

Council AGENDA



THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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<http://www.braintree.gov.uk>

Date: Monday, 30 June 2014

Time: 19:15

**Venue: Council Chamber , Braintree District Council, Causeway House,
Bocking End, Braintree, Essex, CM7 9HB**

Membership:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Councillor J E Abbott | Councillor M E Galione | Councillor Ricci |
| Councillor J S Allen | Councillor C Gibson | Councillor D E A Rice |
| Councillor M J Banthorpe | Councillor M Green | Councillor W J Rose |
| Councillor P R Barlow | Councillor P Horner | Councillor V Santomauro |
| Councillor J Baugh | Councillor S A Howell | Councillor W D Scattergood |
| Councillor J C Beavis | Councillor H D Johnson | Councillor W Schmitt |
| Councillor D L Bebb | Councillor S C Kirby | Councillor A F Shelton |
| Councillor E Bishop | Councillor M C M Lager | Councillor L Shepherd |
| Councillor R J Bolton | Councillor C Louis | Councillor C E Shute |
| Councillor L B Bowers–Flint | Councillor D J Louis | Councillor C Siddall |
| Councillor G Butland | Councillor D Mann | Councillor G A Spray |
| Councillor C A Cadman | Councillor J T McKee | Councillor J S Sutton |
| Councillor S Canning | Councillor R G S Mitchell | Councillor J R Swift |
| Councillor T G Cunningham | Councillor J M Money | Councillor P Tattersley |
| Councillor J G J Elliott | Councillor Lady P Newton | Councillor C M Thompson |
| Councillor Dr R L Evans | Councillor J O'Reilly-Cicconi | Councillor M Thorogood |
| Councillor A V E Everard | Councillor I C F Parker | Councillor L S Walters |
| Councillor J H G Finbow | Councillor J A Pell | Councillor R G Walters |
| Councillor M J Fincken | Councillor R P Ramage | Councillor S A Wilson |
| Councillor T J W Foster | Councillor D M Reid | Councillor B Wright |

Members of the Council are requested to attend this meeting to transact the business set out in the Agenda.

N BEACH
Chief Executive

QUESTION TIME

Immediately after the Minutes of the previous meeting have been approved there will be a period of up to 30 minutes when members of the public can speak.

Members of the public wishing to speak should contact the Governance and Members Team on 01376 552525 or email demse@braintree.gov.uk at least 2 working days prior to the meeting.

Members of the public can remain to observe the whole of the public part of the meeting.

Health and Safety. Any persons attending meetings in the Council offices are requested to take a few moments to familiarise themselves with the nearest available fire exit, indicated by the fire evacuation signs. In the event of a continuous alarm sounding during the meeting, you must evacuate the building immediately and follow all instructions provided by the fire evacuation officer who will identify him/herself should the alarm sound. You will be assisted to the nearest designated assembly point until it is safe to return to the building. Any persons unable to use the stairs will be assisted to the nearest safe refuge.

Mobile Phones. Please ensure that your mobile phone is switched to silent or is switched off during the meeting.

Documents. Agendas, reports and minutes for all the Council's public meetings can be accessed via the internet at <http://www.braintree.gov.uk>

We welcome comments from members of the public to make our services as efficient and effective as possible. We would appreciate any suggestions regarding the usefulness of the paperwork for this meeting, or the conduct of the meeting you have attended.

Please let us have your comments setting out the following information:

Meeting AttendedDate of Meeting.....

Comments.....

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Contact details.....

Members unable to attend the meeting are requested to forward their apologies for absence to the Governance and Members Team on 01376 552525 or email demse@braintree.gov.uk

INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS

Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, Other Pecuniary Interest or Non-Pecuniary Interest:-

Any member with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or other Pecuniary Interest to indicate in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Such Member must not participate in any discussion of the matter in which they have declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or other Pecuniary Interest or participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting. In addition, the Member must withdraw from the chamber where the meeting considering the business is being held unless the Member has received a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer.

PUBLIC SESSION

Page

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 To receive any announcements/statements from the Chairman and/or Leader of the Council.**
- 3 Declarations of Interest**
To declare the existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, other Pecuniary Interest or Non-Pecuniary Interest relating to items on the agenda having regard to the Code of Conduct for Members and having taken appropriate advice where necessary before the meeting.
- 4 Public Question Time**
(See paragraph below)
- 5 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Annual Meeting of the Council held on 6th May 2014 (copy previously circulated).
- 6 Request for Dispensation under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 for Councillor Anthony F Shelton** **7 - 10**
- 7 Reference from Cabinet - Proposed Purchase of 850 The Crescent Colchester Business Park Colchester** **11 - 20**
- 8 Reference from Local Development Framework Sub-Committee - Pre Submission Site Allocations and Development Management Plan** **21 - 30**
- 9 Reference from Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Scrutiny Review of enabling young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to Participate in Education, Employment or Training** **31 - 74**
- 10 Reference from Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Task and Finish Group - Scrutiny Review of Provision of Rural Services** **75 - 114**

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| 11 | Reference from Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Task and Finish Group - Scrutiny Review of the Operation of the Councils Local Council Tax Support Scheme | 115 - 134 |
| 12 | Reports from the Leader and Cabinet Members To receive the following reports from each Portfolio Holder: Question to the Cabinet relating to a portfolio, the powers and duties of the Council or the district. Procedure rules 7.1 to 7.3 apply to this item. Where a verbal response cannot be given, a written response will be issued to all members. <i>(A period of up to 1 hour is allowed for this item).</i> | |
| 12a | Councillor Butland - Leader of the Council | 135 - 138 |
| 12b | Councillor Beavis - People and Participation | 139 - 142 |
| 12c | Councillor Bebb - Performance and Efficiency | 143 - 146 |
| 12d | Councillor Lady Newton - Planning and Property | 147 - 150 |
| 12e | Councillor Schmitt - Place | 151 - 154 |
| 12f | Councillor Siddall - Prosperity and Growth | 155 - 156 |
| 13 | List of Public Meetings Held Since Last Council Meeting To raise any matters arising from the minutes of meetings that have been held in public session since the Council meeting of 6th May 2014. | 157 - 158 |

14 Chairmen's Statements

To receive statements from those Chairmen who have given prior notification in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.9 and to respond to questions on such statements.

None have been received.

15 Statements by Members

To receive any statements by Members of which the appropriate written notice has been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.6.

There are none

16 External Organisations

To receive reports about and receive questions and answers on the business of external organisations.

There are none.

17 Exclusion of Public and Press: - To give consideration to adopting the following Resolution: -

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act.

PRIVATE SESSION

18 Reference from Cabinet - Proposed Purchase of 850 The Crescent Colchester Business Park Colchester -

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information);

19 Leader's or Cabinet Member Statements - Private Session

Leader's Statements or statements by Cabinet Members containing exempt information on a key issue.

There are none.

- 20 Policy Recommendations and References - Private Session**
There are none.
- 21 Reports from the Leader or Cabinet Members - Private Session**
To receive any reports from the Leader of the Council and each Portfolio Holder containing exempt information and to ask questions on matters contained in the reports.
There are none.
- 22 Private Meetings Held Since the Last Council Meeting**
To raise any matters arising from the Minutes of meetings that have been held in Private Session since the Council meeting of 6th May 2014.
There are none.
- 23 Chairmen's Statements - Private Session.**
To receive statements containing exempt information from those Chairmen who have given prior notification in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.9 and to respond to questions on such statements.
There are none.
- 24 Statements by Members - Private Session**
To receive any statements by Members of which the appropriate written notice has been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.6.
There are none.

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| Request for Dispensation under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 for Councillor Anthony F Shelton | | Agenda No: 6 |
| Corporate Priority: | | |
| Report presented by: | | Councillor Graham Butland, Leader of the Council |
| Report prepared by: | | Emma Wisbey, Governance and Member Manager |
| Background Papers: | | Public Report |
| None. | | |
| Options: | | Key Decision: No |
| To grant or refuse the request for dispensation. | | |
| Executive Summary: | | |
| This report covers two related issues in relation to a Member's absence due to ill health and the requirement for Council to approve a dispensation where a member is unable to attend a meeting of the Council over a six month period. | | |

Decision:

Council is recommended:-

- (1) To approve a dispensation for Councillor Anthony F Shelton from attending meetings of the Council by reason of illness for a six month period commencing 17th February 2014, in order to avoid Councillor Shelton ceasing to be a member of the Authority under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972. Any extension to the dispensation for Councillor Anthony F Shelton is subject to a further approval at the appropriate time under (2) below;
- (2) To agree that any future dispensations under Section 85, in the event of there not being a timely meeting of Full Council to consider the matter, to delegate to the Chief Executive authority to agree dispensations, having obtained the agreement of all of the Group Leaders prior to giving such approval. This is subject to the Chief Executive reporting dispensations agreed under this delegation to the next appropriate meeting of Full Council.

Purpose of Decision:

To enable Councillor Shelton compliance with a Member's obligations under the Local Government Act 1972.

Any Corporate implications in relation to the following should be explained in detail

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| Financial: | If dispensation is not granted, unless Councillor Anthony F Shelton attends a meeting of the Authority before 17 th August 2014 he will automatically cease to be District Councillor and a vacancy will occur for the Ward of Stour Valley South. To fill this vacancy by-election may be required, the cost of which will be met by the Authority. |
| Legal: | As set out in the report. |
| Safeguarding | None arising out of this report. |
| Equalities/Diversity | None arising out of this report. |
| Customer Impact: | The Ward of Stour Valley South is represented by a single District Councillor, Councillor Anthony F Shelton. Whilst Constituents of the Ward of Stour Valley South can approach any District Councillor in respect of their concerns; however, should dispensation not be granted the Ward of Stour Valley will not be directly represented by a District Councillor. |
| Environment and Climate Change: | None arising out of this report. |
| Consultation/Community Engagement: | These proposals have been notified to each of the political group leaders. |
| Risks: | If dispensation is not granted Councillor Anthony F Shelton will automatically cease to be a Member of Braintree District Council on 17 th August 2014. |
| | |
| Officer Contact: | Emma Wisbey |
| Designation: | Governance and Member Manager |
| Ext. No. | 2610 |
| E-mail: | emma.wisbey@braintreegov.uk |

Background

Members will be aware of Councillor Shelton's on-going inability to attend Council meetings on the grounds of ill-health following an accident. Councillor Shelton's last attendance at a qualifying meeting under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 was the meeting of Full Council on held 17th February 2014. Section 85 states that if a Member fails over a period of six consecutive months from the date of his last attendance to attend any meeting of the Authority he shall, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the Authority before the expiry of that period, cease to be a Member of the Authority.

Qualifying meetings include attendance as a Member at a meeting of any Committee or Sub-Committee of the Authority or at a meeting of any Joint Committee, Joint Board or other body discharging functions of the Authority. It also includes attendance as a representative of the Authority at a meeting of, for example, an outside body.

Under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 such dispensations for Members are a responsibility of Full Council. Therefore unless the Council agrees the recommendation, Councillor Shelton will automatically cease to be a member of the Authority on 17th August 2014.

It is possible that similar situations will occur again and it is therefore proposed that in the event of there not being a timely meeting of Full Council to consider a dispensation request, that a flexible mechanism be introduced via a delegation to the Chief Executive to consider such requests and which would avoid the need to call an extraordinary meeting of Full Council to deal with the issue.

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| Reference from Cabinet Proposed Purchase of 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester | Agenda No: 7 |
| Corporate Priority: Providing value for money Portfolio Area: Performance and Efficiency Report presented by: Cllr David Bebb, Cabinet Member for Performance and Efficiency Report prepared by: Alison Webb | |
| Background Papers: Cabinet 2nd June 2014 – Agenda and Minutes | Public Report |

Minute Extract
Cabinet - 2nd June 2014

8 ****PROPOSED PURCHASE OF 850 THE CRESCENT, COLCHESTER BUSINESS PARK, COLCHESTER**

Minutes Published: 13th June 2014
Call-in Expires: 23rd June 2014

INFORMATION: As part of a Peer Challenge in October 2013, it had been identified that the Council could seek to generate a better return on the investment of public funds and adopt a more innovative approach to the use of assets.

In order to produce a better rate of return within acceptable risk parameters, consideration had been given to the Council investing in property which had the potential to increase in value and would generate a revenue stream. An opportunity had arisen to acquire a prime modern office, long leasehold property at 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester. Income generated from this investment opportunity would be re-invested in Council services and in the District.

This item was discussed and determined during the Public Session of the meeting. However, a report detailing the terms and funding arrangements for the acquisition of the property was included within the Private Session of the Agenda.

DECISION: That the acquisition of 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester be approved on the terms and project funding arrangements as set out in the Private Session report, subject to contract and due diligence, and such other terms and conditions as agreed by the Cabinet Member for

Performance and Efficiency and Corporate Director (Finance).

That it be **Recommended to Council** the approval of capital funding for the project on the terms set out in the Private Session report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Council to obtain better rates of return on its investments.

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| Proposed Purchase of 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 9YQ | | Agenda No: 6c |
| Corporate Priority: Providing value for money Portfolio Area: Performance and Efficiency Report presented by: Cllr David Bebb Report prepared by: Andrew Epsom | | |
| Background Papers: | | Public Report |
| Options: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the acquisition of 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester 2. Do not approve the acquisition of 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester | | Key Decision: Yes |
| Executive Summary: <p>Areas for consideration identified in the Peer Challenge undertaken at Braintree District Council in October 2013 are for the Council to generate a better return on investments of public funds; have a more innovative use of assets and maximise income. As a result of this the Council has undertaken a review of its approach to asset management and its investment strategy. The Council currently receives £172,200 on its reserves and investments (based on an average investment per month of £29million at an average rate of 0.6%). To produce a better rate of return within acceptable risk parameters, the Council has been exploring investing in property which secures a capital asset whose value is likely to increase overtime and generates a revenue stream through annual rent. An opportunity has come forward to the Council to purchase a long leasehold property in Colchester Business Park.</p> <p>Recently the Council has undertaken similar investments in the District such as the Eckard House site and Mayland House in Witham for the purposes of generating an annual income stream and also to create job opportunities. The Council will continue to look for investment opportunities.</p> <p>Income generated from the Colchester investment opportunity will be re-invested in services and in the District.</p> <p>The Council has now agreed terms, subject to Council approval and Contract, to acquire a prime modern office investment on Colchester Business Park.</p> | | |

Decision:

1. That Cabinet recommends to Council approval of the acquisition terms and project funding as set out in the report in Private Session, subject to contract and due diligence, and on such other terms and conditions as agreed by the Cabinet Member for Performance and Efficiency and Corporate Director (Finance).

Purpose of Decision:

To enable the Council to obtain better rates of return on its investments.

Any Corporate implications in relation to the following should be explained in detail

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| Financial: | It is proposed that this property purchase will be funded from existing capital resources (including existing borrowings). Independent financial advice will be sought on the tenants financial stability as part of the due diligence process. |
| Legal: | The purchase of 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester is subject to Full Council approval and subject to contract. The Council's Legal Service will be instructed to act on the Council's behalf in respect of the exchange of contracts and completion of this purchase and ensure that the Council's interests are protected at all times. |
| Safeguarding | Not applicable. |
| Equalities/Diversity | Disabled car parking, lifts, disabled WC's and appropriate signage are available at the property to meet the requirements of disabled users. |
| Customer Impact: | This valuable source of revenue income will enable the Council to continue to deliver good quality services to its customers and provide value for money. |
| Environment and Climate Change: | This is a modern office building built to a good standard and of low maintenance materials. |
| Consultation/Community Engagement: | Management Board and Members have been consulted in respect of this investment opportunity. The acquisition of this property will be subject to Full Council approval. |
| Risks: | See Risk matrix in the main body of this report. |
| | |
| Officer Contact: | Andrew Epsom |
| Designation: | Head of Asset Management |
| Ext. No. | 2921 |
| E-mail: | andrew.epsom@braintree.gov.uk |

1 Background

- 1.1 A Peer Challenge at Braintree District Council was undertaken on the 8th - 10th October 2013.
- 1.2 The scope and focus of the Peer Challenge included:-
 - (a) Financial Challenge in 2015/16 and beyond i.e., how does the Council continue to deliver its priorities and good local services whilst providing value for money and being financially sustainable?
 - (b) Does the Council now have the right skills, capacity and focus in place to deliver its economic development priorities?
- 1.3 Within the Peer Challenge Summary and Observations the Peers concluded that “opportunities to invest monies more creatively to ensure projects are delivered and to generate greater returns should be actively explored”.
- 1.4 The Council has therefore been proactively researching suitable investment opportunities that generate greater returns (a target above 5% has been assumed) and which are considered to be relatively low risk.
- 1.5 The Council has recently acquired the Eckard House site in Witham and is currently in the process of converting this property into a commuter car park.
- 1.6 A modern office investment opportunity has now been identified on the Colchester Business Park. A sale of this property was agreed to a foreign purchaser in December 2013 but did not proceed as the purchaser could not obtain UK mortgage funding. The Council has now agreed terms to purchase this investment property.

2.0 The Identified Property Investment Opportunity

- 2.1 The Council has identified a modern office investment situated at 850 The Crescent, Colchester Business Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 9YQ (as shown outlined in red on the plan at Appendix 1).
- 2.2 This property comprises of modern 2 storey office building containing 18,686 sq ft (1,736m²) net internal floor area with 101 car parking spaces on a 1.34 acre site. The property is situated on the modern Colchester Business Park close to the new A12 road junction.
- 2.3 The property is held on a ground lease from Colchester Borough Council for a term of 150 years expiring 21st August 2150 and at a peppercorn rent.
- 2.4 The premises are under-let to Care UK Limited on a 15 year full repairing and insuring lease expiring on the 28th September 2028.
- 2.5 The lease to Care UK Limited incorporates 5 yearly upwards only rent reviews and does not contain any break provisions.
- 2.6 This purchase will be subject to contract, due diligence and Full Council Approval.

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| 2.7 | Timing: Council to possibly approve purchase | 30th June 2014 |
| | Exchange of Contracts | 4th July 2014 |
| | Completion of purchase | 18th July 2014 |
- 2.8 The under-lease is guaranteed by the parent company, Care UK Health and Social Care Investments Limited, who at September 2012 had assets valued at £511.7 million.
- 3.0 The Tenant, Care UK Limited
- 3.1 Care UK Limited, with its registered head office located in Colchester, is engaged in the provision of health and social care services. Working in close partnership with local authorities and primary care trusts, it provides care and support for older people and those with learning disabilities as well as a range of healthcare services.
- Its services include the operation of NHS walk-in centres, surgeries and treatment centres and the provision of a range of specialist mental health care including treatment for young people who self-harm or have eating disorders.
- It also operates nursing and residential homes for older people and provides care and support every week for people in their own homes. In addition, it offers supported living services for people with learning disabilities and mental health needs.
- 3.2 It was incorporated in 2010 after being delisted from the stock exchange. Its Annual Report shows that in the financial year ending September 2013, it had a turnover of £657.2 million and earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization of £56.2 million but a net loss of £30.3 million. Care UK Limited employs in excess of 18,000 staff.
- 4.0 Benefits of Acquiring this Property Investment
- 4.1 This investment produces a good level of return.
- 4.2 Care UK Limited appears to be a low risk, sound and financially stable tenant. In addition, the lease is guaranteed by the parent company Care UK Health and Social Care Investments Limited which provides the Council with added comfort, security and protection.
- 4.3 Additional revenue income will become available to help meet savings/income targets and support the delivering of good quality Council services going forward.
- 4.4 This is a good quality, low risk property investment opportunity which should also sell readily in the market if the Council was minded to dispose of it in the future.
- 5.0 Colchester Business Park
- 5.1 The Colchester Business Park has been developed over the last 15-20 years for predominately good quality office users.

- 5.2 The land on Colchester Business Park is owned and managed by Colchester Borough Council (via Colchester Business Park Management Company) with individual plots let on terms of 150 year ground leases at peppercorn rents. There are only c.2 acres remaining to be released.
- 5.3 There are currently 3 units under 3000 sq ft available to let and one 2.5 acre site for sale. Otherwise the Business Park is fully let/occupied/developed.
- 5.4 Significant occupiers on the Business Park include: RBS, Natwest, Essex County Council and Care UK Limited.
- 5.5 This part of North Colchester around the Community Stadium is a developing area with some 40 acres of land allocated for employment, leisure, Park and Ride and related development. A relief road from the A12 junction to Colchester Station is under construction.
- 5.6 As a developing area the prospects for growth in rental and capital values are good.

| 6.0 | <u>Risks</u> | | |
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| | <u>Item</u> | <u>Issue</u> | <u>Action</u> |
| | Financial stability of tenant | The current rental income from this property investment is significant. If the tenant got into financial difficulties and could not pay the rent falling due, then this could put the Council's finances under pressure. | The lease is protected by a guarantor providing the Council with another layer of comfort, security and protection. The Council to carry out due diligence on the soundness and financial standing of both the tenant and guarantor. |
| | Economic conditions change and rents/values decline | This would impact on the Council's ability to obtain a rental increase at review or potentially dispose of the property in the open market in excess of the price and costs incurred in purchasing the property. | The lease contains 5 yearly upwards only rent reviews which means that the current rental received by the Council would not decline. If the Council was minded to dispose of this property then this would need to be subject to prevailing market conditions to ensure that best value could be achieved. |
| | Access Road unadopted | The Council may need to make a future contribution to the cost of | It would appear that all estate service charges have been passed on to the |

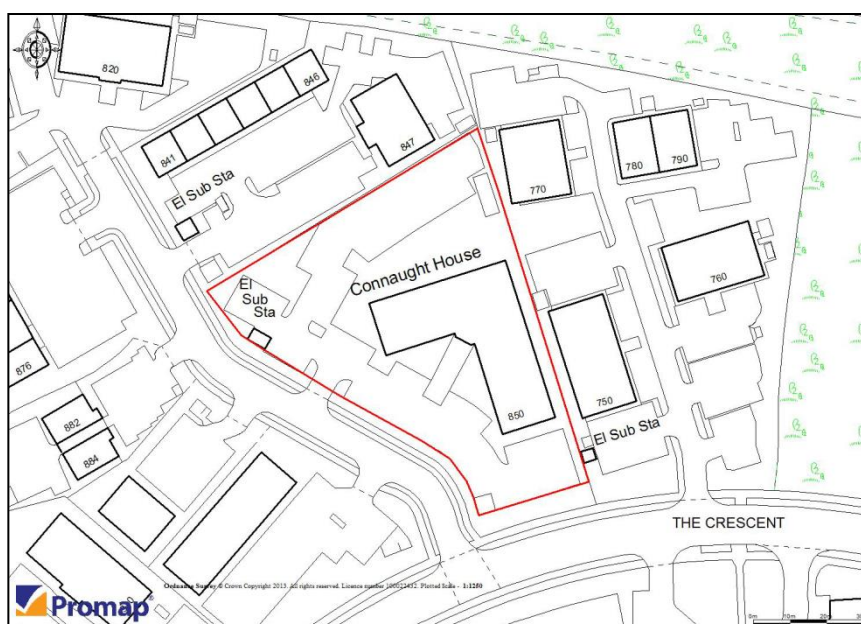
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| | | the road adoption works. | under-tenant. This issue to be addressed during the course of the Council's due diligence exercise. |
| | Changes to commissioning of care services | This may have an impact on Care UK Limited's core business and impact on profitability. | <p>This appears to be growth industry, particularly with the ageing population in the UK.</p> <p>In any event, the lease is protected by a guarantor.</p> |

7.0 Funding

- 7.1** This property investment acquisition shall be funded from existing capital resources, including existing borrowings.

8.0 Conclusions

This investment opportunity provides many benefits to the Council including supporting the delivery of key Corporate Priorities, realising valuable revenue income, producing a good initial investment yield and providing a relatively low-risk investment.



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| Reference from the Local Development Framework Sub-Committee | Agenda No: 8 (Part 1 of 2) |
| The Pre Submission Site Allocations and Development Management Plan | |
| Corporate Priority: Place and Prosperity Portfolio Area: Planning and Property Report presented by: Councillor Roger Walters – Chairman of the Local Development Framework Sub-Committee Report prepared by: Alison Webb | |
| Background Papers: | Public Report |

Local Development Framework Sub-Committee - 12th June 2014
Minute Extract

5 **PRE-SUBMISSION DRAFT SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to a report on the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan and whether this should be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination, or a new Local Plan prepared instead.

Members were reminded that work on the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan had commenced following adoption of the Core Strategy in 2011. The Core Strategy had set a minimum target of 4637 new dwellings to be built in the Braintree District between 2009 and 2026, or around 272 dwellings per year.

However, since adoption of the Core Strategy there had been a fundamental shift in national planning policy including publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in March 2012 and National Planning Practice Guidance in March 2014, and the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies in January 2013. One of the most significant changes required Councils to significantly boost the supply of housing by meeting their full, objectively assessed need for market and affordable housing. Indications from population projections and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment for the Braintree District suggested that the assessed need would be much higher than set out in the Core Strategy and that it could range between 620 to 940 new dwellings per year.

There had been clear signs that carrying forward a Core Strategy housing target based on figures determined prior to publication of the National

Planning Policy Framework, was not likely to be considered acceptable by a Planning Inspector. In the circumstances, the Council had sought advice from the Planning Advisory Service and Counsel who had concluded that submitting the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan for Examination would be a very high risk approach and that the most sensible option would be for the Council to begin work immediately on a new Local Plan.

If the Council decided not to submit the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan for Examination, work on the evidence base for a new Local Plan would begin immediately and the objectively assessed need for housing would be determined in Autumn 2014. The first public consultation on the Plan would take place mid-2015, with a further period of public engagement in 2016. The Plan would then be submitted for Examination with a view to it being adopted in 2017.

DECISION: That it be **RECOMMENDED to Council** that the current Site Allocations and Development Management Plan is not submitted for public Examination and that the Council proceeds with developing a new Local Plan to meet the projected, objectively assessed housing need.

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| The Pre Submission Site Allocations and Development Management Plan. | | Agenda No: 8 (Part 2 of 2) |
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| Corporate Priority Portfolio Area: | Place and Prosperity Planning and Property | |
| Report presented by: | Councillor R Walters, Chairman of the Local Development Framework Sub-Committee | |
| Report prepared by: | Emma Goodings | |
| | | |
| Background Papers: LDF Sub Committee agendas, reports and minutes 8 th April, 12 th June 2014. Council agenda, reports and minutes 23 rd April 2014. Pre-Submission Draft Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (May 2014); Core Strategy (2011); Braintree District Local Plan Review (2005); National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). | | Public Report |
| Options: To approve or not approve the recommendation as set out in the decision. | | Key Decision: No |
| | | |
| Executive Summary: The report sets out the major changes in national planning policy and guidance since the adoption of the Core Strategy in September 2011. These include the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Planning Practice Guidance which was only formalised in March 2014. One of the most significant changes contained within this new guidance relates to the requirement on Councils to significantly boost their supply of housing, by meeting their full objectively assessed need for market and affordable housing. Indications from population projections and from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Braintree District, suggest that this figure is going to be much higher than that which is set out in the Core Strategy. The Council has been monitoring the progress of other local authorities in a similar position and two recent cases are of particular relevance to our situation. The Planning Inspectorate, in their letter of advice to Harrogate Borough Council on the examination of its Sites and Policies DPD, and a planning appeal decision at Sevenoaks District | | |

Council, are clear signs that carrying forward a Core Strategy housing target based on housing figures determined pre National Planning Policy Framework, and not on more up to date evidence, is not an approach which is likely to be considered acceptable by a Planning Inspector.

The Council has also commissioned specific advice on its current Plan from the Planning Advice Service, as well as legal advice from an external Counsel. Both of these conclude that taking the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan to an examination would be a very high risk approach and the most sensible option would be to begin work immediately on a new Local Plan which is fully compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Based on the weight of evidence, officers are therefore recommending to Members that the Pre Submission Site Allocations and Development Management Plan is not submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, but that work begin immediately on a new Local Plan and its evidence base, which will be fully compliant with national planning policy and guidance.

Decision:

That it is RECOMMENDED: The Council determines that the current Site Allocations and Development Management Plan is not submitted for public examination and that the Council proceeds with developing a new Local Plan to meet the projected objectively assessed housing need.

Purpose of Decision:

To decide, whether following the conclusion of this final stage of public engagement, to submit the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan for examination or to begin immediate work on a new Local Plan.

Any Corporate implications in relation to the following should be explained in detail

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Financial: | LDF costs are met through the base budget. |
| Legal: | A Planning Inspector would need to find the Plan sound in line with the criteria set out in the main body of the report. If they consider that the Plan would not meet these criteria then it would be found unsound and could not be adopted by the Council as planning policy. The production of a new Local Plan would need to be guided by current legislation and government guidance. |
| Safeguarding | None. |
| Equalities/Diversity | The Council's policies should take account of equalities and diversity and has been subject to an equalities impact assessment. |

| | |
|---|--|
| Customer Impact: | Providing housing, employment, open space and infrastructure and protecting the countryside and the environment. |
| Environment and Climate Change: | Impact on environment of sustainable policies and sustainable design of housing. |
| Consultation/Community Engagement: | Consultation with the public and stakeholders between the 17 th February and 28 th March 2014, with a further period of public engagement currently underway until the 20 th June 2014. |
| Risks: | As set out in the report there is a high probability that if the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan were taken to examination it would be found unsound. The Council is currently and remains at risk from the charge of not having an up to date development plan until a new Local Plan is adopted. |
| | |
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1. Background

- 1.1 As Members are aware, the Council has been working on the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (ADMP) since the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2011. The Core Strategy set a minimum target of 4637 dwellings between 2009 and 2026 or around 272 new properties per year. The Plan proposed strategic growth locations around Braintree and Witham and also included overarching policies relating to affordable housing, open space, the environment and other areas.
- 1.2 The ADMP was to build on the strategic policies and land allocations in the Core Strategy and provide policies used in development management decisions and smaller non-strategic housing allocations, as well the identification of land for other uses such as open space, allotments etc. Extensive engagement was carried out with the Town and Parish Councils of the District whilst preparing this Plan and two periods of more formal public engagement have taken place in 2013 and in February and March 2014.
- 1.3 The comments received on the proposed further amendments to the Pre Submission ADMP will be reported to a future meeting of the LDF Sub Committee, who will consider the responses and make any recommendations on further changes. If Members decide not to submit the Plan for examination, the LDF Sub Committee will be asked to recommend to Council an interim planning policy statement on the contents of the ADMP. All responses received on the ADMP will also be kept on file and used to inform the new Local Plan process.

2. Recent Changes in Planning Policy

- 2.1 Since the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2011, there have been major changes in national planning policy;
 - In March 2012 the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published and almost all previous national planning policy was cancelled.
 - The Regional Spatial Strategy, which in BDC's case was the East of England Plan, was formally abolished in January 2013. This Plan was the basis for the housing requirements set out in the Core Strategy and was the best available evidence at the time.
 - The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) was released in draft form in the summer 2013 and formalised in March 2014, cancelling all previous national planning guidance.
- 2.2 These changes have represented a fundamental shift in national planning policy and almost all national planning policy in place at the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2011 has now been replaced.
- 2.3 One of the most significant changes to national planning policy relates to housing numbers and the Governments policy to substantially increase housing development across the Country. In the previous system of Regional Plans, a minimum housing target for each District was set within that Plan and needed to be adhered to, and this was the approach which was followed in the Core

Strategy. However, these centralised housing targets have now been abolished and each local authority must determine its own housing requirements in line with the guidance in the NPPF. Paragraph 47 of the NPPF states that local authorities should; “...*boost significantly the supply of housing*” and “*use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area*”

- 2.4 The definition of objectively assessed need is not straightforward. Local planning authorities are expected to consider evidence on a range of scenarios, using local knowledge to interpret the results and the assumptions in the modelling, with the sub-national household projections prepared by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) as a starting point.
- 2.5 Essex Planning Officers Association therefore commissioned consultants, Edge Analytics, to carry out work on examining a range of scenarios for each local authority. Forecasts are produced on a range of scenarios based on the most up to date figures produced by DCLG. The most recent phase 5 work published in January 2014 suggests a range of between 620 and 940 additional dwellings per year for Braintree District.
- 2.6 The NPPF also requires Councils to produce and publish a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which; “*should identify the scale and mix of housing and the range of tenures that the local population is likely to need over the plan period.*” This assessment has now been published. The study quotes a range of 761 to 883 new dwellings per year depending upon what timescale we use to meet our backlog of affordable housing need.
- 2.7 These various forecasts and the results of the SHMA have been examined by officers in preliminary work towards defining objectively assessed need and from this to consider the 5 year supply of housing land which must be provided, but further work will be required to determine the final figure.

3. Position of Other Local Authorities

- 3.1 Officers have been following the progress of a number of other local authorities who were in a similar position to us in terms of planning policy and there have been two recent decisions by the Inspectorate to Harrogate and Sevenoaks Councils, which are of interest to BDC.
- 3.2 Harrogate Borough Council is a similar sized area to Braintree District and adopted a Core Strategy in 2009, with a minimum housing requirement of 390 dwellings per year. A SHMA published in 2011 indicated a requirement of between 862 – 1,086 dwellings per year. Nevertheless a Sites and Policies DPD was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in November 2013 and was based on the housing and employment land targets in the Core Strategy and an examination began on the 23rd April 2014. However after the first hearing sessions the Inspector expressed his serious concerns about the Plan as set out below and suspended the sessions.
- 3.3 Extract from letter to Harrogate Borough Council from The Planning Inspectorate 29th April 2014;

“Meeting housing needs is one of the most important functions of the DPD. Failure to deal with it properly could have wide-ranging implications for the whole plan.

The NPPF (paragraph 47) provides that local planning authorities should boost significantly their supply of housing... It is accepted by the Council that the submitted DPD falls considerable short of meeting the objectively assessed need. The DPD seeks to provide 390 dwellings per annum, in line with the Core Strategy, as opposed to the SHMA (2011) projections (sub national and employment led projections) of 862 and 1086... Based on the most up-to-date available evidence it is therefore apparent that the Council’s plan would probably fail by a considerable margin to meet the housing needs of the area”

- 3.4 Following further correspondence between the Inspector and the Council regarding potential suspension periods in the examination whilst further work is carried out by the Council, the Inspector concludes in his letter of the 30th May that; *“Having said this, I do not consider that suspending the DPD examination until 2016 would be an acceptable and sound way forward, given my concerns above that this could result in a wholly different plan. While I appreciate that this is disappointing news for the Council, taking all of the information before me into account I would ask that you consider withdrawing the DPD and give consideration to my suggestion that a new Local Plan be prepared based in part on the work undertaken to date”.*
- 3.5 Sevenoaks District Council adopted their Core Strategy in February 2011, with targets based on the South East Regional Plan. At the end of January 2014, a developer successfully appealed a decision and gained residential planning permission on a number of adjacent sites in Swanley. The Inspector in his decision noted; *“....there is no dispute between the parties that the council identified a 5 year supply related to the provision set out in the CS, with a 5% buffer, which can be realistically achieved. There is no record of under delivery. However, it is also common ground that the need for housing as assessed will not nearly be met by the adopted housing supply targets arrived at in the CS..”* He concludes that the identification of that supply is not in accordance with the latest advice in the NPPF and therefore the appeals could be allowed.

4. Specialist Advice

- 4.1 The Council has also commissioned specialist advice to look at the present planning policy situation, specifically from a BDC point of view.
- 4.2 The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is part of the Local Government Association and the Council has procured some advice from them. The advice sets out that the Core Strategy could be considered out of date because it predates the NPPF and because it’s housing provision is not based on an objective assessment of the requirement using the most recent information, instead being reliant on the Regional Spatial Strategy target. They advised that if the Council wished to consider continuing with the ADMP then this would need to identify a supply of housing equal to the objectively assessed need, including specific deliverable sites in the next 5 years. Alternatively a new Local Plan should be created which comprised a review of the strategic elements from the Core Strategy together with much of the material already prepared for the

ADMP, through rolled forward and presumably with a greater level of provision identified. PAS advised that this would seem to be the quickest way to put in place a plan that can be found sound.

- 4.3 The Council has also requested legal advice, and the final advice was received at the end of April, from Paul Shadarevian at Cornerstone Barristers in London. The advice sets out that the Council was not responsible for the position that it found itself in and it was through following the NPPF advice and reviewing its evidence base, that it had become clear that the objectively assessed need for housing is likely to be significantly greater than the Core Strategy currently provides for. Therefore there is a real risk with the ADMP, that an appointed Inspector would either invite the Council to withdraw the Plan or eventually find it to be unsound by reference to the fact that it cannot achieve the functionality that the NPPF requires and it is not consistent with Government policy. The conclusion of the advice is that on balance Counsel considers concentrating on bringing forward a new Local Plan and an up to date evidence base as the most sensible and appropriate course of action for the Council.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Since the Council adopted the Core Strategy and began work on the Site ADMP, there has been a fundamental change in the Government's planning policy and guidance. Almost every piece of national and regional planning policy requirements which the Core Strategy was required to be in conformity with, has changed, and one of the most fundamental changes has been in relation to housing numbers.
- 5.2 The target set out in the Core Strategy was based upon a now revoked RSS which itself was based upon evidence which is now largely out of date. The target for Braintree District was specifically constrained to allow a period of respite following a high growth period. However changes in Government policy now make clear that all local authorities are required to significantly boost their supply of housing by meeting their full objectively assessed need for housing.
- 5.3 BDC had recognised that the figure for objectively assessed need was likely to be much higher than the housing targets set out in the Core Strategy. It had sought to address this by timetabling the production of a new Local Plan within the Local Development Scheme which was approved by Members in March, and making further amendments to the Pre Submission ADMP to facilitate development coming forward quicker, for example by proposing to remove the phasing from the strategic growth locations in Braintree and Witham.
- 5.4 However the advice which we have now received and the decisions being issued by the Planning Inspectorate, strongly indicate that taking the ADMP to an examination is a very high risk approach which would have a very high chance of failure and the Plan being found unsound. This would have a significant cost to the authority in terms of officer time and resources and the monetary cost of the examination (estimated cost of the examination is between £50,000 and £80,000).
- 5.5 Officers must therefore advise Members that they consider not submitting the ADMP to the Planning Inspectorate is the most appropriate course of action.

Instead this work would be incorporated and rolled forward into a new single Local Plan, which would deal with all strategic and non-strategic policies and sites in a single document, as per the Government's guidance.

- 5.6 If Council accepts the recommendation to not submit the ADMP for examination then work on the new Local Plan will begin immediately. A timetable for the production for a Local Plan is set out in the approved Local Development Scheme (LDS) which is available on the website http://www.braintree.gov.uk/info/200230/planning_policy. The first phase of this will involve producing the necessary evidence base which is required to support the Plan. Some of this can be carried forward from the current LDF evidence base, or is already underway such as the now completed Strategic Housing Market Assessment or the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment. A detailed report on the objectively assessed need for housing would need to be considered by Council in the Autumn.
- 5.7 The first formal public consultation period on the Plan would take place in mid 2015, with a further period of public engagement in 2016. The Plan would then be submitted for examination and is expected to be adopted by the Council in 2017.

That it is RECOMMENDED: The Council determines that the current Site Allocations and Development Management Plan is not submitted for public examination and that the Council proceeds with developing a new Local Plan to meet the projected objectively assessed housing need.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <p>Reference from Overview & Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Scrutiny Review of enabling young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to Participate in Education, Employment or Training.</p> | <p>Agenda No: 9</p> |
| <p>Corporate Priority: Building a prosperous district Boost employment skills and support business People feel good Supporting vulnerable people in our community</p> <p>Report presented by: Councillor Dr. R Evans, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Report prepared by: Emma Wisbey, Governance and Member Manager</p> | |
| <p>Background Papers:</p> <p>Report and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 4th June 2014</p> | <p>Public Report</p> |

Decision

1. To receive the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and consider the recommendations of the scrutiny review.
2. To refer the Report to Cabinet for a response.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Review of Enabling Young People Who Are Not in Education, Employment or Training to Participate in Education, Employment or Training

April 2014

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Review of Enabling Young People Who Are Not In Education, Employment or Training to Participate in Education, Employment or Training

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SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ENABLING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Enabling young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to participate in education, employment or training is a key issue both within Braintree district and nationally. In the light of the importance of the issue in the district, the Committee agreed to scrutinise the issue of enabling young people who are NEET in Braintree district to participate in education, employment or training.
- 1.2. In conducting its review, the Committee has spoken with a wide range of NEET stakeholders e.g. Braintree District Council, Essex County Council, Jobcentre Plus, National Apprenticeship Services, Colchester Institute (the College at Braintree), businesses, young people and youth support workers.
- 1.3. From the Committee's discussions with stakeholders, it is clear that there are several authorities, organisations and other agencies working to enable young people who are NEET to participate in employment, education and training in the Braintree district. The Committee believes the work of all those involved could be enhanced by closer joint working and sharing of information. The Committee is of the view that Braintree District Council is well placed to facilitate this joint working. A key recommendation is that Braintree District Council establishes a District Employment and Skills Group to bring together the District Council, Essex County Council, Jobcentre Plus, Further Education Colleges, training providers and schools in the district.
- 1.4. The Committee recommends that the proposed Group has an employer and skills focus and that it feeds into the Essex Employment and Skills Board. In the light of its review, the Committee has identified several issues which could be better resolved at a district level by closer joint working and information sharing through the proposed Group. The Committee's review includes several recommendations for consideration by the Group and might form part of the early agenda of the Group.

- 1.5. Over the course of this review, Jobcentre Plus has transformed its communications with young people. Jobcentre Plus staff have changed from a culture of being advisers to one of being work coaches. Jobcentre Plus recognised that its old approach was directive to young people and believes its new approach is more supportive in coaching them. Jobcentre Plus has also transformed its communication in one office in the district with employers seeking new employees. The Committee welcomes these transformations.
- 1.6. The Committee believes the findings in its review are important to enabling young people in the district to participate in education, employment or training. The Committee therefore plan to reviews the implementation of its recommendation in around 6 months.
- 1.7. Based on its findings, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends the following to Cabinet:

RECOMMENDATIONS (all recommendations are to Cabinet or through Cabinet for other authorities and/or organisations).

Braintree District Council – Proposed District Employment and Skills Board

1. That Braintree District Council establishes a District Employment and Skills Group to bring together the District Council, Essex County Council, employers, Jobcentre Plus, Further Education Colleges, training providers and schools in the district with a skills and employment focus.
2. That the work of the proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Group includes the following:
 - 2.1 Increasing awareness of the programmes to improve the job seeking skills of young people in the district.
 - 2.2 Working with Stansted Airport to increase publicity of employment opportunities at the Airport and the employee discount travel scheme
 - 2.3 Raising business awareness of the National Apprenticeship Service support programme for apprenticeships.
 - 2.4 Working with colleges and training providers to change the provision of training in the Braintree district to areas where there is clear skills need.

RECOMMENDATIONS (all recommendations are to Cabinet or through Cabinet for other authorities and/or organisations).

- 2.5 Raising awareness of the new employment opportunities and skill needs of employers in schools and to young people in the district more generally.
- 2.6 Encouraging schools in the district to develop a targeted approach to increasing the provision of work experience for those young people in schools who would benefit from the experience.
- 2.7 Working to bridge the gap between schools/young people and businesses to assist in the provision of careers advice and recruitment opportunities.
- 2.8 Improving the coordination of jobs fairs in the district.
- 2.9 Considering schemes for free public transport and a supported moped and bicycle scheme for young people for apprenticeships and vocational training and in the early stages of employment.
- 2.10 Considering the merit of seeking Government support that the national student loan scheme to included vocation education for young people.

Recommendations (to Cabinet)

Braintree District Council – General Issues

3. That Braintree District Council continues with its commitment to its apprenticeship programme and seeks opportunities to further develop the programme.
4. That Braintree District Council considers the legal position in respect of using Section 106 Agreements in Planning Applications and Community Infrastructure Levies particularly with larger commercial developments to support opportunities for employment and if appropriate, consider their use as routes to increasing employment in the district.
5. That Braintree District Council reviews its arrangements for the assessment of housing benefit of young people in supported accommodation to ensure they are as completed as fast as is reasonably possible.
6. That Braintree District Council considers a tiered approach to the withdrawal of housing benefit for young people in supported accommodation who do not have passported benefit status to provide a greater incentive for them to take up employment.

Recommendations (to Cabinet)

Jobcentre Plus

7. That Jobcentre Plus reviews its support for young job seekers in completing job application forms and includes the opportunity for completed forms to be reviewed.

Essex County Council

8. That Essex County Council facilitates a coordination group for the strategic development of apprenticeships across Essex Councils.
9. That Essex County Council reviews with schools in the district how procedures might be improved in the identification of young people who may need to receive a statement to support them in their educational needs.
10. That Essex County Council reviews strategies and opportunities to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of young people in Essex.

Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning

11. That Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group ensures that GPs in the district are aware of that for young people suffering mental health issues, those issues can escalate rapidly if not treated early to a situation where they are able to seek employment.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Enabling young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to participate in education, employment or training is a key issue both within Braintree district and nationally. Within the district, increasing the participation of young people in education, training and employment not only makes a lasting difference to their individual lives, but can also improve social mobility, increase well-being in communities, and stimulate economic growth.
- 2.2. Addressing this issue is important to young people, to people more generally, and to the economy of the district. Young people who are currently not participating are more likely than their peers to have low skills, to go on to be unemployed in the future, to earn less, and to suffer from poor health or depression which can have an impact well into adult life. This can fuel an inter-generational effect in families that acts as a block to social mobility.
- 2.3. In the light of the importance of the issue in the district, the Committee agreed to scrutinise enabling young people who are NEET to participate in education, employment or training.

3. How the Review was Carried Out

3.1. Terms of Reference

- 3.1.1. The Committee agreed that the scrutiny review should include the following:
 - a. To identify the number and locations of young persons who are NEET and the problems this causes.
 - b. To understand the skills gaps being faced by local employers and if the type training offered meets the gaps.
 - c. To identify and evaluate the organisations, facilities and support services available to help move young people who are NEET into education, employment or training.
 - d. Where appropriate, to recommend improvements to those organisations, facilities and support services to help move young people who are NEET into education, employment or training.
- 3.1.2. The Committee focussed on young people aged 18-24 although recognises the importance of other groups including graduates and people with disabilities who are NEET.

- 3.1.3. As regards people with disabilities, although not covered within this review, the Committee notes, for example, that Jobcentre Plus offers special disabilities services including signposting to more specialist services.

3.2. Scrutiny Hearings

- 3.2.1. The Committee carried out several formal and informal meetings with a wide range of stakeholders including Braintree District Council, Essex County Council, Jobcentre Plus, National Apprenticeship Service, Colchester Institute (the College at Braintree), schools, businesses, young people and youth support workers.
- 3.2.2. A list of all the meetings held is set out in Appendix A.
- 3.2.3. The Committee is grateful to all invitees who attended its meetings and for their contributions to the review. Their contributions have been valuable in the review and in the compilation of this report.

3.3. Publicity and Social Media

- 3.3.1. To increase public awareness, a poster campaign was run with posters displayed throughout Braintree district. Display locations included shops, libraries, hostels and Jobcentres. The review also featured on regional television and radio and in local newspapers.
- 3.3.2. A Facebook page and Twitter Account were also established to encourage public participation in the review.

4. Background

- 4.1. There are many factors which can lead to young people becoming NEET. A review carried out by the University of Essex, NEET in Essex: A Review of the Evidence (2010), identified several underlying factors associated with NEET status which are listed in Appendix B.
- 4.2. In this scrutiny review, the Committee has focused on issues set out in the Terms of Reference which relate mainly to Braintree District Council partners and other agencies with whom the Council works.
- 4.3. Table 1 summarises information on young people registered as being NEET nationally, regionally and locally within the district. These figures are based on the number of young people claiming Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA). The number of young people who are NEET has decreased nationally, within the region and within the district over the last 12 months. It is thought that the

number of young people who are NEET may be close to record low levels. The reasons for the decrease and low levels are not known but are likely to be linked to an improving national economy and possibly also, an increasing number of apprenticeships being available.

Table 1 NEET Rates

| Date | Braintree District | Braintree District % | East % | UK % |
|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| April 2012 | 725 | 6.5 | 6.8 | 7.8 |
| March 2013 | 765 | 6.8 | 6.3 | 7.1 |
| March 2014 | 460] | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.9 |

% is number of persons aged 18-24 claiming JSA as a proportion of the resident population of 18-24 year olds.

- 4.4. In Braintree district, the number of young people registered as NEET has fallen significantly from a high of 765 in March 2013 to 470 in December 2013 [update to February 2014 when available]. This equates to 4.2% [update] of persons aged 18-24 currently claiming JSA as a proportion of the resident population of 18-24 year olds in the district. By comparison, current rates are 4.3% in the East and 4.9% nationally.
- 4.5. The Committee notes that further reductions in the number of young people who are NEET will be increasingly more difficult to achieve. Groups remaining NEET include young carers and young people with multiple barriers and troubled backgrounds.
- 4.6. More detailed information on the number of young people registered as NEET is set out in Appendix C.
- 4.7. Details on the Committee's discussions with stakeholders along with the Committee's findings and recommendations are set in the remainder of this report.

5. Braintree District Council – Braintree District Employment and Skills Group

- 5.1. Braintree District Council is working with schools and employers and others with a focus on how to support new and current businesses in the district. From the Committee's discussions with a range of stakeholders, it is clear that there are several authorities, organisations and other agencies working to help young people into employment, education and training in the Braintree district.
- 5.2. The Committee believes the work of all those involved could be enhanced by closer joint working and sharing of information. The Committee is of the view that Braintree District Council is well placed to facilitate this joint working and recommends that Braintree District Council establishes a District Employment and Skills Group to bring together employers, Jobcentre Plus, Further Education Colleges, training providers and schools in the district. The Group could have employer focus and could feed into the Essex Employment and Skills Board.
- 5.3. The Committee notes that the Braintree District Business Leaders Board, a business focused Board with a remit to identify barriers to economic growth and to work with the Council to address those barriers also supports the establishment of a District Employment and Skills Group. The need for skill delivery in the District to be employer focused was discussed at meeting of the Board on 28th February 2014, where the Board supported the establishment of the District Employment and Skills Group

Recommendation 1

That Braintree District Council establishes a District Employment and Skills Group to bring together the District Council, Essex County Council, employers, Jobcentre Plus, Further Education Colleges, training providers and schools in the district with a skills and employment focus.

6. Employers

- 6.1. The Committee discussed a range of issues with local employers related helping young people into employment.
- 6.2. Employers advised that many young people are demonstrating poor awareness of basic factors important in applying for employment. Many young people are submitting poorly written CVs (e.g. unrealistic or overstating their achievements, and poor grammar) providing employers with little useful information. Some young people are also making basic presentational errors (e.g. inappropriate email addresses and presenting themselves poorly at interview).
- 6.3. To help young people improve their CVs and presentational skills, Stansted Airport and Barclays Bank both run programmes with the aim of helping young people in to employment.
- 6.4. Stansted Airport (through Manchester Airport Group) funds the Stansted Employment and Skills Academy which helps people who wish to apply to work at the Airport. The Academy also provides government funded training for unemployed people over 19 and claiming JSA. The training comprises a free 5 day accredited pre-employment training programme where candidates can increase their knowledge of what it is like to work at the Airport including shift patterns, types of jobs, security, and work conditions, as well as develop the skills required to work at Stansted Airport. Participants are introduced to interview techniques and participate in mock interviews; team building exercises; CV and application support; communication skills and personal presentation.
- 6.5. The Academy also periodically hosts jobs fairs. In October 2013, a jobs fair was held with 19 employers present and over 520 attendees. A similar jobs fair was also held in March 2014.
- 6.6. Barclays Bank runs a LifeSkills education programme which aims to provide young people in the UK with access to the skills they need to make the transition into work. The Programme focuses on three critical areas of people skills, work skills and money skills. The programme is designed to help every student aged 11 to 19 develop the understanding, knowledge, practical skills and confidence they need in the working world. The programme includes helping young people improve their CVs and preparation for interview (e.g. how to dress, presentational skills and mock interviews) and is available to available to all schools. The programme is supported by several organisations e.g. Centrica, McDonald's, Waitrose and Serco.

- 6.7. The Committee believes both programmes can help young people in to employment and complement the NEETs prevention work of Jobcentre Plus. However, the Committee notes that a number of schools in the district appear to be unaware of the various support programmes. As a result, those schools may be missing good learning opportunities which support their work in helping young people in to employment.
- 6.8. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the work of its recommended District Employment and Skills Group includes increasing awareness of the programmes.

Recommendation 2.1

That the work of the recommended Braintree District Employment and Skills Group includes increasing awareness of the programmes to improve the job seeking skills of young people.

- 6.9. Stansted Airport also offers a discounted employee travel scheme through an Airport Travelcard covering up 80% of the cost on most Airport public transport services.
- 6.10. The Committee heard from several young people wishing to work at Stansted Airport who said the cost of transport made working at the Airport prohibitive.
- 6.11. The Committee believes young people in the district are unaware the discounted travel to Stansted Airport and the possible employment opportunities offered. When members met with representatives from the Airport there were over 70 vacancies at the Airport.
- 6.12. The Airport also had an apprentice opportunity advertised through the National Apprenticeship Service website which offered a higher rate of pay than most apprenticeships and to cover up to 100% of the travel costs. The Committee believes few young people are aware of this opportunity.
- 6.13. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the District Employment and Skills Group works with Stansted Airport to increase publicity of employment opportunities at the airport and the employee discount travel scheme.

Recommendation 2.2

That the work of the recommended Braintree District Employment and Skills Group includes working with Stansted Airport to increase publicity of employment opportunities at the airport and the employee discount travel scheme.

7. National Apprenticeship Service

- 7.1. The role of the National Apprenticeship Service is essentially to increase the number and quality of Apprenticeships across England. A main aim of the National Apprenticeship Service is to improve the pathways in to apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are now being made available from levels 4 to 9 (post-graduate level).
- 7.2. The Law Society/Skills for Justice is developing apprenticeships for all higher levels within the legal sector. This will mean that within the next 5 years, learners will be able to become fully qualified Solicitors without having ever gone through academic education after leaving school.
- 7.3. The National Apprenticeship Service has been in existence since 2009. The Committee notes that in 2009 there were 170,000 apprenticeships, which by 2011-12, had risen to 520,000. This has been achieved by increasing the number of employers who are willing to make an Apprenticeship available. As examples, nationally, both Microsoft and EasyJet have committed to supporting a large number on apprenticeships.
- 7.4. The Committee notes that the National Apprenticeship Service believes that for every £1 Government invests in a level 2 apprenticeship, there is a return on their investment to the wider national economy of £16. For level 3, this increases to £21, and level 4, to £31.
- 7.5. The Committee notes that apprenticeships offer young people an opportunity to gain valuable qualifications, skills, knowledge and work experience which can lead to successful long term employment. The Committee strongly supports the development of apprenticeships including those of BDC (see Section 9.1).
- 7.6. The Committee also notes that apprenticeships in England are being reformed. The key elements of the reforms are introducing new employer-designed standards and assessment procedures; strengthening English and Mathematics requirements; and mandating that apprenticeships last for a minimum of 12 months. The new standards and assessment procedures are being designed over 2013/14 and 2014/15 by companies and professional bodies acting as 'trailblazers' for their sector. From 2017/18, all new apprenticeship starts should be based on the new standards.

- 7.7. Employer grants to support apprenticeships are available through the National Apprenticeship Service. However, the Committee notes that awareness of the support amongst employers in the district appears to be low. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the work of the proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Group includes raising business awareness of National Apprenticeship Service support programme for apprenticeships.

Recommendation 2.3

That the work of the recommended Braintree District Employment and Skills Group includes raising business awareness of National Apprenticeship Service support programme for apprenticeships.

8. Barriers to Young People Taking Up Education, Employment and Training

- 8.1. The Committee discussed a range of specific issues with stakeholders related to helping young people into education, employment or training. The Committee's findings and recommendations on these issues which the proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Group would be well placed to consider further are as follows:

8.1.1. Skills Shortages in Braintree District

The recruitment challenges faced by local employers and the mismatch between their needs for skilled people and the training offered by training providers has been described in section xx .

The Committee recommends that the work of the proposed Braintree District Employment Essex Skills Group includes working with colleges and training providers to change the provision of training in the Braintree district to areas where there is a clear skills need.

The Committee also recommends that the work of the proposed Braintree District Employment Essex Skills Group includes raising awareness of the new employment opportunities and skill needs of employers in schools and to young people more generally.

Recommendation 2.4

That the work of the proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Group includes working with colleges and training providers to change the provision of training in the Braintree district to areas where there is a clear skills.

Recommendation 2.5

That the work of the proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Group includes raising awareness of the new employment opportunities and skill needs of employers in schools and to young people more generally.

The Committee heard businesses advising that some young people applying for employment are demonstrating a lack of basic work experience skills (e.g. punctuality, dressing for work, answering telephone). Businesses also advised the Committee that some young people have low literacy and numeracy skills.

The Committee notes that work experience opportunities in schools have declined significantly in recent years. The Committee acknowledges that work experience may not be appropriate for all young people. However, for those planning to enter the world of work after leaving school, work experience can offer a valuable learning experience and new skills for the workplace. A targeted approach to the provision of work experience might, therefore, be appropriate. The Committee, therefore, recommends that proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Group works with schools in the district to develop a targeted approach to increasing the provision of work experience for appropriate young people in schools.

Recommendation 2.6

That the proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Group works with schools in the district to encourage a targeted approach to increasing the provision of work experience for those young people in schools who would benefit from the experience.

8.1.2. Bridging a Gap Between Schools and Employment

The Committee notes that on leaving school, some young people are left with little or no direction in their future. The Committee also notes the reduced provision of careers advice to young people including the abolition of Connexions.

The Committee also notes that businesses wishing to recruit young people are finding difficulty reaching young people in schools. At the same time, schools in the district are seeking to reach businesses to help in the provision of careers advice including in vocational careers.

The Committee believes there is need to bridge the gap between schools and young people, and businesses. The Committee recommends that the work of its recommended District Employment and Skills Group (recommendation 9) includes working to bridge the gap between schools/young people and businesses to assist in the provision of careers advice and recruitment opportunities.

Recommendation 2.7

That the work of the Committee's recommended District Employment and Skills Board includes working to bridge the gap between schools/young people and businesses to assist in the provision of careers advice and recruitment opportunities.

8.1.3. **Jobs Fairs**

The Committee notes that jobs fairs have become a popular way bringing together employers and job seekers with several organisations and individuals hosting fairs (e.g. local authorities and other agencies and Members of Parliament). The Committee sees a continuing and valuable role for jobs fairs although believes there would be value in better coordination of the fairs.

Recommendation 2.8

That the work of the proposed Braintree District Employment and Skills Board includes improving the coordination of jobs fairs in the district.

8.1.4. **Travel to Place of Employment or Training**

The Committee heard from several young people wishing to take up employment or vocational training opportunities who found that the cost of transport prevented them from taking up those opportunities. These opportunities were both inside the Braintree district and outside of the district in neighbouring areas.

The Committee believes supporting young people in public transport during apprenticeships, vocational training and the early stages of employment could assist young people into employment.

The Committee also notes that young people in rural areas with limited public transport services may not benefit from a supported public transport scheme. However, young people in those areas may benefit from a scheme providing support through low cost transport such as a moped or bicycle. Examples of supported moped schemes are described in Appendix D.

The Committee therefore recommends that the proposed Braintree District Employment Skills consider schemes for free public transport and a supported moped and bicycle scheme for young people for apprenticeships and vocational training and in the early stages of employment. Possible funding organisations might include Braintree District Council and Essex County Council.

Recommendation 2.9

That the proposed Braintree District Employment Skills Board considers schemes for free public transport and a supported moped and bicycle scheme for young people for apprenticeships and vocational training and in the early stages of employment.

8.1.5. Cost of Vocational Education

The Committee heard from young people wishing to take vocational education at colleges finding the fees of the courses or training a barrier taking up the learning opportunity. This was particularly noticeable for those young people who had left school and wished to take up the training a few years after leaving school when they had a clearer idea of what they wish to do with their lives.

The Committee recognises that reducing the barrier of the costs of vocational training though support for learning fees is essentially a national issue under the Learning Skills Agency. The Committee also recognises there are financial implications to providing support for learning fees for vocational courses. Furthermore, the Committee recognises that should any change result in support for learning fees for vocational courses, a commitment would be required from the young person receiving the support.

The Committee believes the requirements above might be met through extending the national student loan scheme to include vocation education although in the first instance, this should be considered further by organisations involved in the proposed Braintree District Employment Skills Group.

Recommendation 2.10

That that the Braintree District Employment Skills Group considers the merit of seeking Government support that the national student loan scheme to included vocation education for young people.

9. Braintree District Council – General Issues

9.1. Apprenticeships

- 9.1.1. The Committee notes that Braintree District Council is in its fifth year of apprenticeships and has a 100% success rate in both completion of qualifications and also developing apprentices on to either a level 3 apprenticeship or supporting them in to employment. The current apprenticeships include 4 at Level 3 and 12 at Level 2 working in a range of services across the Council. The Council is also supporting a number of apprenticeships through its Green Team Scheme.
- 9.1.2. The Committee strongly supports apprenticeships and recognises the value of apprenticeships in helping young people into successful long term employment. The Committee supports the Council's commitment to its apprenticeship programme and recommends that it seeks opportunities to further develop the programme.

Recommendation 3

That Braintree District Council continues with its commitment to its apprenticeship programme and seeks opportunities to further develop the programme.

9.2. Planning Considerations

- 9.2.1. The Committee notes there are examples of authorities using Section 106 Agreements in Planning Applications with larger commercial developments as routes to increase employment. However, the legal position on using such Agreements in relation to the National Planning Policy Framework is not clear. Similarly, the position in respect of using Community Infrastructure Levies to support employment opportunities could also be clarified
- 9.2.2. The Committee, therefore, recommends that Braintree District Council considers the legal position in respect of using Section 106 Agreements in planning applications and Community Infrastructure Levies particularly with larger commercial developments to support opportunities for employment and if appropriate, consider their use as routes to increase employment in the district.

Recommendation 4

That Braintree District Council considers the legal position in respect of using Section 106 Agreements in planning applications and Community Infrastructure Levies particularly with larger commercial developments to support opportunities for employment and if appropriate, consider their use as routes to increase employment in the district.

9.3. Housing Benefits for Young People in Supported Accommodation on Taking Up Employment

- 9.3.1. Persons claiming JSA for more than 26 weeks gain passported benefit status. This enables those persons to continue to receive benefits when they take up employment for a period of up to 4 weeks. As benefits continue for a period after taking up employment, this can avoid the situation for some people of losing the incentive to take up employment because of the loss of benefits.
- 9.3.2. However, for persons who do not have passported benefits status, all benefits stop immediately on taking up employment which can be a disincentive to taking up employment. The Committee heard from several young people in supported accommodation who had experienced difficulties from having all benefits stopped immediately on taking up employment.
- 9.3.3. These difficulties are most noticeable for young people living in supported accommodation who take up zero hours contract employment. Benefit payments can stop as soon as they take up employment and may only re-start at the end of the zero hours contract employment and after an assessment of the payments from the period of employment has been made.
- 9.3.4. As a result of all benefits (including housing benefit) stopping, those young people can be left with a period of several weeks of having no income. In the meantime, as payments of housing benefits have stopped, the young people can then fall in to arrears with rent payments. In some cases, the young people on receipt of a first wage or salary, housing benefit is then reassessed by Braintree District Council and reduced benefits may continue to be payable whilst in employment.

- 9.3.5. The Committee notes in other cases, young people in supported accommodation advised that their wage or salary on taking up employment only matched their benefit payments and after taking into account other costs (e.g. transport) it was not financially viable for those young people to take up employment.
- 9.3.6. The Committee recognises that encouraging young people out of benefits and in to employment of a very difficult area. The Committee believes it is important to encourage young people into work particularly with the self-esteem benefits that can flow from being in employment. The Committee also recognises the value of the Government's approach of "work pays".
- 9.3.7. However, the current arrangements of stopping benefit payments particularly those who do not have passported benefit status, can be a disincentive to some young people taking up employment.
- 9.3.8. As regards benefit payments taking several weeks to catch up with the change in circumstances of young people, the Committee notes that this could be a result of late submission of notice of change of circumstances by the young person. However, the Committee recommends that Braintree District Council reviews its arrangements for the assessment of housing benefit to ensure they are as completed as fast as is reasonably possible and that any delays are not a result of any actions by Braintree District Council.
- 9.3.9. As regards ensuring there is an incentive to young people who do not have passported benefit status to take up employment, the Committee recommends that Braintree District Council considers a tiered approach to the withdrawal of benefits to encourage them to take up employment.

Recommendation 5

That Braintree District Council reviews its arrangements for the assessment of housing benefit to ensure they are as completed as fast as is reasonably possible.

Recommendation 6

That Braintree District Council considers a tiered approach to the withdrawal of housing benefit for young people who do not have passported benefit status to provide a greater incentive for them to take up employment.

10. Jobcentre Plus

10.1. Helping Young People in to Employment

- 10.1.1. Jobcentre Plus has a key role in helping young people who are NEET in to employment. Jobcentre Plus advised the Committee that the help it provides includes a tailored approach to supporting young people into employment, wage incentives for employers, work experience and guaranteed job interviews. Jobcentre Plus is also looking to work more closely with communities and in NEET prevention.
- 10.1.2. The Committee notes that Jobcentre Plus advised that it has found one to one and targeted support for young people who require this support to be a particularly good investment in helping young people in to employment.
- 10.1.3. The Committee also notes Jobcentre Plus has been supportive of helping young people into work by recently supporting a youth job fair in Braintree Town Hall.
- 10.1.4. In support of its NEET preventative work, Jobcentre Plus visits schools in the district to discuss with pupils factors that are important in job interviews and social media issues related to employers. From discussions with employers, it is apparent that some young people lack job interview skills and that some employers are also helping people develop these skills. These skills are important in supporting young people into employment.
- 10.1.5. The work of Jobcentre Plus in helping young job seekers includes providing courses on completing job application forms. Several young job seekers advised the Committee that they had attended the same or similar courses on several occasions. However, it appears that there is no opportunity for completed job applications forms to be reviewed. As a result, these forms may contain weaknesses which job seekers are making repeatedly in their job applications. Therefore, the Committee recommends that Jobcentre Plus reviews its support for young job seekers in completing job application forms and includes the opportunity for forms to be reviewed. Funding for this might come from avoiding job seekers attending repeat courses on completing the forms.

Recommendation 7

That Jobcentre Plus reviews its support for young job seekers in completing job application forms and includes the opportunity for completed forms to be reviewed.

10.2. Communication with Young People

- 10.2.1. The Committee held 3 informal and 1 formal meeting with young people and youth support workers. In all meetings, young people expressed concern to members on communication issues with Jobcentre Plus staff and that the staff were not listening to the young people.
- 10.2.2. The Committee raised the concerns expressed by young people with Jobcentre Plus. In discussions, Jobcentre Plus accepted the Committee's findings from its earlier meetings that communication issues had been an issue in its interactions with young people and that criticisms that it has not listened to young people were fair.
- 10.2.3. To address these issues, Jobcentre Plus advised the Committee that it has recently changed the way it engages with young people. All JSA claimants under 25 are now seen weekly in Jobcentre Plus offices. Jobcentre Plus staff have moved away from a culture of being advisers to one of being work coaches. Jobcentre Plus recognised that its old approach was directive to young people and believes its new approach is more supportive in coaching them.
- 10.2.4. As a result of these discussions, the Committee hopes that Jobcentre Plus communication issues with young people have now been fully resolved. In time, the Committee plans to seek views from young people to see if their experiences with Jobcentre Plus have improved in line with the changes introduced.

10.3. Communication Employers

- 10.3.1. The Committee notes that Jobcentre Plus recognises the importance of its employer relationships in encouraging employers to give some young people a chance of employment. From its discussions with young people, the Committee believes giving young people a chance is important and encourages the Jobcentre to further develop its relationships with employers.
- 10.3.2. However, the Committee also heard from directors of a large employer in the district who were looking to recruit a significant number of people. Similarly to young people, the directors advised that they had found communication issues in their dealings with Jobcentre Plus.
- 10.3.3. Jobcentre Plus accepted the Committee's findings that level of service provided to employers seeking new employees at its Witham centre had not been acceptable. Jobcentre Plus advised the Committee that it has recently changed its contact arrangements with employers and is confident that the previous failings will not happen again.

- 10.3.4. Similar to communication with young people, the Committee hopes that Jobcentre communication issues with employers have now been fully resolved.

10.4. Claiming Job Seekers Allowance and Sanctions

- 10.4.1. The Committee recognises the need for effective sanctions to ensure that job seekers are effectively seeking work. However, young people repeatedly expressed concerns to Committee members at the fairness of some sanctions imposed by Jobcentre Plus and the independence of the review of JSA sanctions.
- 10.4.2. Jobcentre Plus offices have discretion in the application of sanctions but not in sanctions policies which are agreed nationally. Locally, Jobcentre Plus advised that it continuously reviews the application of national sanctions policies and only uses sanctions as a last resort. However, Jobcentre Plus recognises that the recipient of a sanction may not take the same view. In an attempt to avoid formal appeals against sanctions, and to resolve matters early, locally, Jobcentre Plus advised that it uses a mandatory reconsideration process involving an independent person reviewing cases.
- 10.4.3. In the light of concerns expressed in relation to sanctions, the Committee welcomes the Government's current Independent Review of JSA Sanctions expected to be presented to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions shortly.
- 10.4.4. The Committee had found young people being discouraged from taking up short term employment due to losing JSA which then takes some time to be re-instated at the end of the period of employment. Jobcentre Plus advised that young people are encouraged to reclaim their JSA online before the end of the period of employment in order that their JSA can be reinstated without delay. Young people are only required to confirm that their circumstances have not changed since they last claimed;

11. Essex County Council - NEET Prevention and Reduction

- 11.1. Essex County Council's (ECC's) strategy on NEET prevention and reduction in Essex has three strands of raising participation, NEET reduction, and jobs with training. The participation strand involves young people staying at school until they are aged 18 years from 2015 in line with changes in national legislation.
- 11.2. The Committee notes that pre-16 year old disengagement in learning can lead to young people becoming NEET. In an attempt to combat this and to identify the likelihood of young people becoming NEET, ECC has introduced a model known as Achieve. The model monitors risk factors likely to lead to a young person becoming disengaged in learning and is available for use by all schools. For those young people identified as being at risk, schools may then develop targeted strategies to help reduce the risk of them becoming disengaged.
- 11.3. The Essex Connexions service previously supported by ECC provided young people with careers advice until the service was decommissioned following the withdrawal of national funding in 2008. The Education Act 2011 places the emphasis for careers advice on schools and ECC now works with all 8 secondary schools and the College in the district to help in the provision of this advice.
- 11.4. The Committee heard from several young people who said they received little careers advice whilst at school. Indeed, many expressed a desire to see a return of the Connexions service. The Committee believes the provision of good careers advice including information on employment markets and opportunities is important before young people make choices on possible careers to help them avoid becoming NEET. The Committee recognises that resources for careers advice have been removed in England and that it is now an additional responsibility for schools without additional funds. The Committee also notes that ECC is supporting careers advisors in schools in the district. However, the provision of good careers advice is important in helping some young people avoid becoming NEET and is discussed in more detail later in this report.
- 11.5. From its discussions with several stakeholders, the Committee notes that there appears to be a gap between schools, school leavers and businesses in the district which could be addressed collectively. This is also discussed in more detail later in the report.
- 11.6. The Committee notes that ECC supports an extensive apprenticeship programme across Essex. From discussions with all stakeholders, it is clear that apprenticeships can provide excellent sustainable employment opportunities for young people. The Committee strongly supports apprenticeships and believes there are opportunities for the strategic development of apprenticeships both in Braintree district and across Essex through a greater coordination between Essex councils. The Committee, therefore, recommends that ECC facilitates a

coordination group for the strategic development apprenticeships across Essex councils.

Recommendation 8

That Essex County Council facilitates a coordination group for the strategic development apprenticeships across Essex councils.

11.7. The Committee notes that among its roles, ECC supports targeted youth workers who work closely with young people who have multiple barriers to participation. As regards young people with special needs there are two groups. One has specific learning needs (having a statement within school) who work with a transition pathway and a learning plan. The other does not have a statement in school but is in need of action.

11.8. The Committee noted concerns that young people who have not been identified and received a statement in school may be at risk of becoming NEET as they may be missing out on support that would be beneficial to them in moving into education, employment or training. The Committee, therefore, recommends that Essex County Council reviews with schools in the district how procedures might be improved in the identification of young people who may need to receive a statement to support them in their educational needs.

Recommendation 9

That Essex County Council reviews with schools in the district how procedures might be improved in the identification of young people who may need to receive a statement to support them in their educational needs.

11.9. As regards some young people having low literacy and numeracy skills, the new national requirement for young people to remain in education until the age of 18 (Year 13) from 2015 may help young people improve in these skills. Nevertheless, the Committee recommends that through ECC, the Essex Employment and Skills Group reviews strategies and opportunities to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of young people in Essex.

Recommendation 10

That proposed Essex County Council reviews strategies and opportunities to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of young people in the district.

12. Essex County Council - Essex Employment and Skills Board

12.1. The Essex Employment and Skills Board (ESB) brings together large employers, Small Medium-sized Enterprises, business membership groups, colleges, universities and local government. The ESB was established in July 2013 in recognition of the need for employers to play a far more prominent role in the publically funded skills system to achieve the best (value) outcomes for individuals and the economy. An important remit for the Board is to engage with the wider business community. This is being achieved via events, a website (<http://esb.essexpartnership.org>) and through engagement with local forums.

12.2. The Board has the following objectives to help achieve its mission:

- 12.2.1. To ensure the creation of a robust evidence base for skills and to use this to develop an executable five year business plan which incorporates an implementation plan and is reviewed annually;
- 12.2.2. To ensure the creation of a robust evidence base for skills and to use this to develop an executable five year business plan which incorporates an implementation plan and is reviewed annually;
- 12.2.3. To support the deployment of the new enabling mechanisms which contribute to the closer alignment of skills provision and business need – including an online employer portal and the Essex Skills Investment Fund;
- 12.2.4. To champion involvement and participation in the skills system by engaging widely with businesses through disseminating information from the Board and by creating the conditions which allow the views of interested businesses to be taken into consideration;
- 12.2.5. To take the case for requisite finance and flexibilities to Government on behalf of all Essex providers, businesses and public sector agencies.

- 12.3. The ESB is seeking to ensure that an increasing number of young people are being trained in the skills needed by employers. The overwhelming feedback from local businesses is that there are skills shortages and recruitment challenges with a need to ensure that young people are properly equipped for future careers.
- 12.4. The Committee notes there is mismatch between the needs of employers and the training offered by training providers. The system has been led by the desires of young people often uninformed on the job opportunities and by the ease of the training providers and colleges to provide training they are comfortable with. Such training can often be low cost with a stream of young people ready to take up the training regardless of whether there are job opportunities at the end of the training.
- 12.5. Currently, there are over 1000 vacancies in computer programming in a range of employers across Essex. At the same time, suitably trained people are not available and there are no training providers in computer programming in Essex. This example clearly demonstrates the current mismatch in the training currently being provided and the requirements and skill shortages of employers.
- 12.6. The Essex Skills Board is working to influence the funding a provision a training in Essex in order that it meets the needs of employers and the Essex economy. This requires colleges and training providers to change their provision to areas where there is a clear need. The expected development of offshore wind farms in Essex and the region is an example of where there is a need. The development will require engineers, technicians, designers, project managers etc. and nationally there are insufficient people with the necessary skills to take up the positions that will be created.
- 12.7. There is a similar need to increase awareness of the new employment opportunities and skill needs of employers in schools and to young people in the district more generally.
- 12.8. The Committee believes there is a strong case for Braintree District Council to facilitate a Group for Braintree district with aims and objectives similar to that for the ESB (see section 5).

13. Schools and Colleges

- 13.1. The Committee notes that the strategies of schools in the district to help avoid young people becoming NEET include the following:
 - 13.1.1. Using the school's curriculum offer to 14-16 year olds to give pupils experience of a broader range of options including vocational programmes and an experience of College and/or the work place;
 - 13.1.2. Increasing pupils understanding of the range of opportunities and choices post-16;
 - 13.1.3. Working with Parents/Carers to encourage their supportive involvement in their Children's learning and in decisions about their career options;
 - 13.1.4. Enhancing the provision of information advice and guidance from Year 7 onwards; with particular focus on Years 9, 10 and 11 to inform pupil's choices including the availability of Financial Support – use of the Pupil Premium.
- 13.2. Government figures estimate that 49% of young people in England are likely to enter higher education. As a result, it is important to ensure good opportunities (e.g. apprenticeships) are available for the 51% who do not enter higher education.
- 13.3. Equally important to help young people avoid becoming NEET, is to provide pupils with information on employment opportunities and career paths. Schools in the district are participating in industry days, where businesses provide this information. The Committee supports these events but notes that schools advise they are experiencing great difficulties in finding businesses to participate. As a result, the Committee believes there is a role for schools and authorities to work with businesses to encourage them to participate and to bridge a gap between schools and businesses (see Section 13.1.2).
- 13.4. The Committee notes that the English Baccalaureate was introduced in 2010 as a performance measure in school performance tables. The Baccalaureate is not a qualification in itself but recognises where pupils have secured a C grade or better across a core of academic subjects – English, Mathematics, History or Geography, the Sciences and a Language.
- 13.5. The English Baccalaureate aims to improve the prospects of young people going into further education or taking up employment. However, the schools attending the Committee's meeting expressed concern that as a result of their performance being assessed against the Baccalaureate, pupils who are struggling to achieve a grade E/F in English are being forced to study a modern language such as French or Spanish. The schools advise that studying a

modern language is inappropriate for these pupils and that vocational learning is more appropriate. The schools feel they are working against the direction they would like to go in supporting vocational learning for some. Indeed, some schools in the district are providing vocational learning for some pupils in recognition that this is more suitable for them and are prepared to risk their performance assessment.

- 13.6. The Committee notes that the work of the Colchester Institute (College at Braintree) which can help young people avoid becoming NEET includes working with employers, apprenticeships, a Skills to Succeed Programme, and tailored courses. The College has submitted a bid with the aim of bringing Engineering (e.g. welding, fabricating, plumbing etc.) back to the Braintree Campus. If successful, this would bring more vocational learning to the Campus with the potential to help young people in the district in to employment.

14. Other Barriers to Young People Participating in Education, Employment or Training

14.1. Health Issues

As mentioned in the introduction, being NEET can lead to young people suffering from poor health or depression, which can have an impact well into adult life. Mental health issues can escalate rapidly to a position where for some young people, their health needs can prevent them from being in a position to look for employment. The Committee noted that for some young people in the district, the delay in receiving help for their mental health issues appears to result in them not being in a position to seek employment.

The Committee recognises that the Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (Mid Essex CCG) faces competing health demands and priorities in the district. However, the Committee recommends that Mid Essex CCG ensures that GPs in the district are aware of that for young people suffering mental health issues, those issues can escalate rapidly if not treated early to a situation where they are unable to seek employment.

Recommendation 11

That Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group ensures that GPs in the district are aware of that for young people suffering mental health issues, those issues can escalate rapidly if not treated early to a situation where they are able to seek employment.

Meetings Held as Part of the Scrutiny Review

The Committee carried out 3 formal scrutiny meetings and 6 informal meetings with a wide range of stakeholders as follows:

Committee Meeting on 10th July 2013

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|-----------------|---|
| Andy Wright | Corporate Director, Braintree District Council |
| Peter Smith | Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, Braintree District Council |
| Nathan Rowland | Community Projects Officer |
| Dave Cope | Customer Services Operations Manager, Braintree and Witham Jobcentres |
| Paula Hornett | Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager Essex County Council |

Informal Meeting on 3rd September 2013

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|-----------------|--|
| Thomas Pitts | Housing Support Worker, Leahurst Hostel, Braintree |
| Katie | Resident at Leahurst Hostel, Braintree |
| Craig | Young person,(not resident at Leahurst Hostel) |

Informal Meeting on 4th September 2013

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|-----------------|--|
| Jasmine | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Jo | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Sam | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Charmaine | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Shannon | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Larissa | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Kristian | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Lucas | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Anthony | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Pauline | Housing Support Worker, Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Angie | Housing Support Worker, Braintree Foyer, Braintree |

Informal Meeting on 5th September 2013

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Daisy | Resident at Bramble Court, Witham |
| Shauna | Resident at Bramble Court, Witham |
| | |

Committee Meeting on 25th September 2013

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|------------------------|--|
| Andy Wright | Corporate Director, Braintree District Council |
| Peter Smith | Head of Economic Development and Regeneration |
| Cathryn Henry | National Apprenticeship Service |
| Samantha Hampshire | Housing Support Worker, Bramble Court Witham |
| Melanie Nash | Housing Support Worker, Bramble Court Witham |
| Daisy | Resident at Bramble Court, Witham |
| Shauna | Resident at Bramble Court, Witham |
| Anthony | Resident at Braintree Foyer, Braintree |
| Wesley | Green Team Graduate |
| Bradley | Braintree District Council Apprentice |

Committee Meeting on 7th November 2013

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|------------------------|---|
| Brian Cairns | Director of Community Engagement and Marketing Colchester Institute (The College at Braintree) |
| Claire Pike | Work Related Learning Coordinator Alec Hunter Academy, Braintree |
| Damien Lee | Vice Principal, Maltings Academy, Witham |
| Douglas Mongan | Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Participation Consultant ~ Braintree, Employability and Skills Unit, Essex County Council |

Informal Meeting on 10th January 2104

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|------------------------|--|
| Marcella M'Rabety | Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, Stansted Airport |
| Anita Garrard | Urban Futures London Ltd, Training and Quality Senior Manager |

Informal Meeting on 13th January 2104

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|------------------------|--|
| Tim Holland | Senior Business Manager, Barclays Bank |

Informal Meeting on 23rd January 2014

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Neil Jesse | Managing Director, Village Glass |
| Steve Mayhew | Operations Director, Village Glass |

Committee Meeting on 12th March 2014

| Invited Speaker | Position |
|------------------------|--|
| Dave Cope | Manager, Jobcentre Plus, Braintree and Witham |
| Peter Cook | Head of Employability and Skills Essex County Council |

Officer Meetings

Officer also held 4 informal meeting in support of the review were as follows:

Informal Meeting on 24th July 2013

| Contact | Position |
|----------------|---|
| James Martin | Positive Engagement Coordinator – Greenfields Community Housing |

Informal Meeting on 25th July 2013

| Contact | Position |
|--------------------|--|
| Shaun | Resident at Bramble Court |
| Samantha Hampshire | Housing Support Worker, Bramble Court Witham |

Informal Meeting on 25th July 2013

| Contact | Position |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Mark Watson | Then Manager of Braintree Foyer |

Informal Meeting on 7th August 2013

| Contact | Position |
|----------------|---|
| Liz Richardson | Housing Support Worker, Leahurst Hostel |

Factors Underlying NEETS

A review carried out by the University of Essex, NEET in Essex: A Review of the Evidence (2010), identified the following underlying factors associated with NEET status:

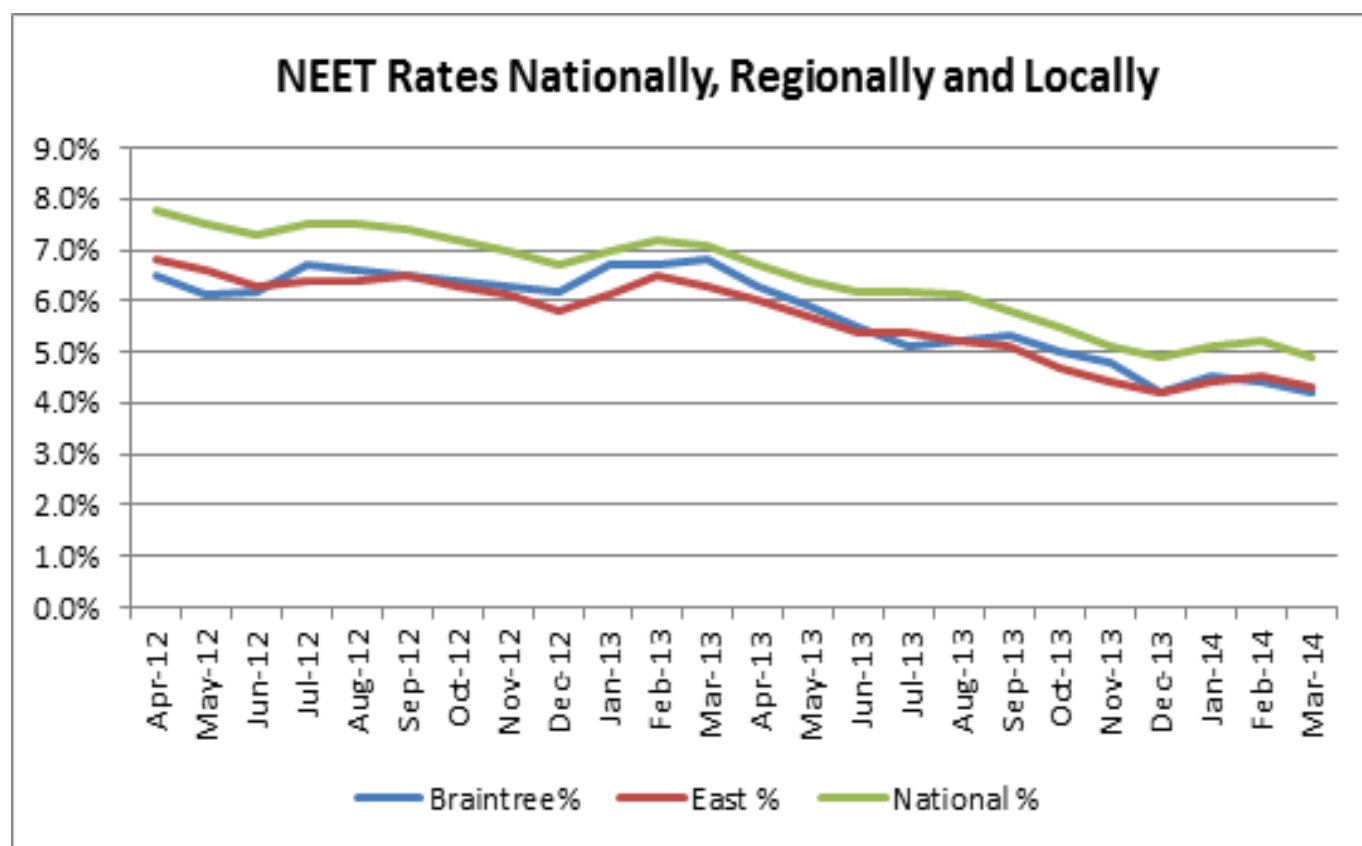
- economic deprivation and non-working parent(s);
- poor access to local jobs;
- low academic attainment;
- large family size;
- parental conflict;
- poor schools;
- teenage pregnancy and parenthood;
- truancy;
- special education needs and learning difficulties;
- low motivation and aspiration including lack of confidence, sense of fatalism, and low self-esteem;
- 'locked-in' and dense local social networks;
- low levels of parental support;
- living in care or living independently; and
- health problems.

Supporting NEETs move into Employment, Education and Training

The University of Essex review identified that young people living in deprived areas suffer low levels of local employment, a sense of fatalism and limited outlooks, and lack access to formal employment networks. Similar to other reviews, the lack of formal educational qualifications that can unlock the door to employment and training was a critical factor in being NEET.

The review considered several support mechanisms including:

- **Mentoring.** Evidence on effectiveness of mentoring is mixed but suggests that mentoring can increase the chances of finding employment, especially if mentors are better matched to the mentored.
- **Teenage pregnancy and parenthood.** Having a child at an early age makes it problematic to engage in employment, education or training, particularly for young mothers. Recruiting older and more experienced mothers to mentor teenage mothers significantly reduces child maltreatment.
- **Transport.** Young people in deprived areas travel little and think locally. This affects where they will seek employment or training. Disadvantaged young people who are qualified drivers are twice as likely to be employed as those not qualified to drive.
- **Housing.** Overcrowding and moving house are significant factors underlying poor academic achievement.



| EET Rates | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|--------|------|--------|--------------------|----------------------|--------|------|
| Date | Braintree District | Braintree District % | East % | UK % | Date | Braintree District | Braintree District % | East % | UK % |
| Apr-12 | 725 | 6.5 | 6.8 | 7.8 | Apr-13 | 715 | 6.3 | 6.0 | 6.7 |
| May-12 | 690 | 6.1 | 6.6 | 7.5 | May-13 | 665 | 5.9 | 5.7 | 6.4 |
| Jun-12 | 700 | 6.2 | 6.3 | 7.3 | Jun-13 | 615 | 5.5 | 5.4 | 6.1 |
| Jul-12 | 750 | 6.7 | 6.4 | 7.5 | Jul-13 | 575 | 5.1 | 5.4 | 6.2 |
| Aug-12 | 750 | 6.6 | 6.4 | 7.5 | Aug-13 | 590 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 6.1 |
| Sep-12 | 725 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7.4 | Sep-13 | 585 | 5.3 | 5.1 | 5.8 |
| Oct-12 | 720 | 6.4 | 6.3 | 7.2 | Oct-13 | 555 | 5.0 | 4.7 | 5.5 |
| Nov-12 | 705 | 6.3 | 6.1 | 7.0 | Nov-13 | 535 | 4.8 | 4.4 | 5.1 |
| Dec-12 | 700 | 6.2 | 5.8 | 6.7 | Dec-13 | 470 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 4.9 |
| Jan-13 | 755 | 6.7 | 6.1 | 7.0 | Jan-14 | 505 | 4.5 | 4.3 | 5.1 |
| Feb-13 | 755 | 6.7 | 6.5 | 7.2 | Feb-14 | 490 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 5.2 |
| Mar-13 | 765 | 6.8 | 6.3 | 7.1 | Mar-14 | 460 | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.9 |

% is number of persons aged 18-24 claiming JSA as a proportion of resident population of 18-24 year olds.

Examples of Supported Moped Schemes Helping Young People to Participate in Education, Employment or Training

West Somerset Council

The scheme started in 1998 with a fleet of just 6 mopeds and now has 50 in use across the county. The scheme is thought to be among the most successful of its kind in the UK and has helped over 200 young people across Somerset, addressing the issues of rural isolation. As well as arranging training, the scheme offers ongoing support to moped users youth workers meeting regularly with the young people. The scheme is open to all young people aged 16-25 living in rural Somerset

South Norfolk Council

Kickstart is a moped hire scheme to aid work and training opportunities in rural areas. Persons aged 16-65 may qualify for the scheme which offers support the following areas:

1. Unemployed or people changing their jobs to get to work;
2. People seeking to access work experience or work based training;
3. People attending to college.

North Somerset Council

The 'Wheels 2 Work' scooter scheme has been designed by North Somerset Council to give people (over 17 years of age) a way to get to work and training. The scheme aims to help people get to work or training in North Somerset's rural areas, who currently find transport a barrier and are unable to commute by other means. Public transport timetables can be unsuitable for shift workers. For many people looking for work or training, especially school leavers and the under 25s, affordable transport is essential.

Hampshire County Council

The Wheels to Work moped loan scheme is designed for people who do not have access to public or private transport to get them to a job, vocational training or to attend interviews. A moped can be loaned for 3 to 12 months depending on circumstances.

Nottinghamshire County Council

Wheels to Work provides a six month loan of a moped or helps fund other transport solutions for people who have been offered a job but have no other way of getting to and from their place of work or training.

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Reference from Overview & Scrutiny Committee - Task and Finish Group | Agenda No: 10 |
| Scrutiny Review of Provision of Rural Services. | |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Corporate Priority: | People – Supporting vulnerable people in our community, Promoting safe and healthy living, Encouraging flourishing communities Prosperity – Boost employment skills and support businesses, Securing appropriate infrastructure and housing growth Performance - Providing value for money, Delivering excellent customer service. |
| Report presented by: | Councillor M Banthorpe |
| Report prepared by: | Emma Wisbey, Governance and Member Manager |

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Background Papers: | Public Report |
| Report and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 4 th June 2014 | |

| |
|---|
| Decision |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To receive the report of the Task and Finish Group and consider the recommendations of the scrutiny review. 2. To refer the Report to Cabinet for a response. |

RURAL SERVICES TASK AND FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT: **APRIL 2014**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A quarter of England's population, 12.7 million people, live in rural communities. Rural areas make up 86% of England; they cover a wide range of geographies and include areas of affluence and poverty, both of which can vary markedly not just within local areas but within individual communities themselves. Yet, rural communities continue to have access to fewer public services than their urban counterparts.¹
- 1.2 The establishment of the Rural Services Task & Finish Group has been imperative in examining this issue more specifically regarding the provision of services in the rural Braintree District, as per its Terms of Reference, as follows:
- a) To identify any impacts specifically as a result of living in rural areas in the district to the delivery of public services (in particular, those delivered by Braintree District Council, Essex County Council, Police and Health Services). Impacts should include consideration if any result in social isolation or exclusion and those services delivered by authorities across district borders.
 - b) To identify how the services in rural areas might be improved where any adverse impacts are identified.
 - c) To identify where costs of the provision of services impact on rural areas.
 - d) To consider the relationship between Essex County Council, Braintree District Council and Parish Councils in the delivery of these services and the proposed related RCCE led coordinated and streamlined volunteer advice services.
- 1.3 Given the six month time-frame allotted to the Group in examining such an expansive topic, there have been limitations on the scope of the recommendations made which have been realised through the following key messages identified within the review:

¹ House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, *Rural Communities*, Sixth Report of Session 2013-2014, volume 1, p.5

- The previous recommendations of the Rural Isolation Task & Finish Group have been useful in identifying initial areas for investigation by the Group, to establish whether improvements have been made since 2008, determine which particular service areas should be tackled in more detail, and avoid a duplication of recommendations.
- Considerable benefits are gained from the Rural Services Survey and this should continue to be provided in the foreseeable future, with the amendments of the Rural Services Task & Finish Group included.
- The provision of rural areas cannot be improved by Braintree District Council (BDC) alone, and nor would it be reasonable to attempt to comprehensively tackle issues falling within the remit of external organisations given the timescale and resources for the review.
- There is an impression of a clear division between how services to rural areas are perceived by Braintree District Council and how rural areas feel about the services provided for them.
- The four key areas that have been discovered to be of importance in establishing the Group's outcomes are: 1) Communication 2) Access to Services 3) Rural Facilities 4) Rural Health.
- The Council is encouraged to re-visit the Group's recommendations in future to ensure that they are being achieved, and to rectify any issues to avoid rural services worsening in future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.4 Based on the research and study undertaken, the Rural Services Task & Finish Group identifies the following recommendations to help the council to further support provision of rural services across the District:

| RURAL COMMUNICATION |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council should continue issuing its press releases and parish clerks should be encouraged to share these with parish councillors. 2. The Council should have a designated named contact for parish councils to go to with their issues. |

3. Parish magazines should have a dedicated page for Braintree District Council news.
4. It is essential that the Council continues to hold its annual Parish Summit with BALC and all parish councils to improve communication between the different types of local authorities. In future these should become more interactive, better planned and carefully structured to offer even greater value to parishes.
5. The Council should establish and facilitate a separate parish clerks' network to encourage communication and share best practice between parish clerks.
6. The Council should consider providing paper copies of planning applications to parishes for a nominal charge.
7. This report should be circulated to parish councils for consideration and feedback.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

8. The Council should re-examine the way it provides support and advice to rural businesses and improve awareness of how to access this support and advice.
9. The Council should proactively offer feedback when specific services are made unavailable to businesses, such as when signage applications have been turned down.
10. Greater consideration should be given to the impact of business rates and waste collection charges in affecting the financial viability of village shops and small rural businesses in particular.
11. The Council should provide leaflets containing a list of its main services and customer service number to the town councils, libraries and council offices in Haverhill and Sudbury.
12. All future proposals included in Cabinet reports by Braintree District Council should explain the impact to rural areas, in addition to the financial, legal, safeguarding considerations etc which Cabinet reports capture at present.

RURAL FACILITIES

- 13.** The Council should (in advance of anticipated adverse weather conditions) supply information to businesses about whom to contact and is responsible for what to do in an emergency (e.g. flooding).
- 14.** The Council should consider the increase in rural station car parking to encourage the use of trains and potentially encourage tourism to these areas.
- 15.** It is possible that some parishes may wish to investigate other sources of rural broadband and examples of good practice could be shared between parish councils at a Parish Summit.
- 16.** Parish councils should be encouraged to lobby mobile service providers directly to improve coverage in local areas.

RURAL HEALTH

- 17.** The Council should adopt a Health & Wellbeing Strategy for rural areas to give a clear structure to any health and wellbeing activities planned.
- 18.** The Council should consider the possibility of playground upgrades and replacements to remain within the remit of the Council, with maintenance issues to be carried out by parish councils.
- 19.** An audit of sporting facilities and clubs in rural areas should be undertaken in order to develop a strategy that fits into the overall plan for Health & Wellbeing.
- 20.** Parish councils should produce up to three walking maps/routes for their parish which can be published on the Braintree District Council and parish councils' websites.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Group held its initial meeting on 12th September 2013 and the approach for coming to a set of agreed outcomes has since been the following:

- Discussing initial key areas for discussion;
- Inviting guest speakers to provide insight into chosen key areas for information;
- Determining preferred outcome areas; and
- Undertaking research in smaller working groups to establish key findings and final recommendations.

2.2 It was felt that this was the best approach to prevent members from pre-empting their interpretation of rural issues, as well as serving as an opportunity to understand the diverse nature of services provided by the council.

2.3 In total six meetings were held between September 2013 and March 2014 with officer support provided by Chris Fleetham (Corporate Director), Cherie Root (Head of Business Solutions) and Navshika Beeharry (Research & Policy Officer).

2.4 During the first 4 meetings the Group had specific sessions with the following invitees:

Meeting 1 **Councillor Gabrielle Spray (Chairman of Rural Isolation Task & Finish Group)**, to receive an overview on priorities and outcomes of the Rural Isolation Task & Finish Group.

Meeting 1 **Jan Cole (Rural Community Council for Essex)** to receive an overview and insight into rural issues as identified within the Rural Services Survey 2011.

Meeting 2 **Andy Wright (Corporate Director and member of the BDC Health & Wellbeing Panel)** to receive information about Health & Wellbeing and its impact upon the rural District.

Meeting 2 **Tania Roberge (Marketing & Communications Manager)** to receive greater clarity about marketing and communications arrangements to parish councils/rural areas.

Meeting 2 **Peter Smith (Head of Economic Development & Regeneration)** to receive an update on Rural Broadband.

Meeting 3 **Chris Fleetham (Corporate Director)** to receive a list of rural services provided by BDC.

Meeting 4 **Paul Partridge (Head of Operations)** to discuss the provision of services in rural areas.

2.5 At the end of the third meeting the Group agreed upon a set of areas of further investigation which were organised into 4 separate headings and researched by members in teams of 3, to report back initial findings and final recommendations.

2.6 The areas for further investigation and their allocated members were as follows:

| Areas for Further Investigation (and members who researched these specific areas) | |
|--|--|
| Communication <i>(Cllrs Banthorpe, Bowers-Flint and Fincken)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with Parish Councils and/or rural residents and businesses • Use of village magazines • District/Parish Council responsibilities • Audit implementation of task and finish group outcomes |
| Rural Facilities <i>(Cllrs Johnson, Galione and Horner)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution to the Rural Services Survey 2014 • Parking at train stations • Monitor development of rural broadband project and mobile phone coverage • Transport for job seekers in conjunction with the community bus |
| Access to Services <i>(Cllrs Parker, Pell and Swift)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to services from service centres out of the district (Sudbury and Haverhill) • Consideration of rural areas when considering service changes • Support of village shops and Post Offices |
| Rural Health <i>(Cllrs Cadman, Finbow and Shelton)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and wellbeing representation for rural areas • Playgrounds for younger children • Sports activities for younger children • Bike racks at bus stops |

- 2.7 The remainder of this report seeks to summarise the headline findings of the Group arising from its sessions with invitees in the first four meetings, before presenting the individual reports on the above key headings which members chose to analyse in greater detail (during the fourth, fifth and sixth meetings), for the purpose of establishing recommendations for the overall review.
- 2.8 This is useful to understand the Group's developments and to share the information received by them, which has been integral in arriving at a set of outcomes, as summarised in the conclusion.

3.0 KEY FINDINGS

MEETING 1

3.1 *The initial meeting took place on 12 September 2013, where the Terms of Reference, Scope of the Review, Rural Services Survey 2011 and a background to the work of the former Rural Isolation Task & Finish Group was presented by its Chairman, Councillor Gabrielle Spray.*

3.1.1 The Group expressed concern that two recommendations of the [Rural Isolation Task Group's final report](#) (p.16) had not been fully taken advantage of, specifically:

- The council should make greater use of Parish magazines, and publications such as the Neighbourhood News and The Villager to publicise its services in rural areas e.g. a BDC page containing names of local District Councillors; contact points for BDC services etc; and
- The council's web site should include a link to every Town/Parish Council web site where these have been set up.

3.1.2 Communication was felt to be an important issue that members wished to discuss in greater detail in the following meeting.

3.1.3 **Following the meeting all Parish Councils were contacted to ask for their up to date contact information. This has now been updated on the BDC website.**

MEETING 2

3.2 *The second meeting took place on 21 October 2013 where members were given presentations by Andy Wright (Corporate Director), Jan Cole (RCCE), and Tania Roberge (Marketing & Communications Manager), to aid discussions on identifying specific outcomes for the Task & Finish Group.*

3.2.1 Andy Wright

- Members were directed to the [Cabinet Report dated 15th July 2013](#) for background information to Braintree District Health & Wellbeing Panel (BDHWP).
- Members were explained the roles and responsibilities of the organisations involved in the provision of health & wellbeing in Essex and the aims of the BDHWP in: reducing the number of hip fractures in those aged 65 and over; and reducing the number of adult obesity.

3.2.2 Andy Wright contacted Nick Shuttleworth (Executive Director, Rural Community Council of Essex) to discuss the possibility of rural representation on the Braintree District Health & Wellbeing Panel. Nick has confirmed his interest in joining the Panel.

3.2.3 Jan Cole

- Jan referred members to [p. 4-5 of the Rural Services Survey 2011](#) for an overview of the survey results, summarising in particular that Halstead had the lowest provision of access to services in the District; the percentage of broadband coverage per area could only be approximated in the survey (see p.13 of the survey for details); and the biggest need captured in the results was broadband and the biggest challenge was oil/energy.
- [RCCE's Hold Fast Credit Union](#) (energy scheme provided in association with Greenfields) was offered as a solution for people experiencing challenges in oil/energy payments.
- Members requested that the following services become audited in the upcoming 2014 Rural Services Survey: cycle storage near public transport, indoor/outdoor gyms, walking groups and collection points for deliveries.
- Members suggested that the following indicators should be included in the survey: mobile phone coverage, quality of broadband, willingness of parish clerks to forward BDC articles to village magazine/parish magazine editor.

3.2.4 Jan Cole noted all the above suggestions and will be including these in the next Rural Services Survey.

3.2.5 Tania Roberge

- An overview of BDC's channels of communication was given, recapping on: BDC's email newsletter (which has the highest number of subscribers in Essex); social media; website; Contact magazine (circulated annually); newspapers and press releases (which are circulated to the parish councils who have not opted-out in receiving them) and BDC campaigns.
- Members questioned the process of contacting editors and the high proportion of non-rural storylines in BDC press releases. Tania clarified that most news stories affect whole of the District and editors can choose what stories they publish.

MEETING 3

3.3 *The third meeting took place on 02 December 2013 where members received information from Peter Smith (Head of Economic Development & Regeneration)*

and Chris Fleetham (Corporate Director) to identify areas of interests for the Group in order to finalise specific outcome areas for focussed research.

3.3.1 Peter Smith

- 4,000 residents in the District registered a demand for improved broadband, of which the implementation for this is anticipated to begin in April 2014 and is expected to benefit 16,000 households.
- A detailed roll-out plan is to be finalised and released by Essex County Council (ECC) shortly, and there are currently aims to increase target for broadband from 87% to 95%, but this is being agreed nationally and is dependent on funding.

3.3.2 **Braintree District Council is still awaiting an outcome from Essex County Council regarding the implementation dates for superfast broadband across the District.**

3.3.3 Chris Fleetham

- Service Unit Managers were asked 3 questions about the rural nature of the services they deliver – the results are attached in *Appendix 1* of this report.
- Referring to the list, one member questioned the financial rationale of working arrangements of BDC and libraries (e.g. clear sack hand-outs and benefits forms) in favour of a greater partnership between parish and town councils, which was felt to be a better point of contact for local government and beneficial in assessing community needs.

3.3.4 **The working arrangements of BDC and its libraries are currently being appraised as part of the findings by Paul Partridge in the following meeting (see below).**

MEETING 4

3.4 *The fourth meeting took place on 27 January 2014 where Paul Partridge was in attendance and members reported back their initial findings based on their allocated 4 key research areas (Communication, Access to Services, Rural Facilities and Rural Health).*

3.4.1 Paul Partridge

- Paul Partridge gave a presentation to Members outlining rural services provided by BDC Operations Team – see *Appendix 2* of this report.

- Other points discussed by Paul were: allotment allocations; mechanical sweeping of rural versus town areas and the Code of Practice which identifies a 2h response time to clean town areas as opposed to 3 weeks for rural areas; ECC trade waste recycling pilot for 2 months at Springwood Industrial Estate, which requires vehicles to pay to dispose of their waste; services provided by Highway Rangers; management of 6m sacks used annually across the District, costing circa £250,000; and current ideas to improve rate of sack depletion in Witham (where 1.4m sacks are used annually).

3.4.2 Members proceeded to deliver their initial findings during the course of this meeting (and those that followed) to produce final recommendations. These are presented in the following section.

4.0 SPECIFIC FINDINGS OF CHOSEN AREAS FOR INVESTIGATION

- 4.1 This section summarises the key findings that the Rural Services Task & Finish Group discovered whilst researching the topics of Communication, Access to Services, Rural Facilities and Rural Health more closely.
- 4.2 A description of the areas researched (including the members involved) under each of the four headings below is given in the table in the *Introduction*.

4.3 COMMUNICATION

- 4.3.1 This working group surveyed all parish councils and received responses from over a third (20) of them. A breakdown of findings as well as details of respondents is contained in *Appendix 3*. Overall, the survey revealed the following attitudes of parish/town councils:
- 4.3.2 When asked about what BDC could do to improve communication in rural areas (including parish councils), the following points were raised:
- Continue with press releases
 - Send press releases to parish clerks/councillors
 - Have a point of contact for Causeway House
 - Have a parish bi-annual/annual 'summit' to cover new and forthcoming legislation
 - Have a council page in local papers
 - Statutory notices
- 4.3.3 One problem identified was that it was difficult to view planning applications on small screens and that hard copies have to be made by parish clerks for those who do not have access to email or are unable to use the necessary software to access files.
- 4.3.4 When asked what would be the most effective way that BDC can consult with parish councils, the following methods were suggested:
- District councillor attendance at parish council meetings
 - To have parish clerk meetings organised by BDC (following the example of Colchester Borough Council with its parishes)
 - Email
 - Nominated point of contact at BDC

- 4.3.5 When asked what methods parish councils use to communicate with its residents, the following methods were identified:
- Parish assembly
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Direct contact (letters/visits)
 - Parish/Church magazines
 - Websites
 - Notice boards
- 4.3.6 Three respondents expressed differing views to the above. Namely, Halstead Town Council uses Annual Meetings and is considering a newsletter to all residents prior to the meeting. It also has a Mayor's monthly column in Free Press and makes use of its Town Council website. Witham Town Council also stated preference for its Town Council website.
- 4.3.7 Therefore, with the exception of a small number of concerns, **most parishes are satisfied with the service from BDC and the majority use or have plans to use a wide range of ways to communicate with their residents.** There is wide use of parish magazines which have a very efficient distribution system and, even if not read, are available to all households.
- 4.3.8 **Parish magazines are printed regularly and have a very efficient distribution network.** Although many are printed by the local Church, parishes do contribute in many instances through their precept.
- 4.3.9 **Support for local press was not featured as it could be expected in the areas least populated, some mentioned papers like the Higgle and Suffolk Free Press.**
- 4.4.10 **Email has strong support but there is an urgent need to improve internet speeds before it could be relied on to be considered other than a secondary option.**
- 4.4.11 **There has been a mention that parish clerks would like some formal point of contact or occasional meeting, as some are very isolated and could possibly benefit from networking with their peer group.** Without doubt the attendance of District Councillors at Parish Council meetings is considered very important, with some allowing their District Councillor to contribute other than at question time.

4.4 RURAL FACILITIES

4.4.1 This working group agreed from the outset that **considerable benefits could be gained from the Rural Services Survey and that it should be proposed that this be continued for the foreseeable future.**

4.4.2 Subject to a series of discussions and research undertaken by this group, the following observations were made on the following services:

Railway Stations

(i) Braintree

The station appears to be underused, the reasons for which could form part of a large survey. Some speculation and personal experiences have suggested that some incentives could be provided to improve this situation. Should the passing loop be constructed this would encourage more use however this is a long-term issue. Those returning to Braintree from work can currently experience some delay in waiting for the connecting train, thus increasing their already long day.

(ii) Cressing

This is a well-used commuter station serving Cressing, Black Notley and surrounding areas. It has a small car park which provides parking for approximately 10 cars however this is not enough and the cars spill out onto the very narrow Bulford Mill Lane, causing danger for other road users as they park anywhere they can including a dangerous sharp right hand bend. Cressing Parish Council has complained to Essex County Council on several occasions about this as it has eroded all roadside verges.

(iii) White Notley

This station has no commuter parking at all and local residents were previously against any being provided.

(iv) Braintree Freeport

This is a commuter station which was used intensely until the owners of Freeport implemented a restriction of up to 6 hours parking therefore making it impossible for commuters to park. This has led to a number of cars parking on the road leading to the car park, very close to a set of traffic lights making it difficult for shoppers to access Freeport. Essex County Council is aware of

this and it is believed that the North East Essex Parking Partnership (NEEPP) is dealing with the problem.

(v) Witham

The additional 60 parking places at Eckhard House will be of some benefit as these will be larger than the current spaces and should encourage those with larger vehicles to make use of them. This proposal could be used in the future for other District car parks and is considered to be a good and practical remedy to avoid damage to vehicle doors. There have been comments about the apparent lack of parking at the station; these extra spaces should alleviate some concerns.

(vi) Hatfield Peverel

Well used and drawing commuters from many surrounding villages, the station parking appears adequate.

(vii) Bures and Stour Valley

On site investigation has indicated that the small car park (26 spaces) is full during the working week, and the very small road near the station has single yellow lines thus precluding parking. The nearest parking is 150m away near the main road (B1508). It is considered therefore that additional parking for the commuters is vital and that a more spacious car park would also encourage tourists for Stour Valley to travel by rail.

(viii) Kelvedon

Kelvedon station, which also serves a number of villages to the North of the District, has an insufficient number of car parking spaces relative to the number of users it receives.

Coggeshall runs a mini-bus which goes directly to London Liverpool Street and attracts other users from the large village of Tiptree and surrounding areas.

Broadband and Mobile Telephone Cover

4.4.3 Broadband coverage is very patchy and significantly bad in some northern villages. Residents continue to await firm information from Essex County

Council concerning the proposed improvements. Similarly, areas of poor mobile phone coverage are causing much frustration and indeed many problems where mobile phones do not work and the emergency services are required.

Transportation

- 4.4.4 This is generally problematic for many in villages and rural areas. Simply attending doctor/hospital appointments or job interviews is very difficult. Whilst there are some areas where rural transport is available the timings are very often not appropriate. The very high fuel costs continue to hit many very hard. There is little part-time work available and this is usually offered in pubs and restaurants during the evening. Where main bus services are employed some form of bus pass would be of tremendous benefit.
- 4.4.5 Generally life is more expensive in rural areas; it cannot be argued that those who live in villages all do so by choice.
- 4.4.6 When the emergency services are required they take longer to reach rural areas. The Fire and Ambulance services seem to still be coping very well with few complaints. There is still an abundance of rural crime with farm thefts increasing, domestic oil thefts, shed break-ins etc. Police cover is sparse and of great concern to many who seek the assurance of seeing some signs of Police activity. With the prospect of yet more cuts to the Police budget the future is not bright.

Roads

- 4.4.7 Many minor roads are currently in a very bad state, with recent bad weather not assisting. This situation has been developing for some years and many residents feel that some roads have been abandoned.
- 4.4.8 **Pot holes are of major concern and continue to lack prompt responses from Essex Highways Authority. Many of these roads are impassable for days due to flooding as the ditches and gullies are not being maintained.**

4.5 ACCESS TO SERVICES

4.5.1 Looking specifically at village shops and Post Offices as well as council services across the border, this group reported the following findings after discussions with businesses and organisations:

Village shops and Post Offices

4.5.2 In the village surveyed, there used to be 8 shops 17 years ago. There are now just 2. Village shops struggle to make enough profit as people perceive them to be more expensive and prefer to shop in supermarkets. However they do provide a useful service where the supermarket is far away and for those without transport, particularly the elderly.

4.5.3 It is difficult to help shops on the income side but help could be provided on the cost side. All three businesses spoken to said a reduction in business rates would be a big help. All three also mentioned charges, for example rubbish collection and waste disposal. A reduction in these would help keep their businesses viable. Even better would be no charge for rubbish collection.

4.5.4 One of the businesses would like a relaxation of the rules on business development, advertising and signage. This may be beyond BDC's control but they would like to see a more constructive approach from officers on signage with clearer advice on what is permitted, feedback as to why an application has failed and what amendments could be made to ensure it succeeds. Generally they would like the planning authority to work with businesses rather than adopting an adversarial approach.

4.5.5 Two businesses mentioned the recent flooding and expected the Council to provide advice on sandbags and pumping, for example.

4.5.6 One business thought it would be very helpful if the Council offered advice on how they could develop their business or at least was able to direct them to other bodies that could help. Perhaps Ignite would be relevant here; if so, more could be done to publicise Ignite.

4.5.7 To summarise, the following would help village shops to survive:

- **Reduction in business rates**
- **Reduction/ abolition of waste collection charges**
- **More constructive approach from BDC's planning department on signage and advertising, specifically to know what is permitted, feedback as to why an application has failed and what amendments could be made to ensure it succeeds**

- **Disaster advice (e.g. flooding)**
- **General business advice (e.g. Ignite)**

Council services across the border

- 4.5.8 Following enquiries made in Haverhill and Sudbury, it became apparent that there are no BDC leaflets or links to the BDC website in either Haverhill or Sudbury, despite the fact that they are the closest towns for people living in the north of the District and are the major centres for them.
- 4.5.9 In Haverhill, the places where BDC information could be available are the Town Hall where the clerk to the Town Council is based, St Edmundsbury Borough Council offices and the Library. They could each display a small number of leaflets and it would be especially useful if they could have the main customer services telephone number for BDC and a list of the main services provided by BDC. Perhaps a list of the villages served by BDC rather than Babergh or St Edmundsbury Borough Council would also help. It would also be useful to have a link to the BDC website on the Town Council website.
- 4.5.10 In Sudbury, the places where information could be available are the Town Hall and the Library. The same information outlined in relation to Haverhill should be provided. There should be a link to the BDC website on the Sudbury Town Council website.
- 4.5.11 To conclude, the following information should be provided in Haverhill and Sudbury:
- **Links to the BDC website on the town council websites;**
 - **A list of main services and the customer service number for BDC to be provided at the town councils, the libraries and the council offices in Haverhill; and**
 - **A few leaflets at the town council offices, the libraries and the Borough Council offices in Haverhill.**

4.6 RURAL HEALTH

- 4.6.1 Having met with BDC's Portfolio Holder for Health & Wellbeing, it was found that the national and county health responsibilities/structures are going through a period of significant change which has slowed the rate of progress in a number of key areas. This delay has not prevented the action that BDC has taken with the Portfolio Holder to recently create the newly formed *Active Braintree Network* group. This has resulted in a series of activities having either commenced or planned.
- 4.6.2 Whilst this work is commendable, the absence of a clear vision and strategy for Health & Wellbeing in rural areas as well as associated actions and time-scales required, leaves the impression of an unstructured approach without which the group found it difficult to identify what is being planned.
- 4.6.3 **The group recommends that a 4-year rural strategy for Health & Wellbeing for is developed.**
- 4.6.4 In terms of playgrounds across the District, it is recognised that that the upgrade, replacement and maintenance of playgrounds is one of those areas where long term dissatisfaction remains in rural areas, and as such **the group considers that BDC should recognise and resolve this matter by ensuring that playgrounds are accepted as a BDC responsibility with maintenance to remain with parish councils.**
- 4.6.5 Lastly, in terms of sporting activities, there is currently a tremendous range of activities occurring in rural areas, which could develop and contribute towards a healthy community if given the right type of support and encouragement. With this in mind, **it is suggested that an audit of sporting activities and clubs in rural areas is undertaken in order to develop a strategy that fits into the overall plan for Health & Wellbeing.**

5.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Overall this was a demanding topic to investigate within the time-frame given. However, the previous recommendations of the Rural Isolation Task & Finish Group were extremely helpful in establishing what improvements have been made since 2008, and determining which particular services were highlighted for improvements then, so that they could be tackled in greater depth now, to avoid a duplication of recommendations by the Rural Services Task & Finish Group in future.
- 5.2 In order to establish realistic and achievable outcomes following the study, therefore, it was realised early on that the provision of services in rural areas does not solely rely on the input of Braintree District Council. For this reason, some topics have been excluded from analysis to ensure that research time is allocated on issues that Braintree District Council can influence. However, this suggests that efforts must be undertaken to challenge external organisations to tackle such specific issues where appropriate.
- 5.3 The four working groups established as part of the review were found to be very useful in gathering external views and highlighted the need for a better provision of rural services, as the Group's Terms of Reference specified.
- 5.4 It is now hoped that the following recommendations are taken forward by Council *and* that they are visited in future to ensure they are being achieved, to rectify any future issues and avoid them from deepening further.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RURAL COMMUNICATION

1. The Council should continue issuing its press releases and parish clerks should be encouraged to share these with parish councillors.
2. The Council should have a designated named contact for parish councils to go to with their issues.
3. Parish magazines should have a dedicated page for Braintree District Council news.
4. It is essential that the Council continues to hold its annual Parish Summit with BALC and all parish councils to improve communication between the different types of local authorities. In future these should become more

interactive, better planned and carefully structured to offer even greater value to parishes.

5. The Council should establish and facilitate a separate parish clerks' network to encourage communication and share best practice between parish clerks.
6. The Council should consider providing paper copies of planning applications to parishes for a nominal charge.
7. This report should be circulated to parish councils for consideration and feedback.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

8. The Council should re-examine the way it provides support and advice to rural businesses and improve awareness of how to access this support and advice.
9. The Council should proactively offer feedback when specific services are made unavailable to businesses, such as when signage applications have been turned down.
10. Greater consideration should be given to the impact of business rates and waste collection charges in affecting the financial viability of village shops and small rural businesses in particular.
11. The Council should provide leaflets containing a list of its main services and customer service number to the town councils, libraries and council offices in Haverhill and Sudbury.
12. All future proposals included in Cabinet reports by Braintree District Council should explain the impact to rural areas, in addition to the financial, legal, safeguarding considerations etc which Cabinet reports capture at present.

RURAL FACILITIES

13. The Council should (in advance of anticipated adverse weather conditions) supply information to businesses about whom to contact and is responsible for what to do in an emergency (e.g. flooding).

- 14.** The Council should consider the increase in rural station car parking to encourage the use of trains and potentially encourage tourism to these areas.
- 15.** It is possible that some parishes may wish to investigate other sources of rural broadband and examples of good practice could be shared between parish councils at a Parish Summit.
- 16.** Parish councils should be encouraged to lobby mobile service providers directly to improve coverage in local areas.

RURAL HEALTH

- 17.** The Council should adopt a Health & Wellbeing Strategy for rural areas to give a clear structure to any health and wellbeing activities planned.
- 18.** The Council should consider the possibility of playground upgrades and replacements to remain within the remit of the Council, with maintenance issues to be carried out by parish councils.
- 19.** An audit of sporting facilities and clubs in rural areas should be undertaken in order to develop a strategy that fits into the overall plan for Health & Wellbeing.
- 20.** Parish councils should produce up to three walking maps/routes for their parish which can be published on the Braintree District Council and parish councils' websites.

The Rural Services Task & Finish Group

Councillor L Bowers-Flint (Chairman)
Councillor M Banthorpe
Councillor C Cadman
Councillor J Finbow

Councillor M Fincken
Councillor M Galione
Councillor P Horner
Councillor H Johnson

Councillor I Parker
Councillor J Pell
Councillor A Shelton
Councillor J Swift

April 2014

APPENDIX 1

Service Unit Managers were asked whether they can provide a list of services within their service areas, which:

1. Are provided across the district, including rural areas;
2. Are directly aimed at or provided differently for rural areas of the District; and
3. Are in the process of undergoing any changes (if any) that would affect the rural areas of the District.


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| Joanne Albini | <p>1. Housing Register; Homechoice based lettings scheme; Housing Options Service; Housing Service works with housing associations to enable affordable housing across the District; Empty Homes Owners Scheme.</p> <p>2. Funding for Rural Housing Enabler post at RCCE to enable development of 'rural exceptional sites' housing developments – for villages to let to people with connection to a village</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Kathy Brown | <p>1. Health Safety Emergency Planning, Land Drainage Service, Environmental Searches for Land Charges, Private Water Testing for Environmental Services Team ; Health & Safety courses.</p> <p>2. Emergency planning: work closely with parish and town clerks to provide information and support to assist communities.</p> <p>3. None</p> <p>4. How can your services be better provided or adapted to rural areas with your current resources?</p> <p>I do not feel that they can. Jan advises the rural communities on land drainage issues that they raise and signposts them to the correct agencies.</p> <p>An objective for 2014/15 is to promote the use of Social Media within for the Parishes for Warning and Informing during an emergency.</p> |
| Tracey Corcoran | <p>1. Community Transport</p> <p>2. The Shopper Bus – aimed solely at rural areas which have been identified as having no or very little public transport</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Lee Crabb | <p>1. All services provided to rural areas</p> <p>2. Summer camps for children in villages and Fusion's upcoming exercise classes in Rayne and Shalford village halls</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| David Ekins | <p>1. Council tax and business rates bills are provided District-wide and are a statutory requirement, not a service.</p> |

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| | <p>2. No distinction made between rural and non-rural areas.</p> <p>3. Any changes are made in legislation and there are no major changes anticipated at present.</p> |
| John Krischock | <p>1. Out of hours telephone service</p> <p>2. None</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Matt Mills | <p>1. Website, FOI, complaints</p> <p>2. None</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Paul Partridge | <p>1. All services are District-wide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste collection – domestic, green, dry recyclable (paper/card) and some trade waste • Grounds Maintenance – Parks and Open Spaces • Recycling Banks • Maintenance of Car Parks (mainly urban/sub-urban locations) • Management of Cemeteries • Management of some Play Areas • Management of Allotments • External Grounds Maintenance Contracts – some schools, verge grass cutting for some Parishes and ECC. • Street cleansing – street sweeping and litter picking <p>2. None provided to rural areas differently</p> <p>3. Proposed changes to waste collection routes and collection days from 2015 as part of budget challenge.</p> |
| Alastair Peace | <p>1. All services in Member Services are provided across the district.</p> <p>2. None</p> <p>3. There are no changes planned that would affect the rural areas of the District.</p> |
| Paul Pooran | None |
| Peter Smith | <p>1. Ignite Business Enterprise Ltd – helping to generate more business starts by offering different types of support, including rural business support. Town centre and rural regeneration schemes – as part of the delivery of economic development and supporting the growth of rural enterprises. Business Group – forum for local businesses to propose ideas for support from local authorities. The Group has rural representation.</p> <p>2. Broadband campaign with involvement of parishes. Chairman's Civic Rural Business Reception - an opportunity for rural businesses to ask questions to key service areas within Braintree District Council, which aims to support business growth. Mobile infrastructure consultation – provide comments on proposals to</p> |

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| | <p>develop a mast in the north of the district to provide increased mobile phone coverage for rural areas.</p> <p>3. None identified at present</p> |
| Angela Verghese | <p>1. Keep Safe Scheme is offered to all people who live in the District, although those most likely to benefit are people living in one of the three towns or people who access these towns. Mi Community funding is available to Parish & Town Councils and local voluntary and community groups across the District.</p> <p>2. None</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Dominic Warren | <p>From a Procurement point of view we have no services that fall under these points so have nothing to add.</p> |
| Mark Wilson | <p>1. Sustainability Team (Environmental Services): Advice and support in reducing energy, water consumption and carbon emissions, tackling fuel poverty and adapting to climate change impacts for residents, communities and businesses.</p> <p>2. Facilitating take up of green initiatives and grants for farming and rural businesses, plus encouraging joining or setting up oil clubs, sourcing renewable energy alternatives and working in partnership with CAB and RCCE.</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Anita Norgett | <p>1. Customer Service Centre deals with all queries relating to BDC and all its residents.</p> <p>2. Witham and Halstead Libraries provide support for the more northern and southern parts of the District.</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Colin Batchelor | <p>1. The services provided by the Housing & Pollution team are primarily statutory functions which must be provided across the district and we do not differentiate between rural or urban areas.</p> <p>Pollution services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise • Air quality • Water sampling and testing • Asbestos advice • Food safety <p>Housing services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying for housing • Housing advice • Domestic abuse • Empty homes • Homelessness • Private landlords and tenants |

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| | <p>2. None</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Andrew Epsom | <p>1. Asset Management manages and maintains the Council's property assets and provides specialist advice and support to services within the Council in respect of property related issues. Asset Management leases out a large number of industrial, shop, commercial and community facilities across the District, however most of these properties are situated in Braintree, Witham, Halstead and Sible Hedingham. We do not have a lot to do in the rural areas.</p> <p>2. Not applicable</p> <p>3. Not applicable</p> <p>4. How can your services be better provided or adapted to rural areas with your current resources? We are not aware of any requirement for our services within the rural areas but any additional work will require additional resources.</p> |
| Juli Rigby | <p>1. Statutory requirement to deliver Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support to residents of the district. However we do provide an electronic service to all, to improve access to rural areas. Witham and Halstead Libraries provide a Verification service on behalf of the service – this could be increased to include additional libraries across the district?</p> <p>2. Benefits Visiting Officer available to assist housebound customers and those in the rural areas without access to public transport links.</p> <p>3. None</p> |
| Emma Goodings | <p>1. Planning policy and work on producing the statutory development plans are District wide services</p> <p>2. Engagement with individual parishes, towns or areas will depend on local planning and development issues</p> <p>3. No</p> |
| Tessa Lambert | <p>1. The determination of planning applications and tree/hedgerow applications are statutory functions which must be provided across the entire District. The provision of the planning enforcement service is also District-wide. The maintenance of trees on Council-owned land is a function that applies across the District but is probably more focussed in urban areas as this is where most of the Council-owned land is located.</p> <p>2. None</p> <p>3. None</p> <p>4. How can your services be better provided or adapted to rural areas with your current resources? On the follow-up question - I don't think the Development Management service could be adapted to provide a different level of service to rural areas within current resources.</p> |


APPENDIX 2



Presentation to
Rural Services Task & Finish Group
27 January 2014


Rural Services provided by BDC Operations

Making a Difference



- 28,000 properties (44.50%) receive a refuse and recycling collection
- 2.2 million clear recycling sacks delivered to households
- 1,535 properties on a black sack collection
- Trade Waste: New trade waste recycling service for rural businesses to be introduced from February 2015
- Over 100 Recycling Bring Banks provided
- 50+ Parish Councils signed up for the Street Cleansing Partnership – annual budget £61k
- 9 play areas owned and maintained by BDC (includes 6 refurbished since 2009)

Making a Difference



- 4 sports pitches
- Over 1300 litter and dog bins
- 69 allotment plots at 5 different sites
- Mechanical sweeping of road channels 4 times a year
- Removal of fly tipping
- Collection of bulky household waste
- Provision of amenity refuse vehicle (on request)
- Parish grounds maintenance service
- Highway Rangers
- Grounds maintenance service for schools

Making a Difference

APPENDIX 3

Rural Services T&F – ‘Rural Communication’ Initial Findings

(By Councillors M Banthorpe, M Fincken and L Bowers-Flint)

Parish Clerks were emailed and asked:

- 1. In what ways do you think the District Council can improve its communication with the Rural Areas, including Parish Councils?*
- 2. What do you think is the most effective way that the District Council can consult with Parish Councils?*
- 3. What method does your Parish use to communicate with its residents? Please give details, including those of any Parish or Church publications you may use.*

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| Steeple Bumpstead (June Argent) | <p>1) The best and only method in Steeple Bumpstead is by writing something for our village magazine which is published every 2 months as long as it is short and to the point and relevant to the residents of Steeple Bumpstead (people here are not interested in what is happening in Braintree, Halstead or Witham etc). As a Parish Council I think we receive more than enough information about what is going on at BDC.</p> <p>2) Keep the regular emails coming.</p> <p>3) We have a regular slot in the 'Yellow Book', our village magazine editor@sb-yellowbook.org and post information on the PC website www.steeplebumpstead-pc.co.uk. Occasionally we print and deliver leaflets to all households in the village. We also post notices on four village noticeboards.</p> |
| Castle Hedingham (Claire Waters) | <p>1) The Parish Council is concerned that the loss of one or two of our District Councillors following the Boundaries Review will have a negative effect on our communication with the District Council. We are currently fortunate with our three District Councillors – Wendy Scattergood, Jo Beavis and Hylton Johnson, who regularly make the effort to attend Parish Council meetings. Each of them has their own areas of interest and expertise and all of them have been a great support to the Parish Council on different issues, whether it be planning, finance, crime etc. It is too early to say what effect the change in boundaries will have on our communication with the District Council in this respect.</p> <p>2) By e-mail via the Parish Clerk works well, as long as the objective of the consultation is clearly stated in the communication. As a part time Parish Clerk I have a lot of emails to deal with and so limited time</p> |

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| | <p>to spend on proof reading every document to decide whether it is relevant to forward on to Parish Councillors or to include as a meeting agenda item. I am also aware that if I inundate my Councillors with emails they will suffer an overload which would almost certainly mean that important items are missed. Therefore, a system used by all Council departments which clearly flags up to the Parish Clerk what needs to be done and by when would be most helpful.</p> <p>Also, I am sure Castle Hedingham is not alone in having Parish Councillors who differ very widely in terms of their IT skills. We still print Planning Applications and similar important documents to circulate to members, because one member does not have internet access, some members lack confidence and skills in accessing documents online and some members are simply unused to taking in information from a complex document unless it is in printed hard-copy form. Therefore although it would theoretically be great to do everything by email or online, this is simply not feasible yet.</p> <p>3) Methods to communicate with residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Noticeboards • Parish Magazine (monthly) • Website www.castlehedingham.org contains monthly agendas, minutes, news, events and other information • Door to door leaflet drops for important issues e.g. annual parish newsletter, community engagement meetings. • Posters in local shops, coffee shops, pubs and doctors surgery • Word of mouth. • Written letters by post or emails in response to specific issues • Monthly press release to Halstead Gazette, Neighbourhood News, The Higgle. |
| Helions Bumpstead (Tony Evans) | <p>1) Our District Councillor, Chris Cadman, attends the majority of my Council's meetings and supports the Council when he can. He provides reports at these meetings giving valuable information. Communication should be in both directions and it appears that there does not seem to be a process by which issues are regularly fed back and considered by BDC. A good example of this is the lack of support my Council has been offered by BDC for the provision of superfast broadband to our area. This is possibly the most significant issue within our community given the lack of any commitment by Essex County Council or BT as to when (if ever) superfast broadband will be available in Helions Bumpstead. It would appear that BDC does not want to listen and provide any form of support in resolving this issue –</p> |

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| | <p>financially or otherwise.</p> <p>2) BDC should give rural parish councils the opportunity to be consulted by issuing formal requests for comments on a particular subject. BDC should also utilise district councillors and officers more effectively to proactively meet with parish councils in order to gain a greater understanding of rural needs and issues and to provide feedback. This has been demonstrated when my Council was consulted on the Local Development Framework.</p> <p>3) My council publishes a quarterly magazine free of charge to local residents. The Clerk and Councillors' contact details are published in the village magazine. The Clerk is available to discuss issues in the Village Hall office at regular times during the week. My Council holds an extensive list of residents' email addresses which is used to communicate specific messages. My Council has a website which is used to publish Council and other events as well as publishing the minutes of Council meetings. My Council hosts the Annual Parish Assembly when residents are encouraged to ask questions about the work of my Council as well as the District and County Councils. My Council publishes a calendar which publicises community events throughout the year.</p> |
| Bures Hamlet (Jenny Wright) | <p>1) Communication with rural communities - via local press and public surgeries in the villages.</p> <p>2) Communication and consultation with parish councils - via email or via meetings</p> <p>3) Parish communication - via parish magazine (run by St Mary parish church), noticeboards and local facilities e.g. pubs, shops and post office</p> |
| Great Sailing & Shalford (Cathryn Carlisle) | <p>1) I'm not sure how you can improve the communication much better than you already do.</p> <p>2) Any email I receive from either BDC or ECC that is related to our area or of interest to councillors I pass on via email.</p> <p>3) For Shalford we mainly use the parish web site. At Great Saling we do put things in the parish mag.</p> |
| Panfield (Jean Simmons) | <p>1) Panfield Parish Council receives excellent communication from their District Councillor, Cllr Peter Tattersley, who always keeps us abreast of developments and gives us feedback from various</p> |

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| | <p>committees, and, if we wish to find out information, seeks out the relevant BDC personnel for us. Braintree District Council could improve its communication with the Rural Areas by using Parish websites (regular updates sent to website managers – sometimes not the Parish Clerk), sending Parish Clerks a regularly-updated list of contact personnel for various departments – Clean Team, Local Highways Panel, Trees, Health & Safety, Legal matters, planning, invoicing etc... The use of posters is limited – space on Parish Council notice boards is usually not generous, and many people just do not read notice boards.</p> <p>Parish Councils would also be helped if BDC noted when the majority of Parish Council meetings are held (mostly the first or second Monday or Tuesday of each month – and many not in August) and sent out information in good time to be put on agendas, especially if a response from the Parish Council is required.</p> <p>2) See above – make sure consultation documents have a deadline which is realistic bearing in mind the once-a-month meetings; I often receive consultations (e.g. planning) which have a deadline before the next Parish Council meeting – we usually receive an extension of the deadline when I point this out, but it does make more work for Clerks having to do this constantly.</p> <p>Using District Councillors attending Parish Council meetings is most effective, as the District Councillor is on hand at the Parish Council meeting to answer questions. This would mean that meetings at BDC involving District Councillors do not coincide with meetings of the Parish Councils of which they are Members. If this cannot be avoided, then another member of BDC personnel attending Parish Council meetings would be a very acceptable alternative. I also feel that people attending a meeting where the subject of the consultation is discussed can gain a much clearer picture of the feelings of Parish Councils than just sending a questionnaire.</p> <p>3) Panfield Parish Council communicates with its residents via the bi-monthly Parish Magazine (delivered to every household in the village, produced by the Community Association and includes the Church Outreach), which is also published on the Panfield website. The Chairman of the Parish Council contributes a summary of the Parish Council's work and future plans, and an update on on-going matters to each magazine. We also use the Parish Council notice board and a dedicated Parish Council notice board in the village pub.</p> <p>A Member of Panfield Parish Council attends Panfield Community Association meetings, and vice-versa. We have also recently communicated with our residents via a questionnaire for the Village Design Statement (feedback from which was put on our website and in the Parish Magazine), and meetings for residents to give their views and opinions and to see the progress of the VDS were held in the village hall.</p> |
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| | <p>We also send out personalised invitations to all the groups and clubs in the village, the Church, BDC and ECC representatives and the Police for the Annual Parish Assembly. This is usually quite well attended. Every January we hold a meeting in the pub for groups, clubs, the Community Association, the Church, the Parish Council and the Pub to discuss dates for forthcoming village events so that events don't coincide with each other.</p> |
| <p>Great Notley (Suzanne Walker)</p> | <p>1) It is generally felt that the current method of email communication and occasional hard copy letters does the job!</p> <p>2) Depending on the complexity of the issue either by holding a meeting if the issue is complex or if less complex by contacting the clerk by email who can raise the issue with Councillors</p> <p>3) Great Notley Parish Council communicates with its residents predominantly through the quarterly magazine the Great Notley Times which appears to be well read by parishioners. Information is also placed on the four noticeboards and on the Parish Council website. On occasion public meetings have also been held. In addition depending on the particular issue information has been disseminated by the two schools and the local church.</p> |
| <p>Sturmer (David Porth)</p> | <p>1) By holding regular group or cluster meetings with parishes in similar areas.</p> <p>2) By written communications – many parish council members are not online and may miss out on important information.</p> <p>3) Village newsletter articles written by members of the parish council, quarterly. Word of mouth and public meetings. Every parish council meeting has an 'open forum' section in which parishioners' questions are invited. Also the annual parish meeting is notified to every household.</p> |
| <p>Hatfield Peverel (Lisa Miller)</p> | <p>1) To realise that Parish Councils are volunteers and Parish Clerks work part time and that two or three days notice to disseminate info and expect a sensible response is probably not going to happen.</p> <p>2) E-mail is the best way to communicate with hyperlinks to the relevant topic in question. Referring residents and Parish Councillors to the main BDC website is not helpful - Planning is a good example as unless you understand their system there is no way any non-council person would ever find what they were looking for.</p> |

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| | <p>3) Bi-monthly newsletter, funded by the Parish Council, is the most effective method of parish communication but costs are high circa £7,500 annually and it takes a large chunk from our precept. However, it works and is proven to work and will remain as it is an accepted part of the village life and history. There is a nucleus of villagers who provide the information, assemble it, arrange printing and collection and deliver it. It glues the village together. The churches and clubs contribute to it. It is a hard copy - it does not need technology, wires, electricity, plugs etc and can be read anywhere, anytime and conforms to the KISS principle.</p> |
| Feering (Martique Freathy) | <p>1) District Councillors should attend Parish Council Meetings (which they currently do) and provide a paper report in advance of the meeting for the Clerk to circulate to Councillors</p> <p>2) As above</p> <p>3) Methods the Paris uses to communicate with its residents include the website, Parish Magazine, provision of an Annual Report at the Annual Assembly, use of noticeboard and the local press.</p> |
| Great Maplestead (Ann Crisp) | <p>1) Ensure a consistent and timely approach to all communication. At times communication channels on long term projects can falter i.e. if a project is delayed or a proposed timescale changes it would be good to get this communicated, without the need for parishioners or councils to chase. A lack of information can lead to wrong conclusions being drawn and may adversely affect reputations.</p> <p>E-mails in general are the best form of communication and they can be easily shared with others where appropriate. Maybe a weekly newsletter e-mailed to parish councils could be an option for providing updates and breaking news. Other organisations use these to good effect i.e. keep the messages short and to the point.</p> <p>2) The most effective way of communicating key messages is via representation of District Councillors at Parish Council meetings, visibility and accountability are key.</p> <p>3) Great Maplestead PC communicates with parishioners via its own website, articles in the local Parish News, and village noticeboards. The majority of Councillors are also very active within the community and speak with parishioners regularly at fund raising/social events. Again visibility and accountability.</p> |
| Sible Hedingham and Little | <p>1) I cannot suggest any way in which communications can be improved.</p> |

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| <p>Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington (Adrian Corder-Birch)</p> | <p>2) By email, because it is the quickest way of communicating and as Clerk I can easily forward emails to Councillors.</p> <p>3) Both Parish Councils communicate with residents through Parish Magazines and notice boards. Sometimes Sible Hedingham Parish Council produces an additional newsletter of its own, which Councillors deliver to every household. In addition, where relevant, I also communicate with residents by letter, email, telephone and personal visit. Sible Hedingham is fortunate in having an office where residents regularly visit me and from where I can provide services to help residents. This includes distribution of various leaflets, footpath maps, dog poo bags (although we now have to buy these since BDC discontinued supplying them), recycling sacks, etc., etc.,</p> <p>Incidentally, although you have not asked the question there is one area where the very small rural parishes in the north of the district require help. That is to clear rural roads with a snow plough in bad weather. I appreciate that this is an ECC function rather than BDC but if BDC can persuade ECC to clear the roads to all villages it would be appreciated. This is the one service which the residents of some of the very small and isolated villages have asked for.</p> <p>If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to let me know.</p> |
| <p>Borley Parish Meeting (Mrs Charlie Hamp)</p> | <p>Borley is tiny, we have 48 houses and approximately 90 people on the electoral role and we are a Parish Meeting not a Parish Council but we operate in more or less the same way with two meetings a year.</p> <p>In response to your three questions:</p> <p>Braintree used to have a Small Parish Liaison / Coordinator, this worked very well. If there was <i>one person</i> who we could call on who knew all the information that was relevant to small (i.e. less than 500) parishes it would help. As a voluntary clerk looking after a tiny parish I get a great deal of information that is not relevant to us and often do not know who to go to at BDC for advice.</p> <p>So the answer from us is.....</p> <p>1) Employ somebody at BDC who is a <i>Small Parish Liaison Contact</i> so we can be in email / phone communication with this person.</p> <p>2) As above – this person sends/emails us all BDC information that is relevant to the Parish.</p> |

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| | <p>3) We have been communicating with our residents by sending out flyers / leaflets to everybody (very time consuming) and obviously in a village this size actually speaking to people.... but we are slowly moving over to email and hope to have a small website set up soon. There is a Parish Magazine that covers our village as well as a three others (Pentlow, Foxearth and Liston) so 'event's' get advertised there.</p> |
| <p>Rayne (Sarah Cocks)</p> | <p>1) I would like to see the resurrection of parish cluster meetings which faded away some years ago I believe. Being a parish clerk is quite an isolated job and it would be good to meet with colleagues on a regular basis not just through training courses or via email!</p> <p>2) The most cost effective and speedy way of consulting with Parish Councils has to be via email unless there is a bigger issue in which case it would be better to meet face to face but this depends on individual circumstances. We also appreciate your attendance at our monthly Parish Council meetings as you are very good at informing us about any relevant issues.</p> <p>3) We have a monthly parish magazine, called Rayne in Focus to which I contribute a report which is a summary of the monthly Parish Council meeting plus any other items of interest to villagers. We also have an email circulation list which villagers can opt in to for circulating useful information. Lastly there is a Facebook page for both the Parish Council and village as a whole - I am an administrator for both.</p> |
| <p>Earls Colne (Val Holmes on behalf of J Bendall, Chairman)</p> | <p>1) By concentrating on being a District Council and not a Town Council. By keeping the Parishes informed of current issues being considered by the District Council and given the opportunity to comment.</p> <p>2) To ensure that the District Council communicate with Parish Councils on matters of importance and giving the Parish Council a reasonable time to comment. Ensuring that information is available via email, website and Facebook, etc.</p> <p>3) The Parish Council has a website, produces an Annual Report, has a Facebook account and publishes information in the local free press.</p> |
| <p>Great Bardfield and Finchingfield (Kate Fox)</p> | <p>1) We think BDC do a pretty good job! However there is a lot of reliance on e mail communication nowadays which is obviously cost effective but not always user friendly. Hard copies of documents regarding consultation and changes and posters for parish notice boards would be a good thing. Downloading large documents can be very onerous for parish councils.</p> |

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| | <p>2) Parish Forums/Network meetings, especially when there have been significant policy changes, have been useful in the past and should be encouraged. It is appreciated that there is little point in organising such events when there is nothing new to impart but a useful platform when appropriate.</p> <p>3) Great Bardfield PC produces a monthly report delivered (free to every household) within the Bardfield Times village magazine - likewise Finchingfield Parish Council - use The Villager. This proves to be one of the best ways to update residents on the work of the PC and District and County Councils as well as general parish news. In addition we have notice boards throughout the parishes which is why well produced (A4) posters that do not carry too much text (which people do not have time to stop and read) are very useful. In Great Bardfield we also have a Community Facebook Page which is obviously not run by the PC but is used as an additional means of informing residents. Both parishes have their own websites for publishing Minutes and other documents as well as details of local businesses etc.</p> |
| Halstead (Mike Murkin) | <p>1) Improve communications – generally communications between BDC and HTC seem good. Email has speeded up contact and replies to questions seem to come back quickly. Planning applications still give us some issues – mainly of access to the applications on-line. These include a) only being able to see plans on a small screen, b) not having access to large scale paper plans, & c) 2 councillors who do not have computer access.</p> <p>2) Effective way to communicate – email is quick and efficient, but can put a burden on local councils if access to multi-page reports entails extra printing costs i.e. for councillors who do not have computer access or who still prefer to read reports on paper.</p> <p>3) Communicate with residents – currently we rely on the Annual Town Meeting and the Mayor's monthly column in the local free paper (Neighbourhood News). We are considering a newsletter to go to all residents in advance of the Annual Town Meeting.</p> |
| Cressing (Anna Tame) | <p>1) I think communication is quite good at present</p> <p>2) Via email for most things but attendance at Parish Council meetings for particularly important issues would be very effective if time permitted</p> <p>3) Cressing Parish Council uses a number of methods including: Cressing Parish Council website, Facebook page, Twitter, x2 notice boards in the village and via the Cressing Community Magazine (in</p> |

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| | conjunction with the church) |
| Alphamstone and Lamarsh (Angus Goody) | <p>1) I'm also clerk at Mount Bures which comes under Colchester Borough Council. They hold a Clerks meeting every quarter at varying times so that most clerks can get to at least ½ meetings per year. Clerks are able to add items to the agenda that are currently affecting the community and it allows the Borough Council to update Clerks with important information, with speakers from the B Council i.e. Local Gov Boundary Commission changes. Braintree DC seem to be missing a great way of communicating by not offering this service.</p> <p>3) Noticeboards, but probably more effective is the parish newsletter which covers around 6 small parishes in N>Essex. It tends to go out to most residents. All the clerks send in details, including anything important via Braintree DC.</p> |
| Wethersfield Parish Council (John Sheldrake) | <p>1) BDC could improve communications by resurrecting the Three Fields meetings which were considered of value, in that we met our local councillors regularly, and they had a three parish audience to address.</p> <p>2) As above!</p> <p>3) We have a website and a church magazine (limited circulation).</p> |

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| Reference from Overview & Scrutiny Committee - Task and Finish Group | | Agenda No: 11 |
| Scrutiny Review of the Operation of the Councils Local Council Tax Support Scheme. | | |
| | | |
| Corporate Priority: | People feel good – Supporting vulnerable people in our community, Promoting safe and healthy living, Encouraging flourishing communities Building a prosperous district – Boost employment skills and support businesses, Providing value for money, Delivering excellent customer service. | |
| Report presented by: | Cllr Cunningham Chairman, of Task and Finish Group | |
| Report prepared by: | Emma Wisbey, Governance and Member Manager | |
| | | |
| Background Papers: | Public Report | |
| Report and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 4 th June 2014 | | |
| | | |
| Decision | | |
| 1. To receive the report of the Task and Finish Group and consider the recommendations of the scrutiny review. | | |
| 2. To refer the Report to Cabinet for a response. | | |
| | | |

Task and Finish Group Report

Scrutiny Review of the First Six Months Operation of the Council Tax Support Scheme

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Local government has had to face fundamental changes in how it collects Council Tax collection policy. This scrutiny report seeks to understand and assess the first six months of implementation in line with the following terms of reference:
- 1.2 To review the first six months of the operation of the Council Tax Support Scheme covering:-

Details of the scheme introduced and comparison with other Essex authorities schemes;

The impact on and the number of people affected by minority grouping;

The cost of the scheme and the impact on the Council Tax collection rate;

Use of the Exceptional Hardship Fund;

Public feedback on the changes;

Funding of the scheme in the future.

2. HOW THE REVIEW WAS CARRIED OUT

- 2.1 The Task and Finish Group met four times between November 2013 and May 2014. Discussions were had with representatives from the Citizens Advice Bureau and Greenfields Community Housing. The Task and Finish Group perused its remit broadly giving due attention to both residency qualification and discretionary housing payments.

2.2 Findings:

2.2.1 Citizens Advice Bureau:

In attendance: Mr. Laurence Duncan, Chairman, and Ms. Caroline Halfacre, Money Advisor, from the CAB.

- a) As of November 2013 there have been three appeals to the Valuation Tribunal against the Council's Local Council Tax Scheme (LCTS): in all three cases the Council's position has been upheld.
- b) Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has found that due to the increase in benefit changes the client cases have been more complex, therefore increasing its workload.
- c) Circulated statistics of referrals from BDC and Greenfields with the figures of clients recommended for hardship payment.
- d) The average cost of hardship payment per applicant is £220 based on the 41 recommendations from the CAB.
- e) Concern was expressed regarding clients who have mental health issues as this can be very difficult to get them to complete the Debt information pack. CAB estimate that a quarter of all the claimants referred have mental health issues.
- f) CAB has turned away clients at busy times. Some do come back for advice however, some of the others seek their own solution e.g. have taken out payday loans to resolve their immediate debt problems causing more problems for the future.
- g) The increase in non-dependant charges along with paying 20% of the Council Tax is causing hardship. At least 20% are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA); however, many of these are not entitled to a hardship payment as the financial assessment shows that they have surplus income available to meet the council tax liability.
- h) Some residents were having to choose between paying council tax and forgoing other high personal expenditure such as SKY TV.
- i) CAB stated that the publicity work BDC did before LCTS was implemented had helped and therefore in their opinion the impact of LCTS had been less challenging than originally thought.
- j) The working partnership between CAB and BDC is working well and the

- relationship with the Council Tax recovery section was much improved.
- k) CAB, stated that they have higher demand than they can manage and have concerns that some of the CAB's funding is being withdrawn. The budget for the CAB in this district for £250,000, of which approximately 67% is for staffing costs. The money advice service level agreement operates until 31st March 2015.

2.2.2 Discretionary Housing Payments:

- a) The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) decisions are based on the good practice guide. The grant received from the Government for DHP's in this year is £199,001. It is anticipated that a similar figure will be provided for 2014/15.
- b) DHP has also been used to help with rent deposits and rent in advance.

2.2.3 Greenfields Community Housing:

In attendance: Carlo Sicheri, Welfare Benefits Advisor for Greenfields Community Housing.

- a) Greenfields Community Housing (GCH) attended the meeting to give feedback on the impact of the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme has had on the debt problems for its tenants.
- b) GCH reported that the level of arrears has not increased significantly since LCTS has been introduced.
- c) GCH commented that the DHP's had been extremely useful as a safety net but questioned what would happen if the Government withdrew the funding of these payments.
- d) DHP's are available to help support tenants with rent charges, thereby increasing their available income which in turn can help them to meet their Council Tax liability.
- e) Some tenants have taken out payday loans to avoid court summons, Carlo highlighted that they have seen financial abuse/ domestic violence cases rise due to debt problems.
- f) GCH considered Braintree's LCTS Policy to be one of the best in Essex as the scheme is more generous than the other schemes introduced by other authorities.
- g) Within GCH the Welfare Advisor service receives referrals from the Income Team when they identify rent arrears and/or benefit changes or delays. Changes and delays included the time taken by the Department for Work and Pensions to undertake Personal Independence Payment assessments and sanctions being applied to the claimant's benefit(s). They also receive requests directly from their tenants' asking for assistance.
- h) GCH have a good working relationship with BDC Benefits when dealing with all debt/benefit issues, which provides the customer with the best advice and support available.

2.2.4 **Non-Dependant Charge:**

- a) BDC current scheme allows for those claimants in receipt of DLA and PIP, to be exempt from any non-dependant deduction from their Council Tax Support award.
- b) The cost of removing the current £10.00 per week non-dependant deduction for those non dependants in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Income Support (IS), is estimated to be £325,520. Members considered that the very high cost involved, and the very limited issues which have arisen in respect of the £10.00 charge, the good communication and procedures already implemented including the employment of a temporary Collections Support Officer and the Exceptional Hardship Fund did not warrant any changes at present to the non-dependant charges.

2.2.5 **Residency Criteria:**

- a) Whilst no further information had been received from Tendring District Council concerning the operation of its residency criteria in 2013/14, Members received a copy the residency criteria which Basildon Borough Council is introducing as part of its LCTS scheme for 2014/15. Members discussed the criteria which although requiring residency in the borough of 7 years for new claimants has a number of exemptions to ensure vulnerable groups are protected. Members considered that the demographics of the two councils with this criterion are different from Braintree district and therefore would not be recommending the inclusion of residency criteria for 2015/16.

2.2.6 **Analysis of Recovery Action – Council Tax payers:**

- a) Members were presented details of the recovery action of Council Tax payers over the last five years. The Collections Support Officer attends Court to offer help to those council tax payers with debt problems and to seek to make arrangements to pay therefore reducing the court costs if agreed.
- b) From April 2014, the Council will increase its efforts at recovery action prior to council tax debts being referred to Enforcement Agents (formerly Bailiffs) due to increased costs, prescribed by the Ministry for Justice, for this recovery action.

3. Conclusive Findings:

- a) Recognition that the joint working between Greenfields/BDC and the service level agreement with the CAB are both working particularly well;
- b) The impact of the new LCTS scheme has been minimised due to:
 - Early communications with claimants of the changes and potential impact on them before 1st April 2013;
 - The money advice service level agreement with the CAB and the Exceptional Hardship Fund, both funded by the major precepting authorities;
 - The employment of the temporary Collections Support Officer also funded by the major precepting authorities;
- c) Considered whether changes to the LCTS scheme, in particular regarding residency criteria and non-dependant charges, should be proposed for 2015/16 but determined no changes would be recommended.
- d) The variance rate in collections between 2012/13 and 2013/14 is minimal.

4. Recommendations:

- a) **The joint working between Greenfields/BDC should be replicated with all social housing providers in the district, as and where appropriate;**
- b) **A Cost/Benefit analysis for Collections Support Officer, Money Advice service level agreement with the CAB and Exceptional Hardship Fund is undertaken early in the new financial year as part of the budgetary process for 2015/16.**

List of Appendices

- 1 Council Tax Collection Rates 2013/14
- 2 Exceptional Hardship Fund as of November 2013
- 3 Discretionary Housing Payments
- 4 Local Council Tax Support – Essex Schemes 2013/14 & 2014/15

Council Tax Collection Rates 2013/14

In year collection rates i.e. excludes monies collected toward arrears in previous years.

| | Percentage collected 2013/14 | Percentage collected 2012/13 | Variance |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| October | 68.81% | 69.37% | -0.56% |
| September | 59.36% | 59.75% | -0.39% |
| August | 49.59% | 50.05% | -0.46% |
| July | 40.11% | 40.48% | -0.37% |
| June | 30.60% | 30.93% | -0.33% |
| May | 21.32% | 21.63% | -0.31% |
| April | 11.37% | 11.62% | -0.25% |

In year collection rate for 2012/13 was 98.63%

Allowance for losses in 2012/13 was 0.5% i.e. council taxbase was set at 99.5%.

Expect to collect 0.87% in future years regarding 2012/13 council tax.

However in recent years the amount actually written off/bad debt provision has been approximately 0.3%.

Allowance for losses in 2013/14 was 1.5% i.e. council taxbase was set at 98.5%.

Expect to collect 0.43% in future years regarding 2013/14 council tax. (98.5% - (98.63% -0.56%))

Exceptional Hardship Fund as of November 2013

Total number of Referrals to Citizens Advice Bureau: 99

Currently With CAB: 24

Returned to BDC: 34

Hardship Cases: 41

Requests for Hardship Funding: 43

Agreed: 41

Awaiting Agreement: 2

Total of Value of Awards: £9,091.59

Analysis of Returned Cases from CAB: 34

PAID up to date: 15

Not paying: 14

- 2 Pre Summons
- 1 Summons
- 5 Liability Orders
- 3 Bailiffs Pending
- 1 With Bailiffs
- 2 Attachments to Benefits

Paying however in arrears: 5

- £673.99 total – No Arrears - Special Arrangement set up £83.00 per month
- £249.00 total - £15.00 in arrears – At summons Stage as special arrangement not being adhered to.
- £286.80 total – £35.00 in arrears – At Summons as November payment not made in full.
- £664.63 total - £10.00 in arrears – on special arrangements for £10.00 per week.
- £561.78 total – No Arrears – New Payment Plan recently agreed for £168.00 per month however payments are usually only £40.00 per month.

Total Cases which have not been referred to CAB: 25

(Due to payment plans being set up or declining to be referred to the CAB)

PAID up to date: 19

Not Paying: 5

- 1 Pre Summons
- 1 Liability Order
- 1 Bailiffs Pending
- 1 With Bailiffs
- 1 Attachment to benefits

Paying however in arrears: 1

- £80.00 total – No Arrears – New arrangement recently made. To date payments are being made.

Braintree District Council
Discretionary Housing Payments

Policy

This policy will be reviewed yearly.

Introduction

The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Scheme is designed to help people who need additional financial help with their rental payments.

It is extra money that the Council can pay on top of the claimant's normal Housing Benefit (HB) award if it considers that they need extra help. The main principles of the scheme are:

- The claimant has no statutory right to a payment
- The scheme is discretionary
- All applications must be treated on their own merit
- The scheme is administered by Braintree District Council
- The level of payment will be decided by the Council and administered via the HB system
- DHP is not a payment of HB and as such is not subject to the statutory appeals mechanisms. However, the authority does have a review process and further information can be found within the Review section of this policy
- The DHP is seen as short-term emergency assistance in cases of exceptional hardship.
- The Council has the right to amend, suspend or cancel DHP when necessary or appropriate
- Total amount payable in any financial year is cash limited and therefore applications cannot be progressed once the funding is fully utilised within that year.

This fund will be cash limited and all cases will be considered on a case by case basis.

Purpose of the DHP

The purpose is to:

- Prevent homelessness
- Alleviate poverty
- Safeguard residents in their home
- Help claimants through personal crises and difficult events

How to claim

- The DHP application form must be completed. The claim must contain sufficient evidence/information to enable the local authority to get a balanced view of the claimant's situation and circumstances.

The DHP form requests the following:

- Reasons why financial assistance is required
- A declaration that the information given is correct
- Authorisation for Braintree District Council to verify information given
- A declaration that the claimant will repay any overpayment
- Additional evidence may also be requested. If needed this must be provided within one month of the request date.

Who can complete a request for DHP

Braintree District Council will accept claims from:

- Claimants
- Appointees
- Another person acting on the claimant's behalf such as a relative or social worker. The claimant, however, must countersign the claim
- Supportive departments and other organisations, i.e. Housing Options Team at Braintree District Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, Support Workers.

Who can claim?

Claimants can be considered for DHP if:

- they are already receiving Housing Benefit (HB)

- **and** they get less than the full Housing Benefit due on their home
- **and** they need further financial assistance with their rental liability

Claimants will **not** be considered for DHP if:

- They are not entitled to HB

What types of shortfalls can DHP's cover?

Braintree District Council will give priority to cases to safeguard individuals and families living in the community and contribute to preventing homelessness.

The type of cases that may be eligible for a DHP subject to available funding and taking into account that awards of DHP are **SHORT TERM** only, include:

- Shortfall in Housing Benefit due to a non dependant deduction being taken.
- Shortfall in Housing Benefit due to scheme restrictions.
- Claimants receiving medical care or expenses occurred because of a medical condition. Consider the claimant's circumstances and extra cost she/he has to pay because of illness. The department reserves the right to seek advice from occupational therapy, social worker and any other professional body.

Each case that meets the overall scheme objectives will be considered on its merits. Please note that an award for a DHP is short term only.

The following guidelines should be used to assess each case:

- Any social or health problems currently being faced by the claimant and/or their family and do they cause the claimant extra financial costs?
- Age should be considered in relation to other factors in the case.
- Any income and expenditure of the household excluding the joint tenant
- Disregarded income if claimant is working. It is reasonable to expect them to use their disregarded income towards their shortfall
- Is there danger of eviction and homelessness?
- Any savings or capital that might be held by the household
- Priority debt, which the claimant has incurred
- What is likely to happen to the family if a DHP is not awarded?
- Are there any other fund/funding schemes available via Benevolent funds or charitable organisations that would be appropriate to use instead of a DHP.

The Council will not make any allowance for the following:

- Any loss resulting from the claimant's failure or delay in claiming any income to which they are entitled
- Any debt arising from an overpayment/arrears of Housing Benefit.
- Any debt, which, in the opinion of the Council arises from the financial imprudence of the claimant.

DHP decision

There are several possible outcomes of a DHP application:

- DHP refused
- DHP awarded in full
- DHP awarded in part i.e. less DHP paid than requested or paid for a shorter period
- Further information required

Notification details

Braintree District Council will notify the claimant of the decision. If awarded, the notification advising them they have been successful will specify:

- Period of the DHP award
- Weekly amount of DHP
- The right of the claimant to ask for a review of the award and the time and manner of doing so
- The right of the LA to amend suspend or cancel a DHP when deemed necessary or appropriate.

Start dates

The start date of the DHP payment will normally be from the Monday following the date the written request was received. If a claim is received at the same time as an HB claim the start date of the DHP can be matched to the start of HB award.

Length of award

- The end of the financial year
- To the end of the current tenancy agreement
- To tie in with an expected change in circumstance, i.e. baby due date.
- A date considered reasonable given the circumstances of the case
- The end date of the benefit entitlement.

When considering a DHP claim it should be taken into account that the DHP scheme should in most cases be seen as a short-term emergency fund. Claimants must be made aware that they must seek advice with regard to their housing needs and ways to manage financially in the long term. DHP cannot be paid indefinitely.

Payments

DHP's will be paid with the award of Housing Benefit

Change in circumstance

Claimants must report, in writing, any change in circumstance that might affect the amount of DHP they get. Examples of these changes include:

- If they change address
- If they leave their home temporarily
- If their income changes
- If the household make up changes

Overpayments

The Council may seek recovery of an overpaid DHP in certain circumstances:

- Misrepresentation or failure to disclose a material fact, fraudulently or otherwise
- An error made when the claim was determined

Reviews

Claimants can request a review of DHP decisions. They must do this in writing within one month of the date they are notified of the decision. The claimant (or appointee) must sign the review request letter.

Late requests will be considered at the discretion of the appropriate Officer where she/he considers that there were good reasons for the delay.

If a review is requested regarding the decision this will be looked at by the Head of Finance who will then determine the final decision.

NOTE: the member of staff cannot have an invested interest (related or by service provision)

Once the review has been completed, the Officer will write to the claimant informing them of the decision within one week.

The claimant has no further right of review against this decision.

Local Council Tax Support – Essex Schemes 2013/14 & 2014/15 Proposed

| <u>Authority</u> | | <u>Negative changes</u> | <u>Positive changes</u> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| Braintree | <i>No change</i> | Based on liability of 80% Non-dependant deductions increased to £10 Child Benefit for 2 nd child + taken into account Second Adult Rebate removed Band D restriction | Earnings disregard increased to £40 per week Capital limit retained at £16,000 |
| Colchester | <i>No change</i> | Based on liability of 80% Non-dependant deductions increased to £10 (except ESA/IS) Child Benefit counted in full Second Adult Rebate removed Band D restriction Capital limit reduced to £6,000 | Earnings disregard increased to £25 per week |
| Chelmsford | | Based on liability of 80% <i>changed to 77%</i> Child Maintenance payments included (less £10) Non dependant deductions increased (between £6.60 & £14.85pwk) Second Adult Rebate removed Band D restriction Capital limit reduced to £6,000 Backdating reduced to 1 month | Earnings disregard increased by £10 per week |
| Maldon | <i>No change</i> | Based on liability of 80% Child Maintenance included in full Second Adult Rebate removed Band D restriction Capital limit reduced to £6,000 No Backdating Non-dependant deductions increased to £10 | |

| | | <u>Negative changes</u> | <u>Positive changes</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| Harlow | <i>No change</i> | Based on liability of 76% Second Adult Rebate removed Capital limit reduced to £6,000 | |
| Epping | <i>No change</i> | Based on liability of 80% Child Maintenance payments included (less £15) Minimum award of £0.50 per week Second Adult Rebate removed Band D restriction Capital limit reduced to £6,000 | |
| Rochford | <i>No change</i> | Based on liability of 80% Child Maintenance payments included in full Second Adult Rebate removed Band D restriction Capital limit reduced to £6,000 | No non-dependant deductions |
| Basildon | | Based on liability of 85% Band D restriction Non-dependant deductions increased to £10 Minimum payment of £5.00 per week | <i>changed to 80% and introduced a residency clause of 7 years</i> |
| Castle Point | <i>No change</i> | Based on liability of 70% Child Benefit payments included in full Second Adult Rebate removed Band D restriction Capital limit reduced to £6,000 No Backdating | No non dependant deductions Claimants on DLA not affected by changes |
| Uttlesford | | Based on liability of 91.5% Minimum award of £2.00 per week Second Adult Rebate removed | Claimants on DLA protected Earnings disregard increased to £25 per week |

Negative changes

Positive changes

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|-----------------|------------------|--|---|
| Tendring | No change | Based on liability of 90% Those on JSA for 3yrs+ - based on 65% liability 5 year residency clause ALL household income taken into account | Claimants on DLA or Carers Allowance, protected |
|-----------------|------------------|--|---|

Brentwood **No change** **3 different schemes introduced depending on the Working Age customers' circumstances.**

Enhanced Scheme Qualifies if in receipt of a: Disability Premium; Enhanced Disability Premium; Severe Disability Premium; Disability Premium for Dependants; Enhanced Disability Premium for Dependants; Disabled Earned Disregard; CT Disability Reduction; War Disablement Pension; War Widows Pension; Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Payment

- 100% maximum award including for residents in band f, h and h properties.
- 20 % taper
- No non-dependant deductions

Working Age Employed Scheme Qualifies if the claimant or partner is working an average of **more than** 16 hours per week
100% maximum award up to Band D. Maximum award will therefore be 100% of a Band D equivalent.

- No minimum contribution
- Band F, G and H owner occupiers are excluded.
- 15% taper
- Child Benefit and Maintenance now included & self-employed claimants may be subject to a minimum income floor
- No non-dependant deductions

Working Age Other Scheme This is the standard scheme for all those not meeting the qualifying conditions for the other Council Tax Support schemes

- Maximum award will be 80% of a Band D Council Tax
- 20% minimum contribution from all claimants
- Band F, G, H owners excluded
- Child benefit / Maintenance taken into account
- No non-dependant deduction

LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL

Agenda No: 12a

Report covers activity ending 14th June 2014

1. Haven Gateway Partnership – 7th April 2014

This meeting was held at the offices of Mid Suffolk District Council at Needham Market.

The Chairman, George Kieffer, highlighted the following parts of his report:

Stansted Airport

He had met with Andrew Harrison from Stansted Airport who confirmed that the Airport were keen to join the Partnership and were just deciding on who would be best to represent them on the Board. They had offered to host June's meeting.

University Enterprise Zones

He gave an update to the Board on the University Enterprise zones. £15m had been allocated to three or four zones. However, to save Universities and partners a lot of work, applications had been restricted to core city universities only which meant that the University of Essex were no longer able to apply for this funding.

SELEP

The governance structure was circulated to the board members. I thanked the Chairman for his work and effort on the governance structure of the SELEP.

It was noted that SELEP has recognised corridors for growth in its plan and the A120 has been noted as being a very important route because it unlocks so much growth.

A120/Enterprise Areas

The Chairman highlighted that it may not be possible to form an All Party Parliamentary Group for the project as Labour - with no MPs along the route- cannot be part of it.

As we are in the run up to an election and comprehensive spending review, it is a good time to promote our case. However, because of the amount of money needed we are competing with other heavy-weight transport schemes.

It was explained that the brief for the PR and lobbying had been agreed with

ECC and they had had informal discussions with five or six different lobbying companies.

It was suggested that the terms of engagement should include specific deliverables.

It is important that all members work together and through the Haven Gateway. It was noted that other activity has been taking place, and events organised by Essex Chamber were highlighted. A more cohesive approach is important.

The Board supports holding an All Party Parliamentary Group before the summer recess to present the case to Ministers before the SELEP Growth Deal negotiations are completed.

2. Witham Town Football Club – 16th April 2014

Together with the Chief Executive I visited the Village Glass Stadium and met the Chairman and Directors of the football club. They shared their aspirations for the club and informed us of the contribution that they were making to the wider community.

They explained the constraints they were experiencing as regards facilities for the several youth teams that they have. We discussed whether it might be possible to make a further area, around the stadium, available to the club. Officers have subsequently been involved in discussions with the club.

3. Witham Leisure Centre – 8th May 2014

I visited the site of the new Witham Leisure Centre to see how the project was progressing. I was very impressed with the facilities and I have no doubt that when it is opened it will be a major asset for the town.

4. Superfast Essex Broadband Launch at Rivenhall – 12th June 2014

Braintree District, and specifically Rivenhall, has become one of the first areas in Essex to get Superfast Broadband. The Chairman of Essex County Council, Cllr Norman Hume, was present at the launch together with a choir from the local primary school.

The community of Rivenhall are to be congratulated on their very successful campaign to get their highly prized “green box” and I pay tribute to the Parish Council for the leadership that it demonstrated.

5. John Ray Infant & Junior Schools

I am pleased to inform members that the County Council has agreed proposals to expand John Ray Infant School, from 270 places to 360 places, and to expand John Ray Junior School from 384 places to 480 places on a phased basis with effect from 1 September 2015.

As a result of a rising birth rate, inward migration and continued housing

development there is a rising demand for primary school places in Braintree. As a result there has been pressure on pupil places in the town over the last few years. The decision of the County Council is to be welcomed.

Cllr Graham Butland
Leader

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**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF
PEOPLE & PARTICIPATION**

Agenda No: 12b

LEISURE SERVICES

1 – Witham Leisure Centre

The new leisure centre at Witham is progressing well and we are now in the promotion and publicity stage. The building constructors, Barr, are in discussion with our leisure providers, Fusion, about forthcoming press opportunities and we are actively looking to display a time-lapse video of the construction for display in the Bramston Centre. We are working with Essex County Council and Taylor Wimpey to try to minimise the traffic disruption without significantly delaying the completion of the centre.

2 – Braintree Swimming Centre

Refurbishment works have started at the Braintree Swimming Centre to provide additional fitness facilities.

ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

1 – Safeguarding Children and Young People

Initiatives for promoting our safeguarding obligations have been developed and are currently being implemented. Initiatives include a simplified online reporting form, a streamlined internal support structure and improved staff training. The priorities for the Mid Essex Children's Partnership Board include:-

- Stay Safe (Professional Curiosity, Neglect and Child Sexual Exploitation)
- Youth (including NEET and Risky Behaviours)
- General Health & Well being

2 – Community Builders

Following on the back of the success of our trail we have been informed that Essex County Council have ear-marked Braintree as a possible trail area for the new Community Agents.

We continue to pursue other contacts in particular Humber Road estate is quite interested in doing a community event and discussions are being held about the Children's Centre and Doctor's surgery in Sible Hedingham.

3 – Our Witham

Together with our partners, we have submitted an application to the next phase of the

Government's Our Place scheme along with a request for funding to support this. The aim is to implement a new partnership structure for the Our Witham project and explore future operating models for joint working. We expect to hear if this has been successful by the end of June.

4 – BDVSA

BDVSA have advised that they have received confirmation from EEC that the funding is safe for the remaining 6 months of the year i.e. until 31st March 2015. However, funding beyond that date is still uncertain.

5 – Tour de France (TDF)

We continue to hold public meetings for the parishes and communities along the Tour de France route. Attendance has been good and comments mostly positive. All businesses and households on the route have received letters from this Council in addition to the Essex County Council leaflet which is being distributed to every household in the county.

6 – Health and Wellbeing

“Livewell” Communications approach – Livewell Website

The Green Heart campaign has provided the inspiration for a Livewell communication approach to promote our health and wellbeing initiatives. I will provide further information as the Livewell brand develops.

Promoting Healthier Communities

We aim to engage with local sports clubs to develop our Open Spaces Action Plan. These will be invaluable when negotiating future Section 106 agreements with developers.

Health Facilities

Discussions are continuing about the possibility of improved health facilities at Sible Hedingham, however progress continues to be slow with new obstacles continuing to be identified.

Exercise Referral Scheme

The new scheme has now been “soft” launched in the Braintree District, the system is working well with a steady trickle of referrals going through. Fusion is training more staff to process clients.

Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group

Mid Essex CCG are preparing to engage with key stakeholders on their system-wide 5 year strategic and clinical transformation plans. The plan set out the case for change required across the mid Essex health and social care landscape in order to ensure viable and sustainable services the local population. A ‘high level’ stakeholder meeting is to be held on Tuesday 15th July.

James Bullion, Director for Integrated Commissioning and Venerable People at Essex County Council is consulting with the Mid Essex CCG leadership group (which BDC is part of) on the establishment of a “Safe and Well Programme” aimed at community-based health and well-being improvements.

The Programme will attempt to bring together action by the Council’s, Health providers, Schools and Third Sector in Mid Essex, all who link with the Who Will Care commission outcomes, and add impetus to current action. The consultation is just the start of the process but by consulting with the MECCG leadership group he hopes this will provide a strong community and clinical leadership and be evidence based.

7 – Community Transport

The Community Transport Service continues to go from strength to strength. The 2013/14 annual target for passenger journeys of 59,740 was exceeded by 2,507 resulting in a grand total of 62,247.

8 – Museum Service and Town Hall Feasibility Study

Following the Project Initiation meeting on 8th May 2014 a series of initial interviews with stakeholders and background research has been undertaken to create an initial series of options that will be appraised during June, led by the consultants Fourth Street.

9 – Braintree District Museum

Currently open is the *Braintree District Summer Open Exhibition* until 26th July 2014. The following exhibition, *Braintree District at War* from 5th August – 19th December 2014 will be the start of the commemorative programme to mark the World War I centenary including exhibitions, events, talks and walks. For more information please visit www.braintreemuseum.co.uk/whatson/first-world-war-centenary.

10 – Braintree Town Hall

Bookings at Braintree Town Hall remain busy with the Braintree Textile Fair on 11th May and the first same sex marriage on 16th May 2014.

11 – Warner Textile Archive

The fourth annual Textile Fair was held at the Archive, Museum and Town Hall on Sunday 11th May 2014 and over 400 people saw demonstrations, talks, stalls, tour, two exhibitions and the Vintage Tea Room. Full details can be found at www.warnertextilearchive.co.uk/textile-fair.

The next event is on Saturday 21st June 2014 when *Coffee, Cakes and Memories* will celebrate 10 years of the Warner Textile Archive in Braintree. There will be former employees of Warner & Sons, as well as friends and family, as part of a project recording and documenting memories of the Company and its designers, as well as day to day life at the Mill.

12 – Bocking Post Mill

Following Ancient Scheduled Monument Consent from English Heritage to replace the tail pole member, strengthen the sail arms, lift the hinges to the sail inspection hatch, repair and paint the outer boarding, the contractor Universal Stone is due to complete essential maintenance project by the end of July.

13 – World War II Aircraft Crash Anniversaries

The sub-group of the East Braintree Community Organisation has been researching two Second World War aircraft crashes in Braintree, a B24 on 8th June 1944 and a B17 Flying Fortress on 10th May 1945. A commemorative event is going to be held on 10th May 2015.

Cllr Joanne Beavis
Cabinet Member – People & Participation

Further information on the contents of this report can be obtained by contacting:

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**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF
PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

Agenda No: 12c

Performance

The Council has continued to perform well throughout the year with a total of 28 projects completed, a further eleven projects on track and all but two performance indicators exceeding their targets.

Over the year, we have continued to support our communities and the local economy by investing in our town centres, supported young people not in training, education or employment with apprenticeships and training opportunities and invested further in providing new affordable homes and mortgage schemes for first time buyers. We have continued with our successful scheme to keep the district clean and green gaining national recognition for the works we do and continued to invest in health, leisure and play areas across the district.

Of the 18 performance indicators published, 16 have exceeded their target and 2 performance indicators have missed target by more than 5%. Examples of good performance and success in projects in the last quarter include:

- A total of 103 affordable homes have been delivered and 88 empty homes returned to use.
- All front line services have successfully been accredited with the Customer Service Excellence Standard with excellent feedback received from the assessor on how we deal with hard to reach customers, how we supported customers through the welfare reform changes, partnership working which in some cases was seen as market leading and how staff, managers and members put the customer at the heart of service delivery.
- Over 60,000 passenger journeys were provided through the Community Transport scheme
- The number of complaints received by the Authority has reduced over the year by 44% with 443 complaints received throughout the year in comparison to 793 received in 2012/13. The reduction is mainly due to back office improvements to processes.

Finance

The Council's financial outturn for 2013/14 has been determined and the accounts are being finalised for external audit, which commences in early July. Higher than anticipated cumulative increased income over several services in the final quarter and slightly lower expenditure led to a boost in final net underspend. Thus, the outturn is a

net addition to the General Fund balance of £540,361, giving a balance as at 31st March 2014 of £8.244million. This is a change from the provisional figures reported to Cabinet on 2nd June 2014: the final figure for the business rates retained and the grant receivable from the Government for the Small Business Rates Relief scheme is £320,057 (provisional estimate was £485,000) and the adjustment on the accounted loss on the Investments at Risk was a credit of £133,491 (provisional figure was £113,490).

Business Rates – following the Cabinet’s approval to introduce the discretionary retail rate relief scheme – all businesses that would potentially meet the criteria were advised of the scheme and invited to make an application. As at the end of May, retail relief of up to £1,000, has been granted to 363 retail businesses in the district. The cost totals £332,342 and this will be met by the Government.

Collection rates for the first two months are:

- Council Tax - 35.53% compared to 35.87% for the same period last year
- Business rates – 26.1% compared to 26.73%.

Business rate collection is down marginally as businesses now have option of paying over 12 months rather than 10 as mandated in previous years.

Local Authority Mortgage scheme:

Sector, the intermediary for the LAMS schemes, has reported to us that “your scheme is doing very well. You already have 15 mortgages April at application stage as at 30th and over a quarter of your combined indemnity has been allocated at £545,654”.

Human Resources –Apprentices

New Apprentices:

We are currently recruiting an apprentice for Law & Governance to replace Chloe Glock (level 3 apprentice) who has successfully gained employment at BDC. Recruitment for our next Level 2 cohort (a minimum of 8) is in hand with the aim of the apprentices being in post by November.

Successful Completion.

Kelly Ashdown has successfully finished her Level 3 Apprenticeship in Information Technology. Kelly was the first public/private apprentice that the Council has taken on. Kelly has gained employment with the private company with which we partnered.

Awards:

Jess Mann (level 3 apprentice in Cemeteries) was a finalist in the Countywide Business Awards in the field of Apprentice of the year. Colby Crossman (level 3 apprentice in Economic Development & Regeneration) and Chloe Glock (level 3 apprentice in Member Services) have successfully gone through to the National Apprenticeship awards next stage in the category of Apprentice of the Year. The regional stage judging will be completed at the end of June and if either are

successfully nominated as a regional finalist they will receive an invitation to a regional award ceremony in September.

IT - Better Connected:

Each year a national report reviews websites ranking them according to what services customers can access via the website, how useful and up to date the website is, and how easy it is for customers to use. This year we have been awarded 3 out of 4 stars for our website, and have been particularly noted as one of the best authorities in the country at engaging our citizens and customers digitally. Over the next year we will be focussing on making our website mobile friendly, as the number of our customers who want to access services on their mobile devices is increasing.

Cllr David Bebb
Cabinet Member for Performance and Efficiency

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**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF
PLANNING AND PROPERTY**

Agenda No: 12d

INFRASTRUCTURE

A120

An economic impact study on improvement of the A120 commissioned by Haven Gateway Partnership has now been completed. The study demonstrates that substantial reductions in congestion and journey times would be delivered by the scheme. Haven Gateway Partnership has engaged lobbying consultants to help the Partnership develop its strategy for securing government priority for the scheme. The A120 corridor is included in the South East LEP's Strategic Economic Plan which is currently being negotiated with government. Cabinet on 2nd June 2014 approved £2,500,000 of New Homes Bonus towards a package of improvements to improve access to Braintree town centre from the A120. This will focus on improvements in the Galleys Corner area of the network and will lever funding from the County Council and the Highways Agency towards an estimated total cost of £10 to £13m.

Broadband

Essex County Council has re-launched the Superfast Essex website which gives details of the BDUK programme to roll out broadband access across the County, including a post code checker which indicates whether areas will receive an upgraded service and (if so) when that will be delivered. As part of the programme, the Leader attended the launch by the County Council and BT of an upgraded cabinet in Rivenhall on 12th June 2014. As part of the New Homes Bonus package approved by Cabinet on 2nd June 2014, £250,000 was allocated to improving business broadband on strategic employment sites, responding to feedback from businesses through the District Business Leaders Board that business broadband availability through the BDUK programme would not enable businesses to remain competitive.

PLANNING POLICY

Land Charges

The Infrastructure Bill as set out in the Queen's Speech on the 4th June 2014 proposes the transfer of the statutory responsibility for the local land charges register and delivery of local land charges searches from Local Authorities to the Land Registry which it says will support the delivery of digital services, and extend Land Registry's powers to enable it to provide information and register services relating to land and other property. We are now waiting for further information on the timescale of this proposed change (during consultation the Council expressed lack of support for the proposals).

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Sainsbury's has lodged an appeal against the Council's decision to refuse planning permission for a proposed convenience store at the Broomhills Industrial Estate, Pod's Brook Road, Braintree. The appeal will be the subject of a Public Inquiry at the end of the year although dates have yet to be agreed between the parties and the Planning Inspectorate.

HOUSING

Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation

Between April 2013 and the end of March 2014 the Council accepted a homeless duty to 166 households (2012/13 164).

In 2013/14 the number of households where assistance provided by the Housing Service helped to prevent homelessness was 291 compared to a figure of 232 in 2012/13.

At the end of April 2014 there were 55 homeless households in temporary accommodation arranged by the Council. The average number of homeless households housed in temporary accommodation per month in 2013/14 was 63.

The Government has, through the National Practitioner Support Service, developed the Gold Standard – a set of targets to encourage Local Authority Housing Options Services to provide high quality services. The targets are set out in this Council's Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan. The process involves undertaking a Diagnostic Peer Review (DPR) – a group of Local Authorities taking it in turns to review and be reviewed by another member of the group. Our group currently consists of Braintree District Council, Tendring District Council, Colchester Borough Council and Maldon District Council.

The process is intended to be positive and inclusive with the focus on continuous improvement of services and to improve customer outcomes.

The DPR will look at corporate commitment, the Homelessness Strategy and relationships with other internal and external services and partners. The Diagnostic Peer Review process commenced in June 2014, and our review will be carried out by Colchester Borough Council in August 2014.

Affordable Housing Development

In 2013/14 there was a total of 103 new affordable homes completed (there were 71 completions in 2012/13). In the first quarter, there have already been 3 affordable homes acquired in Braintree through open market purchases as part of the Colne Open Market Purchase Programme. In the second quarter it is anticipated that 41 new affordable homes will be completed or acquired. Colne Housing is expected to complete 24 flats at the former garage site in South Street, Braintree. Colne is also expected to take delivery of 13 new flats at Constance Close, Witham. Greenfields is expected to complete 4 new homes at Ronald Road, Halstead.

The Housing Register

In 2013/14 a total of 752 housing association homes were let in the Braintree District via the Gateway to Homechoice, Choice Based Lettings scheme. In 2012/13 the number let was 607.

As of the 31st of May 2014 there were 2,382 applicants on the Housing Register consisting of:-

92 – Band A (the highest band)
218 – Band B
616 – Band C
92 – Band D
1346 – Band E

The average number of applicants on the housing register in 2013/14 from our recorded monthly data was approximately 2,700.

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REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF PLACE

Agenda No: 12e

The Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Bill receives Royal Assent

The Act changes the basis for licensing of remote gambling in Britain from the current 'place of supply' to a 'place of consumption' basis and creates an even playing field for GB based licensed gambling operators. All remote gambling operators, no matter where they are based, will be required to hold a Gambling Commission operating licence to enable them to transact with British customers and to advertise in Great Britain. The Act is expected to come into force after 1 September 2014.

Below Cost Selling Order to take effect from 28 May 2014

The Licensing Act 2003 (Mandatory Conditions) Order 2014 banning the sale of alcohol below the cost of VAT and duty will take effect from 28 May 2014.

Air Quality

The Council has submitted its 2014 Air Quality Progress Report to DEFRA in fulfilment of its duties under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995, Local Air Quality Management. There are no issues of concern that have been identified and it is recommended that we continue monitoring for NO₂ as we have been for some years. We are now awaiting comments from DEFRA as to whether they are satisfied with the submission and its recommendations.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Door-stepping (domestic recycling)

The officers are targeting areas in the District which have a lower than expected recycling participation rate. Between April – May 2014 they visited approx. 700 properties in the Witham area offering practical advice and guidance to customers on how they can recycle more of their waste. The team is working closely with Greenfields Community Housing to consider the options for introducing recycling at 6 blocks of flats later in the year.

Vehicle and Plant Workshop

The Council's new vehicle and plant workshop is nearing completion and should be operational from July onwards. This Council vehicle procurement and maintenance contractor will maintain the entire fleet including the 19 new vehicles they have procured to date with a further 7 vehicles due to be delivered in July.

Recycling

The Council will be participating in National Recycling Week which takes place from 16 June. Operations' staff will be manning an exhibition stand at Causeway House Reception and there will also be stalls at George Yard, Tesco (Braintree), The Grove Centre, Witham and Halstead Market.

As part of our work to educate young people about recycling, we have invited 51

primary schools across the District to participate in a competition to design a poster to promote recycling that we can use throughout Recycling Week. The winner was Howbridge Infant School, Witham. The winner will be presented with a framed certificate at their School in recognition of this achievement.

As part of the consultation exercise relating to Essex County Council's Review of Household Waste & Recycling Centres, I wrote to the Cabinet Member for Waste at ECC, followed by a meeting and have received an assurance from him that there are no plans to close any recycling centres in the County. I took the opportunity to emphasise that any future plans must be considered in the wider context of maintaining customer satisfaction, encouraging and supporting positive behaviours, providing a cleaner and greener environment and maintaining a high level of recycling performance for both our Authorities.

Street Cleaning

In April, a Spring Clean of the A120 took place (litter-pick of central reservation and channel sweep) with some 35 tonnes of detritus and over 600kgs of litter being removed. The work was carried out overnight to minimise disruption to road users and to maximise safety of the staff involved in this operation. In addition to this, an intensive clean was undertaken of traffic islands and roundabouts in the District.

Cordons Farm

I am pleased to be able to report that good progress is being made by Essex County Council and their contractor with the construction of the Waste Transfer Station at Cordons Farm. The service road nearing completion and the contractors have now turned their focus to the site itself, working to install the infrastructure (drainage/power supplies) that will underpin the operation of this site. It remains on target to be completed by the end of the calendar year.

Cemeteries Service

I was delighted to accompany Jessica Mann, our apprentice within the Cemeteries Service, who was one of 6 young people nominated as a finalist in the Apprentice of the Year category of the Essex Business Awards. Although Jessica didn't win, it was an amazing achievement to be nominated and extremely well deserved; she is certainly an excellent ambassador for the Council.

As part of a 3-year project, work has recently been completed to create an additional 300 Cremated Remains plots at Bocking Cemetery. Other works will include new burial plots, public open space and allotments.

Gt Notley Country Park

In conjunction with Essex County Council, work has started at Great Notley Country Park to improve access to the Discovery Centre building (including disabled access) and to enhance and provide additional outside picnic areas for customers who visit the Park. In addition, a number of the footpaths are being upgraded with improved links between certain areas of the Park.

Car Parking

At the beginning of May, Cashless Parking was introduced in the Braintree District. This is the latest initiative to support businesses by encouraging more people to shop locally and stay longer. Provided in conjunction with the North Essex Parking Partnership, the secure cashless parking option enables motorists to pay for parking by

phone or via a secure on-line site, removing the hassle of having to have cash handy and enabling motorists to 'top-up' their parking time. It's a great way to avoid having to cut short a shopping trip or risk over-running on a pre-purchased parking ticket.

I am delighted to report that BDC has successfully retained the Park Mark (Safer Parking) Awards for sixteen parking locations in Braintree, Witham, Coggeshall and Earls Colne. Introduced to lower vehicle related crime and improve the standard of car parks, the nationally recognised safer parking award assesses the quality, management, lighting, surveillance, cleanliness and general safety of the car parks. This is the Council's 5th consecutive year of winning these awards.

Cleaner Essex

As per my e mail to members this project was launched w/c 2nd June, in addition I have had the pleasure to have been invited to Northampton to discuss with members from the county about our Green Heart Project, this is very gratifying as this is my home county.

Community Safety

W/c 9th June has seen the launch of a World Cup Campaign, 15 pubs in Braintree, Witham and Halstead have agreed to display posters and or wear promotional t-shirts raising awareness of Domestic Violence and hospital admissions because of alcohol consumption during the period of the World Cup.

Landscape and Countryside

It is with great pleasure that I can announce that Braintree District has been selected to hold the East Anglian Region Tree Warden Forum, on October 4th. The subject is Making Trees Matter – 40 years on, this is to mark The Tree Councils 40th anniversary.

A Friends Group is in the process of being formed for Hoppit Mead, Braintree and The River Walk in Halsted. The Braintree volunteers have already done a litter pick and will become Green Heart Volunteers also.

Cllr Wendy Schmitt
Cabinet Member – Place

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**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF
PROSPERITY AND GROWTH**

Agenda No: 12f

Economic Development

Cabinet on 2nd June 2014 approved a package of infrastructure schemes to deliver economic growth, using £4,981,810 of allocated New Homes Bonus funds. This complements projects submitted to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver its Strategic Economic Plan which is currently being negotiated with the Central government. The package includes £500,000 towards developing an Enterprise Centre at Witham, replicating the successful Springwood Drive Centre, £2,500,000 towards an A120 access improvement package to relieve congestion and £250,000 to improve business broadband which will enable a wider coverage of high speed broadband throughout the district, this very much commitments is in addition to the Superfast Essex BDUK programme announced by Essex County Council.

The package also includes a feasibility fund to develop a pipeline of infrastructure projects that will help deliver housing and economic growth in the District and attract future funding, and a £1,250,000 re-investment fund to unlock strategic development sites. This fund would be used for land or asset purchase that would support the strategic housing and employment growth priorities of the Council. Land or assets purchased through the fund could then be sold on and/or redeveloped generating a return which could be re-invested in further similar projects.

Business support

Witham Industrial Watch are balloting businesses on Witham's Industrial Estates over a renewal of their Business Improvement District initiative which provides CCTV and other measures on the industrial estates, it has been very successful in reducing business crime and improving business confidence. The ballot closes on 30th July and, if successful will enable the BID to operate for a further 5 years continuing to build on the excellent work that has been done in the past. Neil Jesse from Village Glass based in Witham, who is a member of the BID Board, presented the case for renewing the BID to the District Business Leaders Board (which I chair) on the 10th June 2014. The Board were happy to confirm their support for the BID and also to consider how it can support and encourage businesses to develop BID's on other industrial estates in the District.

I am pleased to report that the Council has now appointed a Business Liaison Manager, this key role will allow us to maintain relationships with strategic businesses, provide a first point of contact for business enquiries and support the Council in its delivery of services to businesses.

Skills

The District Employment and Skills Board met for the first time on 28th May 2014, with representatives from businesses, Colchester Institute, and Jobcentre Plus as well as Council officers. The recommendation to form this Board came directly from the District Business Leaders Group, as number of the companies felt that they could play an important part in helping to meet employer skill needs. It will take forward many of the recommendations that the recent Scrutiny Committee review highlighted, in particular the support for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and has identified helping employers to recruit, and improving employability skills as key issues. The Board has now commissioned a survey of local employers to help develop this work.

Regeneration

Highways works at the corner of South Street and Fairfield Road in Braintree have now been completed and a landscaping scheme for the site is being delivered. This work already improved traffic flow, and the feed back I have been given to regular users in the area has been very positive, once the landscaping has been completed it will also provide a more attractive gateway to the town centre.

Working with traders in the area, we are also in the final stages of commissioning a public realm scheme to improve Sandpit Lane in Braintree town centre, to encourage footfall and support trade. This is now being progressed with detail design and further discussions with traders in the area.

Cllr Chris Siddall
Cabinet Member – Prosperity and Growth

Further information on the contents of this report can be obtained by contacting:

Cllr Chris Siddall, telephone: (01376) 565302

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| LIST OF PUBLIC MEETINGS HELD SINCE COUNCIL MEETING OF 23RD APRIL 2014 | | Agenda No: 13 |
| Corporate Priority: Not applicable Report presented by: Not applicable Report prepared by: Emma Wisbey – Governance and Member Manager | | |
| Background Papers: Published Minutes of the meetings listed within the report below. | | Public Report |
| Options: Report for noting. | | Key Decision: No |
| Executive Summary: <p>Since the Council meeting held on 23rd April 2014 the following Minutes have been published for meetings held in public session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Planning Committee – 15th April 2014 (2) Council – 23rd April 2014 (3) Planning Committee – 29th April 2014 (4) Council AGM – 6th May 2014 (5) Planning Committee – 13th May 2014 (6) Licensing Committee – 14th May 2014 (7) Planning Committee – 27th May 2014 (8) Cabinet – 2nd June 2014 (9) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 4th June 2014 (10) Planning Committee – 10th June 2014 (11) Local Development Framework Sub-Committee – 12th June 2014 (12) Braintree District Local Highways Panel – 19th June 2014 (copy to follow) (13) Planning Committee – 23rd June 2014 (copy to follow) <p><i>Note: Hard copies of Minutes are sent to Members of the relevant Committee. Copies are available for all Members to view on the Council's website at http://www.braintree.gov.uk/meetings</i></p> | | |
| Decision: Members are invited to note the Minutes published. | | |
| Purpose of Decision: Not applicable. | | |
| Officer Contact: | Emma Wisbey | |
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