

Minutes

Council Meeting



21st February 2022

These Minutes principally record decisions taken and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions. An audio recording of the meeting is available for six months at www.braintree.gov.uk

Present:

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Councillor J Abbott	Yes	Councillor Mrs J Pell	Yes
Councillor J Baugh	Yes	Councillor I Pritchard	Yes
Councillor Mrs J Beavis	Yes	Councillor M Radley	Yes
Councillor K Bowers	Yes	Councillor S Rehman	Yes
Councillor G Butland	Yes	Councillor F Ricci	Apologies
Councillor J Coleridge	Yes	Councillor B Rose	Yes
Councillor G Courtauld	Yes	Councillor Mrs J Sandum	Apologies
Councillor Mrs M Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Miss V Santomauro	No
Councillor T Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Mrs W Scattergood	Yes
Councillor Mrs C Dervish	Yes	Councillor Mrs W Schmitt	Yes
Councillor P Euesden	Yes	Councillor P Schwier	Yes
Councillor T Everard	Yes	Councillor Mrs G Spray	Yes
Councillor Mrs D Garrod	Yes	Councillor P Tattersley	Yes
Councillor A Hensman (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Councillor P Thorogood	Yes
Councillor S Hicks	Yes	Councillor N Unsworth	Apologies
Councillor P Horner	Yes	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
Councillor D Hume	Yes	Councillor D Wallace	Yes
Councillor H Johnson	Apologies	Councillor T Walsh	Yes
Councillor Mrs A Kilmartin	Yes	Councillor Mrs L Walters	Yes
Councillor W Korsinah	Yes	Councillor Miss M Weeks	Yes
Councillor D Mann	Yes	Councillor D White	No
Councillor T McArdle	Yes	Councillor Mrs S Wilson (Chairman)	Yes
Councillor J McKee	Yes	Councillor J Wrench	Yes
Councillor A Munday	Yes	Councillor B Wright	Yes
Councillor Mrs I Parker	Yes		

Councillor Mrs S Wilson, Chairman of the Council welcomed everyone to the Council meeting. The Chairman was also pleased to welcome Ms Suzanne Bennett, new Corporate Director. The meeting was being held in a 'hybrid' format in the Council Chamber at Causeway House in order to minimise any risk posed to the safety of those in attendance 'in person.' A period of

three hours would be allowed for this meeting. Members attending the meeting remotely were allowed to participate in the meeting but would not be permitted to vote on any items on the agenda.

The following Councillors were in attendance at the meeting remotely: Councillor K Bowers, Councillor P Euesden, Councillor D Hume, Councillor J McKee and Councillor W Scattergood.

63 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:-

On behalf of the Green and Independent Group, Councillor J Abbott declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 4, 'Public Question Time' as the speaker, Mr M Staines, was a colleague of the Group.

Councillor Mrs J Pell declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Council Budget and Council Tax 2022/2023 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26' as a member of a charity that was due to receive funds from the Budget.

Councillors remained in the meeting, unless stated otherwise and took part in the debate and decision when the Items were considered.

64 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 13th December 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

65 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were four statements made, as follows:-

The first statement was made by Mr Alan MacKenzie and related to predetermination in Planning in respect of the Wethersfield Mega Prisons Proposal.

The second statement was made by Mrs Beverley Ault and related to the cultural heritage of the North Essex Countryside and the impact of the Wethersfield Mega Prisons Proposal.

The third statement was made by Mr Mark Ault and related to correspondence within the Council and Councillors' correspondence with the MOJ regarding the Wethersfield Mega Prisons Proposal.

The fourth statement was made by Mr Michael Staines and included a question in three parts which related to the re-use of the Wethersfield Airfield Site and the Members' Forum.

In response to the statements made, Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, implored residents who felt that there had been misconduct by Councillors to report this to the Monitoring Officer. In respect of the development of the Members' Forum, this was being worked on by Councillor Mrs Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure and would be reported to the meeting of Full Council in March. In regard

to pre-determination, the Council had yet to receive a planning application in respect of the mega prisons proposal, and any such response by the Council would not be made until this stage. Councillor Butland highlighted that there were views for and against such a proposal, and that one of the major concerns he had revolved around highways access to the site.

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

INFORMATION: The Chairman's announcements covered the following:

Former District Councillor Mr John Finbow

It was with great sadness that the Chairman announced the death of a former District Councillor, John Finbow. Mr Finbow passed away on 10th January 2022 and his funeral was held on 4th February 2022, which was attended by Councillor Mrs Pell. Mr Finbow was elected to the Council in 1987 as representative of the Three Fields Ward and served continuously until 2015, a total of 28 years. Mr Finbow was also Vice-Chairman of the Council in 2004/05 and Chairman of the Council in 2005/06.

Councillor Mrs Pell, Councillor Mann, Councillor Abbott and Councillor Butland were each invited to say a few words in tribute to Mr Finbow, who would be remembered for his sense of humour, his friendly and approachable manner and his dedication to his local community.

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman wished to express her sincere condolences to Mr Finbow's family and all who knew him.

Former District Councillor Mr Michael Haslam

It was with great sadness that the Chairman advised Members of the death of a former District Councillor, Mr Michael Haslam. Mr Haslam passed away on his 91st birthday and his funeral was held on 14th February 2022. Mr Haslam was elected to the Council in 2003 and served one term of office until May 2007.

Councillor Butland and Councillor Mrs Schmitt were both invited to say a few words in tribute to Mr Haslam. As a District Councillor, Mr Haslam was a very conscientious individual who took his role seriously. Similar to Mr J Finbow, Mr Haslam worked very well with all groups of people he came across.

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman wished to express her sincere condolences to Mr Finbow's family and all who knew him.

I-Construct Opening Ceremony

The Chairman was delighted to attend the much anticipated opening of the I-Construct Conference Centre. The fantastic new facility offered advice, one-to-one mentoring and grant support to businesses connected to the construction industry. The Centre's activities would serve businesses across the South East and the hub would be a place where innovative construction ideas, technologies and techniques were shared and celebrated.

Business/Community Visits

The Chairman confirmed that she was continuing with her visits to businesses and community groups across the District. The following visits had taken place since the last meeting of Full Council:

- Witham Hub
- Bar 92, Braintree
- First Stop, Braintree

Engagements

In addition to her business and community groups' tour, the Chairman had also visited:

- Witham Lunch Club
- Visit Father Christmas, Sible Hedingham Railway
- Cressing Parish Council public meeting given by the Fire Service
- HomeStart, Halstead
- The Pride of Tendring Awards Ceremony
- Wassel evening, Big Bear Cider Farm

The Leader's announcements covered the following:

Following the long anticipated publication of the Government's 'Levelling Up' White Paper, Councillor Butland made reference to 'Mission 12' of the Paper, which stipulated that by 2030, every part of England that wanted one would have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified long-term funding settlement. The White Paper also referred to three potential levels of devolution which would coincide with what powers and freedoms would be given to Local Government within those levels.

Councillor Butland explained that he had this afternoon met with all Essex Leaders and Chief Executives across the twelve Districts, City and County Authorities, Essex County Council and the two Unitary Authorities of Southend and Thurrock in order to gather information and exchange ideas as to how the County might wish to take the White Paper forward. There was general agreement that Essex should seek to be ambitious in what it wanted to achieve for the whole of the Greater Essex area, although there was likely to be differing views in terms of what the County should seek to achieve. It was stressed that the County was a 'long way' from the devolution proposed and that there would need to be extensive discussions around the potential opportunities first. It was also highlighted that there did not need to be unanimity amongst all of the Authorities in Essex, and that it was the County Council and two Unitary Authorities who had the 'lead' in any decision making. The Authorities had jointly agreed that Members across all levels of Local Government would receive a briefing on what was in the White Paper to help Leaders gain insight as to the views of their colleagues. It was also agreed that the same presentation would be given to all Authorities in order to ensure there was consistency. Councillor Butland would ensure that this Authority received the presentation at the earliest opportunity.

Finally, Councillor Butland congratulated the East of England Local Government Authority (EELGA) for the composition of their resume of the White Paper, a copy of which he would ensure was circulated to all Members for their reference.

Storm Eunice – 18th February 2022

Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment provided a brief update for Members on the impact that the recent storms had had on the District. Prior to the event, due notice was received from the Met Office about the potential impact of Storm Eunice; in response, a Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) was established. As an organisation, the Council was required to respond to two key issues: the first was the Emergency Planning response, and how the Council supported local communities to help them deal with the impact and aftermath of the storm, and the second was the Council's Business Continuity response, which was concerned with the continuation of services and mitigation of any impacts. The Council took the immediate decision to close the District's Cemeteries, parks where possible and the top floor of the George Yard car park in Braintree. It was decided that the usual Friday refuse collection would go ahead, the collection of which was successful and the Council had since received a number of comments commending the efforts of the refuse crews, although there had also been a number of calls received concerning missing bins. The Marketing and Communications team issued regular messages on all the various forms of media in order to keep members of the public as informed as possible as the situation progressed, and the Customers Services team helped with responding to the huge number of calls that were received, signposting customers to the correct contacts where needed.

As a result of the storm, there were a large number of power cuts across the District; in some areas, these were resolved quickly, whereas in other areas the power cuts lasted much longer, or power initially returned and then cut out again. The Council received a request from UK Power Network to assist with door knocking and welfare support for those who were without power on the vulnerable list. Due to there being a large number of properties who were still without power on the morning of 19th February, it was decided that Rest Centres would be set up in Braintree, Witham and Halstead Leisure Centres in the afternoon and on the following day with Council staff deployed at each centre.

Storm Eunice had caused a great deal of damage across the District, the full extent of which was still being assessed, but work would continue on repairs and clear up. On behalf of all Members, Councillor Mrs Schmitt wished to thank all staff who were involved in the response efforts as they had given up many hours of their weekend to do so whilst working in difficult conditions.

67 **PRESENTATION TO CHRIS FLEETHAM, CORPORATE DIRECTOR**

INFORMATION: The Chairman explained that this evening's meeting of Full Council would mark the last of Mr Chris Fleetham before his retirement.

As a Corporate Director for the Council since 2003, Mr Fleetham would be remembered fondly for his quiet, strong leadership and in helping to develop many of the staff who had worked for him. In particular, Mr Fleetham would be remembered for his development of a strong, resilient Finance team who had successfully managed the

organisation's finances and enabled the Authority to deliver on an ambitious agenda. Mr Fleetham first joined the Authority in 1985 as a group accountant, and it was clear from an early stage that he would progress within the organisation.

The Chairman also wished to pay tribute to Ms Helen Krischock, Head of Human Resources, who was also due to retire. Ms Krischock had worked for the organisation for almost 32 years after joining in 1990.

On behalf of all Members, the Chairman expressed her sincere gratitude to Mr Fleetham and Ms Krischock for their significant contribution to the Authority and wanted to wish them both a happy retirement.

Councillor Butland, Councillor Abbott, Councillor Mrs Pell and Councillor Mann were then invited to say a few words each in farewell. At the end of the speeches, Mr Fleetham was also invited to say a few words in close. In his statement, Mr Fleetham thanked Members for their kind words and spoke fondly of his experiences at the Council over the years and his work with Members.

68 **APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER (S151 OFFICER)**

INFORMATION: Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, was invited to present the report on the appointment of the Council's Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer).

Members were advised that the Local Government Act 1972 required every Local Authority to appoint a suitably qualified responsible officer for the proper administration of its financial affairs (Section 151 Officer). Section 113 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 required that the Officer appointed as the Section 151 Officer must be a member of a specified Accountancy Body. The current Section 151 Officer, Mr Chris Fleetham, Corporate Director, was due to retire on 14th April 2022, with his last working day on 24th February 2022.

Mr Philip Myers was appointed as the Council's Head of Finance on 1st September 2021 and had worked for the Council for 40 years. Mr Myers had been a qualified Accountant since 1991 and had the relevant expertise and experience to carry out the role. Furthermore, since his appointment as Head of Finance, he had been shadowing the current Section 151 Officer in the execution of those statutory duties within the role.

DECISION: That Philip Myers, Head of Financial Services, be appointed as Braintree District Council's (the Council's) Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) with effect from the 22nd February 2022, and; Authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make any consequential amendments to the Constitution to reflect this appointment.

REASON FOR DECISION: To appoint the Council's Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) in accordance with statutory provisions and the Council's Constitution.

69 **PROCESS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS 2023/24 TO 2027/28**

INFORMATION: Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation, was invited to present the report on the appointment of the external auditor. Prior to this, Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, moved the report as Councillor McKee was in attendance at the meeting remotely.

Members were advised that the current Auditor appointment arrangements covered the period up to and including the audit of the 2022/23 accounts. Under the Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ("the Act"), the Council was required to appoint an auditor to audit its accounts for each financial year. The Council opted into the 'appointing person' national auditor appointment arrangements established by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) for the period covering the accounts for 2018/19 to 2022/23. The PSAA was now undertaking a procurement for the next appointing period, covering audits for 2023/24 to 2027/28.

The Council therefore had three options:-

1. To appoint its own Auditor, which required it to follow the procedure set out in the Act;
2. To act jointly with other authorities to procure an Auditor following the procedures in the Act, and;
3. To opt in to the national auditor appointment scheme administered by a body designated by the Secretary of State as the 'appointing person'. The body currently designated for this role was the Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA).

Although the first two options were considered to be viable; however, they were not considered to be the optimum option due to the probable increase in costs and administration effort required, which included the establishment of an independent auditors panel. Acceptance of the third option would ensure there was maximum opportunity and would ensure that fees were as realistic as possible whilst the quality of audit was maintained by entering into a large scale collective agreement. The estimated value of the total procurement was approximately £500,000.

If the Council wished to take advantage of the national auditor appointment arrangements, it was required under the local audit regulations to make the decision at Full Council. The opt-in period started on 22nd September 2021 and was due to close on 11th March 2022. To opt into the national scheme from 2023/24, the Council needed to return the completed opt-in documents to PSAA by 11th March 2022.

DECISION: That Council:-

1. Approved the decision to accept Public Sector Audit Appointments' (PSAA's) invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors for the five financial years commencing from 1st April 2023; and
2. Delegated authority to the Council's Responsible Finance Officer (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation, to consider and, if appropriate, to make representation on behalf of the Council to a proposed external auditor appointment by the PSAA.

REASON FOR DECISION: The report set out proposals for appointing the external auditor for the Council's accounts for the five-year period from 2023/24. The Council was asked to consider the options for procuring the external auditors and agree the preferred approach.

70

COUNCIL BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2022/2023 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022/23 TO 2025/26

INFORMATION: The Chairman informed Members that this item would be dealt with by way of a single debate on the Council Budget and the Council Tax Resolution, which would then be followed by a single recorded vote. Members were reminded that they could only speak once during the debate.

The report in relation to this item had been circulated to all Members separately in advance of the meeting. It was also advised that no amendments had been submitted for this item. The Chairman then invited Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, to commence this item by moving the recommendations within the report. The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth.

In his opening statement, Councillor Butland made reference to the impacts of the Covid-19 variants on the budget setting process over the last year, the situation of which had evolved rapidly. Fortunately, with restrictions now lifting, the outlook regarding the pandemic was now far more positive; nonetheless, it was acknowledged that substantial challenges still lay ahead in respect of the budget, from inflationary pressures to supply chain issues. The 2021 Autumn Budget and Spending Review Statement gave only a single-year funding settlement for 2022/23; together with the publication of the 'Levelling Up' White Paper, the passing of the Environment Act, the Planning White Paper and uncertainty around pay settlements in Local Government, had provided a difficult backdrop for budget planning.

It was reported that the Council had been notified of a further £1.6million of New Homes Bonus (NHB); this, added to the amount received to date, took the total amount to be provided to the Council to approximately £19million. The Council's approach towards NHB had been to use it for the purposes of investment towards supporting the delivery of business and housing growth across the District. Along with other Capital Resources, the NHB had allowed the Council to deliver a number of projects and programmes, which included supporting: affordable housing schemes, regeneration of Braintree Town Centre, health facilities at Church Lane in Braintree, and feasibility work for the proposed Hedingham 'health centre.' After omitting the funds that had already been spent or committed, there remained a balance of £3.8million of unallocated NHB as at the end of the year.

The Council's 'BBT' plan ('Bouncing Back Together') set out the Authority's plan for recovery over the next 18 months (ending March 2023) and the organisation emerged from the impacts of the pandemic. The key focus areas of BBT would be on sustainable growth and prosperity, strengthening communities, providing increased opportunities for all residents and protecting the environment for future generations. It was added that these plans would continue to be reviewed and refreshed over the coming months.

With regard to Council Tax, Members were advised that the current Band D tax rate for the year was £184.68 and was the fourth lowest of the 12 District and Borough Councils in Essex. The budget proposed an increase in Council Tax of £4.95 for the year, which would set a Band D tax rate of £189.63. It was added that the increase of 2.68% was significantly below that of inflation.

Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation, was invited to present the main body of the Budget report, and detailed the governance process that was followed. Further to the report, the Chairman invited Councillor J Abbott, as spokesperson for the largest opposition group, to respond to the recommendations contained within the report.

The debate in full by Members on this Item may be viewed on the Council's YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3W03JZdpeU>

Once the debate had concluded, a single recorded vote was taken on the Council Budget and Council Tax Resolution. Only those Members present in the Council Chamber were permitted to vote. The results of the vote were as follows:

For the Motion:

Councillors: Abbott, Baugh, Mrs Beavis, Butland, Coleridge, Courtauld, Mrs M Cunningham, T Cunningham, Mrs Dervish, Everard, Mrs Garrod, Hensman, Hicks, Horner, Kilmartin, Korsinah, Mann, McArdle, Munday, Mrs Parker, Mrs Pell, Pritchard, Radley, Rehman, Rose, Mrs Schmitt, Schwier, Mrs Spray, Tattersley, Thorogood, van Dulken, Wallace, Walsh, Mrs Walters, Miss Weeks, Mrs Wilson, Wrench and Wright (38).

Against the Motion:

Councillors: (0).

Abstained:

Councillors: (0).

Virtual Attending Members Unable to Vote:

Councillors: Bowers, Euesden, Hume, McKee and Mrs Scattergood (5).

Absent:

Councillors: Johnson, Miss Santomauro, White and Unsworth (4).

The Motion was declared **CARRIED**.

DECISION: That Council **approved** the following:

1. The budget variations to the current base budget and the additional income and cost reductions as detailed in [Section 7](#) of the main report;
2. The unavoidable revenue budget demands and new priority growth added to the Base Budget for 2022/23 of £559,490 as detailed in Section 7.7 of the main report (and shown in [Appendix C](#));

3. The unavoidable revenue budget demands and new priority growth required to meet one-off or time-limited expenditure in 2022/23 of £325k as detailed in Section 7.7 of the main report (and shown in [Appendix C](#)) and these to be funded from reserves as detailed;
4. The Braintree District Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23 as detailed on the Council's website at [Local Council Tax Support Scheme](#);
5. The package of support to claimants experiencing difficulties as a result of the Local Council Tax Support scheme as detailed in [Section 11](#) of the main report;
6. The Council's discretionary fees and charges and housing rents for 2022/23 as detailed in [Appendix O](#).
7. Delegated authority is given to the appropriate Cabinet Members to determine the level of charges for Trade Waste collection, Environmental permits, core leisure, and planning pre-application advice service and street naming and numbering for 2022/23;
8. That delegated authority is given to the appropriate Cabinet Members to agree any in-year variations to Trade Waste, Town Hall Centre, Building Control and Car Parking fees and charges for commercial purposes during 2022/23;
9. The sum of £2,737,178 be transferred from the Business Rate Equalisation Reserve to offset the estimated deficit on the Business Rates Collection Fund as at 31 March 2022, which is required to be taken into account for the 2022/23 Budget.
10. To continue the Council's policy for Discretionary Business Rate Relief Schemes (under Section 47 of the Local Government Act 1988, as amended), as detailed in [Section 9.2](#) of the main report, for 2022/23:
11. To extend the Council's policy for Discretionary Business Rate Relief (under Section 47 of the Local Government Act 1988) to introduce a Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Rate Relief Scheme and Extension of Transitional Relief and Supporting Small Business Relief for small and medium properties for 2022/23 as recommended and funded by the Government, as detailed in [Section 9.2](#) of the main report and [Appendices L and M](#);
12. Discretionary council tax discounts and exemptions for 2022/23 are:
 - Discount applicable to empty dwellings undergoing major repairs is set at Nil % for the twelve month period;
 - Discount applicable to vacant dwellings is set at Nil % for the six month period;
 - Discount applicable to second homes is set at Nil %;
 - Discretionary Council Tax Empty Homes Premiums charged on dwellings vacant for over two-years but less than five-years continue at 100%; on dwellings vacant over five-years but less than ten-years continue at 200%; and on dwellings vacant for over ten-years continue at 300%, and that that this is duly published in a local newspaper within 21 days from this

decision. In addition, the refund arrangement, as detailed in Section 13 of the main report;

13. The Council's Pay Policy for 2022/23 as detailed in [Appendix B](#) to the main report, subject to the amounts of pay included being updated in line with the final agreed settlement for the cost of living award to be implemented with effect from 1st April 2021.
14. A transfer to the Revenue Account of £89,494 from the General Fund unallocated General Fund balance to meet the budget shortfall in 2022/23;
15. Establish the following new earmarked reserves: Planning Enforcement reserve; a single consolidated Climate Change Reserve; and a Recycling Income reserve;
16. The estimated movements on earmarked reserves as detailed in [Appendix E](#) to the main report, including the transfer of balances no longer required to the General Fund unallocated balance and unallocated New Homes Bonus;

Capital

17. The Capital bids for 2022/23 listed in [Appendix H](#) to the main report;
18. A Disabled Facilities Grants programme to match the resources allocated to the Council from the Better Care Fund;

Capital and Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy

19. The Capital and Investment Strategy including the authorised borrowing limit, operational borrowing boundary, the policy on Minimum Revenue Provision and prudential indicators as detailed in [Appendix I](#) to the main report;
20. The Treasury Management Strategy including the schedule of counterparties and limits and prudential indicators as detailed in [Appendix J](#) to the main report;

Council Tax

21. The proposed estimates (producing a Council Tax Requirement for the Council of £10,421,496) as detailed in [Appendix C](#) and the Council Tax rate for 2022/23 of £189.63 for a Band D property, having taken into consideration:
 - The consultation feedback, if any, received and reported verbally at the meeting;
 - The assessment of risks in the budget assumptions;
 - The Equalities Impact Assessments and
 - The Section 151 Officer's report (Corporate Director – Finance) on the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of balances ([Appendix G](#) to the main report).

REASON FOR DECISION: To determine the Budget (capital and revenue) and Council Tax level proposals for 2022/23 in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution.

CABINET'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

INFORMATION: The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council to introduce the Cabinet Report to Full Council. The Leader confirmed that neither he nor the other Cabinet Members had anything further to add to their reports. Following this, the Chairman invited Members to ask their questions arising from the reports. Questions were not limited to the content of the report and could be about matters relating to a portfolio, the powers and duties of the Council, or matters pertaining to the District.

A webcast of the questions to and the responses of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members is available on the Council's website and its YouTube channel at: <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/youtube>

The main topics were as follows:-

- Councillor Abbott asked about the level of involvement that all Members would have in making decisions on investment and other matters regarding the 'Levelling Up' agenda.
- Councillor Abbott asked a question about the likely trajectory for the adoption of the Local Plan.
- Councillor Abbott sought clarification as to the impact on the library services following the discontinuation of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Essex County Council.
- Councillor Abbott raised a query in regard to any campaigns that could be undertaken by the Council to encourage energy savings on lighting.
- Councillor Mrs Beavis requested further clarity around the Members' Forums, and asked whether a 'working paper' of sorts could be circulated to all Members in advance of the presentation of the report on this matter at the meeting of Full Council in March.
- Councillor Mrs Beavis commented on the excellent work of the Council's Street Scene Team, especially in clearing fly-tips.
- Councillor Everard was pleased with the external funding that had been established for the new Skills Centre, and added that he would like to see some of this knowledge passed on to local culture and community groups wishing to start their own projects.
- Councillor Hicks praised the plans for improvements to the Little Elms in Witham North Ward, but queried why the Council did not work with partners in order to secure a community facility and GP services for the area, and questioned the allocation of Section 106 monies for Witham South Ward.
- Councillor Mrs Kilmartin made reference to the high cost of social care and asked that emphasis be placed on preventive care and neighbourly assistance for illnesses that have the most impact on the system.

- In advance of the Cabinet report due to be presented in March, Councillor Mrs Pell requested a briefing with Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and the four District Councillors in Halstead on the proposals for physical improvements to town centres in the District.
- Councillor Rehman asked whether there were any plans in place in the town centre for disabled constituents going forward.
- On the subject of 'Levelling Up,' Councillor Walsh questioned what the benefits would be of a County deal and, if such a deal was not pursued, what the rationale behind this would be. Any insight as to the impacts of Levelling Up on rural areas was also welcomed.
- Councillor Walsh requested an indication of how many refugees (including from Afghanistan) had come to the District, how many were individuals or families, and where they had been placed.
- Councillor Wright requested an update on the progress of the Silver End Conservation Area.
- Councillor Wright commended the work undertaken to clear the rubbish along the A120 and asked if a similar operation could be conducted along the A12.

The following actions were agreed in response to questions raised by Members. Written answers would be issued within 10 working days of the meeting and circulated to all Members:-

- Councillor K Bowers, Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Skills agreed to supply a written response on the subject of refugees who had come to the Braintree District.
- Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation, agreed to provide a written response about the impact on library services following the discontinuation of the SLA with Essex County Council.
- Councillor Mrs Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, would look into the possibility of providing a 'working paper' of sorts on the 'Members' Forum' for all Members in advance of the meeting of Full Council in March.
- Councillor Mr Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, agreed to provide a written response in respect of the improvement plan for the Little Elms area in North Witham.

During this Item, Councillor Abbott moved a Motion without Notice in accordance with Standing Order 12.17 of the Constitution, sub-section (j) that the Council's Standing Orders were suspended to extend the duration of the meeting beyond the 3 hour time limit by a duration of 10 minutes beyond 10.15pm. This was seconded by Councillor Butland. On being put to the vote, the Motion to suspend the Council's Procedure Rules was **CARRIED.**

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 10.25pm.

Councillor Mrs S Wilson
(Chairman)