



Our plans for the District in 2014/15

Welcome to Braintree District Council's Plan for 2014/15

I am pleased to present to you the key priorities for the Council over the next year. We are an ambitious Council and our aim is to ensure that the district is a good place to live, work and do business. We have aligned our budget and resources to support the delivery of these priorities and projects.

We set ourselves a £1.5million savings target over the next two years in response to ongoing reductions in government funding. We have met this challenge head on with significant savings achieved this year. Frontline services have not been cut and at the same time, we have reduced council tax for a second consecutive year. This is the fourth consecutive year where council tax levels have been frozen or reduced.

As well as ensuring we provide good value for money to our hard working taxpayers, we continue to invest in the district. For example, this year we will see the opening of the £9.5million new leisure centre in Witham; the building of 100 new affordable homes and the launch of the new Local Authority Mortgage scheme to help people get on the housing ladder for the first time; investment in our Green Heart pledge to keep the district clean and green in town centres and on rural roads; investment in play areas and our other leisure centres to improve facilities for all; support for new business start-ups and apprenticeships for young people; investment in our car parks and the continuation of the successful '10p after 3pm' car parking initiative to support town centres; investment in waste and recycling services to householders and businesses; and the purchase of new community transport buses to ensure this service remains reliable for our most vulnerable residents.

We have not used the new homes bonus funding from government to 'prop up' our budget, but instead we are working on plans to invest this money in major projects that will boost the local economy, create new jobs and improve the district's infrastructure such as roads and better broadband.

We are now entering the third year of our four year Corporate Strategy and this plan also outlines our achievements last year. Our priorities remain focused on our key themes of Place, People, Prosperity, Performance and Partnership.

Councillor Graham Butland
Leader of Braintree District Council

Nicola Beach
Chief Executive

PLACE

Our Priorities are to:

Keep our District clean and tidy
Protect our environment
Provide green space for everyone to enjoy

In 2013/14 we have:

More than doubled the number of businesses who receive a trade waste recycling service, with 172 businesses signed up so far.

Improved the cleanliness of town centres through a targeted campaign.

Reduced litter by 55% across the district through an education campaign supported by proactive enforcement.

Planted mature trees at Weavers Park, Bramble Road and Bradford Meadows to improve our parks and open spaces.

Contributed to the Halstead Town Partnership that resulted in “Halstead in Bloom” being named as the overall winner in Anglia in Bloom 2013 and best in Town category in the Britain in Bloom competition.

Completed a door-stepping campaign to raise awareness of recycling and food waste collection services which resulted in a 4% increase in participation.

In partnership with Greenfields Community Housing, built a new play area at Oxford Meadow, Sible Hedingham and refurbished two new play areas at Panners Pond, Great Notley and Templars, Witham.

Achieved a total of 27 awards for play areas from Essex Playing Field Association including 16 gold, 8 silver awards for the standard and quality of the Council's play areas. Achieved best in class win for Mill Chase, Halstead and runner up class awards for King George V Playing fields, Halstead and Hilly Bunnies Play Area, Earls Colne.

In 2014/15 we will:

Maintain cleanliness standards across the Braintree District by:

- Continuing a 7 day cleaning programme in the town centres, including the use of beat barrows to litter pick and regular mechanical sweeping;
- Maintain a programme of mechanical sweeping in rural areas on a quarterly basis;
- Continue to encourage the ‘See it Report it’ initiative to take action against litterbugs.

Join forces with all Essex Local Authorities to deliver an Essex wide litter campaign to reduce litter by 50%.

Introduce a further recycling door-stepping campaign to offer residents practical advice and guidance to help them recycle more, with the aim of diverting an extra 400 tonnes of recyclable waste from landfill.

Introduce new household and commercial refuse and recycling routes including extending the commercial waste recycling service to support local businesses, particularly in rural areas, and improve customer service across the District from February 2015.

Commence a three year car park improvement plan, including introducing cashless/flexible payments, resurfacing & redecoration works, new bay markings and improving disability bays and access to blue badge holders.

Complete the extension of Bocking Cemetery and increase the space available for burials and cremated remains at Braintree Cemetery.

Create new allotments at Church Lane Braintree to increase the number of plots available that can be self-managed by an Allotment Association.

Update the Council's commitment to climate change, by addressing the wider issues of carbon emissions, energy usage, and fuel poverty by producing a new Climate local strategy and delivering its associated action plan, which will also focus on building resilience against the impacts of climate change across the district.

Develop and maintain a collective energy switching scheme to help reduce residents' energy bills.

Complete the installation of Solar panels on the roofs of the Braintree Swim and Halstead Leisure Centres.

Develop a District-wide Local Heritage List to enable the community to nominate buildings of local architectural interest.

PEOPLE

Our Priorities are to:

Support vulnerable people in our community
 Promote safe and healthy living
 Encourage flourishing communities

In 2013/14 we have:

Constructed over 0.3km of new footway/cycle path in the District.

Completed the refurbishments and gym extension at Braintree & Halstead Leisure Centres on time. Construction of Witham Leisure Centre started and to date has delivered to timetable and within budget.

Set up a successful Community Sports Partnership through the Active Braintree District Network to improve sporting activities across the District.

Supported the development of 10 Community Led Plans including: 1 Neighbourhood Plan, 4 Parish Plans, 1 Town Estate Plan (Braintree East), 4 Village Design Statements.

Invested £124,234 in 11 community projects through the Mi community Scheme

Launched the Keep Safe scheme for older people in August 2013 and had 1,443 people signed up to carry Keep Safe Cards by December 2013.

Provided 59,740 passenger journeys for vulnerable people within the Braintree District through Community Transport.

Started a domestic abuse pilot scheme (one of two in the county), to raise awareness and identify and help potential victims as appropriate

Supported our customers through the welfare reform changes, providing advice and guidance to help them adjust to the changes.

Adapted over 100 homes in the District to enable disabled occupants to remain living in their own home.

In 2014/15 we will:

Complete the transfer of the Allotment, Public Convenience and Car Park to Earls Colne Parish Council and the rural car parks at Coggeshall and Hatfield Peverel to the Parish Councils.

Work in partnership with Braintree District Museum Trust Ltd to complete a feasibility study into options for the future operation of Braintree District Museum, Braintree Town Hall and the Warner Textile Archive.

Increase the number of visits to our Leisure Facilities by 2% over the next year.

Work with the tour organisers and Essex County Council to make the 3rd stage of the Tour de France a success in our District in July 2014

Open the new Witham Leisure Centre in summer 2014.

Set up a Braintree Health & Wellbeing Panel along with our partners in the NHS and Greenfields Housing Association, to work towards reducing overall health inequalities in the District and tackling the two major public health issues affecting the District : adult obesity and hip fractures in the over 65's.

Coordinate the work of partners to develop the Our Witham project, improving the health and wellbeing, employment and skills outcomes in the Witham area of young people

Refurbish 4 play areas across the District – King George V Playing Field Braintree, Fisher Field, Braintree, Glebe Avenue, Braintree and Church St, Bocking and create a new one at Windsor Close Witham.

Develop a new Housing Strategy for the Braintree District for 2014 to 2019 to ensure that resources are directed to meet the housing needs of the District.

PROSPERITY

Our Priorities are to:

Increase job prospects and support business
Promote and improve our town centres
Secure appropriate infrastructure and housing growth

In 2013/14 we have:

Launched the 2013/2026 District Economic Development Prospectus setting out key priorities to create the conditions for economic growth.

Started work on the expansion of the IGNITE Enterprise Centre at Springwood Drive, Braintree, and worked with IGNITE to create 50 new businesses.

Reviewed our business rates and developed a discretionary business rate relief scheme to support inward investment and business expansion.

Provided training and work experience for young people through the Green Team Programme.

Reduced congestion and improved access to Braintree town centre through improvements to the South Street/Fairfield Road junction.

Supported the "Town Teams" to improve our town centres in Braintree, Halstead and Witham.

In 2014/15 we will:

Complete 100 new affordable homes across the District working with Housing Association partners.

Offer up to 50 mortgages to residents under the Local Authority Mortgage scheme to help first time buyers onto the housing ladder

Publish an Investment Prospectus promoting the District's strengths as a business location and marketing the Prospectus to attract inward investment and create business and jobs growth.

Work in partnership with IGNITE Business Enterprise to provide 75 new business start-ups in the District through the provision and management of business start-up space and the provision of business advice, training and support.

Produce a guide to broadband for District businesses and promoting the guide to businesses to enable them to make informed choices in purchasing broadband and improve their competitiveness.

Establish a District Business Leaders Board, to engage effectively with strategic businesses and hold an annual business conference in partnership with the Board and IGNITE Business Enterprise.

Appoint a Business Liaison Manager to improve access for businesses to Council services and ensure that those services are 'business friendly'

Enhance our town centres, increase footfall and the economic viability by:

- Continuing the '10p after 3pm' car parking initiative
- Offering parking at a flat rate evening charge to support the night time economy
- Completing improvement works to St Michaels fountain in Braintree

Generate vocational training opportunities, improving basic skills levels for young people across the district by:

- Developing a programme of work experience placement at Braintree District Council
- Continuing our corporate apprenticeship programme
- Delivering a business apprenticeship support campaign for 30 apprenticeship placements with 25 businesses across the district

PERFORMANCE

Our Priorities are to:

Provide value for money
Deliver excellent customer service
Improve access to our services for all

In 2013/14 we have:

Increased satisfaction and reduced cost of the refuse and recycling service.

Carried out a review of off-street parking and produced a strategy to implement a 3 year action plan for 2014/17.

Implemented an improved search module to access planning and licensing applications and supporting information. This also provides the ability to comment on applications.

Achieved the Customer Service Excellence Standard for key front line services, supporting our ongoing priority to deliver excellent customer service.

Achieved high customer satisfaction levels for a number of our key services, including:

- Environment service;
- Planning;
- Cemeteries;
- Waste;
- Licensing;
- Customer Services.

Delivered a balanced budget for 2014/15, with reduced funding from central government, and with no cuts to services

In 2014/15 we will:

Reduce Council Tax by 1% with a desire to freeze or reduce again in 2015/16.

Deliver a balanced budget over the next four years by continuing to review how we deliver and commission services and focussing our resources on what is important to our customers.

Use a range of new technology to improve the way we deliver services and to make our services easier to access for our customers.

Maintain high levels of customer satisfaction, seeking feedback from our customers to identify where we can improve services.

Review our investment strategy to maximise income.

Improve the operational efficiency of the waste collection service and reduce costs by £200,000 per year.

PARTNERSHIP

The majority of our services and improvements are provided in partnership with others, whether it is with community groups, voluntary organisations, public sector or private sector organisations.

Over the next twelve months, some of our key priorities will be delivered in partnership.

These include:

Economic Growth and Infrastructure - engage with key partners such as local business leaders, Haven Gateway Partnership, South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Essex County Council, other district authorities and Stansted Airport to continue to drive forward economic growth and infrastructure improvements in the District and surrounding area, such as high speed broadband, A120 improvements, better rail services and create new jobs.

Health Improvements – engage with key partners (e.g. Essex County Council, Mid-Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS England and local GP surgeries) to support the integration of health and social care and improvements to local health services to deliver better outcomes for residents.

Young people, skills and education – work with key partners to influence change and improvement to the educational attainment and aspiration of young people in the District, including the promotion of apprenticeships, partnership with businesses and boosting employability skills.

Parishes - continue to support parish and town councils to deliver better outcomes for their residents through close working with the Rural Community Council for Essex.

MEASURING SUCCESS

In addition to the projects and actions described in this annual plan we also measure these indicators which focus on some of our broader priorities

Description	Target	Estimated Outturn	Target
	2013/ 2014	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015
Place			
The percentage of land that falls below cleanliness standards for litter	8%	3%	7%
Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting	60%	56.70%	60%
The percentage of accessible non-hazardous fly tips on public land cleared within 24 hours of being reported	100%	100%	100%
Public satisfaction with parks and open spaces	86%	82%	88%
People			
Total number of visits to our leisure facilities	Establish Baseline	842,510	2% increase
Number of visitors to our leisure facilities from under-represented groups	Establish Baseline	638,239	2% increase
Number of passenger journeys on the Community Transport Scheme	59,740	59,745	60,000
Number of Mi Community projects successfully completed	100%	100%	100%
Prosperity			
Number of empty homes in the district returned to use	55	79	75
Number of affordable homes delivered	58	96	100
Number of new business start-ups in the District created in partnership with Ignite Business	120	120	75

Description	Target	Estimated Outturn	Target
	2013/ 2014	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015
Performance			
Percentage of enquiries resolved at first point of contact within the Customer Service Centre	85%	85%	85%
Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit new claims	18 days	18 days	18 days
Time taken to process housing benefit claim changes	6 days	6 days	6 days
Processing of minor planning applications within eight weeks	72%	72%	72%
Percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to within target	90%	90%	90%
Collection rate for	98%	97.5%	98%
• Council Tax	98.5%	98.0%	98.5%
• Business Rates			

COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK

We always welcome comments, suggestions and feedback (critical or otherwise) on our plans and improvements and in the way that we write our documents and communicate them.

- You can e-mail our Customer Service Centre at csc@braintree.gov.uk.
- You can drop written comments off at one of our main offices:
Braintree – Causeway House, Halstead Library or Witham Library
- You can telephone our Customer Service Centre on 01376 552525.
- You can speak to your local Councillor who will be able to pass your comments back if you wish. Details of how to contact your local Councillor can be found on our website: www.braintree.gov.uk