

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.

