatives 2016-17

- The Council distributed over £200,000 of Voluntary Welfare Funding to 'not for profit' organisations that help the Council to meet its equality and safeguarding objectives. In 2016-17, the following organisations received funding: Age Concern; Colchester Citizen's Advice Bureau; Community 360; Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge; Emergency Night Shelter; Grassroots; Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE); and SHAKE Colchester Furniture Project.
- The Community Initiatives Team co-ordinated *Crucial Crew* for 1665 Year 6 children. This included educational scenarios on Anti-Social Behaviour, Fire Safety, Drugs and Alcohol, and Internet Safety, the latter including information on 'how to keep yourself safe around sexual exploitation, grooming and sexting'. The team also worked in partnership with Community 360 to promote its Winter Warmth Scheme which is targeted towards older people. This included information on the Council's [Warm Homes Project](#) and its [Emergency Heater Scheme](#). During the period, the [Keep Safe](#) scheme has been extended to include a broader spectrum of 'vulnerable people' including those experiencing dementia.
- Funded by the Council and Community 360, the [Good Gym](#) was launched in 2016 to help promote a healthier lifestyle and to reduce loneliness and isolation. Local 'runners' pay a visit to a Community Group Hub as part of their route in order to do odd jobs for vulnerable older people. To July 2017, the scheme was attracting around 6 new runners per month, and was shortlisted as a finalist in the Voluntary Community Service Award in the 'Who Will Care?' awards. The Council supports the [Older Persons Forum](#) whose aim is to engage with, and empower, older people within the borough. It continues to be well attended by many local partners.
- Former armed forces personnel sometimes face barriers to accessing services and re-integrating back into civilian society, especially where individuals have physical or psychological disabilities. The Council recognises that, being a Garrison Town, Colchester has a special responsibility, and this is why it has sought and secured external funding for two years for a Community Development Officer dedicated to supporting affected individuals under the terms of the [Armed Forces Covenant](#). This has only been made possible by effective partnership working with the Ministry of Defence and Tendring and Braintree District Councils.
- With partner agencies, the Council continues to fund Colchester's SOS Bus which has developed the range of clinical care services available. The service attends community events and has Medics on duty. It has also increased volunteer numbers to 64 in 2017. This has been possible through offering high standards of training including Mental Health Awareness as well as courses on Equality and Diversity, and Safeguarding. The total number of users of the service 2016-17 was 905, which was an increase of 8.4% on the previous year.
- The Council's Parks and Recreation Service are supporting the creation of a new community interest' company *Together We Grow*, which will take forward the highly successful [Big Garden Project](#) which has now been operating for 10 years. This key project provides educational, social and therapeutic horticultural services within a large community vegetable garden. Its success has only been made possible through the dedication of over 40 volunteers.

- On 30 November 2016, the Safer Colchester Partnership hosted its *Hidden Harms Conference* for partner organisations in order to raise awareness, share approaches and deepen joint working. It included presentations and workshops around key issues such as Gangs, CSE and Modern Slavery. This well attended event was described in feedback as “really informative and thought provoking”.
- In 2016, the Council appointed an externally funded *Gangs Co-ordinator* as a response to intelligence from the NCA and Essex Police that vulnerable young people are exploited within the borough to facilitate the running of street level drug dealing within ‘county lines’. The role is funded to January 2018 and involves direct support to some of the borough’s hardest to reach and most vulnerable tenants, and delivers close and effective partnership working with key agencies and voluntary organisations. The Public Health Youth Offending Team has also implemented a dedicated team to deal with gang related activities, and effective partnership working has facilitated intelligence sharing and mutual support.
- Colchester has welcomed a total of 12 families since the Council begin working with partners as part of the Syrian VPR ([Vulnerable Person Resettlement](#)) Programme in 2015. The Council works with [Essex Integration](#) (formerly DNA Fresh Beginnings) to provide the resettlement service, as well as the Home Office and EELGA, which help to ensure that families settle in well. Essex Integration assign a case worker to each family and supply their own translators. Its scheme manager chairs the *Essex Migrant Agency Forum* which is supported, and currently hosted, by the Council.
- The Council’s Customer Support Team have been a key agent in delivering the [Transformation Project](#) at the Library and Community Hub. This has involved: the redesign of the ground floor to allow increased support for customers; supporting customers to access council services online; and greater sharing of technology and information between Essex County Council, Colchester Borough Council and Community 360. From November 2017, a fully accessible disabled WC will be completed at the Library and Community Hub. The [Changing Places](#) WC will be a vital new facility of particular benefit for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and cerebral palsy.
- Partnership working at the Library and Community Hub has included ‘lunch and learn’ events, dedicated training sessions, and attendance by staff at various community events. During 2016-17, representatives from the following organisations have attended Customer Support Team meetings to deepen working relationships and enhance referral processes: African Families in the UK; Open Road; One Support; Beacon House; Dementia Training; Colchester MIND; Emergency Night Shelter; Job Centre Plus; ‘YES’; the Women’s Refuge; Colchester FoodBank; Phoenix Futures; NACRO; Victim Support; Out for Good; NERIL (North Essex Resource and Information Line); Invicta; and Community 360.
- The Council has worked closely with the LGBT community over the period, and Outhouse East has provided specialist awareness training for 19 members of staff within Customer Services.
- There are many ways the Council consults residents and collects customer feedback to use as *insight* to inform service improvement. Since 2016, the Council has been using a new consultation framework, managed by the Research and Engagement Team to help ensure consistent methodology and quality. All of the Council’s web-based customer consultations - past, present and future - are brought together on the Council’s website [here](#).

- Customer Services have engaged with Essex County Council to deliver *Dementia Friends* sessions which give specialist customer facing teams an “interactive tour” from the perspective of someone affected by dementia. This explores different ways to communicate and how small adjustments (to the provision of services) can have big impacts.
- *Leisure World* has continued to provide specific opportunities for vulnerable individuals to access its facilities. Two hour ‘Whiz Kids’ sessions offer children with disabilities and their families a safe and supportive environment to participate in football, basketball and trampolining. A similar service is offered to adults with disabilities called ‘Endeavour’: Sessions are well attended by up to 30 adults. Leisure World also offers free *disability cricket* sessions in partnership with Essex Cricket.
- The Licensing Team has carried out a comprehensive review of the Council's Taxi Licensing Policy to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in an industry which has seen significant challenges in recent years in relation to safeguarding issues. In addition to the introduction of mandatory safeguarding training for all drivers and operator staff, the Council seeks to embody safeguarding principles throughout its policy and in its day-to-day business. Comprehensive pre-licensing standards, the introduction of a convictions policy, and the Council's penalty point scheme combine to ensure that the Council meets its statutory obligations and helps safeguard vulnerable individuals.
- Progress continues to be made in delivering the priorities identified within Colchester’s Homelessness Strategy. During 2016-17, the Housing Solutions Team worked with partner organisations to prevent homelessness for 648 households by giving advice on budgeting, defending illegal evictions, negotiating with landlords and helping secure alternative accommodation. Colchester and Tendring successfully secured £239,375 of government funding to provide an *Early Response Co-ordinator* post in both local authority areas. The project aims to provide a co-ordinated outreach response to rough sleeping across both local authority areas to support and prevent homelessness.
- The Council is working in partnership with [Essex Lifestyle Service](#) to embed Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training within the Council, and to encourage staff to talk more freely about mental health, reducing stigma and creating a more positive culture. The internationally recognised training is designed to teach how to: spot the signs and symptoms; provide help on a first aid basis; and guide someone to appropriate support. By the end of 2017, the Council will have 15 ‘Mental Health First Aiders’ across a range of different services.
- In February 2017, the Council organised a briefing and training event for CBC councillors, CBH board members and key partners on CSE and Modern Slavery, delivered by the ECC lead, and Essex and Kent Police Co-ordinator respectively. In feedback, the event was described as “very worthwhile”.
- The Council’s housing stock is managed by Colchester Borough Homes, which contributes significantly towards the Council meeting its equality and safeguarding duties. Following a mock inspection in April 2017, work is underway to ensure that CBH is well-placed to achieve the ‘excellent’ level of the LGA’s SHEF (Social Housing Equality Framework). Recent initiatives designed to meet the needs of vulnerable tenants include a new process to identify and respond to a ‘cause for concern’, and the collation of information and data on hoarding issues. CBH have deepened their working with Essex County Council and now have representation by a *Partnership Officer for Children and Families* at relevant meetings.

- The Council is proud that its staff so often go ‘the extra mile’. In September 2017, a Council employee in Waste and Recycling, Chris Payne, took a ‘hands-on’ approach to safeguarding: He happened to be outside a first floor flat in Colchester when a fire started inside. With the help of another resident, they managed to get the occupant to safety by piling two wheelie bins on top of each other. He said: “I don’t consider myself a hero... I did what anyone else would have done in those circumstances... The fire commander told me if it had happened at night when no-one was around she would have died.”

- **Colchester is now a *Borough of Sanctuary***

On 26 July 2017, Colchester Borough Council agreed the following Motion:

Colchester Borough Council has been instrumental in providing services and support for refugees under a variety of Home Office schemes over the years. Most recently the Council gave unanimous support to instigate the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme working with Essex County Council, public sector and voluntary sector partners. We are proud of our achievement in welcoming 12 Syrian families over the past 18 months.

In order to strengthen our commitment to those who face the ordeal of being separated from their families and home this Council pledges to:

- *continue to do all in its power to welcome and assist refugees and all those forced to seek sanctuary in our Borough*
 - *ensure services and resources are accessible, including by signposting, translation, and advocacy*
 - *acknowledge the pledges of institutions, businesses, individuals and families across Colchester*
 - *declare ourselves as a Borough of Sanctuary, following the examples of other local authorities already signed up to the City of Sanctuary principles.*
- In 2017 the Council signed up to the Disability Confident employer scheme in order to help recruit and retain disabled people and people with health conditions for their skills and talent.



REACH - Community Briefing Event
Realising Equality of Access at the Community Hub

Background

Improving access to services was the main focus of a briefing event hosted by Colchester Borough Council at the Library and Community Hub on 13 September 2017. Led by the Customer Support Team, the event drew together an invited audience from more than 10 local community groups to explore ways of breaking down barriers and maximising access to services provided by the three key partners located at the Community Hub: Colchester Borough Council, Colchester Borough Homes and Essex County Council.

Welcome

Pam Donnelly, Colchester Borough Council's Strategic Director of Customer & Relationships, welcomed representatives from East Anglian Indian Association, Victim Support, Community360, The Night Shelter, Essex Fire & Rescue Service, Fair Access Colchester and others, to the REACH event.

The Library and Community Hub is a busy and vibrant partnership space, offering a range of frontline and other services to residents of Colchester, which has gained a reputation for supportive and innovative customer service since it opened in December 2013.

Guests heard about the different ways individuals are able to access services, how effective partnership working maximises access, and the ways the Council is helping to overcome barriers to access and inclusion shaped by issues such as language, opening hours, how customers access services, and the way advice is delivered.

Council staff leading and supporting this event included Jason Granger, Sarah Eveleigh, Andrew Harley, Sarah Thompson, Ann Offord, Tracey Brushett and Leonie Rathbone.

The Tour

The event progressed to an interactive tour of the Library and Community Hub, aimed at showcasing the partnership work which is providing services to some of the most vulnerable residents using the community space. It included:

- Ground Floor (Express Zone)
Assisted Self-Serve and Go Online; Customer Experience and the Triage process; 'Set up' Zone and the Children's Zone (with the Sensory, Summer Read and Rhyme Time areas)
- First Floor
Booths/ Registrar Services; One to One support for vulnerable customers; Housing Triage and complex Housing Benefit and Council Tax enquiries; DHPs (Discretionary Housing Payments) and EHPs (Exceptional Hardship Payments), LAIEF (Local Authority Information Exchange Form); Budget Planning help for Universal Credit Customers; The Welfare Reform Team; CAB/ Community 360; and the Coffee Shop!
- Second Floor
Interview rooms; Housing Options (Colchester Borough Homes); Security Protocol; Meeting rooms/ sensitive conversations.

The tour was followed by a question and answer session, and finally refreshments.

Pam Donnelly said: "This was an extremely useful event, and a fantastic opportunity to be open and transparent about the services on offer at The Library and Community Hub... Everyone who took part shares our interest and commitment to overcoming the barriers that can prevent our customers from accessing the services and the support they deserve. By sharing our experiences, and guided by the feedback provided by everyone involved in the event, we will be better able to tailor the support and advice we offer to some of the most vulnerable customers using our services."

Cllr Beverley Oxford, Portfolio Holder for Customers, added: "I am immensely proud of the collaborative work and vision that has made the ground-breaking Community Hub such an innovative and vibrant facility."

Outcomes and Feedback

A number of access and other issues were raised at the event, and these are being addressed by staff where required. Issues included those relating to: community groups using the Library and Community Hub; access to Council sports facilities by minority ethnic communities; tackling homelessness; and reporting hate crime.



Thanks to everyone who took part in the REACH event and for sharing our aspiration to remove the barriers that can prevent our customers from accessing services. By coming together at community events such as these, we continue to make the Library and Community Hub an even more welcoming and easy-to-use centre for all of Colchester's residents.

Positive feedback about the day was provided by those who attended:

*"Thanks for your help and well done on a helpful and informative event."
"It was very interesting, and impressive... I think word will get around."*