

“As part of post-Covid recovery I would urge the Borough to actively promote lifelong learning.

The value of children’s education is seen as crucial to the nation’s future. This should also be the case for adult learning – because education should be a life-long process.

And it is much more than training for jobs. It’s about the whole person – at any stage of life - so adults need a really comprehensive offer from which to choose.

Through all kinds of learning, people can improve their lives - to everyone’s benefit, because active minds better cope with life-changing circumstances.

Adult learning has never had as high a profile as children’s schooling – and recent reference to adult education in the Queen’s Speech was about vocational training to regenerate the economy. But we also need to re-energise individuals, families and communities.

The ideal curriculum for adults isn’t a set of ladders to climb, but a climbing frame to explore – moving freely in any direction.

The Borough once had precisely that, even though it isn’t the education authority. Grey Friars adult college was steeped in the community’s needs. And it worked with others through the Colchester Learning Shop to make choices clear and accessible. The Borough was a key partner in this venture.

Both were town-centre walk-in-off-the-street facilities that no longer exist, so how do people find out what’s available now? It needs an ‘honest broker’ facility, giving unbiased information and a clear overview of choices, matching enquirers’ motivations.

Our charity called “Learning Never Stops” tried to fill the gap, but we close this year. There is now a real need for a one-stop-shop to provide such a valuable service.

Response to our Lifelong Learning Festivals in 2017 and 2018 and subsequent pressure on our website in 2019 proved this. Enquiries were well beyond our means, working from my home office.

This is where the Borough can act. A Lifelong Learning Information Service could be put together for relatively minimal outlay. The Council has the connections and resources to do this. We ran on a shoestring budget and thousands used us.

By actively promoting adult learning as part of Covid-recovery, Colchester could be poised to enhance its reputation as a town of learning excellence - for all its citizens, whether 5, 25, 55 or 95.

I would urge the Cabinet to consider such a move.”