

# Equality Information Report

## 2016



**DRAFT**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

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More information:

For more information about this report or any aspect of the Council's equality work see [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk) or email [equality@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:equality@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

## Introduction

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### Forward by the Portfolio Holder responsible for Equality:

#### Councillor Richard Bassett



Across Epping Forest District Council we work hard to continually improve services and make sure everyone who lives, works or visits our district can access our services and benefit from our work. We also recognise we are a community leader and by setting high standards and promoting values of consideration and understanding, we can influence attitudes and help people to accept others more easily.

Equality remains at the centre of all we do and is key to achieving our Corporate Aims and objectives [\[link\]](#) We are an inclusive organisation and believe it is essential that all members of the Council and our community feel valued and able to fulfil their potential. We challenge any form of unfair discrimination or harassment and we expect all members of staff and partner organisations we work with to share this commitment.

Our work is underpinned by legislation with specific responsibilities for local government. This legislation requires that we produce an annual report of our work to progress equality. We hope you will enjoy reading our report and that it will enable you to better understand what we do, and how we are working to improve the everyday lives of people in our community.

### This report

This report provides an overview of our work over the last 12 months since July 2015, and builds upon previous [reports](#) and should be read in conjunction with them. Together these reports enable others to assess how effective we are in meeting our responsibilities under equality legislation.

As an overview of our work, this report doesn't necessarily contain information about everything we do. As an organisation committed to equality, much of what we do is routine and part of our everyday experience. Many of our activities which deliver greater equality, are so integrated into our way of working that they do not stand out as being evidence of compliance with equality legislation. This is as it should be. Equality should be embedded and be just the way we do things at the Council. Therefore this report sets out just some of the changes we have made or services we have delivered over the last year.

## Equality legislation and council duties

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*...sets an expectation that public services must treat everyone with dignity and respect.*

### Public sector equality Duty:

*Also known as 'the general equality duty' and s149*

Anti-discrimination legislation was harmonised and strengthened in 2010 by the introduction of The Equality Act, providing stronger protection against discrimination, and greater clarity for employers, businesses and public service providers about their responsibilities.

Evidence shows that some groups of people are repeatedly disadvantaged in society by the way their needs are overlooked or ignored. These groups of people are offered protection under the Equality Act. The Equality Act requires us to consider their needs and requirements when carrying out our business as an employer and service provider.

These groups are known as protected groups and are: age, disability, faith or religion, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, and sexual orientation.

**The Equality Act 2010** places a number of responsibilities and requirements on the Council. We have a 'public sector equality duty' to have due regard to the need to:

- 1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation**
- 2. Advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and**
- 3. Foster good relations between different groups**

**The purpose** of the 'public sector equality duty' is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into our day-to-day business.

## What does 'due regard' mean?

'Due regard' means consciously thinking about the three public sector equality duty aims as part of the process of our normal business and decision making, removing disadvantage, and encouraging participation and success. It requires us to consider whether the aims of the public sector equality duty can be progressed by our services and activities.

## ....and 'equality of opportunity'?

**Equality of opportunity** means

- Removing or minimising disadvantages
- Taking steps to meet different needs
- Encouraging participation when it is disproportionately low

## ...and 'foster good relations'?

'Foster good relations' means promoting understanding between different groups of people.

## Protected Characteristics:

...are age, disability, faith or religion, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, and sexual orientation



## Equality Objectives

In addition to the public sector equality duty we have two additional and specific duties:

1. We have to set equality objectives at least every four years that will help us to further the aims of the public sector equality duty

(See pages 6-7 for more information about our equality objectives)

## Equality information

2. and we must publish information annually to show the progress we are making to deliver the general duty

This is our report for 2016 and is evidence that we are complying with our statutory duties.

## Equality Objectives

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**We produce objectives to provide focus where it matters**

Equality legislation requires that we set equality objectives at least every four years that will help us to further the aims of the public sector equality duty. In March 2016 the objectives we set in 2012 came to the end of their lifetime. These objectives were our first set of objectives and we were concerned to establish the capacity, tools, and ownership to deliver meaningful equality work. These objectives were:

### **2012—2016**

- 1. To develop existing customer and employee equality intelligence gathering systems and the use of intelligence in service planning**
- 2. To ensure ownership of equality by those within the Council in a position to shape services, for example Councillors and managers**
- 3. To develop engagement across all the protected equality groups**
- 4. To Ensure that the Council’s culture, systems and working practices allow for the development of a management profile representative of its workforce as a whole**

The work we set ourselves to achieve these objectives was organised through an action plan [\[link\]](#) and coordinated by a working group of representatives from across the Council. Progress was reported to and monitored by the Council’s elected members every 6 months and over the objectives’ four year life time, 94% of the actions were achieved representing significant progress to further the aims of the public sector equality duty.

### **2016—2020**

In April 2016 we adopted a new set of equality objectives to build and expand upon the initial set, and take the Council forward until 2020. These objectives are:

- 1. To integrate the Council’s public sector equality duty into our partnership working**
- 2. To apply robust equality requirements in commissioning, procurement and contract management**

3. **To develop our capacity so that our employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver our plans**
4. **To improve and develop equality in our business activities**

An action plan has again been developed to deliver these objectives and the Corporate Equality Working Group will meet regularly to coordinate the work. The Council's elected members will monitor progress on a six monthly basis and our progress [link] will be published on the Council's website.

## **Equality through our high level strategic aims and objectives**

Equality is built into our highest level Council aims and objectives. The Council's Corporate Aims and Key Objectives include a commitment to ensure the Council understands the effects of an ageing population within the district and to work with other agencies to make appropriate plans and arrangements to respond to these effects.

### **Understanding the ageing population**

This year we undertook an Ageing Population Project to:

- better understand the ageing demographic
- review the provision and delivery of community and cultural services
- to ensure our sheltered and designated accommodation for older people is fit for purpose.

### **Essex Superfast broadband helps rural areas**

We are involved in the Essex Rural Broadband project to provide broadband to people in rural areas. Access to broadband helps people who find it difficult to get out to access services and information.

### **New affordable homes**

This year, we appointed a contractor to build up to 51 affordable rented homes and are in discussion with developers for the provision of up to 15 more.

## **Transforming our services**

We have launched a Transformation Programme to modernise our services and better equip ourselves to deliver our Corporate Aims and Key Objectives. Through this programme we are fundamentally modifying our policies, systems and structures. Therefore we are investing in infrastructure, new ways of thinking and working, and the development of new skills and abilities. We are changing the way we do business in order to respond to changes in our external environment and customer expectations.

Modern and more accessible services together with greater efficiency, will enable everyone seeking to use our services to access them more easily and have their enquiry addressed at first contact more often.

## Equality initiatives and progress

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### Through employment

#### Attracting the best employees for the future

We have recently signed up to a Local Government Association initiative called 'Plotr', which is a national careers website based on an interactive, psychometric game. It's aim is to help young people aged 11 to 24 to discover and investigate potential career paths based on their interests, skills and personality. We want to access young people and schools at key decision milestones and to create awareness of potential careers within the Council and help us to attract younger people to our workforce.

#### Looking after our staff

We have recently commissioned training on Mental Health to help managers identify if an employee may be struggling with mental health issues and how to best support those employees in the work place.

#### Strengthening personal resilience

This year we ran 'Strengthening Personal Resilience' sessions which give members of staff advice and tools on how to cope with pressure while helping to ensure our workforce is motivated, engaged, committed and maintains performance through periods of uncertainty and change whilst minimising the stressful effects of such events.

#### Providing a healthy work-place



We have also recommitted to the MINDFUL EMPLOYER® Charter for employers who are positive about mental health. A voluntary agreement supporting employers in working within the spirit of its positive approach. The Charter is one element of the MINDFUL EMPLOYER initiative aimed at increasing awareness of mental health in the workplace and supporting businesses in recruiting and retaining staff. We want to support our employees to remain in work, help reduce sickness absence and thereby improve customer service.

#### Work experience for graduates with disabilities

We are working with 'Change 100' which provides placements for graduates with a disability to provide them with a meaningful period of work experience and hopefully help them secure permanent work opportunities.

#### We welcome job applications from people with disabilities

We have placed an advert in the 'Living with Disability' magazine to bring awareness that the Council welcomes job applications from disabled candidates.



## **Through our services**

### **Help with waste collection including medical waste**

We continue to assist people who need help with their waste bins. Elderly residents or residents with disabilities can place their bins at a point more convenient to them or our operatives will collect their bins saving these residents from moving them to the boundary of their property. We also provide additional bin capacity for medical waste which needs regular disposal.

## **Large print**

We work with people with visual impairment to help them to access our services and will provide our documents in larger print or Baille when requested .

### **We help people claim the benefits they are entitled to**

Benefits officers are available to help people to make online applications for Universal Credit. We also offer personal budgeting support to recipients of Universal Credit to help them manage their finances.

### **Rent surgeries for older tenants**

Older people can often benefit from help to interpret the rent increase letters. We arrange rent surgeries at all sheltered schemes when the rent increase letters are issued to help residents understand the rent increase letters in conjunction with housing benefit letters in the comfort of their own homes and with easy access to relevant documentation.

### **We work with other agencies to help vulnerable tenants**

We refer vulnerable tenants or other tenants in need of additional housing support to other agencies who can help them.

Family Mosaic provide advice and support regarding:

- independent housing support
- money and budgeting
- life skills
- enjoying and achieving
- health and wellbeing, and
- community and social networks

The Citizens Advice Bureau provide advice and support regarding:

- independent housing support
- tenancy management
- budgeting and rent accounting issues, and
- social networks.

Making these referrals and helping vulnerable or other tenants in need of additional housing support to access these services, helps them to maintain their tenancies.

### **Flexible direct debit payments**

Our council housing tenants are now able to pay their rent by direct debit on any day of the month which helps people manage their finances.

## Equality for our tenants and leaseholders

We provide a housing service for around 6,500 council homes. We make sure we understand demand for our council homes by monitoring applications for services, undertaking satisfaction surveys and occasionally whole-sector surveys.

## Understanding our tenants

This year our Tenant Satisfaction Survey produced 798 responses. Of these:

- 43% were aged 60 years or over
- 65% were female
- 77% had a household member whose day to day activities are limited due to health problems
- the majority (83%) were White British
- 6% were spread across a range of ethnic origins.

## Providing a home for refugees

When a request was received from the Government to assist with providing accommodation for Syrian refugees we responded positively. We agreed to make available 1 x 2 bedroom flat and 1 x 1 bedroom flat from our housing stock to house up to 6 Syrian Refugees in each year for a period of four years. This represents in total up to 8 properties housing up to 24 Syrian Refugees. Those housed will be non-secure tenants for up to a period of 5 years. Helping to relocate some vulnerable Syrian people addresses discrimination and advances equality of opportunity for a settled life for this disadvantaged racial group.

## We listened to customers and made Careline easier to access



Our Careline Customer Satisfaction Survey this year told us that customers like being able to apply for emergency alarms or other telecare equipment linked to Epping Forest Careline online and pay by direct debit. Increasing the range of ways people can apply and pay for Careline services helps people with mobility difficulties, or people fleeing domestic violence for example, to access the service from their own home.

## Kitchen improvements

Our sheltered housing schemes have a communal kitchen to enable residents to prepare their meals together and safely. This year we've upgraded these kitchens so that they are more accessible for residents with disabilities. Making sure people with restricted movement can access the kitchen gives them the same opportunity to use the kitchen facility as others.

## **Helping people in the private sector with their housing**

### **Supporting private mobile homes sites**

Many older people live in park homes and the implementation of new site condition licences for Park Homes sites has resulted in improvements to health and safety and for conditions which are fair and non-discriminatory. Additionally our consultation with Gypsy, Roma and Travellers authorised site owners and residents and the settled community resulted in new standard site licence conditions being introduced for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers authorised privately owned sites. We continue to work with site owners and residents to ensure site condition licences are complied with.

### **Student Accommodation Accreditation Scheme...**

We continue to work in partnership with East 15 Acting School (University of Essex) to encourage good practice among landlords of student housing, Together we operate a Student Accommodation Accreditation Scheme to provide good quality private rented accommodation for students who are often young and living on limited incomes.

### **...we prosecute for illegal evictions**

Security of tenure is important and we deal with illegal evictions when necessary. In June 2016 we successfully prosecuted a local landlady for illegally evicting a tenant who refused to pay further costs for utilities in addition to the costs included in her 6 month tenancy agreement. The tenant, a Taiwanese student, was awarded £100 compensation by magistrates for her distress reflecting her highly intimidating and frightening experience without family to help or additional money for alternative accommodation.

### **Improving living conditions for agricultural nursery workers**

A task group has been set up to improve the living conditions for many agricultural workers who live in temporary and makeshift permanent structures on the sites in which they work. Many of these workers are migrant workers and English is their second language. Looking at fire and gas safety, heating provision, and water supply and drainage facilities, the task group aims to improve living conditions and ensure health and safety requirements are met.

Part of this work is a consultation with site operators seeking their views on proposed standard conditions for the stationing of caravans used to accommodate workers on nursery sites.

## **Helping people at risk of abuse**

### **The J9 Network of 300 practitioners**

We continue to organise free domestic abuse awareness training for staff, agencies and voluntary groups working in the district. 'J9' is a Domestic Violence Initiative and its aim is to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to enable all staff to understand their role and responsibility in relation to domestic abuse. The courses explore the dynamics of domestic abuse and also the impact domestic abuse has on those involved and how this can differ according to gender, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, faith, disability, or age. J9 courses are now also run in the neighbouring district of Uttlesford and a J9 Network with over 300 practitioners across Essex has been developed.

### **A plan of action for victims of domestic abuse**

Our work with the police, fire service and the voluntary sector to plan the safety and security of people at medium and high risk of domestic abuse continues. Additional security measures are provided or a 'safe' room created in the home to provide a sanctuary for people at risk.

### **We are trained to respond**

Regular training and refresher training on safeguarding has enabled us to help identify vulnerable adults and children in a number of cases and to liaise with partner agencies to ensure people receive the support they need.

### **...and to safeguard children and vulnerable adults**

In 2015 our safeguarding team received 142 safeguarding reports concerning 109 children and 90 adults. Of these, 66 cases were referred to social care, 3 to the Police, and 22 were referred to other partner agencies. If concerns do not meet the thresholds for statutory referrals to social care, then the safeguarding team attempt to signpost vulnerable people and families to organisations who can provide early help and intervention, for example, Family Mosaic or the Citizen Advice Bureau.

The response to complex safeguarding cases is managed via a Multi-Agency Case Conference meeting with our partners including Social Care, the Police and Fire Services, voluntary agencies and statutory mental health teams. A plan is agreed to protect and support the vulnerable people in these cases.

### **...and to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable people**

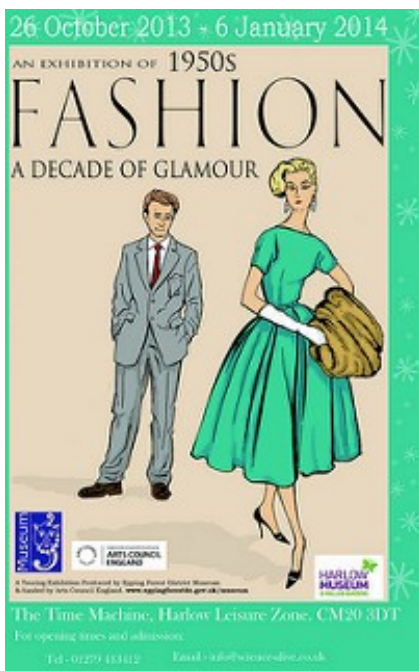
We also continue to work with the police, the voluntary sector and landlords to provide crime prevention advice and assistance for vulnerable people. Bespoke risk management plans are developed for people who are vulnerable perhaps through age, disability, race or their sexual orientation, or those who might be exploited by other people moving in and taking over their homes, often for criminal purposes ('cuckooing').

## Our bigger and more accessible museum opened this year

In March 2016 together with the London Borough of Broxbourne we re-opened The Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey after its complete renovation and extension. Now fully accessible with lift access to all 3 floors, and new accessible toilet facilities, visitors can use all floors of the building to access activity rooms, view displays and access learning sessions. Not forgetting museum staff and volunteers, the office areas are also fully accessible as part of this £2million scheme.

## Accessible events and Inclusive exhibitions

Between the Epping Forest Museum and the Lowewood Museum in Hoddesdon, there are new displays and both permanent and touring exhibitions showing all aspects of life in the district including the district's lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans history.



## A Decade of Glamour 1950's exhibition poster

Staff from our Museum, Heritage and Culture team provide an extensive range of activities for visitors to learn about their history and to develop their subject knowledge and learn the skills of historical investigation. Activities are offered for all ages from toddlers to older people, and at different times - including a 'Museums at Night' event - to be as inclusive as possible; whilst people with disabilities are encouraged to take part.

Staff also deliver a programme of talks of benefit to older people including residents of care homes, the U3A (University of the third age), and social groups and thereby help to prevent social isolation.

## 'Boxes' to help learning and memory

Topic boxes, containing a range of original and replica artefacts, can be hired for half a term at a time to support work on a topic in school.

In May 2015 a popular scheme to provide reminiscence boxes was launched across the district and the London Borough of Broxbourne. Reminiscence boxes are often used by care homes for people with dementia however, reminiscence therapy can also be used by retired social groups, visual impaired groups, people with learning difficulties, or those with speech and language difficulty to help stimulate conversation and memory.

## Helping people with dementia

The Council is supporting the 'Transitions' programme provided by Essex County Council. A resource pack about the programme is downloadable from our website and provides information about activities which positively impact on the care of those living with dementia in care settings. Additionally officers from Museum Heritage and Culture gave a presentation on this work at a Reminiscence Network East Conference in Norwich in March.

## Helping people manage their homes

Low cost repairs and home security for older residents....



...and gardening services

Adapting the homes of disabled people

Understanding our customers

We collect equality monitoring data from our customers

Research and consultation to help us

Learning about the impact of an Ageing population

Our 'Handyperson Service' continues to be very popular with an increase in demand of 15% this year. Low cost repairs and home security provided by vetted contractors allows our older residents to trust the contractors entering their homes.

Many of our older residents benefitted this year from gardening services provided by a vetted gardener through our C.A.R.E service. We have also added a vetted private gardening contractor to our 'Preferred contractors' list.

The demand for 'Disabled Facilities Grants' continues to grow with referrals increasing this year by 53%. The changes we make to the homes of disabled home owners and private tenants allow them to access their bathrooms, use their kitchens, and get up and down stairs. These grants are means-tested and applicants are referred by Essex County Council Occupational Therapists. We supplement government funding to help meet demand.

We analyse our services and activities at least every three years, to make sure we understand how they impact on people. We use this understanding to focus on need and to make sure all our services are accessible. Analysis completed this year is published on our [website](#).

Our services collect equality monitoring data from customers when they need this data to help them provide the right services in the right ways. The data helps us learn which groups of people aren't making the most of our services, and helps us to provide services fairly. This year we carried out equality monitoring on visitors to a proposed development consultation, and on applicants for jobs with us.

Every year we undertake a wide range of [consultations](#) and surveys to generate views and information to help us to provide the right services in the way people want.

This year we carried out a series of informal consultation focus groups with people aged 65-90+ to ascertain what they believe will be their service needs and aspirations when they reach their very old age.

## **Sporting, social and leisure activities for older people**

Sporting, social and leisure opportunities for the over 60s are provided by the Council, Everyone Active, private clubs and other organisations. A 'New Horizons' brochure is produced in April every year and includes everything from athletics, netball, swimming and tea dances at locations across the district.

***“The Jubilee Court group in Waltham abbey really enjoyed their afternoon of Boccia”.***

Boccia is a seated inclusive support which engages participants in low level physical activity through a variety of challenges and games. Working with Voluntary Action Epping Forest, resident associations, and Age UK, the Council delivers regular sessions across the district.

## **Traffic free cycling**

Cycling for Health aims to get older people fit and active through social cycling sessions that are traffic - free. Increasingly popular, on average 26 aged 60+ people participate in each session.

## **‘Winter Warmers’**

Talks from health professionals, community safety officers, health checks, seated exercise, information and a free lunch was provided to 150 older people in Buckhurst Hill, Epping and Waltham Abbey during November and December. We provided these sessions in partnership with the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group to help older people access the support and information they need to keep healthy through the winter.

***“It was a wake-up call making people aware of scams”***

Over 100 older people attended Senior Safety day in Waltham Abbey in March. The event aimed to provide residents with the tools and knowledge they need to keep safe in and around the home and encouraged those coming along to share what they have learned with their families, friends and neighbours.

## **Combatting isolation and loneliness for older people**

Loneliness and isolation can be a problem for many older people. We have developed activity groups to provide a social programme to combat feelings of isolation or loneliness, and improve general health and wellbeing. Regular sessions are facilitated in accessible locations across the District. In addition to providing a friendly, welcoming activity for older people, the groups provide an opportunity for signposting to wider support services and other appropriate agencies.

## **Improving community cohesion in areas of deprivation**

Our district has some recognised areas of deprivation including Limes Farm Estate in Chigwell, Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey, Oakwood Hill Estate in Debden and Shelley Estate in Ongar. We work with residents from these communities, with a particular focus on the “hard to reach” groups, in order to encourage participation in a range of activities to help create a sense of community cohesion and wellbeing.

## Empowering young people

### EFDC Youth Council

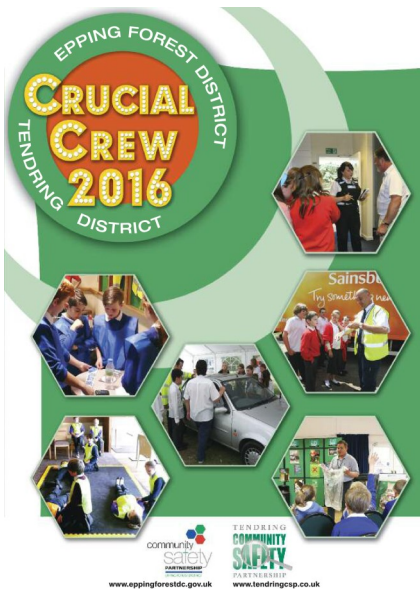
Our Youth Council is a group of 21 democratically elected teenagers between the ages of 13 and 19 years of age. In October 2015 the Youth Council held a Youth Conference attended by 90 pupils from years 7-11 from 8 secondary schools in the district on relevant issues and provided an opportunity for young people to voice their opinions on the European Union.

Regular intergenerational project work is undertaken in order to bridge the gap between generations, with local young people arranging social events for older residents for the benefit of both age ranges.

## Considered choices and understanding the consequences

We worked with other specialist agencies to raise awareness of personal safety, emotional wellbeing and crime prevention with every year 6 and year 9 pupil in the district again this year.

'Crucial Crew' and 'Reality Roadshow' are projects provided in schools every June delivering stimulating and interactive scenarios in order to empower young people to make considered choices and understand the consequences of their actions.



We provide support to the district's young artists by our Creativity Awards. Open to all our young people, the awards support the very best in artistic and creative talent.

## Encouraging creativity in our young people

This year 400 young people from a range of backgrounds and with varying abilities took the opportunity to perform and progress their dancing talent in dance showcases. This year we have continued to run 'The Epping Forest Inclusion Project' to provide a wide range of sports and leisure opportunities for children and young people with disabilities of special educational needs.

## Including disabled children and young people in sport

**“Until I found out about what was on offer through the disability inclusion project, I didn't know how to access sports and activities where he could be himself, not have to worry about people staring if he behaved differently”.**

During the school term the project puts on a number of sessions ranging from trampolining to horse riding. During the schools holidays various sessions and activities are held, which where possible include siblings and parents. To date 576 disabled children and young people have accessed the service.

Benefits include increased social interaction with peers and positive behaviour, listening and following instructions, as well as physical improvements including greater stamina, strength and flexibility.



### **Redressing the disadvantages our Armed Forces community face**

The Council is a signatory to the Essex Community Covenant which is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It recognises that the wider community has a moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces, whether currently on active duty or veterans, and their families and aims to redress the disadvantages that the Armed Forces' community faces in comparison with other citizens.

We give increased priority to Armed Forces personnel through our Housing Allocations Scheme, Local Council Tax and Housing Benefits Schemes and support many events for serving and former personnel, especially on and around North Weald Airfield and the Airfield Museum.

### **The 'Veterans Portal'**

The Council is also involved in the 'Veterans' Portal' initiative and has contributed a grant towards it. The aim of the portal is to allow service veterans to register and thereby gain access to services and support available under the Community and Corporate Covenants.

### **We provide grant aid for voluntary and community groups**

We have reviewed our Grant Aid Scheme for Voluntary and Community Organisations and have new priorities which include projects which meet the needs of both older and younger people.



### **Flying the rainbow flag**

In February for the third year running, we raised the rainbow flag outside the Council offices for a day in recognition of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans (LGBT) history month. A short statement was read to assembled staff to promote understanding and acceptance within our community.

### **Keeping our staff up to date**

We produce an equality newsletter regularly for our staff to ensure they have the latest information and guidance to deliver equality through the services they provide. Our last newsletter, published in June, promoted our new equality objectives (see page 6) and advised staff on the work we support good mental health amongst staff (see page 8).

## Going Forward

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We will publish more equality information in September 2017 for the next 12 months.