



CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

Wednesday, 31st January 2024 at 7.15pm

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

THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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

Councillor J Abbott
Councillor J Beavis
Councillor J Bond
Councillor G Courtauld
Councillor P Heath (Chairman)
Councillor D Holland
Councillor J Martin

Councillor I Parker
Councillor R Ramage
Councillor W Taylor
Councillor E Williams
Councillor T Williams
Councillor J Wrench

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 MEMBERS – DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

Any Member with a DPI, OPI or NPI must declare the nature of their interest in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Members must not participate in any discussion of the matter in which they have declared a DPI or OPI or participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting. In addition, the Member must withdraw from the Chamber where the meeting considering the business is being held unless the Member has received a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer.

Public Question Time – Registration and Speaking

The Agenda allows for a period of up to 30 minutes for Public Question Time. Members of the public may ask questions or make statement to the Committee on matters listed on the agenda for this meeting.

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

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

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

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

Please note that completion of the on-line form does not guarantee you a place to speak during Public Question Time. You will receive email notification from the Governance Service confirming whether your request is successful.

The Chairman of the Committee has discretion to extend the time allocated to registered speakers and to amend the order in which they may speak.

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

Further information on Public Question Time is available on the [Council's website](#).

Health and Safety

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Documents

Agendas, Reports and Minutes may be accessed via www.braintree.gov.uk

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https://www.braintree.gov.uk/info/200136/access_to_information/376/privacy_policy

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The meeting will also be broadcast via the Council's YouTube Channel.

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 may send these to governance@braintree.gov.uk

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Declaration of Interests - Scrutiny Committee

- 1) To declare the existence and nature of any interests 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.
- 2) To declare the existence and nature of any instruction given by or on behalf of a political group to any Councillor who is a member of that group as to how that Councillor shall speak or vote on any matter before the Committee or the application or threat to apply any sanction by the group in respect of that Councillor should he/she speak or vote on any particular matter.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd November 2023 (copy previously circulated).

4 Public Question Time

Please see the agenda notes above for guidance.

5 Scrutiny of the Council's Budget 2024/25 - Update

To receive a presentation from Cabinet on the updated Council Budget for 2024 to 2025.

The report and presentation slides are to follow:-

- 1) The report for this Item is prepared for the publication of the Agenda for the meeting of the Cabinet on 5th February 2024.
- 2) All Members of the Council are invited to attend for this Item as part of the Member Development Programme to enable them to understand the Council's Budget for 2024/25.
- 3) Only Members of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee will be asked to note the report.

6 Second Quarter Performance Report 2023/24

5 - 35

7 Decision Planner - 1st February 2024 to 30th April 2024

The Committee is asked to note the Decision Planner for the period 1st February 2024 to 30th April 2024.

| | |
|---|---|
| Report Title: Second Quarter Performance Report 2023/24 | |
| Report to: Corporate Scrutiny Committee | |
| Date: 31 st January 2024 | For: To inform |
| Key Decision: No | Decision Planner Ref No: DP/2023/37 |
| Report Presented by: Tracey Headford, People and Performance Manager | |
| Enquiries to: Tracey Headford, People and Performance Manager tracey.headford@braintree.gov.uk ext 2442 | |

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Council provides a report to demonstrate the performance of Braintree District Council (the Council) at the end of the second quarter (July 2023 to September 2023). The performance report was presented to Cabinet on the 22nd January 2024.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The report is to inform the Corporate Scrutiny Committee of the performance of the Council following its presentation and noting at Cabinet on the 22nd January 2024.

3. Summary of Issues

- 3.1 The Council keeps a record of its performance which is reported to cabinet every quarter for consideration and noting.
- 3.2 As at the end of the second quarter, three projects are complete with 51 projects on track and three projects have an amber status with reasons for delays varying from costs coming in over budget to planning recommendations requiring additional work.
- 3.3 Eleven performance indicators have met or exceeded target, and three performance indicators have missed target by more than 5%. The areas of underperformance are in relation to cumulative number of homes granted planning permission (>5%), recycling rates (>5%), and enquires resolved at first point of contact in the Customer Service Centre (>5%).
- 3.4 The Finance section of the report sets out the current budgetary position, information on capital spending and resources, details of treasury management activity and the estimated movement on General Fund unallocated balances.

- 3.5 The review of income and expenditure against budget and forecast for the year indicates a net overall negative variance of £6,000.
- 3.6 A central provision has been made for the staff pay award that reflects the latest National Employers' proposed offer which for staff covered by NJC conditions is for an increase of £1,925 or 3.88%, whichever is the higher; and for Chief Officers and Chief Executives an increase of 3.5%. Chief Officers have already accepted the proposed pay rise. The estimated increase in pay costs is +6% against the budget provision of 3% resulting in an estimated additional cost of £606,000. At the time of review, finalisation of the pay award is still pending the trade unions confirming acceptance.
- 3.7 Other expenditure is forecast to be £550,000 over budget, and the Council is continuing to accrue legal costs in relation to the Wethersfield asylum centre appeals.
- 3.8 Offsetting the projected additional staffing cost and other expenditure, is an overachievement of income currently forecast to be £1.3 million, which is mainly attributable to treasury management investment income.
- 3.9 Details of the main variances are set out in the Finance Section of the report.
- 3.10 Capital spend to the end of the second quarter was £2.05million, incurred on the disabled facilities grant programme, planned property maintenance, community facilities and IT as key contributors. Currently there is an estimated positive variance against the capital projects of £119,000.
- 3.11 The estimated movement on the General Fund unallocated balances is a net withdrawal of £1.13 million.

4. Options

- 4.1 There are no options to consider as a result of this report.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 There are no next steps as a result of this report being presented to Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The report provides an update as to the financial position as at the end of the first quarter covering the revenue and capital outturn for this period.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1 A summary of complaints received each quarter, analysed by outcome (justified, partially justified, or not justified) is provided.

8.2 The Enhancing our Environment priority has a number of actions that are designed to have a positive impact on the environment and climate change. An update on the progress of the actions in the Climate Change Action Plan is included classified under the themes of the Climate Change Strategy.

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; and
- (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 Equalities and diversity issues are considered fully in the Council's key projects. Where appropriate, an equality impact assessment is prepared and considered for any key projects identified.

10. List of Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 – Second Quarter Performance Management Report 2023/24.

11. Background Papers

11.1 Previous performance reports are published on our website once noted by Cabinet. They are published at [Our performance reports – Braintree District Council](#)



SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

1 JULY 2023
TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

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Section 1: Introduction and Summary






Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to demonstrate the performance of the Council at the end of the second quarter of 2023/24 in relation to our Annual Plan 2023/24. This sets out the key activities being implemented to deliver our corporate priorities and summarises the measures in place by aligning key performance indicators to our priorities within the Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2024. Further detail is given in relation to a set of business performance indicators covering finances, customer focus, our people and health and safety.






This report does not contain details of the numerous activities ongoing in each service area that also contribute to delivering what is important and will make a difference to all in the District. Full details of all projects and performance indicators used to measure the outcomes are available upon request.

Summary of the Corporate Projects current position for the end of the second quarter

The following table provides updates for the end of the second quarter in relation to our key activities.




| Corporate Priorities | Status of projects and actions | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |
| Connecting People and Places | - | 14 | 2 | - | - |
| Enhancing our Environment | 2 | 14 | - | - | - |
| Supporting our Communities | 1 | 8 | - | - | - |
| Promoting Prosperity | - | 6 | - | - | - |
| Delivering and Innovating | - | 9 | 1 | - | - |
| TOTAL | 3 | 51 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

KEY:




-  Project completed
-  Project on target
-  Project scope/target date requires attention
-  Project requires amendment
-  Project aborted/closed

Summary of the Key Performance Indicators position for the end of the second quarter

The following table shows the performance for the end of the second quarter in relation to key performance indicators

| Corporate Priorities | Status of indicators | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|-----------|
| |  |  |  | Data Only |
| Connecting People and Places | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Enhancing our Environment | 2 | - | 1 | - |
| Supporting our Communities | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| Promoting Prosperity | - | - | - | 3 |
| Delivering and Innovating | 6 | - | 1 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 11 | 0 | 3 | 6 |

KEY:

-  Performance Indicator has achieved target
-  Performance Indicator is up to 5% below target
-  Performance Indicator is 5% or more off target

Summary Position

The performance in the second quarter is in line with expectations, and has moved on since the first quarter in most areas. Three projects still have an amber status, equal to the first quarter, where there are delays in relation to costing and planning recommendations.

Eleven performance indicators have met or exceeded target, an improvement compared to the first quarter where 8 had met target. Performance in approving Disabled Facility Grants and responding to complaints within timescales has improved, as well as the collection of business rates moving forward after a slow first quarter.


Three performance indicators have not met target by more than 5%. The areas of underperformance are in relation to the cumulative number of homes granted planning permission, recycling rates and enquiries resolved at first point of contact in the customer service centre. The performance in the underperforming areas is a trend continuing from the first quarter. We will continue to monitor these areas of under performance and focus time and attention on these key areas to achieve our corporate objectives.

Section 2: Delivering our Corporate Strategy











Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|--|---------------|--------|
| Complete the physical improvements to Witham and Halstead town centres to improve public realm | | |
| Discussions on the proposals for the landscape works and road layout changes have taken place with Witham and Halstead town councils. License applications for the landscape works have been drafted by the contractors and have been sent to Essex County Council for approval before final submission. There are several surveys and modelling works which need to be completed in order to support the road layout changes proposed, which is currently being investigated. | December 2023 | |
| Improve the district's housing stock by addressing energy efficiencies and exploring best practice to tackle empty homes | | |
| Meetings between registered housing providers continue to take place. The Sustainability team are arranging to meet with landlords in November. | March 2030 | |
| The empty home working group has finalised the Empty Homes Policy and has finished creating the Homelessness Prevention Scheme. Mapping of empty homes continues together with assessments to better understand the impact of the empty home. | March 2025 | |
| Develop a revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 to 2028 | | |
| The Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy evidence document is in draft and is undergoing review for initial feedback. | March 2024 | |
| Improve our health and leisure facilities by replacing the studio and sports hall floors at Braintree Leisure Centre and refurbishing the wet and dry changing facilities at Halstead Leisure Centre | | |
| The works to replace the sports hall floor at Braintree sports and health leisure centre is awaiting the approval of a grant agreement by Loxford Academy. Three flooring companies have been contacted to arrange quotations for the works. | March 2024 | |
| The works to replace the studio floor at Braintree sports and health leisure centre is awaiting the approval of a grant agreement by Loxford Academy. Three flooring companies have been contacted to arrange quotations for the works. | March 2024 | |

| | | |
|--|------------|---|
| Due to current pressures both nationally and locally on the leisure industry the works to refurbish the wet and dry changing facilities at Halstead Leisure Centre has been delayed. We will continue to work with Fusion over the coming months towards completion of this project. | March 2024 |  |
|--|------------|---|

Actions carried out in partnership with others

| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|---|---------------|---|
| Engage in the pre-application and examination processes for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) in and around the district | | |
| Longfields Solar Farm – The secretary of state has consented to the Development Consent Order. The Council is awaiting the developer to confirm the next steps and the full timeline, and it is anticipated that construction will commence in 2024. | December 2026 |  |
| A12 Widening scheme – The Planning Inspectorates six month examination of proposals ended in July 2023 and is now being considered before a recommendation report is issued to the Secretary of State for Transport in October 2023. | December 2028 |  |
| Bramford to Twinstead reinforcement – Relevant representations for the pre-examination process were submitted in July. A local impact report has also been submitted in September. Examinations started in September 2023, and a decision is expected in Summer 2024. | November 2028 |  |
| Norwich to Tilbury – The public consultation on the latest preferred draft alignment closed in August 2023. All comments are now being considered. | March 2030 |  |
| Rivenhall IWMF and Energy Centre – The public consultation launched in June 2023 was concluded in August 2023. The feedback received will now be taken into consideration when preparing the Development Consent Order application which is expected at the end of 2024. | December 2025 |  |
| Develop our plans to introduce walking and cycling networks across the district | | |
| The audit carried on the identified network routes has been completed and the plans will be going out to public consultation in November for 6 weeks. | December 2025 |  |
| Enable the delivery of a new build, multipurpose community centre in Witham bringing people together to socialise, learn and access key services | | |
| Pre-contract terms are currently being drafted to confirm an operator for the new centre but these are not yet in place and therefore the project is rated amber. Planning activity continues and is anticipated to be completed in the fourth quarter. The anticipated completion date for the project has moved from November 2024 to June 2025, and a change control notice for this was actioned. | June 2025 |  |
| Continue to facilitate the delivery of a purpose-built medical centre in Sible Hedingham | | |
| The outline business case has been approved by the integrated care board, and the preparation of a full business case is currently underway. | October 2023 |  |

Work with the Integrated Commissioning Board to enhance the delivery of health and wellbeing services at the Victoria Square development







Mount Chambers GP practice have moved in and are operational. A bi-monthly meeting has been established with Provide to develop partnership working. There is also work underway with the integrated care board to explore community/voluntary usage of the development.

March
2024




Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|--|---------------|--------|
| Enhance biodiversity by refurbishing the wildlife garden in Halstead Public Gardens | | |
| The Council has appointed a contractor and works will commence in October 2023. | November 2023 | |
| Improve the facilities in our skate parks at Weavers Park in Braintree and Spa Road in Witham | | |
| The tender for the improvement works for all skate park improvements commenced on 12 th September 2023 and will close on the 2 nd November 2023. The decision to award the contract will be made in December 2023. | November 2024 | |
| Deliver improvements to the recreation ground at Ramsey Road, Halstead | | |
| The improvements to the recreation ground at Ramsey Road consist of a skate park, extension to the play area and soft and hard landscaping. The skate park works have been jointly procured with the skate park improvements in Weavers Park and Spa Road (see above) and this area of works needs to be completed before the soft and hard landscaping works. | July 2024 | |
| Respond to the requirements of the Environmental Act 2021 in relation to air quality, biodiversity, water and waste reduction | | |
| The review into the Council's air quality monitoring methodology was undertaken, and the independent review of Braintree District Council's air quality monitoring methodology confirmed that the Council was monitoring in accordance with best practice and legislation. Actions from the review are also underway. | March 2024 | |
| Whilst the Council continue to work at an Essex wide level to prepare for the introduction of biodiversity net gain, the implementation of mandatory biodiversity net gain for major sites has been delayed until January 2024, as | March 2024 | |

| | | |
|---|------------|---|
| the guidance and legislation has not yet been published. Officers have been working with others across Essex to put a planning guidance document together which will be published by each District to help guide their approach to biodiversity net gain. | | |
| A baseline audit of the Council's water usage has taken place, and investigation is underway into the opportunities to reduce water usage. | March 2026 |  |
| The Council is awaiting further government guidance on a 'simpler recycling collection system' before considering the impact on the waste service and plans around waste reduction. | March 2024 |  |
| Protect our communities by implementing the requirements of Martyn's Law | | |
| The Council has finalised the list of Council owned properties that come into either the Standard or enhance Tier alongside confirming a list of event venues or buildings not owned by Council which may be affected. The Bill is still in the Pre-Legislative scrutiny phase, and until the details of the Bill have been confirmed, there are not further actions to undertake. | March 2024 |  |
| Deliver campaigns and work with our communities to: | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report litter offenders who throw litter from their vehicles • Minimise food waste to help households save money and avoid unnecessary waste • Improve awareness and understanding of climate change | | |
| The campaign to report litter offenders who throw litter from their vehicles is due to launch in November 2023, with the core campaign concepts now finalised. | March 2024 |  |
| The Council continues to support the Love Essex Campaign on minimising food waste which runs until December 2023. | March 2024 |  |
| <p>The project has identified two campaigns to run before the end of the financial year, 'See It Report It' and 'Engine Idling'.</p> <p>The Councils residents newsletter was distributed to 69,000 homes in the district and included many climate change messages including the creation of a list for residents which will help them cut carbon and save money. It carries our main key message which is: Go Green – It isn't just good for the environment it is also good for your wallet. The magazine also included articles on the Safer, Greener, Healthier Braintree consultation, and Essex County Council's Climate Change app. It also carried adverts on Digigo and food waste.</p> | March 2024 |  |

Actions carried out in partnership with others

| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|---|-------------|---|
| Deliver projects in our Climate Change Action Plan to contribute to our long term aims of being a carbon neutral district such as working with communities and businesses to build climate resilience, developing baseline data for a tree strategy, piloting the ECC green accreditation scheme (before rolling out to businesses) whilst continuing to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels | | |
| Details of the projects being delivered in our Climate Change Action Plan are detailed in the next section of this report. The Climate Change Action Plan is currently being revised to include any new projects for 2023/24. | March 2030 |  |

| | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| Develop opportunities for increasing the renewable energy and fuel security within the district | | |
| The Council is considering a large renewable energy project in the district and a viability assessment is currently underway. Central Government has confirmed that the planning process around onshore wind farms has been relaxed. | April 2025 | ▶ |
| Increase biodiversity and the attractiveness of the district by re-wilding open spaces and wild seed highway verges | | |
| The Council will be re-wilding open spaces in Halstead during November and December planting native species whips. Further rewilding will take place in Braintree in Spring 2024. | December 2025 | ▶ |
| As part of a two-year safer streets programme, tackle enviro crime in the focused area of Witham | | |
| The Councils Grounds Maintenance team continue to regularly review the environment of Cut Throat Lane to ensure it is maintained. No further works were required in the second quarter. | March 2024 | ▶ |
| The official launch of the Dog Watch Scheme took place on 15th April 2023 in Witham with over 200 visitors. The aim of the event was to encourage local residents to sign up to the Essex Police led Dog Watch Scheme where local dog owners will become guardians for the local area while exercising their dogs, reporting criminal damage or anti-social behaviour. A total of 65 people signed up to the Dog Watch scheme on the day. | April 2023 | ✔ |



CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS

Introduction

In the second quarter 2023/24, continued focus has been on collating the final performance of all the 2022-23 Climate Action Plan actions and on collecting data for The Council's carbon emissions in preparation of completing the 22/23 final year end outturn.

The Climate Change Awareness course was created for all desk-based staff and launch is due for 6th November on The Council's Learning Hive platform. The Staff Eco Group meetings in the second quarter focused on the theme of Staff Green Travel and were well attended.

The Council's Youth Panel shall largely focus on giving young people in the district a voice on Climate Change and early scoping for this has begun.

The Climate Action Plan is classified under seven themes and individualised progress on these themes is outlined below:

Resources

On 18 July, Management Board approved progression to invitation for tender for 34 vehicles in the 2023/24 Vehicle Replacement programme and infrastructure works to accommodate the first tranche of Electric Vehicles. It was agreed at the Portfolio Holder Briefing to await further Government guidance on 'a simpler recycling collection system' before our consultants are asked to complete a member workshop. A baseline audit of The Council's water usage has taken place and opportunities to reduce the water use have already taken place. The "Help us Prevent Fly-Tipping" article went in the Local News e-newsletter which goes out to 8,888 people. A social

media story was published to promote a Green Heart Champion and the Green Heart platform has actively celebrated litter picking across the district. We supported Hedingham School by providing 32 high vis jackets for community litter picking projects.

Energy Conservation

The revised Home Upgrade Grant 2 funding allocation has been reduced to £2.466m in 2023/24 with an option to increase this further in 2024/25. Plans are in place for The Council to begin delivery in November 2023. The Contact Magazine was distributed to residents and included a two page article on cutting energy use which has a large focus on cost savings as well as carbon reduction. Work has begun on a baseline audit of all meters and an energy efficiency audit of all Braintree District Council assets.

Transport

Braintree District Council submitted a response to Essex County Council's Electric Vehicle Strategy consultation. The Livewell Stakeholder event took place on 25th September which engaged with physical activity partners around the refresh of the Livewell strategy. Fusion deliver many programmes to encourage physical activity including Witham Sporting Memories, Active Rewards and Safer Streets Autumn Activity Programme. The Council is now investigating a salary sacrifice scheme for electric vehicles. The Council are also exploring the opportunity to support DigiGo with reducing their running costs through a dedicated charging infrastructure at Horizon 120. We have completed the unmet demand survey which looks at taxi provision in the district.

The Essex County Council e-scooter scheme has now been finalised and TIER will be launching the new pay as you go trial in October 2023. The trial will promote e-scooters for residents, commuters and visitors to travel around the town with ease and will support 'green' local, active travel and also help ease the burden on transport networks.

The Essex County Council Active Travel Fund scheme in Braintree town is progressing with the new walking and cycling infrastructure scheme which runs from Braintree Railway Station, Fairfield Road, The Avenue, through Coggeshall Road and onto Panfield Lane through to Tabor College. Phase 1 is anticipated to be complete by December 2023.

The Essex County Council Braintree town Transport Strategy, which was consulted on earlier this year will be submitted to Cabinet in November before finalisation.

Business and the Green Economy

The launch of Essex County Council's Green Business Accreditation scheme named "A Great Start" is scheduled for January 2024.

Natural Environment

Winter rewilding projects have been planned as follows:

For Winter / Spring 2023/24: 370 Native Species Whips will be planted in November and December 2023 on open space in Halstead. Areas in Braintree will be rewilded from Spring 2024. Sustainable planting is proceeding to schedule.

Under the Shared Prosperity Fund, the Council has committed £32,774 to support the development of community gardens in the district. Funding now closed with 26 applications received which are now being assessed.

The implementation of mandatory biodiversity net gain for major sites has been delayed from November 2023 to January 2024 as the guidance and legislation had not been all published.

Officers have been working with others across Essex to put a planning guidance document together which will be published by each District to help guide their approach to Biodiversity Net Gain. A joint officer across Essex has also been agreed and is being recruited. An internal working group meets regularly to discuss implementation.

Mapping is currently being produced for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Once this has been completed, any gaps in the mapping will be identified and it could be discussed about how those gaps might be able to be plugged.

The Big River Watch Day was promoted on social media channels as well as the internal Climate Change communication site.

Adapting to Climate Change

A warning message was shared on 2nd August for potential flooding. Throughout August, the communications channels shared several social media posts signposting residents to the NHS website.

34 of the 52 town and parish councils have now completed and submitted their emergency plans to the Council.



The Corporate Risk Register is up to date and the Council has now completed their Emergency Plans and they have been reviewed. They shall be published imminently.


The Council is now regularly sending out weather alerts and part of its emergency warning and informing role for heavy rain, winds and flooding as we enter storm season. In September the Council sent out the Government's 30 days, 30 ways winter preparedness advice to residents on preparing for winter, information is included in various media (parish newsletter, Braintree District Council newsletter etc) and the Council will shortly publish its "Don't Wait for Winter" campaign material for residents.

SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES








Actions carried out by Braintree District Council


| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|---|-------------------|---|
| <p>Over a two-year period, use £1m of New Homes Bonus to support residents of the district through the continued cost of living crisis by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing food security and access to essential goods across the district • Helping community groups and organisations provide additional support to our most vulnerable residents • Enabling physical and emotional health and wellbeing support with a focus on young people who find it difficult to access these services | | |
| <p>Work continues towards opening a new food bank distribution centre in Braintree, investigation of an electrical survey is currently underway, and it anticipated that contracts will be signed in November. The delivery service has begun delivering to households, extending the support offered to rural areas where previously assistance has not been available. A new outreach worker has been appointed, providing outreach support to the community. £10,000 has been paid towards the Sport for Confidence programme, enabling vulnerable people to attend sports and leisure activities. The initial introduction at Witham Leisure Centre has been positively received.</p> <p>Discussions around the Community Supermarket continue with Essex County Council and other partners. Funding may be in excess of £100,000 to deliver a mobile model to enable the rural parts of the district to have access to affordable food. The project planning is ongoing, with a lead partner to be identified.</p> <p>The Repair Café at Cornerstone Church in Braintree has been a success, and the Council is exploring expanding the idea to additional sites.</p> <p>A training and resource package has been created for frontline staff to help provide further information to customers around cost of living issues, and what support is available. It is hoped that this will be published publicly next quarter. The council continues to explore funding opportunities with other partners.</p> | <p>March 2025</p> |  |
| <p>Support local projects and initiatives through the Councillor Community Grants scheme</p> | | |
| <p>In the second quarter, Panfield Parish Council received a grant of £1,000 towards their Coronation Woodland project. Coggeshall Parish Council were awarded a grant of £500 which will enable them to pay for an energy audit to be carried out on the village hall with a view to making it more efficient. Friends of Bradford Street were given a grant of £2,350 made up of contributions from 12 councillors. This will go towards the purchase of Blue Plaques marking houses in the street where famous people have lived and add</p> | <p>March 2024</p> |  |

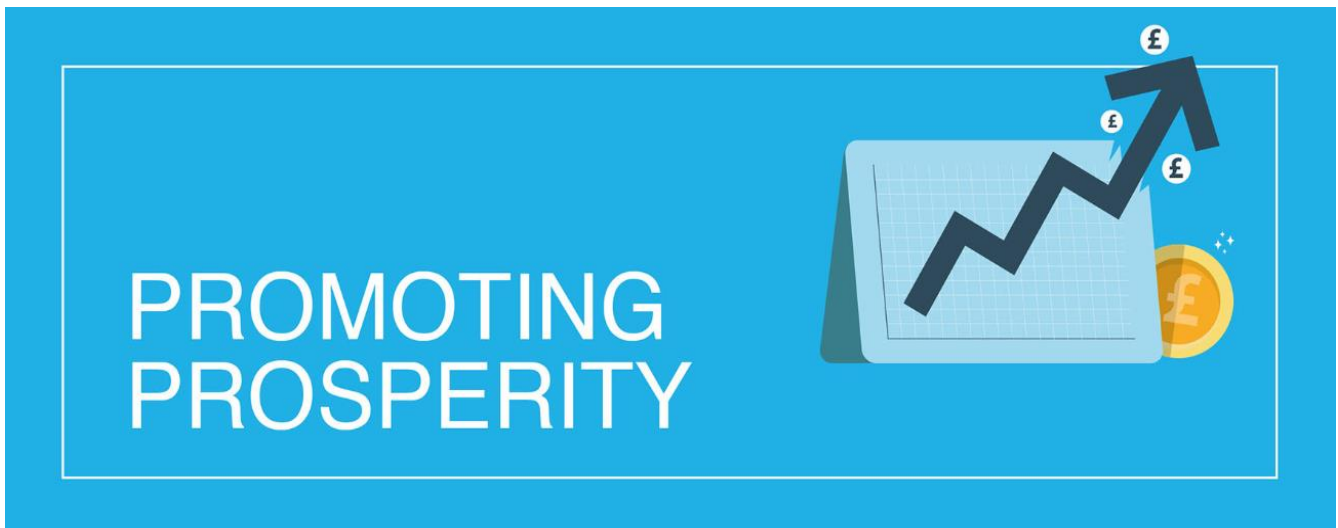
| | | |
|--|---------------|---|
| to the historical information for residents and those interested in history who walk the street. Dance Network Association received a grant of £500 towards the costs of providing dance sessions for people living with dementia and their carers. The sessions will take place in Witham and will support the physical and mental health of those attending with a social time included as an opportunity to chat with others going through a similar experience. The grant will be added to a larger Lottery funding to provide sessions for 6 months (Sept - March). To date, 19 grants have been awarded totalling £13,114. | | |
| Support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless on their pathway to independent living through supported housing and move-on accommodation | | |
| This is a partnership project with Peabody to deliver 3 self-contained units of accommodation, with visiting support. Builders are now on-site conducting preliminary work. The project is expected to be complete by end November 2023. Homes England have approved an additional £100k grant funding and Councillors have agreed to an additional £27.5k capital funding from the Council. | December 2023 |  |

Actions carried out in partnership with others



| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|--|---------------|---|
| Build more resilient communities to response to emerging issues | | |
| This is funded through UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) with a budget of £30k to support people accessing basic skills to respond to issues that commonly arise and the actions to support this are being scoped out for delivery in 2024. | March 2025 |  |
| Equip young people with the skills required to face challenging situations by delivering crucial crew workshops to schools across the district in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership | | |
| Three crucial crew events took place between 3 rd and 6 th July, delivering workshops to 289 children from 7 primary schools across the district. | March 2024 |  |
| Review our Livewell Strategy to support the changing needs of our residents and wider health and care priorities | | |
| A stakeholder engagement session took place in September and gathered feedback from partners. Common themes were identified to develop the strategy going forward, and knowledge gaps were identified to be addressed in future sessions. | December 2023 |  |
| Address the health inequalities of the district through the Mid-Essex Alliance partnership by designing integrated health services in local communities and neighbourhoods | | |
| The Council continues to work with the Mid Alliance partners to develop the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. The current timeline is for these to be fully operational by October 2024, and are due to launch in Braintree in November 2023. The FeelWell subgroup focusing on children's health and wellbeing has progressed with regular sessions taking place. A number of other subgroups under the LiveWell domain are due to be established next quarter. | October 2024 |  |
| Oversee the delivery of a safer streets programme to tackle perception of violence against women and girls in the night-time economy and neighbourhood crime for identified areas in Witham | | |
| A Steering Group meeting took place in August 2023. The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) approved the repurposing of the Essex Youth Service and Eastlight funding to the Centre for Action on Rape and Abuse (CARA) in September. Eastlight were also unable to arrange for educational theatre group TIC Box Productions to perform the Consent production in September and confirmed that the production could take place in December 2023. | March 2024 |  |


Deliver two changing places toilets in Witham and Halstead allowing people with complex needs to have greater access to public places to take part in everyday activities

| | | |
|---|-------------------|---|
| <p>A contractor and project manager have been awarded the project. Site surveys revealed that the doors at Witham Town Hall were not wide enough for motorised wheelchairs. Quotations have been received for the removal and replacement of internal and external doors, and Witham Town Council have agreed to part fund this with Braintree District Council. Work is due to start at the beginning of October for both sites.</p> | <p>March 2024</p> |  |
|---|-------------------|---|






Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| <p>Build on the current success of the Horizon 120 Business and Innovation Park by selling the remaining site plots and promoting the development of the phase 2 land</p> | | |
| <p>Updated land valuations have been commissioned to support sale agreements on the plots in phase 1, and pre-app activity is also in motion for those remaining plots. A planning application will soon be submitted for the phase 2 land by the option holder and discussions to confirm an easement agreement across the phase 1 land to support access for phase 2 land have begun.</p> | <p>November 2023</p> |  |
| <p>Continue to develop the Witham Enterprise Units to bring forward new business premises for SME's</p> | | |
| <p>An updated scheme design has been prepared and pre-application planning activity has begun. With the need to then assess the financial viability of the scheme given its updated design, the timescale for the delivery of the project has been delayed in order to ensure the project is deliverable, with the target date moving from October 2024 to September 2026. A change control notice has therefore been processed, in recognition of the change in the likely timescale for the delivery of the project, to amend the anticipated delivery date.</p> | <p>September 2026</p> |  |

| | | |
|---|------------|---|
| Develop and deliver a business support programme based at the Plaza to help District businesses start, grow and increase productivity, especially in key sectors | | |
| The Sole Trader support scheme has now launched and to date, 14 applications have been successful in signing up to the scheme. Partners are being asked to promote the programme that runs until March 2024 and is available to a total of 40 people. | March 2025 |  |

Actions carried out in partnership with others



| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|--|-------------|---|
| In partnership with NEEB, deliver a shared prosperity funded programme of support focusing on: | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and debt management support and advice alongside signposting to other areas of financial support to create and safeguard jobs across north Essex • Digital skills support to businesses across the district enabling them to grow digitally | | |
| The North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) is funding a two-year business support programme with Let's Do Business Group to help businesses in North Essex by delivering high-quality, independent advice to businesses either looking to start or established businesses looking to take their next step and grow. The first 'Starting my biz' webinar was held on 17th July with 42 attendees, 5 businesses attending from Braintree, and the first networking event was held at Burnham On Crouch Marina sponsored by NEEB. The second 'Starting my biz' workshop ran 19th - 26th September. There are a number of upcoming in-person workshops to take place over the next few months at Hylands House in October and Colchester in November. | March 2025 |  |
| Facilitate a series of employer led school visits/workshops to introduce students to new industries and sector course pathways | | |
| Officers supported the Heddingham School Enterprise Challenge in July 2023 providing year 12 students with the opportunity to develop skills by working on an organisational project gaining insight into the way decision making impacts on a business and providing them with an opportunity to gain more of an understanding of the roles available within the public sector. Officers and Apprentices also attended Job Fairs in George Yard in Braintree and an apprenticeship fair at Chelmsford Race Course. Preparation is also underway for a Jobs Fair in October taking place at Causeway House. | March 2024 |  |
| Support productivity and prosperity in our rural areas through the allocation of grant funding from the Rural England Prosperity Funding | | |
| The new grant scheme to support rural communities and businesses and create jobs opened to applications in September 2023. Grants between £10,000 and £50,000 are available for capital projects in rural areas The fund supports capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure which will improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities. | March 2025 |  |

DELIVERING AND INNOVATING







Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|--|-------------|--------|
| Develop plans to sustainably close our budget gap by capitalising on commercial opportunities to increase our income stream and identifying a deliverable efficiencies programme | | |
| Commercial opportunities are being captured and reviewed through the Commercial Group and the Investment and Development Programme. There are a number of opportunities at concept and pipeline stage being explored by officers across the Council with updates to be presented to members on the Investment and Development Programme Board at the end of October. This includes the Commercial Gov opportunities. Existing projects and traded service performance is being tracked through these groups. | March 2024 | |
| Develop an Asset Management Strategy to implement a more coherent approach to all property interests across the district | | |
| Work continues to progress to determine the best route for revising the current Asset Management Strategy. The Asset Management team will begin a process of review in the next quarter and a budget bid for 2024/25 has been made for resource to support the drafting of the final Strategy in early 24/25. | March 2024 | |
| Consider an operating model for residents and businesses to potentially subscribe to the garden waste collection service | | |
| Over 12,000 residents have taken up the early-bird subscription to benefit from a reduced cost garden waste collection service. Bin hangers have been ordered to further advertise the scheme and are due to be distributed from the beginning of October. | March 2024 | |
| Continue to develop our online and digital services to support changes in customer demand and expectations | | |
| The My Account functionality is due to launch in October 2023, and will provide immediate benefits to customers. Creating an account will allow customers to auto-complete personal details on forms, save forms for completing at a later date, track submitted forms and applications, and receive notifications on the progress of their requests. The Digital Services team are also exploring how this system can be expanded upon in the future. | March 2024 | |







| | | |
|--|--------------|---|
| Understand the impacts of the reforms to national planning policy and mainstreaming biodiversity net gain in the planning system | | |
| The Council continues to work with other Essex authorities to prepare for Biodiversity Net Gain being introduced in November for large sites. Secondary legislation is pending from Central Government and work continues to prepare both Essex Wide and District specific plans for implementation. | January 2024 |  |
| Provide fit for purpose car parking machines across our car parks | | |
| The Council is in receipt of the 8 new ticket machines. An on-site meeting with the contractor is due to take place in October to plan installation. | March 2025 |  |

Actions carried out in partnership with others



| Project description and comments | Target Date | Status |
|---|---------------|---|
| Inform and influence negotiations with Government around a Greater Essex Devolution deal to ensure the benefits are felt locally for residents and businesses | | |
| Progress has been made towards agreeing a devolution deal for Greater Essex, where the Government have now confirmed that Greater Essex will enter into negotiations with the aim of agreeing a deal by the Autumn Budget Statement on 22 November 2023. | November 2023 |  |
| Deliver on the plan for North Essex Authorities to work more closely together on shared priorities and improving resilience | | |
| Leaders and Chief Executives from across Essex have been discussing how we can build on the strong relationships we built through Covid and explore potential options to share support services. North Essex Councils has been formally established and meetings have taken place with other councils to look at collaboration opportunities. | March 2025 |  |
| Drive forward Levelling Up for the district including the rural pilot with Essex County Council | | |
| The second large scale event was held on 12 September where those in attendance received a presentation given by Toppesfield Pub & Shop to give an insight into the identified need, who was involved, how it evolved and the key drivers for success. A presentation was also given on current services and the insights from the first round of community reference groups and then discussions took place exploring: What works well in the community, what the big problems are in the community, and what ideas might help resolve the big problems. A third and final group event is scheduled to take place in November. | March 2025 |  |
| Review and adopt a new Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex | | |
| Essex County Council published the draft Waste Strategy for Essex in September for public consultation and feedback. The deadline for consultation is 22nd November 2023, thereafter, Essex will review the feedback and discuss any amendments to the strategy with all of the Essex authorities before a final draft is put forward for approval and adoption in the second half of the 2024/25 financial year. | March 2024 |  |

Section 3: Managing the Business

Our Performance Indicators in Detail

| Performance Indicator | 2023/24 | | | | | | Comments |
|--|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------------|--|---|
| | Q1 Outturn | Q2 Outturn | Q3 Outturn | Q4 Outturn | Target for the Quarter | Status at the end of the Quarter | |
| CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES | | | | | | | |
| Number of affordable homes delivered | 77 | 90 | | | 63 |  | |
| Cumulative number of homes granted planning permission (outline and full) | 140 | 194 | | | 398 |  | <p>The breakdown between full and outline permissions are as follows: Full – 139 Outline - 55</p> <p>It is recognised that the approval process for new homes is not linear. Several large applications are anticipated to be received by the Council which may be determined before the end of the reporting year which would support an increase in this indicator and it is anticipated that there will be an increase in applications in the next quarter ahead of proposed government changes to planning fees in the autumn (Quarter 3)</p> |
| ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT | | | | | | | |
| Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting | 54.14% | 53.88% | | | 60% |  | <p>The recycling target is an aspirational target set by the Essex Waste Partnership. At the time of writing, the outturn figure is awaiting validation by ECC. The tonnage of Dry Mixed Recycling collected in this quarter was 697 tonnes higher than in Quarter 1. This was partly offset by Food and Garden where the tonnage was 492 tonnes lower compared to Quarter 1. This was expected as the tonnage of green waste in the second quarter of the year tends to be lower to reflect the seasonal weather.</p> |
| Kilograms of residual household waste collected per household | 108kgs | 108kgs | | | 117kgs |  | |
| Percentage of accessible non-hazardous fly tips on public land cleared within 24 hours of being reported (number of flytips in brackets) | 100% (309) | 100% (323) | | | 100% |  | |
| Number of residents assisted in installing energy saving measures | Annually reported | | | | | | |
| SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES | | | | | | | |
| Percentage of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) approved within | 95.35% | 100% | | | 80% |  | |

| Performance Indicator | 2023/24 | | | | | | Comments |
|--|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| | Q1 Outturn | Q2 Outturn | Q3 Outturn | Q4 Outturn | Target for the Quarter | Status at the end of the Quarter | |
| timescale | | | | | | | |
| Participation levels across all our sports centres | 177,126 | 204,842 | | | 182,993 | | |
| Participation of adults being active for 150 minutes per week | Annually reported | | | | | | |
| Number of measures carried out through the Handyman scheme | 79 | 69 | | | n/a | n/a | |
| Number of homelessness cases prevented | 54 | 67 | | | n/a | n/a | |
| PROMOTING PROSPERITY | | | | | | | |
| Percentage of people in the district claiming out of work benefits rate (aged 16 – 64) | 2.7% | 2.7% | | | n/a | n/a | |
| Number of new business start-ups across the district | 271 | 269 | | | n/a | n/a | |
| Number of businesses that have contacted us for business support | 63 | 102 | | | n/a | n/a | |
| DELIVERING AND INNOVATING | | | | | | | |
| Percentage of calls resolved at first point of contact in the Customer Service Centre | 64% | 60% | | | 70% | | <i>The Customer Services Team dealt with 14,752 calls out of 24,635 calls at first point of contact. In the second quarter there continues to be a higher than normal volume of calls requiring a more in-depth answer mainly relating Housing Options and Assessment calls, Planning enquiries, licensing enquiries and Council tax enquiries.</i> |
| Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days of receipt | 98.50% | 98.60% | | | 97% | | |
| Number of people transacting with us online | 33,995 | 55,634 | | | n/a | n/a | |
| Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit new claims | 17.13 days | 16.31 days | | | 18 days | | |
| Time taken to process housing benefit claim changes | 2.89 days | 2.69 days | | | 5 days | | |
| Percentage of Stage 1 complaints responded to within 7 working days | 88.61% | 94.74% | | | 90% | | |

| Performance Indicator | 2023/24 | | | | | | Comments |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------------|--|----------|
| | Q1 Outturn | Q2 Outturn | Q3 Outturn | Q4 Outturn | Target for the Quarter | Status at the end of the Quarter | |
| Collection rate for Council Tax | 30.50% | 58.24% | | | 57.40% |  | |
| Collection rate for Business Rates | 30.12% | 55.37% | | | 51.6% |  | |

Complaints

The quarterly complaints analysis for the second quarter of 2023/24 is detailed below. This is compared with 2022/23 figures shown in brackets. The figures represent all three stages of the complaints process.

| Complaint Category | Q1 2023/24 | Q2 2023/24 | Q3 2023/24 | Q4 2023/24 | TOTAL |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Justified | 43 (40) | 95 (87) | (45) | (57) | (229) |
| Not Justified | 23 (61) | 40 (65) | (32) | (39) | (197) |
| Partially Justified | 13 (27) | 17 (15) | (28) | (29) | (99) |
| Not known | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | (1) | (0) | (1) |
| Total | 79 (128) | 152 (167) | (108) | (125) | (526) |

Comments

The number of complaints received in the second quarter has increased compared to the first quarter, following a similar trend to last year. Total complaint numbers so far this year are lower than 2022/23 by 22%.

The vast majority of complaints (141) relate to the Operations service, with particular focus around missed bin collections. Volumes were particularly high during August, which experienced sustained high temperatures, increasing the impacted of a missed collection. There were also a high number of customers aggrieved by the introduction of a chargeable garden waste service.

A small number of complaints were received in relation to the Planning service, all involving enforcement action.

All complaints received in the second quarter were resolved at Stage one of the complaints process, with no complaints escalating to stages two or three.

A summary of Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases:

During the Second Quarter the Council received no final decision statements from the Local Government Ombudsman.

The council received one initial enquiry from the LGO in July 2023 in respect of Building Control, but the matter was closed on initial enquiry on the grounds of a premature contact to the LGO with no complaint received by the Council.

Our Organisation

The following is a selection of our people performance measures:

| People: Indicators of Performance | Q1 23/24 | Q2 23/24 | Q3 23/24 | Q4 23/24 | Change on previous period | Yearly Target |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Total headcount | 482 | 489 | | | +7 | - |
| Total staff FTE | 435.98 | 444.29 | | | + 8.31 | - |
| Level of employee turnover | 3.94% | 1.84% | | | - 2.1 | - |
| Number of leavers | 19 | 9 | | | - 10 | - |
| Number of starters | 15 | 16 | | | + 1 | - |
| Working days lost to sickness per employee | 1.34 days | 1.73 days | | | + 0.39 days | 8.0 days |
| Percentage of staff with nil sickness | 84.56% | 68.30% | | | Cumulative | - |
| Number of learning hours | 1078 | 617 | | | - 461 | - |
| Number of delegates | 200 | 235 | | | + 35 | - |
| Number of apprentices ** | 19 | 20 | | | + 1 | - |

| Year on Year Headcount Analysis | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2023/24 |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 466 | 481 | 492 | 499 | 492 | 486 |

** BDC's apprenticeship programme runs throughout the year. The figures reflect various apprenticeships ranging from level 3 through to a degree level 6

Health & Safety

The following is a selection of our health and safety performance measures. The data is for information purposes only.

Health and safety is a crucial responsibility of everyone within the organisation. This information is used to improve the management of health and safety of staff, our customers, residents and other non-employees we come into contact with. Monitoring is undertaken by the corporate health and safety committee and action plans will be put in place where necessary.

| Health & Safety: Indicators of Performance | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | |
|--|------------------------------|--------|------|------|--|
| | (2022/23 figure in brackets) | | | | |
| Total number of reported accidents/ incidents, calculated from: | 13 (13) | 22 (5) | (15) | (13) | |
| <i>Accidents/ incidents to employees</i> | 12 (12) | 22 (5) | (15) | (13) | <i>Majority of accidents was injured whilst handling and moving.</i> |
| <i>Accidents/ incidents to contractors</i> | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | (0) | (0) | |
| <i>Accidents/ incidents to non-employees</i> | 1 (1) | 0 (0) | (0) | (0) | |
| Time lost in days due to employee accidents/ incidents | 14 (37) | 9 (35) | (16) | (1) | <i>2 separate incidents caused time lost. 1 instance of twisted ankle - 6 days, 1 instance of back injury 3 days</i> |
| Number of reported verbal/ physical incidents to employees | 1 (3) | 4 (2) | (1) | (5) | <i>3 verbal abuse incidents 1 physical. Abusive member of public in reception, argument outside town hall verbally abusive to public and staff, verbal abuse leading to a food bin being emptied in the reception area. The physical instance was related to waste, member of public physically pushed staff after refusing to collect contaminated waste.</i> |
| Number of near miss incidents | 2 (1) | 1 (1) | (2) | (0) | <i>Electrical wire sparked. PAT Testing has since been undertaken.</i> |
| Number of Accidents/ incidents registered resulting in insurance/ compensation claim | 2 (2) | 1 (1) | (0) | (0) | |
| Number of claims settled | 0 (4) | 1 (0) | (1) | (1) | |

Financial Performance: Second Quarter Review and Projected Year End Position

Background

Full Council agreed a net budget of £17.5m. During the year budgets may be updated in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure.

General Fund Revenue Spending

The table below shows the projected outturn for the year by service as forecast at the end of Q2.

| Business Plan Service | Updated Budget £'000 | Forecast Spend for the year £'000 | Current Forecast Variance £'000 | Previous Quarter Variance £'000 | Current Forecast RAG Status |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Asset Management | (2,814) | (2,394) | 420 | 407 | R |
| Community & Leisure | 772 | 826 | 54 | 26 | R |
| Corporate Management Plan | 1,619 | 1,613 | (6) | (8) | G |
| Economic Development | 231 | 114 | (117) | (20) | G |
| Environment | 912 | 1,022 | 110 | 58 | R |
| Finance | 1,261 | (114) | (1,375) | (1,255) | G |
| Governance | 1,307 | 1,289 | (18) | (27) | G |
| Housing Services | 921 | 923 | 2 | 4 | A |
| ICT & Facilities | 2,009 | 1,931 | (78) | (49) | G |
| Marketing & Communications | 642 | 665 | 23 | 18 | A |
| Operations | 7,214 | 7,110 | (104) | (127) | G |
| People & Performance | 1,003 | 986 | (17) | (12) | G |
| Strategic Investment | 36 | 22 | (14) | (36) | G |
| Sustainable Development | 1,448 | 1,701 | 253 | 1 | R |
| Service Plan Total | 16,561 | 15,694 | (867) | (1,020) | G |
| Corporate Financing | 1,334 | 941 | (393) | (353) | G |
| Wethersfield Legal Challenge | 0 | 235 | 235 | 162 | |
| Est. Impact of Proposed Pay Award | 0 | 606 | 606 | 568 | |
| Efficiency & Income Allowance | (425) | 0 | 425 | 425 | |
| Net Total | 17,470 | 17,476 | 6 | (218) | A |

RAG Status: G = favourable or nil variance, A = up to 5% adverse variance or <£50k, R = > 5%
¹see below for commentary on Strategic Investment Team

General Note:

- **Staffing Changes** - projections are based on known changes at the end of Q2 and include allowance for changes in current vacant posts as advised by the relevant service. Vacancies and other staffing changes are likely to occur over the remainder of the year and will be reflected in subsequent updates to projections.
- **Staff Pay Award** – a central provision has been made at this stage that reflects the latest National Employers' proposed offer which for staff covered by NJC conditions is for an increase of £1,925 or 3.88%, whichever is the higher; and for Chief Officers and Chief Executives an increase of 3.5%. Chief Officers have already accepted the proposed pay rise. The estimated increase in pay costs is +6% against the budget provision of 3% resulting in an estimated additional cost of £606k. At the time of review, finalisation of the pay award was still pending the trade unions confirming acceptance.
- **Efficiency & Income Allowance** – the budget includes an allowance of £300k for staffing and £125k for income to reflect that historically staffing costs are lower than originally budgeted due to churn and changes in hours, grades & scale points, etc; and fees & charges income has over recent years been overachieved.

- **Wethersfield Legal Challenge** – costs are those incurred to date (£10k was accounted in 22/23 – total £245k). There will be further costs incurred which will be picked up in future updates. Cabinet have recommended a budget limit of £300k to Full Council to be met from General Fund unallocated balances.

The table below breakdowns the forecast variance:

| Business Plan Service | Forecast £'000 | Variance by Category | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | | Staffing | Other Expenditure | Gross Income |
| | | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Asset Management | 420 | (64) | 290 | 194 |
| Community & Leisure | 54 | 6 | (13) | 61 |
| Corporate Management Plan | (6) | (7) | 1 | 0 |
| Economic Development | (117) | (67) | (50) | 0 |
| Environment | 110 | 177 | 13 | (80) |
| Finance | (1,375) | (45) | 138 | (1,468) |
| Governance | (18) | (106) | 10 | 78 |
| Housing Services | 2 | (1) | 6 | (3) |
| ICT & Facilities | (78) | (24) | (54) | 0 |
| Marketing & Communications | 23 | (14) | 45 | (8) |
| Operations | (104) | (16) | 77 | (165) |
| People & Performance | (17) | (13) | (4) | 0 |
| Strategic Investment | (14) | 56 | 0 | (70) |
| Sustainable Development | 253 | (164) | 94 | 323 |
| Service Total | (867) | (282) | 553 | (1,138) |
| Corporate Financing | (393) | 42 | (125) | (310) |
| Wethersfield Legal Challenge | 235 | 0 | 235 | 0 |
| Est. Impact of Proposed Pay Award | 606 | 606 | 0 | 0 |
| Efficiency Savings Target | 425 | 300 | 0 | 125 |
| Net Total | 6 | 665 | 663 | (1,323) |

Commentary on Main Service Variances (+Adverse/ -Positive)

Asset Management

- Higher cost of interim management arrangements and additional surveyor to complete outstanding rent reviews (+£129k).
- H120 Business Park – estate management expenditure (+£54k).
- Victoria Square – additional site operating costs (+£123k) primarily due to unrecoverable service charges for void units, the bus park, and Eastlight service charge cap. Other costs include a backdated business rate adjustment and increased insurance premia. Reduced lease rent income due to void units (+£53k).
- Net underspend on the plaza (-£35k) primarily due to staffing underspends which is negated against lower overall income when compared to the original business case.
- Causeway House - £31k of reduced income due to un-let vacant space.
- Additional cost of Industrial sites including higher business rates (+£8k) from vacant units and increase in rental costs including back-dated rents paid for industrial units that are sub-let (+£35k).

Community and Leisure

- Casual bookings at the Town Hall lower than forecast (+£58k) partly due to groups diverting to other venues post-pandemic. This is partially offset by an increase in wedding income (-£20k).

Economic Development

- Economic Development is part funded from reserves. The budget assumed £208k reserve drawdown and the latest forecast position is £91k. The difference is reflected in a movement in earmarked reserves rather than General Fund balances. Variance due to change in assumptions on when staffing posts will be occupied (-£66k) and reduction in expenditure (-£50k).

Environment

- Building Control net additional agency staff costs due to ongoing difficulties in recruitment combined with continuing high service demand (+£215k), partially offset by additional income generated from a new fees and charges schedule introduced for non-statutory ancillary building control services (-£58k).
- Net underspend from vacancies within Environmental Protection and Carbon Management Unit (-£24k)

Finance

- Net underspend on employee costs due to vacancies, reduced hours and staffing starting at lower scale points than budget (-£45k).
- Local tax and housing benefit cost recoveries are lower than budget reflecting recent outturns (+£100k). The cost-of-living crisis is impacting on recovery as most of the liabilities relate to low-income households.
- External audit fees in relation to Housing Benefit subsidy claim (+£40k).
- Housing Benefits net cost of benefits paid (+£87k) – due to an increasing number of claimants in temporary/ bed & breakfast accommodation necessarily used by Housing; and higher rents charged in supported housing schemes.
- Unbudgeted new burdens funding in relation to DWP grants and Energy Rebates / Household support payments (-£79k).
- Treasury Management investment income due to higher interest rates / cash balances (-£1.5m).

Governance

- Difficulties with recruitment into legal services has led to underspends in the first half of the year (-£89k), partially offset by costs incurred via the Local Legal Partnership (LLP) where extra capacity has been provided (+£22k). Spend for the remainder of the year is expected in line with budget as further attempts are made to recruit into vacant post or agency staff or the LLP is used.
- Land charges income from residential searches is projected to be lower than budget (+£73k) which reflects the slowdown in housing activity; however, this is partially offset from extra income (-£11k) from commercial searches and a reduction in payments to ECC (-£16k) for their input to searches.

ICT & Facilities

- Corporate ICT systems maintenance (-£44k) and staffing variances (-£24k).
- Causeway House maintenance and running costs are projected be overspent (+£22k) whilst energy costs are forecast to be lower than budget (-£40k).

Operations

- Net saving projected on staffing costs (Net -£16k).
- Other expenditure is lower across waste management and street cleansing due a combination of a reduction in the market price of diesel; and changes in tonnages of material collected; diversion of waste disposal to alternative site from Cordons Farm; and additional vehicle hire and maintenance costs (Net -£27k)

- Other expenditure variances across Operations (+£105k) include: provision for dilapidation costs at Unit 4; statutory parking order advertisement; and car park & cemeteries maintenance; and non-achievement of saving from transfer of community assets.
- A reduction in income from dry recycling material due to a combination of less tonnage being collected and sharp fall in market price has been offset by higher income from glass where market prices remain significantly higher than previous years and was allowed in the budget. (Net Nil)
- Increase in income due to higher demand for the bulky waste collection service (-£45k)
- ECC recycling credits are lower due to reduced tonnage being collected (+£104k).
- Increase in waste management income under the Inter-Authority Agreement from ECC (-£43k)
- Income from Interments and related income higher than budgeted partially offset by increased costs (-£52k)
- Horticultural & Plant Workshop additional income (-£35k) from external contracts following a re-pricing exercise.
- Green Waste Charging - Net income from the early bird income received part of which is attributable to 23/24 financial year given March 2024 start date (-£20k)
- Car parking income – overall small net variance (-£3k) reflecting usage of car parks continuing to improve with income around 7.5% higher than same period last year; offsetting the delay in the implementation of the new parking tariffs.

Sustainable Development

- Majority of the staffing variance due to current vacancies within the service (including enforcement roles/ landscape services (-£163k).
- Additional costs from external contractors and ECC to cover staff shortages in Landscape services and tree maintenance (+£65k)
- Overall, planning income is forecast to underachieve by £330k. A shortfall of planning application income is forecast (+£400k) where levels of income have not been able to recover back to those seen in 2018/19. Planning Performance Agreement income is projected to exceed budget by (-£100k), partially offset by lower Pre-application income (+£40k). Application income can be variable, and a small number of major applications can have a material impact. Currently awaiting confirmation of an uplift to statutory fees by government and date of implementation which may impact on the current year position.

Strategic Investment Team (SIT)

- Staffing cost higher than allowed in the original budget to reflect the arrangements for interim staff with partial mitigation through a vacancy. Staff time charged to capital projects is higher than was allowed. The net variance is offset by a reduction in use of reserves.

Corporate Financing

- Council Tax sharing agreement –Council Tax collection performance at Q2 results in a forecast for the year that is better than the scheme baseline leading to an increase in share-back from preceptors (-£160k).
- Business Rate income is projected to be higher due to taxbase growth (-£200k)
- Staff time charged to capital projects from service project managers is expected to be less than the budget allows based on first quarter timesheet information (+£50k).
- The Council's higher cash position has resulted in delaying the need to externally borrow and instead use internal cash balances in the short term (-£175k).

Capital Programme

Capital programme totals £13m (excluding prior year spend) of which £6.8m is profiled into 2023/24:

| | Budget Profiled 23/24 £000 | Actual Spend 23/24 £000 | In-year Variance 23/24 £000 | Slippage (-or deduction from future budget) £000 | Forecast Project Variance 23/24 £000 | Expected Remaining Spend 23/24 £000 |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Horizon 120 Business Park infrastructure | 501 | 124 | 376 | 0 | 0 | 376 |
| Horizon 120 - The Plaza | 282 | 0 | 282 | 0 | -92 | 190 |
| Manor Street regeneration | 142 | 0 | 142 | 0 | 0 | 142 |
| Maltings Lane Community Facility | 200 | 10 | 190 | 0 | 0 | 190 |
| Town Centre improvements | 619 | 1 | 618 | 0 | 0 | 618 |
| Industrial estate improvements | 58 | 14 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 44 |
| Property planned maintenance | 473 | 313 | 160 | 0 | -2 | 158 |
| Information technology systems & equipment | 630 | 265 | 364 | 0 | 0 | 364 |
| Community facilities, play areas, parks & open spaces | 993 | 331 | 662 | 0 | 0 | 662 |
| Cemetery improvements | 95 | 91 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Paths, cycleways, and other infrastructure | 60 | 35 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| Operational equipment | 459 | 88 | 371 | 0 | 0 | 371 |
| Sports and leisure facilities improvements | 435 | 5 | 430 | 0 | 0 | 430 |
| Climate change initiatives | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Shared / Rural Prosperity Fund | 180 | 0 | 180 | 0 | 0 | 180 |
| Housing renovation & disabled facilities grants | 1,357 | 607 | 751 | 0 | 0 | 751 |
| Capital salaries | 329 | 162 | 168 | 0 | -25 | 142 |
| Total | 6,814 | 2,046 | 4,768 | 0 | -119 | 4,649 |

Changes to programme since last report

- The profiled spend in 23/24 has increased by £198k from that reported at Q1. The main reason for the increase is due to:
 - The inclusion of a project at Mill Park Drive for new play equipment of £146k which is funded by S106 contributions and Unilateral Undertakings.
 - The addition of the acquisition of a compact tractor £35k from reserve.

Programme risks

- Horizon 120 shortfall on serviced land sales, and cost of removing excess soil from the site leading to a potential requirement to allocate additional capital resources.
- Inflation risk on projects, including Maltings Lane Community Facility which could result in increased construction costs.
- A review of the capital programme for quarter 3 to identify any potential programme slippage.

Significant Capital resources generated

- Eastlight agreements: Right-to-Buy sales – 3 sales were completed in the first 6 months generating c£195k. A further 12 applications are in progress; however, with recent increases in interest rates, together with wider economic uncertainty, completed sales have stalled. Receipt from the VAT shelter £129k.
- Better Care Funding received £1.06m which is used to fund expenditure on disabled facilities grants.
- Capital grants of £33k & £148k received from the Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund respectively
- Additional funding of £642k has been received from SELEP for the Horizon 120 Plaza building – as funding is conditional this needs to be applied to financing which will reduce the overall project borrowing requirement
- Other minor receipts totalling £84k.

Treasury Management

Investment activity

The Council's treasury management activity to the end of the first quarter is summarised in the table below:

| Amount Invested at start of the year | Activity for the year | | Amount Invested at end of September |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | New Investments | Investments Matured | |
| £47.1m | £77.4m | £54.0m | £70.5m |
| Average amount invested for the year to date | | | £68.3m |
| Highest amount invested in the year to date | | | £77.3m |

Investments totalling £19m were maintained across a range of long-term pooled funds with varying exposures to property, equities, and other financial assets. The remaining balance of investments have been held in short-term investments comprising money market funds; Debt Management Office Account (UK Government); bank deposits; and liquid cash held in a current account with Lloyds Bank.

Dividend income earned to the end of the quarter was £526k and interest on short-term investments was £1.140m, a total of £1.666m, or an annualised return of 4.88%.

The market value of shares and units in long-term pooled funds at the end of the quarter was £20.4m, representing an unrealised gain of £1.4m over the amount originally invested.

General Fund Balances

General Fund balances are held for the following reasons:

- As a contingency against unforeseen events
- To meet short-term or non-recurrent one-off costs that are not provided in the base budget and/ or are incurred to achieve future savings and efficiencies.

Based on the projected outturn set out above, the estimated movements on the General Fund balances are:

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Balance at 1 April 2023 | £'000 |
| | 8,093 |
| Addition/(deductions): | |
| Budgeted reduction | (644) |
| Funding for one-off investment / costs | (386) |
| Pension Fund cost | (93) |
| Forecast variance | (6) |
| Sub-total Net Budget Variance | (1,129) |
| Est. Balance at 31 March 2024 | 6,964 |

Movements shown on the General Fund balance are in respect of:

- The Budget for the year was approved based on using balances of £644k.
- An anticipated reduction in balances for the initial net operating costs of the Plaza (£121k), Green waste implementation Costs (£200k), the additional legal costs in respect of Wethersfield (£65k)
- Pension Fund strain costs (£93k)
- The projected outturn variance for the year at Q2 is small adverse variance of £6k.