

Community, Health & Wellbeing Teams

Annual Report 2025/2026



Armed Forces

Armed Forces Covenant - MOD Employer Recognition Scheme Award

Gold Award – Revalidation Certificate:



Colchester City Council was proud to receive its revalidated Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold Award at a formal presentation in the Mayor's Parlour at the Town Hall.

The Employer Recognition Scheme acknowledges businesses and organisations that have provided exceptional support to the armed forces community and defence by going above and beyond their covenant pledges. This allows the Ministry of Defence to publicly thank and honour those organisations for their support.

The prestigious certificate was presented by the Lord Lieutenant of Essex to Pam Donnelly, Chief Executive of Colchester City Council, in recognition of the Council's continued dedication to supporting the Armed Forces community.

The presentation was attended by Mrs Jennifer Tolhurst, the Lord Lieutenant of Essex; Sir Bob Russell, High Steward of Colchester; members of the Armed Forces – including Lieutenant Colonel Ed Rankin, Kristina Carrington, Regional Employer Engagement Director, and Paul Gilham, Communications Manager of the East Anglia Reserve Forces and Cadets Association; Councillor David King; Councillor Jocelyn Law; Mr Philip Tolhurst; and the Council's Armed Forces Champion and officers.

This revalidation follows the council's original ERS Gold Award in 2019, reaffirming its outstanding commitment to veterans, service personnel and their families. From employment support to community engagement, Colchester continues to go above and beyond its Armed Forces Covenant pledges.



British Forces Resettlement Service (BFRS) Careers Fayre

Colchester City Council attended the **BFRS** Careers Fayre in Colchester to support members of the Armed Forces community, by providing information and support for careers at Colchester City Council.



Children & Young People

Colchester City Council sits as a Panel member for the weekly Essex County Council Early Help Drop-in Sessions.

These session are designed to give partners in Essex who work with children, young people & families the chance to: discuss anonymized cases, gain peer support, be signposted to advice & help to answer general questions.

Early help drop-in sessions



Weekly drop-in sessions - you can attend **any** session

This session is designed to give partners in Essex who work with children, young people & families the chance to: discuss anonymised cases, gain peer support, be signposted to advice & help to answer general questions.

These sessions are supported by our panel of subject experts from across the children's system including:

- Team Around the Family Support Officer (TAFSO)
- Inclusion Partners
- Essex Family Support Service
- Engagement Facilitators
- SENDIASS
- Attendance Specialists
- Essex Youth Service
- Peabody Outreach
- Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service
- DWP
- and others

These sessions **DO NOT** replace work undertaken by the Children & Families Hub as outlined in [Effective Support for Children & Families in Essex](#)



North Essex drop-in session
Tuesday 15:30-16:30pm

→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Email (North) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk



South Essex drop-in session
Wednesday 12:30-13:30pm

→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Email (South) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk



West Essex drop-in session
Thursday 12:00-13:00pm

→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Email (West) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk



Mid Essex drop-in session
Wednesday 12:00-13:05pm

→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Email (Mid) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk

Please note that the Mid Essex has an [online booking system](#), where you are able to pre-book a slot to present a case. Colleagues are still welcome to join the session without booking, but you won't be guaranteed a time to discuss your case.

Resettlement

Homes for Ukraine

Arrivals have continued throughout the last year, with Colchester now having welcomed 413 guests.

February marked the 4th Anniversary of the start of the war and CCC hosted an event for guests and hosts to mark the event.

Afghan resettlement

Colchester has welcomed another 4 families

- 2 under the Communities for Afghan scheme where local groups sponsor a family and
- 2 under the Find Your Own Scheme

Suffolk and North East Essex ICS 'Can Do' Health and Care Awards 2025

- Communities Team – Highly Commended in Preventing Ill Health, Inequalities & Injustice
- Resettlement Team – Commended in Preventing Ill Health, Inequalities & Injustice



Asylum

Asylum funding has been used to

- Support 21 newly granted refugees into housing
- Provide 2 caseworkers and an interpreter at RAMA
- 60 newly granted refugees with a £200 bursary to support them until their benefits were sorted
- Funded ESOL provision on Greenstead two days a week
- Support the Bridgeway Mission, STEP. Boys and Men CIC, BOAZ
- Support the Salvation Army Migrant Hub
- Level 3 Immigration advisor

Training

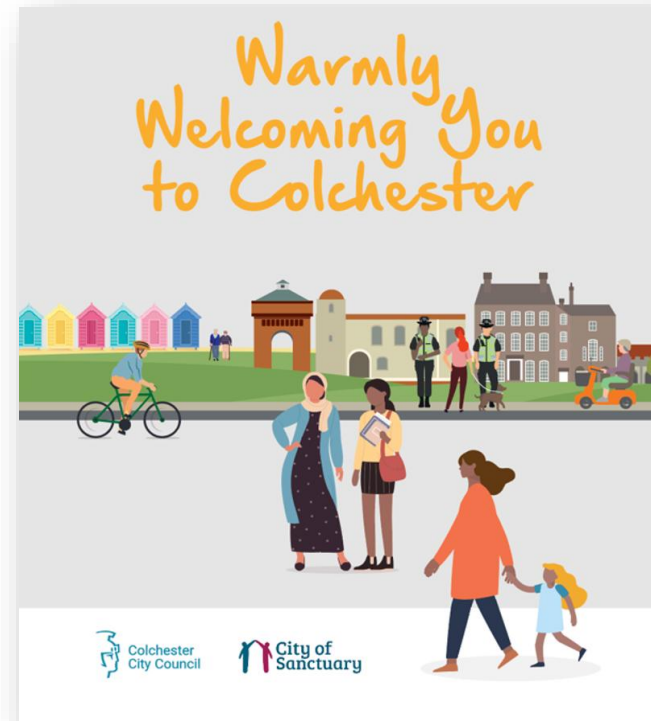
Working with the Police and RAMA 10 sessions of training planned for asylum seekers around misogyny, consent, sexual harassment and health relationships

UASC

22 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are housed in Colchester. The team have made links with the social workers and agencies supporting them.

Wider Involvement

- The team responded to the Government's earned Settlement Consultation
- Hosts the Essex Migration Forum
- Attend regional resettlement meetings
- Stakeholder involvement in the Anglia Ruskin University MigRefHealth project - £2.4m project to support vulnerable communities



Welcome and Congratulations packs provided in 10 languages to new arrivals and newly granted refugees

City of Sanctuary Grants launched

Using Home Office funding a City of Sanctuary grants scheme has been launched where voluntary sector organisations, health and education can apply for grants up to £20000 to run projects that support asylum seeker sin dispersal accommodation. Grant applications are assessed by a panel from members of the City Of Sanctuary Forum.

Grants have included:

- STEP – carpentry and cooking courses
- RAFIKI – conversations with men around FGM
- CARA support for victims of domestic abuse
- Colchester Institute – ESOL support officer
- RAMA & RAFIKI – Friendship Café and cooking club
- BOAZ Project – warm clothes and It equipment

Refugee Week 2025

During refugee week we held a football match between RAMA's football team and a team made up a selection of CCC, CBH colleagues and councillors. Unfortunately, the CCC team lost but a rematch is planned for this year's refugee week.

A market place event was also held which brought together all the agencies supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Colchester



City of Sanctuary

The award recognises the council's commitment to fostering a culture of welcome, inclusion, and integration support for people seeking sanctuary.



“Colchester are punching above their weight in this area”
Maggie Filipova-Rivers - City of Sanctuary Local Authority Programme Manager



Community Integration Work

Monthly Job Club for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

Held at RAMA (Refugee, Asylum Seeker & Migrant Action), in collaboration with S.T.E.P., Together We Grow, Reed & Restart and Essex Integration (DNA Networks).

The club provides a safe and supportive group environment where participants can:

- Identify transferrable skills.
- Learn how to use positive language in CVs and interviews.
- Understand safety while job hunting (with input from CAMS (Colchester Against Modern Slavery and DAST (Digital Access Support Team))).
- Navigate workplace documents.
- Receive Health & Safety (H&S) training (with support from Colchester City Council's H&S Officer).
- Improve their online presence (DAST-led sessions), and LinkedIn basics
- Hear from guest speakers with lived experience about volunteering and work placements.
- Practice job interview skills – including how to prepare for the interview, then how to follow-up for feedback.

All attendees receive **newsletter updates** after each Job Club session to keep participants informed and engaged.

They are all invited to be on the 'job club with Shaz' WhatsApp group where they receive regular posts re job vacancies, volunteering opportunities, training courses and careers fairs.

Job Club

at 1:30 to 3pm

**2nd Thursday of each month
at RAMA House**

31 Eld Lane, Colchester, CO1 1LS

Get the help and support you need to
prepare for work in the UK

**All refugees and Asylum Seekers who live
in Colchester are WELCOME!**

Any questions? Just email
communities@colchester.gov.uk



Community Integration Work

Weekly Drop-in for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

Held at The Salvation Army every Friday, people can take advantage from one-to-one employment support from Colchester City Council's Community Integration Support Officer and Employment Plus.

A bespoke skills profile is set up for each person, along with their preferred area of work.

In addition to this, clients can take part in music lessons, sewing lessons, informal English lessons delivered by Boys & Men, or just relax at the art table or have a game of chess, draughts, or dominoes – perfect across any languages – all followed by a hearty meal home cooked by Boys & Men.

On Friday afternoons we have been joined by the Digital Access Team and delivered our Refugee, Asylum and Migrant Digital Champion Training.

We were joined by Pedal Power on five occasions where our clients were gifted a bike. These were sourced from Police Stations who would otherwise be consigning their unclaimed stolen bikes to landfill. They were cleaned up and made roadworthy for this scheme. Each person also received a helmet, a lock, and a set of bike lights, and were all invited to Confidence Ride-Outs.

2025 Snap-shot

- 32 CVs reviewed
- 51 one-to-ones
- 112 drop-in enquiries
- 93 attended job club
- 14 eVisa support
- 80 added to WhatsApp
- 61 bikes given away
- 110 Digital Champions



Reed in Partnership



Colchester Multi-faith Committee

Leaders from across the city's many faith communities joined together to form a new multifaith committees that that promotes inclusion, mutual understanding, and will provide a shared response in times of community tension.



Physical Activities

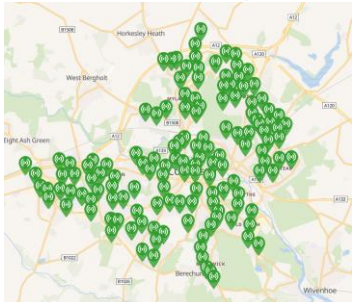
Beat the Street



Beat the Street Colchester made a massive impact

The city-wide interactive game returned to Colchester from 11 March to 22 April, transforming the city into a giant physical activity challenge, and the community turnout was staggering.

An incredible 17,999 residents of all ages laced up their shoes, hopped on bikes, and took to scooters or wheelchairs to get active together. Collectively, Colchester covered a mind-blowing 135,544 miles. To put that into perspective, that is nearly 5 full trips around the Earth's equator! Beyond the jaw-dropping numbers, the real impact was felt across our neighbourhoods. The game successfully got families, schools, and friends moving together, injecting fun into daily exercise and proving how powerful a community can be when moving toward a healthier, more active future.

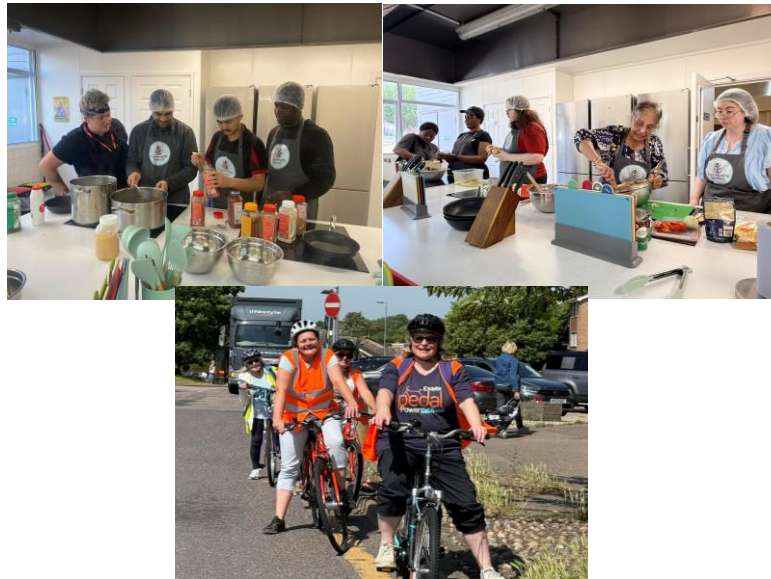


Cook and Cycle

Some great work by Essex Pedal Power who have brought back the popular **Cook and Cycle** event run in conjunction with Heart Of Greenstead back in January 2026.

"An ideal opportunity to learn cooking skills with a professional chef and enjoy a cycle ride (or if the weather is not nice, we will run a bike maintenance workshop) then we all eat together! The aim is that each participant also takes a tub of food home".

Keep an eye out via The Active Wellbeing Society, Essex Pedal Power Colchester and Heart of Greenstead socials to see when the next events are planned.



Essex Pedal Power



Essex Pedal Power has now been running in Greenstead for a number of years. If you have spent any time in the city, we are sure you will have seen some of the bright orange bikes being ridden around. To date, Pedal Power has provided:

- 972 free bikes to residents
- 86 refurbished bikes
- Weekly group rides including, Sofa to Saddle (ladies), Men's only , Bike Bus to Unity School - plus taking bikes up to Abbey fields
- Weekly Bike Kitchen and Fix Its to get bikes repaired and learn how to fix it.
- Monthly Social Saturday rides

All with a group of volunteers offering their skills twice a week (6-8 hours per week)

[Essex Pedal Power Colchester & Tendring 2025](#)

[Essex Pedal Power Journey 2025](#)

Colchester Borough Homes: Sports and Recreation

Activity Highlights:

Swimming for Wellbeing (55+): Held every Friday at Leisure World, these sessions see an average of 14 residents per week enjoying the water and social refreshments afterward

Chair Dance: In partnership with Dance Network and Let Your Hair Down, our sessions at *Elfreda, Enoch, Cannons, and Worsnop* remain a weekly favourite, with strong attendance across all venues

Health Walks: Led by Mental Health Runner Shawn, residents have enjoyed guided walks through Castle Park, supported by minibus transport

Darts & Social Fun: Our monthly social at Leisure World successfully launched in November with 10 participants enjoying music, dance, and darts

Want to meet Bernard or get involved?

Have a look at this great video as part of the Active Essex Place Partnerships Investments [Colchester Borough Homes Place Partnerships Initiative](#)



Wheels For All

The wait is almost over! Our new hub at Old Heath Recreation Ground is set to become a reality this Spring. We expect to have "spades in the ground" by late February, with the building arriving in late March. This new space will be a game changer for our community sessions.

Fundraising Highlights

Our community's generosity continues to amaze us. This year, we received several wonderful donations:

Golf Day Memorial: A group of friends raised £570 in memory of a dear friend.

Tiptree 10 Miler: Jo Smith, our Colchester Wheels for All Coordinator smashed the Tiptree 10 miler with a PB of 1hr 18mins, raising £400. Well done Jo!

Club Support: A massive thank you to the Tiptree Runners, who donated £1,200 from the proceeds of the race.

These funds are vital as we look toward our next goal: purchasing a new e-trike for our fleet.



Public Health

Tuck IN



Tuck IN has been relaunched in Colchester with the support of Colchester City Council Environmental Health and Public Health colleagues.

The free council support programme is designed to "make food better" by supporting small local businesses & schools to improve their nutritional quality.

Find out more information here: [TuckIN | Making Food Better For Schools, Councils and Business](#)

If you are an Essex based food business the TuckIN programme is free to join. Sign up is quick and simple and includes initial online training and downloadable support resources. Certification requires a commitment to an understanding of and an agreement to deliver the 8 pledges above to help make food better for your customers and your community.

[Sign Up To TuckIN | Making Food Better](#)

Bite Back in School Programme - The Gilberd School

Students at The Gilberd School are leading real change in their school canteen, thanks to their involvement in the national Bite Back in Schools programme.

Despite facing a challenging year, with parts of the school closed due to RAAC concrete and a temporary canteen in place, students have stepped up to improve the lunchtime experience. In 2025, their School Food Champion gave a presentation to staff and peers, proudly presenting the improvements they've made, from new, healthier food options to a more welcoming canteen space.

Bite Back in Schools is a youth-led programme that empowers students to take action in making school food healthier and fairer. The Gilberd School is part of the fourth Essex group to join the programme and is one of six Essex schools currently involved. With additional funding from Essex County Council, students embraced the challenge—auditing food choices, speaking with fellow pupils, and using their creativity and funding to drive meaningful change.



Working with Essex County Council, Colchester City Council are calling for more schools to get involved in this great project.

<https://www.biteback2030.com/join-bite-back-in-schools/>

Essex County Council's Public Health team has backed the programme as part of its work to support young people to eat well and stay healthy. In addition to Bite Back, all schools across Essex can also get involved with the Healthy Schools Programme, run by the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service, to help promote healthier choices for students of all ages. Visit

<https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/services/school-age/healthy-schools/> for more information.

Public Health Funding

As part of the Public Health Practitioner Programme from Essex County Council (ECC), Colchester City Council (CCC) was provided funding to be utilized in the cities wards with the aim of improving public health across several key focuses.

For 2025/26 these aims were:

Criteria A: Projects that address a health and wellbeing priority in the local area

- Reducing health inequalities by focusing on the wider determinants of health.
- Supporting long term independence for all sections of the local community.
- Supporting the health weight agenda for Colchester through direct and/or indirect delivery.

Criteria B: Focuses on addressing the healthy weight strategy for Essex and Colchester

- An environment which supports and enables people to be a healthy weight and minimizes risks of excess weight.
- More people with excess weight effectively supported to be a healthy weight and sustained.
- Healthy lifestyle behaviors are the easy choice and become sustained.
- Focuses on places and changing the obesogenic environment.



Project Name
12th Man
Wellness Expansion- Boys and Men
Walking for Wellbeing – Mental Health Runner
Education Ranger Role - CCC
Health Talks - Colchester Community Health Champions project
Colchester City Dementia-Friendly Friendship Group for People Aged 60 and Over - AWE
CBH Transport Project
Fit & Fab - BOAZ
Blossome - Mindful Self-compassion for Widows
Singing Mamas Colchester
CLiUK - Salama Project
Changing Lives - Diet and Exercise Programme
Colchester Intercultural Walking Network - Wyrld Flora
Minories - Castle Hearts School of Art and Wellbeing
Essex Uni - The Learning Disabilities Health Promotion Project
Trusted Programme
STEP CIC - Home Economics for Young People
AFFC - Healthy Living for Colchester Young Carers
Mind - Mental Health Toolkit Essentials – MHTK
CCC - Tuck IN Colchester

Total investment of £55,295 for 2025/26

Locality Budgets

More than **150 communities and neighbourhoods** across the city received help from the **Locality Budget (2025/26)**, with **£106,325** awarded to local projects and initiatives.

Discover more community enhancements here <https://tinyurl.com/yck7863y>

£510 Birch Parish – Memorial Cross

The project to refurbish our Memorial Cross has been completed. The Memorial Cross is an important landmark in Birch, situated in the Conservation Area close to St Peters Church. Services are held on Remembrance Sundays and other important occasions and are very well attended.



£1000 Tiptree Medical Centre – Slipper Exchange.

The event will help improve safety and comfort at home by ensuring recipients have appropriate footwear designed to reduce the risk of slips and falls. It will also provide an opportunity to engage with older residents, raise awareness about wellbeing, and offer additional support or signposting where needed. This initiative aims to support vulnerable individuals in the community by promoting warmth, safety, and overall wellbeing during colder periods.



£1000 Wakes Colne Station – Bicycle Shelter.

The station adopters are very grateful for a very generous donation from the locality fund for this project.

The “Living Roof” is one project looking to make the railway station a haven for natural wildlife and encourage more people to ride a bicycle to the station.



£821 Speed limit sign – River Colne

The sign alone, taken together with other initiatives have contributed to a noticeable improvement in behaviour during 2025, with fewer recorded complaints and prosecutions.



Compassionate Communities

Compassionate Champion Awards shine a light on local heroes

Colchester's spirit of compassion and togetherness shone brightly at the recent Compassionate Champions event, held on 11 September at the Town Hall.



S106 Funding

We continue to work closely with the 30th Colchester Scout Hut with their rebuild, following their S106 grant:

Colchester City Council is proud to support the 30th Colchester Scout Group as they prepare to embark on an exciting new chapter. Plans are progressing to replace their long-serving Scout Hut on Rayner Road with a modern facility that will better meet the needs of today's young people and the wider community.

The Scout Group has been a cornerstone of youth development in Colchester for over a century, beginning around 1920 and settling in Shrub End in the late 1960s. Since then, the current wooden hut – originally repurposed from a local factory - has welcomed generations of Scouts, leaders, and volunteers. It has also served as a valuable space for community activities, hosting other groups, rehearsals, and events.

However, the building has reached the end of its usable life and is currently closed due to its deteriorating condition. In October 2024, the group temporarily relocated to continue their activities while plans for a full rebuild were developed.

Supported by S106 funding, the project will enable the complete demolition of the existing hut and the construction of a modern, brick-built facility.



Demolition images: (Images: courtesy of 30th Colchester Scout Group).

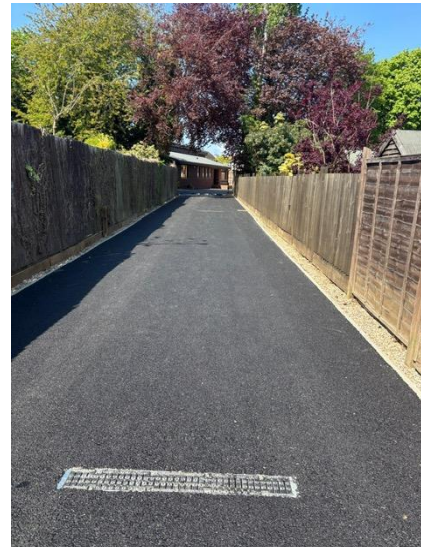
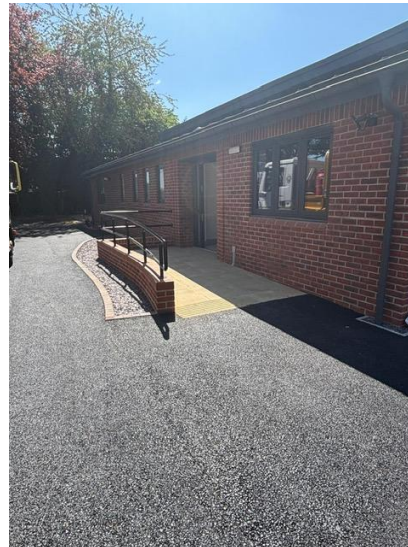
Rebuilding – end 2025



Early 2026 – the build so far.....



April 2026 - Nearing completion.....



(Images: courtesy of 30th Colchester Scout Group).



We have also been working with The Mersea Island Centre (MICA) to help upgrade and repair the roof in two areas of the building to ensure that existing and new residents can enjoy what the facility has to offer throughout the year. The work should be completed by the Summer of 2026.

The S106 funding comes from a number of developments near to the facility.
(Image: via X @englandsr)

Eight Ash Green Village Hall

S106 award £190K towards refurbishment (£700k total project cost)
Reopened April 2026.



Partnership Working

Amey Defence Services – Move You In Packs, to support those residing within our temporary accommodation scheme.

Through our partnership working with the Armed Forces Community, Amey Defence Services kindly donated some **Move You In Packs**, to help families settle into their new home. Boxes were delivered to our temporary accommodation scheme, to support those who have moved into temporary accommodation from hostels, B&B'S and those who have been sleeping rough.

The Move You In Pack project, developed in partnership with e50K, provides 6,000 families each year with organic and sustainable essential items that include cordial, coffee, soap, 'green' cleaning products and garden seeds. All these items are sourced from veteran or spouse-led organisations and help Service families settle into their new homes, ensuring they feel welcomed and supported from day one.



Toothbrush Packs for those residing within our temporary accommodation scheme

We also received a donation of toothbrush packs from Suffolk and North East Essex ICB in partnership with Essex County Council, for both adults and children, to help support oral hygiene amongst our harder to reach communities. The 200 toothbrush packs will support children, young persons and adults and help to improve their oral hygiene, and were delivered to those residing within our temporary accommodation scheme.

Further information on how to Take Care of your Teeth and Gums can be found on the 'Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service' website (Oral Health).



Community Project Support

Colchester councillors join The Gilberd School students for Q&A on local democracy

Cllr Alison Jay and Cllr Joycelyn Law, Colchester City Council's Cabinet Member for Community and Public Protection, visited The Gilberd School for a dynamic "Councillor Question Time" session – part of an ongoing initiative to build stronger links between the council and young residents.

The session, designed to support the school's lessons on national and local government, began with a tour of the school, followed by a short presentation developed with the Council's Democratic Services team. Students then led a wide-ranging Q&A session, asking thoughtful questions on the role of councillors, the impact of local elections, community engagement opportunities, environmental initiatives, funding for school projects, and regeneration plans in the city.

Councillors responded with openness and enthusiasm, offering real-world context to civic topics and acknowledging the value of youth-led projects in strengthening community cohesion.

Community Project Support

Officers within the Community, Health & Wellbeing Teams also support the coordination and delivery of the below forums;

One Colchester Delivery Board

The One Colchester Delivery Board is a long-standing forum with a collection of partners for Community, Voluntary & Statutory sectors who come together monthly to not only share important ongoing projects but also to collaborate and explore partnership opportunities and ways we can collectively support our most vulnerable communities in Colchester.

Town & Parish Council Forum

The Town & Parish Clerks Forum coordinated by CCC officers provides an opportunity for Town & Parish Clerks to network, share learning and receive updates and information from organisations and services there to support them in their hyperlocal work within their communities. These forms take place quarterly both online and in person.



Community Project Support – Community Asset Fund

Our Community Asset Fund programme was implemented to provide funding for improvements in places and spaces across Colchester to benefit our local communities. A total of £2 million has been allocated to supporting current and new community provision across the city. Whilst the process is ongoing and in its later stages before award, please see the below list of facilities due for investment. Community Officers are leading and coordinating this work on behalf of CCC.

Community Asset Fund Recipients

Tollgate Hall
Langham Community Centre
Holy Trinity Church
North East Essex Muslim Association
Kingsland Church
Mersea Island Scout Hut
Chappel & Wakes Colne Village Hall
Greenstead Community Centre
St Stephens Church
Mede Way Play Park
Heart of Greenstead



Community Project Support – Pride in Place

Pride in Place is a Government run scheme to invest in some of our more deprived communities across the country. From April 2027 Greenstead will see investment of £20 million over 10 years aimed at restoring civic pride, empowering communities and delivering visible improvements in local areas.

Colchester City Council are the accountable body to MHCLG throughout the programme with Community & Health Manager being the lead officer, but the decisions are made via the residents and community of Greenstead through a Neighbourhood Board which is currently being ratified.

For more information as the programme evolves visit - <https://greenstead.org.uk>



St John's & Highwoods Community Centre

£200k investment towards the refurbishment of the centre.



Communities Newsletters

We send our monthly newsletter to just under 500 recipients, which include both Town and County Councillors, Schools, Faith Groups, Charities, and local organisations. It's a great way to keep in touch with members of our community and for them to have somewhere else to promote their events.

There is a link to our web page containing funding opportunities contained within the newsletter, which many organisations have said saves them time in sourcing their funding to enable them to continue serving the communities that rely on them.



Financial Equality & Wellbeing

As a team, we remain committed to supporting residents experiencing financial difficulties by delivering a comprehensive package of assistance, that addresses immediate needs while helping to build longer-term financial stability.

Financial Support and Resident Engagement

Throughout the year 2025, we continued to see high levels of demand for support, receiving an average of around 200 calls, emails along with in person contacts each week from residents seeking financial advice and guidance.

Crisis Support

In 2025 we provided vital, immediate assistance through:

- 590 Food Bank referrals**, ensuring residents had access to essential food supplies.
- 137 Fuel Bank referrals**, helping households maintain heating and energy during periods of financial hardship.
- 1397 Partner referrals**, to provide additional wrap around support and build financial resilience

Discretionary Funding

Our team assessed and processed applications for a range of discretionary funds designed to prevent homelessness and reduce financial strain.

- The **Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)** supported over 457 residents, with financial assistance to help them sustain their tenancies and avoid homelessness.
- The **Exceptional Hardship Payment (EHP)** assisted 266 residents, reducing council tax debt for those facing significant financial difficulty.

Despite tight budgets, we carefully managed:

- £308,862** allocated for DHP
- £43,600** allocated for EHP

This careful management ensured that funding reached the households with the greatest need and delivered maximum impact across the community.

Welfare Benefit Support

Claiming disability benefits can be a daunting task, especially for vulnerable residents. Our Financial Equality Specialists work to reduce barriers to claiming by providing clear guidance and support, ensuring that people with long-term health conditions receive the assistance they are entitled to. Support is offered throughout the entire process—from initial applications and revisions to changes of circumstance, reconsiderations, and appeals—resulting in strong success rates. Nearly 400 residents have received advice or specialist support, and more than **£600,000** was successfully claimed in 2025 as a result of the team's interventions.

Projects

The team stays up to date with changes to benefit legislation and welfare reforms, identifying ways to proactively support residents as these changes take effect.

- The **Universal Credit Migration** Programme aims to assist residents who have recently migrated to UC or have been advised to claim it before their legacy benefits end.
- The **Attendance Allowance initiative** focuses on reaching pension-age residents to ensure they do not miss out on one of the UK's most underclaimed benefits.

Outreach

We recognise that not all residents have access to, or feel confident using, online or telephone services. To ensure everyone can receive support, our team works closely with partners to provide in-person, drop-in sessions across a variety of outreach locations.

By regularly attending the Food Bank, Job Centre Plus, Mind, the Youth Enquiry Service, and a range of local events and group sessions, we make our services more accessible to residents who may otherwise be deterred from seeking help.

Employment Support

This year, more than 300 residents have connected with our Employment Specialists for guidance, with around 20 moving into sustainable employment.

We're passionate about offering personalised employment support that helps residents grow in confidence, build new skills, and access the training they need to move toward meaningful, long-term employment.

Through friendly, one-to-one support — and with the whole team's expertise behind us — we work together to remove any barriers that may be standing in the way of returning to work. From CV writing and interview practice to job-search support, we're here to help every step of the way.

We're also continuing our outreach across the community to make sure residents know we're here, ready to help whenever they need us.

Just a few words from the people we help

“Myself and my little girl have had a couple of hot meals and paid bills and rent. All thanks to you. Very much appreciated, panic over.”

“Thank you so much for the fuel vouchers you have no idea! I really, really appreciate it.”

“Thank you again for helping me get my refund. I really appreciate it.”

“I was so worried about not having gas or electricity this weekend, but you saved a family. Thank you so much! God bless you.”

“I sincerely thank you and the Discretionary Housing Payments team for confirming the award and providing such detailed advice.”

“My PIP has finally come through just over £100 a week! We honestly cannot thank you enough for all your help and support.”

"Thank you so much for all of your care , compassion, understanding and direction in helping us both with all the forms .Your expertise and understanding yesterday helped us beyond belief "



Food bank



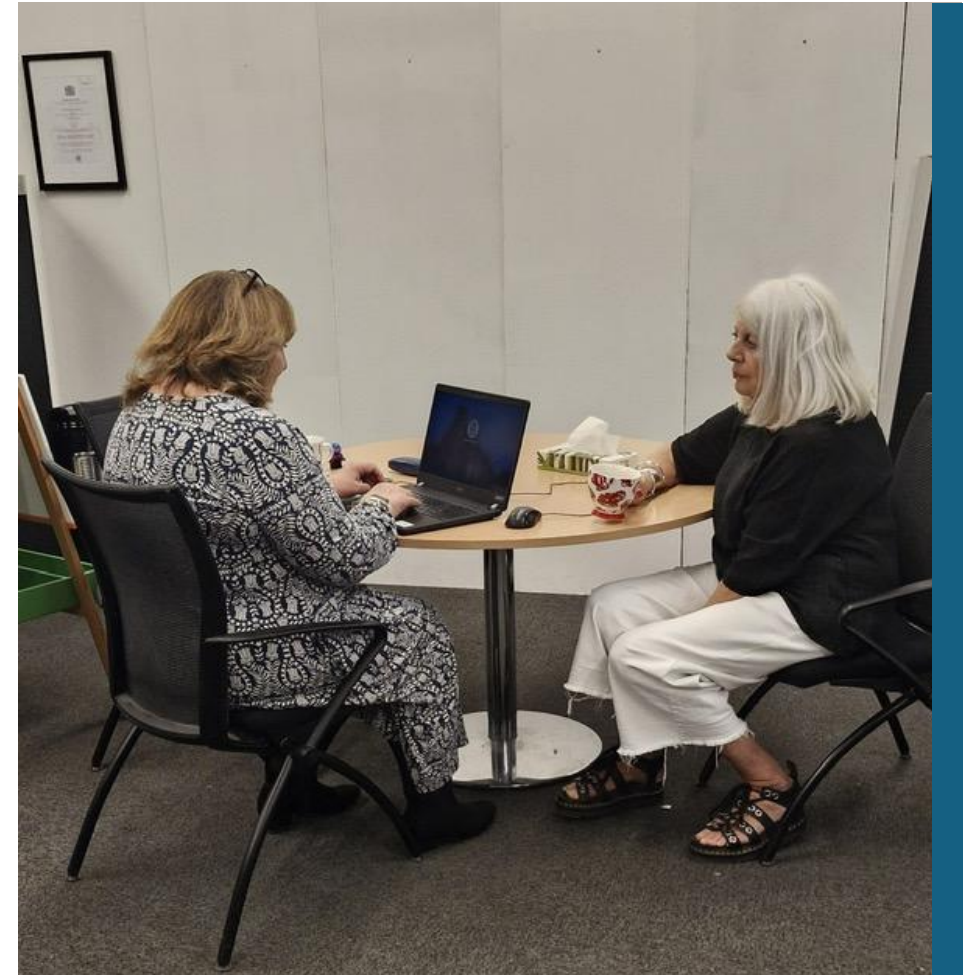
MIND Welcome Cafe



JCP



Youth Enquiry Service



A few of regular venues where we offer advice and support

Digital Access Support

Following the end-of-year shutdown and the planned closure of the team, services have not recommenced in 2026/27. Throughout 2025, a reduced service model was implemented due to limited resources. Despite these constraints, the team continued to deliver a range of support activities, including:

- * Ad hoc digital access queries
- * One-to-one support
- * Group sessions
- * Tutorials and Workshops

These were delivered both online and in person to ensure ongoing access for service users.

Ad hoc queries and one to one support is delivered on a daily basis, assisting between 1 and 6 individuals each day. We have held 4 group sessions with over 57 attendees. And spreading across 16 Tutorials we have had over 213 attendees across both Colchester & Tendring. Our 3 Workshops Essential Digital Skills, Top Tips to Finding a Job Online and Refugee, Asylum and Migrant Digital Champion Training, has seen over 110 attendees.

We also represented the service at several external events, including participating as a guest speaker at the Connected Britain conference and continuing our collaboration with Barclays Digital Wings.

In addition, installation of the remaining Fixed Digital Access Points across NEE has now been completed, bringing the total to 80 access points across health and community venues.



One of the team delivering a Tutorial



RAM DCT classes with their certificates



Barclays Digital Wings



FDAP in use



Learning in progress



Panellist Connected Britain

As of **31 March 2026**, the Digital Access Project and the Digital Access Support Team have ceased providing services.

The link below will assist you in identifying an alternative service.

[Digital support services | Colchester City Council](#)