

# Minutes

## Corporate Policy Development Committee 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023



### Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
M Ault	Apologies	S Rajeev (Vice-Chairman)	Apologies
J Bond	Yes	M Staines	Yes
G Courtauld (Chairman)	Yes	B Taylor	Apologies
J Edwards	Yes	P Thorogood	Yes
M Fincken	Apologies	E Williams	Apologies
J Hayes	Apologies	T Williams	Apologies
L Jefferis	Yes		

### 13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** The following interests were declared:-

Councillor M Staines declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, Draft Household Waste and Collection Policy as a Director of 'PAIN' (Parishes Against the Incinerators).

Councillor P Thorogood declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, Draft Household Waste and Collection Policy as an Elected Member at Essex County Council (ECC).

Although not a Member of the Committee, Councillor L Bowers-Flint, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing, also declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as an Elected Member at ECC.

### 14 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy Development Committee (the Committee) held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 15 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**INFORMATION:** There were no statements made, or questions asked.

### 16 **DRAFT HOUSEHOLD WASTE AND COLLECTIONS POLICY**

**INFORMATION:** Members received a report which provided them with an overview of the draft Household Waste and Collections Policy (the Draft Policy) in advance of its

consideration by the Cabinet. Accordingly, the Chairman welcomed P Partridge, Head of Operations, and S Pandya, Operations Strategy and Policy Manager.

Alongside the report, Members received a presentation from P Partridge on waste minimisation and recycling in the Braintree District. The presentation slides covered aspects such as recent legislative changes, ambitions for the future, the draft Waste Strategy for Essex 2054 and Braintree District Council's (the Council) performance in terms of the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting.

The Chairman thanked P Partridge for his presentation and invited questions from Members. In response to the questions raised, the following information was provided:-

- Members were informed that household waste not recycled was processed as landfill at a site in Colchester. Although the Council collected waste, the responsible Authority for its disposal was Essex County Council (ECC).
- In respect of the six waste streams, it was explained that detailed guidance around these had yet to come forward from DEFRA, including the extent in which waste can continue to be comingled.
- The Government stipulated that glass should be collected from the kerbside; however, this did not coincide with the Council's current and well-used bring bank system. The collection process for the District going forward would therefore need to be considered as part of the proposed changes to recycling
- It was recognised that landfill was not a sustainable means of disposing residual waste. Accordingly, ECC was looking at alternative measures for treating waste.
- Members were advised that the Council's Waste Minimisation and Recycling Team were able to attend schools across the District and speak to students about recycling, thereby disproving any misconceptions about how waste was processed.
- The residual waste figure for the District was fairly high as much of the waste that could be recycled was placed into black bins. For this figure to improve, cultural change was required, and the amount of waste produced by residents needed to be reduced. It was added that although it could be improved, the recycling rate for the District was still a high level.
- Although recycling rates were generally good, waste contamination had increased amongst dwellings such as flats and would need to be addressed going forward.
- Along with other Essex Authorities, the Council was a member of the Essex Waste Partnership. Waste composition analysis had previously been carried out through the Partnership and would be repeated in future.
- The Government mandated that plastic film would need to be collected from the kerbside from 2027, but there was uncertainty as to whether the technology would be in place to support the implementation of this process.
- Previously, the Council had included recycling information on the front of clear sacks; however, it was found that residents took less notice of this after a period of time.
- There was no guarantee that the Council would continue with the clear sack process

for recycling going forward, and other receptacles would need to be considered, especially if the Government proceeded with glass collections at kerbsides.

A broadcast of the meeting, including the full presentation and slides, is available to view via the [Council's website](#) and [YouTube Channel](#).

Following the presentation, S Pandya provided Members with further detail on the Draft Policy. Members were reminded that the service standards for household waste were last updated in 2014, and that there had been a number of changes in subsequent years at local and national levels. The Draft Policy captured long established practices in terms of the delivery of the Council's Waste Management Service, but it also sought to clarify the service standards where the Council was required to deviate from the norm (e.g. where vehicle access difficulties arose). Also included within the Draft Policy were new proposals which had the potential to impact on all customers, such as the cessation of side waste collections.

The following information was then provided in response to questions raised by Members on the Draft Policy:

- In respect of side waste, there was a need to look at why this was being generated in the first instance, and what proportion could be recycled. If residents were to separate side waste, it could potentially be collected as part of dry recycling and the amount of side waste would thus be reduced.
- In terms of statistics, a more detailed breakdown of the data was also available (e.g. showing the split between green and food waste, dry mixed recycling and residual waste, etc). The data allowed officers to ascertain which areas of waste collection required improvement and often supported the Council's marketing and communications campaigns.
- The waste generated by properties such as churches was classified as household waste. For instance, churches could subscribe to the garden waste collection service.
- Household waste was collected on an area-by-area basis. For example, waste was collected in the north of the District on Mondays and Tuesdays, and more centralised areas were covered on a Friday.
- Where vehicles had to re-visit areas of the District to collect missed waste, this contributed towards non-productive travel time for staff and less efficiency in the service. The preference therefore was for residents to contact the Council before 12.00pm if their bins had been missed in order to allow waste crews more time to finish other jobs and return.
- As of 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023, 26,000 properties (approx. 40%) had subscribed to the new garden waste collection service. With more residents subscribing to the new service, the collection costs would increase. In anticipation of this, the projections under the subscription service were to be remodelled on a three-monthly basis as previously agreed.
- Colchester City Council used a 'hybrid' system for their waste collection service, which did not include the collection of side waste. A key priority for the Braintree District was to reduce the amount of side waste generated by households.

- A degree of garden waste was placed in residual bins, but the majority of residents were known to separate their waste correctly. Although garden waste was classified as household waste, the Council had provided a specific service and receptacle for this and residents were expected to utilise these rather than the residual bins.
- D Gascoyne, Chief Executive at the Council, reminded Members that the medium-term financial forecast of the Authority indicated that there was still a budget gap of £2.3 million after the four-year period. This projection allowed for the latest assumptions based on the number of subscriptions to the garden waste collection service to date.
- Members raised a final point which underlined the importance of active communication by the Council with residents on the subject of household waste and recycling, as well as education in schools.
- Reference was also made to the need to keep governmental bodies informed of the District's latest data around waste (e.g. the amount of recyclable materials being incinerated).

Following the end of Members' questions, the Chairman thanked P Partridge and S Pandya for their attendance at the meeting and the information provided.

**DECISION:** Members gave consideration to the Draft Policy and any recommendations as part of the finalisation of the Draft Policy in anticipation of its approval at Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To consider Braintree District Council's (the Council) draft Household Waste & Recycling Policy (the Draft Policy) in advance of its consideration by Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

## 17 **DRAFT EMPTY HOMES POLICY**

**INFORMATION:** Members received a report which provided them with an overview of the development of the Council's draft Empty Homes Policy (the Policy). The Chairman welcomed C Jones, Strategic Business Support Manager, and C Elias-Stephenson, Head of Housing and Communities, who were in attendance to introduce the report. Councillor L Bowers-Flint, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing, was also in attendance.

A broadcast of the meeting is available to view via Council's [YouTube Channel](#).

Members were advised that although there was currently no statutory requirement for the Council to have an Empty Homes Policy, it was recommended that this was in place to help reduce the number of empty homes across the District. In March 2023, the Council adopted the Healthy Housing Strategy 2023-2028; as part of the public consultation that was undertaken at the time, 80% of respondents rated reducing the number of empty properties in the District (by exploring options to bring them back into use) as "important." The responses received therefore illustrated that empty properties were a cause for concern for residents.

As at the end of September 2023, there were 69,484 properties within the Braintree District, of which 2,647 were empty homes. 1.5% of empty properties were classed as long-term empty, unoccupied and unfurnished. The Council's focus was on homes known to have been empty for more than six months, usually for two years or more. As of July

2023, there were 2,235 active applications on the housing register; as such, bringing empty properties back into use was necessary for the Council to start to meet the housing demand.

In May 2023, the Council employed an Empty Homes and Private Rented Sector Officer on a full-time basis. In November 2023, a Private Rented Sector Sustainment Officer was also employed. On 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023, the Council launched its pilot Landlord Incentive Scheme (the Scheme) which was due to run for 18 months. The intention of the Scheme was to provide landlords with a financial incentive to provide tenancies to homeless households in the District. One household had already been moved into the private rented sector since the launch of the Scheme, and a further viewing was due to take place in the week.

The ultimate aim of the Policy was to reduce the number of empty homes across the District by offering advice and assistance to homeowners. Extensive research undertaken by the Council's Empty Homes and Private Rented Sector Officer indicated that the best course of action was to identify properties through two main routes: complaints from the public, and Council Tax data. Support would also be offered through the Council's 'three-stage' engagement letter.

The Chairman then invited Members to ask their questions of officers. In response to the questions raised, the following information was provided:

- The Council did not utilise 'enforced sales' at the current time; however, this was an available option if required. The purpose of the Policy was to allow the Council to explore all available options, but any enforcement action was a last resort.
- The Council launched the Incentive Scheme for landlords in order to improve access to the rented sector for the District's residents. Similar schemes had also been utilised in neighbouring areas as well and enabled landlords to offer properties within the Braintree District to outside residents, which subsequently had a negative impact on the District's residents who were trying to access the private rented sector. There was also a significant divide between the Local Housing Allowance and charges by the private rented sector.
- The Council recently held its first Private Sector Landlords Forum, and early feedback from indicated that landlords were 'struggling' with the impacts of the Cost-of-Living Crisis. The launch of the Incentive Scheme was therefore helping to support landlords and opening further avenues for the Council and the District's residents to access housing.
- The Incentive Scheme was launched for 18-month period and was funded through a top-up received from the Homeless Prevention Grant (which had required the Council to meet with specific criteria). Robust monitoring of the Scheme was being undertaken by officers in order to ascertain its success, and the feedback would be reported back to Cabinet at the relevant time.
- In terms of the impacts of Airbnbs and second homes in the District, this was not currently an area of concern for the Council. It was added that there were 205 unoccupied but furnished second homes within the District.
- Members were advised that the Council was still in the early stages of understanding the reasons behind the increases in the number of empty homes. Part of the Council's

agenda was to engage more with landlords to determine how improvements could be made.

- In respect of empty commercial properties, Members were reminded that the Empty Homes Policy was still in the early stages of its implementation. It was added that work was currently being undertaken with the Environmental Health team around monitoring commercial properties; however, the primary focus of work was on empty homes.
- An 'exempt' home referred to homes where the occupants had perhaps been moved into a care home, prison, etc.
- In respect of Council Tax charged for private empty homes, approximately 62 properties were being charged the maximum amount, which was being paid in full. Properties targeted by Housing Officers were usually given a profile and assigned a 'score' in terms of general upkeep, with the highest scoring properties taken forward.
- For reference, it was highlighted that the Council published the Policy for 'Second Homes and Long-Term Empty Properties and Determining Discounts for Certain Dwellings' in 2019.

**DECISION:** Members considered the draft Empty Homes Policy and the principles of the future management of empty homes within the District.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To engage with the Corporate Policy Development Committee (the Committee) on the development of Braintree District Council's (the Council) draft Empty Homes Policy (the Policy).

## 18 **DRAFT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**

**INFORMATION:** Members received a report which provided them with a summary of the priorities contained within the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024/28 (the Draft Strategy). Once again, the Chairman welcomed C Jones, Strategic Business Support Manager, and C Elias-Stephenson, Head of Housing and Communities, to the meeting. Councillor L Bowers-Flint, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing, was also in attendance.

Councillor L Bowers-Flint explained that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an opportunity to consider the priorities contained within the Draft Strategy, prior to its public consultation. It was highlighted that nationally, 1 in 208 households were homeless, and that throughout September 2023, the Council had accommodated, or already had living in temporary accommodation, 65 households. The evidence collected thus far indicated that households which presented as homeless had more complex needs than in previous years, with many other households at risk of homelessness. The aim of the Strategy was therefore to provide advice and support, both to those directly affected and throughout the community.

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all Housing Authorities were required to have in place a Homeless Strategy which was to be reviewed every five years. The Council's current Strategy covered the period 2018 to 2023. The new proposed Strategy was designed to support households who faced the threat of homelessness at an early stage to help reduce the risk of this and rough sleeping against the following priorities:

- "Prevent homelessness wherever possible;

- Facilitate the delivery of suitable, temporary accommodation;
- Increase access to suitable accommodation; and
- Prevent and break the cycle of rough sleeping.”

It was underlined that the Draft Strategy retained a clear focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness, and where prevention was not possible, to end homelessness at the earliest opportunity. On 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023, a stakeholder event was held to gather feedback on the Draft Strategy. The event was attended by 35 Council partners, with much of the feedback gathered placing a strong emphasis on the prevention of homelessness at early stages.

The Chairman then invited Members to ask their questions of officers and of Councillor Bowers-Flint. In response, the following information was provided:

- The average number of rough sleepers within the District over the last few years was five to six. In 2023, the average number of rough sleepers in the District was four.

C Jones then gave a presentation to Members which provided them with a more detailed summary of homelessness and rough sleeping rates in the District. The main points included a definition of homelessness vs rough sleeping, the exact number of people who were currently homeless within the District (including national influences and milestones), and the reasons behind the loss of a ‘settled home.’

At the end of the presentation, Councillor L Bowers-Flint expressed that she was extremely proud of the Council’s statistics on homelessness and rough sleeping, the lower levels of which would not have been reached without the dedication of officers. It was also acknowledged that rough sleepers often had complex needs and were sometimes unable to go into accommodation as a result. Finally, it was explained that placing families into hotels, as opposed to more suitable accommodation, was always a last resort for the Council; however, this was a possibility due to fewer properties being available in the District.

A broadcast of the meeting, including the full presentation and slides, is available to view via the [Council’s website](#) and [YouTube Channel](#).

Further to the presentation, the Chairman invited Members to ask their questions of officers. The following information was provided:

- In terms of care leavers and accommodation, these fell under the remit of Essex County Council (ECC). In her dual capacity as an Elected Member at ECC, Councillor L Bowers-Flint explained that accommodation for care leavers would be a key area of focus for the Children’s Services and Early Years Team. Accordingly, ECC officers would be meeting with the Essex Authorities on an individual basis to discuss care leavers and how they could be supported going forward.
- Members were informed that as part of the Draft Strategy, there would be an action plan and evidence base with more detailed statistics and information. The priority for the Council was around the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping, and this encompassed all levels (e.g. including children and care leavers). To achieve this, the Council was working with its partners (e.g. Citizens Advice, Foodbanks etc) and individuals coming forward in order to understand what the cohorts were locally, rather than focusing on a single area. It was added that families with young children were

automatically categorised as being of priority need in terms of the Council's duty to offer accommodation.

- Residents who faced the prospect of homelessness should come forward to the Council as early as possible. The Housing Options team were the appropriate contact for anyone that was dealing with or had been threatened with the prospect of homelessness. There was also a 24 hour out-of-hours service available for residents in need of urgent support.
- When identifying suitable accommodation, the Housing Options team would always strive to meet with the needs of individual families where possible (e.g. by finding a location in close proximity to a child's school). It was added that families with young children would be prioritised in terms of which properties they were placed in.
- The Chancellor had announced a freezing of the LHA rate in the Autumn Statement, which would hopefully prevent some households going into homelessness. However, this would not support the Council in terms of the costs incurred for the provision of temporary accommodation. Allowances were therefore to be made in the Council's budget to help mitigate the impacts going forward.
- The public consultation on the Strategy had been moved to late January 2024 to coincide with its presentation at Cabinet. In gathering feedback from the consultation, the Council's priorities were around the "lived experience" of households and where improvements to the Council's approach to homelessness could be made going forward (e.g. with earlier interventions).
- Households which became homeless outside of the Braintree District were not under the Council's responsibility. However, it was noted that other Local Authorities did sometimes house residents within the District in privately rented accommodation. This was a growing issue for the Council as it was not always informed when this occurred.
- In terms of its statutory duties, the Council was only required to accept applications from households within the District, or who had a "local connection" to the area (e.g. someone who had lived in the District for a significant period or had a close family relative in the area); however, criteria was overridden by residents from more 'at risk' backgrounds, such as those fleeing domestic violence.
- Under the legislation, Local Authorities who housed residents within the Braintree District (e.g. in private accommodation, HMOs, etc) were required to notify us of this. There was also 'local connection' criteria set within the Council's Housing register ('Gateway to Homechoice'). Although residents could apply to live 'cross-boundary,' they would have less priority over someone with a 'local connection' to the area.

C Elias-Stephenson agreed to provide Councillor J Edwards with some statistics around the average timeframe that families received homelessness support from the Council.

Following the end of Members' questions, the Chairman expressed his grateful thanks to C Jones, C Elias-Stephenson and Councillor L Bowers-Flint for their attendance and the information provided.

**DECISION:** Members considered the priorities contained within the Draft Strategy and provided initial feedback to Lead Officers as part of the consultation process.



**REASON FOR DECISION:** To provide the Corporate Policy Development Committee (the Committee) with an opportunity to consider the priorities contained within the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2028 (the Draft Strategy) prior to consultation.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.08pm.

Councillor G Courtauld  
(Chairman)