

Minutes

Council Meeting



4th September 2023

These Minutes principally record decisions taken and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions. A recording of the meeting is available on the Council's YouTube Channel at <http://www.braintree.gov.uk/youtube>

Present:

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Councillor J Abbott	Yes	Councillor L Jefferis	Yes
Councillor D Abram	Yes	Councillor J Martin	Yes
Councillor M Ault	Yes	Councillor S Mason	Apologies
Councillor J Ayten	Yes	Councillor A Munday	Apologies
Councillor J Baugh	Yes	Councillor I Parker	Yes
Councillor J Beavis	Yes	Councillor J Pell	Apologies
Councillor J Bond	Apologies	Councillor G Prime	Yes
Councillor K Bowers	Yes	Councillor S Rajeev	Yes
Councillor L Bowers-Flint	Yes	Councillor R Ramage	Yes
Councillor G Butland	Yes	Councillor F Ricci	Yes
Councillor J Coleridge	Yes	Councillor P Schwier	Yes
Councillor G Courtauld	Yes	Councillor G Spray	Yes
Councillor M Cunningham	Yes	Councillor M Staines	Yes
Councillor T Cunningham	Yes	Councillor B Taylor	Yes
Councillor C Dervish	Yes	Councillor W Taylor	Yes
Councillor T Diamond	Yes	Councillor M Thorogood	Yes
Councillor J Edwards	Yes	Councillor P Thorogood	Apologies
Councillor C Finch	Yes	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
Councillor M Fincken	Yes	Councillor T Walsh	Yes
Councillor D Garrod	Yes	Councillor L Walters	Apologies
Councillor M Green	Yes	Councillor E Williams	Yes
Councillor J Hayes	Yes	Councillor T Williams	Yes
Councillor P Heath	Yes	Councillor J Wrench	Yes
Councillor D Holland	Yes	Councillor B Wright	Yes
Councillor A Hooks	Yes		

18 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared

Councillor J Beavis declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 'Motion by Councillor Joanne Beavis - Delivering a balanced budget and quality services' as she intended to make reference to Sible Hedingham Parish Council of which she was an elected Member.

Councillor G Butland declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 9 'Questions to the Leader and Cabinet' as an Elected Member of Essex County Council.

Councillor A Hooks declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 'Motion by Councillor Joanne Beavis - Delivering a balanced budget and quality services' as she intended to make reference to her Ward in relation to the motion.

Councillor T Walsh declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 'Motion by Councillor Joanne Beavis - Delivering a balanced budget and quality services' as he intended to make reference to his Ward in relation to the motion.

19 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 17th July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There was one question asked. The question related to matters which were not on the Agenda for discussion.

'Wethersfield Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan'

Statement read by Mr MacKenzie

Councillor G Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure, responded to the statements.

21 **ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

INFORMATION: The following announcements/statements were made: -

Chairman of the Council - Announcements

The Chairman started this item with the sad announcement of the death of a former colleague, District Councillor Michael Gage who passed away on 2nd August 2023.

The Chairman added that Michael was elected to Braintree District Council in 1999 and he had served continuously until 2011, representing Halstead St Andrew's Ward. Michael was also a Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economic Development,

Transport and Environment issues between 2003 and 2006. Michael also represented his community on the Halstead Town Council and was the Club President of Halstead Town Football Club.

A thanksgiving Service for Michael was held at St Andrew's Church, Halstead on Thursday 31st August. On behalf of the Council, the Chairman expressed and formally recorded our sincere condolences to Michael's family and to all those who knew him.

The Chairman announced that this summer she had conducted seventeen visits including celebrating Braintree Police Station open day and Ukrainian Independence Day, both of which were very well attended.

She added that she had thoroughly enjoyed visiting members of the Community with many more upcoming engagements in the lead up to Christmas. The Chairman would also be hosting an evening event at Braintree Museum in late October to raise funds for her chosen charity, The Salvation Army along with holding the annual Christmas Service at St Peter's Church, Bocking.

Leader of the Council – Announcements

The Leader advised Members that since his last update to Full Council, the Home Office's plans for housing asylum seekers at the RAF Wethersfield site had continued.

It was understood that the Home Office were still using a phased approach to moving people on site which we were told had gone smoothly and safely so far from an operational perspective. The Leader along with Councillor Mary Cunningham, and Ward Councillors Taylor, Ault and Staines as well as Parish Councillors, visited the site on Friday 25th August. He added, this gave useful insight into the current conditions of the site, where they were able to see some of the facilities. They were able to meet some of the asylum seekers currently living on the site and were given the opportunity to learn about their stories. They were also able to ask questions of the Home Office on behalf of the community.

He added that they were aware of the continued various concerns and questions being raised by the local community. It was felt that the Home Office needed to address and clarify residents concerns and the Council would continue to share this feedback. There had` also been media reports on various issues. Officers continued to strongly encourage the Home Office to be open and transparent with the community and organise regular engagement to ensure residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders were updated with the latest developments and information relating to the site.

A Multi-Agency Forum had been running since April which was set up as a forum for statutory partners including local authorities, health, police and fire services, to meet with the Home Office to understand the impact on services and the plan for the operational use of the site.

In terms of the Council's legal action against the Home Office on these plans, Members would be aware that the Council had been granted permission to proceed with its

Judicial Review. The substantive hearing for the judicial review challenge would be heard on 31st October and 1st November. This would be the Council's opportunity to formally present its challenge under the three grounds on which it had been granted permission and would allow for evidence to be presented to the High Court.

Despite the ongoing legal action, this didn't stop the Home Office from progressing with their plans at the Wethersfield site, and so all multi agency partners would continue to not only provide support where needed for all asylum seekers coming into the District, but also for the wider local community too.

There had been some conversations locally about the funding provided alongside the larger asylum site plans. Whilst it was understood that there would be grant funding of £3,500 per bed space made available by the Home Office to local authorities, the Council had not yet been provided with this funding and were still awaiting further details on any specific criteria attached to the funding, which may restrict the Council's use of it. As a result, the Council were unable to make plans for this funding at this time.

The Leader added that the Council would continue to push for clarification on any issues or concerns as they arise and that community engagement was prioritised as the site developed.

The Leader thanked all Officers who had worked extremely hard behind the scenes to continue encouraging the Home Office to share more information and for more engagement, bringing forward the legal action and raising concerns and questions on behalf of the community, and for the support of all Members, Parish Councils, residents, businesses, community groups and local MP's.

22 **MOTION BY COUNCILLOR FRANKIE RICCI – COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS SUPPORT**

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to a Motion submitted by Councillor F Ricci. Appropriate Notice of the Motion had been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedural Rule 12.17 of Chapter 2 of the Council's Constitution.

The Motion:

'This council acknowledges the policies that have enabled it to support communities and businesses in difficult times and to help them bounce back together. The Council also appreciates that £1 million allocation to support residents with cost-of-living concerns, would not have been possible without sound financial management over several years. Likewise, Council support for communities and our businesses has been dependant on responsible finances and a resourceful approach to generating income and securing funding.

Following the unprecedentedly difficult start to this decade, this Council reaffirms its commitment to policies that maintain quality statutory services and give support to our communities and businesses. This Council will continue to play its part in looking after

the most vulnerable and helping our District and its residents become more prosperous.'

There followed a discussion on the Motion.

On being put to vote the Motion was declared **CARRIED.**

A webcast of the full debate can be viewed here https://braintree.public-tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/804251

23 **MOTION BY COUNCILLOR LYNETTE BOWERS-FLINT – AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY PROGRAMME**

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to a Motion submitted by Councillor L Bowers-Flint. Appropriate Notice of the Motion had been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedural Rule 12.17 of Chapter 2 of the Council's Constitution.

Members were advised that following the publication of the report, an amendment to the published motion was received in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules. Councillor Bowers-Flint and Councillor Spray as the proposer and seconder of the original motion were consulted and had consented to the amendment. As a consequence of this acceptance, the amended motion was now the substantive motion to be considered by Members.

The Substantive Motion:

'This Council acknowledges the achievement of its Affordable Housing delivery programme in recent times. After a record breaking 417 completions in 2021/22, it delivered another 288 completions in 2022/23, against the annual plan target of 250. With still a high number of affordable homes in the pipeline with planning consent and/or on site currently under construction, the Council is confident that the coming year's annual plan target of 250 will be met once again.

Going forward the Council undoubtedly faces uncertainty with housing pressures in the District and acknowledges the challenges it will face with achieving its future year's targets for affordable homes, especially with the slowdown of completion by developers, and so many landowners deciding to hang on to sites with planning permission and not starting building. The Council also acknowledges the strain on residents not being able to get private rented properties due to landlords deciding to sell rather than let.

The Council resolves to proactively seek opportunities to increase social and affordable house building to help ease the pressures of the housing market on those with low and medium incomes, including direct delivery of housing on suitable sites when it is viable to do so.'

There followed a discussion on the Motion.

On being put to vote the Motion was declared **CARRIED.**

A webcast of the full debate can be viewed here https://braintree.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/804251

24 **MOTION BY COUNCILLOR JOANNE BEAVIS - DELIVERING A BALANCED BUDGET AND QUALITY SERVICES**

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to a Motion submitted by Councillor J Beavis. Appropriate Notice of the Motion had been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedural Rule 12.17 of Chapter 2 of the Council's Constitution.

The Motion:

'This Council will strive to deliver a balanced budget over the next 4 years by more fairly levelling up our district, with a focus on strengthening communities.

This Council will strive to deliver quality services and facility improvements equally for all our residents and businesses, in town and rural areas alike.'

There followed a discussion on the Motion.

On being put to vote the Motion was declared **CARRIED.**

A webcast of the full debate can be viewed here https://braintree.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/804251

25 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER AND CABINET**

INFORMATION: Members were then given the opportunity to put their questions to the Cabinet. A webcast of the questions and the responses from the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members is available on the Council's website and its YouTube channel at https://braintree.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/795711

The main topics were as follows:-

- Councillor Edwards raised a query on the cancellation of this year's Christmas light switch on and whether the event would be returning to the Town in the future.
- Councillor Green raised a question on the definition of affordable housing.
- Councillor Wrench requested an update on the expression of interest from members of the public on the uptake of the new garden waste service.
- Councillor Wright requested an update on the progress of the Silver End Conservation Area Appraisal and Guide.

- Councillor Coleridge raised concerns regarding the recent closures of several schools throughout the District due to structural issues and the building materials used. He requested an update from the Leader on the impact this would have in the District.
- Councillor Jefferis asked a question in respect of whether the Council was still achieving its target of 30% affordable housing on all new development sites.
- Councillor Courtauld made reference to the cost of living crisis allocation of £1million set aside in the budget and asked for an update on how this money was being used to support urban and rural foodbanks.
- Councillor Ault raised a query in relation to planning enforcement issues at the Wethersfield Airbase, and how the District Council could gain back some control over the site.
- Councillor Baugh requested an update on the current GP provision as a result of the new Livewell Hub in the Victoria Square development in Braintree Town Centre.
- Councillor Fincken asked for an update on the allocation on funds set aside for Halstead community facilities and the Halstead Community Centre project.
- Councillor Hayes raised a query on how the Council's 5-year housing supply plan was affected by developers with planning permission not building on sites, and what steps the Council could put in place to ensure developments with planning permission are progressed.
- Councillor Abram ask a question on approved and proposed developments in Bradwell.
- Councillor Rajeev requested an update on the Council's approach to transformation and shared services.
- Councillor Abbott raised a question on dealing with complaints against Councillors.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.32pm.

Councillor D Garrod
(Chairman)