



COLCHESTER BOROUGH HOMES BOARD

28th July 2021

Report Title	0007i Equality and Safeguarding Annual Report				
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Report Objective:	To detail how CBH is meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty and its legal duties around Safeguarding				
Matters to note/Exception Highlights	Key progress over the past year and focus over the next is included within sections 5 and 6 respectively.				
Link to Consumer Standard objective	Tenant involvement and empowerment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Home <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Tenancy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Neighbourhood and community <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Sensitivity	Commercial		Action	Assurance	
	Confidential			Noting	
	Open	✓		Approval	✓

Recommendations

The Board is asked to note how we are meeting our legal obligations.

Executive summary

CBH has continued to prioritise support for its most vulnerable customers (and staff) during this exceptional period. As part of our response to the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have further developed our partnership working and community engagement in order to advance our ‘equality objectives’ and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and ‘adults at risk’. All services have contributed towards our response to date.

Over the next year (2021-22) we aim to: develop our links with faith communities and our work with the University of Essex and local equality networks; complete our review of available housing specific accreditation schemes and benchmarking frameworks; publish a new combined (staff and customer) Domestic Abuse Policy; continue to ‘escalate’ referrals to social care in order to help safeguard our customers; further develop our programme of e-learning; continue to improve the use of customer data to help strategic planning and operational delivery.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1
- To detail how CBH is meeting (a) The Public Sector Equality Duty, and (b) its legal duties around Safeguarding;
 - To highlight key progress over the past year and to outline the focus for 20/21/22.

2. Background & Context

- 2.1 The Board receives an annual update detailing its approach to Equality and Diversity, and Safeguarding. This report relates to the period between 01/07/2020 and 30/06/2021. All data within this report refers to this period unless stated otherwise. As was the case during 2020-21, the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has required additional focus on our most vulnerable customers and staff.

3. How CBH meets its Statutory Duties

Equality and Diversity

- 3.1 The Head of HR and Governance remains the strategic lead for Equality and Diversity and the Business Partner (Equality and Safeguarding) remains the operational lead.
- 3.2 Through its relationship with Colchester Borough Council, Colchester Borough Homes is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty. This includes the 'general duty' and the 'specific duties' of the Equality Act 2010. Under the general duty, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 3.3 CBH's overall approach is to seek to integrate equality into its day-to-day business, as required by guidance. We do this in the following ways:
- Policies and procedures are in place to protect customers and staff from discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
 - Our Staff Equality Focus Group meets quarterly in order to review progress and cascade best practice.
 - Services are designed to help ensure that we meet the needs of all our customers. We ensure that 'reasonable adjustments' are made to advance equality of opportunity.

- We conduct Equality Impact Assessments on our key policies, services, strategies and decisions. There is no statutory requirement to do this, but we believe that such an approach is necessary to ensure that possible impacts upon groups within the ‘protected characteristics’ are consciously and systematically considered, and that any negative impacts are effectively mitigated. Publication of assessments demonstrates transparency and helps to evidence “due regard”.
- We are committed to resourcing specialist face-to-face training for key front-line staff as well as to making full use of the increased efficiencies offered by e-learning.

3.4 The following information published on [this section](#) of the CBH website provides evidence of how we are meeting the general duty:

- [Equality Information](#) (which includes data and equality analysis)
- Our ‘Equality Statement’
- Over 50 Equality Impact Assessments
- Our commitment to [Resident Engagement](#)

3.5 Under the [Equality Act 2010 \(Specific Duties\) Regulations 2011](#), CBH is required to: (a) publish information to demonstrate its compliance with the Equality Duty; and (b) set equality objectives at least every four years. Equality Information must be published annually by 31 January and must include “information relating to persons who share a particular protected characteristic who are... its employees (and) other persons affected by its policies and practices.” In January 2021, CBH published [Equality Information](#) which included equality analysis of data by protected characteristic in regard to: (a) staff; (b) tenants and leaseholders; and (c) housing applicants.

3.6 Adopted in 2019, CBH’s Equality Objectives continue to be:

- Equality of Access
- Equality of Opportunity

Whilst the first objective is more externally focused (towards customers), the second is more internally focused (towards staff). These objectives and corresponding actions are tracked and monitored through the strategic plan and its six key Delivery Plans. These are the Business Development Plan, the Community Plan, the Customer Plan, the Leadership Plan, People Plan and the Value for Money and Technology Plan.

3.7 CBH works closely with local organisations to meet our equality objectives, and to support and engage with the local community. These are detailed in section 4 (below).

- 3.8 All new staff and Board members receive an induction on Equality and Diversity, and all staff and managers are required to complete a dedicated e-learning course tailored to their role. In addition, recruiting managers are encouraged to complete an e-learning course to increase understanding around 'Unconscious Bias', particularly in regard to recruitment and selection. In 2020, the need for additional training for staff was identified in order to enhance our service response for customer groups more likely to face barriers to accessing services. Bespoke professional training 'Respecting Diversity and Understanding Bias' was delivered by Equality & Diversity UK to 133 members of staff during 2020 to help CBH take full account of cultural, religious and language needs in order to enhance equality of access to services.
- 3.9 Safeguarding
- 3.10 The Director of Operations remains the strategic lead for Safeguarding whereas the Head of Housing Management remains the operational lead. The Business Partner (Equality and Safeguarding) assists staff and customers with day-to-day enquiries.
- 3.11 CBH is subject to specific safeguarding duties by virtue of its relationship with Colchester Borough Council:
- 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."
 - Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities must work with the investigating authority (Essex County Council) to discharge its duty to co-ordinate action to support an adult who (a) has needs for care and support (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.
- 3.12 The Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) and Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB) co-ordinate safeguarding activity and CBH is subject to agreed SET Procedures (covering Southend Essex and Thurrock) which are integrated into CBH's Safeguarding Policy and procedures.
- 3.13 CBH helps to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and 'adults at risk' by referring concerns around abuse or neglect to Essex County Council's Children and Families Team and to Adult Social Care.

- 3.14 Over the relevant period (July 2020 to June 2021), CBH has made a total of 60 referrals, 56 in relation to adults and 4 child referrals (for a total of 5 children). This reflects an 18% decrease overall compared with referrals recorded in 2019-20 and appears to reflect an overall decrease in referrals from all sources into Essex Social Care during the pandemic. The total number of children referred by CBH has fallen from 19 (2019-20) to 5 (2020-21) which represents a decrease of over 70%. Of the 4 child referrals, 3 related to neglect and 2 were statutory risk of homelessness referrals. In contrast, the number of adult referrals has slightly increased from 54 in 2019-20. Of 56 adult referrals, a total of 80 concerns were raised. (This is because, in many cases, more than one type of abuse was raised as a concern.) Self neglect was raised as a concern in 83% of referrals. Physical abuse was raised in 17% of referrals; material/ financial abuse in 17%; domestic abuse in 7%; psychological/ emotional abuse in 4%; and neglect in 2%. Compared to 2019-20 data, self-neglect has become more dominant as the principal concern highlighted, and the number of referrals raising domestic abuse as a concern has increased.
- 3.15 It is important to note that 17% of safeguarding referrals also raised a concern around the risk of suicide which is a higher proportion than during the previous period. In these cases, self-neglect was the type of abuse actually highlighted. The Police and/or the local mental health services were also contacted in these cases since safeguarding against abuse or neglect is not the primary route for raising such concerns.
- 3.16 CBH's SharePoint 'record of referrals' facilitates effective monitoring of safeguarding referrals by the Corporate Management Team. (During the period we have increased the proportion of referrals for which we hold records on the 'outcome of referral' from under 50% to over 75%.) This is also reviewed by the Designated Safeguarding Officers Group which meets quarterly as a minimum (having met more frequently as part of the emergency response to Covid-19). Its role includes reviewing referrals and sharing best practice.
- 3.17 Partnership working remains key to meeting our safeguarding duties: CBH attends the Community Safety Partnership (which has responsibilities under Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004) as well as the Safeguarding Leads Network and NE Essex Children's Partnership meetings. CBH also acts as the housing representative in the region at the Strategic Hate Crime Prevention Partnership.
- 3.18 CBH continues to provide advice and support around domestic abuse, which includes delivering home security improvements through the Sanctuary Scheme. Referrals are accepted from Essex Police, MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference), and Next Chapter, as well as direct from CBH tenants and private residents. During the period from July 2020 to the end of June 2021, 59 individuals have been supported by CBH.



3.19 All new staff and Board members receive a safeguarding induction. In addition, CBH maintains its commitment to a programme of intensive 5-hour external professional training for front line staff ('Level 2') and for Board members, Designated Safeguarding Officers, CMT and leads ('Level 3'). 103 members of staff and Board members received this training between July and December 2020.

4 Community Engagement

4.1 CBH works closely with local organisations to meet our equality (and wider) objectives, and to support and engage with the local community.

4.2 We have provided grant funding (through a delegated budget) to the following local organisations:

- [Catch 22](#) works with young people and their families to provide early intervention and specialist support services to families with complex issues.
- [Colchester Citizens Advice](#) delivers financial and debt advice, and advocacy for our tenants.
- [Colchester CAP \(Christians Against Poverty\) Debt Centre](#) provides free advice and support for money issues and debt counselling.
- [Open Road](#) to support tenants with drug and alcohol problems and have developed an online family support group for CBH tenants during the Covid-19 pandemic

4.3 Service Level Agreements are in place with the following organisations who support those who are homeless or likely to be:

- [Beacon House](#), a Christian charity which supports local residents experiencing (or at risk of) homelessness, and those living in insecure accommodation.
- [Youth Enquiry Service](#), providing a confidential and informal service for young people between the ages of 16 and 25.
- [Sanctuary Supported Living](#), a 'housing led' project designed to provide holistic support to rough sleepers.

4.4 In addition, CBH provides practical support and funding to [Colchester Credit Union](#), a Savings and Loans Co-operative which helps facilitate access to loans on ethical terms at reasonable rates.

4.5 We also continue to work closely with:

- [One Colchester](#) (the local strategic partnership), including sitting on its working group: 'Tackling Racism'.

- [Community 360](#), One Colchester's independent charity. Specifically, we have worked together to support volunteering activity and to establish a Town Centre Advice Hub.
- [Solo Housing](#), assisting single people across the East of England to find a safe and affordable place to live.
- Colchester Engagement & Next steps (formerly the Night Shelter) – which provides support and short-term accommodation

5. Developments and Improvements (2020-21)

- 5.1 From Jul 2020 to the end of June 2021, CBH installed grab rails (124), wetrooms (40), ramps (7) and stairlifts (13) to improve accessibility for its tenants. Despite the working restrictions in place for much of this period due to the pandemic, these figures compare favourably to 2019-20. Most notably, there has been an 80% increase in the number of wetrooms installed from 22 to 40.
- 5.2 In 2020-21, six community groups benefitted from a share of CBH's £40,000 [Community Initiatives Fund](#) considered by the panel to be able to deliver the greatest impact upon individuals and communities in the borough. These were: [Greenstead Community Centre](#) including its 'Filling Station Café'; [Abbacus Early Learning](#) including the 'Abacus Cabin' offering a child-friendly space during the school holidays; Action for Family Carers which includes the 'Feeling Good Caring Well' programme; Lexden Springs appeal fund (supporting children with severe physical and neurological disabilities); [Abberton and District Cricket Club](#) which offers dedicated cricket coaching to children aged 5-18; and [Korban](#), which provides supported housing for young people in crisis.
- 5.3 Building upon the incorporation of equality data into key dashboards, Customer Insight data has improved the quality of information that underpins strategic planning and operational response. Examples of business intelligence and customer insight having helped deliver an enhanced service include:
- Data on customer demographics experiencing financial hardship was used to target support and assistance during the pandemic.
 - Data on CBH customer demographics most likely to respond positively to the offer to move to online housing services has been used by both CBH and CBC;
 - Asset Management has used Gateway to Homechoice bidding data in order to help ensure that planning for new homes is as responsive as possible to demand by customer group.
 - An equality profile audit was completed on Resident Voice membership in 2021 whose results were presented to the group in April. CBH is using the data to work towards building a panel membership that is more representative of a wider range of tenant voices and opinions.



- 5.4 CBH published its first [Hoarding Policy](#) in May 2021. Its development reflected the need for a more consistent and systematic approach. The policy recognises the need for specialist support underpinned by effective partnership working. Its development has benefited from the combined operational approach to equality (since hoarding may be underpinned by disability) and safeguarding (since hoarding may reflect mental capacity issues and/or 'self-neglect'). CBH's Suicide Prevention Protocol was launched in the autumn of 2020. This provides detailed processes and guidance to help us safeguard some of our most vulnerable customers.
- 5.5 HR have worked with staff to achieve the following:
- A new and improved Employee Assistance Programme for all staff;
 - 'Working Well' Accreditation Award (Level 3) ([Wellbeing Charter](#));
 - Regular 'Wellbeing Champion' meetings, facilitating the promotion of free wellbeing courses on Yammer (CBH's staff social media platform);
 - Benefits to the community through supporting staff volunteering, which has included assistance at several Covid-19 vaccination centres.
- 5.6 Effective Tenant Involvement and feedback is vital to promoting equality of opportunity and access. In 2020-1, CBH purchased tablets to support Involved Tenants, Quality Assurance Advisers (QAAs) and Sheltered Quality Assurance Advisers (SQAAs). Over the period, CBH has offered customers more online methods to deliver vital customer feedback in order to help improve services for underrepresented groups.
- 5.7 Two members of staff within CBH Housing Management are now Sensory Champions (accredited through the [Sensory Action Alliance](#)). This will help us to deliver enhanced service provision for people with sight or hearing impairments.
- 5.8 No tenants were evicted for rent arrears in 2020-21. The ASB Team worked with Essex Police to close properties where ASB was seriously impacting upon neighbours. An ASB and neighbour disputes handbook was launched called 'How to be considerate towards your neighbour'.
- 5.10 Older Persons Services has continued to move forward during the period with communal lounge refurbishment being completed at Fairfield Court and John Lampon Court. Newsletters and competitions have continued throughout the period with tenants recording their experiences of the lockdown in poetry. Officers met with 449 tenants and made 2580 calls to tenants to check on welfare.
- 5.10 The Rough Sleeper Outreach Team appointed a Specialist Drug and Alcohol officer and a trauma informed counsellor. This has enabled the team to build pathways to treatment and housing for customers. 101 people were accommodated in the 'Everybody In' Protect and Protect Plus Initiatives. CBH chairs the Colchester Homelessness Action Partnership and the Joint Referral Panel which have continued



through the pandemic. 17 rough sleepers remained accommodated at end of March (2021) with pathway plans to move into alternative accommodation.

- 5.11 A new [Accessibility Statement](#) was published on our website in the spring of 2022 and plans are in place to improve accessibility further by the end of March 2022.
- 5.12 CBH Asset Management has exceeded both its roof insulation target (by 500%) and its wall insulation target (by 357%). This has delivered health and financial benefits to tenants who are vulnerable basis of age or disability. Despite the pandemic, CBH has achieved 100% compliance around gas servicing. CBH reintroduced a full repairs services from April 2021 which followed full risk assessments for 'shielded' repairs operatives and PPE packs in place for emergency repairs in 'Covid-19 positive' households.
- 5.13 A dedicated [Equality Impact Assessment](#) was carried out as part of work towards agreeing a Covid-19 Recovery Plan in the summer of 2020. The Plan made specific adjustments in order to maximise equality of opportunity and equality of access which included: additional bespoke workstation adjustments following assessments (prioritising staff with known health conditions); Staff over 70 with pre-existing health conditions continuing not to work "on site"; Priority given for vulnerable customers requiring non-essential repairs (postponed during earlier phase to avoid unnecessary contact); Continuation of the programme of 'welfare checks' for tenants identified as vulnerable on the basis of age, disability, pregnancy and financial hardship. To date, CBH has carried out a total of over 10,000 checks.

6. Looking Forward (2021-22)

- 6.1
- We will further develop our links with faith communities, building upon our membership of the [Essex Faith Covenant](#). When conditions allow, we plan to offer 'faith community based' appointments around housing and financial advice in order to maximise equality of access to our services.
 - CBH will continue to work with the University of Essex and *HDN Diversity East* to share Customer Insight and best practice. This will help to develop our response to inequalities around Covid-19 experienced by 'BAME' groups.
 - Awaiting publication of CIH's new Equality Charter, CBH will look to complete its review of available housing-specific accreditation schemes and benchmarking frameworks for possible adoption in 2022-3.
 - We will incorporate key changes introduced in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 into a new 'combined' (staff and customer) CBH Domestic Abuse Policy. We also plan to seek housing provider accreditation from the [Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance](#).
 - We will promote the use of Essex County Council's *Children and Families Hub* including *Early Help*. We will seek to increase the proportion of all referrals for

- which we have the 'outcome of referral' recorded. We will continue to 'escalate' individual referrals for which we do not receive adequate responses.
- We will further develop our programme of e-learning including CBH specific 'Safeguarding Awareness' and 'Suicide Awareness'. We will also make the existing 'Unconscious Bias' course mandatory for managers. We will continue to improve our use of data to help strengthen strategic planning and operational delivery.

7. Risk Management

7.1 CBH needs to ensure that it is fully complying with the Equality Act 2010 and with its safeguarding duties. As an employer and provider of public services, Colchester Borough Homes may face legal challenges from individuals who have been discriminated against because of discriminatory practices, however unintended. This report demonstrates how CBH effectively manages such risks and continues to be compliant in meeting in full its legal duties.

8. HR Implications

8.1 CBH's statutory responsibilities extend to how it treats and manages its employees. We must continue to take full account of the Equality Act 2010 by having "due regard" to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 Legal implications have been considered within 7 (above).

10. Financial Implications

10.1 Financial implications have also been considered within 7 (above).

11. Value for Money

11.1 CBH seeks to integrate equality and safeguarding into the day-to-day business of the organisation. This helps to support its core business and achieve value for money.

12. Health & Safety Implications

12.1 There are no specific considerations around Health and Safety as opposed to wider safeguarding considerations which have been considered in full within this report.

13. Equality & Diversity Implications

13.1 Much of this report has been focused upon equality and diversity.



14. Residents at the Heart

- 14.1 We recognise that effective Resident Engagement is critical to inclusion, and to advancing equality of access to services for CBH customers. The mainstreamed and integrated approach towards both equality and safeguarding helps us to meet the needs of our most vulnerable customers.