

CABINET AGENDA

Monday, 28th November 2022 at 7.15pm

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>

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

Overall Strategy Innovative Environment

Finance and Corporate Transformation
Climate Change and The Environment
Operations and Commercialisation

Councillor G Butland (Leader of the Council)
Councillor J McKee
Councillor Mrs W Schmitt
Councillor R van Dulken

Connecting People, Places and Prosperity

Economic Growth
Housing, Assets and Skills
Planning and Infrastructure

Councillor T Cunningham (Deputy Leader)
Councillor K Bowers
Councillor Mrs G Spray

Supporting Our Communities

Health and Wellbeing
Communities

Councillor P Tattersley
Councillor F Ricci

Invitees: Councillors J Abbott, Mrs J Pell and D Mann are invited to attend as Group Leaders

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 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 wishing to participate are requested to register by contacting the Governance and Members Team on 01376 552525 or email governance@braintree.gov.uk by midday on the second working day before the day of the Committee meeting. For example, if the Committee meeting is due to be held 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). Public Question Time speakers may participate in person or virtually. Speaker preference must be indicated upon registration.

The Council reserves the right to decline any requests to register for Public Question Time if they are received after the registration deadline.

The public may ask questions on any matter listed on the Agenda for this meeting. All questions or statements should be concise and should be able to be read within the 3 minutes allotted for each question/statement.

The Chairman of the Committee has discretion to extend the time allocated for public question time and to amend the order in which questions/statements are presented to the Committee.

Public Attendance at Meetings:

Public attendance is welcomed, but is limited and will be on a first come first served basis with priority given to Public Registered Speakers. In order to maintain safe distances, the Council may have to refuse entry to members of the public. The public may not be able to sit in the Council Chamber, but will be able to observe the meeting from a public gallery through a large screen.

Alternatively, the Council meetings are webcast and are available via the Council's YouTube Channel and can be viewed by the public as a live broadcast, or as a recording following the meeting.

Public speakers and public attendees are required to attend on their own, and where possible only one representative of any community group, family household or Company should attend. Members of the public intending to come to Causeway House to observe a meeting are recommended to watch the meeting via the webcast, or to contact the Governance and Members Team to reserve a seat within the public gallery.

Health and Safety:

Visitors are requested to follow all instructions displayed at Causeway House or given by Officers during the course of their attendance.

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Documents: Agendas, Reports and Minutes can be accessed via www.braintree.gov.uk

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Comments and Suggestions:

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

1 Apologies for Absence**2 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.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10th October 2022 (copy previously circulated).

4 Public Question Time

(See paragraph above)

5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING**5a Fusion Lifestyle – Presentation to Cabinet**

To receive a presentation from Anthony Cawley, Chief Executive, Fusion Lifestyle.

6 FINANCE & CORPORATE TRANSFORMATION**6a Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023-24 to 2026-27****6 - 39****7 CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT****7a Review of the Council's Enforcement Policy**

This report is to follow.

8 ECONOMIC GROWTH**8a Rural Prosperity Fund Implementation Plan****40 - 49**

9 OPERATIONS AND COMMERCIALISATION

9a	Award of a Tender for the provision of tyres and associated services for the Council's Commercial Vehicle Fleet	50- 53
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10	HOUSING, ASSETS AND SKILLS	
10a	Housing Strategy 2023-2028	57- 107

Report Title: Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27	
Report to: Cabinet	
Date: 28 th November 2022	For: Decision
Key Decision: No	Decision Planner Ref No: DP2022/24
Report Presented by: Councillor John McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation	
Enquiries to: Phil Myers, Head of Finance, phimy@braintree.gov.uk	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides detail of the progress updating of the Financial Profile and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 to 2026/27; unavoidable cost pressures and budget growth; and options for revenue cost reductions/additional income to contribute towards the anticipated budget gap in 2023/24; and the strategy for achieving a balanced budget and addressing the longer-term financial gap across the MTFS period.
- 1.2 The report also provides an update on the Capital Programme and proposed financing, including details of the proposed additions to the programme from the capital bids received for 2023/24.
- 1.3 The report has been written ahead of the Autumn Statement that is due to be announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17th November 2022. Following the announcement, it may be necessary to revise the assumptions made in the report and the updated MTFS Financial Profile.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet to agree that:

- 2.1 No discretionary changes are proposed to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24 and consequently there is no requirement for consultation to be undertaken; and
- 2.2 The Revenue and Capital Programme position, as presented in this report, constitute the initial proposals and options for determining the 2023/24 Budget and that views are sought as appropriate.
- 2.3 Funding available for Discretionary Housing Payments in 2022/23 is increased by £77,000 through an allocation from the Covid-19 reserve.

- 2.4 To increase the minimum level of the General Fund unallocated balance for the Budget Strategy from £1.5million to £3million.

3. Budget Context and Strategy

- 3.1 The Council's Budget Strategy (the Strategy) has been established for several years, which is to:
- Be a low council tax authority
 - Have plans to deliver a balanced budget over the medium-term; and
 - Maintain a minimum level of unallocated balances (currently determined as £1.5m, but recommended to raise to £3m)
- 3.2 The approach to achieving this Strategy has been to deliver cost reductions and additional income without impacting on customers and service delivery.
- 3.3 Braintree District Council (the Council) has also progressed its ambition to invest in the district, most visible through the capital investment strategy and strategic projects. Funding for this investment has been through a combination of using the Council's own capital resources, including New Homes Bonus, external funding wherever possible, and by increasing prudential borrowing.
- 3.4 The economic backdrop now means that delivering the Strategy has become significantly more challenging with high inflation, increased interest rates, greater scrutiny and more regulatory change. Residents and businesses face a cost-of-living crisis that has already seen increased needs and support from the Council. Forecasting is more difficult with increased macro-economic volatility, exacerbated by external events such as the war in Ukraine and other geopolitical developments.
- 3.5 Whilst the Spending Review announced in October 2021 (SR21), set out a spending envelope comprising real term growth in resources for local government, the subsequent rapid rise in inflation, Government's commitment to ensuring the UK's economic stability and a need to provide confidence in fiscal discipline, has led to much greater uncertainty over how this will now impact on council finances particularly as all Government departments have been tasked with finding more efficiency savings to stay within the SR21 targets. Further information will become known once the Autumn Statement is published on 17th November, which it has been confirmed will address both taxes and spending, but the Government is unlikely to provide clarity on the specific impact on local government until the provisional local government finance settlement later in December.
- 3.6 The scale of the overall financial challenge facing the Council and the emerging strategy to ensure a sustainable MTFs position is set out in Section 8.

4. Updates on the Financial Assumptions in the MTFS

- 4.1 In February 2022, the MTFS identified a budget gap across the four-year period of £1.243m. Since then, the assumptions and estimates underpinning the MTFS have been reviewed considering the latest information and best estimates in what is a very volatile and uncertain fiscal context. The Table below shows the latest extract from the MTFS Financial Profile:

	23/24 £000	24/25 £000	25/26 £000	26/27 £000	MTFS £'000
MTFS ongoing gap Feb 22	925	119	199	-	1,243
Pay, inflation, cost pressures, and reduced income	2,024	34	(8)	113	2,163
Govt. funding and NI	(523)	240	-	-	(283)
Business rates and collection fund	(361)	157	(4)	(4)	(212)
Proposed growth	302	65	136	-	503
Budget gap before savings	2,367	615	323	109	3,414

- 4.2 Further details of the changes made to the Financial Profile are set out below.

4.3 Pay Costs

- 4.3.1 The annual staff pay award, with effect from April 2022, covering the majority of staff has been confirmed with the unions accepting the National Employers' offer of £1,925 on all pay points. This increases the Council's pay bill by around 6% (compared to 2% originally assumed in the MTFS). For financial planning, a 3% increase has been allowed in 2023/24, and 2% in subsequent years.
- 4.3.2 Annual incremental progression is allowed for all staff that are not at the top of their grade, although advancement is subject to satisfactory performance. The estimated cost of incremental progression will be revised based on an updated staffing profile prior to budget estimates being finalised.
- 4.3.3 The provisional results from the latest Triennial Review of the Essex Pension Fund conducted as at 31st March 2022, are currently being assessed and clarifications sought with the Essex Pension Fund Service to confirm the position for the Council in terms of its pension contributions for the period April 2023 to March 2026. Based on an initial assessment, a previous cost pressure item has been removed from the Financial Profile, and further adjustments are to be confirmed.
- 4.3.4 The net effect of changes to pay costs is an additional £790k from that which had been assumed in the MTFS in February 2022.

4.4 Gas & Electricity

- 4.4.1 The Council contracts its energy through Crown Commercial Services (CCS). The current contract basis is that energy costs are purchased 6-months in advance of the charging period, which is either October-September, or April-March, depending on the property account concerned. Whilst this approach provided protection from the rapid increase in wholesale market prices,

particularly after the start of the Ukraine war, the Council is now exposed to market prices. An initial estimate of the additional cost in 2023/24 has been made and factored into the updated Financial Profile (+£240k). Mitigation against increased costs is being provided in the current year through a new government Energy Bill Relief Scheme, which will provide a discount for all non-domestic customers (including the public sector); however, this relief is currently only available until April 2023. The government has indicated the position will be reviewed on any further extended support including which businesses might be targeted. Given the high degree of volatility in the wholesale market, budget assumptions will continue to be refined ahead of the final budget report.

- 4.4.2 It is uncertain if, and when, energy prices may reverse, therefore a working assumption has been that increased costs will remain for 2-years, and then will reduce in the following two subsequent years of the MTFS.

4.5 Fuel and Other Inflationary Costs

- 4.5.1 Allowance has been made in the Financial Profile for increased costs above those assumed in February because of higher fuel and other inflationary pressures (+£309k in 2023/24 and +£34k in 2024/25). These estimates are also subject to a high degree of uncertainty and fluctuation. A significant positive impact that is partially offsetting increased costs has been the rapid rise in the market prices of mixed dry recycling material and glass for which the Council receives credit/ income through contracts with external material processors. The uplift in income is subject to a risk that prices fall significantly and therefore the assumption made is that income is based on the average price achieved in 21/22 resulting in an additional £299k of income. Again, these assumptions will be kept under review, and in particular the next quarter review of recycling prices which the Council has been advised is expected to see a fall in prices from the peak that was agreed for Q3 of the current year.

4.6 Cost Pressures

- 4.6.1 The Council faces other cost pressures and reduced income in its activities that have been reflected in the updated Financial Profile:
- **Causeway House Lettable Space** - Reduced rent income (£134k) and service charge recovery (£157k) from the lettable areas of Causeway House as all tenants have now vacated whilst efforts continue to be made to secure alternative occupiers of the space. This is being partly offset by a proposal to relocate staff from Unit 4 at Lakes Road, which will result in future savings on the rental of this unit.
 - **Car Parking Income** - Since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic the Council has suffered a drop in income from car parks, particularly from pay & display. Whilst there has been some recovery since the worst effects of the pandemic, income nevertheless is forecast to be lower than provided for in the base budget by £210k.
 - **Cordons Farm Disposal Costs** – Essex County Council (Waste Disposal Authority) has informed us of increased costs of tipping

residual waste at the Waste Transfer Station, Cordons Farm from 1 April 2023 (est. £145k). We are in discussions and working with officers at ECC to consider options to mitigate and reduce the costs, where practically possible.

- **Housing Benefit** – the net cost of providing housing benefit support is higher than the budget allows (£100k), after taking account of government subsidy. The main reasons for this are the need to utilise a higher level of bed & breakfast type accommodation and costs associated with benefits paid to supported housing providers, both instances where subsidy recovery is capped. In the current year this additional cost is being met from reserves; however, this position is expected to continue under current circumstances.
- **Corporate Costs** (£148k) – there are several costs which are expected to increase: external audit fees where the Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) has recently advised authorities to plan for a 150% increase in fees from 2023/24; insurance premiums where the Council has increased risk exposure through its property and commercial activities; and bank and card transaction fees where increases are being levied on transactional charges related to income collection.
- **Council Tax Sharing Agreement (CTSA)** – A review of the current CTSA scheme which operates between the major precepting authorities and billing authorities has recently been completed. A revised scheme is being proposed from April 2023, the estimated impact of which would be to reduce the income the Council receives (£50k).
- **Operations** (£38k) - increased operational costs including the running costs of a new street washer that will be able to be used across all three main towns.

4.7 Government Funding

- 4.7.1 The Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) for 2022/23 provided for a single-year financial settlement for councils, reflecting a roll-forward of the previous year's settlement, but with a new one-off Services grant. The settlement also included a Lower Tier Services Grant for the second year. At the time, the Government stated its commitment to ensuring that future funding allocations for councils would be based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources, and that it would work closely with the sector and other stakeholders before consulting on any potential changes. So far there has been no consultation issued and therefore it is currently assumed that 2023/24 may similarly be a single-year roll over settlement.
- 4.7.2 For the purposes of updating the Financial Profile the Lower Tier Services Grant (currently £159k) has been assumed to be ongoing, and the Services grant (£240k) paid for a second year only.

4.7.3 From 6th November 2022, the temporary 1.25% increase in National Insurance rates was reversed for the rest of the financial year. The introduction of a separate Health and Social Care Levy tax in April 2023 has been cancelled. The annual saving to the Council from this change is estimated to be £123k. There is a risk that government clawback funding provided via the SR21 in relation to what was seen as an additional cost burden on councils.

4.8 Business Rates and Collection Fund

4.8.1 The Business Rates Baseline, the amount of business rates the Council is entitled to retain before levy is payable, is assumed to increase by 2% per annum. In previous years, the government has either uprated baselines in line with inflation or, if the rating multiplier to be paid by businesses has been capped or frozen, compensated councils for the reduction in income through additional grant. The high rate of annual inflation in September 2022, would normally be expected to be applied; however, no allowance has been made at this time pending further clarification from Government.

4.8.2 The additional amount of retained business rate income has similarly been increased across the MTFS period by 2% per annum; however, an additional increase of £200k (ongoing) has been assumed from 2023/24 based on the current level of business rate income being collected. Whilst having a positive impact, this does increase the level of risk from £1.5m to £1.7m in terms of any potential reset of the Business Rate Retention Scheme.

4.8.3 No allowance has been made of the potential impact of introducing a new valuation list from April 2023. A draft valuation list is still awaited from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA), which would be expected to be implemented across England based on not raising the overall amount of income generated from business rates, this being achieved by adjusting the National Rating Multiplier, either upwards/ downwards depending on the overall effect of the revaluation on rateable values. At a local level, councils can be gainers/ losers from the changes. For individual business ratepayers it is expected that a transitional protection scheme will be introduced that phases in large increases/ decreases over a set period.

4.8.4 The budget setting process includes estimating the amount of council tax likely to be collected. Variation from the estimate results in either a surplus or deficit on the Collection Fund which must either be returned to or requested from council taxpayers in the following year. The surplus or deficit is allocated between the four major preceptors: Essex County Council, Braintree District Council, and Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (EPFCC) for Policing and Community safety and for the Fire and Rescue Authority.

4.8.5 It is estimated that the balance on the Collection Fund available for distribution is a surplus of £1,807,134. The surplus will be allocated to:

- Essex County Council £1,309,953
- Braintree District Council £221,760
- EPFCC Policing & Community Safety £205,427
- EPFCC Fire & Rescue Authority £69,994

- 4.8.6 During the 2022/23 Budget process it was proposed that the cost of providing a **Councillor Community Grants Scheme**, which is not in the base budget, would be met from any share of a Collection Fund surplus. The current scheme provides for £1,250 per Member, a total annual cost of £61,250.
- 4.8.7 After allowing funding for a Councillor Community Grant Scheme this will leave a residual amount of the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund surplus of £160,510, which has been taken into account within the updated Financial Profile as a one-off benefit in 2023/24 only.
- 4.8.8 The assumption at present is that any share of a balance on the Collection Fund that relates to business rates will be matched by an equivalent addition/reduction from the Business Rate Retention Reserve. Balances in respect of business rates continue to be impacted by timing differences related to the accounting treatment of Covid business rate reliefs and the related government compensation grants. Further detail on the balance relating the business rates will be provided in the final budget report.

4.9 **Council Taxbase**

- 4.9.1 The Council Taxbase for 2023/24 is required to be calculated as at 30th November 2022, and will be agreed under delegated authority by the Section 151 Officer. However, prior to this determination and for financial planning purposes the council taxbase for 2023/24 is estimated to be 55,507 (an increase of 1% over the 2022/23 taxbase).
- 4.9.2 The Council Taxbase includes estimated allowances for discounts and exemptions including the Local Council Tax Support Scheme, single persons discount and losses on collection. For 2023/24 the allowance for collection losses has been increased by 0.5% giving a revised collection rate assumption of 98.5%. It is considered that this is prudent given the considerable financial pressures that households will be facing over the coming months and the risk this poses to future collection performance.
- 4.9.3 The Council has previously exercised its discretionary powers to set discounts where it is permissible for empty properties (both properties undergoing extensive repairs and properties unfurnished) and second homes. Currently no discount is provided, and it is proposed to keep this policy in place for 2023/24.
- 4.9.4 The Council has also previously exercised its discretionary powers to set a premium on long-term empty properties (unoccupied and substantially unfurnished) in addition to a full charge. The premiums are based on the length of time a property has been empty:
- 100% for a period of less than 5 years
 - 200% for at least 5 years but less than 10 years
 - 300% for at least 10 years.

As an incentive, when a property is brought back into use and occupied a refund of the premium charged (i.e., the amount above the previous level set by government of 50%) for the previous 12 months will be made.

It is not proposed to vary any of these premium levels for 2023/24.

- 4.9.5 On 3rd October 2022, 196 properties were subject to a premium: 91 charged 100%, 43 charged 200%, and 62 charged 300%. It is noted that 91 of the 196 properties are owned by the Ministry of Defence at the former Wethersfield Air Base.
- 4.9.6 The Council has discretionary power, under section 13A 1c of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, to enable it to reduce council tax liability where statutory discounts, exemptions and reductions do not apply. Current policy is to consider each application on its merit. The cost of an award under the policy must be met from the General Fund. No changes or amendments to this policy are proposed.
- 4.9.7 A council tax exemption for care leavers, aged 24 and under, also applies. Essex County Council and this Council fund this exemption, in proportion to precepts.
- 4.9.8 The Financial Profile includes allowance for future growth in the council taxbase at 1% per annum from 2024/25 onwards (and assumes the collection rate reverts to 99%).

4.10 Local Council Tax Support Scheme

- 4.10.1 The Council is committed to assisting residents through the current cost of living crisis. The Council's Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme applies to working age claimants and retains a significant proportion of the principles and elements of the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme. The level of council tax liability on which LCTS awards are based is 76%.
- 4.10.2 There are no proposed changes to the existing scheme other than to reflect statutory changes that Government have/ will introduce including disregarding certain cost of living payments and compensation for victims of infected blood. Therefore, it is considered there is no requirement for consultation on the scheme to be operated from April 2023. Details of the current scheme can be found at [The Local Council Tax Support scheme – Braintree District Council](#)
- 4.10.3 Support given to claimants of pensionable age is calculated using the rules as existed under the former Council Tax Benefit scheme, uprated by government in line with wider benefit system changes.
- 4.10.4 The LCTS scheme is accounted for as a discount with the Council's taxbase being reduced by an estimate of the amount of support that will be awarded each year. The variation between the actual and estimated amount awarded is reflected in the balance on the Council Tax Collection Fund at the year-end.
- 4.10.5 The Equalities Impact Assessment produced for the current scheme continues to be relevant. This identified that the scheme provides a positive impact for older people but potential negative impact for people with disabilities. The

potential impact is minimised as Disability Benefits are disregarded thereby providing additional support to those with specific long-term conditions. Support for people with mental health issues may be available by means of an exemption from Council Tax liability under SMI (Severely Mentally Impaired) legislation.

4.10.6 As further support to households an Exceptional Hardship Fund is to be retained which will provide for short-term assistance to households facing exceptional financial difficulties. The Fund is financed by the Council and from contributions from the major precepting authorities, in proportion to individual council tax precept levels.

4.10.7 The Council's current process for dealing with requests for assistance from the Fund involves a referral to the Citizens Advice (CA) for an assessment of the claimant's finances. Detail of the process is contained in the 'Council Tax – Discretionary Reduction in Liability Policy.' No changes are being proposed to the arrangement with the CA or the funding for this element of the service.

4.10.8 In addition to the money advice service provided by the CA, the Council employs an officer to work specifically with claimants who are experiencing difficulty in paying their council tax with the objective of offering support and advice and to ultimately agree a payment plan. The Council's procedures for collection enforcement also aims to work constructively and sympathetically with taxpayers who are genuinely struggling to pay.

4.11 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

4.11.1 DHP are payments to recipients of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit that provide extra financial assistance for housing related costs for the following reasons:

- prevent homelessness
- ease poverty
- safeguard residents in their home
- keep families together
- help claimants through personal crises and difficult events
- provide tenants with time to reassess their situation and find a long-time solution.

4.11.2 Government allocate DHP funding annually to be disbursed by local authorities. The amount provided in the current year is £174,853 which is £76,964 less than the amount provided in 2021/22 of £251,817. Local authorities can use their own funds to top up the government contribution up to a maximum of two and a half times the DWP allocation.

4.11.3 The Combined Scrutiny Committee into the Cost-of-Living Crisis 2022 recently reported its response to Full Council at its meeting held on 10th October 2022. In the response the Committee included the following recommendation:

'It is recommended that the Council add to the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to assist those who are most vulnerable and to avoid homelessness.'

4.11.4 In making the recommendation, the Committee drew on the fact that the Council still retained a £1million reserve that was set aside for Covid, although recognising that there were still some unknowns regarding the related costs and the Council was facing its own financial challenges.

4.11.5 At the end October the amount of DHP awarded was £115k or 66% of the available funding. Without any additional funding, there will be just £60k available to provide support over the remainder of the financial year. It is therefore proposed to top-up the Government funding by £77k which will provide the same level of funding for the scheme that was available in 21/22, and to meet this from a re-allocation from the Covid reserve.

4.12 Council Tax Levels and Referendums

4.12.1 The Localism Act 2011 gives local communities the power to decide whether to accept an excessive council tax increase. The Secretary of State determines the level of increase above which a proposed increase in council tax must be subject to a referendum. For shire district councils the threshold for 2022/23 was set at the higher of less than 2% or up to £5. The Government will announce its proposed limit in the provisional Financial Settlement for 2023/24.

4.12.2 In line with the Budget Strategy, the Financial Profile is currently based on council tax rate increasing by less than 2% per annum, giving the following Band D tax rates:

- 2023/24 – 1.99% providing a Band D level of £193.41
- 2024/25 – 1.95% providing a Band D level of £197.19
- 2025/26 – 1.96% providing a Band D level of £201.06
- 2026/27 – 1.97% providing a Band D level of £205.02

4.12.3 The following table sets out a range of scenarios for the 2023/24 council tax rate and impact this would have on the Council's budget and the available resources over the MTFS period compared to what is already assumed:

Change in Band D Rate	Band D Rate £. p	Increase per week pence	Impact on current 2023/24 budget gap +Adverse/ - Positive	Spending Power impact over current MTFS -Reduction/ +Increase
Freeze	£189.63	-	+£210k	-£827k
0.5%	£190.53	2p	+£160k	-£630k
1.0%	£191.52	4p	+£105k	-£414k
1.5%	£192.42	5p	+£55k	-£217k
2.0% (MTFS)	£193.41	7p	-	-
Max 2.6% (£4.95)	£194.58	10p	-£65k	+£256k

4.12.4 The MTFS in February 2022 already assumed a 2% increase in the Council's share of the overall Council Tax rate and, therefore, £210k of additional income.

5. Budget Growth

5.1 Proposed Budget Growth for 2023/24

5.1.1 Bids for budget growth in 2023/24 total £302k. The bids proposed, that would be added to the budget if confirmed after considering views sought through the budget consultation, would include the following items:

Climate Change and the Environment.

- **Litter and Dog Bin Route Review** – To commission an external resource to undertake a review of the litter and dog bin routes with a view to increasing operational efficiency. This item is seen as a potential 'invest to save' item. A request for one-off funding in 2023/24 of £15k.
- **A12 Street Cleansing Partnership** - This is for a budget to clean and maintain the A12 as part of a new collaborative partnership with other Essex councils to provide a more consistent and safer service. Funding is requested to meet the Council's contribution towards contracting the required clean-up work and related traffic management. Subject to further clarification of requirements and level of take-up by other local authorities, a request is being made for £30k per annum.

Overall Strategy

- **Marketing & Communications** – The Council's ambitious strategic investment programme and continued investment in its corporate priorities has meant that demands on the communications team have remained high. Additional funding was agreed for a four-year period to provide additional staffing resources which will be fully utilised by the end of the current financial year. A bid for £25k has been made to maintain funding for this resource in base budget.

Finance & Corporate Transformation

- **Legal Services restructure** – to ensure that there is robust legal support in place to meet the Council's needs it has been necessary to restructure the legal services team increasing in-house resources. This is in part an 'invest to save' approach as the new structure should reduce reliance on the need for external legal services in areas such as strategic investment, asset management, and planning and enforcement. The additional capacity and expertise will also enable the Council to offer services and generate additional income through the local authority legal partnership. A request for £62k of additional base budget is being made which includes £45k that has previously been funded from reserve for the last four years.

- **Programme Management Office (PMO)** – The purpose of the PMO will be to provide support to the organisation in terms of project/programme portfolio management, governance and assurance and performance management. The PMO would be independent to project delivery. A provisional funding request for an additional £170k to base budget for staffing has been made but the exact requirements are yet to be confirmed and may be partly addressed through redirecting existing resources.

5.2 Strategic Investment Team

- 5.2.1 At its meeting on 8th October 2018, Full Council agreed funding over a four-year period from New Homes Bonus (NHB) to provide the necessary resources to support a Strategic Investment Team. Over that period a significant package of investment has been delivered into the district supporting health, homes, journeys, and jobs, though major projects such as Victoria Square; the Horizon 120 business innovation and logistics park; the Plaza Enterprise and Innovation Centre; and I-Construct. Capitalisation of project costs and use of NHB has funded the cost of the Strategic Investment Team which has comprised both permanent and interim staff. The available funding will be fully utilised during the current financial year.
- 5.2.2 The longer-term resource requirement for the Strategic Investment Team will depend on both the expected delivery timescales for existing projects, and the extent to which pipeline projects are expected to proceed and what other new opportunities may be on the horizon. It is therefore proposed that any further revenue funding requirement (after capitalisation of appropriate costs) continues to be met from the balance of unallocated New Homes Bonus (NHB). The exact amount of NHB that will be required is yet to be confirmed as it will depend on both the final in-year position for funding of the team and decisions on the level of resource to be required moving forward. The proposed allocation of NHB will be set out in the final budget report to Cabinet on 6th February 2023.

5.3 Provisional Budget Growth – Economic Development Team

- 5.3.1 A new Economic Growth Strategy is in development to deliver the Corporate Plan priority of ‘a prosperous district that attracts business growth and provides high quality employment opportunities’ - through a 5-year action plan focusing on the core economic growth needs for the district.
- 5.3.2 The Financial Profile includes a provisional item of budget growth totalling £216k per annum, with an initial part-year requirement in 2024/25. The Economic Development Team is currently funded from a mixture of base budget, external funding, and reserves, the latter of which is estimated to be fully utilised during 2024/25. The provisional item is therefore to highlight a future funding bid that will ensure resources are in place to deliver a robust economic development activity. However, exact requirements will be influenced by the ‘Plan for Growth’ which is expected to be completed by February 2023, and which will determine priorities.

6. The Budget Gap and Proposed Management Savings and Additional Income

- 6.1 Based on the foregoing the updated Financial Profile shows a significant adverse movement in the budget position with a structural financial gap that will need more transformational changes to the way the Council operates over the medium-term. This level of change will need to be set in the context of what sort of Council does Braintree want to be which will be very much an early challenge for a new administration following the May 2023 elections.
- 6.2 The Service Review undertaken for the budget planning has identified some areas of savings and options that will partially mitigate the budget gap, mainly in 2023/24, but with some opportunities identified that will impact in later years.

6.3 Management Savings

- 6.3.1 Senior Managers have been reviewing their service budgets to identify savings and cost reductions and/or additional income generation. Management Board have agreed these as they do not have a direct impact on customers or service delivery.
- 6.3.2 The proposed Management savings are mainly achievable from 2023/24 with further adjustments in 2024/25, as summarised in the table below:

Management Savings	23/24 £000	24/25 £000	MTFS £'000
Increased income	131	-	131
Reduction in budgets due to local management review of requirements	83	34	117
Reduction in service costs due to adoption of technology, changes to processes.	84	-	84
Treasury Management	75	-30	45
Savings where agreements with external bodies have ended	20	-	20
Total Management Savings	393	4	397

7. Options and Opportunities for Savings and Additional Income

- 7.1 Where Senior Managers identified savings or opportunities for additional income which could have an impact on customers and service delivery these have been reviewed by the Cabinet at the Strategy Workshop held on 21st October. From this initial review options have been agreed and on which views are being sought through the budget consultation process.
- 7.2 Options have been categorised across several themes
- 7.2.1 **Funding Arrangements with Other Organisations**
- Extend the Service Level Agreement with the Citizens Advice for a further year with a grant of £107k, a reduction of £5.6k against the current year, but to continue with a separate payment of £25k for the

Money Advice Service recognising the likely demands on the CA during the current cost-of-living crisis. Arrangements for 2024/25 onwards to be subject to further review.

- Revise the Management Agreement with the Museum Trust and link to a 3% per annum reduction (£5k) in funding, commencing in 2023/24. To recognise the additional support the Trust is providing to residents during the cost-of-living crisis outside the current Management Agreement, a one-off payment is proposed in 2023/24 equivalent to the reduction in grant proposed for that year.
- Reduce the amount of funding provided to Parish Councils under the Street Cleaning Agreement by 33% (£29k). This excludes the grounds maintenance function undertaken by some Parish/Town Councils.

7.2.2 Community Facilities

There are several facilities where it is considered that the Council could work with the respective Town Councils over alternative arrangements for provision, management, and maintenance of facilities. This includes the public toilets at both Maldon Road and Newland Street in Witham, as well as certain operational aspects for the Halstead Public Gardens. If alternative arrangements cannot be established the option of withdrawing services would need to be considered to reduce revenue costs (£35k).

7.2.3 Horticultural Related Services

In line with the Council's commitment to biodiversity and re-wilding the District, options for reducing the current spend on horticultural related services include:

- Replace all Summer/Winter bedding planting with sustainable planting across the district or grass over all the beds (£6k). The budget saving in the first year would be used to implement the changes required to the beds. If the option is rejected, there is currently a shortfall on the budget for maintaining the current position (+£4k).
- Reduce cuts of urban amenity verges by 50% from 12 -14 down to 6-7 per annum (£30k). Most verges in urban areas are the responsibility of the County Council as they form part of the public maintainable highway. Under a historical arrangement, ECC pay the Council to undertake 2 safety cuts; however, the Council has chosen to increase the number of cuts per annum to maintain to an 'amenity standard'. During 2023/24 the Council will look to work with communities to pilot re-wilding projects in key locations where a reduction in cuts to the minimum level could be sustained.
- Cease the provision of hanging baskets in Braintree Town Centre and at Causeway House (£9k).

7.2.4 How We Communicate with Residents

There are several ways in which the Council could change the way it communicates with residents that make best use of technology, and which

allows for a more agile approach to service design and delivery and, importantly, reduces the Council's use of natural resources:

- Cease provision of hard copy waste collection calendars to all households by default and put on-line. Hard paper copies would be made available on request (£25k)
- Reduce the frequency of the Council Page in local newspapers to monthly (£2.8k)
- Increase advertising within the A5 Contact Magazine delivered with the Council Tax bill (£1k).
- Consider to what extent the Council could move towards a more paperless organisation, including all Committee agendas. This proposal would, if supported in principle, require further consideration before it was possible to quantify the savings that might be generated.

7.2.5 Other Options

There are a range of other options proposed that involve generating income or reducing costs that total £130k, these include:

- Remove the Commercial Manager position from the staffing establishment as this role is undertaken by various officers across the organisation and has been vacant for some time.
- Introduce new charges to recover costs from third parties, for example, for sealing contracts; and to cover administrative costs when making referrals to government energy schemes.
- Reviewing options on the parking provision at Causeway House.
- Withdraw membership of Keep Britain Tidy
- Cease the current approach to assessing Customer Service Excellence Standard accreditation and put in place alternative ways of measuring and improving performance
- Withdraw the specific budget for Member Development as the Council has other available funding set aside for this activity and access to resources both internal and external to support specific member development requirements.

7.3 Parking Charges

7.3.1 Car parking charges are normally reviewed every three years and were due to be reviewed ahead of the current year's budget. This review, however, was delayed given the continued uncertainties at that time over the impact of Covid, meaning that charges have not been reviewed since 2018 when only modest changes were made.

7.3.2 Options and recommendations are due to be brought to a future Cabinet meeting; however, for budget planning purposes provision has been made for an increase in income to close the forecast budget gap from this activity of £200k, with implementation expected from June 2023.

7.3.3 Whilst formal decisions have yet to be taken and which will also be subject to public consultation where parking tariffs are amended, options include the following:

- Conversion to cashless payment method only resulting in savings on income collection costs as well as reducing operational risks e.g., cash held in machines.
- Withdrawal of the 10p after 3pm concession.
- Changes to Pay & Display tariffs – options under consideration have been based on comparative data.
- Increases to charges for season tickets.
- Increases to overnight charges.

7.4 Garden Waste Charging

- 7.4.1 The collection of garden waste is currently a discretionary service and local authorities can make a reasonable charge if they wish to do so. In a consultation launched by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in May 2021, it was stated that 98% of local authorities operated a green waste collection service and that 65% levied a charge. The use of the current service is not universal in that not all households have gardens, but the cost (estimated at £583k in 2021/22) is met by all council taxpayers.
- 7.4.2 Introducing a charge for the service would aim to recover the full cost of the service, subject to other considerations around the level of charge considered acceptable and an equalities impact assessment. The income generated would be subject to take-up of the service and there would also be one-off set-up costs in year one, meaning that the full financial benefits would not be realised until 2025/26 if the charge is introduced from April 2024.
- 7.4.3 The financial challenges faced by the Council means that introducing a charge would be a significant step to addressing the structural budget gap. However, the lack of clarity over the Government's intentions makes the decision more difficult. The Government's has stated previously an aim of providing consistent collection of recycling for households in England which would include the provision of a minimum level of garden waste collection free of charge. DEFRA consulted on this in 2021 but to date there has been no further announcements as to what arrangements are going to be required. The consultation recognised that whilst there were environmental benefits to such a service, this would be at a significant cost to local authorities, and primarily because of the loss of revenue. There was acknowledgement of potential new burdens funding being provided which would be subject to a new burdens assessment.
- 7.4.4 It is, therefore, proposed that charging for providing a garden waste service is introduced from April 2024, subject to there being no Government announcement in the intervening period that requires local authorities to provide a free minimum service.

7.5 Fees & Charges

- 7.5.1 The general principle of the Charging Policy for the Council's discretionary fees and charges is that service users should make a direct contribution to the cost of providing services at their point of use.

- 7.5.2 The majority of the discretionary fees and charges are reviewed annually, and this process is currently in progress.
- 7.5.3 As a baseline, services are being asked to consider increasing charges by at least the current rate of inflation (CPI c10%) which would potentially yield an additional £100k to £150k of income. However, there will be other factors that services will need to consider, including market competitiveness, contractual provisions, the need for concessionary rates, and any statutory cost recovery limitations.
- 7.5.4 A schedule detailing the proposed levels of discretionary fees and charges for 2023/24 will be presented in the Finance report to Cabinet on 6th February 2023.
- 7.5.5 Many of the Councils fees and charges are statutory and set by government, including fees for planning applications, some licensing arrangements, and fines and permits. The Government has previously indicated an intention to consult on proposals to increase the fees for major and minor planning applications with suggested increases of 35% and 25% respectively. If introduced, this would generate a significant amount of additional income; however, to date no firm proposals have been published and the timeline for implementation of any uplift in fees is unclear.

7.6 Summary of Options and Potential Impact on MTFS

- 7.6.1 Based on the options set out above, the estimated financial impact is summarised below:

Options	23/24 £000	24/25 £000	25/26 £000	MTFS £'000
Changes to funding external organisations	40	5	5	50
Changes to arrangements for community facilities	35	-	-	35
Changes to horticultural services	39	6	-	45
Changes to how we communicate with residents	29	-	-	29
Other options (various)	130	-	-	130
Car Parking costs and charges	170	30	-	200
Garden Waste charging	-	£ tbc	-	£ tbc
Discretionary fees & charges (est. tbc)	125	-	-	125
Planning application fees	?	?	-	?
Total	568	41	5	614

- 7.6.2 Where proposed savings have an impact on staffing, the Council's Change Management Process will be followed including where necessary applying the Employment Stability Scheme.

8. Financial Challenge

- 8.1 Taking account of the Management Savings and Options that have been quantified this results in a budget gap for 2023/24 and MTFS as set out below:

	23/24 £000	24/25 £000	25/26 £000	26/27 £000	MTFS £'000
Budget gap as per Table Para 4.1	2,367	615	323	109	3,414
Management Savings	(393)	(4)	-	-	(397)
Options (quantified)	(568)	(41)	(5)	-	(614)
Budget gap	1,406	570	318	109	2,403
Cumulative	1,406	1,976	2,294	2,403	

8.2 The updated Financial Profile is set out in **Appendix A**.

8.3 The position set out above is still subject to further changes as work progresses on the detailed service budgets, and assumptions are updated based on latest information, along with the implications of government announcements, including the Autumn Statement on 17th November, and the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, expected in December.

8.4 Actions are already underway that will contribute towards addressing the structural deficit:

- **Investment & Development Programme (IDP)** – better tracking, understanding, challenge and oversight of the various projects and workstreams contributing to closing the budget gap.
- **Review of commercial activities** – benchmarking to peers, assessment of structures and processes, identification of opportunities.
- **Asset Management Review** – strategy for managing and optimising the use of assets we hold, or looking at options for rationalisation, disposal, and reinvestment.
- **Services/ Zero Based Budget reviews** – ensuring efficiencies across services, understanding cost base better, statutory/ discretionary costs, cost recovery through charges, and data to better inform choices.
- **Shared Services** – discussions across greater Essex councils to explore opportunities, economies of scale, and resilience.
- **Devolution** – maximising the opportunities that might be available.

8.5 Use of Balances

8.5.1 It is recognised that addressing the immediate budget gap will require the use of General Fund balances as a short-term measure to ensure a balanced budget can be set for 2023/24.

8.5.2 The General Fund unallocated balance on 1st April 2022 was £6.1m, which is £1.5m higher than had previously been projected. The latest in-year position forecasts that the level of balances will increase by £536k.

8.5.3 The minimum level of balances for the Budget Strategy has previously been set at £1.5m, an amount that has remained constant for many years. There is no recommended level of balances that councils should hold, and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) recommends a risk-based approach considering a broad range of factors.

- 8.5.4 The Council's activities have fundamentally changed over the last few years in part because of the strategic investment programme but also the need to address the sharp reductions in Government funding introduced during the period of austerity, and which has meant the Council having to explore other ways to self-finance. The economic context is also significantly different with high inflation and increased volatility. On this basis it is recommended that the minimum level of balances retained should be increased to £3m.
- 8.5.5 Allowing for an increased minimum level of balances to be retained, there is scope to be able to apply a level of balances in 2023/24 to be able set a balanced budget as a short-term solution. However, this must be on the basis that plans continue to be developed to deal with the structural deficit and that delivery of savings assumed in the MTFS are closely monitored.

8.6 Earmarked Reserves

- 8.6.1 Earmarked reserves are General Fund balances that have been set aside for a specific purpose. Reserves are categorised across the following: Capital and Investment, Risk Management including Business Rate Retention (BRR), Covid-19 Pandemic (BDC and balance of government funding), and Service Reserves.
- 8.6.2 On 1st April 2022, the balance of earmarked reserves was £30m; however, significant elements of the balances are already committed to the capital programme funding and other service requirements, as well as being required to offset a Collection Fund deficit (timing difference) in terms of the BRR reserve.
- 8.6.3 The Council continues to retain £1m of funding set aside from general balances for Covid-19 in an earmarked reserve. Whilst there are still some unknown costs that may be incurred related to Covid, a proposal is being made to use some of this reserve to increase the Discretionary Housing Payments fund which was reduced by the Department for Works and Pensions in the current year by around 30%. This proposal is made in light of the recommendation from the Combined Scrutiny Committee into the Cost-of-Living Crisis 2022, which recently reported its response to the meeting of Full Council held on 10th October 2022.
- 8.6.4 Recognising the requirement to use balances for the 2023/24 budget, it is sensible that earmarked reserves are also subject to a review that considers whether reserves are still required, whether the balance held is appropriate to its purpose, and what opportunities exist to reprioritise or replenish the General Fund unallocated balance.
- 8.6.5 A reserves strategy is to be developed that strengthens the framework and corporate control over how reserves are managed and spent in future. Further details of the strategy and outcomes from the review will be included in the budget report to Cabinet on 6th February 2023.

9. Capital

- 9.1 The Council's existing capital programme and available resources is summarised in the table below:

Resources allocated	£m	Planned Expenditure & Provisions	£m
B/Fwd. April 2022	15.5	Existing programme	18.3
Capital receipts (usable)	6.3	Provisions:	
Government grants	2.0	Witham	3.5
S106 contributions	2.0	Halstead	0.6
NHB and other reserves	2.9	Millennium Slips	2.5
Prudential borrowing	3.5	Manor Street 5%	1.5
		H120 Infrastructure	2.0
		Balance of resources	3.8
Total	32.2	Total	32.2

- 9.2 Whilst the table above shows that there are £3.8m of capital resources available, this assumes that there is a further increase in borrowing requirement of £3.5m, mainly in relation to the Plaza (£2.9m). This would mean the Council's total borrowing requirement would be £22m, with actual debt held of £6m, and the difference of £16m being met through 'internal borrowing' i.e., using cash held for other purposes. Maintaining this level of internal borrowing is dependent on future availability of cash balances (i.e., linked to the level of reserves and balances held). The Council is therefore exposed to a potential refinancing risk given the recent sharp increase in interest rates that currently exceed previous assumptions.
- 9.3 Details of the proposed service capital bids are provided in the schedule at **Appendix B**. The total value of the projects in 2023/24 is £0.8m (net of anticipated external funding).
- 9.4 The schedule also includes anticipated requirements of £1.1m (net) in 2024/25 and £0.6m per annum in 2025/26 and 2026/27 respectively.
- 9.5 During the 2022/23 budget process, the Leader of the Council committed to introduce a Councillor Capital Bid scheme for 2023/24 and wrote to all Members in May inviting any bids to be submitted by 2nd September. Two bids were received which are detailed in **Appendix C**.
- 9.6 In relation to the two councillor capital bids, the following is proposed:
- **Sustainable Parking at Silver End Bowls Club** (£40k net) – this project to be considered further in relation to the potential for developing a designated public car parking area.
 - **Feering Community Centre & Hall Carbon Footprint Reduction** (£30.9k) - it is proposed that Council resources are not allocated to this project at this time but instead the Council will continue to work with the Parish Council/ Community Hub in helping to identify and obtain other external funding, where possible.
- 9.7 It is proposed that the Council continue to invest in a disabled facilities programme using any Better Care Funding, which is awarded to the Council annually via Essex County Council (the allocation for 2022/23 was £1.056m).
- 9.8 Opportunities for investment in the District continues to be reviewed as further extension to the strategic investment programme. However, with high inflation, increasing interest rates, and greater Government regulatory control

over councils' borrowing activities, this does mean that business cases are becoming more challenging to be able to demonstrate financial viability.

- 9.9 Future funding of the capital programme will to a large extent be reliant on the achievement of future capital receipts. The Council has been able to use the steady stream of right-to-buy receipts generated through arrangements put in place as part of the housing stock transfer. However, these receipts are subject to demand and economic conditions and already there is some evidence of a slowdown in completions and pipeline sales. The Council also has other sites intended for residential development on which offers have been accepted but are subject to planning and similarly may be impacted by the current economic climate and its effect on the housing market.
- 9.10 Other potential sources of capital funding include the balance of New Homes Bonus (c £1m), and any future receipts (if any); the balance of the Business Rate Pool reserve (£2.1m) including estimated receipts from participation in an Essex pool in the current year and 2023/24; and Section 106 balances and future receipts, subject to meeting agreement conditions. Government funding may also become available through e.g., future Levelling-up bidding rounds and UK Shared Prosperity Funds.

10. Options

- 10.1 The report sets out the assumptions and options on which consultation is being sought to help inform the 2023/24 Budget and updated MTFS. Cabinet could propose variations to the options set out which would then be reflected in revised proposals that will form the basis of the Budget report on 6th February 2023.

11. Next Steps and Budget Consultation

- 11.1 The current budget process timetable is set out below:

2022		
17 th November	Autumn Statement	Announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer
23 rd November	Performance Management Scrutiny	Initial budget options (revenue and capital) - All Members invited to attend.
28 th November	Cabinet	Initial budget options (revenue and capital)
12 th December	Council	
Mid/ Late December	Government announcement	Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement
21 st December	Additional Strategy Workshop	
2023		
January	Business Community	Consultation on budget proposals – article included in January edition of the Business Bulletin
1 st February	Performance Management Scrutiny	Consultation on final budget proposals and updated MTFS - All Members invited to attend
Early February	Government announcement	Final Local Government Finance Settlement
6 th February	Cabinet	Final budget proposals and updated MTFS
20 th February	Council	2023/24 Budget and Council Tax approved

- 11.2 The Performance Management Scrutiny Committee will examine and consider the budget options contained in this report on 23rd November 2022. The Chairman of the Committee extends an open invitation to all Members to attend this meeting.

12. Financial Implications

- 12.1 Based on the proposals and options set out in the report, there remains a budget gap for 2023/24 of £1.406m, which without further savings or additional income will have to be met from the General Fund unallocated balance to be able to set a balanced budget and Council Tax. However, the position is still subject to change with work continuing reviewing and updating budget assumptions, including taking account of the latest forecast position for the current year. Feedback from the budget consultation process will also be considered prior to finalising the budget proposals. The position reported is subject to any implications that may arise from Government announcements on the Autumn Statement and provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

- 12.2 Across the MTFS period there is a forecast ongoing budget gap of £2.4m that will need to be addressed through a more transformational approach to the Council's spending and resources, for which some of the actions already been taken or planned are set out in Section 8 of the report.
- 12.3 Capital requirements (net of external funding) with a total value of £0.8m are proposed for 2023/24 with anticipated requirements of £1.1m in 2024/25 and £0.6m in both 2025/26 and 2026/27. These requirements exclude any further strategic investment projects, the programme for which is still under consideration and will be updated in the February budget report.
- 12.4 Councillor capital bids have been considered and responses have been set out in the report.
- 12.5 An assessment of available capital resources shows that there will be sufficient to fund the proposed additions to the capital programme, but this is subject to proceeding with increasing the Council's borrowing requirement in 2022/23.

13. Legal Implications

- 13.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report at this stage. However, legal implications will be considered, as necessary, for all budget saving proposals as they are prepared as part the final budget setting process, and as those specific projects are brought forward.

14. Other Implications

- 14.1 Assessment of customer impact, where appropriate, will be included in the savings proposals reported to Cabinet in the Budget report on 6th February 2023.
- 14.2 There are many risks inherent within the position set out in the report. The assumptions may prove to be incorrect resulting in savings not being achieved as planned, inflationary and other cost pressures rising by more/ less than projected, and income targets assumed not being achieved. Government funding remains uncertain until such time detail of the Local Government Finance Settlement is announced.
- 14.3 The proposed financing of the capital programme is dependent upon scheme costs being in line with estimates, and planned resources, including future capital receipts, being realised.

15. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 15.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 15.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 15.3 Equality Impact Assessments will be considered, as necessary, for all budget saving proposals as they are further developed as part of the budget setting process.

16. List of Appendices

Appendix A – General Fund Revenue Profile 2022/23 – 2026/27

Appendix B – Capital Requests 2023/24 and Indicative Requests 2024/25 to 2026/27

Appendix C – Councillor Capital Bids 2023/24

17. Background Papers

- 17.1 Council Budget and Council Tax 2022/23 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26 report to [Cabinet 7th February 2022](#) and Full [Council 21st February 2022](#); and
- 17.2 Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26 Update report to [Cabinet 5th October 2022](#).

General Fund Revenue Profile 2022/23 to 2026/27

APPENDIX A

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Base Budget brought forward from previous year	15,879	17,066	16,822	16,850	17,292
<u>Pay, Inflation, & Treasury Management:</u>					
Pay related costs	1,220	559	462	448	457
Energy, Fuel, and Other & Income Inflation	186	398	196	43	107
Increase in dividends & interest	-100	-120	-30	-	-
<u>New Demands:</u>					
Budget Demand & Growth - previously agreed	590	31	38	25	-
New Cost Pressures & Reduced Income	-	985	-	112	-
Options for New Growth	-	302	65	136	-
<u>Reductions:</u>					
Savings/Additional Income previously profiled	-709	-31	-88	-	-
New Management Savings/Additional Income	-	-393	-4	-	-
Options for Savings/Additional Income	-	-443	-41	-5	-
Discretionary Fees & Charges Review	-	-125	-	-	-
Green Waste Charging	-	-	tbc	tbc	-
Planning Govt. increase to statutory fee levels (tbc)	-	?	?	-	-
Ongoing Savings Required	-	-1,406	-570	-318	-109
Updated Base Budget	17,066	16,822	16,850	17,292	17,747
<u>One-Off or Short-Term Demands</u>					
One-off items previously identified met from GF balances/ reserves	682	196	-	-	-
Councillor Community Grant Scheme	61	61	-	-	-
Strategic Investment Resources	-	275	-	-	-
Net projected underspend (Q2) including in-year Recovery Plan	-850	-	-	-	-
Budget including one-off adjustments	16,959	17,355	16,850	17,292	17,747
Addition to/(Withdrawal) from Balances/ Reserves - Budget 22/23	-843	-196	-	-	-
Change in estimated use of Balances due to in-year variance (Q2)	126	-	-	-	-
Contributions from the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve	-2,737	-	-	-	-
New Contributions from Earmarked Reserves/ Balances/NHB	-	-275	-	-	-
Budget Requirement	13,504	16,883	16,850	17,292	17,747
Revenue Support Grant	-1				
Retained Business Rates - Baseline	-3,487	-3,557	-3,628	-3,700	-3,774
- Growth above baseline and compensation	-1,712	-1,946	-1,985	-2,025	-2,065
Rural Services Grant	-23	-23	-23	-23	-23
Lower Tier Services Grant	-160	-160	-160	-160	-160
Services Grant (New)	-240	-240	-	-	-
Collection Fund Balance - Business Rates Deficit	2,737	-	-	-	-
Collection Fund Balance - Council Tax Surplus	-198	-222	-	-	-
BDC Requirement from Council Taxpayers	10,421	10,736	11,055	11,385	11,725
Tax base (Band D Equivalents) ('000)	55	56	56	57	57
Council Tax (Band D) £.p	£189.63	£193.41	£197.19	£201.06	£205.02
Council Tax increase per annum £.p	£4.95	£3.78	£3.78	£3.87	£3.96
Percentage Increase	2.68%	1.99%	1.95%	1.96%	1.97%
Increase per week £.p	£0.10	£0.07	£0.07	£0.07	£0.08

Note - figures and totals rounded

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24

APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
1	Climate Change and the Environment	Building Control IT Upgrades - To upgrade the Building Control system to support paper free processing, electronic booking of visits, more simple electronic transfer of large files and electronic performance management reporting.	BDC Building Control is currently trying to increase its market share (currently 30%) by improving and promoting the Building Control services it provides.	17,000				No
2	Climate Change and the Environment	Play Area Refurbishment - Partial refurbishment/ equipment upgrades at 4 Play Areas: 1. Rickstones, Witham (installed 2009) 2. Spa Road, Witham (installed 2004) 3. Meadowside, Braintree (installed 2007) 4. Brook Meadow & Oxford Meadow, Sible Hedingham (installed 2005) to maintain a high standard for our play areas for our residents and visitors to enjoy, as well as meet the health and safety requirements for the equipment.	Monthly visual inspections by trained staff and an annual safety audit by an independent external assessor have identified those play areas that require some refurbishment.		200,000			s106 (tbc)
3	Climate Change and the Environment	Housing Renovation Grants	Providing financial support through a repayable grant scheme to ensure those under financial pressure can afford to adequately heat their homes and when it is impractical to carry out disabled adaptations to a property, offer the occupier a relocation grant to enable them to move to a more suitable (adapted) property. No requirement for 2023/24 as balance available from current year.	-	40,000	40,000	40,000	No

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24

APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
4	Climate Change and the Environment	Refurbishment of Wildlife Garden in Halstead Public Gardens - The raised beds in the Wildlife Garden at Halstead Public Gardens have required increased levels of repair/ refurbishment over recent years; the materials are continuing to fail to support the raised beds. We intend to replace the supports with reclaimed materials, RSJ supports with reclaimed railway sleepers, to support soil and planting. These will fit in with the nature of the environment of the Wildlife Gardens.	BDC parks are visually inspected on a regular basis by trained staff during the course of their duties. Inspections carried out this year identified this site for partial refurbishment / upgrade. Failure to act would result in the possibility of not meeting the required safety standards and deterioration of the hard landscaping, leading to expensive repairs or removal of these areas.	20,000				No
5	Climate Change and the Environment	Rebound Goal (Spa Road) - Rebound goals enable recreational football to be played on open spaces whilst controlling the direction of the ball thus creating a safer environment for all open space users. This Bid is for the purchase and installation of one goal at one site. The recommended site is Spa Road, Witham	Following requests to look at recreational football facilities on our Open Spaces in the South of the District (Witham) we have identified the benefits of installing rebound goals at Spa Road Witham, Maldon Road Witham and Bramble Road, Witham.	20,000				No

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24

APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
6	Climate Change and the Environment	Refurbishment of Public Toilets at Newlands Drive, Witham - BDC own and maintain the public toilets at Newlands Drive, Witham which need refurbishment to bring them up to a good standard of repair and decor.	Not refurbishing the public toilets would result in further deterioration of the facilities with greater and more frequent repairs.	50,000				No
7	Climate Change and the Environment	LED Installation at the Leisure Centres - Halstead, Witham, and Braintree Leisure Centres and Braintree Swim Centre are used by Fusion who have a fixed rate supply until November 23. Contractually Fusion have the ability to ask for funding should their energy costs go over an agreed level. There are energy savings to be made in completing these conversions that will reduce the total energy bills received by Fusion. Fusion have stated they will part fund the project by 50% - agreement to be put in place	There is an action in the Climate Strategy Action plan to convert BDC stock to LED lighting. BDC is not paying for the energy bills but this will potentially divert a request from Fusion for further revenue funding.	151,580				75,790
8	Communities	Community Transport Replacement Minibus - Purchase a replacement minibus for FP61 TFK (11 years old and 109k miles)	The community transport minibus fleet consists of 5 minibuses. We expected it to take time for the community transport service to recover from the impact of Covid-19 therefore it was considered manageable to operate with 4 minibuses in 21/22 and 22/23. The lead time from order to delivery of a minibus is normally in excess of 6 months.	40,000				No

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24

APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
9	Finance and Corporate Transformation	MYAccount Phase 2 - As a further enhancement to Phase 1 the following areas have been identified :- Online booking system An online booking system for residents and staff to book and pay for any asset owned by the council, such as sports pitches, meeting spaces, venue hire and individual workspaces Single Sign On (SSO) integration SSO integration from the BDC website to other council online portals such as, Council Tax and Planning. BDC Mobile application Develop a mobile application to promote and enhance council services.	The approach is to make best use of previous investments by enhancing the current and future functionality provided by Jadu or integrated add-ons.	80,000				No
10	Finance and Corporate Transformation	Council Chamber Audio Visual Replacement -The current solution comprising of projectors and screens is now 'old technology' and there are now more efficient and reliable technologies available. Examples of these have already been implemented at iConstruct and the Plaza to great effect. The webcasting solution is currently based upon an analogue sound configuration which has caused interference and quality issues for those joining the webcast. The migration to a digital sound solution would greatly improve the sound quality of the webcasts.	There have been several issues with the projectors, screens and microphones used for presentations in the Council Chamber.	45,000				No
11	Finance and Corporate Transformation	Technology Replacement Programme - Lifecycle replacement	Our hardware and software estate needs to be kept up to date to ensure that it can continue to be supported by our ICT service provider and continues to be fit for purpose.	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	No
12	Finance and Corporate Transformation	Arcserve Backup System Hardware Renewal - Renewal of associated hardware.	Hardware will be under warranty until Dec 2024. At this point we would need to renew the device or risk running it without any support.	-	50,000			No

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24
APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
13	Health and Wellbeing	Braintree Leisure Centre - Replacement of Studio and Sports Hall floors. The centre is operated under a joint-use arrangement and negotiations to be held with the Academy regarding a contribution of up to 25% towards the works. This to be confirmed prior to works commencing.	Substantial defects have been discovered though condition surveys by BDC Asset Management. Studio 1 and Sports Hall floors are coming to the end of their serviceable life. The floors are almost 30 years old. The defects could cause a potential Health & Safety hazard for school children and users of the sports centre and may jeopardise bookings from high profile users playing in national leagues.	90,000				22,500
14	Health and Wellbeing	Braintree Leisure Centre - Resurfacing of the athletics track	The track was built in 1992 so is 30 years old and met its life expectancy and now has a requirement for ongoing maintenance and repairs that are unbudgeted for Fusion but necessary for the track to meet the UK athletic track mark standard for the athletics club to hold its regional events.		400,000			200,000
15	Health and Wellbeing	Braintree Leisure Centre - Replace the halogen bulb floodlighting system with new LED floodlights	The current halogen bulb system is now outdated and energy inefficient, and prone to frequent breakdowns with the supply of ballast and switchgear becoming harder to source.	40,000				No
16	Health and Wellbeing	Halstead Leisure Centre - Replace/ upgrade external cladding (It is assumed that Fusion will contribute 50% towards this cost - tbc)	The current cladding is nearly 50 years old and is now ineffective in terms of its thermal property and needs to be upgraded - Per Keagan's facility condition survey report.		80,000			40,000
17	Housing, Assets and Skills	Causeway House Car Park - The car park was last patch repaired in 2018, and has since deteriorated in both surface and line marking. The Causeway House (CH) rear car park (immediately behind the building) and road leading to the staff entrance requires some work to be done to it. The car park and road is used by BDC staff and tenants visiting Causeway House.	To meet the council's legal obligations and in the interests of health & safety. The work to be done is twofold: 1) Parts of the tarmac have broken and potholes are starting to form. These form a health & safety hazard for pedestrians and can cause damage to car tyres leaving the council open to claims. 2) The re-surfacing will remove all road markings and will have to be re-painted.	33,000				No

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24

APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
18	Housing, Assets and Skills	Causeway House Windows - There are approximately 50 windows at CH that are in need of maintenance or replacement. Some of these windows are very large and have not been able to be fixed by routine maintenance. These windows will need specialist equipment to remove and maintain / replace them.	Some windows have been locked shut as they are not safe to be opened and some windows are unable to be opened at all due to being faulty.	20,000				No
19	Housing, Assets and Skills	Planned Maintenance of Council Properties - The annual investment required to maintain those properties owned, leased and managed by the Council where the Council has a maintenance and repairing obligation.	Condition surveys - to be updated prior to 2024/25 budget process - provisional sum being allowed		530,000	530,000	530,000	No
20	Operations and Commercialisation	Wheelie Bins Provision and Replacements - Additional funding is required for the purchase of new bins, related to growth within the District. Recently the service has experienced additional budget pressures due to the increase bins required to supply new developments, along with increased cost of bins. From 25/26 different arrangements may apply for collecting waste as part of the Governments consistency in waste collections.	An increase in requests for replacement wheelie bins . The district continues to grow with new properties being built and new bins being required as a statutory service delivered by the council. The price of purchasing bins has increased by approx. 21% this year due to the economic demand in plastic and rise in national and international rates.	50,000	50,000			No

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24

APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
21	Operations and Commercialisation	<p>Roller Brake Tester - Purchase and installation of a new Roller Brake Tester (RBT) for the Fleet Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to enable the HGV technicians to carry out all Preventative Maintenance Inspections (PMI) in line with the requirements of the Operator Licence (each of the 9 tests required per vehicle per year requires an accompanying braking performance report) to permit the technicians to carry out the test in a safe and efficient way that is not dangerous to the technician or to the automatic transmission of most BDC fleet vehicles. 	The continual breakdown of the current RBT is causing additional work for the HGV technicians who either have to outsource the testing to an external workshop or adapt the way vehicles are placed onto the RBT for fear of it breaking down again.	45,000				No
22	Operations and Commercialisation	<p>Winter Gritter for Horizon 120 Business Park - Winter gritting/ salt spreading and snow clearing have been undertaken through the use of our All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) with small hoppers mounted to accommodate grit/ salt to spread safely from the vehicle cab. These have been, and will continue to be, used in our town centres and town car parks.</p> <p>The Horizon 120 site on the outskirts of Gt Notley (off the A131) now requires us to have a gritter/ salt spreader that can be towed by our 3.5t Fleet from our Depot to the Horizon site</p>	<p>The location of the Horizon 120 site requires the acquisition of a Towable Gritter/ Salt Spreader which can be towed by our 3.5t Fleet from our Depot to the Horizon site.</p> <p>This will have greater capacity to accommodate the amounts of grit/ salt required for the car parks and highways in BDC ownership which can be directly accessed via the A131.</p> <p>Applying grit/ salt by this method would be a safe working practice for our In-House Team to deliver as part of our Winter Contingency Plan / Schedule.</p>	15,000				No

Requests for Capital Funding 2023/24

APPENDIX B

	Portfolio	Project Description	Project Drivers	Capital Requirement (gross external funding)				External Funding TBC
				2023/24 Bid	2024/25 (Indicative)	2025/26 (Indicative)	2026/27 (Indicative)	
				£	£	£	£	
23	Operations and Commercialisation	Replacement Car Park Ticket Machines - Purchase and installation of 25 new ticket machines for all BDC owned car parks. Particular importance will be placed on machines (design) that have a good level of engineer support in our area. We will take guidance from North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) on the choice of machine. Programme of installation will be over two year period.	Ticket machines in BDC owned car parks are now reaching the end of their serviceable life. This has resulted in increasingly frequent issues with the machines that are costly to repair, inconvenient for the customer and difficult to manage. The machines that we use can only be repaired by Flowbird engineers, of which there is a shortage in our area. This leads to long wait times to get the machines repaired. There is also a loss of income when machines are out of order.	150,000				No
				906,580	1,390,000	610,000	610,000	338,290
			Less External Funding	98,290	240,000			
			BDC Resources	808,290	1,150,000	610,000	610,000	

Councillor Capital Bids 2023/24

APPENDIX C

	Project Description	Project Drivers	Project Achievements	2023/24 Bid	External Funding
1	<p>Sustainable Parking at Silver End Bowls Club - To provide sustainable parking at Silver End Bowls Club, including a new dropped kerb on to Broadway. The parking would need to use a sustainable and permeable design such as grasscrete or similar, so that it would retain a green appearance. The draft design includes landscape planting along the frontage with sections of privet hedging in keeping with the village and extant Conservation Area rules. The whole site (building and open areas) is owned by BDC. Total project cost £45k less £5k contribution from the Bowls Club towards the cost of a dropped curb.</p>	<p>The Bowls Club is a long-established facility in Silver End in the heart of the Conservation Area. About 3 years ago, it emerged that the access used to park on the grass at the front of the club was no longer available, and that the parking itself was not authorised. BDC is currently negotiating a new lease with the club and it has been agreed to include the grassed area at the front for parking.</p>	<p>Provision of dedicated and well-designed off-road parking for the Bowls Club, thus supporting its continued viability. Improved access to the Bowls Club building for those with mobility issues, thereby assisting all groups who use the facility, e.g. for village events.</p>	45,000	5,000
2	<p>Feering Community Centre & Hall Carbon Footprint Reduction - A three stranded project to continue to reduce the carbon footprint of the Feering Community Centre and Hall by (1) adding 14.2 kWh of battery storage to the recently installed 39 panel solar PV system, which is battery ready (2) replacing the 28 ceiling light panels in the hall (4 fluorescent tubes per panel) with low energy LED light panels & better ceiling tiles to improve insulation & acoustics. This includes replacing the emergency lighting. (3) replacing the two large single-glazed windows with double-glazed windows, including replacing the emergency exit doors. Bid £25,785 plus VAT assuming non-recoverable (tbc)</p>	<p>To continue the carbon footprint reduction journey and to increase the on-site use of the renewable solar PV electricity. This will assist with the journey to net zero, reduce costs and ensure that the community centre remains viable.</p>	<p>(i) an increase in the use of on-site generated renewable energy, reduction in the use of energy from fossil fuels. Progress towards net zero (ii) a reduction in the carbon footprint / reduction in energy used by the installation of more energy efficient LED lighting, improved ceiling tiles & double-glazed windows (iii) the community centre remains viable and can maintain hiring fees at an affordable level. Also helps the primary school's budgeting by reducing their share of the hall electricity bills. (iv) inspiration to the community including what Councils and Councillors can do to make a difference to encourage people to become Councillors.</p>	30,940	No
				75,940	5,000
				Less External Funding	5,000
				BDC Resources	70,940

Report Title: Rural Prosperity Fund Implementation Plan	
Report to: Cabinet	
Date: 28 th November 2022	For: Decision
Key Decision: No	Decision Planner Ref No: DP/2022/50
Report Presented by: Councillor Tom Cunningham, Cabinet for Economic Growth	
Enquiries to: Emma Goodings, Head of Planning and Economic Growth emma.goodings@braintree.gov.uk	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider the addendum to the Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) investment plan to allow Braintree District Council (the Council) to access a total of £589,191 of Rural England Prosperity funding for 2023/4 and 2024/5

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the submission of the required information to Government to access the Councils provisional allocation of Rural England Prosperity Funding.
- 2.2 To delegate final approval of the wording of that submission to the Corporate Director Growth in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Economic Growth.

3. Summary of Issues

- 3.1 In April 2022 the government announced Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) which was provisionally awarded to local authorities to spend on a range of specified interventions. The Council was awarded £1.036M and was required to submit an Investment Plan to access that money by the 1st August 2022. The money was a mixture of capital and revenue and was to be spent by the end of the respective financial year. The Councils Investment Plan was approved at Cabinet in July 2022. No feedback from Government on the Investment Plan has been received and therefore the funding has not yet been confirmed or received by the Council.
- 3.2 In September 2022, the Government announced that Rural England Prosperity Funding (REPF) would be an additional fund which was available to some rural authorities. The Council was provisionally awarded £589,191 of that funding. No advance notice of this was given to the Council, even though Government state this is an add on to the SPF and would use the information submitted within the Councils Investment Plans as part of the approval process.

- 3.3 The Prospectus states that; *'The Rural Fund supports the aims of the government's Levelling Up White Paper and Future Farming Programme. It funds capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure. This will help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities'*. It goes to say that; *'The Rural Fund provides capital funding to; support new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify income streams. Support new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy'*.
- 3.4 In common with the SPF, a set of interventions, objectives, outcomes and outputs have been provided which the Council must work within as part of its submission. Monitoring and reporting back to Government on the success of the projects will be required and combined with the reporting for the SPF.
- 3.5 The fund must only be applied to rural areas. For the purposes of this fund rural areas have been defined by government as; *'towns, villages and hamlets with populations below 10,000 and the wider countryside, market or hub towns with populations of up to 30,000 that serve their surrounding rural areas as centres of employment and in providing services'*. In practice for the District it is expected that this means that everyone outside Braintree town will be eligible, however the position is being checked with government.
- 3.5 In order to meet the requirements of the funding and to support the Councils businesses and rural communities in the best way, it is proposed that the money is to be used to directly grant fund rural businesses or community groups. Broadly this will be as set out below with more detail in appendix 1. A full grant funding scheme with detailed judging and awarding criteria will be developed by officers and approved by the relevant portfolio holder and director in due course. The fund will be distributed in 2 ways.
- 3.6 Scheme 1: Available to small and medium sized businesses to grow and develop including to undertake innovation, adopting new to the firm tech or processes, enhancing local services or leisure facilities for visitors and residents and creating or safeguarding jobs. Proposals should show how they contribute to tackling climate change including impact on the local environment, implementing energy efficiency and use low carbon technologies and how their proposal will support the wider rural community. Capital grants of between £20,000 and £50,000 will be available, although match funding from the businesses of at least 20% will be required.
- 3.7 Scheme 2: Available to Parish Councils, legally constituted community groups, or charities, to refurbish local natural, cultural or heritage assets or to set up community led repair cafes or mend workshops. As above the proposals should show how they contribute to tackling climate change and supporting the rural community. Capital grants of between £20,000 and £50,000 will also be available but match funding will not be required.

However, the group receiving the funding will need to ensure that it has plans in place for the long-term maintenance and management of the capital asset which is developed under this funding.

- 3.8 At present the Council is waiting for further detail guidance on whether the funding will need to be spent by the receiving group within the period up to the end of March 2025 and therefore additional criteria may need to be added to ensure that this takes place. Projects will also need to commit to reporting requirements required by the Government.
- 3.9 The funding in this scheme is capital only, and there is no additional revenue or administrative funding for either the Council or those groups bidding into the project. For the Council, this means that it would need to meet the administrative and reporting burdens on this fund via existing resources. This may be via the expected new part time project manager which will be employed to deliver the SPF. The Council will consider how it can support community groups and businesses in putting together bids.
- 3.10 The funding that we will deliver through the Rural England Prosperity fund will complement the work that we already carry out in rural areas, including working with ECC on the Rural Braintree levelling up pilot, which is currently at the stage of collecting information from residents about the issues that they face.
- 3.11 For businesses this includes visits to individual businesses to hear first-hand their issues and provide solutions where possible, providing signposting for business support and access to funding opportunities, shop local and tourism campaigns to promote to residents what is available local to them and working with partners to provide access to skills and training so that rural businesses have access to appropriately skilled staff.
- 3.12 For the rural communities in particular we also run a range of support programmes. This includes holding regular meetings with Parish Clerks to update and support them with key issues, hosting community events and supporting local groups to start up and grow. The Councillors Community grant scheme and other grant schemes have made numerous awards to parish councils, village halls, tree planting. We also work with rural schools through the Braintree District Cultural Education Partnership.
- 3.13 The Council also works with rural communities on a range of partnerships including the Braintree District Social Isolation Forum and is working with the police and others on initiatives including the Rural Crime Strategy 2022-5 and Farm Watch/Rural Watch.
- 3.14 The recommendations set out in this report will help the Council to deliver the following Corporate Objectives:
- A sustainable environment and a great place to live, work and play;
 - A well connected and growing district with high quality homes and infrastructure;

- A prosperous district that attracts business growth and provides high quality employment opportunities;

4. Consultation

- 4.1 The Council has discussed and received feedback on the proposals from a wide-ranging group of internal and external stakeholders at the Councils Levelling Up workshop which was held on the 31st October. More detailed informal discussions have also taken place with officers in the Council and with businesses within the community. Feedback was positive on the schemes that have been proposed with most stakeholders wanting to support both businesses and community groups. There were some mixed views as to how much of a feature of the bid responding to climate change should be. The main feedback from the stakeholder session in particular was about how the Council might be able to facilitate and help put bids together, e.g. by bringing a range of groups together to ensure long term sustainability of a project or working with a group to consider what and how could be implemented that would meet some of the outcomes and outputs within the project interventions list. This will be taken on board and considered for the detailed implementation of the scheme, although with no additional revenue funding to support the scheme the resources to provide that support is likely to need to be taken from existing staff.
- 4.2 Further consultation will take place with ward members representing rural wards prior to the scheme being launched to ensure that we are delivering what the rural communities need, within the restrictions of the interventions set out in the REPF.

5. Options

- 5.1 The preferred option for the delivery of this scheme is set out in this report. It is considered that this delivers the best opportunities for rural businesses and communities to benefit from the scheme and is the least impactful on resources of the local authority
- 5.2 There are a variety of alternative approaches on the preferred approach which could for example only support businesses or only support community groups, to propose a smaller amount of funding per grant to spread the grant out to more businesses or community groups. However, the preferred option is considered to deliver the best and broadest outcomes.
- 5.3 A final option is to not submit any further information and to not ask to secure the government funding which has been provisionally allocated. This is not considered an appropriate way forward as it does not secure funding for the local businesses and communities.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 If approved, officers will submit the information to Government via the submission portal before the 30th November 2022. Government will then assess the information and ask any questions of clarifications. There is no advised timetable for when this will take place. If accepted and money received, the project will begin in April 2023.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no additional financial implications arising for the Council from this proposal on the basis that any grant funding allocated will not exceed the sum received from government, and the Grant Agreement with recipient organisations will reflect the conditions of the Rural England Prosperity funding, including that use of funding is restricted to capital expenditure.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising out of the proposals set out in this report. Parties receiving grants through the allocation of the Rural Prosperity Fund will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Council, which will incorporate all the relevant provisions, including reporting requirements of Government.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

10. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 10.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 10.3 Individual projects within this project will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment to show that the proposals will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

11. List of Appendices

11.1 Draft government submission.

12. Background Papers

12.1 [UK shared prosperity fund; Prospectus.](#)

12.2 [Cabinet July 25th 2022](#)

12.3 [*Rural England Prosperity Fund: Prospectus*](#)

12.4 [*Rural England Prosperity Fund: allocations*](#)

This document is to support in the drafting of your Rural England Prosperity Fund addendum to UKSPF Investment Plan. Please do not submit information using this document. Information can be submitted at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/rural-england-prosperity-fund/ad6e2088/>

Rural England Prosperity Fund: Addendum to UKSPF Investment Plan

Select your area

Your area	Braintree District Council
Name of person submitting REPF information	Emma Goodings
Alternative contact name and email	Dominic Collins
SRO contact details	
UKSPF Investment Plan reference number	

Local context

You have already submitted your UKSPF investment plan. Here, we would like you to provide any additional information about specific rural challenges, market failures, and opportunities for rural businesses or rural communities in your area that you would like us to consider.

As set out in our Investment Plan submission, Braintree is a large rural District, with 3 main market towns and 50 Parishes which include larger and smaller villages, settlements and countryside. The district is therefore very diverse with the need to tackle both more urban and rural issues. Distance is also a considerable factor in delivery and accessibility of services. Not only because of the absolute distance between settlements but because there is a lack of public transport and options outside of the private car to travel around. There is also a lack of mains gas in many rural parts of the district which makes reliance on oil or other more expensive forms of heating necessary. Taken together this means that for businesses and communities in rural areas the costs of running a business or a home is often more expensive than their counterparts in urban areas, they have less access to facilities and services and travelling often takes more time and is more expensive. Whilst therefore we are catering for the rural areas within our main investment plan, we welcome the opportunity to have access to additional funding, focused on the rural areas.

Interventions – rural business

Please choose the interventions you wish to use under the rural business investment priority. Select as many options as you wish from the menu. The list of interventions can be viewed [here](#).

2023-2024 interventions:	1: Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas including capital funding for net zero infrastructure for rural businesses and diversification of farm businesses outside of agriculture to encourage start up, expansion or scale up of these businesses where this involves converting farm buildings into other commercial or business uses. 2: Funding (capital grants) for growing the local social economy and supporting innovation. This includes community businesses, cooperatives and social enterprises, research and development sites
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2024-2025 interventions:	As above
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Please explain how the interventions selected will address local rural business challenges, market failures, and opportunities (max 300 words)

By focusing the business grants on funding to investment in micro and small rural businesses to expand and grow, create jobs and be innovative with regards to their impact on the environment, as well as supporting the local social economy, we believe that this is most likely to address the issues that we have identified. We expect that by focusing on these interventions we will empower rural businesses to create new high value jobs and opportunities within their communities and ensure the

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long-term sustainability of businesses through the introduction of net zero infrastructure.
Please rank the interventions selected in order of expected value added
1
2

Interventions – rural communities	
Please choose the interventions you wish to use under the rural communities investment priority. Select as many options as you wish from the menu.	
2023-2024 interventions:	5 Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups 6 Funding (capital grants) for the creation of and improvement to local rural green spaces. 7 Funding (capital grants) for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer. 8 Funding (capital grants) for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities. 10 Funding (capital grants) for rural circular economy projects. 11 Funding (capital grants) for impactful volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places.
2024-2025 interventions:	As above
Please explain how the interventions selected will address local rural business challenges, market failures, and opportunities (max 300 words)	
<p>The interventions that we have chosen to support the rural community are expected to help the community to provide new and improved facilities for themselves and visitors to the local area. This will ensure that community led and other facilities are accessible and available locally, and those in rural areas are not at a disadvantage compared to residents in more urban areas. The rural circular economy and the desire to see projects which also support and enhance the local environment which provide positive steps to sustainability for our rural communities.</p>	
Please rank the interventions selected in order of expected value added	
5 10 7 11 6 8	

Interventions outcomes
Please select what outcomes the interventions selected in the rural business investment priority are expected to achieve
Jobs created Jobs safeguarded Number of businesses adopting new to the firm technologies or processes Number of businesses experiencing growth
Please select what outcomes the interventions selected in the rural communities investment priority are expected to achieve

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Increased users of facilities or amenities
Jobs created
Jobs safeguarded
Number of community-led programs as a result of support
Improved engagement numbers

Delivery	
Please set out the indicative spend profile of your REPF allocation, additional to that of your UKSPF investment plan. Please detail the indicative budgets at investment priority level and at intervention level, for the 2 years of the fund, including if REPF money will be used to complement UKSPF funded projects. (300 words max)	
It is difficult to estimate when the spend will take place as detailed guidance has not yet been provided on when funding can be released. For example is this funding in advance in arrears or alongside project completion. At the presentation to local authorities a breakdown of the funding between year 1 and year 2 was mentioned but this is not in any of the guidance documents.	
Please set out how you intend to select projects to support, detailing including how you will ensure they deliver value for money, including additionality. Please also set out how you will determine that projects cannot be funded by private finance. (500 words max)	
<p>The Council is proposing that all the money allocated under the Rural Prosperity Funding be available for businesses and community groups in grant funding.</p> <p>The Council will set up an awarding panel made up of various officers from across the organisation who have specialist knowledge in particular areas including economic development, community support and finance.</p> <p>Bid application forms will be required to be filled in. These will be developed in detail once the full detail of the funding conditions are received from government. However, it will be expected to include financial and timing details of the scheme to be funded, details of any other funding required or match funding necessary, the reasons for seeking grant funding, how the bid will meet and monitor the interventions, outputs and outcomes of the fund and to set out how the scheme being funded will benefit the wider rural community and how the scheme will help to mitigate the impacts of climate change.</p> <p>A clear and transparent scoring mechanism will be created, and grants awarded to those who score the highest across the categories and can meet the requirements which maybe set by government e.g. spend and delivery timescales.</p>	
Have you identified opportunities to work with other places on specific interventions and/or projects for rural business interventions?	
Intervention(s) you intend to collaborate on:	None
Place(s) you intend to collaborate with:	None
Have you identified opportunities to work with other places on specific interventions and/or projects for the rural communities interventions?	
Intervention(s) you intend to collaborate on:	None
Place(s) you intend to collaborate with:	None

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Engagement	
Further to your UKSPF Investment Plan engagement, have you engaged or consulted with rural stakeholders, or expanded your UKSPF local partnership group, to inform the information you have submitted above? If yes, please give details. You should also use this section to tell us about planned future engagement with rural stakeholders.	
<p>In early development of the proposals, officers from a range of different teams discussed early thoughts about the scheme and detailed 1-2-1 conversations were held with a small number of rural business representatives who were able to put forward their views on opportunities and constraints of potential options.</p> <p>BDC's local partnership group, which includes a range of rural business and community stakeholders, as well as those for our market towns, met on the 31st October to consider the draft proposals for the scheme. The session was held as a workshop style and draft options for community and business grant schemes were highlighted and feedback sought. This feedback has led into the final proposal contained within this plan.</p>	
Are there aspects of your plans to use your REPF allocation that are not supported by rural stakeholders and the rural community? If yes, please provide more detail.	
No	
Are there MPs who are not supportive of your investment plan? If yes, please list which MPs are not supportive and outline their reasons why.	
No	

Confirmation of approval	
Please provide the names of who has approved the submission of the additional information provided	
Chief Executive:	
Elected leader:	
Section 151 officer	

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Report Title: Award of a Tender for the provision of tyres and associated services for the Council's Commercial Vehicle Fleet	
Report to: Cabinet	
Date: 28 November 2022	For: Decision
Key Decision: Yes	Decision Planner Ref No: DP/2022/33
Report Presented by: Councillor Richard van Dulken, Cabinet Member for Operations and Commercialisation	
Enquiries to: Steve Wilson, Operations Manager, steve.wilson@braintree.gov.uk Debbie Bezzina, Transport Manager, debbie.bezzina@braintree.gov.uk	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval to award a contract to Direct Tyre Management Limited for the provision of tyres and associated services for Braintree District Council (the Council) commercial fleet.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1.1 Approve the award of a 3-year contract to Direct Tyre Management Limited (DTM) at a contract value of £271,800 from 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2025, with the provision to extend for a further two years (1+1) at £90,600 per annum.
- 2.1.2 Approve an additional Contract spend (variation) of up to £14,400 per annum (funded from the existing operational budget) to provide flexibility for replacement tyres in any one year, as the actual number is variable and determined by maintenance inspections.

3. Summary

- 3.1 In April 2019, the Council brought the maintenance of its commercial vehicle fleet back in-house. As part of the transitional arrangements, it was agreed that the provision of tyres and associated services would continue to be provided by a third-party supplier (DTM) under a National Framework Agreement. The current expenditure varies between £85k and £105k per annum which covers some 80 vehicles across Operations' commercial fleet

for tyre replacement, wheel balancing, alignment, tracking, turning on rim and general tyre care services.

- 3.2 The Agreement was coming to an end and to ensure continued value for money, the Council decided to carry out a full procurement exercise for the provision of tyres and related services.
- 3.3 The procurement process commenced in September 2022 and four Tyre Suppliers tendered for the Contract. Each bid was evaluated and scored against the agreed (and weighted) criteria that reflected the specification and overall requirements. The evaluation process was split into two parts: Quality (65% weighting) which was evaluated by officers within Operations; and Price (35% weighting) which was evaluated by officers within the Procurement Team. The overall scores for each of the tenders is shown below.

BIDDER	OVERALL SCORE WEIGHTED
Direct Tyre Management Limited	89.29%
Supplier 2	83.50%
Supplier 3	82.80%
Supplier 4	73.06%

- 3.4 Of the four bids returned, Suppliers 3 and 4 failed to meet the minimum score required on one question or more and so were unsuccessful in their bids. DTM received the highest score and was cheaper per annum than Supplier 2 and accordingly was selected as the Council's preferred bidder.

4. OPTIONS

Option 1

No Change. The Council no longer holds a formal contract for the provision of services through DTM and continuing to use their services under the Framework Agreement would not be in compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Council's own Procurement Procedure Rules for this level of spend. In addition, the National Framework does not facilitate DTM utilising all the third party support it has at its disposal and so the Agreement was operated under a standard contract rather than one bespoke to the Council's requirements. This option is not recommended.

Option 2

Award the contract to DTM (Recommended Option). Their bid has been robustly evaluated against agreed criteria (price and quality) and offers the most economically advantageous option. DTM is a leading supplier of tyres with a proven track record under the National Framework Agreement. It has an extensive portfolio of both private and public sector, which provides the Council with assurances that they will be able to fully support the Council's commercial fleet throughout the life of the contract.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If the recommendation is approved, and subject to all provisional award steps being completed to the Council's satisfaction, the Council will proceed to issuing the Contract for all parties to sign, with a view to the new contract commencing on 3 January 2023.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Council's annual spend is variable subject to the number of tyre repairs/replacements required. Typically spend has been between £85k – £105k per annum. DTM has quoted an annual cost of £90.6k based on a representative basket of supplies that would be expected to be required in any one year. Budgetary provision for the tyre contract is contained within the overall Fleet Management operational budget for maintenance.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Council has a statutory/legal duty under its Operator's Licence to ensure the safe and proper use of the commercial vehicles in line with the standards for maintaining roadworthiness, part of which covers tyres and associated parts. The award of this contract will ensure that the Council is able to meet that obligation.
- 7.2 Throughout the procurement exercise the Council has followed all statutory requirements and its own Procurement Procedure Rules.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 8.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 8.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 8.3 The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

9.0 List of Appendices

9.1 None

Report Title: Award of Contract for the Provision of a Grave Digging Service	
Report to: Cabinet	
Date: 28 November 2022	For: Decision
Key Decision: Yes	Decision Planner Ref No: DP/2022/46
Report Presented by: Councillor Richard van Dulken, Cabinet Member for Operations and Commercialisation	
Enquiries to: Samir Pandya, Operations Strategy & Policy Manager	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for Braintree District Council (the Council) to award a contract for the provision of Grave Digging Services.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the award of a Contract to A. Wallace for an initial three-year period from January 2023 to December 2026 for a total contract value of £225k, with the option to extend for a further two years up to and including November 2028 for an additional £150k (£375k for 5 years in total).

3. Summary of Issues

- 3.1 The Council owns and operates four cemeteries located at Braintree, Bocking, Witham and Halstead. The management of cemeteries in the UK is regulated by the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 and, as a Burial Authority, the Council has a statutory duty to comply with the requirements of the Order.
- 3.2 The Grave Digging Service has been successfully outsourced for many years, however, on 16 April 2022, the contract with the then contractor was terminated owing to a deteriorating quality of service and some health and safety concerns. For business continuity, A. Wallace was appointed to provide the Grave Digging Service as an interim measure, pending the outcome of a full procurement exercise.
- 3.3 A procurement process commenced on 22 July 2022 for a 3-year contract with the option to extend for an additional 2 years, with a closing date of 25 August 2022. Three bids were received, but one of the bidders was disqualified as the company failed to provide all the tender documents required.
- 3.4 The remaining 2 bids were evaluated on 6 September 2022 in two parts: (1) Financial and (2) Quality with a 40% and 60% weighting respectively. The overall combined scores for each of the tenders is shown below.

Bidder	Overall Score (Weighted)
A. Wallace	86.31%
Supplier 2	58.00%

- 3.5 Supplier 2 was £3,205 p.a. cheaper, but the bidder failed to meet the PASS threshold for the Quality section of the tender specification and so A. Wallace received the highest score.

4. Options

- 4.1 **Option 1:** Award the contract to A. Wallace. This supplier has a proven record of delivering a good quality and reliable service for the Council over the past 6 months and throughout Essex. This is the **RECOMMENDED** option.
- 4.2 **Option 2:** Award the contract to Supplier 2. This is not recommended given that the supplier did not demonstrate that it could meet the qualitative aspects of the service.
- 4.3 **Option 3:** Choose not to award the contract. This would mean that the Council would be unable to provide a Grave Digging Service and thus fail to meet its statutory obligations as a Burial Authority. This option is not recommended.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to Cabinet's decision, to notify A. Wallace that they are the Council's preferred supplier and will be awarded the contract.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Grave Digging service is demand led and it is difficult to say with any certainty what the annual value of the contract will be.
- 6.2 For the purpose of tendering, bidders were required to submit rates for various works against a set frequency, based on an average of work completed over the past 3-years. This gives an indication of annual contract value of £75k per annum, however, this could vary plus or minus depending on the demand. The table below sets out the indicative Contract value over a 3 and 5 year period (if the 2-year extension is invoked)

	3-Year Contract	5-Year Contract
Annual Contract Value - £75k per annum	£225k	£375k
Annual Budget - £57k	£171k	£285k
Budget Shortfall	£54k	£90k

- 6.3 As can be seen from the above table, there may be a projected budget shortfall of £18k per annum, however, this may vary for the reasons stated. The intention is to let the new Contract from 1 January 2023. The additional cost that may be incurred in the current year as a result of the new contract can be met from a virement from staffing underspends in Operations

Management and Administration. Proposals for the 2023/24 budget include an unavoidable cost pressure of £18k per annum which would provide adequate base budget based on estimated service demand. The service will also be reviewing its fees and charges for next year which will take account of the increased contractor cost.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 In conducting the procurement exercise, the Council has followed the relevant legislative provisions and its own Procurement Procedure Rules.
- 7.2 Once the award has been approved, the Council will ensure that the contracts are finalised and sealed the contract in accordance with the Constitution.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 9.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act.
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 9.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 9.3 There are no Equality and Diversity implications with awarding the contract.

10. List of Appendices

- 10.1 None.

11. Background Papers

- 11.1 None.

Report Title: Housing Strategy 2023-2028	
Report to: Cabinet	
Date: 28 th November 2022	For: Decision
Key Decision: Yes	Decision Planner Ref No: DP/2022/31
Report Presented by: Councillor Kevin Bowers, Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Skills	
Enquiries to: Caroline Elias-Stephenson, Head of Housing and Community caroline.elias-stephenson@braintree.gov.uk	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To review and refresh Braintree District Council (the Council) Housing Strategy 2016 – 2021 which is currently out of date.
- 1.2 A new draft Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028 (the Strategy) has been developed and sets out 3 key priorities which address the main housing issues that residents in the Braintree District are facing.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet considers and approves the draft Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028 for consultation, as set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2 Cabinet, notes that the draft Strategy will be subject to consultation commencing on 13 December 2022, and the final Strategy will return to Cabinet, together with the Consultation considerations for approval at its meeting in March 2023.

3. Summary of Issues

- 3.1 Housing continues to be a key government priority. Coupled with demographic trends, particularly an aging population, and the changing focus of health and care services towards an integrated system in the community, the Council needs to consider the best way forward.
- 3.2 The new Strategy provides a clear vision and direction to guide the Council's housing activity. The adoption of the Strategy will aid the Council in delivering an effective future housing service.
- 3.3 The draft strategy is yet to go to public consultation. The public consultation would take place from 13th December 2022, and full details are set out in paragraph 4 below.

- 3.4 In the preparation of the draft Strategy, Housing Strategy Workshops were held on 17 and 18 October 2022. These consisted of a Member workshop with 5 District Councillors followed by a second workshop with 30 individuals from the NHS, other Local Authorities, internal officers from key departments and representatives from the voluntary sector and Housing providers. The purpose was to gather views on the main housing issues, across all tenures, within the district. The feedback from this event has influenced and developed the Strategy before it is submitted for public consultation.
- 3.5 The Workshops highlighted that meeting the needs and supporting communities, improving home standards, access to housing and affordability are priority areas to focus on. A key theme identified through the workshops was that residents needed both immediate short-term support reflected in the cost of living, but also the need for creative measures to be implemented to explore long term sustainable change, which would support future living costs and energy efficiency. Accordingly these themes have been brought into the Strategy.
- 3.6 The recommendations set out in this report will help the Council to deliver the following Corporate Objectives:
- A sustainable environment and a great place to live, work and play;
 - A well connected and growing district with high quality homes and infrastructure;
 - A prosperous district that attracts business growth and provides high quality employment opportunities;
 - Residents live well in healthy and resilient communities where residents feel supported;
 - A high performing organisation that delivers excellent and value for money services;
 - Delivering better outcomes for residents and businesses and reducing costs to taxpayers.
- 3.7 This Strategy is aligned to the corporate plan. The aim of the Healthy Housing Strategy is to promote homes that are energy efficient, sustain health and well-being, meet the needs of the growing population, and build resilient communities with employment opportunities. As well as supporting the build of new homes, the Council is committed to improving the district's current housing stock and supporting residents to live in suitable, stable housing.
- 3.8 The Council will achieve this by working on its 3 key priorities for the next five years which are.
1. Enable a consistent programme of good quality homes which best meet the needs of the current and future residents
 2. Support communities and enable housing across the district to meet the needs of all our residents, especially those who are vulnerable.
 3. Improve access to and the quality of existing homes including the Private Rented Sector

- 3.9 The Strategy complements the newly adopted Local Plan and other key strategies and policies, which address areas out of scope for the strategy including housing demand and the infrastructure required to support housing growth.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Whilst there is no statutory requirement to have a Housing Strategy, it is recommended that the Council has one in place to provide a clear strategic direction for housing within the district. Accordingly, it is best practice that in introducing this Strategy, the Council carry out a public consultation, so as to ensure that it captures the broader views of those with an interest in housing within the district. Accordingly, the Council will commence its consultation on 13th December 2022, and this will run for a period of 9 weeks. The evaluation of this consultation will be provided for Cabinet on 13th March 2023 alongside the final Strategy for approval.

- 4.2 The consultation will include engagement with residents and key stakeholders to seek feedback and direction on the development of the strategic direction the Council has set out in the Strategy. To ensure that the Council reach the wider stakeholders, the Council will consult through the following mechanisms:

- 1) A local press release
- 2) Promotion and discussion via social media
- 3) Braintree District Council website
- 4) Emails to key partners
- 5) Discussion at various partnership forums
- 6) Surveys sent to all partners and residents
- 7) Survey on the Councils website

- 4.3 As part of the consultation, the Council will be asking feedback around the following three areas:

- 1) The extent to which respondents agree with the proposed priorities and objectives set out within the Strategy;
- 2) General themes and feedback; and
- 3) Profile of respondents

An evaluation summary of the consultation will be included in the final document illustrating how respondents' feedback has been considered and where necessary incorporated into the final Strategy document.

5. Options

- 5.1 The Council is not required to have a Housing Strategy. The Deregulation Act 2015 removed the requirement for Local Authorities to have a Housing Strategy. The key options considered are:

Option 1 – No Housing Strategy

- 5.2 The option to not have a housing strategy is not recommended. This is because a local housing strategy comprehensively describes the approach our district plans to take to meet its housing objectives and is considered best practise. With the current financial landscape our residents and businesses are facing, the possibility of a 40% reduction in new starts next year and an ambitious target to be net zero, this strategy bridges the gap and offers a strategic approach to supporting new and existing affordable, suitable housing for our residents in a time of uncertainty.

Option 2 – Approve the new draft Housing Strategy

- 5.3 To approve the new draft Strategy and commence public consultation. This option is recommended. It is widely considered best practise to have a Housing Strategy and doing so helps the Council to monitor the current financial climate that we are in. As there is a need to have a clear vision and strategy to guide future housing activity, ensure that we continue to meet affordable housing targets, align with The Local Plan, and support the links to economic regeneration and wellbeing.
- 5.3 Option 2 is a preferred option to enable a clear strategic direction regarding Housing in the district. There are evident concerns of ongoing financial challenge amongst a raft of other changes affecting the current landscape. The Council's Housing Action Plan will have a robust proactive monitoring process to horizon scan and consider evolving and responding to this changing landscape and to consider proactive interventions where required.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The draft Strategy will be subject to public consultation on 13th December 2022 for a period of 9 weeks. This will then be presented back to Cabinet with the consultation evaluation on 13th March 2023 for final consideration and adoption of the final Strategy.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications. The Strategy commits the Council to explore several areas that may have financial consequences, but the funding required would not be clear at this stage. Programmes that require additional funding to enable implementation will be presented to the Cabinet or Council as required.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on Housing Authorities to formulate, publish and update Homelessness Strategies. However, the Deregulation Act 2015 removed the requirement for Local Authorities to have a Housing Strategy. Therefore, there is no similar legal requirement for a Housing Strategy, but it is expected that Councils will formulate and update strategies that set out their aims and objectives.
- 8.2 The previous Housing Strategy is now out of date, and it is considered best practice for the Council to continue to have a strategy in place. The Housing

strategy supports several strategies including The local Plan, The Bouncing Back Together Plan and The Climate Strategy.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1 The Strategy considers the needs of vulnerable families and adults. The Strategy is intended as a strategic document, but of the actions involved in implementing the Strategy may have safeguarding implications, which will be considered at the time.

10. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 10.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 10.3 The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic. The Housing Strategy is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.

11. List of Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix A – Draft Housing Strategy.
- 11.1 Appendix B - Evidence base for Draft Housing Strategy

12. Background Papers

- 12.1 None



2023
2028



Braintree District Council

Healthy Housing Strategy



Foreword



As we introduce this new Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 to 2028, it comes at a time of change and uncertainty in both the housing and economic sectors,

and since our last housing strategy, we have all navigated through a global pandemic.

There has never been a more pressing time for us to reconsider the way we live our lives, where and how we live. Looking forward to the next five years, this strategy will become a route map to tackling the challenges we face, promoting the district and supporting the current and future housing offer and needs for those choosing to live in our fantastic district.

To enable the provision of homes for our current and future populations, 14,000 homes need to be built by 2033. But delivering new homes is about much more than just reaching housing targets. We want to ensure high-quality, secure homes that allow people to settle in a community and access local jobs.

We want well-designed homes that help create pleasant and safe neighbourhoods. By expediting the delivery of high-quality places and ensuring there is choice for everyone through a range of accommodation options, enhanced growth and further investment will inevitably follow.

The climate emergency means we must transform the way we think of housing – ensuring they are sustainable and are built at high environmental standards, considering

energy conservation and efficiency so residents benefit from reduced energy consumption, lowering bills and improving thermal comfort and well-being.

The crucial role that housing plays in the wider determinants of health is at the heart of this strategy, as good housing contributes positively to both physical and mental health.

Strengthening the links between housing, health, the environment and economy and other partners underpins this strategy. To do this, partnership working is vital to delivering our ambitions and this strategy sets out a framework to support all public, private, and voluntary sectors to achieve our housing outcomes.

We are extremely proud of services we have delivered for our residents and local businesses. Preventing homelessness has always been a priority for us, supported through our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and we will continue to improve housing options and opportunities to alleviate the homelessness pressures wherever we can.

As we implement our Healthy Housing Strategy Action Plan to deliver the strategy, which will evolve as we respond to challenges and the changing needs of residents, we hope that the positive impacts will be felt by all our residents, communities, partners, property owners and businesses.

Councillor Kevin Bowers
Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets & Skills

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Executive Summary

Braintree District Council's Healthy Housing Strategy is being published at a time of change both in the housing sector, the economic sector and the health and wellbeing sector. It is evident that the Council will need to respond to these changes and those ahead.

The Braintree District has excellent transport links with proximity to London, Chelmsford and Colchester which makes it an attractive place to live and work. High quality housing has a positive impact on every area of a person's life, and we are working hard to ensure that our residents live in safe, affordable, and secure accommodation. We want to continue to provide homes that meet the needs of the residents and promote vibrant and healthy communities.

This revised strategy is an important document for all stakeholders, recognising that housing plays a significant role in the wider determinants of health, social, environmental, and economic wellbeing of everyone who lives in the district.

The Council's Vision is to:

Promote healthy sustainable communities by raising the standard of existing homes and enabling provision of quality new ones; resulting in suitable, affordable, high housing for all Braintree district residents that meets their needs and enable them to live longer healthier lives, reaching their full potential.

The data and research that has been collated has provided us insight and intelligence to produce the Healthy Housing Strategy. The aim of the Healthy Housing Strategy is to promote homes that enhance our resident's health and well-being. We will achieve this by working on 3 key priorities for the next five years.

- 1** Facilitate a consistent programme of high quality, affordable homes which best meet the needs of the current and future residents
- 2** Support communities and enabling housing across the district to meet the needs of all our residents, especially those who are vulnerable
- 3** Improve access to and the quality of the Private Rented Sector and make best use of assets and existing properties.

This Strategy is aligned to Braintree District Council's Corporate Strategy through its strategy priorities.

- A sustainable environment and a great place to live, work and play
- A well connected and growing district with high quality homes and infrastructure
- A prosperous district that attracts business growth and provides high quality employment opportunities
- Residents live well in healthy and resilient communities where residents feel supported
- A high performing organisation that delivers excellent and value for money services
- Delivering better outcomes for residents and businesses and reducing costs to taxpayers.

Preventing homelessness is a priority for Braintree District and the Healthy Housing Strategy sits alongside our Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 – 2023.

The evidence base used to inform this strategy can be found at **TO BE CONFIRMED**

About Braintree District Housing

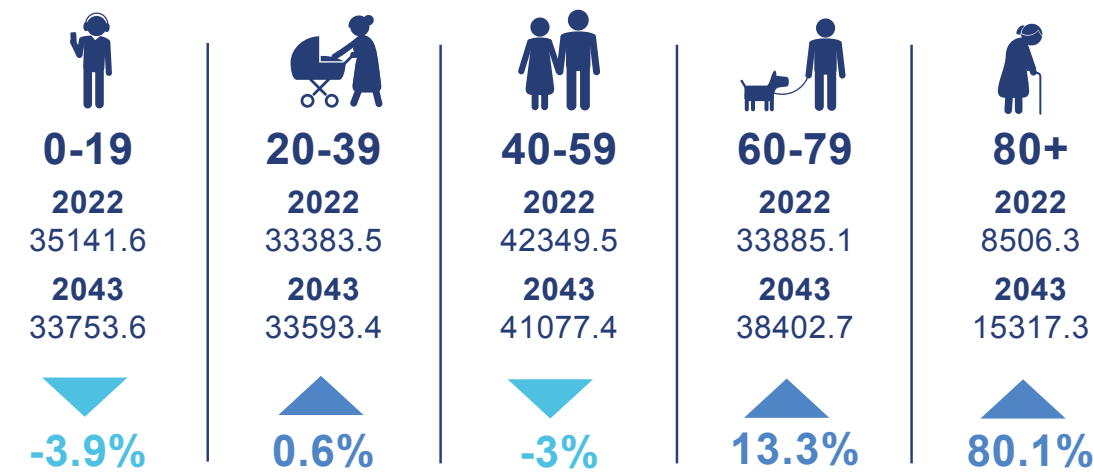
2021 Census shows:

- The 2021 census shows that the population of Braintree District has increased by 5.5%, with **155,200** residents living in the district.
- **9,529** long term health condition which limited day to day activities a lot

Braintree District Council Housing Data shows:

- August 2022, there were **68,427** properties in the district.
- August 2022, there were **2093** applications on the Housing Register for re-housing, 27% are single households
- Between 2018 – 2022, **167** households accepted an offer to downsize their properties
- There are currently **62** households waiting to downsize.
- During 2017-2022, **686** household accepted offers through Gateway to Homechoice

Braintree District Population Projection



The impact of the global pandemic and beyond

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that when the economy receives an unexpected and significant change, the number of people requiring housing support increases. Combined with the changing financial landscape, unemployment, family relationships breakdown, food poverty and homelessness all increase which exacerbate disadvantage and inequalities.

The post pandemic world has significantly changed the way people work and live, with more people than ever working from home. Whilst a choice for some, people could be working and living in properties that may be in poor condition.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for healthy resilient communities with our resident's wellbeing at the heart of everything we do.

To support our residents, local businesses, and communities to thrive through growth, prosperity, and opportunities we will be continuing to transition through our Corporate Plan.



Who is the strategy for?

This Strategy is intended to be a framework to underpin the work we will undertake in the housing sector.

Braintree District's residents and community: This strategy sets clear objectives so residents can see what we aim to achieve with our partners. Our aim is to build suitable, affordable, sustainable, and safe housing which enables thriving communities.

Our partners: We have developed this Strategy with input from our key partners and stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We work hard to build and maintain positive relationships with partners, we do not work in isolation. This strategy provides a framework to support all sectors to achieve the outcomes set out in the strategy.

Ourselves: The strategy provides the Council with a clear direction. The delivery plan that sits alongside this strategy will drive service delivery. In these times of uncertainties, we want to make sure that we can respond to challenges quickly. The delivery plan will evolve, and it will be reviewed regularly.



Achievements from the Housing Strategy 2016 - 2021

Over the lifetime of the previous strategy, many changes took place both locally, regionally and nationally. However, through our strong partnerships, we are proud of how much has been achieved during 2016-21.

Achievements to note:

- Adoption of The Local Plan
- Matching supply and demand: Continuing to build the right houses that meet the needs of residents
- 100% nomination rights through Gateway to Homechoice on new developments
- Meeting the needs of households: Building properties to a high standard and meeting the needs of the vulnerable residents
- Striving to get all affordable homes built to Nationally Designed Space Standards (NDSS)
- Promoting affordable properties to be built accessible and adaptable

- During 2017–2022 the Braintree District saw 1159 affordable homes completed, averaging 232 a year
- In 2020-2021 the annual target to build 250 new homes was exceeded, and 417 properties were completed
- Disability Facilities Grants were used to support residents to live safely in their homes
- Supported 95 Ukrainian families under Homes for Ukraine in 2022
- Responded to the governments 'Everyone's In' initiative by ensuring Rough Sleepers were off the streets of the district during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Recruited a Domestic Violence Officer in response to Domestic Violence Bill 2021
- Use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to prevent homelessness.



1159
affordable homes
completed
During 2017–2022

Challenges

We recognise that there are new challenges ahead and to note:

- Consequences of the economic crisis on housing affordability
- Consequences of the economic crisis on developers and the impact on building new houses
- Increase demand on the private rented sector
- Over the past ten years house prices in The Braintree District have risen at a faster rate than national rates
- Average income in the Braintree District remains lower than the rest of Essex
- Pockets of social isolation exist in many communities
- To meet the housing demands of the urban and rural communities.



Increase demand

on the private rented sector



Average income

in the Braintree District remains lower than the rest of Essex



Our Priorities

This Strategy covers provision of new homes, supporting the needs of our communities and promoting the best use of existing housing within the district.

Priority 1

New Affordable Housing: Facilitate a consistent programme of high-quality housing which best meet the needs of the current and future residents

- 1** Work in partnership to deliver new, high quality, affordable homes in the district
- 2** Support a range of tenure to be built which reflect the needs of our residents
- 3** Ensure all new homes emphasise energy efficiency and the use of new renewable energy.

Whilst the district has been successful in reaching the targets for new affordable housing delivery, we must be realistic that this may not continue. National changes on economics mean that as we publish this strategy interest rates are increasing to a level where mortgages are more difficult to secure, there is a concern of a housing recession, building materials have increased and building labour is harder to secure. The country faces a lack of genuinely affordable housing. National trends reports that people are moving outside London for more space, this has increased demand on the districts housing market.

We want to support residents to live well and safely in their homes and communities and we will achieve this by working with our partners to develop suitable properties to meet the needs of all our residents. Building schemes which are made up by owner occupied, intermediate rent and affordable housing in a variety of sizes and tenures will help meet the needs and offer choice to our current and future residents.

The Braintree District Local Plan 2013-2033 has been adopted. This is a key document as it set out a vision and framework for all future development in the district in relation to new homes, jobs, and infrastructure, as well as safeguarding the environment. The local plan states we need to build 14,000 homes by 2033 and that 30-40% of all new builds built are affordable housing sites where 10 properties or more are being built

and 5% of all of these will be adapted for specialist housing.

Our Local Plan Policy LPP 71 ensures that developers are expected to demonstrate energy conservation by building developments with lower carbon emissions, increase renewable energy provision and adapt to the expected impacts of climate change.

The Councils Climate Change Strategy 2021 – 2023 has been produced and there is a clear ambition to be carbon neutral as a Council as far as practical by 2030, as well as supporting our communities to reduce the impacts of climate change across the district.

The government has announced the Future Home Standard, a set of standards which will work alongside the Building Regulations to ensure that new homes are subject to energy conservation and produce less carbon supporting the aim to be carbon neutral.



30%
of new homes
to be affordable



5%
of new homes
to be accessible

Priority 2

Support for specific needs: Support communities and enable housing across the district to meet the needs of all our residents, especially those who are vulnerable.

- 1 Support a range of accommodation to be developed within communities for the demographic shift towards an increasingly ageing population**
- 2 Work with our partners to support residents to move into appropriate properties within suitable communities as their needs change**
- 3 Continue to support our vulnerable residents with specialist provisions and housing to live independently and thrive in the community.**

National government guidance states that local authorities should plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends and needs of the different groups in society. Addressing the housing and supporting needs of the elderly will be paramount over coming years.

Residents such as the elderly or disabled, may need specialist housing provision, which is specially designed for their needs. We want to continue to support homes being developed that meet the needs of our residents. By providing lifetime home standards, dementia friendly layouts, and wheelchair accessibility, means we can support our most vulnerable residents to access and maintain high quality housing which meets their needs.

An aging population can bring greater health concerns and additional support is often needed for day-to-day activities to continue without limitation. The Council currently makes use of the Disabled Facility Grants where adaptations to properties can be made on the advice and support of social care services. This grant helps our residents with additional needs to live independently for longer.

As well as supporting our residents to remain in their properties, we recognise personal circumstances can change and a move to a more suitable property could be required. On this basis, we will work with partners to review our downsizing policy to make this process a smooth transition.

Priority 3

Improve access to and the quality of existing homes including the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

- 1 Build positive relationships with property owners and estate agents to help improve routes into the PRS**
- 2 Explore incentives to reach more people to help them access the PRS**
- 3 Reduce the number of empty properties in the district by exploring options to bring them back into use.**

Housing plays a vital role in addressing health inequalities. Living in a safe, secure, and affordable home has a direct impact on people's health and happiness. Our health is influenced by many aspects around us, including education, income, living in warm and energy efficient homes, ventilation and the air quality where we live.

People living in the private rented sector often pay the highest rent and move the most often. We would like to be able to support individuals and families by increasing stability and security for people living in the private rented sector, so that they can embed and connect with the community by using local leisure facilities, applying for employment locally and sending their children to the local schools.

The issue we face as a district is that there is a lack of properties available in the private rented sector that meet the Local Housing Allowance rate. Local Housing Allowance is far lower than the properties that are available to rent locally, this means that there is a significant shortfall each month and rent arrears can quickly accrue.

The Council will work to strengthen our relationship with stakeholders, property owners and estate agents. For us to be able to do this successfully, we need to understand the barriers that they face so that we can offer support. We aim to grow our network to be able to provide a range of suitable options for our residents and we will explore incentive schemes which will support residents to access the private rented sector.

Taking into consideration the wider determinants of health, which are a diverse range of social, economic, and environmental factors which influence people's mental and physical health. There have been multiple studies which evidence that housing conditions have a direct impact on wellbeing. More vulnerable groups often face greater barriers to accessing high quality care.

Empty Properties

Homes can be empty for a variety of reasons including ownership of second homes and holiday lets. However, being left empty for a long time can mean that properties can fall into disrepair, the outside could become overgrown, the property could become damp, attract squatters and/or anti-social behaviour.

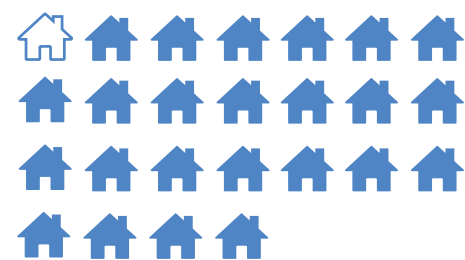
Nationally across England, **1 in every 25 homes is without residents.**

At present, we have just over 2000 empty homes in the Braintree District. Whilst we endeavour to work with property owners to try and bring them back into use, we recognise more needs to be done.

We have compared Government data published by MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) 10 Nov 2021 with BDC data of empty and second homes, BDC data shows that 1 in 70 homes is not in residential use. If we just consider long term empty properties, that equates to 1 in 87 homes being currently empty.

In 2019, Braintree District Council published the policy for Second Homes, Long Term Empty Properties and determining discounts for certain dwellings. This document sets out action taken on long term empty dwellings in the district. At the end of Aug 2022 there were 62 properties paying the maximum council tax. We will continue to work with our partners to develop a set of tools to enable empty homes to be brought back into use.

Report an empty property through this online form [Report an empty property](#) – Braintree District Council



1 in every 25 homes
is without residents

Nationally across England

Consultation

Two Housing Strategy Workshops were held on 17 and 18 October 2022. Stakeholders highlighted that meeting the needs and supporting communities, improving home standards, access to housing and affordability are priority areas to focus on.

There was a recognition from the workshops that the strategy should include the word 'healthy' in the title to become 'The Healthy Housing Strategy'.

The consultation has been designed to give everyone with an interest in Housing in the district the opportunity to contribute to the review. Throughout the consultation period there will be opportunities for residents and interested parties from across the public and private sectors to express their views on the strategy via an online survey, face to face discussion, and email feedback.

The online survey will be available for the full consultation period which is due to take place from 13th December 2022 to 7th February 2023.

For any questions on the strategy please contact
Carly.Jones@braintree.gov.uk



Housing Strategy Delivery Plan

The Housing Strategy Delivery Plan is the core of this Strategy. It will evolve throughout the lifetime of the strategy to ensure it responds and drives delivery through changing landscapes. Its purpose will be to set timescales and appoint lead officers who take responsibility for completing the agreed action points.

The Healthy Housing Strategy 2023-2028 and associated information including the outcome of the consultation, the delivery plan and the evidence base will be published on the Council's website.

Monitoring and Governance

The Healthy Housing Strategy will be monitored through the Healthy Housing Strategy delivery plan which will be discussed at and monitored by a Strategic Housing Board. The purpose of the Board is to develop the delivery plan with our partners and to monitor trends and performance to inform future actions.

Throughout this 5-year Strategy, new priorities may emerge and new national policies may be introduced. The Housing Strategy delivery plan is a document which ensures that the Strategic direction for housing is clearly defined and is intended to keep the Housing Strategy both responsive and proactive. It is vital that the strategy remains current by evolving and adapting with local, national, and global influences so that it remains effective.

An annual review of the strategy will be published and quarterly of the delivery plan will take place.

Annual reports will be published following an annual review.

The Delivery Plan will be monitored with Braintree District Council's Housing and Community Services.

Glossary

Affordable Housing: Housing provided to meet the needs of people on low income. As defined in the National Planning Policy Framework, the term includes homes for social rent, affordable rent, and shared ownership

Affordable Rent: Homes available to rent from a registered provider at a cost below 80% of the average, local market rent for a given area

Department of Social Security ‘DSS’ is a term which was previously used. LHA (local Housing Allowance), UC (Universal Credit) and HB (Housing Benefit) are what is used now to pay

Disabled Facilities Grant Uptake of the disabled facilities grant – a mandatory entitlement administered by housing authorities for eligible disabled people in all housing tenures – can enable homeowners to remain living an independent life at home.

Energy efficiency This means using energy more effectively, and often refers to some form of change in technology. Energy efficiency measures differences in how much energy is used to provide the same level of comfort, performance, or convenience by the same type of product or building

Homelessness This describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is often the

result of what is known as systemic or societal barriers, including a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural, or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination

Housing Association Independent, not-for-profit organisation providing affordable housing

Independent living Access to living arrangements and community features for disabled people, individuals with special needs, and/or diverse abilities, seniors and others that provides individuals with as much independence and autonomy as possible at home, work, school or in social and recreational settings

Land supply refers to the amount of deliverable housing land within a local authority area and, as part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Lifetime tenancies Either Secure (council) or Assured tenancies (registered provider).

Long-term health problem or disability A long-term health problem or disability that limits a person’s day-to-day activities, and has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months. This includes problems that are related to old age. People were asked to assess whether their daily activities were limited a lot or a little by such a health problem, or whether their daily activities were not limited at all.

Market Rent This refers to private sector rent levels. The rent levels used in this document are sourced from the GLA Rents map and use Valuation Office Agency data. Registered Providers will calculate market rent based on the RICS guidance “Market Rent: a guide for providers of Affordable Rented housing”

Registered Social Landlords Government funded not-for-profit organisations that provide affordable housing. They include housing associations, trusts and cooperatives.

Right to Buy: The scheme by which eligible council tenants can apply to buy their council home with a discount

Rural areas These include all land lying outside population centres and the people living within those rural areas

Social Housing providers Provider of subsidised social housing below market rent, including the council and other registered providers such as housing associations

Social Rent Rents which are kept low through state subsidy, to approximately a third of market levels. The social housing sector is currently governed by a strictly defined system of rent control to ensure that rents are kept affordable

Supported housing This is housing that provides a physical environment that is specifically designed to be safe, secure, enabling and home-like, with support services such as social services, provision of meals, house-keeping, and social and recreational activities, to maximize residents’ independence, privacy and dignity

Sustainable homes These are homes designed, built, and operated using techniques, materials and technologies that result in houses that are highly energy efficient, make efficient use of resources, have low environmental impact, are healthy to live in, are affordable, and produce as much energy as they consume on an annual basis

Vulnerable residents Persons belonging, or perceived to belong, to groups that are in a disadvantaged position or marginalised are often referred to as vulnerable groups or equity-seeking groups. In the case of the National Housing Strategy, priority groups are currently defined to include survivors (especially women and their children fleeing domestic violence); seniors; Indige nous peoples; people with disabilities; people dealing with mental health and addiction issues; veterans; LGBTQ2(+); racialized groups; recent immigrants (including refugees); and people experiencing homelessness. We recognize that people often live with multiple experiences of marginalization and thus an intersectional lens should be applied in discussion of each of these vulnerable groups.

Wider Determinants of Health: Wider determinants, also known as social determinants, are a diverse range of social, economic, and environmental factors which impact on people’s health





Braintree District Council
Healthy Housing Strategy
2023 – 2028
Evidence Base V.6

Contents

- 1 Introduction and key themes for new strategy
- 2 Scene setting
- 3 National policy context
- 4 Local policy context
- 5 National Influences
- 6 Local Influences
- 7 Affordable Housing
- 8 Tenure
- 9 Energy Efficiency
- 10 Aging Population
- 11 Private rented
- 12 Empty Homes
- 13 Glossary
- 14 Useful links
- 15 References

1.0 Introduction

Braintree District Council is developing a new healthy housing strategy 2023 - 2028. The purpose of this strategy is to provide a clear direction of travel and set clear priorities for Housing provision in the district. Local authorities are no longer required to have a housing strategy, although many local authorities feel it is a useful way of setting out priorities for themselves and for partner organisations. There is still a statutory requirement to have a policy for preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping; we will be reviewing our Homeless Strategy 2018 – 2023 next year.

This document outlines the available evidence to inform strategic decision making for the Housing Strategy under three themes:

Priority 1 Affordability: Facilitate a consistent programme of good quality homes which best meet the needs of our current and future residents

Priority 2 Support for specific needs: Enabling housing across the district to meet the needs of all our residents, especially those who are vulnerable.

Priority 3 Access: Improving access to and the quality of existing properties including the Private Rented Sector

2.0 Context: Our growing population

The 2021 census shows that the population of Braintree has increased by 5.5%, with 155,2000 residents living in the district ¹. To put this in context nationally, Braintree district's population rise is lower than the East of England which grew averagely at 8.3%.

There are 68,427 properties in the district, covering an area of approximately 612 square kilometres, the Braintree District is the second largest local authority in Essex in terms of area. It is classed statistically as predominantly rural with most residents living in either rural settlements or hub towns, which include the 3 largest settlements of Braintree, Witham and Halstead.

The Essex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment JNSA ² shows that the Braintree District scores worse than the rest of Essex and England for:

- under active adults
- higher levels of smokers
- higher levels of diabetes
- higher percentage of adults who are overweight
- more hip fractures in the over 65's
- higher rates of suicide.

The Braintree District scores better than the rest of Essex and England on average for:

- higher levels of adults in employment
- Percentage of cancers diagnosed at stages 1 and 2
- lower inequality in life expectancy at birth and lower winter deaths.

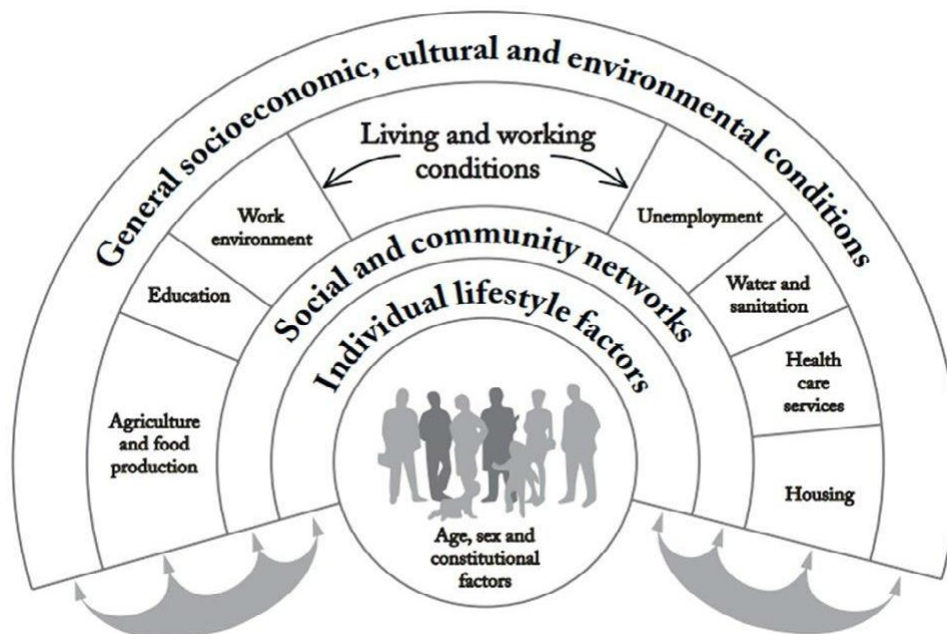
2.1 Wider determinants of Health

The wider determinants of health are a diverse range of social, economic and environmental factors which influence people's mental and physical health ³.

There have been multiple studies which evidence that housing conditions have a direct impact on health. More vulnerable groups often face greater barriers to accessing high quality care⁴.

1.6 million people are living in properties in poor conditions, living in cold, damp, and low-quality homes in the private rented sector ⁵. One in three household (32%) are living in homes with multiple problems relating to overcrowding, affordability, and non-decent conditions have rated their health as less than good ⁶.

The Dahlgren and Whitehead model of the main determinants of health



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead [wider-determinants-of-health](#)

Damp, mould, overcrowded, poor insulated, cold homes can make people ill and cause respiratory conditions. Children living in cold homes are twice as likely to suffer from respiratory problems ⁷. The Mid and South Essex Health and Care partnership coordinated the Health Inequalities Deep Dive Session Respiratory document. This document identifies high respiratory admission by poor quality housing. The results show:

- In the last 12 months, 709 admissions for a primary diagnosis of respiratory conditions were for patients from Braintree
- Colne Valley PCN (north of district – most rural) has the highest proportion of respiratory admissions from areas of poor-quality housing
- 40% of respiratory admissions are in areas of poor-quality housing

- Residents living in rural villages in dispersed areas in Braintree can live 120 minutes away from their GP via public transport.
- Residents living in Halstead, can travel 2 hours to a clinical service
- Across Mid and South Essex, there were 3,582 respiratory admissions. Over 1/3 of all admissions are for digitally excluded patients.

2.2 Indices of deprivation

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) publishes the English indices of deprivation⁸, the most recent version being 2019. The indices show where residents experience significant levels of deprivation, characterised by poorer health, lower skills, educational disadvantage, fuel poverty and reduced access to quality housing.

In 2015 Braintree District ranked 194 out of 317 local authorities, and in 2019 the rank was 203 indicating an above average position. However, Bocking, Witham West and Halstead Trinity are areas that ranks amongst the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in the country.

Links to other Strategies and Frameworks

This Housing Strategy does not stand alone, there are many strategies, policies, and frameworks nationally and across Braintree District Council that the Housing Strategy operates alongside of these can be found at [Strategy and policy documents – Braintree District Council](#).

3.0 National

- A **‘Levelling Up’** agenda stimulating economic activity, investment in infrastructure and promoting community activity
- **The National Planning Policy Framework**, revised 20 July 2021 sets out the governments planning policy for England and how they will be applied
- **A new Fire Safety Act and an emergency Building safety bill** which aims to make provisions about safety and standards of buildings
- **A fairer private rented sector** This white paper sets out our plans to fundamentally reform the private rented sector and level up housing quality in this country.
- **A Housing White Paper ‘Fixing our Broken Housing Market’** published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government in February 2017 setting out the government’s plans to reform the housing market and boost the supply of new homes in England
- **The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** Fundamentally changed how local authorities respond to homelessness in their districts.
- **The Homelessness Reduction Act 2020** ensures that all homeless people will be able to get help from their council, councils must try to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place, families with children will still be housed by councils if that’s the best way to help them
- **Health and Social Care Act 2012** each local authority has a duty to take steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area. This includes people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.
- **Homes England Strategic Plan 2018-2023** ensuring affordable and sustainable homes are built in areas of greatest need.
- **English Housing Survey Private rented sector 2020-21** is a national survey of property owners and letting agents who own and/or manage privately rented properties in England
- **The Climate Change Act 2008** is the basis for the UK’s approach to tackling and responding to climate change

- **Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016** introduced Universal Credit and made amendments to jobseeker's allowance, employment and support allowance, income support, tax credits, industrial injuries benefit, housing benefit and the social fund
- **Everyone In: how to end homelessness in Great Britain 2018**
- **Social Housing White Paper 2020.** Charter for Social Housing Residents. The charter sets out seven commitments that residents should expect from their property owner
- **The Future Home Standards 2021** This consultation set out the government's plans for a new green Future Homes Standard and sought views on changes to building regulations in England to improve energy efficiency and cut carbon emissions in new build homes
- **Coronavirus Act 2020** Introduced to provide guidance on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the economy, housing, homelessness, and the welfare system
- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** designed to promote awareness of domestic abuse; protect and support victims and their families; transform the justice process to prioritise victim safety and provide an effective response to perpetrators; and to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas, agencies and sectors.

4.0 Local strategies

- Braintree Plan for Growth April 2017 – 2022
- Braintree District Bouncing Back Together Plan
- Braintree District Council Housing Strategy 2016 - 2021
- BRAINTREE Economic Viability Study
- Braintree Housing Allocations Policy 2013
- Braintree Climate Change Strategy 2021 - 2030
- Braintree Council Tax Policy for Second Homes, Long Term Empty Properties and determining discounts for certain dwellings from 1st April 2019
- Braintree District live well strategy 2019-2023
- Digital Strategy (Dates tbc)
- Essex Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022 - 2026
- Gateway to Homechoice Allocation Policy July 2022
- Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-23 is due to be reviewed and will focus on preventing and supporting our homeless community.
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2019
- The Local Plan
- Policy LPP 31: Affordable Housing
- Policy LPP 32 Affordable Housing in Rural Areas
- Policy LPP 33 Specialist Housing
- Policy LPP 42 Sustainable Transport
- Policy LPP 48 An Inclusive Environment
- Policy LPP 49 Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment
- Policy LPP 71 Climate Change
- Policy LPP 72 Resource Efficiency, Energy Generation and Energy Efficiency
- National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment from 2016
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Dec 2015

5.0 The impact of the global pandemic and beyond

The Covid 19 pandemic demonstrated that when the economy receives an unexpected and significant shock, the number of people requiring housing support increases. Combined with the changing financial landscape, unemployment, family relationships breakdown, food poverty and homelessness all increase, which exacerbate disadvantage and inequalities.

The post pandemic world has significantly changed the way people work and live, with more people than ever working from home. Whilst a choice for some, people could be working and living in properties that may be in poor condition. After the pandemic, there has been a shift in how people work and live with an increased amount of time is spent at home. In February 2022, 84% of workers who had to work from home because of the coronavirus pandemic said they planned to carry out a mix of working at home and in their place of work in the future ⁹.

5.1 National Economic Position

The evidence collected in this document takes into consideration national influences which includes global pandemic, Brexit, Russia invading Ukraine, cost of living crises and a housing emergency.

In October 2022,¹⁰ UK food price inflation soared to a record annual rate of 11.6%. Considering other national influences, this has a considerable impact on the public.

Braintree Area Foodbank Ltd report shows that in 2012 the main reason (53%) for presenting at Braintree food bank was due to benefit change or delay, in 2021 63% of referrals are due to low income.

The foodbank report explains the increase in 'low income' being due to the following reasons

- Universal Credit and other state benefits are insufficient for people to pay their living expenses, rent, Council Tax, heat and light and food.
- Zero hours contracts mean income fluctuates and can reduce annual income by a considerable amount
- People unable to find full-time work and unable to 'top up' with Universal Credit
- Minimum wage is insufficient to cover living expenses
- In 2020/21 many people were furloughed on 80% of their income

6.0 Local Economics Position

According to the JSNA, the average weekly income for a Braintree resident working full time in 2018 was £630.30, £11.70 (1.86%) higher than the average for Essex and £55.40 (8.79%) higher than the average for England ¹¹.

Nationally, as of July 2022, the average wage was a little above £30,000. According to BuiltPlace, in October the average house price in Braintree was sold for £349,699 ¹². House prices in Braintree grew by 13.7% in the 12 months to August 2022. By comparison national house prices grew by 12.8% and prices in the East of England grew by 13.6% over the same period. Braintree house prices are now 68.4% above their previous peak in 2007.

According to land registry, First-time buyers in the Braintree district spent an average of £249,000 on their first property - £18,000 more than a year ago, and a staggering £47,000 more than in December 2015 ¹³.

The number of residents claiming out of work benefits has increased to its highest level in 5 years from 1.2% in April 2015 to 1.9% in April 2019. This is lower than the averages for Essex (2.1%) and England average (2.6%) but compared to other areas is the fourth highest claimant rate overall.

In 2019, the most common types of benefit issues Citizens Advice help residents with was initial claims for Universal Credit (UC). In 2022 – 2023 in line with the rest of the UK, this is now Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claims ¹⁴.

Energy bills have always been a concern for Braintree residents. Citizens Advice report that in 2019 through to 2023, the most common types of debt they support residents with are energy bills.

6.1

Table 1 and 2: Ratio of median house prices to median gross annual earnings

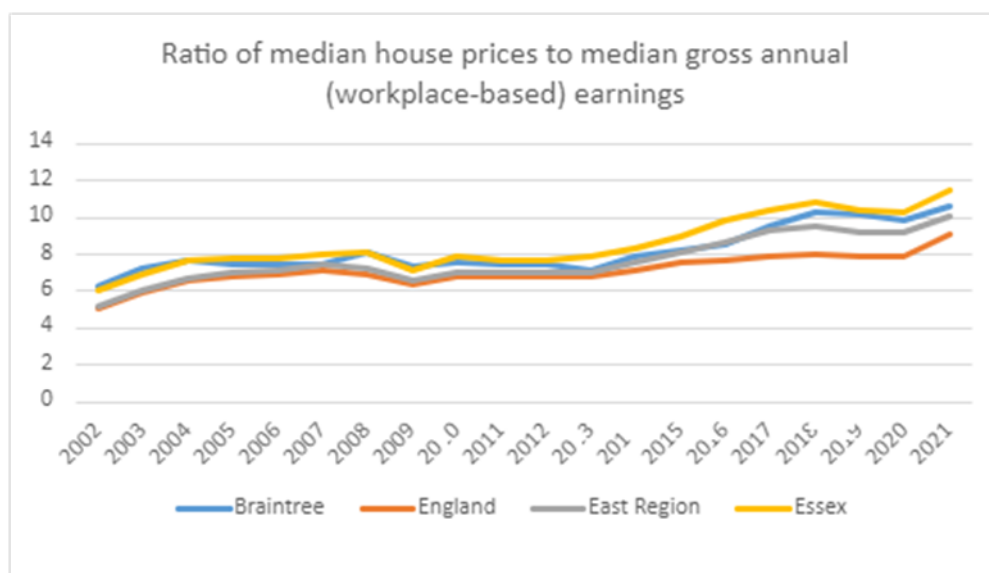
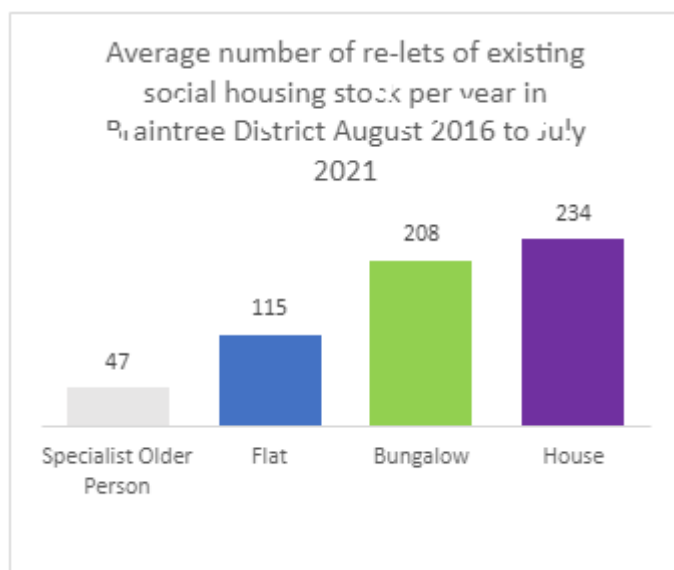


Table 2 Ratio of median house prices to median gross annual earnings

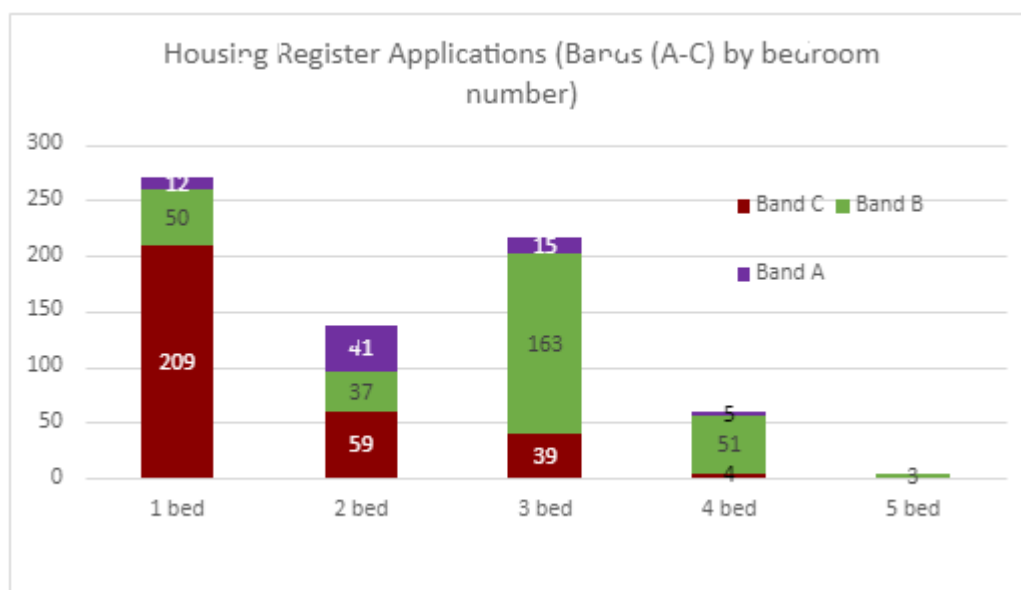
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Braintree	8.34	8.55	8.61	8.71	9.62
England	7.91	8.04	7.88	7.87	9.05
East Region	8.85	9.1	8.86	8.77	9.51
Essex	9.37	9.68	9.49	9.46	10.55

Table 6.3 Average number of re-lets of existing social housing stock 2016 - 2021



Source BDC

Table 6.4 and 6.5: Housing Register Applications by Band and Bed Number



Source: Gateway to Homechoice, Sep-22

6.5 Number of applicants on the Housing Register

	Band C	Band B	Band A
1 bed	209	50	12
2 bed	59	37	41
3 bed	39	163	15
4 bed	4	51	5
5 bed		3	

Source: Gateway to Homechoice, Sep-22

7.0 Affordable Housing

Braintree District Council's housing stock was transferred to Greenfields Community Housing in November 2007. The transfer secured major investment to improve the condition of the housing stock of just over 8,000 homes. It also established a significant local organisation with resources to invest in neighbourhoods and communities in the district.

We are working to meet the demand of those in need of housing through choice based lettings. There are just over 10,000 homes owned by housing associations in the Braintree District. The largest supply of social housing is through Eastlight Community Homes.

We maintain positive relationships with local registered providers, we are involved in each development through the following means

- Negotiating the affordable housing provision with developers through 'planning gain'
- Funding and co-funding (with the HCA) various schemes through our Housing Capital Programme
- 100% nomination rights through Gateway to Homechoice on new developments
- Striving to make sure that all affordable homes are built to Nationally Designed Space Standards (NDSS)

Most funding for affordable housing development (which is 70% of open market) comes from the housing providers, but a subsidy is normally needed to maintain affordability. The subsidy may come from reduced land price (for example if the association already owns the land) or through planning gain, where the subsidy is from the landowner and developer. The other main source is grant funding from the HCA or from the Council.

Braintree's Local Plan was adopted in July 2022, it is vital to this strategy as it ensures that we use adequate and continuous supply of land for housing development in accordance with the requirements of The Local Plan. At present, land supply in Braintree sits just under 5 years ¹⁵.

In line with The Local Plan, we plan to deliver in partnership, an average of 700 new homes per year in the district, at least 30% of these to be affordable 5% being accessible.¹⁶ New homes need to be flexible to meet the needs of a range of household types and sizes, and to meet individual households' changing needs over time. All new homes must meet the nationally described space standards ¹⁷¹⁸.

According to revised forecasts produced by research house Capital Economics in the wake of the government's 'growth plan', housing starts are predicted to fall by 40% next year (2023). "The change [in borrowing rates] has really affected scheme viability. Now we have got to review all our schemes on a scheme-by-scheme basis to see what we can do., in terms of tenure" ¹⁹

8.0 Tenure

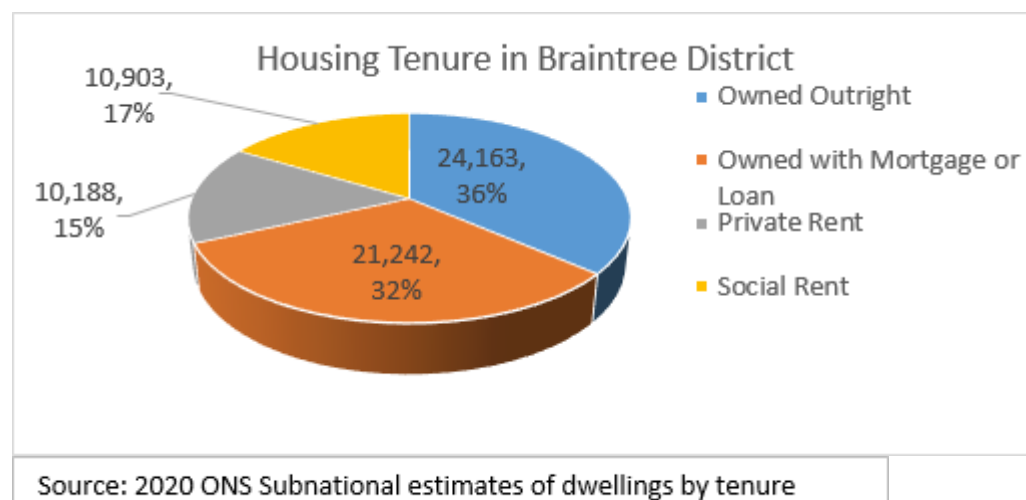
Braintree District Council uses a range of tools to support the build of appropriate homes in the right areas of the district and we want to support a range of tenure to be developed which reflect the needs of our residents. The tools we use are:

The Housing StatNav was developed in partnership with Greenfields Community Housing. This website sets out affordable housing supply and demand in every town and village in the district ²⁰

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was completed in 2015 in partnership with our neighbouring councils of Chelmsford, Colchester and Tendring and provides an overview of the housing market, supply and demand and housing needs of specific household groups. The SHMA sets out that 218 affordable homes are needed in the district per year to meet our current housing needs ²¹.

The Housing register can identify who is on the housing waiting list and what their immediate needs are.

Table 8.1 Housing Tenure in Braintree District



8.2 According to ONS, over the last 20 years the ratio of median house price to median gross annual earnings has risen from 5.5 to 9.6.

Over the same period the ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile gross annual earnings has risen from 5.7 to 10.6.

Over the same period the ratio of lower quartile house price to median gross annual earnings has risen from 4.1 to 7.8 ²².

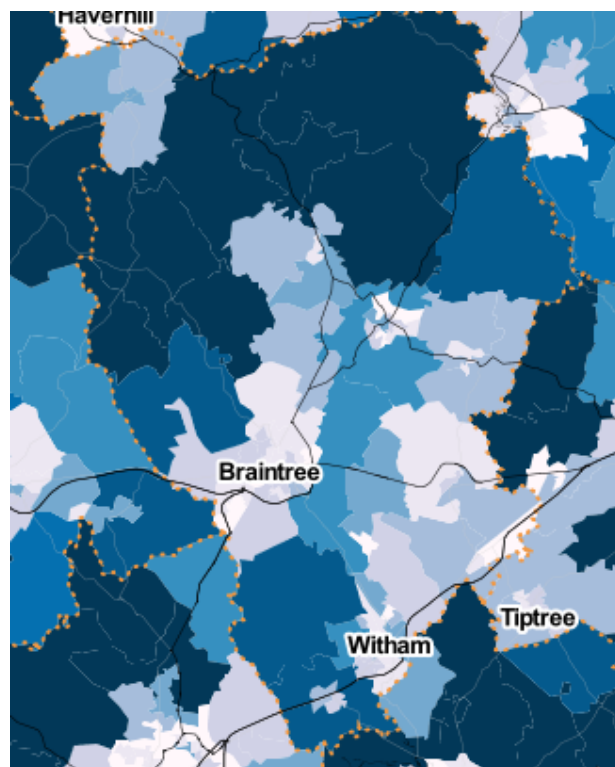
9.0 Energy efficiency

Most homes in the UK are poorly insulated. The UK's housing stock is also among the oldest in Europe. More than half (52%) of homes in England were built before 1965 and 20% prior to 1919. ²³

Evidence provided by CAB shows that Energy debts are a concern for many of the district's residents. Braintree District Council's Climate Strategy has been produced as we set a clear ambition to be carbon neutral as a Council as far as practical by 2030, as well as supporting our communities to reduce the impacts of climate change across the Braintree District ²⁴.

Over a million people live with multiple housing issues, such as living in properties which are in poor conditions such as from damp, hazards to overcrowdings, with minimal housing security and many are unaffordable, all of this impacts our wider determinant of health. Braintree District Council is committed to ensuring that housing standards are met across the district, we will explore how we can make the best use of existing homes ²⁵.

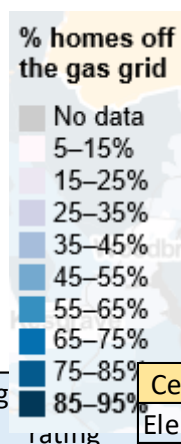
Table 9 Energy Efficiency & Fuel Poverty



85-95% of rural areas in the north of Braintree District are non-gas properties.

Source: <https://www.nongasmap.org.uk/>

Table
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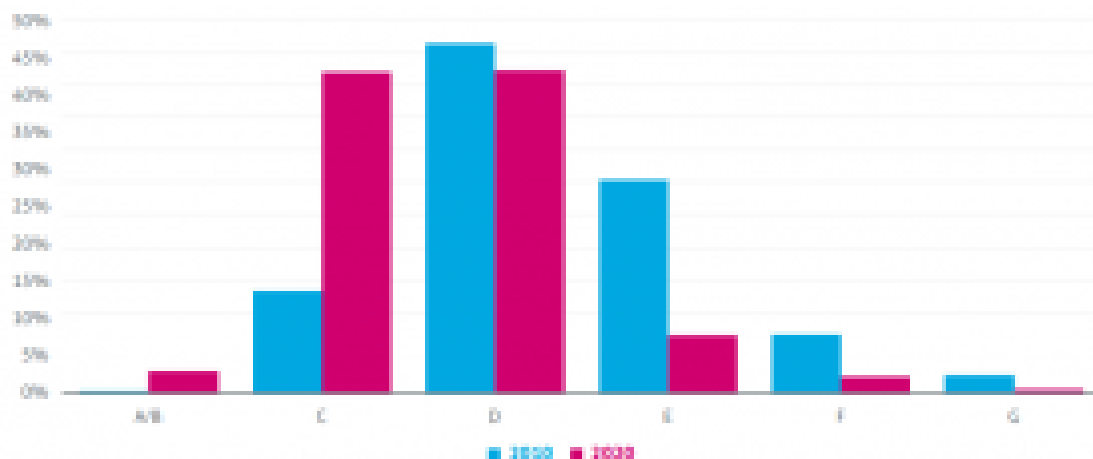


9.1 Energy categories and types of properties Braintree District

Energy	Central heating	Number	%
A and below	Electric	6774	10.0%
B and below	Multiple	30729	26.3%
C and below	None	30694	26.5%
D and below	Oil	27835	23.8%
E and below	Other	18361	15.7%
F and below	Solid	6772	5.8%
G	Gas	1990	1.7%
	Unknown	390	0.3%

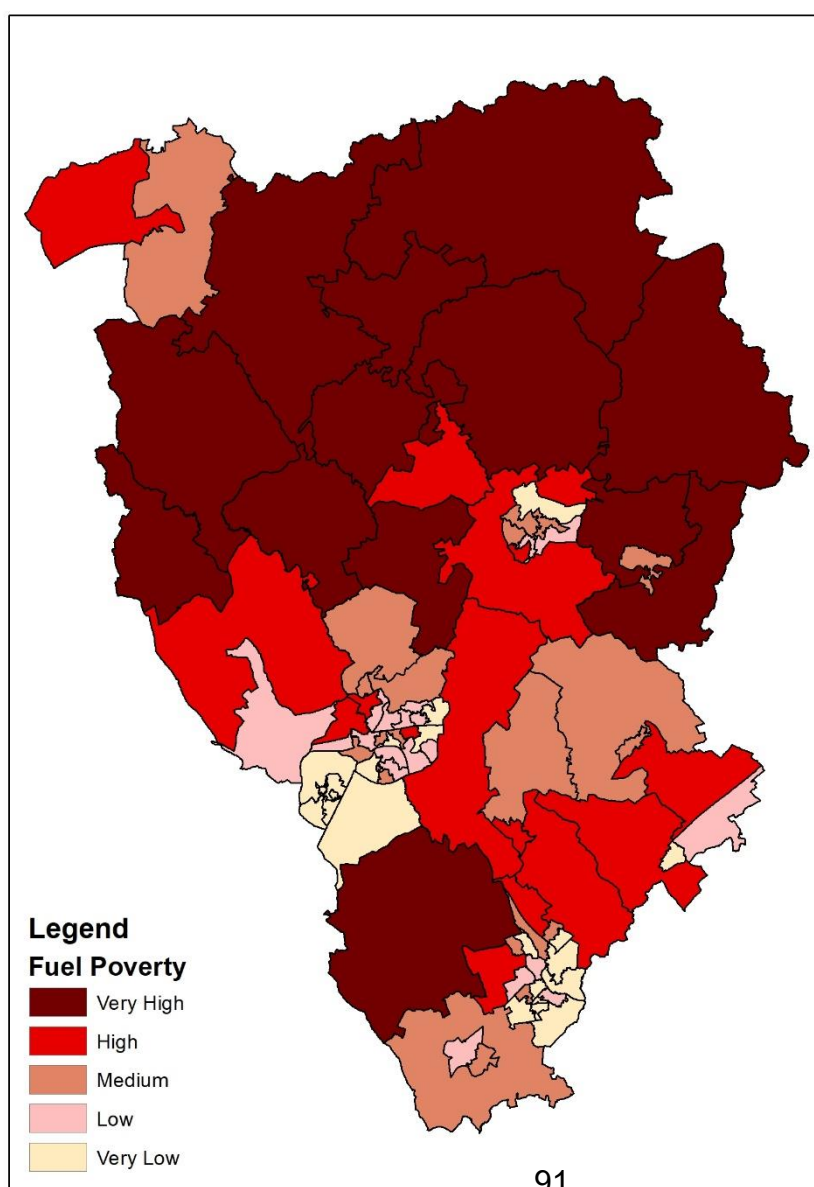
Source: Department for Communities and
Source: 2011 Census
Local Government 2005 to 2016

EPC ratings, housing in England 2010 to 2020



Source: Institute for Government analysis of English Housing Survey 2020-2021

Table 9.2 Fuel Poverty in Braintree District by LSOA



Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Sub-regional Fuel Poverty data, 2018

10.0 Ageing population

Table 10.1: Population Projection

2022 35141.6	2022 33383.5	2022 42349.5	2022 33885.1	2022 8506.3
2043 33753.6	2043 33593.4	2043 41077.4	2043 38402.7	2043 15317.3
-3.9%	0.6%	-3%	13.3%	80.1%

Population projection gives us an insight as to who will be living in our district in the future and helps us identify the needs of our residents so that we work in partnership to enable properties to be provided accordingly, it also helps us assess our downsizing policies and work with partners to consider incentive schemes or similar ²⁶.

The largest increase in population will be the older population with an 80% increase in the over 80-year-old and going from 8500 to over 15,000 followed by 13% increase in 60–70-year-olds. The youngest is set to fall, and the other ages stay similar as previous years.

Table 10.2 Housing Register Applicant types and access Needs

Age	Applicant type			Access needs			
	Direct	Transfer	Homeless	Wheelchair user	Cannot manage stairs	Level access shower	No access needs
Under 60	1,081	592	68	14	38	46	1653
60-69	109	66	6	4	13	24	140
70-79	67	40	1	2	8	15	83

80+	27	26			8	12	33
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Source: Aug-22 Housing Register

10.3 Housing Register households aged 60 or over

Braintree District Council is committed to working with our partners to support residents to move into suitable properties as their needs change.

In August 2022, there were a total of 2,093 applications on the Housing Register for re-housing in Braintree.

In August 2022, there were 342 applications on the Housing Register for re-housing in Braintree from people where the main applicant was aged 60 or over.

Of these, 203 applications were direct applicants, 132 were for transfers from existing BDC tenants and 7 were homeless applications.

Of all the applicants, 6 were wheelchair users, 29 couldn't manage stairs, 51 required level access showers and 256 had no access needs at all.

Of the 342 applications, 97 were placed in bands A-C (indicating more likely to be re-housed).

Source: Aug-22 Housing Register data

10.4 Downsizing households on the Housing Register

	Number on Housing Register	Number of months on Housing Register
HRA - A11 - Transfer Incentive Scheme (4 or 3 Bed)	41	19.9
HRA - B2 - Transfer Incentive Scheme (2 or 1 Bed)	21	24.1
Total	62	21.3

10.5 Downsizing households who accepted offers

Year	HRA - A11 - Transfer Incentive Scheme (4 or 3 Bed)	Months wait	HRA - B2 - Transfer Incentive Scheme (2 or 1 Bed)	Months wait	Total number	Months wait	Total households who accepted offers	Total Wait (months)
2018-19	39	14.1	12	14.9	51	14.3	639	15.4
2019-20	24	9.5	13	20.2	37	13.3	643	15.4
2020-21	22	13.7	13	8.7	35	11.9	574	12.5
2021-22	28	9.0	16	13.8	44	10.8	693	12.5
2022-23	14	16.4	7	19.9	21	17.6	285	13.1
Total	127	12.3	61	15.0	188	13.2	2834	13.9

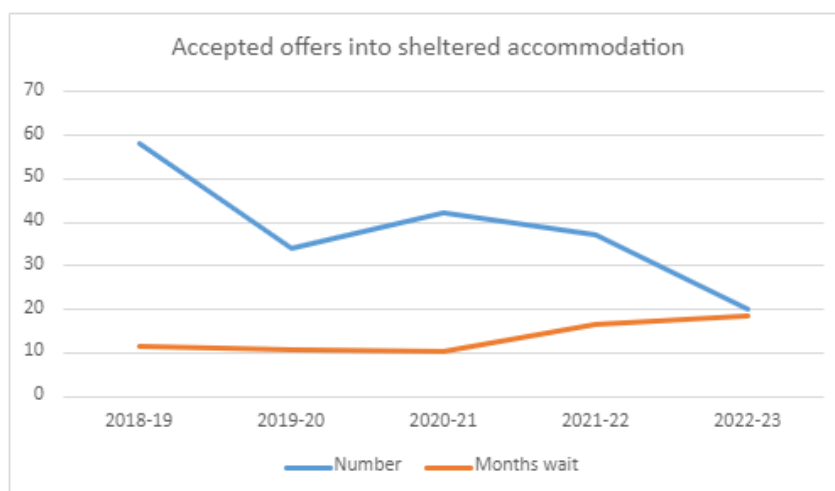
Table 10.6 Accepted offer into supported housing

	Year	Number	Months wait
	2018-19	0	-
	2019-20	1	22.0
	2010-21	0	-
	2021-22	3	4.7
up to Sep-22	2022-23	2	3.0
	Total	6	7.0

Table 10.7 Accepted offer into sheltered housing

	Year	Number	Months wait
	2018-19	58	11.6
	2019-20	34	10.8
	2020-21	42	10.1
	2021-22	37	16.4
up to Sep-22	2022-23	20	18.5
	Total	181	12.5

Table 10.8 Graph of Accepted Offer into sheltered accommodation



10.9 The Council is promoting the Livewell campaign, working together with partner agencies to reduce levels of adult obesity and reduce numbers of hip fractures in the over 65s. Braintree District has the highest rate of excess winter deaths out of all the districts in Essex ²⁷.

The JNSA states that the direct age standard admissions rate of hip fractures was estimated to be 716.43 per 100,000 population ages 65 and over. This was higher than the average for England (577.8) and the highest level in Essex²⁸.

The QOF prevalence of Dementia was estimated to be 0.80%. This was ranked as being the 5th highest prevalence compared across the other Districts in Essex. By knowing the health conditions that our elderly residents face, we can continue to support our vulnerable residents with specialist provisions and housing to live independently.

Braintree District Council has provided an average of 141 Disability Facility Grants per year to support residents to remain in their homes.

10.10 Number of Disabled Facility Grants

Year	Number of Disability Facility Grants
2021-22	134
2021-20	134
2019-20	161
2018-19	120
2017-18	156

Source: BDC data

10.11 Braintree Districts numbers by Long-term health problem or disability

Disability	Numbers			
	All categories: Long-term health problem or disability	Day-to-day activities limited a lot	Day-to-day activities limited a little	Day-to-day activities not limited
All categories: Tenure	145,463	9,529	13,149	122,785
Owned or shared ownership: Total	103,078	5,373	8,877	88,828
Owned: Owned outright	35,979	3,675	5,709	26,595
Owned: Owned with a mortgage or loan or shared ownership	67,099	1,698	3,168	62,233
Rented or living rent free: Total	42,385	4,156	4,272	33,957
Rented: Social rented	22,998	3,223	2,987	16,788
Rented: Private rented or living rent free	19,387	933	1,285	17,169

Age is derived from the date of birth question and is a person's age at their last birthday, on 27 March 2011. Dates of birth that imply an age over 115 are treated as invalid and the person's age is imputed. Infants less than one year old are classified as 0 years of age.

10.12 Braintree Districts % by Long-term health problem or disability

Percentage

Disability	All categories: Long-term health problem or disability	Day-to- day activities limited a lot	Day-to- day activities limited a little	Day-to- day activities not limited
All categories: Tenure	145,463	9,529	13,149	122,785
Owned or shared ownership: Total	70.9%	56.4%	67.5%	72.3%
Owned: Owned outright	24.7%	38.6%	43.4%	21.7%
Owned: Owned with a mortgage or loan or shared ownership	46.1%	17.8%	24.1%	50.7%
Rented or living rent free: Total	29.1%	43.6%	32.5%	27.7%
Rented: Social rented	15.8%	33.8%	22.7%	13.7%
Rented: Private rented or living rent free	13.3%	9.8%	9.8%	14.0%

10.13 Braintree Districts Long-term health problem or disability % by tenure

% by Tenure	All categories: Tenure	Owned or shared ownership: Total	Owned: Owned outright	Owned: Owned with a mortgage or loan or shared ownership	Rented or living rent free: Total	Rented: Social rented	Rented: Private rented or living rent free
All categories: Long-term health problem or disability	145,463	103,078	35,979	67,099	42,385	22,998	19,387
Day-to-day activities limited a lot	6.6%	5.2%	10.2%	2.5%	9.8%	14.0%	4.8%
Day-to-day activities limited a little	9.0%	8.6%	15.9%	4.7%	10.1%	13.0%	6.6%

Day-to-day activities not limited	84.4%	86.2%	73.9%	92.7%	80.1%	73.0%	88.6%
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11.0 Private Rented Sector

According to English Housing Survey Private Rented Sector, 2020-21, the private rented sector is home to just over 4.4 million households, which is one fifth of households in England.

The private rented sector accounts for 19% of households in England, larger than the social rented sector at 17%, but smaller than owner occupation, which accounts for 65% of households.²⁹

Table 11.1 Homeless households helped into Private Rented Sector

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 (Apr-Sep)
Number of households assisted into PRS	98	141	120	120	54
Number of households securing access to PRS via DHP	13	8	11	8	1
Value of DHP to secure PRS access	Not known	£12,566	£12,275	£10,891	£1,600
Rent in advance loans	£44,550	£26,104	£6,495	£981	£1,322
Incentive payments made to landlords	Not known	£200	£0	£0	£0
Deposit bonds agreed	Not known	£0	£0	£0	£0

Source: Housing Options Team BDC

11.2 The English Housing Survey, states that nationally, the private rented sector has the poorest quality housing^{30 31}, with 25% of homes considered non-decent. As the Fairer Private Rented Sector White Paper states 'Poor-quality housing is holding people back and preventing neighbourhoods from thriving'³². The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is in place to check hazards in private rented homes that could affect health. The council must act if serious problems are found. A consultation has been launched on introducing a new Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector³³

11.3 As mentioned earlier in this document, housing plays a critical role as part of the wider determinants of health. Longer tenancy agreements can help residents feel secure in their homes, this in turn helps people embed in their local communities, build a sense of belonging and reduce isolation and improve overall wellbeing. Multiple studies have shown a link between children who move multiple times and the short- and long-term effects of housing insecurity on their health. For many children, there is a significant impact on physical and oral health outcomes, decreased attachment to education and increased anxiety and mental health concerns which can continue into adulthood³⁴.

The average stay in PRS compared with Social Housing and owner occupiers is below:

PRS	Social Housing	Homeowners
4.2 years	10.8 years	16.0 years

11.4 Incomes, particularly those of lower income families, have failed to keep up with increases in the cost of living over recent years ³⁵. With the increased pressures on finances, not being able to meet rent and mortgage payments can lead to evictions and repossessions. Affordability can cause severe stress and anxiety which can exacerbate health conditions. On average, private renters spend 31% of their income on their rent. Private renters in receipt of housing support spend around 40% of their income on rent and 37.6% of private renters were living in fuel poverty.

Housing authorities are encouraged to work in close partnership with property owners. Having these strong relationships helps us to facilitate opportunities to expand the provision of private rented accommodation that is available to people threatened with or who are homeless ³⁶. The issue we face as a district is the lack of properties available in the private rented sector that meet the Local Housing Allowance rate. Local Housing Allowance is far lower than the properties that are available, this means there is a shortfall each month and rent arrears can quickly accrue.

11.5 Braintree District sits across 4 LHA for both Chelmsford, Colchester Cambridge and Bury

Local Housing Allowance Rates	Chelmsford	Colchester	Cambridge	Bury
Shared Accommodation Rate	£90.10	£71.34	£97	£82.85
One bedroom Rate	£149.59	£120.83	£178.36	£120.82
Two-bedroom Rate	£182.96	£158.79	£195.62	£149.59
Three-bedroom Rate	£226.68	£195.62	£218.63	£184.11
Four-bedroom Rate	£298.03	£252.15	£299.18	£276.16

Source: [Local Housing Allowance – Braintree District Council](#)

In the past, we could assume that anyone securing a social tenancy would be able to meet the cost through wages or Local Housing Allowance ³⁷.

This is no longer the case as:

- Local Housing Allowance is capped as shown in table 22. This means that larger family homes (and particularly new homes let at 'Affordable Rents') will be unaffordable for some households.
- Under 35s are limited to a room in a shared house. They are no longer able to claim enough to pay for a one-bed flat.
- The bedroom tax cuts universal credit housing element or housing benefit if claimants are under-occupying. They can have their Housing Benefit reduced by 14% for one spare room or 25% for 2 or more rooms.
- Benefit levels have not kept pace with rising inflation

11.6 Barriers to the Private Rented Sector

The English Private Sector Landlord survey 2021 showed that 44% of property owners were unwilling to let to tenants on with housing support or Universal Credit and 44% were unwilling to let to tenants requiring adaptations to the policy.

Braintree plans to make the private rented sector a viable option to house our residents, but more work needs to be done on building relationships, breaking down perceptions of Universal Credit and building confidence between property owners and the local authority ³⁸. We also need to explore incentives to reach more people to help them access the private rented sector.

In 2020, two court rulings concluded that housing benefit discrimination is unlawful and in breach of the Equalities Act. The result of this ruling is that property owners and agents can no longer discriminate against people in receipt of benefits. The issue that continues to occur, is that many agents and property owners require several weeks rent upfront, a deposit and a guarantor who often must be a homeowner or earn a certain amount of income. Many people who are reliant on benefits cannot provide this and therefore the PRS is not a viable housing option for them.

According to Braintree's Citizens Advice cost of living data dashboard in 2019 – 2020 the most common type of housing issues they supported residents with, was 'threatened with homelessness' now, in 2022 the main housing issue is 'accessing accommodation' ³⁹.

Shelter report that almost 2.5 million renters are either behind or constantly struggling to pay their rent - an increase of 45% since April 2022 ⁴⁰.

12.0 Empty homes

Nationally across England 1 in every 25 homes is without residents. At present in Braintree District, we have just over 2000 empty homes. As a result of a global housing crises, the Global Empty Homes Network (GEHN) was launched which recognise that this is a global concern.

Homes can be empty for a variety of reasons such as second homes and holiday lets but left empty for a long time can mean the property falls into disrepair, the outside can become overgrown, the property can become damp, attract squatters and anti-social behaviour. Tackling empty properties will help provide additional much-needed homes in the district by providing a valuable source of affordable homes for residents.

12.1 Local authorities are encouraged to make use of their powers and the incentives available to tackle empty homes. Through the New Homes Bonus, local authorities can earn the same financial reward for bringing an empty home back into use as building a new one. They can also charge up to 150% council tax for a home left empty for over 2 years. Housing authorities may wish to consider introducing local schemes that incentivise property owners to bring empty properties back into use, for example by providing grant funding subject to the refurbished accommodation being made available for homeless households ⁴¹.

Table **12.2** shows England's long-term empty and second homes to show total number of properties not in residential use on a long-term basis, by local authority area published by Action on Empty Homes

12.2 Proportion of empty properties in Braintree and surrounding districts

	Amount of empty Homes / 2 nd homes		Total Population	1 in every 'x' homes out of use
Chelmsford	639	331	78,560	97
Colchester	746	680	84,266	69
Maldon	326	260	29,230	61
Braintree	568	200	67,246	83
Uttlesford	224	187	38,839	99

Source: Government data published by MHCLG 10 Nov 2021.

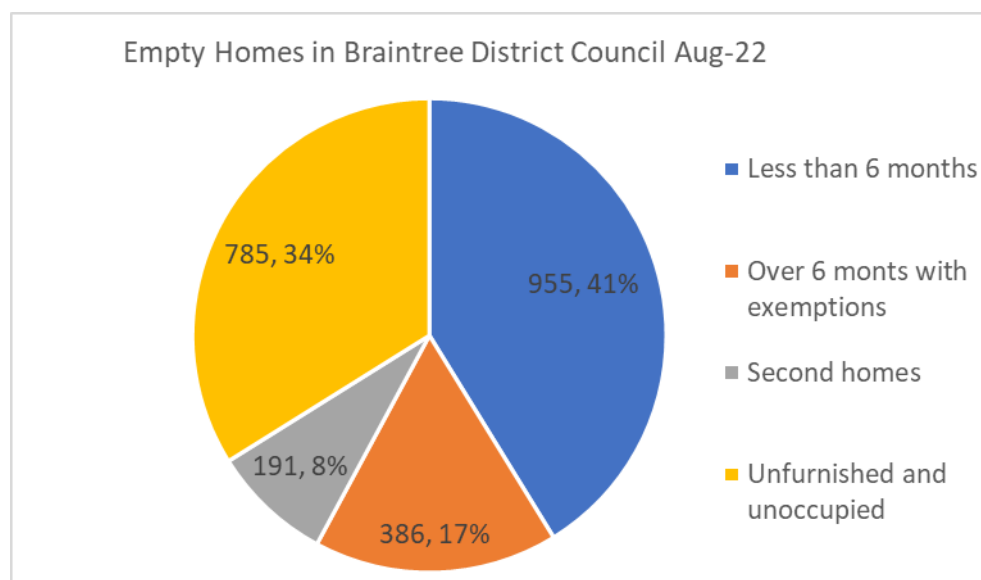
We have compared Government data published by MHCLG 10 Nov 2021 (table 12.2) with BDC data of empty and second homes, BDC data shows that **1 in 70 homes** is not in residential use. If we just consider long term empty properties, that equates to **1 in 87 are currently empty**.

Braintree District Council Tax data shows on 31/08/2022, there are 68,427 properties in the district.

2317 were empty homes (for longer than 6 months):

- 955 homes empty for less than 6 months, 326 of those have an exemption
- 1362 homes empty for 6 months or more, 386 homes empty for 6 months or more with an exemption (charity, prison, nursing homes, 178 probate, 113 annexes)
- 205 second homes, unoccupied and furnished, 14 are short term
- 785 long term empty homes unoccupied and unfurnished with no exemptions from council tax and not second homes

12.4 Empty Homes in Braintree District Aug-22



12.5 There are a variety of powers that can be used by the local authority, these include

- Compulsory Purchases
- Enforced Sales
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders
- Council Tax Charging
- Enforcement Powers which cover dangerous buildings, securing and fencing off, vermin, drainage and general amenity.

In 2019 Braintree council published the Policy for Second Homes, Long Term Empty Properties and determining discounts for certain dwellings. This document sets out action taken on long term empty dwellings in the district. At the end of Aug-22 there were **62 properties** paying the maximum council tax.

We have previously worked with property owners to try and bring empty homes back into use, but we know that more needs to be done ⁴².

Consultation

Two Housing Strategy Workshops were held on 17 and 18 October 2022. Stakeholders highlighted that meeting the needs and supporting communities, improving home standards, access to housing and affordability are priority areas to focus on. A key theme was that residents needed both immediate short-term support and to explore long term sustainable change. There was a recognition from the workshops that the strategy should include the word 'healthy' in the title to become 'The Healthy Housing Strategy'.

14.0 Glossary:

Affordable Housing: Housing provided to meet the needs of people on low income. As defined in the National Planning Policy Framework, the term includes homes for social rent, affordable rent and shared ownership

Affordable Rent: Homes available to rent from a registered provider at a cost below 80% of the average, local market rent for a given area

Department of Social Security 'DSS': A government department that was responsible for benefit payments which no longer operates, that department was shut down in 2001 as part of reforms to the benefits system LHA (local Housing Allowance), UC (Universal Credit) and HB (Housing Benefit) are what is used now to pay towards housing costs

Disabled Facilities Grant Uptake of the disabled facilities grant – a mandatory entitlement administered by housing authorities for eligible disabled people in all housing tenures – can enable homeowners to remain living an independent life at home.

Energy efficiency This means using energy more effectively, and often refers to some form of change in technology. Energy efficiency measures differences in how much energy is used to provide the same level of comfort, performance or convenience by the same type of product or building

Homelessness This describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is often the result of what is known as systemic or societal barriers, including a lack of affordable

and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination

Housing Association Independent, not-for-profit organisation providing affordable housing

Independent living Access to living arrangements and community features for disabled people, individuals with special needs, and/or diverse abilities, seniors and others that provides individuals with as much independence and autonomy as possible at home, work, school or in social and recreational settings

Land supply refers to the amount of deliverable housing land within a local authority area and, as part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Lifetime tenancies Either Secure (council) or Assured tenancies (registered provider).

Long-term health problem or disability A long-term health problem or disability that limits a person's day-to-day activities, and has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months. This includes problems that are related to old age. People were asked to assess whether their daily activities were limited a lot or a little by such a health problem, or whether their daily activities were not limited at all.

Market Rent This refers to private sector rent levels. The rent levels used in this document are sourced from the GLA Rents map and use Valuation Office Agency data. Registered Providers will calculate market rent based on the RICS guidance "Market Rent: a guide for providers of Affordable Rented housing"

Registered Social Landlords Government funded not-for-profit organisations that provide affordable housing. They include housing associations, trusts and cooperatives.

Right to Buy: The scheme by which eligible council tenants can apply to buy their council home with a discount

Rural areas These include all land lying outside population centres and the people living within those rural areas

Social Housing providers Provider of subsidised social housing below market rent, including the council and other registered providers such as housing associations

Social Rent Rents which are kept low through state subsidy, to approximately a third of market levels. The social housing sector is currently governed by a strictly defined system of rent control to ensure that rents are kept affordable

Supported housing This is housing that provides a physical environment that is specifically designed to be safe, secure, enabling and home-like, with support services such as social services, provision of meals, housekeeping and social and recreational activities, in order to maximize residents' independence, privacy and dignity

Sustainable homes These are homes designed, built and operated using techniques, materials and technologies that result in houses that are highly energy efficient, make efficient use of resources, have low environmental impact, are healthy to live in, are affordable, and produce as much energy as they consume on an annual basis

Vulnerable residents Persons belonging, or perceived to belong, to groups that are in a disadvantaged position or marginalised are often referred to as vulnerable groups or equity-seeking

groups. In the case of the National Housing Strategy, priority groups are currently defined to include survivors (especially women and their children fleeing domestic violence); seniors; Indigenous peoples; people with disabilities; people dealing with mental health and addiction issues; veterans; LGBTQ2(+); racialized groups; recent immigrants (including refugees); and people experiencing homelessness. We recognize that people often live with multiple experiences of marginalization and thus an intersectional lens should be applied in discussion of each of these vulnerable groups.

Wider Determinants of Health: Wider determinants, also known as social determinants, are a diverse range of social, economic and environmental factors which impact on people's health

14.0 Useful Websites:

Braintree Council [Braintree District Council – Braintree District Council](#)

Built place [Built Place](#)

Census [Census 2021](#)

Citizens Advice cost of living data dashboard [Public Flourish Studio](#)

Empty Homes Network www.ehnetwork.org.uk

Action on Empty Homes [action on empty homes](#)

Homes and Communities Agency www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation www.jrf.org.uk

Local Housing Allowance [Check LHA rates](#)

Shelter www.shelter.org.uk

StavNav [Braintree Statnav](#)

15.0 Reference

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- ¹ Census [Census 2021](#)
- ² JNSA [Braintree JSNA Profile 2019 – Essex Open Data](#)
- ³ Gov.uk [wider-determinants-of-health](#)
- ⁴ Citizens Advice. A very general practice: How much time do GPs spend on issues other than health? 2015 [CitizensAdvice AVeryGeneralPractice May2015.pdf](#)
- ⁴ Fingertips [Wider Determinants of Health - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](#)
- ⁵ Fairer Private Rented Sector [A fairer private rented sector](#)
- ⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [English Housing Survey](#)
- ⁷ Housing and the health of young children, National Children’s Bureau, 2016 <https://www.ncb.org.uk>
- ⁸ Indices of Deprivation [English indices of deprivation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
[dclgapps.communities.gov.uk](#)
- ⁹ ONS Is hybrid working here to stay? <https://www.ons.gov.uk>
- ¹⁰ Inflation <https://www.ons.gov.uk>
- ¹¹ JNSA [Braintree JSNA Profile 2019 – Essex Open Data](#)
- ¹² Built place [Built Place](#)
- ¹³ Land Registry [HM Land Registry Open Data](#)
- ¹⁴ Citizens Advice cost of living data dashboard [Public Flourish Studio](#)
- ¹⁵ Council shares frustration over housing land supply <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/news>
- ¹³ National Planning Policy Framework: [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
- ¹⁶ Braintree Local Plan [What is the Local Plan 2033? – Local Plan 2033 – Braintree District Council](#)
- ¹⁷ National space standard: <https://www.gov.uk>
- ¹⁸
- ¹⁹ Capital Economics [capitaleconomics.com global-economy-outlook](#).
- ²⁰ StavNav [housing-statnav](#)
- ²¹ SHMAR [Strategic Housing Market Assessment – Braintree District Council](#)
- ²² ONS 2020 [Subnational estimates of dwellings by tenure, England \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)
- ²³ Chartered Institute of Housing www.cih.org/news/uk-housing-review-2022
- ²⁴ Braintree Climate Strategy [Delivering the strategy – Climate change strategy](#)
- ²⁵ The Health Foundation: Number of households experiencing multiple housing problems
<https://www.health.org.uk>
- ²⁶ Population projection [Population projections for local authorities: ONS](#)
- ²⁷ LiveWell Campaign [Braintree-Livewell-Guide-2018.pdf \(livewellcampaign.co.uk\)](#)
- ²⁸ JNSA [Braintree JSNA Profile 2019 – Essex Open Data](#)
- ²⁹ The Health Foundation: Relationship between health and home quality:
<https://www.health.org.uk>
- ³⁰ Shelter [Health and safety standards for rented homes \(HHSRS\) - Shelter England](#)
- ³¹ English Housing Survey Private rented sector, 2020-21 [English Housing Survey: Private rented sector](#)
- ³² Fairer Private Rented Sector [A fairer private rented sector](#)
- ³³ Gov.uk [new-standards-for-rented-homes-under-consideration](#)
- ³⁴ Moving-Always-Moving-Report.pdf www.childrenssociety.org.uk
- ³⁵ Link to Cost of Living on Braintree District Council web site [Help with cost of living](#)
- ³⁶ ³³ [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities](#) Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities Published 22 February 2018 Updated:1 June 2022 [Homelessness code of guidance](#)

[for local authorities - Chapter 2: Homelessness strategies and reviews - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁷ Local Housing Allowance [Check LHA rates](#)

³⁸ ¹⁴English private sector landlord survey 2021 [English Private Landlord Survey 2021](#)

³⁹ Citizens Advice cost of living data dashboard [Public Flourish Studio](#)

⁴⁰ Shelter [The cost of living crisis - Shelter England](#)

⁴² Empty Homes Network [Empty Homes Network \(ehnetwork.org.uk\)](#)