

# **COUNCIL AGENDA**

**Monday, 20th February 2023 at 7.15pm**

**Council Chamber, Braintree District Council, Causeway House,  
Bocking End, Braintree, CM79HB**

## **THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

Members of the public will be able to view and listen to this meeting via YouTube.  
To access the meeting please use the link below:

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

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

Councillor J Abbott  
Councillor D Abram  
Councillor J Baugh  
Councillor Mrs J Beavis  
Councillor K Bowers  
Councillor G Butland  
Councillor J Coleridge  
Councillor G Courtauld  
Councillor Mrs M Cunningham  
Councillor T Cunningham  
Councillor C Dervish  
Councillor P Euesden  
Councillor T Everard  
Councillor Mrs D Garrod  
Councillor M Green  
Councillor A Hensman

Councillor S Hicks  
Councillor P Horner  
Councillor D Hume  
Councillor H Johnson  
Councillor A Kilmartin  
Councillor W Korsinah  
Councillor D Mann  
Councillor T McArdle  
Councillor J McKee  
Councillor A Munday  
Councillor Mrs I Parker  
Councillor Mrs J Pell  
Councillor I Pritchard  
Councillor M Radley  
Councillor S Rehman  
Councillor F Ricci

Councillor B Rose  
Councillor J Sandum  
Councillor Miss V Santomauro  
Councillor Mrs W Scattergood  
Councillor Mrs W Schmitt  
Councillor P Schwier  
Councillor Mrs G Spray  
Councillor P Tattersley  
Councillor P Thorogood  
Councillor R van Dulken  
Councillor T Walsh  
Councillor L Walters  
Councillor Miss M Weeks  
Councillor D White  
Councillor Mrs S Wilson  
Councillor J Wrench  
Councillor B Wright

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 [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk) by 3pm on the day of the meeting.

D GASCOYNE  
Chief Executive

## **INFORMATION FOR MEMBER – DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

### **Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI), Other Pecuniary Interests (OPI) or Non-Pecuniary Interests (NPI).**

Any Member with a DPI, OPI or NPI must declare the nature of their interest in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Members must not participate in any discussion of the matter in which they have declared a DPI or OPI 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 Question Time - Registration and Speaking:**

The Agenda allows for a period of up to 30 minutes for Public Question Time. Members of the public may ask questions or make statement to the Council on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affect the district and matters listed on the agenda.

All questions or statements should be concise and should be able to be heard within the 3 minutes allotted to each speaker.

Anyone wishing to ask a question or make a statement are requested to register their interest by completing the Public Question Time registration [online form](#) by midday on **the second working day** before the day of the meeting.

For example, if the Committee Meeting is on a Tuesday, the registration deadline is midday on Friday, (where there is a Bank Holiday Monday you will need to register by midday on the previous Thursday). The Council reserves the right to decline any requests to register to speak if they are received after this time.

When registering for Public Question Time please indicate whether you wish to attend the meeting of Full Council 'in person' or to participate remotely. People who choose to join the meeting remotely will be provided with the relevant link and joining instructions for the meeting.

The Chairman of the Council has discretion to amend the order in which questions/statements are presented to Full Council.

In the event that a registered speaker is unable to connect to the meeting, or if there are any technical issues, their question/statement may be read by a Council Officer.

Further information on public question time is available on the [Council's website](#).

### **Health and Safety:**

Any person attending meetings are requested to take a few moments to familiarise themselves with the nearest available exit, indicated by the fire evacuation signs. In the event of an alarm you must evacuate the building immediately and follow all instructions provided by Officers. You will be assisted to the nearest designated assembly point until it is safe to return to the building.

**Mobile Phones:**

Please ensure that your mobile phone is switched to silent during the meeting in order to prevent disturbances.

**Webcast and Audio Recording:**

Please note that this meeting will be webcast and will be available on the Council's YouTube channel.

**Documents:**

Agendas, Reports, Minutes and Public Question Time questions and statements can be accessed via [www.braintree.gov.uk](http://www.braintree.gov.uk)

**Data Processing:**

For further information on how the Council processes data, please see the Council's Privacy Policy.

[https://braintree.gov.uk/info/200136/access\\_to\\_information/376/privacy\\_policy](https://braintree.gov.uk/info/200136/access_to_information/376/privacy_policy)

**Your Comments:**

We welcome comments to make our services as efficient and effective as possible. If you have any suggestions regarding the meeting you have attended, you can send these to [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)

## **PUBLIC SESSION**

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

### **2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 3rd January 2023 (copy previously circulated).

### **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 above)

### **5 To receive any announcements/statements from the Chairman and/or Leader of the Council.**

### **6 Statement by a Councillor – Councillor James Abbott “Supporting, and Investing in, the community of Silver End”**

This statement is made in accordance with the Notice required and provisions of paragraph 12.14 of the Constitution.

The Chairman has the discretion to decline to allow any statement to be dealt with under this paragraph on the grounds that it addresses matters that would be inappropriate to consider at the meeting. Such discretion can be exercised during the meeting. In determining whether or not a statement is inappropriate, the Chairman will take advice from the Chief Executive and/or the Monitoring Officer.

A response to this statement may be made by the Leader, the appropriate Cabinet Member or Chairman of the relevant Committee.

**7 Council Budget and Council Tax 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27**

Please note: This has been circulated as a separate report and published on the [Council's website](#).

In addition to this, an Addendum Report was subsequently circulated on 7th February 2023. This is also available to view on the [Council's website](#).

Members are asked to ensure they have copies of these reports available for the meeting.

- a) Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27 recommendations from Cabinet as set out in the report listed above.
- b) Council Tax Resolution 2023/24 - Report to follow

**8 Cabinet's Report to Full Council**

**6 - 17**

<b>Report Title:</b> Cabinet's Report to Full Council	
<b>Report to:</b> Council	
<b>Date:</b> 20 <sup>th</sup> February 2023	<b>For:</b> Noting
<b>Key Decision:</b> No	<b>Decision Planner Ref No:</b> N/A
<b>Report Presented by:</b> Councillor Graham Butland, Leader of the Council	
<b>Enquiries to:</b> N/A	

## 1. **Introduction**

This report covers the main activities of all Cabinet Members since the last ordinary meeting of full Council.

## **SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES**

## 2. **Councillor Frankie Ricci – Cabinet Member for Communities**

### **Communities**

#### **Homes 4 Ukraine**

The team continues to support Ukranian guests and their hosts and provided a Christmas coffee morning on 9<sup>th</sup> December at Braintree Community Centre, 35 people were in attendance.

#### **Halstead Community Fund**

The Halstead Community Fund was officially launched on 9<sup>th</sup> January and will provide a capital funding stream for projects in Halstead and surrounding villages. Information including the application form and guidance is available on the council's website and the closing date is 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

### **Community Safety**

#### **Serious Violence Duty**

The Home Office issued Statutory guidance on the Serious Violence Duty in accordance with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022. This will ensure relevant services work together to share information and allow them to target their interventions, where possible through

existing partnership structures, collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence within their local communities.

A Strategic Needs Assessment for Greater Essex is required as part of the duty, this is being developed by the Essex Violence & Vulnerability Board with input from CSP's and other partners and is due for completion by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

### **CSP Strategic Assessment**

All Community Safety Partnerships are required to produce an annual strategic assessment which will determine the priorities for the coming year. The first part of this process is a risk matrix which looks at crime types and data, this has been completed with Essex Police and sent to RAG members for comment and feedback. A workshop with a range of community safety partners will be held to discuss and agree the priorities and begin the development of an action plan for 2023/24.

### **Domestic Abuse Campaign**

The World Cup campaign on social media reached 7,771 people on Facebook with 152 engagements and 2,229 on twitter with 64 engagements. We are awaiting Police data in relation to incidences of DA this period. A J9 domestic abuse training course was held with 10 people from faith groups, local businesses, voluntary and community sector groups and Parish Councils in attendance.

### **3. Councillor Peter Tattersley – Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing**

#### **Increase in Covid and flu and pressure on hospitals**

There is a continuing emphasis for residents in the Braintree district to have their covid and flu vaccines. The NHS is seeing high levels of hospital admissions this winter from infections such as Covid, Flu and Scarlet Fever.

#### **Dementia Christmas Tea**

Our work providing support and activities to those living with dementia and their carers continues. Most recently a Christmas afternoon tea for 45 people was hosted at Braintree Town Hall where refreshments and entertainment were provided.

#### **Warm Spaces Update**

Since the beginning of the year, a number of new warm spaces activities have been established bringing the total to 73. Contact was made with 22 of the organisations participating to see if other support is required. Seven stated they were seeing more people than expected, four were seeing fewer people than expected and 11 stated the amount of people they were seeing matched their expectations. A number of the activities in the towns and larger community facilities are seeing between 20 – 40 people with activities in the villages seeing between 5 – 10 people per session.

Both Halstead and Witham Leisure Centres were opened up to provide a warm space to residents on Wednesdays from 23<sup>rd</sup> November. Facilities include a second-hand book swap, a chance to play board games with others and an offer of free tea, coffee and biscuits. For an additional 50 pence people can have a swim or gym session as well whilst at the site. Leisure Centres are also participating in the “Ask Tommy” campaign for residents who are struggling with heating hot water to have a shower at the facilities free of charge. This is part of a wider NHS scheme looking at personal hygiene and the increase in people they are seeing neglecting their hygiene due to the increasing costs at home. Both Centres have therapy dogs coming to site in February which will enable people to pet and care for the dogs to support emotional wellbeing.

### **Fusion Wellness café supporting our residents health in Witham amid the Cost of Living issues**

The monthly wellness café has been running at Witham Leisure Centre since November. At the session in January over 56 health checks were completed, and over 11 local agencies had the opportunity to engage our residents with health and cost of living support.

### **Fusion – Investment into facilities**

Following the re-awarding of the leisure contract, Fusion Lifestyle, Braintree District Council's leisure partner, is investing £1.1m in redevelopment works at Braintree Sport & Health Club, Braintree Swimming & Fitness, Halstead Leisure Centre and Witham Leisure Centre.

The extensive works are seeing upgrades at all four centres, including brand new gyms currently being installed at each site. The new gym and group exercise studios at Braintree Sport & Heath Club, Halstead Leisure Centre and Witham Leisure Centre have been open since January and works on Braintree Swimming and Fitness will be completed shortly. The gyms at each centre are being completely transformed with new energy efficient equipment installed, a new layout, new lighting, decoration, flooring and specialist equipment for those living with disabilities.

The works will improve the customer experience at all centres, giving them access to more advanced equipment and brighter, refreshed facilities. New memberships for the New Year have been encouraging as residents have gradually returned to use the facilities post pandemic. 350 new members across the Braintree District took up memberships in January.

### **Ride London 2023**

Ride London, the world's greatest festival of cycling, returns for its ninth edition, with new routes in Essex, from Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May to Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2023. Extensive road closures will be required in some areas on these dates. Ride London 2023 will feature more than 75,000 cyclists and five different events. The festival of cycling is a London 2012 Olympic Games legacy event and was developed by the Mayor of



London, Transport for London, London & Partners and London Marathon Events. Last year, Ride London is Europe's most successful fundraising cycling event, with riders raising almost £80 million for charity since the first event in 2013.

The Ride London 100 on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May will see in excess of 25,000 amateur riders pass through the District at Blake End as part of the 100mile round trip out of London and back. In addition, there will be two UCI Women's Classique races taking place on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May, although the route has not been confirmed we can expect to see these elite riders racing through sections of district again in 2023.

The whole event is being managed by London Marathon events (LME) strategic planning is split into four key categories group which Braintree has officer representation on:

- Detailed Planning Group – looking closely at both the Event Management Plan (EMP) and traffic management plans (TMP)
- Safety Advisory Group (SAG)
- Communications both Event wide and Essex Communication group
- Activation Group both Event wide and locally for Essex Districts and Boroughs

Communication with residents is already underway for the Ride London event on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May, informing of any road closures and working with partners and residents impacted by this.

## **INNOVATIVE ENVIRONMENT**

### **4. Councillor John McKee – Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation**

#### **Finance Service**

**Council Tax collection** was 84.2% of the amount due for 2022/23 at the end of December which was 0.5% lower than was collected last year (84.7%). This may be the early signs of a downturn due to the cost-of-living crisis and the squeeze on household finances. The Council's Revenues & Benefits Team continue to offer support and help wherever possible to taxpayers that are struggling with payments. The amount collected was £92m.

**Business Rates collection** was 82.3% of the amount due for 2022/23 at the end of December, which is higher than performance last year (81.8%). The amount collected was £36m.

**Energy Rebate Scheme** – both the main and discretionary schemes are now closed and are being reconciled against government funding – almost £8m of financial support was distributed to eligible households.

**Business Rate Revaluation** – the Council received the draft Rating List that will apply from April 2023. Whilst the overall increase in rateable values in the Braintree district has increased above the national average (19% verses 7%), businesses will

be protected from increased bills through a range of measures, such as freeze on the Rating Multiplier, a new Transitional Relief Scheme, an improved Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief scheme, and a new Small Business Relief scheme.

**Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2023/24** – the Council received details of the proposed finance settlement on 19<sup>th</sup> December, the impact of which has been reflected in the proposed budget and updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The settlement was subject to consultation, and I provided a response on behalf of the Council. We expect the final settlement to be confirmed early February.

**Appointment of External Auditors** – the Council opted-in to the national procurement process undertaken by the Public Sector Auditor Appointments Ltd (PSAA) following which the PSAA have now been confirmed that the Council's external auditors for the five-years commencing April 2023 will be KPMG.

### **Customer Services**

The average call answering time for December was 22 seconds. The call answer time is now achieving target despite a high demand on the service in supporting other services such as Housing, Planning and Landscapes. Monitoring of busy times will continue. Customer Services received a high number of calls regarding delays in waste collections due to the snow and icy conditions at the beginning of December – adding messaging to social media, our website and telephone system helped to alleviate this.

In the month of December, the Customer Service Centre dealt with 5,588 calls, 834 emails, 427 online enquiries and 1,014 face to face enquiries.

### **Performance and Improvement Team**

In December, the team received 34 Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Requests and responded to 98.04% of requests within the 20-working day timescale. One request was responded to one day late.

The team are currently working on refreshing the ward profiles and await the release of Census data from the Office of National Statistics (provisionally set for release on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023).

### **Human Resources and OD&L**

The work of the OD&L team has been recognised as great practice by the East of England Local Government Association. They were featured as a case study in the recent EELGA HR Matters magazine, highlighting the Power House sessions where thought provoking and inspirational speakers provide an hour's talk to BDC and partner organisations and also the work done on Mental Health First Aiders and Menopause Mentors.

The Agile Working policy is being reviewed and revised setting out the Council's approach to hybrid working allowing staff to split their time between attending the office and working remotely subject to the needs of the service.

The Organisational Development & Learning team launched the annual member development survey to better understand the requirements around member development in 2023/24. This will complement the induction programme for new members in 2023/24.

National Apprenticeship week starts on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023, and we have a full programme of events prepared including launching a manager's handbook, keynote speaker Shola West on the value of Gen-z apprentices as well as placing adverts for three Apprenticeship roles at the Council.

## **Procurement**

At the Procurement Service Awards at Essex County Council, the Shared Procurement Team was awarded Team of the Year. This is particularly good news given the team is still only getting started and is considerably smaller than the other teams nominated. Recognition was given for the work being undertaken to bring procurement professionals together from across different organisations to build resilience, increase expertise and start to deliver collaboration.

The Shared Procurement Team has been also been recognised within the organisation following support given to support two complex, collaborative procurements where Braintree was acting as lead partner.

The packages of support that will be offered by the shared service continue to be developed and shared documentation and working practices are being agreed. A workshop is to be organised soon with member authorities to agree priorities and approach going forward. A draft approach to social value is being developed and consulted on.

A Comprehensive forward plan is in place which is shared with Management Board monthly including detail on exemptions, with a shared forward plan being developed across Councils. Officers have started to work together to understand efficiencies in working together on this forward plan.

## **ICT**

The Council's ICT team remain vigilant to the threat of cyber attacks and are proactively monitoring the local landscape alongside the Essex Digital Partnership (EDP) Cyber Group and nationally via the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). Security patches continue to be applied locally to reduce the impact of successful attacks. Phishing email campaigns are ongoing with advice and guidance given to Staff and Members where appropriate to ensure that suspicious emails are reported and deleted.

## **Health & Safety**

Internal mandatory online Health and Safety and Fire Safety training modules have gone live on the internal Learning Management System with an initial target date for all to complete by the end of January 2023.

A revised draft Health Safety and Welfare Policy based on updated Health and Safety Executive's guidance has been submitted to Management Board for consideration/approval.

An internal Health Safety and Welfare SharePoint resource for staff and managers is under development.

5. **Councillor Mrs Wendy Schmitt – Cabinet Member for Environment**

**OPERATIONS**

**Parks & Open Spaces**

**Cut Throat Lane, Witham**

As part of the Safer Streets project the vegetation along Cut Throat Lane, Witham has been cut back to allow clear sight lines and visual permeability along the pathways, rear accesses and alleys that will help residents feel safer when walking in this area.

**London Road, Braintree**

The Council has replanted containers in London Road, Braintree with a mixture of existing new sustainable planting and primroses from the cemetery and approximately 1,200 tulip bulbs. This will improve the gateway into the town from London Road.

**Meadowside/Coldnailhurst Avenue Braintree Open Space**

The Council is working with Anglian Water who are investigating the source of water emanating on the open space at Meadowside, Braintree. A main's water leak has been discounted by Anglian Water and investigations are ongoing to trace the source of what appears to be surface water.

**Halstead River Walk**

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 2022 a sink hole appeared on Halstead's River Walk near Nether Court. Anglian Water has confirmed the hole may have been caused by a collapsed surface water sewer serving properties in the Nether Court area and they are arranging a repair and reinstatement of the area.

**Rewilding / Wildflower Seeding of Rural Verges**

The Council received two applications from Rivenhall and Feering Parish Councils for a licence to plant on some of the rural verges within their parish boundaries owned by Essex County Council. If any other Parish Councils are interested in rewilding some of their verges, they can contact the Council via the Customer Service Centre.

## **Street Scene Enforcement**

### **Fly tipping at Witham Cemetery**

A fly tip of building waste at the entrance to Witham Cemetery received extensive publicity from Essex Police, BBC Essex Radio and Braintree and Witham Times. This was the third fly tip at this location in less than two months. The Council has a zero-tolerance approach to fly tipping and investigations are ongoing to identify where the waste originated from and who was responsible for illegally dumping it. On BBC Essex Radio, Cllr. Mrs. Wendy Schmitt, Cabinet Member Climate Change and the Environment, reinforced the Council's zero tolerance approach to fly-tipping and emphasised that it will always seek to hold those responsible to account for their actions.

### **Stray Dogs**

Unfortunately, the Council has seen an increase in the number of stray dogs being reported and abandoned. In the calendar year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, a total of 60 stray dogs were reported of which 15 were not claimed. This compares with a total of 47 dogs reported in the previous year ending December 2021 of which 33 were not claimed. Unclaimed dogs are signed over to the RSPCA to be assessed and to be put up for adoption. We strongly urge anyone who is interested in buying a dog to think carefully about the costs, time and commitment needed to care for it.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **Public Health and Housing Team**

DHLUC published a template for completion by Local Authorities regarding damp and mould. The Public Health and Housing team has submitted the information requested. The team is in the process of commissioning the scheduled 2023 House Condition Survey.

### **Disability Grant Team**

There has been progress in the third quarter of 2023/23 towards reducing the period of time between a referral being received and grant approved. (129 days in Q3) and the team are continuing to work with partners to bring this time down further to meet the target of 90 days.

### **Building Control**

The Building Control team have served formal proceedings against two owners of dangerous structures within the district and have overseen the structures being made safe to reduce the risk of harm to residents.

### **Handyman Scheme**

The handyman scheme is continuing to see a high demand for the installation of key safes and mobility rails in order to facilitate the discharge of patients from hospitals.

## Energy Efficiency

The Sustainable Warmth grant is now fully subscribed, and we have been advised to no longer promote the scheme as all the funding has been allocated. An announcement is anticipated imminently from Central Government in relation to the Homes Upgrade Grant Phase 2 for off gas properties. BDC was one of a consortium of Local Authorities that submitted a bid for some of the £700M assigned to this grant.

### 6. Councillor Richard van Dulken – Cabinet Member for Operations and Commercialisation

## Waste & Recycling

Back in December 2022 the district experienced extreme weather conditions which affected the collection service. We would like to thank our residents for their patience and understanding, and for the numerous supportive 'posts' in social media at that time, as well as all the positive comments we received about the service during the Christmas/New Year period.

Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) are chemical substances commonly found in waste textiles and foam used in household items such as sofas, chairs and beanbags. In December 2022 the Environment Agency issued new guidance that requires the Council to keep items including POPs separate from other waste streams – accordingly residents will no longer be able to dispose of such items at Town and Parish amenity refuse collections and will need to arrange a bulky waste collection with the Council to have the items removed.

At the end of November 2022, the Council Waste Minimisation and Recycling Team visited George Yard Shopping Centre to talk to shoppers about recycling, reducing food waste and home composting, as well as advertising post-Christmas drop-off points for the Christmas tree collection. On 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023 the Team took part in an event run by Community 360 in George Yard – Community Showcase – with the aim of promoting the reduction of food waste.

In Essex roughly 25% of residual waste is made up of food waste, a huge waste of money as well as contributing to climate gases when put into landfill. BDC is supporting the Love Essex partnership launched in January, a joint campaign of Essex County Council and nine other authorities in Essex, in a bid to reduce food waste. This 12-month campaign will highlight many ways to save money as well as reduce waste, and includes a humorous animated film to push home the message – details are at [www.loveessex.org/foodwaste](http://www.loveessex.org/foodwaste).

In January the Council collected 132 trees and wreaths from 10 locations across Essex – 39 more than in January 2022.

## Licensing

The Licensing Team is currently investigating how the emerging draft legislation Martyn's Law (or Protect Duty) once adopted in 2023 will affect the premises licensing process in the future. This will be part of a wider project to understand the impact of the legislation on the organisation and the district.

The government has consulted BDC on whether to relax the licensing hours across England and Wales to mark His Majesty the King's Coronation. The government is proposing to allow the extension of hours from 11 PM to 1 AM on Friday 5<sup>th</sup>, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May.

The Council has started a public and trade consultation regarding the proposal to consider removing the restriction of Hackney Carriage licences (currently limited to 84) issued in the District. (Hackney Carriages are taxis which can be hailed at the roadside).

### **Commercialisation**

The Commercial.Gov report has been reviewed by officers and members and a prioritised short-list is being finalised.

All areas of traded activity (roundabouts, conference bookings etc.) are on target for 2022/23.

## **CONNECTING PEOPLE, PLACES AND PROSPERITY**

### **7. Councillor Tom Cunningham – Cabinet Member for Economic Growth**

#### **Business Engagement and Support**

The Council has been holding a number of business workshops in the Plaza this year. These have been set up following the feedback received from businesses on areas that they would like support on. The topics include trading out of the cost of living crisis, increasingly productivity and recruiting and motivating staff. We have also held a session for businesses located on Springwood Drive and continuing the programme of individual business visits. Business support and skills courses continue to be offered through our NEEB resources. These include on pre-start, digital, import/export and low carbon. Debt and financing advice has also been a very well used resource which is above targets and business navigation which has helped 92 braintree based businesses in the programme to date.

#### **Economic Strategies**

The Economic Growth Strategy has been subject to consultation and is subject to final approval at Cabinet in March alongside the first-year action plan. The Council is also working with North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) members to agree a North Essex Economic Strategy and year 1 action plan. This is being supported by external consultants. Workshops will be taking place in February with the wider communities, businesses and members.

8. **Councillor Kevin Bowers – Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Skills**

**Housing**

In the last calendar year, January 2022 - December 2022, there were 353 new affordable housing completions which included 6 wheelchair accessible bungalows. During this time there were also 110 households who were supported into the Private Rented Sector.

**Witham Community Centre**

The Council's architects are preparing the planning application pack and look forward to submitting this soon for consideration. A revised Expression of Interest invitation has been issued and recently closed, in order to secure a charity or similar organisation to operate the centre. It is hoped that an operator will be secured through this process so that invitations to tender can be released and a construction partner found to build this important new community centre for Witham.

**Witham Enterprise Units**

Work continues to progress on the options to develop new business accommodation in Witham. Pre-application feedback has now been received and a revised layout is being finalised. This will provide the basis for the commissioning of market research into demand and values to ensure the viability of the project before it is progressed further.

**Sible Hedingham Medical Centre**

The NHS Integrated Care Board has indicated that progress is being made with One Medical Group and that they anticipate the positive progression of the final business case through its internal processes, with a view to confirming the delivery timescale of the project in the coming months.

**Job Fair**

We are delighted with the return of the jobs fair following a break due to covid. The jobs fair will be held in March at the Plaza and will showcase a range of local job, training and skills opportunities for local residents. Local businesses, training providers and the Council will all have stalls on the day.

The annual apprenticeship information event for all schools in Braintree was to take place in February but has unfortunately had to be rescheduled for June.



9. **Councillor Mrs Gabrielle Spray – Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure**

**Infrastructure Funding Statement**

The Council has published its Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) on the website for the year ending March 2022. The IFS contains information in a form specified by government.

**NPPF Consultation**

Consultation on amendments to the NPPF were released on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2022 with consultation closing on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023. I am broadly welcoming of the changes proposed within the consultation which would remove the requirement for Braintree to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply as long as it keeps an up-to-date Local Plan. This marks the first of a number of expected consultations and changes to the planning system which are likely to come in force over the next year or so.