



CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

Wednesday, 3rd April 2024 at 7.15pm

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

THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Members of the public will be able to view and listen to this meeting via YouTube.
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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

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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 31st January 2024 (copy previously circulated).

4 Public Question Time

Only Registered Speakers will be invited by the Chairman to speak during public question time. Please see the agenda notes for guidance.

5 Third Quarter Performance Report 2023/24

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6 Update on Draft Work Programme 2024/25

Members to receive an update on the progress of the draft Work Programme of the Committee for 2024/25.

7 Decision Planner - 1st May 2024 to 31st July 2024

To note the Decision Planner for the period 1st May 2024 to 31st July 2024 (to be published 2nd April).

Report Title: Third Quarter Performance Report 2023/24	
Report to: Corporate Scrutiny Committee	
Date: 3 rd April 2024	For: To inform
Key Decision: No	Decision Planner Ref No: DP/2023/70
Report Presented by: Tom Williams, Corporate Performance Coordinator	
Enquiries to: Tom Williams, Corporate Performance Coordinator tom.williams@braintree.gov.uk	

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 third quarter (September 2023 to December 2023). The performance report was presented to Cabinet on the 4th March 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 4th March 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 third quarter, six projects are complete with 41 projects on track and ten projects have an amber status, with reasons for delays varying from costs coming in over budget to planning recommendations requiring additional work.
- 3.3 Ten performance indicators have met or exceeded target, one performance indicator has missed target by less than 5%, and three performance indicators have missed target by more than 5%. The areas of underperformance are in relation to collection rate of council tax (<5%), 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 positive variance of £494,000.
- 3.6 Staffing expenditure is currently projected to be underspent at service level which includes the corporate efficiency target. This follows a budget transfer of £600,000 agreed at Full Council on the 11th December 2023 between Treasury Management income and all service staffing budgets to offset the Employers' annual pay increase offered from April 2023.
- 3.7 Other expenditure is forecast to be £730,000 over budget, and the Council is also accruing legal costs in relation to the Wethersfield asylum centre appeals.
- 3.8 Offsetting the projected forecast for other expenditure, is an overachievement of income currently forecast to be £1.3million, 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 third quarter was £3million, mainly incurred on the disabled facilities grant programme. Capital spend typically increases in later quarters. Currently there is an estimated positive variance against the capital projects of £223,000.
- 3.11 The estimated movement on the General Fund unallocated balances is a net withdrawal of £471,000.

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 third 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 – Third 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](#)



THIRD QUARTER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

1 OCTOBER TO
31 DECEMBER 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 third 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 third quarter

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




Corporate Priorities	Status of projects and actions				
					
Connecting People and Places	-	11	5	-	-
Enhancing our Environment	4	11	1	-	-
Supporting our Communities	1	6	2	-	-
Promoting Prosperity	-	5	1	-	-
Delivering and Innovating	1	8	1	-	-
TOTAL	6	41	10	-	-

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 third quarter

The following table shows the performance for the end of the third 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	5	1	1	1
TOTAL	10	1	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 third quarter continues to show progress across the projects undertaken this year. A further three projects have been completed taking the total to six and 41 projects remain on track. A number of projects have been through the appropriate change management process to amend the end date due to being re-prioritised or re-scoped as necessary to accommodate new and competing demands on the Council. Additionally, there has been an increase in amber status projects in the third quarter. Amber statuses reflect delays in obtaining planning permissions and budgetary constraints, amongst other challenges which are detailed in the report.

Ten performance indicators have met or exceeded target in the third quarter, a reduction of one compared to the second quarter. The collection rate of council tax has slipped slightly below target.




A further three performance indicators have missed target by greater than five percent. The areas of under performance continue to be in relation to the number of homes granted planning permission, recycling rates, and enquiries resolved at first point of contact in the customer service centre.

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		
<p>Revised licence applications for all work required on Essex County Council land are still under consideration and unexpected additional work on the application has been required at this late stage.</p> <p>Discussions with Essex County Council continue to finalise the plans. A revised end date will be set once the revised programme of works is agreed.</p>	December 2023	
Improve the district's housing stock by addressing energy efficiencies and exploring best practice to tackle empty homes		
<p>The Council has continued to work towards addressing energy efficiencies through a Healthy Winter Housing session that took place in November chaired by Strategic Housing, where all registered providers were invited to attend. The agenda covered sharing best practices on supporting residents during winter months when facing economic challenges and offering advice and support to collaborate and the align climate strategies, with special emphasis on discussing biodiversity and climate action plans. 'Support for Winter' leaflets were shared with the group. This is a long term area of work, which supports our Climate Action Plan.</p>	March 2030	
<p>The Empty Homes Working Group has finalised the Empty Homes Policy which will be presented to Cabinet in January 2024 for approval. The mapping of empty homes continues across the district with further impact assessments being completed.</p>	March 2025	
Develop a revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 to 2028		
<p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy remains in draft and has received internal feedback. There are 4 recommended priorities: Prevention, Temporary accommodation, Move on support, and Rough Sleeping. The policy is due to be presented to Cabinet in January 2024 for approval.</p>	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		
A tender is underway for the works following a revised costing estimate over budget for the studio floor. The resulting delay means that the works will not complete before March 2024, and due to commitments of the space for academy exams during the first quarter of 2024/25, the work cannot take place until summer. A revised completion date will be considered once the tender is complete.	March 2024	
A tender is underway for the works following a revised costing estimate over budget for the sports hall floor. The resulting delay means that the works will not complete before March 2024, and due to commitments of the space for academy exams during the first quarter of 2024/25, the work cannot take place until summer. A revised completion date will be considered once the tender is complete.	March 2024	
Considering the pressures on the leisure industry, a revised budget has been agreed and a tender is underway. Works are anticipated to start in the fourth quarter, and a revised end date will be processed once a timescale for completion is known.	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 Council is awaiting a detailed timeline of works from the developer. Construction is anticipated to start in 2024 and be completed in 2026.	December 2026	
A12 Widening scheme – The recommendation report submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport is expected to receive a decision in early January 2024. Discussions on pre-planning applications have begun. Construction is planned to start in 2024.	December 2028	
Bramford to Twinstead reinforcement – Site examinations started in September and are currently still ongoing. The Development Consent Order is still awaiting a decision, which is anticipated in summer 2024.	November 2028	
Norwich to Tilbury – Pre-planning application discussions have begun and a statutory consultation is due in Spring 2024. The Development Consent Order is expected towards the end of 2024, with construction not anticipated to start until 2027.	March 2030	
Rivenhall Integrated Waste Management Facility (IWMF) and Energy Centre – The pre-planning application has been signed and the Development Consent Order (DCO) application was submitted in November 2023 and accepted by the Planning Inspectorate. We are now awaiting a decision on the DCO in due course.	December 2025	
Develop our plans to introduce walking and cycling networks across the district		
Public consultation launched on 22 November 2023 and will run for 8 weeks ending on 17 January 2024. Once the consultation ends, a report will be produced for review before the Council decides on the adoption of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).	December 2025	


Enable the delivery of a new build, multipurpose community centre in Witham bringing people together to socialise, learn and access key services		
Procurement preparation for construction of the community centre is underway. The project is currently awaiting a date for the Planning Committee to make a decision. The project is also currently awaiting a decision from a potential operator. The amber status reflects that planning permission is yet to be granted, and an operator is still to be agreed.	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 continues. The target date for completion has been extended from October 2023 to May 2024 due to delays incurred with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) approval of the outline business case.	May 2024	
Work with the Integrated Care Board to enhance the delivery of health and wellbeing services at the Victoria Square development		
Bi-monthly meetings with Provide continue to develop our partnership working. The Council is collaborating with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to explore community usage of the facility to host events and groups, such as the Mind Crisis Café. Provide and the ICB also organised a press release and communications about the hub in the third quarter.	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		
New flower beds have been successfully installed in the wildlife garden. This project is now completed.	November 2023	
Improve the facilities in our skate parks at Weavers Park in Braintree and Spa Road in Witham		
The tender evaluation process has been completed and a decision to award the contract was made at Cabinet in December. A contractor will be appointed in January.	July 2024	

Deliver improvements to the recreation ground at Ramsey Road, Halstead		
The tender evaluation process has been completed and a decision to award the contract was made at Cabinet in December. A contractor will be appointed in January.	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 now 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. Guidance published by the government in November 2023 is being considered by the Council, and training to the relevant members of the planning has been arranged to take place across December 2023 and January 2024, covering what the biodiversity net gain means and how The Council will implement the statutory legislation.	March 2024	
The council continues to explore opportunities to reduce water usage across the organisation.	March 2026	
In October 2023 the Government published guidance on a 'simpler recycling collection system'. A workshop is scheduled in January 2024 for officers and councillors to discuss the guidance and feedback on the review of our current waste collection service.	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 Enhanced 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.	March 2024	
The Home Affairs Select Committee's scrutiny of the bill suggested extensive amendments are needed prior to the legislation being finalised. Until the details of the Bill have been confirmed, the Council is unable to proceed with further actions and will await further information from central government. Therefore, the project is at amber status.		
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 is currently focusing on fly-tipping and appealing to members of the public to "SEE-IT REPORT-IT" to encourage them to send in dash-cam footage, pictures or any information they can share to help our investigations to catch the culprits.	March 2024	
The use of digital communications channels including social media and e-newsletters, as well as media releases, are being used to inform the public of the call to action.		
BBC Essex featured a live interview with Cllr. Tom Cunningham on Sadie's breakfast show which helped raise awareness of the issues of fly-tipping across Essex and how local authorities are tackling offences.		
The Council continued to support the current the Love Essex 2023 campaign through the third quarter, which ran until the end of December 2023. Promotion has included encouraging residents to sign the pledge with a chance of winning	March 2024	

£60 of supermarket vouchers and a December competition to win a food processor or one of two mini food processors.		
Final result to the year's campaign will be forthcoming from Essex County Council in 2024.		
Ten environmental newsletters, reaching 7,500 recipients, were sent over the course of the third quarter including information across a wide range of topics such as the DigiGo service, changes to waste and recycling collections, various local environmental initiatives and sustainable Christmas tips.	March 2024	
The social media campaign has also continued covering: Local Nature Recovery Strategy workshop, Sustainable Christmas, DigiGo service, de Vere Primary School's green flag award, Love to Ride, New EssexAir website, Food waste, and recycled wrapping paper / Naturally Unwrapped.		

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.	March 2030	
Develop opportunities for increasing the renewable energy and fuel security within the district		
A business case has been submitted as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for a large solar panel array in the car park at the Plaza. In October the Sustainability Team took concept scoping figures to the Commercial Board. The Sustainability Team is now working to provide top level figures to determine whether such a project is viable. As anticipated Central Government has relaxed the planning process around on shore wind turbines, and this methodology of delivering renewable energy is currently being explored.	April 2025	
Increase biodiversity and the attractiveness of the district by re-wilding open spaces and wild seed highway verges		
370 Native Species Whips have been planted in the third quarter on open space in Johnson Close and Brendon Drive, Halstead. Godlings Way, Braintree and the cycle path that runs from White Court School to Queensborough Lane at Gt Notley, Braintree are planned for planting 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. Environmental improvement of Cut Throat Lane was completed in December.	December 2023	
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 third quarter 2023/24, the Climate Action Plan Annual Report 2022-23 was published with a full update of progress to date since The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and the Climate Action Plan 2023-24 was published as part of the Cabinet Meeting report papers on 27 November 2023.

The online Climate Change Awareness course was launched for desk-based staff and the video for frontline staff was completed ready for delivery in the fourth quarter. The internal Staff Eco Group meetings in the third quarter focused on Energy Efficiency and welcomed external guests including Essex County Council.

A new Climate Change Communications Officer was appointed in December 2023 on a one-year fixed contract. The Environment E-Newsletter has been published regularly (eight editions within the quarter) and shares case studies, signposting to external partners and general advice on sustainability, nature conservation and Climate Change. 272 additional people signed up to the newsletter during the quarter, bringing the total number of subscribers to 7,547.

The Council have continued to work with many partners and are building closer links with neighbouring councils to support collaborative working with regards to Climate Change. The Climate Action Plan is classified under seven themes and individualised progress on these themes is outlined below:

Resources

The Simpler Recycling reform initial plans were published in October 2023. Under the plans, all local authorities by 31 March 2026 will collect the required recyclable waste streams: glass; metal; plastic; paper and card; food waste; and garden waste. Local authorities will continue to be able to charge for garden waste collections. Local authorities and waste collectors will be required to collect plastic film as part of the plastic waste stream by 31 March 2027.

Promotion of local food producers has continued, to include a local Apple Day at Cressing Temple and a community brewery in Toppesfield. Support and advice has been given to residents and businesses regarding sustainability at Christmas to include recycling and waste reduction tips as well as the promotion of Christmas tree recycling through Farleigh Hospice.

We published an e-newsletter to align with Recycle Week and also raised awareness of the international COP28 Climate Change Conference.

Energy Conservation

The 'Don't Wait for Winter' booklet has been updated and has been published as well as shared at several community events. The Essex Energy Switch auction took place on 3 October, however, energy suppliers were unable to offer fixed tariffs below the new energy price cap due to the ongoing volatility in the energy market.

The Green Doctor Service continues to be active and has been regularly promoted through various channels. A business case was submitted and is awaiting approval for the installation on a solar canopy at the car park of The Plaza building at Horizon 120. A funding bid was made to Sports England for energy efficiency works at our leisure centres.

Built Environment

The Home Upgrade Grant was launched, offering eligible Braintree residents in off-gas areas part of £2.466m for energy efficiency home improvements.

Transport

The Council have promoted the extension of the £2 bus fare cap to residents across social media. We have also continued our promotion of DigiGo electric bus service.

We invited residents to complete the Essex County Council survey as part of their public consultations on walking and cycling routes across Essex. The Active Braintree Strategic Group have continued to meet on a monthly basis. Fusion have delivered many programmes to encourage physical activity including Witham Sporting Memories, Active Rewards and Safer Streets Autumn Activity Programme. The Finding Your Feet walks have been delivered by Community360 at various places in the district.

A Committee report on Hackney Carriages has been written which has an option to issue eight taxi licences and an option to allocate four to electric vehicles. Support has been given to Essex County Council with facilitating up to three on-street electric vehicle charging points across the district as part of their Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) project. Investigations are underway to support DigiGo with electric vehicle charging infrastructure at Horizon 120. The trial of electric scooters with TIER and Essex County Council launched in October and is scheduled to be reviewed in May 2024.

Business and the Green Economy

Preparations are underway to host a Green Business Showcase at The Plaza in June 2024 to provide support for businesses interested in developing sustainable practice. A Green Travel article has been written for the Business Rates booklet due to be published in the Spring.

Several businesses in the district have been given support, including a referral through to Innovate UK for potential product research and development.

Natural Environment

370 native species whips have been planted in November 2023 on open space in Johnson Close and Brendon Drive, Halstead. Under Shared Prosperity Fund grants, twelve Community Gardens projects have been approved for this financial year and planning is underway for next year which will include a larger focus on supporting community orchards where possible.

The Council have attended and engaged within Essex County Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy meetings and have promoted the strategy widely to encourage landowners, farmers, community groups and residents to attend the workshops. There has been continued preparation for the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain and The Planning Team have undertaken training ready for the national launch in January 2024. Support has been given to local landowners as requested. Social media channels have promoted the Great Coastal Birdwatch 2023.



Adapting to Climate Change

Flood warnings were published for Storm Babet in October 2023 and signposting was made to the emergency planning e-newsletter to support businesses and residents with being prepared for severe weather events. Flood Warnings were published again for Storm Ciaran in November 2023 as well as other flood alerts due to significant and prolonged rainfall events. The Corporate Risk Register is up to date.









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>£100,000 has been awarded to Braintree foodbank to open a new distribution centre, offer a delivery service and employ an outreach worker. Delivery numbers have increased in the vast majority of wards compared to 2022, and the outreach worker has already made over 20 referrals to support services for vulnerable residents.</p> <p>A collection of low cost, healthy recipe cards have been developed to include in communications to residents. A cost-of-living resource directory has been developed and shared with staff at Braintree District Council and numerous partner services across the district, to allow us to share helpful and up to date information with service users.</p> <p>A Small Grants Scheme has been approved and work is underway to develop application forms and criteria ahead of marketing to partners. The Council continues to explore other opportunities for funding with our partners.</p>	<p>March 2025</p>	<p>▶</p>
<p>Support local projects and initiatives through the Councillor Community Grants scheme</p>		

<p>To date the sum awarded is £23,400 through 39 grants and is 38.2% of all monies available within the scheme.</p> <p>Five councillors have used their full allocation and two have potential applications being explored.</p> <p>Grants awarded in October included one for £700 to Witham Town Luncheon Club towards their members Christmas dinner.</p> <p>Two large grants were made in November which will help address needs in the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Baby Stuff Braintree received £2000 to purchase warm items for families in need. The Witham Hub were awarded £1000 to buy butcher shop vouchers.</p> <p>One of the grants made in December was £300 to the Hatfield Peverel Scouts and Guides Headquarters towards the installation of Hive heating thermostat.</p>	<p>March 2024</p>	
<p>Support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless on their pathway to independent living through supported housing and move-on accommodation</p>		
<p>Peabody are delivering this project on behalf of the Council. The project has encountered delays which have prevented delivery as expected. We are working with Peabody to understand these challenges, and support where possible.</p> <p>The completion date has been amended to reflect the revised delivery schedule as advised by Peabody.</p>	<p>June 2024</p>	

Actions carried out in partnership with others

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<p>Build more resilient communities to response to emerging issues</p>		
<p>The Council is exploring the opportunity to utilise the Shared Prosperity Fund to support the Levelling Up rural pilot project. An initial round of community engagement has been completed, and a meeting was held to discuss the next steps of the project.</p> <p>Braintree District Council is working with Essex County Council's Strengthening Communities Team to work on drafting a business case for this opportunity.</p>	<p>March 2025</p>	
<p>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</p>		
<p>Three crucial crew events took place between 3 - 6 July, delivering workshops to 289 children from 7 primary schools across the district.</p>	<p>March 2024</p>	
<p>Review our Livewell Strategy to support the changing needs of our residents and wider health and care priorities</p>		
<p>The Livewell Strategy has been finalised and is due to be presented to Cabinet in January. The first round of stakeholder engagement took place in December and a second stakeholder session has been organised to take place in February to formally launch the strategy and strategic action plan.</p> <p>The strategy was due to be presented to December Cabinet but was delayed until January to allow for other urgent items to be discussed. The target date</p>	<p>February 2024</p>	

for completion has moved from December 2023 to February 2024 to account for the delay and to await the Cabinet Decision on the strategy.		
Address the health inequalities of the district through the Mid-Essex Alliance partnership by designing integrated health services in local communities and neighbourhoods		
The Mid-Essex Alliance Deputy Director presented the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) to Braintree District Council's Joint Executive Team in December. Managers from our Housing Team and our Health Improvement Officers now attend the INT meetings to enhance our collaborative working. We are currently working with the Integrated Care Board's lead officer on what the next steps will be in the fourth 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		
In the third quarter Essex Police donated a number of Ring doorbells to Eastlight Community Homes, to provide to vulnerable residents in Witham. A property marking event took place at Witham Community Hub in October. Two bleed kids were purchased by the Liam Taylor Foundation and delivered to venues on Witham High Street, along with training on how to use the emergency life saving equipment.	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		
Contractors have started work on site at Halstead Leisure Centre, and are due to complete in January. Work has not yet started at Witham Town Hall as the associated planning permissions have not yet been finalised. The project has an amber status due to a delayed start at Witham Town Hall and additional funding requirement to reprofile the door widths for wheelchairs. A revised end date will be processed once works start and timescales for completion are known.	March 2024	




PROMOTING PROSPERITY



Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
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 two land		
The planning application for the phase two development is to be heard by Planning Committee in March 2024, which has resulted in the target date for phase two moving from November 23 to March 24. Groundworks required for the sale of the remaining plots are under investigation, and the target date for the sale will likely be revised in the fourth quarter once the scale of work is fully understood.	March 2024	
Continue to develop the Witham Enterprise Units to bring forward new business premises for SME's		
Work continues in relation to the planning application process following the updated scheme design delivered in the second quarter. Financial viability assessments and business case planning, including marketing research, for the project has commenced and will be reviewed in the fourth quarter. The amber status for the project reflects that there are still a number of variables which require finalisation before the project can be delivered including; obtaining planning permission for the development, financial viability and approval of the full business case.	September 2026	
Develop and deliver a business support programme based at the Plaza to help District businesses start, grow and increase productivity, especially in key sectors		
25 memberships have been offered out of 40 to the end of the third quarter. An influx of enquiries have been received over the Christmas period, enquiring about the scheme, following an advert placed in the Council's section of the Braintree and Witham Times. In January, the first batch of 3-month interval performance data will be collated from businesses to assess the impact the scheme has made so far for successful applicants.	March 2025	

Actions carried out in partnership with others


Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<p>In partnership with NEEB, deliver a shared prosperity funded programme of support focusing on:</p> <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 		
<p>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.</p> <p>KPIs have improved, jobs created and new businesses have started to record results. The number of businesses receiving support and the number of training courses delivered have significantly performed above the targets for the third quarter. 100 businesses have received non-financial support versus a target of 54, and 15 training courses have been delivered against a target of 1.</p> <p>Active liaison takes place with all five authorities forming the NEEB area to understand their needs, the specific needs of businesses in these areas and to support events, campaigns, awards ceremonies, business weeks etc.</p>	<p>March 2025</p>	<p></p>
<p>Facilitate a series of employer led school visits/workshops to introduce students to new industries and sector course pathways</p>		
<p>Work is currently ongoing with Braintree College and all secondary schools to deliver an Apprenticeship Fair in February 2024. This will showcase Braintree District employer and training provider apprenticeship schemes across a variety of sectors. Transportation will be funded for all Year 10 students from all the secondary schools throughout the day to enable this activity to take place.</p>	<p>March 2024</p>	<p></p>
<p>Support productivity and prosperity in our rural areas through the allocation of grant funding from the Rural England Prosperity Funding</p>		
<p>Around 30 applications have been assessed and a provisional award made for those which will cover year 1 funding. We are awaiting grant agreements which are currently being processed.</p> <p>Discussions have already begun regarding next year's grant funding.</p>	<p>March 2025</p>	<p></p>

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		
<p>The Commercial team continue to consider and track commercial opportunities for the Council across the district. A part of this work includes considering each service the Council provides against the benchmarks of our competitors to consider opportunities to develop these and ensure that we are offering best value.</p> <p>Consideration is also being given to the resource requirements to increase existing business and explore new business opportunities.</p>	March 2024	
Develop an Asset Management Strategy to implement a more coherent approach to all property interests across the district		
<p>Work continues to progress to determine the best route for revising the current Asset Management Strategy. Draft scope for the new strategy will be confirmed in January with a view to work beginning in quarter four. We have advertised for a Head of Property and Asset Management position, which was put to advert in December.</p>	March 2024	
Consider an operating model for residents and businesses to potentially subscribe to the garden waste collection service		
<p>The operating model for the new service is being reviewed and updated to reflect the total number of subscribers to the service. This review will continue into the new year ahead of the service starting in spring 2024.</p>	March 2024	
Continue to develop our online and digital services to support changes in customer demand and expectations		
<p>The 'My Account' system successfully launched in the third quarter with 1,500 website users signing up in the first two months. These users are now benefitting from auto-completions of personal details within forms, saving of forms to complete later, tracking of submitted forms and progress, notifications, and the ability to subscribe to garden waste collection.</p>	March 2024	
Understand the impacts of the reforms to national planning policy and mainstreaming biodiversity net gain in the planning system		
<p>The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has become an Act, and we are waiting for the changes within the bill to be enacted. Some will come into force two months from the act being made, but many others including the</p>	January 2024	







most significant ones, will require further legislation or responses to consultations that have already been released. Work continues to prepare both Essex Wide and District specific plans for implementation. A revised end date for the project will be reviewed in the fourth quarter when further information is made available.		
Provide fit for purpose car parking machines across our car parks		
The Council has successfully installed 8 new card-only ticket machines into George Yard car park. The requirements for the remaining pay and display car parks are currently being assessed, with work due to complete by April 2024.	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 confirmed that Greater Essex would enter into negotiations with the aim of agreeing a deal by the Autumn Budget Statement on 22 November 2023. Unfortunately a deal has not yet been agreed. The Government remains geared towards devolution, and whilst a deal is still yet to be agreed, the work completed together in Essex has forged strong partnerships and deepened our understanding around what is needed to improve outcomes in an array of policy areas. A new strategic partnership has been established across North Essex along with a commitment to resourcing our collaborative work.	November 2023	
Deliver on the plan for North Essex Authorities to work more closely together on shared priorities and improving resilience		
A single Joint Executive Shared Service Board has been established, allowing Chief Executives and Directors to meet more regularly to work together on key decisions within the shared services programme. Opportunity to collaborate on 'back office' continues to be explored, using examples already in practice as a model, including shared payroll and the North Essex Parking Partnership.	March 2025	
Drive forward Levelling Up for the district including the rural pilot with Essex County Council		
The third and final large scale event was held in November where those in attendance focussed on the five problems identified at the second event. The five problems are: Inadequate Communication & Wrongful Terminology, Lack of Provision of Resources for Milestone Years of Education, Inaccessibility of Information, Engagement, and Difficulty in Accessing Public Services. Attendees discussed and evaluated the ideas and developed the proposals. This work will feed into the next steps.	March 2025	
Review and adopt a new Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex		
Braintree District Council responded to Essex County Council's consultation on the draft Waste Strategy for Essex which closed on 22 November 2023. The County will now review the comments and feedback, and discuss any amendments to the strategy with all the Essex authorities, before a final draft is put forward for Cabinet approval and adoption in the second half of 2024/25. This project is on track at the end of the third quarter. The end date will be revised in the fourth quarter to align with the date of the cabinet meeting at which the strategy is presented.	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	162		63		
Cumulative number of homes granted planning permission (outline and full)	119	173	253		597		<i>Please note: Q1 figures have been revised. As a result, Q2 figures have also been adjusted. The submission of application and therefore the rate of applications granted remains unpredictable. We remain confident that several housing applications will be determined over the course of quarter 4 that will bring the number of homes granted permission closer to the annual target for this year, however it may not be reached given changes in the market caused by cost-of-living issues. Also, the anticipated submission of some large applications to the Council have not yet been received.</i>
ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT							
Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting	54.14%	53.88%	46.87%		60%		<i>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. Total tonnage of recycling collected in the third quarter was lower than in the second quarter by 2,088 tons (25%). This is due to the suspension of garden waste collections during the winter, which has led to a lower percentage of recycling compared to previous quarters and target.</i>
Kilograms of residual household waste collected per household	108kgs	108kgs	101kgs		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% (236)		100%		
Number of residents assisted in installing energy saving measures	Annually reported						
SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES							
Percentage of Disabled Facilities Grants approved within timescale	95.35%	100%	94.64%		80%		<i>Please note: Quarter 1 figures have been revised</i>

Performance Indicator	2023/24						Comments
	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	Target for the Quarter	Status at the end of the Quarter	
Participation levels across all our sports centres	177,126	204,842	168,300		137,154		
Participation of adults being active for 150 minutes per week	Annually reported						
Number of measures carried out through the Handyman scheme	79	69	84		n/a	n/a	
Number of homelessness cases prevented	54	67	50		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%	2.9%		n/a	n/a	
Number of new business start-ups across the district	271	269	258		n/a	n/a	
Number of businesses that have contacted us for business support	63	102	91		n/a	n/a	
DELIVERING AND INNOVATING							
Percentage of calls resolved at first point of contact in the Customer Service Centre	64%	60%	56%		70%		<i>The Customer Services Team dealt with 11,883 calls out of 21,268 calls at first point of contact. In the third 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, Environmental Services, and Council tax enquiries.</i>
Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days of receipt	98.50%	98.60%	98.28%		97%		
Number of people transacting with us online	33,995	55,634	41,222		n/a	n/a	
Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit new claims	17.13 days	16.31 days	15.47 days		18 days		
Time taken to process housing benefit claim changes	2.89 days	2.69 days	2.54 days		5 days		
Percentage of Stage 1 complaints responded to within 7 working days	88.61%	94.74%	91.96%		90%		
Collection rate for Council Tax	30.50%	58.24%	83.81%		84.23%		<i>Our council tax collection target is ambitious in the current economic climate, in that we aim to out-perform</i>

Performance Indicator	2023/24						Comments
	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	Target for the Quarter	Status at the end of the Quarter	
							<i>the previous year. This result is only a minor deviation from target, and we continue to work to bring this back on track.</i>
Collection rate for Business Rates	30.12%	55.37%	82.9%		82.26%		

Complaints

The quarterly complaints analysis for the third 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)	56 (45)	(57)	(229)
Not Justified	23 (61)	40 (65)	35 (32)	(39)	(197)
Partially Justified	13 (27)	17 (15)	20 (28)	(29)	(99)
Not known	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1)	(0)	(1)
Total	79 (128)	152 (167)	112 (108)	(125)	(526)

Comments

The third quarter saw a decrease in complaint volumes when compared to the second quarter (-40), and a slight increase compared to last year (+4).

The majority of complaints related to operations(101), focusing on missed bin collections. Four complaints related to Customer Services, four related to Finance, one to Planning and one to Housing. One complaint progressed to stage two which related to car parking. No complaints were escalated to stage three.

Cumulatively the Council has received less complaints this year compared to the same period last year (334 vs 403, a 17% reduction).

A summary of Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases:

In the third quarter there have been no complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman.

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	502		+ 13	-
Total staff FTE	435.98	444.29	457.18		+ 12.89	-
Level of employee turnover	3.94%	1.84%	1.99%		+ 0.15	-
Number of leavers	19	9	10		+ 1	-
Number of starters	15	16	23		+ 7	-
Working days lost to sickness per employee*	1.34 days	1.73 days	5.87 days*		-	8.0 days
Percentage of staff with nil sickness	84.56%	68.30%	55.18%		Cumulative	-
Number of learning hours	1078	617	751		+ 134	-
Number of delegates	200	235	347		+ 112	-
Number of apprentices **	19	20	20		-	-

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

* From the third quarter, the council has moved to reporting working days lost to sickness on a rolling 12 month basis, to allow a more meaningful comparison going forward.

** 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	
	<i>(2022/23 figure in brackets)</i>				
Total number of reported accidents/ incidents, calculated from:	13 (13)	22 (5)	12 (15)	(13)	
<i>Accidents/ incidents to employees</i>	12 (12)	22 (5)	9 (15)	(13)	<i>Trapped finger between bin and tail whilst moving bin, slipped on pallet, injured hand whilst moving bin as bin was broken and hurt finger, injuring back as explained below, cut knee with hedge cutter, walked into a sign, slipped whilst pushing leaves, 2 verbal incidents as explained below.</i>
<i>Accidents/ incidents to contractors</i>	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	(0)	
<i>Accidents/ incidents to non-employees</i>	1 (1)	0 (0)	3 (0)	(0)	<i>Councillor slipped down stairs. Same person on 2 separate occasions threatened to commit suicide.</i>
Time lost in days due to employee accidents/ incidents	14 (37)	9 (35)	45 (16)	(1)	<i>RIDDOR- in storage cupboard objects fell and to protect themselves, turned fast to push away and injured back. Continued to work until later on in the day until realising they couldn't continue, this was for 38 days. The accident for slipping over on leaves was 7 days.</i>
Number of reported verbal/ physical incidents to employees	1 (3)	4 (2)	2 (1)	(5)	<i>Verbal abuse over the phone, gesture from member of public was physical using the gun gesture to staff.</i>
Number of near miss incidents	2 (1)	1 (1)	0 (2)	(0)	
Number of Accidents/ incidents registered resulting in insurance/ compensation claim	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (0)	(0)	
Number of claims settled	0 (4)	1 (0)	3 (1)	(1)	

Financial Performance -Third quarter and end of year projection:

Background

Full Council agreed a net budget of £17.6m. During the year budgets may be updated in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure.

On 11 December 2023, Full Council approved a budget transfer of up to £600k between Treasury Management income and all service staffing budgets to offset the in-year additional cost of the April 2023 pay award settlement. Full Council also approved the allocation of up to £300k for the Council's own legal costs relating to appeals against the use of the former Wethersfield air base for an asylum centre, costs to be met from general balances. Costs awarded against the Council would be additional to the agreed spend limit.

General Fund Revenue Spending

The table below shows the projected outturn for the year by service as forecast at the end of Q3.

Business Plan Service	Updated Budget £'000	Forecast Spend for the year £'000	Previous Variance £'000	Current Forecast Variance £'000	Current Forecast RAG Status
Asset Management	(2,810)	(2,349)	420	461	R
Community & Leisure	798	870	54	72	R
Corporate Management Plan	1,635	1,655	(6)	20	A
Economic Development	237	149	(117)	(88)	G
Environment	944	1,025	110	81	R
Finance	734	(497)	(1,375)	(1,142)	G
Governance	1,325	1,303	(18)	(22)	G
Housing Services	958	963	2	5	A
ICT & Facilities	2,045	1,898	(78)	(147)	G
Marketing & Communications	653	669	23	16	A
People & Performance	1,027	1,006	(17)	(21)	G
Operations	7,489	7,262	(104)	(227)	G
Strategic Investment	36	29	(14)	(7)	G
Sustainable Development	1,500	1,447	253	122	R
Service Plan Total	16,571	15,430	(867)	(877)	G
Corporate Financing	1,496	1,064	(393)	(432)	G
Wethersfield Legal Challenge	-	390	235	390	
Est. Impact of Proposed Pay Award	-	-	606	-	
Efficiency Savings Target	(425)	-	425	425	
Net Total	17,642	17,148	6	(494)	G

RAG Status: G = favourable or zero variance, A = up to 5% adverse variance or <£50k, R = > 5%

General Note:

- **Staffing Changes** - projections are based on known changes at the end of Q3 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.
- **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 budget due to in-year staffing changes; and fees & charges income has overachieved budgets.
- **Wethersfield Legal Challenge** – includes an estimated £300k for the Council's own legal costs and £90k for awarded costs which are still to be confirmed.

The table below breakdowns the forecast variance:

Business Plan Service	Salaries			Other Expenditure			Gross Income		
	Updated Budget	Forecast Spend for the Year	Projected Variance	Updated Budget	Forecast Spend for the Year	Projected Variance	Updated Budget	Forecast Spend for the Year	Projected Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Asset Management	594	516	(78)	1,098	1,421	323	(4,502)	(4,286)	216
Community & Leisure	771	771	0	608	640	32	(582)	(542)	40
Corporate Management	1,773	1,765	(8)	98	126	28	(237)	(237)	0
Economic Development	365	307	(58)	(128)	(158)	(30)	0	0	0
Environment	1,786	1,926	140	115	126	11	(957)	(1,027)	(70)
Finance	2,669	2,616	(53)	29,219	29,365	146	(31,153)	(32,388)	(1,235)
Governance	845	702	(143)	743	762	19	(264)	(162)	102
Housing Services	1,367	1,368	1	157	163	6	(567)	(569)	(2)
ICT & Facilities	1,012	960	(52)	1,037	942	(95)	(4)	(4)	0
Marketing & Communications	543	530	(13)	275	308	33	(165)	(169)	(4)
People & Performance	941	920	(21)	87	87	0	0	0	0
Operations	7,327	7,255	(72)	6,374	6,522	148	(6,211)	(6,514)	(303)
Strategic Investment	248	311	63	(148)	(148)	0	(64)	(134)	(70)
Sustainable Development	2,800	2,560	(240)	411	520	109	(1,711)	(1,458)	253
Service Plan Total	23,041	22,507	(534)	39,946	40,676	730	(46,417)	(47,490)	(1,073)
Corporate Financing	602	634	32	2,703	2,560	(143)	(1,809)	(2,130)	(321)
Wethersfield Legal Challenge	-	-	-	-	390	390	-	-	-
Efficiency Savings Target	(300)	-	300	-	-	-	(125)	-	125
Net Total	23,343	23,141	(202)	42,649	43,626	977	(48,351)	(49,620)	(1,269)

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

Asset Management

- Higher cost of interim management arrangements and additional surveyor to complete outstanding rent reviews (+£116k).
- H120 Business Park – estate management expenditure (+£54k).
- Victoria Square – additional site operating costs (+£124k) 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 (+£64k).
- Net underspend on the plaza (-£23k) primarily due to staffing underspends (-£194k) which offsets lower income from the Hatchery and Makerspace compared to the original business plan (+£154k).
- Causeway House - £31k of reduced income due to un-let vacant space. Cost in relation to PARC building in order to bring back the property into reasonable condition for re-occupation (+£16k)
- Additional cost of Industrial sites from back-dated rents paid for industrial units that are sub-let (+£41k), higher running costs including utilities and business rates across the property portfolio (+£62k), Net increase in rental income from industrial units following rent reviews negated by vacant units (-£34k)

Community and Leisure

- Casual bookings at the Town Hall lower than forecast (+£42k) partly due to groups diverting to other venues. This is partially offset by an increase in wedding income (-£20k).
- Extra cost on interim strategic leisure management (£47k)

Economic Development

- Economic Development is part funded from reserves. The budget assumed £208k reserve drawdown and the latest forecast position is £88k. The difference is reflected in a movement in earmarked reserves shown under corporate financing. Variance due to change in assumptions on when staffing posts will be occupied (-£58k) and reduction in other expenditure (-£30k).

Environment

- Building Control net additional agency staff costs incurred due to difficulties in recruitment combined with continuing high service demand (+£189k), partially offset by additional income generated from a new fees and charges schedule introduced for non-statutory ancillary building control services (-£53k).
- Net underspend from vacancies within Environmental Protection and Carbon Management Unit (-£48k)

Finance

- Net underspend on employee costs due to vacancies, reduced hours and staffing starting at lower scale points than budget (-£52k).
- Local tax and housing benefit cost recoveries are lower than budget reflecting recent outturns (+£91k). The cost-of-living is considered to be impacting 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 (+£72k) – due to an increasing number of claimants in temporary/ bed & breakfast type accommodation 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 net of cost of provision for S106 contributions (-£1.2m). The variance is against the updated budget after the virement approved by Full Council.

Governance

- Difficulties with recruitment in legal services has led to underspends in the first half of the year (-£147k), partially offset by extra costs incurred via the Local Legal Partnership (LLP) where capacity has been provided (+£26k). 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 (+£85k) which reflects the slowdown in housing activity; however, this is partially offset from extra income from commercial searches and a reduction in payments to ECC (-£24k) for their input to searches.

ICT & Facilities

- Corporate ICT systems maintenance (-£54k) and staffing variances (-£51k).
- Causeway House maintenance is projected be overspent (+£42k) whilst energy costs are forecast to be lower than budget (-£84k).

Operations

- Net saving projected on staffing costs due to vacancies (Net -£72k).
- 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; lower costs in relation to Bartec in-cab system, offset by additional vehicle hire and maintenance costs. (Net +£133k)
- Other expenditure variances across Operations (+£30k) include: provision for additional dilapidation costs at Unit 4 (£26k); and lower revenue impact of the replacement of recycling caddies (-£25k); and non-achievement of saving from transfer of community assets (£29k).
- 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 higher than allowed in the budget. (-£62k)
- Increase in income due to higher demand for the bulky waste collection service (-£50k)
- ECC recycling credits are lower due to reduced tonnage being collected (+£101k).
- Increase in waste management income under the Inter-Authority Agreement from ECC (-£80k) due to annual inflationary adjustment from ECC.
- Income from Interments and other related income is higher partially offset by increased costs (-£42k)
- Horticultural & Plant Workshop additional income (-£36k) from external contracts following a re-pricing exercise.
- Green Waste Charging net income from the new subscription service which starts in early March 2024 (-£81k)
- Car parking income net variance (-£50k) reflecting usage continuing to improve with income around 7.5% higher than the same period last year, offsetting the delay in the implementation of the new parking tariffs. Running and maintenance costs are higher including the statutory Parking Order (£48k)

Sustainable Development

- Staffing variance due to current vacancies within the service in relation to the enforcement roles (+£153k)
- Additional costs from external contractors and ECC to cover staff shortages in Landscape services, consultancy, and reactive tree maintenance (+£104k) negated by vacancies within the service (-£67k)
- Overall, planning income is forecast to underachieve by £260k. A shortfall of planning application income is forecast (+£345k) after making allowance for the recent uplift in statutory fees by government. Several major applications are expected to be received for which some allowance has been made; and if all are received in the current year this would improve the position for quarter 4. Planning Performance Agreement income is projected to exceed budget by (-£140k), partially offset by lower Pre-application income (+£60k). Application income can be variable, and a small number of major applications can have a material impact.

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 originally assumed. The net variance is offset by a reduction in use of reserves shown under corporate financing.

Corporate Financing

- Council Tax sharing agreement – Council Tax collection performance for the Council and across other Essex authorities over Quarter 3 results in a forecast for the year that is better than baseline leading to an increase in share-back from preceptors (-£360k). The position is subject to collection performance achieved in quarter 4.
- Staff time charged to capital projects from service project managers is expected to be less than the budget allows based on recent quarter timesheet information (+£40k).
- 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 £13.6m (excluding prior year spend) of which £6.9m is profiled into the current year:

	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	200	301	-145	0	156
Horizon 120 - The Plaza	282	0	282	-112	-107	63
Manor Street regeneration	142	0	142	-48	-62	32
Witham Community Centre	200	10	190	-150	0	40
Town Centre improvements	619	29	590	-555	0	35
Industrial estate improvements	46	22	24	0	0	24
Property planned maintenance	473	313	160	0	-2	158
Information technology systems & equipment	630	288	342	-185	-7	150
Community facilities, play areas, parks & open spaces	996	479	517	-323	0	195
Cemetery improvements	95	91	5	0	0	5
Paths, cycleways, and other infrastructure	77	39	38	0	0	38
Operational equipment	486	173	314	-95	-30	188
Sports and leisure facilities improvements	342	21	321	-321	0	0
Climate change initiatives	101	0	101	49	0	150
Shared / Rural Prosperity Fund	180	20	160	-147	0	13
Housing renovation & disabled facilities grants	1,427	1,122	306	0	0	306
Capital salaries	351	282	69	0	-15	54
Total	6,948	3,087	3,861	-2,032	-223	1,607

Changes to programme since last report

- The profiled spend has increased by £134k from that reported at the previous quarter due to the approval of an additional £100k to the budget for infrastructure works at the Lakes depot for electric vehicles.
- £2m programme slippage has currently been identified which is now anticipated to be spent in 24/25. The budget for climate change initiatives has been reprofiled as per comment above giving a higher expected spend in the current year.
- There is currently a projected underspend in the programme totalling £223k.

Programme risks

- Horizon 120 serviced land plot sales are still to be completed, and surveying work is being undertaken on the options and potential cost of removing excess soil from the H120 site.
- Construction inflation and other pricing risk on projects including Witham community facility.

Capital resources generated

- Eastlight Agreements: Right-to-Buy sales – only 4 sales have been completed by the end of the third quarter generating £376k. A further 12 applications are in progress; however, with the higher interest rates, together with wider economic uncertainty, sales have slowed down. Receipts from the VAT shelter total £259k.
- Better Care Funding of £1.15m received which funds the disabled facilities grants programme.
- The Council was allocated £33k & £148k of capital grants for its Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural Prosperity Fund investment plan, respectively.
- Additional funding of £642k has been received from SELEP for the Horizon 120 Plaza building – as funding is conditional this has been applied to reduce the overall borrowing requirement on this project.
- Other minor receipts totalling £87k.

Treasury Management

Investment activity

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

Amount Invested at start of the year	Activity for the year		Amount Invested at end of December
	New Investments	Investments Matured	
£47.1m	£104m	£82.0m	£69.1m
Average amount invested for the year to date			£69.1m
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 £758k and interest on short-term investments was £1.835m, a total of £2.505m, or an annualised return of 4.83%.

The market value of shares and units in long-term pooled funds at the end of the quarter was £21.1m, representing an unrealised gain of £2.1m 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	(321)
Forecast variance	494
Sub-total Net Budget Variance	(471)
Est. Balance at 31 March 2024	7,622

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 projected budget variance for the year is a positive variance of £494k.