

Fewer are homeless... but we're still needed



■ In demand – Pernille Petersen in one of the refurbished rooms at Colchester Nightshelter in Alexandra Road.
Picture: ADRIAN RUSHTON (BA30528-19)

COLCHESTER is winning the fight to reduce homelessness – but more work needs to be done.

Figures show 83 homeless applications were received by Colchester Council between January and March.

Of these, 40 met the Government criteria and were officially classified as homeless.

That is down from the same period last year, when 138 homeless applications were made, of which 68 were approved.

Matt Sterling, Colchester Council's housing and communities manager, said the reduction was due to action taken to try to prevent people becoming homeless.

He said: "We have been trying to

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do a lot more work to prevent homelessness in the first place.

"We try to help people to maintain their tenancies by helping with advice, budgeting and tenants' rights.

"We also try to help people find privately-rented accommodation and sometimes we have paid deposits up front to secure private accommodation.

"In addition, we have been working with landlords to encourage them to accept people receiving benefits."

Beverley Oxford, Colchester Council's portfolio holder for neighbourhoods, welcomed the

results. She said: "I think the work which has been done is absolutely marvellous.

"Ideally, we would like to have no-one homeless at all. I don't think we can expect that, but you can do all you can to keep it to a minimum.

"This will have long-term benefits for everyone concerned."

However, there are still people who find themselves homeless because they do not meet the criteria for housing.

Pernille Petersen runs Colchester Nightshelter, which provides accommodation for the homeless.

She said: "We have not seen any decline in the demand for our services.

"Most of the people are not

classified as being statutory homeless and, as such, the council does not have responsibility for them.

"The problem is they don't tick the right boxes for a number of different reasons.

"They can have multi and complex problems.

"They may have antisocial behaviour or learning disabilities or mental health issues.

"But each of these situations does not, on its own, signify enough to be awarded services from a statutory body."

She added: "Services can be difficult to access and some people do have the experience of being pushed from pillar to post because their problems cross a number of agencies."

NIGHTSHELTER WORK

Colchester Nightshelter is undergoing a rolling programme of improvements – thanks largely to donations.

Money has been given to the Nightshelter in memory of Lauren Evans, who died aged 17 in a car crash in Mersea Road, Colchester, in 2006.

The trainee hairdresser was a supporter of the Nightshelter and, since her death, family and friends have raised more than £13,000 for the charity.

Funds have also been received from St Leonard's Church, in Lexden, the mayor's charity fund and the Gannett trust, parent company of the County Standard.

Refurbishment work at the shelter began three years ago and has included a £26,000 revamp of the kitchen area, the laundry room and some bedrooms.