

# Minutes

## Cabinet

### 22nd January 2024



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

#### Present:

<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Cabinet Member</b>	<b>Present</b>
<b>Overall Strategy</b>	Councillor G Butland (Leader of the Council)	Yes
Deputy Cabinet Member to the Leader	Councillor B Taylor	Yes
Deputy Cabinet Member to the Leader	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
<b>Transformation, Performance and Delivery</b>		
Resources and Performance	Councillor K Bowers	Yes
Transformation, the Environment and Customer Services	Councillor T Cunningham (Deputy Leader)	Yes
Deputy Cabinet Member	Councillor P Schwier	Yes
<b>Connecting People, Places and Prosperity</b>		
Economic Growth and Inward Investment	Councillor F Ricci	Apologies
Planning and Infrastructure	Councillor G Spray	Yes
Deputy Cabinet Member	Councillor J Coleridge	Apologies
<b>Supporting Communities</b>		
Housing, Health and Wellbeing	Councillor L Bowers-Flint	Yes
Health and Wellbeing	Councillor M Cunningham	Yes
Deputy Cabinet Member	Councillor C Dervish	Yes

#### **Present as Invitees of the Leader:**

Councillor L Jefferis (Leader of the Labour Group), Councillor J Beavis (Leader of the Independent and Green Group) and Councillor Pell (Leader of the Halstead Residents Group) were present as invitees of the Leader.

Those minutes identified by the prefix \*\* may be the subject of the "call-in" provisions of the Constitution within 5 working days of the publication of these minutes. Any decisions made and not "called in" by this date and time will become effective. For further information regarding these minutes please contact the Governance and Members Team, on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)

48. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** The following interests were declared:-

Councillor L Bowers-Flint declared a non-pecuniary interest as an Elected Member of Essex County Council (ECC) as ECC was referred to in various items throughout the Agenda.

Councillor G Butland declared a non-pecuniary interest as an Elected Member of Essex County Council (ECC) as ECC was referred to in various items throughout the Agenda.

Councillor T Cunningham declared a non-pecuniary interest as an Elected Member of Essex County Council (ECC) as ECC was referred to in various items throughout the Agenda.

Councillor P Schwier declared a non-pecuniary interest as an Elected Member of Essex County Council (ECC) as ECC was referred to in various items throughout the Agenda.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Councillors remained in the meeting, unless stated otherwise, and took part in the discussion when the Items were considered.

49. **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** That the Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50. **QUESTION TIME**

**INFORMATION:** There were no registered speakers for public question time.

The Chairman invited the Members who were present in the public gallery whether they wished to ask a question or make a statements. In response to this invite, none were made.

51. **\*\* HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**

Minutes Published: 26th January 2024 Call-in Expires: 2nd February 2024
--

**INFORMATION:** Members were asked to consider the draft Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy prior to public consultation.

Members were advised that the 2002 Homelessness Act required local housing authorities in England to publish a homelessness strategy at least every five years. A revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2029 was required to ensure that Braintree District Council was doing everything possible to prevent and respond to homelessness in the district.

Those minutes identified by the prefix \*\* may be the subject of the "call-in" provisions of the Constitution within 5 working days of the publication of these minutes. Any decisions made and not "called in" by this date and time will become effective. For further information regarding these minutes please contact the Governance and Members Team, on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)

It was reported that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 - 2029 retained a clear focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness; or if prevention was not possible, to end homelessness at the earliest opportunity. The 2024-29 strategy committed the Council to putting in place the advice, support and tools for residents who were either at risk of or who were homeless to ensure everyone had the help they needed, and that no one in the Braintree District was facing homelessness alone.

It was added that the Research and Development team had collated evidence from households presenting as homeless in the district, this showed that households had more complex needs than previous years. Factors which had impacted households included recovering from Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and pressure on the local housing market. Not having a place to call home impacted on mental wellbeing, it affected children's development and opportunities and placed households under financial and physical pressures.

It was added that an up-to-date Strategy, which provided a strategic framework that reflected the current market conditions and operating climate was essential for the Council to be able to respond effectively.

**DECISION:** That Cabinet approved the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, in preparation for it to be taken to public consultation.

52. **\*\* EMPTY HOMES POLICY**

Minutes Published: 26th January 2024 Call-in Expires: 2nd February 2024
--

**INFORMATION:** Members were asked to consider the report which sought approval to implement an Empty Homes Policy, to assist Braintree District Council in the management of empty homes within the district.

It was reported that empty properties were a national issue and housing continued to be a key government priority. The government had indicated that it wanted to increase the number of empty homes that were brought back into use, as a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing, and to reduce blight on neighbourhoods. The government had set out that it expected this to be achieved by builders, investors, and local Councils increasing the supply of repurposed empty homes. As a result, the Council has reviewed how it aligns its approach to tackle empty homes.

It was added that in March 2023 the Council adopted the Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028. As part of the public consultation, 80% of respondents rated 'Reducing the number of empty properties in the district by exploring options to bring them back into use' as important.

Members were advised that there was a high demand for housing within the Braintree District. Empty properties which could otherwise be made available for sale or rent were a wasted resource. In July 2023, there were 2,235 active applications on the housing register. Bringing empty properties back in to use would increase the supply of housing to help to meet local housing need and demand.

Those minutes identified by the prefix \*\* may be the subject of the "call-in" provisions of the Constitution within 5 working days of the publication of these minutes. Any decisions made and not "called in" by this date and time will become effective. For further information regarding these minutes please contact the Governance and Members Team, on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)

According to the Council's Council Tax database, as of 1 September 2023 there were 2,647 empty properties within the Braintree District. There were 1,016 of these empty properties which were classified as unfurnished and unoccupied and regarded as long-term empty having been so for six months or longer.

It was noted that whilst there was no statutory requirement to have an Empty Homes Policy, it was recommended that the Council had one in place in order to reduce the number of long-term empty properties within the district by bringing empty properties back into use and discouraging owners from leaving them empty long term. The implementation of an Empty Homes Policy would aid the Council in delivering an effective future housing service over the next five years, in line with the Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 -2028, supporting the current and future housing offer and needs for those choosing to live in the Braintree District.

**DECISION:** That Cabinet approved the Empty Homes Policy as set out in Appendix A of the report.

53. **\*\* LIVEWELL STRATEGY 2024-2028**

Minutes Published: 26th January 2024 Call-in Expires: 2nd February 2024
--

**INFORMATION:** Members were asked to consider the report and adopt the Livewell Strategy 2024 – 2028.

It was reported that the Livewell Strategy set out the aims and aspirations of the Braintree District Health and Wellbeing Panel to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living in the Braintree District. The Health and Wellbeing Panel formed the strategic partnership for the coordination, communication and commissioning of health improvement and wellbeing services for the local population.

It was recognised that the strategy identified the major health themes in the district that were having the greatest impact on resident's health and wellbeing, with five overarching strategic priorities. These were;

- Reduce health inequalities
- Improve Mental health and wellbeing
- Increase participation in active and healthy lifestyle behaviours
- Enable residents to maintain independence and support the most vulnerable to do more for themselves
- Build community capacity and enable our assets to achieve more

Members were advised that whilst there was no statutory requirement to have a Livewell Strategy, it was recommended that the Council had one in place to provide a clear strategic direction for enabling good health and wellbeing. It was widely recognised that 'place based' approaches were most effective in addressing key health challenges, enabling early intervention, prevention, and sustainable change. There was also a requirement for local leadership and influence to ensure residents had access to the best services and can live healthy, fulfilling lives.

Those minutes identified by the prefix \*\* may be the subject of the "call-in" provisions of the Constitution within 5 working days of the publication of these minutes. Any decisions made and not "called in" by this date and time will become effective. For further information regarding these minutes please contact the Governance and Members Team, on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)

Members were advised that in preparation for this strategy an extensive evidence base had been researched, with careful analysis of a range of data sets alongside detailed insight from partner organisations and colleagues who worked with Braintree residents daily, all of which had been collated and presented in the Livewell Strategy Evidence Base report which informed the strategy.

Councillor Lynette Bowers-Flint, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing expressed her thanks and appreciation to officers Carly Jones and Tristan Easey for their excellent work and outstanding commitment in bringing forward the strategy.

**DECISION:** That Cabinet considered and approved the Livewell Strategy 2024 - 2028, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

#### 54. **SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24**

**INFORMATION:** Members were asked to consider the report which summarised the performance of Braintree District Council at the end of the second quarter.

It was reported that the performance in the second quarter was in line with expectations and had moved on since the first quarter in most areas. Three projects still had an amber status, matching three in the first quarter, where there were delays in relation to costing and planning recommendations, and the asset management strategy.

Members were advised that eleven performance indicators had met or exceeded target and three performance indicators had not met target by more than 5%. The areas of underperformance were in relation to the cumulative number of homes granted planning permission, recycling rates and enquiries resolved at first point of contact in the customer service centre. The performance in the underperforming areas was a trend continuing from the first quarter.

It was noted that some key areas of the business were experiencing an increase in demand on their services and the Council would continue to monitor these areas of underperformance to focus resources and achieve the corporate objectives.

It was added that the review of income and expenditure against budget and forecast for the year indicated a net overall negative variance of £6k.

A central provision had been made for the staff pay award that reflected the latest National Employers' proposed offer which for staff covered by NJC conditions was for an increase of £1,925 or 3.88%, whichever was the higher; and for Chief Officers and Chief Executives an increase of 3.5%. Chief Officers had already accepted the proposed pay rise. The estimated increase in pay costs was +6% against the budget provision of 3% resulting in an estimated additional cost of £606k. At the time of review, finalisation of the pay award was still pending the trade unions confirming acceptance.

Other expenditure was forecast to be £663k over budget, including legal costs incurred in relation to the Wethersfield asylum centre appeals. Offsetting the projected

additional staffing cost and other expenditure, was an overachievement of income currently forecast to be £1.3m, which was mainly attributed to the treasury management investment income. Capital spend to the end of the first quarter was £2.05m, incurred on the disabled facilities grant programme, planned property maintenance, community facilities and IT as key contributors. Currently there was an estimated positive variance against the capital projects of £119k. The estimated movement on the General Fund unallocated balances was a net withdrawal of £1.13m.

**DECISION:** That Cabinet noted the performance of the Council for the second quarter (July 2023 to September 2023).

## 55. **COMMUNITY DELIVERY PLAN FOR 2025-2028 – MEMBER WORKING GROUP**

**INFORMATION:** Members were asked to approve the establishment and agree the terms of reference for an all-party Member Working Group to consider whether the Council should develop a Community Delivery Plan.

Members were reminded that further to the approval of the Motion by Full Council on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 in respect of the development of an Community Delivery Plan, Cabinet had been requested to set up a Member Working Group to consider whether a Community Delivery Plan could facilitate the delivery of specific local projects and improvements to benefit residents and communities fairly across the whole of the District and to establish whether such a Plan would provide added value to the Council.

The Membership of the Working Group would comprise of seven Members consisting of four Members from the Administration and one Member from each of the HRA, Labour Group and I&G Group.

The Working Group would be chaired by one of the Members appointed from the Administration and would meet once, reporting its findings to the next available meeting of Cabinet. Group Leaders were invited to submit in writing the names of their nominated to the Head of Governance.

The Terms of Reference for the Working Group were set out in paragraph 3.2.2 of the Cabinet report. In its consideration of what added value a Community Delivery Plan would provide, the Working Group are to consider, but not limited to the following:

- The likely level of officer and financial resources needed by the Authority to prepare and execute such a plan;
- The linkage with the Corporate Strategy, the MTFS, the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, and existing Community Grant schemes;
- The way and extent to which local communities could be involved in developing such a plan, recognising the diverse nature of the District;
- The way in which partner organisations responsible for issues such as Health, Social Care, Community Safety, the Environment, Transport and Sustainability should be involved; How “fairly” should be determined, for example geographically, by reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, or by Community Groups.

Those minutes identified by the prefix \*\* may be the subject of the “call-in” provisions of the Constitution within 5 working days of the publication of these minutes. Any decisions made and not “called in” by this date and time will become effective. For further information regarding these minutes please contact the Governance and Members Team, on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)

**DECISION:** That Cabinet agreed to establish the Member Working Group and approved its Membership and Terms of Reference as set out in the report.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.04pm.

COUNCILLOR G BUTLAND  
(Leader of the Council)

Those minutes identified by the prefix \*\* may be the subject of the "call-in" provisions of the Constitution within 5 working days of the publication of these minutes. Any decisions made and not "called in" by this date and time will become effective. For further information regarding these minutes please contact the Governance and Members Team, on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)