

Harlow Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Information Report



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Introduction

Harlow Council's aim is to ensure that anyone who lives, works or visits Harlow can access our services. As a community leader we aim to set the highest possible standards.

Equality and diversity are central to the council's actions and aims whether it is in how we work with our residents; in the services we provide or through the recruitment of our workforce. Our commitment goes beyond complying with our statutory duties. We believe that all members of the council and wider community should feel safe, valued and be able to fulfil their potential. We will look to challenge any direct or indirect discrimination or harassment.

This report provides an overview of the wide range of measures the council has taken to promote equality and diversity in Harlow. In addition, it details some of the events and services which the council has provided within the past year to further promote equality and diversity.

Legislative and Council Duties

The council has a legal duty to not discriminate unlawfully against any person with a protected characteristic. Additionally, the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) places a number of responsibilities on the council. These are to have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between different groups of people who share a protected characteristic.
- c) Foster good relations between different groups who share a protected characteristic and those that do not.

The Act provides protections for certain groups who are repeatedly disadvantaged in society as their needs are often overlooked and ignored. These protected groups are:



In addition to the general duty above, the council has a 'Public Sector Equality Duty' which means it must always consider equality and diversity when carrying out its day to day business.

The council must also show compliance with the additional reporting duties found in the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011. These are to:

a) Set equality objectives at least every four years that will help achieve any of the aims of the general equality duty.

b) Publish information annually to show the progress its making to deliver the general duty. This information must include information relating to people we employ who have a protected characteristic and those who are affected by our policies and procedures.

Equality and Diversity Objectives

The council sets objectives at least every four years to help meet its public sector equality duty.

As part of its Equality and Diversity Policy, the council is committed to promoting equality in respect of:

- **Our role as a service provider** – ensuring that the council's services meet the needs of all local people.
- **Our role as an employer** – ensuring that the workforce is representative of the community, the recruitment processes are fair and that the work environment is safe and free from discrimination.
- **Our role as a community leader** – ensuring that the council leads on promoting equality and inclusivity within the town to improve the quality of life for the residents and businesses of Harlow.

Harlow Council Gender Pay Gap Report

The council is committed to promoting equality in all its activities including the provision of its services and employment of its staff.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 came into force on 31 March 2017. The Regulations require public authorities with 250 or more employees to publish specific information about differences in pay between male and female employees and workers-based set pay periods.

The council publishes its Gender Pay Gap Report annually on its website. It is also made available to all council employees and workers and is included in the government gender pay gap website, with the reports of other public and private sector employers.

This is the council's fifth annual report on the differences in pay between female and male council employees and is currently for the year to 31 March 2021. The most up to date report can be found [here](#).

The council is committed to continue reviewing the findings and to develop our understanding of the reasons for our gender pay gap and the actions that we can take to address this.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Initiatives

COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the council introduced additional services to help residents affected by coronavirus whilst continuing to provide its essential services in staff adapted to a more flexible working approach to maintain service delivery, with many staff adjusting to home working.

The council also established a cross-party members working group to co-ordinate its response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Harlow Community Hub

In response to the pandemic, the council took on the running of the Harlow Community Hub, working in partnership with Rainbow Services, to provide instant support to people in Harlow who were self-isolating, had COVID-19 or were classed as clinically extremely vulnerable. Support offered included ensuring that people had access to food and any medication that was needed.

During the pandemic, the hub:

- Answered over 4,500 calls from residents.
- Made over 9,300 welfare calls to vulnerable residents to see how they are doing.
- Answered 500 calls from residents who needed advice, were lonely or concerned about the welfare of someone else.
- Supported 1,700 residents by referring them to other partner agencies for help.
- Helped with 773 general food enquiries and 875 requests from people who needed help with collecting essential food shopping.
- Collected 664 prescriptions for those unable to collect them with 356 referrals made to GoodSAM for prescriptions.

COVID-19 grants

From March 2020 to March 2021, the council paid out:

- A total of £174,000 to 348 residents who were told to self-isolate between October 2020 and March 2021.
- Up to £40m in government grants and reliefs to local businesses.
- £866,729 in additional Council Tax support to over 6,000 households.

From April 2021 to January 2022, the council also paid out:

- A total of £5,107,621 in business rate grants.
- A total of £7,484,524 for business rate relief (Retail and Nursery) to 985 businesses.
- A total of £344,500 for Test and Trace (£500 payments to 689 residents).
- A total of £146,991 in Discretionary Housing Payments for additional support with housing costs.

Support and services

The council also:

- Dealt with over 150,000 enquiries (calls, emails, online forms, applications, and social media messages).
- Published over 3,000 social media posts to keep residents informed.
- Received 387,154 views, with 85,741 views of coronavirus support pages, on the council's website.

Bin crews also collected 12,196 tonnes of non-recycling, 6,566 tonnes of recycling and 2,439 tonnes of food waste, with services remaining largely uninterrupted.

The Playhouse

Harlow Playhouse

Harlow Playhouse hosts several events and performances which tackle issues such as mental health, loneliness and domestic abuse. It also hosts events which celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community and holds pay what you can events, which allow everyone to enjoy what Harlow Playhouse has to offer.

Playhouse values

The Playhouse has four core values: relevant, resilient, innovative and accessible. It aims to ensure that these values are covered by the events and performances its hosts and the different experiences on offer to customers.

Access Performances

Harlow Playhouse hosts versions of its events which have additional provisions for differently abled audience members. This includes the removal of loud noises, pitch blackness and flashing lights to provide an experience which is more relaxed. Access performances can also include British Sign Language (BSL) interpreted, captioned and described performances.

Gender Awareness training for all members of staff

Each member of the Playhouse team has been given training to signpost people to different organisations if they are questioning their gender identity.

J9 Theatre and staff training

Harlow Playhouse is enrolled in the J9 initiative which raises awareness and offers help to victims of domestic abuse. Harlow Playhouse is a place where victims can obtain information which will help them to access a safe place, where they can seek information and use a telephone. Harlow Playhouse strongly promotes Healthy and Positive relationships with a substantial proportion of our staffing team being J9 Domestic violence champions. J9 Domestic Abuse awareness training was developed by Safer Places to support the

creation of networks of Domestic Violence champions and safe places for victims to disclose across Essex. At Harlow Playhouse we are aware that domestic violence does not just happen in opposite sex relationships, therefore, our staff can support anyone to disclose and report.

Senior Safe and Social

Harlow Playhouse have teamed up with Rainbow Services to provide a central host venue for their weekly senior safe and socials. This enables older residents in Harlow to identify issues that are affecting their lives and, with support, bring their ideas to life, get more involved in their community and solve their own problems.

To tackle the issue of increased loneliness and isolation, Rainbow and Harlow Playhouse support older residents to create and maintain weekly social and activity hubs. The hubs take place Monday and Friday mornings.

In addition, GOLDIES SING-ALONG which takes place on the 3rd Monday every month in Theatre 2.

Hate crime incident reporting centre

Harlow Playhouse is a Hate Crime Incident Reporting Centre, with over 50 per cent of the team trained by Essex Police as Hate Crime Ambassadors. We provide an alternative place to report hate crime and hate incidents, either as a victim or a witness, when people feel uncomfortable reporting directly to the police. We work in collaboration with the police and other partner agencies to provide support and advice on hate crime.

Artistic programme

Our artistic programme and vision for Harlow Playhouse encompasses accessibility within our programme of events. Our current programme has productions that look at equality across the spectrum, not just disabilities. We are collaborating with companies to allow more scope for BSL interpreted performances to integrate the interpreter into the performance; this is on order to try to make

this more of the norm for producers and artistes when commissioning work. We also try to engage with producers that are already using captioning or audio description, being a majority receiving house finding performances that encompass all over our values can be challenging.

An example of this is Frozen Light Theatre which is an organisation that we work with to present an annual production for patrons that suffer with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD). Harlow Playhouse prides itself on the repeated enjoyment that our patrons get from this production.

Resident companies

Harlow Playhouse is home to inclusive theatre company Razed Roof. Harlow Playhouse works with Razed Roof to ensure that the profile of inclusive theatre is raised in Harlow. The Playhouse also helps them with their touring work across the UK.

Harlow Playhouse is also home to Livewire theatre. Livewire is free at the point of access theatre training for under 18s, Livewire particularly support young people in having positive mental health and those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

The Livewire Trust believes that all young people have the potential to succeed in anything they wish, if they are within a supportive and safe environment. They believe, that as a community, we should encourage, debate with, challenge, inspire, teach, learn from and engage our young members as they are our future. Harlow Playhouse Artistic Director is a Board Member of Livewire Theatre Trust.

Essential Companion scheme

Harlow Playhouse offers Essential Companion Memberships to patrons who rely on assistance from carers when visiting the theatre. Registered patrons purchasing a ticket for an event will benefit from an accompanying complimentary ticket for their carer. Application forms are available from the Box Office.

Pets' Corner and Harlow Town Park

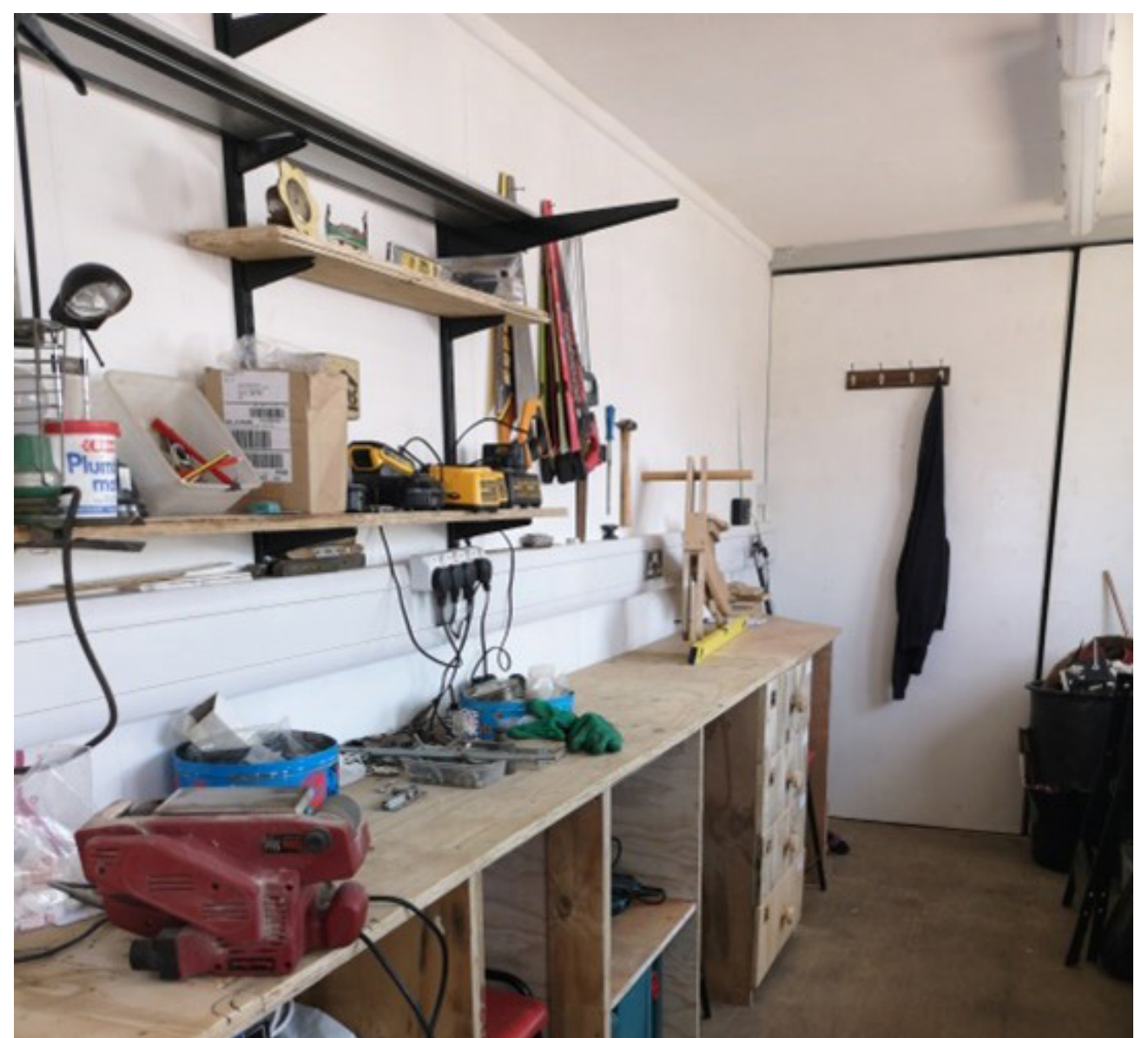
Pets' Corner is a small, free to visit, family friendly farm located in Harlow Town Park. The farm first opened in 1966 and is now home to several traditional farm animals, as well as more exotic animals such as reindeer, llamas and alpacas. Pets' Corner is available for school visits or can be hired out for birthday parties or corporate events. People can also shadow a keeper for the day to learn about their favourite animal.

Harlow Town Park is one of the largest urban parks in the county with over 160 acres of green space. The park not only features Pets' Corner but also five unique gardens, a bandstand, an adventure playground, an inclusive play area, an outdoor gym, a paddling pool and a skate park. The park has received a Green Flag Award for the last five years in a row.

Men's Shed project

The council is working with the Men's Shed Association which aims to provide community spaces for men with the aim of reducing loneliness and isolation. It aims to be self-sufficient with sales from the goods it makes helping to fund further projects.

The shed has been an enormous success and has a growing waiting list with further sessions being put on in order to help meet demand.



Town Park Inclusive Playground

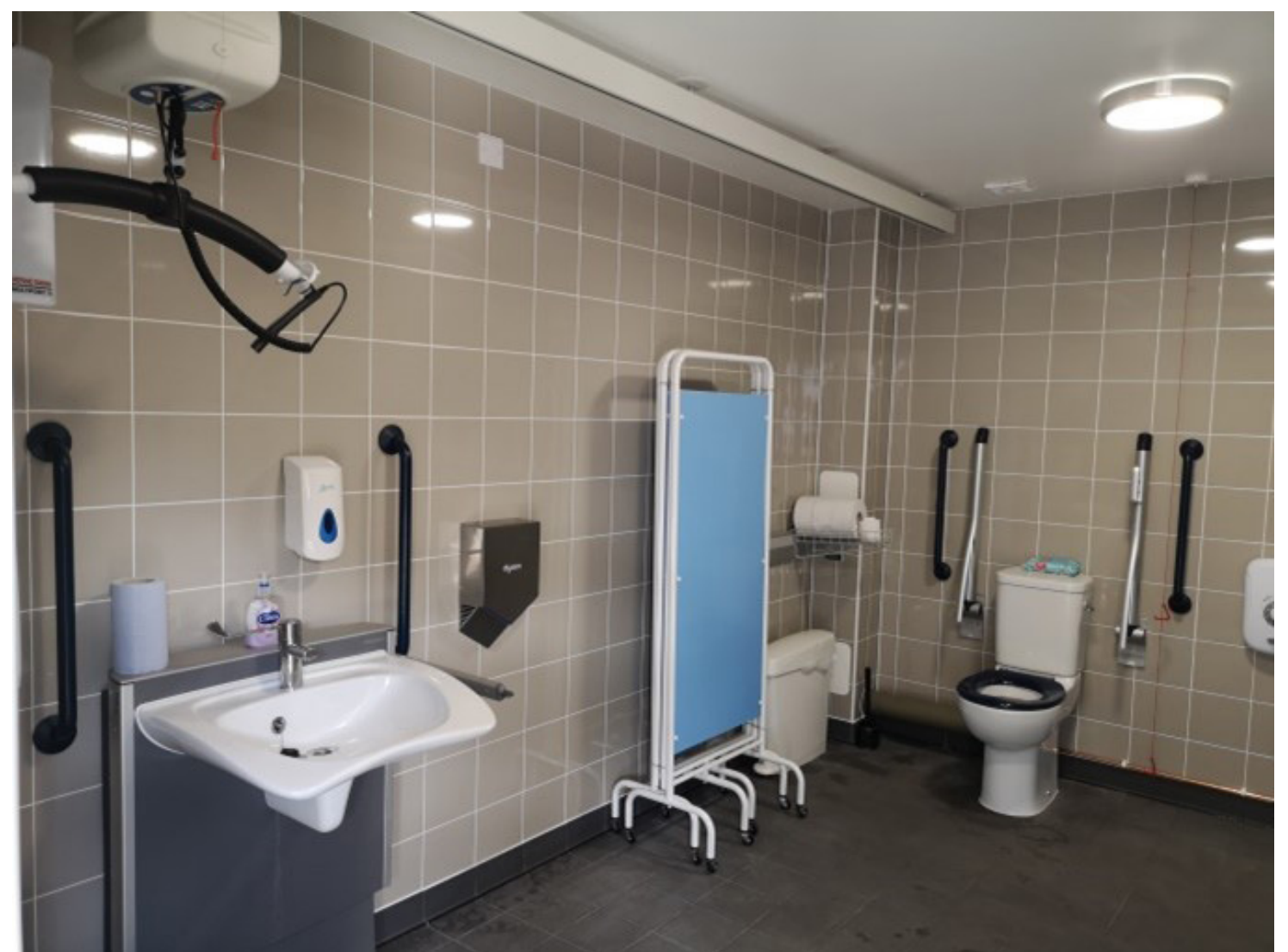
The Pets' Corner playground was recently officially opened in the Town Park. The playground includes 30 different pieces of equipment which cater for all ages and abilities including children and adults with diverse needs and disabilities. Before its official opening, the playground was awarded gold status by PiPA (Plan Inclusive Play Areas) for its accessibility.

Town Park Social Strollers

The Town Park Social Strollers is a walking group aimed at people who want a regular short stroll around the Town Park. The Social Strollers meet fortnightly for a walk around different areas in the Town Park. The Strollers have helped to combat social isolation, particularly amongst the elderly, with many friendships being developed through the Strollers.

Changing Places toilet

Accessible toilets have been installed at Pets' Corner. The toilets have several features which make them much more user-friendly including an adjustable sink and changing table. Regular users can request their own key from the council.



Dementia Adventure

The council has partnered with Dementia Adventure to look at ways in which Pets' Corner can be adapted to make the experience friendlier for people with dementia. The council will implement the recommendations arising from this review.

Sensory equipment

Using Heritage Lottery funding, the council has built a learning centre which includes a sensory equipment area. The area is aimed at those with learning difficulties and provides an interactive area for play.



Initiatives and Support for Council Employees

Child sexual exploitation training

The council has offered child sexual exploitation training to officers and councillors. It has also made it a licensing requirement that all private hire and Hackney carriage drivers take the training.

Mental health awareness training

253 council officers have attended a half-day Mental Health Awareness course. The course covered the specific mental health behaviours of various mental health problems including depression, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia and obsessive-compulsive disorder. It also challenged common myths surrounding mental health. We also engage with the annual Mental Health Awareness Week (normally held in May) to actively encourage employees to take time for mental, psychological and emotional health and wellbeing.

Dignity at Work Policy

This policy sets out how the council will tackle harassment and bullying in the workplace. It promotes equality of treatment for all council employees, independent contractors and agency workers. The council provides help and support via Human Resources and promotes the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to support employees who may be going through a challenging time (as detailed below).

Employee Assistance Programme

The council has an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which offers staff access to help and support if they are going through difficult times. The EAP provides free, confidential support by telephone, email and online on a wide range of topics including work-life balances, relationships, childcare, bereavement and loss, debt, disability and illness, stress, anxiety, depression, bullying and harassment. The EAP is accessed via the employee benefits scheme which also give employees access to a physical wellbeing programme which includes 'Move, Munch, Money and Mind'.

The EAP also includes a wellbeing portal for staff. The portal is a virtual library of wellbeing information, from simple lifestyle changes to practical support for many of life's most common concerns.

Workplace Champions

The council has a team of Workplace Champions who help promote physical and mental health. This includes campaigns such as Dry January, Time to Talk, Stress Awareness Month, National Walking Month, Mental Health Awareness Week, National Fitness Day, Stoptober and Alcohol Awareness Week. The Workplace Champions meet on a regular basis to ensure help and support on physical and mental health is communicated across the council.

Time to Talk

The council has held a "Time to Talk" mental health wellbeing day for its officers to encourage them to speak about any issues that they face. Around 45 officers attended the event which encouraged openness and helped to reduce mental health stigma.

Staff wellbeing room

The council has also opened a staff wellbeing room. The room is an informal space officers can use at lunchtimes or to take a break from their desks during the day. The room can also be used by officers to make confidential phone calls.

Equality Framework for Local Government

The council is part of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The EFLG comprises five performance areas:

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A skilled and committed workforce



Disability Confident

The council is a Disability Confident Committed employer, which means our recruitment process is inclusive and accessible. Any applicant with a disability who meets the criteria of a job will be guaranteed an interview. The council also supports any existing employee who acquires a disability or long-term health condition, enabling them to stay in work.



Talking Tea Party for Mind

The council has held a Talking Tea Party to support and raise money for Mind in West Essex. Staff were encouraged to drop in for a cup of tea, a slice of cake and to have a chat with colleagues about anything non-work related.



Support and advice for carers

The council has a flexible working policy, which includes actively working to provide support and information to those with caring responsibilities, this may include change of work pattern, change of working hours, home working, term time working etc.

Home working

The council constantly looks to develop new ways of working to the benefit of both itself and its employees. It wishes to encourage working at or from home where it is appropriate and where it supports the needs of the service.

All employees may request to be considered for remote and/or home working. However, only those whose posts are considered feasible for this type of working, by reference to the stated criteria, will be eligible to work remotely or at home. There must be a clear, costed, business case to support requests for consideration for home working. Home-based employees have the same employment rights as office-based employees.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the government guidance, all council employees who had the ability to perform their role from home were provided with the necessary equipment to work from home full time.

Access to Work and Remploy support for council employees

Any council employee with a medical condition or disability can contact Access to Work who may be able to provide advice, guidance and recommendations to help support the employee in the workplace. If Access to Work recommend that the employee requires specialist equipment, the council will arrange for this to be purchased.

Remploy is an organisation who helps to support employees who are experiencing mental health issues in the workplace. Remploy will help the employee to create a Wellness Action Plan which can be shared with the council. The Wellness Action Plan may suggest workplace adjustments which the council could see about implementing. Adjustments may include changes to work hours, changes to workspace, working from home, extra training or more positive and constructive feedback.

Civic Centre and Contact Harlow facilities

The Civic Centre and Contact Harlow have access to facilities to assist staff and visitors including the hearing loop and disability friendly toilets. Contact Harlow also has access to telephone interpreters if needed.

Work Well event

“Be Well, Work Well, Stay Well” is an initiative run in Harlow by the Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board. A free “Work Well” event was run at the council with officers in attendance. The event promoted positive health and wellbeing in the workplace to employers and employees in Harlow.

Mental Health First Aid training

Mental health first aid training has been undertaken by 21 council officers and continues to expand across the council. The course helps managers and employees be better equipped to understand present mental health needs in the workplace and support employees in listening and signposting to available support if needed.

Apprentice scheme

In the past five years the council has recruited 19 apprentices. Out of these 19, seven have been successfully recruited into permanent positions. Apprentices attend Harlow College on a day release to study towards an appropriate qualification. The council also arranges for apprentices to undertake job shadowing across different departments to help with the development of skills and knowledge.

At the time of writing this report, the council has three apprentices.

Volunteers

Many of our employees already volunteer within the community, outside of their working hours. The council recognises the contribution that employee volunteering can make to the wider community. To further encourage and support our staff who wish to volunteer the council introduced an employee volunteering scheme in 2017. Employees are allowed to take half a day (3.75 hours) per year

paid time off to complete a volunteering activity for the community. Across the council we have many volunteers who give up their time to help and support areas such as Parndon Wood, Harlow Museum, Harlow Playhouse.

We actively encourage the public to volunteer. A newly update volunteer's registration form for everyone who is interested.

Kickstart Programme

The council has completed work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to recruit six individuals aged between 16 and 24 on a six-month contract for 25 hours per week, with the council enhancing their salary to the Living Wage.

Flexible working

Under the Children & Families Act 2014, all employees have the right to request flexible working if they have a minimum of 26 weeks continuous service with the council.

Agreeing to flexible working ensures that high-quality services are maintained whilst enabling employees to improve their work life balance – carefully balancing the needs of the service and the employee, also helping the council to attract and retain skilled employees as well as developing a lean, agile, and flexible workforce.

The council considers requests such as part-time working, term-time working, varied working hours, altered start and finish times, home working etc.

Flexible retirement

Flexible retirement helps staff to change the nature or pattern of their work in the lead-up to retirement, to suit their future plans. It assists succession planning by retaining valuable skills and experience which can be passed on to others (this policy is currently under review).

Maternity/adoption policies

These policies are in place to support employees during maternity or

adoption leave. All employees are treated fairly and consistently and that a safe and healthy working environment is provided.

Opportunities are provided for maintaining contact during maternity/adoption leave, including 'keeping in touch' provisions for up to 10 days during their leave. Statutory legislation and contractual entitlements are complied with.

The council supplements employees' entitlement to statutory maternity/adoption pay by offering the following allowances to employees that qualify for statutory maternity/adoption pay.

Employees are paid for time off for antenatal appointments/adoption appointments. The council takes the wellbeing of the employee and their baby/child seriously ensuring health and safety are paramount throughout.

Parental leave/paternity leave/shared parental leave policies

The council is committed to ensuring that they have policies which ensure a family friendly working environment whilst maintaining services.

The council recognises the importance of balancing work and home life, seeing flexibility as integral to the recruitment, motivation, and retention of highly skilled employees and that all employees are treated fairly and consistently.

Special leave policy

The council is committed to delivering a working environment that enables employees to achieve the right balance between work and home, whilst providing high-quality services to the community.

This policy seeks to enable employees to balance the demands of domestic and work responsibilities, especially at times of urgent and unforeseen circumstances.

Special leave covers a wide range of paid and unpaid leave entitlements, including (but not limited to) dependency leave,

domestic emergency leave, compassionate leave, statutory parental bereavement leave, carer's leave, training leave, attending interviews and religious holidays.

Career break

The council's career break scheme allows employees to take up to a year's unpaid leave to pursue further educational, developmental, or travel opportunities, care for children and dependent relatives and undertake voluntary work.

This helps retain skilled employees, enables employees to secure new skills/qualifications and increases employee motivation and performance. It also demonstrates that the council is a good employer.

This policy ensures all employees are treated fairly and consistently; opportunities are provided for maintaining effective contact with the employee whilst they are away from their job, with returning employees being supported to successfully return to their post, alongside appropriate training and development.

Public Health and Wellbeing

The Harlow Health and Wellbeing Strategy has four key strategic priorities which aim to offer a ‘whole life course’ approach to health and wellbeing. The priorities are:

- Early Help and Start Well
- Be Well, Stay Well and Work Well
- Age Well
- Physical Activity and Mental Health

The first three subgroups help to ensure that all sections, ages and communities in the town are considered for public health funds towards community projects relating to health and wellbeing priorities.

Early Help and Start Well

The Early Help and Start Well subgroup covers pre-birth to 19 years of age and aims to ensure that all children and young people have access to early help and the best start in life.

The current priorities are mental health, healthy relationships/sexual health, reducing childhood obesity and increasing physical activity. In 2019/20, the subgroup funded a number of projects and initiatives including MiLife (a mental health initiative in secondary school), Livewire (a mental health initiative in primary schools) and Young Concern Trust (a mental health group work programme).

Be Well, Stay Well and Work Well

This subgroup focuses on ensuring that all working age adults know how to be well, stay well and work well.

Age Well

The Age Well subgroup aims for all adults who are sixty five and above to live safe, healthy, and independent lives for as long as possible.

The group has funded befriending projects for ethnic minority groups and oversees a local Compassionate Neighbours scheme to assist with loneliness and isolation. Age Concern were also funded to provide outreach support to older people following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Events

Harlow Council organises and supports a number of events for the local community during the year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the council had to adjust some of its community events in line with government guidance.

Celebrate Harlow

The Playhouse has hosted two Celebrate Harlow events. Both events were diverse showcases of the talented people in Harlow. Local artists performed a variety of acts including ballet, street dancing, solo and group singing, with one performer even playing the accordion. The events saw thousands of pounds being raised for the chosen charities of each Chair of the Council; Streets2Homes, Princess Alexandra Hospital Dolphin Ward, Livewire and the Renal Unit at Addenbrookes Hospital.

Unfortunately, Celebrate Harlow could not take place during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is hoped that Celebrate Harlow will return in 2023.

Harlow Carnival and “End of the Show” Show

Over recent years, each summer the council has organised the Harlow Carnival. The event has celebrated the diverse nature of Harlow and demonstrated the town’s community spirit. Around 1,000 people take part in the parade each year with awards being given to the best walking group and best float.

For the first time in 2019, to mark the end of the carnival, the “End of the Show” Show was held in the town centre. The show consisted of many of the local performers from the Celebrate Harlow event that took place at the Playhouse in January that year.

Unfortunately, the Harlow Carnival could not take place during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is hoped that Celebrate Harlow will return soon.

Crucial Crew

The council organises an annual Crucial Crew event, targeted at Year 6, in conjunction with its partners. The children learnt about healthy relationships, internet safety, fire safety, building site safety, road safety, first aid and CPR, the dangers of smoking and safety around large goods vehicles.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Crucial Crew could not be held in the normal way. Instead, in 2021, an online event was delivered focussing on child exploitation and grooming. In 2022, the event will be held online again and will cover a range of community and personal safety topics as well as topics on healthy relationships and lifestyle.

Paddling pools

The council runs five free outdoor paddling pools and one splash park in Harlow. The paddling pools and splash park are open during the six weeks school summer holidays and are enjoyed by both children and parents alike. The council is currently in the process of updating and modernising each site.

Harlow Spring Clean

In 2021 the council encouraged local residents and businesses to take pride in the community and take part in the Great British Spring Clean. The event saw 28 groups take part in the campaign. In total, over 120 bags of litter were collected off the streets and parks of Harlow which were then collected by HTS (Property & Environment) Ltd with many of the items collected being recycled.

The local people who took part in the event were also honoured at a celebration event hosted in the Council Chamber. Each group was presented with a certificate and a cheque for £100. Many of the groups donated their cheque to local charities whilst others decided to use the money to help with fundraising.

STEAM into Summer activities

During the summer holidays a number of STEAM (science,

technology, engineering, art and mathematics) sessions, run in partnership between the council and the Cambridge Science Centre, are held in the Town Park and Harlow Museum. The sessions are free and aim at getting children engaged with these important subjects. At the events, over a hundred families take part in the interactive activities where science communicators spoke to each child about the science of each activity at a level suitable to their age.

Partnership working with Harlow Royal British Legion

The council recently worked in partnership with Harlow Rocks to run “Harlow Poppy Rocks” to raise awareness of the poppy appeal. Harlow Rocks arranged for 129 rocks to be painted with images relating to World War One and the D-Day Landings in 1944. Each rock was numbered to relate to one of the 128 soldiers from Harlow who lost their life in World War One. One special rock was painted to represent the 75th anniversary of the D-Day Landings. The rocks were hidden around Harlow. Once found, the children brought them to the Civic Centre where they were awarded with a certificate which explained which soldier their rock related to.

The council has previously worked with the Harlow Royal British Legion to create poppy displays for the Civic Centre and Water Gardens in tribute for Remembrance Day. The late local artist Val Fitz-John, with assistance from the council, the British Legion and members of the public, created a net display, made up of over 3,000 hand knitted poppies, to cascade from the Civic Centre and over 600 plastic poppies, made from recycled drinks bottles, to float in the waters at the Water Gardens.

The council continues to support the Harlow Royal British Legion with their remembrance events.

Celebrations and Memorial Days

Throughout the year, the council hosts a number of events which celebrate its staff, residents and local businesses in Harlow. The council also arranges ceremonies for memorial days which are celebrated in the UK or across the world. During the COVID-19 pandemic the council had to adjust the way it commemorates the events in line with government guidance.

Armed Forces Day

Harlow Council held a flag raising ceremony outside the Civic Centre to remember and honour members of the armed forces. The Chair of the Council was joined by members of the Royal British Legion to pay tribute to the Armed Forces community who have fought and given their lives for the freedom and safety of others. The last two years' events have been invitation only to enable the council to ensure social distancing and that government guidance is met.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day is a national commemoration day dedicated to the remembrance of those who suffered in the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution, and in the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The council hosts annual Holocaust Memorial Day services which are open to all.

For the last two years the memorial has been held virtually.

The council has also worked hard with the Jewish community and many other communities to produce a video that could be shown on the council's social media channels on Holocaust Day.

Celebrating LGBTQIA+ and raising the rainbow flag

In the June of each year, the council proudly raises the rainbow flag in support of Essex Pride. The Playhouse represents the council at various Essex Pride events.

Civic Service

The Chair of the Council hosts an annual Civic Service. The theme for the service in 2021 was a celebration of regeneration in Harlow.

Harlow Educational Progress Awards

Since 2014, the council has hosted annual educational progress awards for young people up to the age of 18. The awards celebrate the progress that students make during the academic year and the contribution that their schools make to them and to the town. The council approaches all primary and secondary schools in Harlow, BMAT STEM (based on the Harlow College campus) as well as Harlow College and St Marks for A-Level students and asks them to nominate their own students for the awards. At the awards ceremony, each young person is given a framed certificate and gift voucher to mark their achievement.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the council has been unable to have an in-person ceremony. However, the council still asked all the schools for their nominations and the panel met to decide the winners. Certificates and prizes were sent to the recipients and awards delivered to schools. The winners were also announced on the council's social media channels.

Volunteering thank you event

Throughout the year local people of all ages and abilities give up their time to volunteer and work alongside Harlow Council staff across different services such as the Town Park, Parndon Wood Nature Reserve, Pets' Corner, Harlow Museum, the Leah Manning Centre and the Playhouse.

The council recognises and honours the work of each volunteer at a special thank you event where they are each presented with a certificate in recognition of their hard work and a thank you cake cut by the Chair of the Council.

In 2020, during the pandemic, smaller thank you events were held by volunteer managers. The full thank you event is set to return in 2022.

Harlow Town Centre Awards

The annual Town Centre Awards aim to engage all sections of the community and celebrate the diversity within the town centre.

Businesses, organisations, charities, staff, and volunteers are nominated by members of the entire community (including members of the public, businesses etc.) covering 14 different categories. Those with the most nominations are shortlisted to be finalists with the public then voting for the winner of each 'place' category. A panel of judges decide the winners for the 'people' categories based on representations made by the finalist and their manager; the panel of judges are made up of different representatives to ensure there is a balance and no bias in deciding the winners. The council then holds an awards ceremony at the Civic Centre where the winners of each category were announced and presented with a trophy.

A 15th category is occasionally awarded, the Harlow Council Chair's Award. This category is decided within Harlow Council and given to an individual based on either a commemoration or outstanding contribution to Harlow town centre; the category is open to anyone with a strong link to the town centre.

Active Harlow Awards

The Active Harlow Awards celebrate and recognise local sporting talent in the Harlow area. The awards are held annually and include a number of inclusive and diverse categories including Young Sports Personality of the Year, Community Club of the Year, Unsung Hero, Young Volunteer and The Inclusive Communities Award. For the 2019 Awards, 250 nominations were received with over 2,300 votes cast for the three publically voted for categories.

The guest speaker at the awards ceremony was Noel Thatcher MBE, a five-time Paralympic gold medallist and former world record holder.

Other Initiatives and Services

The council has a number of initiatives and services to promote equality, diversity, inclusivity and general wellbeing in Harlow.

Harlow Youth Council

The Youth Council provides an opportunity for young people to be involved in the council's decision making process and voice their opinion on matters affecting the town. Youth councillors are locally elected 13 to 19 year olds who live in or attend school in Harlow.



Affordable homes

Through HTS (Housing and Regeneration) Ltd, the council is developing new affordable housing in Harlow, increasing the likelihood of those currently priced out of the housing market being able to purchase or rent property.

As part of its 2022 budget proposals, the council has set aside £26 million towards a new council housebuilding programme.

Supported (Sheltered) housing

Supported housing is self-contained accommodation for people aged 65 and over. The accommodation allows people to live independently but with the added security of knowing that help is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The council has a Supported Housing team who provide support and advice to sheltered housing tenants.

Universal Credit

The council, along with its partners, provides support and advice to people receiving Universal Credit.

The council's Scrutiny Committee is carrying out a review of Universal Credit.

The council is closely monitoring the impact of its introduction and is continuing its dialogue to prevent residents from being adversely affected.

Vulnerable tenants

The council has three Tenancy Support Officer roles within the Housing service. The officers provide one-to-one support to tenants who are identified as needing extra help to maintain their tenancies.

Tenants may also be referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau or Peabody should they need extra support.

Local Council Tax Support

The council also has Revenues Collections Officers (Local Council Tax Support Officers) who help to support more vulnerable residents who are struggling with the payment of their Council Tax.

The officers will arrange appointments either at the Civic Centre or at the resident's home (depending on medical needs) to provide advice and to help with the completion of benefit forms.

Residents may also be referred to other agencies if necessary.

Flexible Direct Debit payments

The council offers flexible payments to help residents manage their finances more effectively.

Tenant and leasehold engagement

The council engages with tenants and leaseholders through a wide range of methods including forums and panels. These allow residents to raise concerns and be involved in the decisions which affect them.

Careline

The council's Careline service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service provides emergency support and peace of mind for elderly, disabled and vulnerable people living in the Harlow area. It is available for council tenants, private sector tenants or home owners. It can also be used in shops and offices.



J9 domestic abuse initiative

The Civic Centre and Harlow Playhouse are centres for the J9 initiative. They provide a safe space for domestic abuse victims where they can access information and use a telephone.



Community Engagement Strategy

The council has adopted a new Community Engagement Strategy which ensures that all residents can be informed of matters that affect them.

The purpose of the strategy is to build on good practices that already exist within the council and to increase the number of diversity of people who engage with and work with the council to help make Harlow the best place it can possibly be.

Harlow Times magazine

The council produces and distributes a quarterly magazine to every household in Harlow. The magazine includes information on services provided by the council such as waste and recycling, events that are coming up in the town, housing news for council tenants and leaseholders and councillor details.

Support for rough sleepers

The council was successful in securing additional funding from the government to assist in the prevention of homelessness and to provide support to those who are homeless. The funding has allowed the council to refurbish Bromley Cottages which is leased to a local charity, Streets2Homes. Bromley Cottages are managed by Streets2Homes and offer shelter and support to rough sleepers.

The funding has also been used by the council to recruit a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator. The co-ordinator works closely with Streets2Homes to provide guidance, aid and support for all rough sleepers. Furthermore, the funding provides the council with the ability to offer shelter to rough sleepers during extreme weather.

Grants for people with disabilities for home repairs

The council offers grants for people with disabilities who need to make adaptations to make their homes easier to live in. The grant could be used to make changes such as adapted bathroom facilities, stair lifts, walk in showers and access ramps.

The council recognises that in many instances adapting an existing home is usually favoured by residents rather than alternatives such as institutional care or extended home care packages.

Council Tax reductions due to disability

In some instances, the council offers a reduction in Council Tax if an adult or child in a property needs more space or room to meet special needs because of a disability.

The reduction is also sometimes offered to properties where a disabled person occupies the property and the property has been adapted to provide; an extra bathroom or kitchen, a special room to meet their needs or sufficient floor space to allow the use of a wheelchair (where the person requires the use of a wheelchair indoors).

Disabled persons parking permits

Any resident of Harlow with an Essex County Council blue badge is entitled to apply for a disabled parking permit. This then allows free parking in Harlow Council owned car parks and any residential parking permit areas within Harlow.

Leah Manning Centre

The Leah Manning Centre is a purpose built, modern daycare centre which provides specialist day care for older people. The centre is administered by the Council in partnership with Essex County Council Adult Social Care. It is a warm and friendly environment where service users can make friends and socialise with others. Everyone is offered the choice of activities they want to participate in.

Sam's Place

Sam's Place is a service which provides interaction and development for children and young people with a disability who live in Harlow and the west Essex area. The service is delivered by Harlow Council in partnership with Essex County Council and Action for Children and is based at Harlow Fields School and College.

Planned activity programmes are put together by the children and young people with input from staff and volunteers. Activities include cooking, healthy eating projects, art and craft, gardening and music workshops.

Harlow School Readiness Project

The Harlow School Readiness Project works with families and partner agencies to deliver play-based activities to help children develop the skills they need to be ready to learn and achieve when they start school.

A range of free weekly activities are accessible to all Harlow families with pre-school age children and are targeted to areas/families where we believe the project will have most impact. Parent/carers can meet other families in the area, make friends and offer support to one another.

During school holidays the project delivers community events for families. These events are held in local venues such as Harlow Museum, the Town Park and Parndon Wood Nature Reserve. It is a chance for families to come together and enjoy the local facilities that Harlow has to offer, giving children the opportunity to learn and develop, and for families to become involved in their local community.

The project has an inclusive ethos and is open to all Harlow families.