

Minutes

Council Meeting



23rd September 2024

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

Present:

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Councillor J Abbott	Yes	Councillor L Jefferis	Yes
Councillor D Abram	Yes	Councillor J Martin	Yes
Councillor M Ault	Apologies	Councillor S Mason	Yes
Councillor J Ayten	Yes	Councillor A Munday	Apologies
Councillor J Baugh	Yes	Councillor I Parker	Yes
Councillor J Beavis	Yes	Councillor J Pell	Yes
Councillor J Bond	Apologies	Councillor G Prime	Yes
Councillor K Bowers	Yes	Councillor S Rajeev	From 7.19pm
Councillor L Bowers-Flint	Yes	Councillor R Ramage	Yes
Councillor G Butland	Yes	Councillor F Ricci	Yes
Councillor J Coleridge	Yes	Councillor P Schwier	Yes
Councillor G Courtauld	Yes	Councillor G Spray	Yes
Councillor M Cunningham	Yes	Councillor M Staines	Apologies
Councillor T Cunningham	Yes	Councillor B Taylor	Yes
Councillor C Dervish	Yes	Councillor W Taylor	Yes
Councillor T Diamond	Yes	Councillor M Thorogood	Yes
Councillor J Edwards	Yes	Councillor P Thorogood	Yes
Councillor C Finch	Yes	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
Councillor M Fincken	Yes	Councillor T Walsh	Yes
Councillor D Garrod	Yes	Councillor L Walters	Yes
Councillor M Green	Yes	Councillor E Williams	From 7.19pm
Councillor J Hayes	Yes	Councillor T Williams	Yes
Councillor P Heath	Apologies	Councillor J Wrench	Yes
Councillor D Holland	Yes	Councillor B Wright	Apologies
Councillor A Hooks	Yes		

23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

24 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 23rd July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendments identified.

25 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

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

INFORMATION: The following announcements/statements were made: -

Chairman of the Council - Announcements

Since the last Council meeting in July, the Chairman was pleased to report that she had attended 16 engagements.

One of the highlights was a visit to Essex Activate's "Camp for Champs" summer sessions at Notley High School. The Chairman added that it was heartwarming to see the children joyfully racing around on their little plastic cars, and she was particularly impressed by their smooth operation of the vehicles without a single crash.

The Chairman also had the honour of attending the ACS King's Award Ceremony, a truly remarkable event. ACS was a local business situated in Springwood Industrial Estate, which specialised in maintaining and repairing aircraft parts. Meeting their skilled employees was both fascinating and inspiring.

Other events included the Skate Jam at the newly refurbished Weavers Park skate park, and a delightful summer BBQ with the residents of Riverdale Care Home.

A full list of the engagements the Chairman had attended since the last meeting of Full Council would be published on the Council's website.

The Leader advised Members that he did not have any announcements at this time.

27 **AGENDA ITEM 6 – MOTION BY COUNCILLOR GRAHAM BUTLAND - CHANGES TO THE WINTER FUEL ALLOWANCE AND PROTECTING PENSIONERS FROM FUEL POVERTY**

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

The Motion:

‘Council Notes:

- The Labour Government’s recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of the Braintree District and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across the Braintree District sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance. The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government’s approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

Council resolves to:

- Promote local awareness for those eligible for Pension Credits, to help residents access Winter Fuel Payments for those most in need.
- Request that the Council Leader write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

- Commit the Council to publicly support the ‘Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners’ petition being run by Age UK and write to all Members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.
- Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through Council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in the Braintree District are supported in claiming their entitlement.’

There followed a discussion on the Motion.

Once the debate had concluded, a single recorded vote was taken on the Motion. The results of the vote were as follows:

For the Vote:

Councillors: Baugh, Bowers, Bowers-Flint, Butland, Coleridge, Courtauld, M Cunningham, T Cunninham, Dervish, Edwards, Garrod, Hayes, Holland, Parker, Pell, Prime, Rajeev, Ramage, Ricci, Schwier, Spray, B Taylor, van Dulken, Walters, B Williams, T Williams, Wrench (27)

Against the Vote:

Councillors: Aytan, Diamond, Finken, Green, Jefferis, Martin, Mason, M Thorogood (8)

Abstained:

Councillors: Abbott, Abram, Beavis, Finch, Hooks, W Taylor, P Thorogood, Walsh (8)

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

A webcast of the full debate can be viewed here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmlZ8o3kheY>

28 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER AND CABINET**

INFORMATION: The Chairman reminded Members that they may only ask one question of the Leader and the Cabinet on matters which relate to the functions of the Leader, the Cabinet, the powers and duties of the Council or matters pertaining to the District which have taken place since the last meeting of Full Council held on 23rd July 2024.

Questions must be succinct and could not be asked in parts and supplementary questions were not permitted. It was added that Members may not make statements before asking their questions.

Members were then given the opportunity to put their questions to the Cabinet. A webcast of the questions and the responses from the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members is available on the Council’s website and its YouTube channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmlZ8o3kheY>

The main topics were as follows:-

Councillor Beavis requested an update on the work of the Braintree District Health and Wellbeing Board and the Mid Essex Integrated Care Board and their involvement in the Livewell Strategy 2024/28.

Councillor Parker raised a question on the introduction of VAT on school fees and what impact this would have on local state schools if parents had to withdraw their children from private schools.

Councillor Hooks requested Members be updated on a number of Boards in which the Council were working with including: the LGA Peer Team, the North Essex Economic Board, North Essex Councils and the Mid Essex Alliance.

Councillor T Williams asked the Cabinet Member for Housing Health and Wellbeing what this Council could do to encourage Fusion Lifestyle to improve the maintenance standards at Witham Leisure Centre.

Councillor Diamond asked the Cabinet Member for Housing Health and Wellbeing what this Council could do to ensure that Eastlight Community Housing dealt with tenants housing issues within a timely manner.

Councillor Prime requested an update on the E-Scooter trial within the District.

Councillor Abbott referred to a recent interview by Essex Live with the Leader of the Council, and asked if his comments quoted in the article in respect of New Towns were accurate.

Councillor Edwards requested an update from the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities on the Public Spaces Protection Order recently imposed in Braintree Town Centre.

Councillor P Thorogood asked the Cabinet Member for Housing Health and Wellbeing whether she agreed that a debate on the Air Quality Strategy should be brought before Full Council.

Councillor Abram raised a query in regard to speeding in the District and asked the Cabinet Member whether the Council would consider adopting a District wide approach on speed reduction.

Councillor Jefferis asked the Leader for any further local updates on the MHCLG annual audit.

Councillor Wrench made reference to the recent sad news of the disappearance of a local resident and asked the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities whether the Council had been able to support the ongoing police investigation and offered any support to the family involved.

Councillor Holland made reference to the recent news that National Grid had secured planning permission for the Bramford to Twinstead connection project which enters the North of the District and asked the Cabinet Member for Planning if she would join him in congratulating the Communities in the north of the District for the way in which they have constructively engaged with the planning process over the last 15 years.

29 **HATFIELD PEVEREL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ADOPTION**

INFORMATION: Members were asked to consider and approve the Decision Statement and report of the Hatfield Peverel Neighbourhood Plan.

Members were advised that the Hatfield Peverel Parish Council, as a qualifying body, applied for its Parish to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area under part 2 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. Following a period of drawing up evidence, creating the Plan and undertaking early consultation with the local community, the Plan was submitted to the Council and a further consultation on The Hatfield Peverel Neighbourhood Plan concluded in November 2023. The Council, in agreement with the Parish Council, appointed an independent examiner to review if the Neighbourhood Plan met the basic conditions required in legislation, and whether it should proceed to referendum.

It was reported that the examiner agreed that subject to modifications, the Plan could proceed to referendum as it met the necessary “basic conditions” as set out in the Inspectors report of March 2024. The Council considered this report and agreed with the Inspector’s recommendations. The Neighbourhood Plan, as amended in line with the examiner’s proposed modifications, was the subject of a referendum held on Thursday 5th September 2024.

It was added that the Council agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan, including its preparation, did not breach or would otherwise be incompatible with, any EU obligation or any of the Convention rights and had passed referendum.

DECISION: That Council approved the Decision Statement attached at Appendix 1 of the report, and the Hatfield Peverel Neighbourhood Plan made under section 38A (4) of the 2004 Act.

30 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24**

INFORMATION: Members were asked to consider and note the Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/24.

Members were reminded that the Council had adopted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice (the CIPFA Code) which required the Council to approve a treasury management strategy prior to the commencement of the financial year; receive at least one mid-year report; and then receive an annual report after the financial year-end.

Members were advised that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24 was approved by Council at its meeting held on 20th February 2023 and a mid-year report was presented to Council on 11th December 2023. The Annual Report for 2023/24 was reviewed at the Governance and Audit Committee at their meeting held on 25th July 2024, where no changes were recommended.

DECISION: That Council received and noted the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2023/24.

31 **NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE OF DATE OF FULL COUNCIL – 17TH FEBRUARY 2025**

INFORMATION: Members were requested to note that the meeting of Full Council scheduled for Monday 17th February 2025 had been rescheduled for Monday 24th February 2025 at 7.15pm.

The business currently scheduled for this meeting included the Council Budget and Council Tax 2025/2026 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2028/29.

The Council's website and published timetable of meetings would be updated to reflect this change.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.23pm.

Councillor L Walters
(Chairman)