

Minutes

Council Meeting



20th March 2023

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 Mrs I Parker	Yes
Councillor D Abram	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	Apologies
Councillor G Butland	Yes	Councillor F Ricci	Yes
Councillor J Coleridge	Yes	Councillor B Rose	Yes
Councillor G Courtauld	From 7.18pm	Councillor Mrs J Sandum	Yes
Councillor Mrs M Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Miss V Santomauro	Apologies
Councillor T Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Mrs W Scattergood	Apologies
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 (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Councillor P Tattersley	Yes
Councillor M Green	Yes	Councillor P Thorogood	Yes
Councillor A Hensman (Chairman)	Yes	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
Councillor S Hicks	Yes	Councillor T Walsh	Yes
Councillor P Horner	Yes	Councillor Mrs L Walters	Yes
Councillor H Johnson	Yes	Councillor Miss M Weeks	Yes
Councillor Mrs A Kilmartin	Apologies	Councillor D White	Yes
Councillor W Korsinah	Yes	Councillor Mrs S Wilson	Yes
Councillor D Mann	Yes	Councillor J Wrench	Yes
Councillor T McArdle	Yes	Councillor B Wright	Yes
Councillor J McKee	Yes	Vacancy	
Councillor A Munday	Yes		

71 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 20th February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

72 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared

Councillor J McKee declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 10, 'Cabinet's Report to Full Council' as a Director of Warner Textile Archive Trading Company, which was referenced in the report.

Councillor G Butland declared a non-pecuniary interest as an Elected Member of Essex County Council (ECC) as which 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.

Councillor P Thorogood 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 J Abbott declared a non-pecuniary interest as an Elected Member of Rivenhall Parish Council which he made reference to in Agenda Item 7, 'Climate Change Strategy and Climate Change Action Plan Update'.

73 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were nine questions asked/statements made. The questions/statements related to matters which were not on the Agenda for discussion, as follows: -

'Cost-of-living support' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Mr Jack Edwards
Councillor Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities, responded to the statement.

'Shortfall in the five-year housing land supply in the Braintree District' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Ms India Jayatillake

Councillor Mrs Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure responded to the statement.

'Success of Councillor Grants' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Ms Karen Brown

Councillor Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities, responded to the statements.

'Supporting young people in accessing housing in the District' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Mr Stephen Canning

Councillor Bowers, Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Skills, responded to the statements.

'Litter on the A12' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Mr Ron Ramage

Councillor Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment, responded to the statements.

'Coggeshall Town Centre' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Mr Chris Siddall

Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth responded to the statements.

'Plyons within the District' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Mr David Holland

Councillor Mrs Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure responded to the statements.

'A120 and Galleys Corner Roundabout' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Mr Darrin Hammond

Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, responded to the statements.

'Finchingfield Bridge' (not on the Agenda for discussion)

Statement read by Mr Michael Staines

Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, responded to the statements.

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

INFORMATION: The following announcements/statements were made: -

It was with great sadness that the Chairman advised Members of the passing of a former colleague, Barry Broyd, who had represented the Gosfield and Greenstead

Green Ward until 2007. The Chairman passed on his condolences to Mr Broyd's family at this sad time.

The Chairman advised Members that since his last Council Announcements, he had attended a further 8 engagements. These were as follows:

- Braintree Baptist Church Service
- John Ray Trust Meeting
- Man Vs Fat Visit
- Witham Mayor Civic Service & Awards
- High Sheriff's Awards
- Commonwealth Flag Raising at Causeway House
- Quay's Theatre Tour at Sudbury
- Together in Sound Sharing Event at Braintree Museum

The Chairman then invited Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council to make any statements. The Leader made the following announcement:

Wethersfield Airbase

Members would be aware of recent media coverage relating to the potential plans by the Home Office to secure accommodation for asylum seekers at Wethersfield Airfield. The Council had been approached by the Home office to discuss the potential role the Wethersfield airfield site could have in housing asylum seekers. There had now been a number of meetings between officers of Braintree District Council (BDC) and senior officials at the Home Office to discuss the issue and to seek clarification on the proposals being considered by the Home Office.

The Home Office had advised BDC that they had not taken any formal decision as to the future use of the site. However, they had confirmed that plans were being considered to provide contingency accommodation for asylum seekers on this site. It was understood that if the site was used it would provide accommodation for asylum seekers whilst their claims for asylum were being determined, and not as a detention centre.

The Council had provided the Home Office with a strong view that the Wethersfield airfield was an unsuitable site, given the lack of capacity in local services, its isolated location, the size of the site, and the fact that the scale of the development proposed could have a significant adverse impact upon the local community.

The Council continued to seek further information from the Home Office, and officers were working tirelessly keeping the situation under review.

The Council had sought legal advice and formally written to the Home Office to request full and detailed information on their proposals, together with a request for copies of all relevant documentation. BDC were awaiting full details from the Home Office at this time.

The Leader added that the Council were also aware that recently there had been a range of activity taking place on the site and the Council had written to the Home Office to seek an full explanation and reasoning for this activity.

In the meantime, the Council reserved all legal rights, including the ability to challenge the Home Office on their decision making and the Council's right to consider, all available legal remedies including its ability to seek an injunction if it becomes necessary and appropriate to do so.

Councillor Butland expressed his thanks to all those that had been working with the Council, including but not limited to the Parish Councils in the immediate vicinity, local community groups and members of the public. The Leader reiterated that it was understood how these proposals could give rise to uncertainty, and that the Council would continue to keep residents updated on this matter when they knew more via the Council's communication channels.

75 **CELEBRATING APPRENTICESHIP SUCCESSES AT BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

INFORMATION: Councillor McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation made a presentation to the Council.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following points:

- The apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017 which allowed authorities such as the District Council to claim up to 90-95% of the costs of the educational training for apprentices.
- The programme enabled the Council to recruit talented people and support them to progress in their chosen careers.
- The scheme enabled the Council to address its skills shortage in particular fields and offered career opportunities and the chance to obtain direct experience and training in focus areas.
- The Council offered a range of apprenticeships from a level 2 which gained the original skillset, up to level 7 which was the equivalent of a Masters degree.
- The apprenticeship programme covered a wide range of Council services including: customer services, business admin, housing communities, commercial procurement, marketing, finance and accounting, audit, planning, ICT, strategic investment, operations and business solutions.
- Members were advised that Officers, along with Cabinet Members, wrote to Government during the budget setting process to explain how much the apprenticeship levy was valued.
- Since 2017 Braintree District Council had taken on 78 Apprentices, 30 Apprentices had completed their apprenticeships. 22 Apprentices had moved on and 25 Apprentices were still with the Council, working on completion.
- It was added that the Council were currently in the process of recruiting; a Level 3 Customer Service Apprentice, a Housing, Communities and Leisure - Health & Wellbeing Apprentice and a Housing and Leisure (Data Analytics Technician) Apprentice.

Councillor McKee invited Saila Haq, Senior Leader for Strategic investment, who was currently undertaking a level 7 apprenticeship with Braintree District Council, to share her experience of the apprenticeship scheme.

The Cabinet Member added that the Council recognised and took pride in the positive contribution of the apprentices in all areas of BDC and encouraged their continued success in their careers. The Council's apprentice programme continued to contribute to the future success of the Council and the broader economy.

The full presentation can be viewed on the Council's YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w29pShz_F8

DECISION: That the report was noted.

76 **APPOINTMENT OF A DEPUTY ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER**

INFORMATION: Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, moved the recommendations and set out the report. This was seconded by Councillor T Cunningham.

Kim Mayo, Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer left the meeting while this item was considered.

Members were asked to consider the report which sought to appoint a Deputy Electoral Registration Officer.

Councillor Butland advised Members that every Council was required by law to appoint an officer of the Council to the position of Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). This position was responsible for compiling and maintaining the register of electors. At Braintree District Council this role was held by the Chief Executive.

It was reported that the guidance from the Electoral Commission recommended the appointment of a Deputy ERO to carry out the functions of the ERO and be available to act in their absence. The guidance further recommended that, "Any deputies appointed should have the skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions that they had been assigned." Under Section 52(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council could appoint a Deputy ERO who could carry out the duties of the Electoral Registration Officer in their absence.

The Leader added that upon appointment there would be no additional payment.

DECISION: That Council agreed to appoint the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer as the Deputy Electoral Registration Officer, with the full powers of the Electoral Registration Officer in their absence.

INFORMATION: Members were advised that the purpose of this report was to update Braintree District Council on the progress made to date on the Council's Climate Change Strategy.

Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment provided Members with a brief background on the report. Members were reminded that in July 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency with the aim to make Braintree District Council activities, as far as practical, carbon neutral by 2030. In October 2019 the Climate Change Working Group was established, comprising of cross party Members and public representatives from community, business and other organisations, to develop the Council's Climate Change Strategy and associated action plan.

In September 2021 at Full Council the Climate Change Strategy and its associated Action Plan was adopted. The Climate Action Plan included indicative timescales: ongoing, short, medium, and long term. In November 2021 Essex County Council Published its Climate Action Plan and in January 2022 ECC launched its environmental stewardship Climate Focus Area. It was noted that Braintree District covered 34.52% of the total Climate Focus Area. The intention of the CFA was to pilot sustainable land stewardship technologies and systems that could then be adopted across all of Essex.

Councillor Mrs Schmitt then gave a presentation to Members and highlighted the following points:

- It was reported that the strategy did not just tackle carbon reduction, but also included increasing biodiversity, supporting the development of a green economy, mitigating the effects of climate change and supporting changing behaviours.
- Following the success of the subsidised compost bins the Council had since extended this offer to water butts.
- Energy conservation was essential to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and energy consumption and it was reported that solar panels had now been installed on all of the main Council buildings.
- The Council had set targets to reduce the carbon impact in homes and buildings and had led by example with the Council owned iConstruct and Plaza buildings, with the additional aim of encouraging other businesses in the District to do the same.
- It was reported that there was now 52 electrical vehicle charging points across Council owned carparks and buildings, and at present were also exploring rapid charging point.
- In respect of business and the green economy, it was reported that a survey was sent to business across the district to gain an understanding of their needs and confidence levels in respect of key areas related to climate change and where support was needed with grants, information, and professional advice.
- Members were advised that so far 9 businesses had been supported with grants and an estimated 480 tonnes of CO2 saved.
- The low carbon business support was a fully funded 1-2-1 support, which helped businesses identify and reduce their carbon emissions.

- It was reported that the Council now had 524 Green Heart Champions, from a wide range of different ages.
- The Council was also supporting local Parish Councils with community group funding for community garden projects through the UK shared property fund, utilizing underused spaces across the District with a strong focus on adapting to climate change.
- Members were provided with details on the Tree Canopy Survey initiative which identified every tree within the Braintree District that was over 3 meters tall. The Survey would be at a ward level and once fully implemented, each ward Councillor would receive a copy of their ward and it was expected that this would become available in the summer.
- It was noted that this would be a valuable document for Planning colleagues, in particular for when new developments are put forward, enabling Planners to be able to identify exactly what trees are on site and make informed decisions.
- It was recognised that climate change was in effect and that residents and businesses needed support in adapting to these changes.
- The carbon calculation for the Council and the Braintree District would be reported in the autumn, following an update and publishing of calculations in July 2023. A full performance report of all actions completed would be published at the same time.
- It was added that the Climate Change Action Plan was not static, and that new actions would be added as part of the Councils business plan development and approved by the joint working group.

The full presentation can be viewed on the Council's YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w29pShz_F8

DECISION: That Council noted the progress of the Climate Change Strategy and its associated Climate Change Action Plan.

78 **HEALTHY COMMUNITIES UPDATE**

INFORMATION: Councillor Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities moved the recommendations and set out the report. These were seconded by Councillor McKee.

Councillor Ricci advised that this report provided Members with the opportunity to highlight the work that the Council along with partners had undertaken to support the health and wellbeing of communities throughout the life of the current Livewell Strategy and how to build on this going forward.

The Chairman then invited Councillor Tattersley, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, to provide Members with an update on the Livewell Strategy element of the report. Members were informed that the Livewell Strategy was the generic term for the work undertaken by the Council with partners to provide and promote the Council's health and wellbeing initiatives and how the Council could support statutory bodies such as Essex County Council and the NHS in their own activities.

It was reported that the Council had always recognised the need to involve the voluntary sector and communities in this work and had been very successful in identifying and working with a range of partners.

The Council worked with a wide range of partners, these included: the Mid Essex Alliance, Essex County Council's public health team, Community 360, Citizens Advice, the Active Braintree Foundation and Network, Department of Work and Pensions, Eastlight Community Homes, Fusion Lifestyle, Active Essex and the Essex Wellbeing Service.

The Current Livewell Strategy 2019 – 2023 was due to be updated due to the number of initiatives that had to be put on hold or deferred as a result of the pandemic.

Councillor Ricci then provided Members with an update on the cost-of-living activity and Covid response. It was reported that the cost-of-living activity had been fast paced and continually developing as required to respond to the needs of communities. The report provided an update, following on from that provided in October 2022 and announcements on the response to the cost-of-living Scrutiny report in January 2023.

Members were advised that over the past few months the winter resilience and warm spaces programmes had been active throughout the District, and the Council was working with partners to look at how this may be developed to an all year-round initiative.

The Council had collaborated with the Braintree area food banks, Community 360, the Active Braintree Foundation, along with others, to design projects as part of the £1million investment into the cost-of-living response. It was added that the Council were also working with housing providers to tackle the issues identified around damp and mould and had created a leaflet to support households to minimize damp and mould in their homes. The Council were also in the process of creating a landlords forum to share best practices and identify what more could be done to support tenants. It was noted that the Council would continue to support residents by providing fuel and energy advice, bid for and distribute national funding to assist with energy bills and increase energy efficiency. This would continue to be an area of focus for the organisation over the coming months.

Councillor Ricci then updated Members on the Councils Covid response. The Cabinet Member reported that it was difficult to summarise effectively the wide-ranging nature of the work undertaken to support the District through the pandemic. The Covid summary report focused on the community elements of the Covid response but did take the opportunity to reference other areas where relevant.

Members were advised that Braintree District Council had a long standing and well managed plan to deal with emergencies including Flu pandemics, however this pandemic that continued to have an impact on society had proven to be a significant challenge to Governments and communities around the world.

It was reported that Braintree District Council had collectively risen to the challenge and had demonstrated the strength of the organisation and its partnerships and communities to deal with an extraordinary set of circumstances. The report set out the initial response to the pandemic and how quickly the Council was able to set up the strategies necessary to act swiftly and decisively, adapting to the needs and minimising

the impacts on essential services wherever possible. It was added that the report set out the work undertaken to reopen the District safely and support communities to start to recover from the pandemic and highlight some of the incredible achievements made.

The Cabinet Member noted that following the pandemic the Council had taken the opportunity to review its work with partners and have identified some areas for improvement which would further strengthen the Councils emergency planning an response.

DECISION: That Council agreed the following:

1. To note the progress and achievements from the Livewell Strategy 2019 - 2023.
2. To note the summary report for COVID response – 2020-2023
3. To receive an update on the response for residents on cost-of-living issues.
4. To agree the process for the development of the next Livewell Strategy during 2023.

79 **CABINET'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL**

Before opening the debate, the Chairman reminded Members of the Procedural Rules relating to this Item, as set out in the Council's Constitution.

Each Member may put up to two questions to the Cabinet, which would be responded to by the Leader of the Council, or a Cabinet Member. Councillor Abbott, as the Leader of the Opposition may put up to four questions to the Cabinet.

Questions should relate to the functions of the Leader, or a Cabinet Member, the powers and duties of the Council, or matters pertaining to the District. Members may not ask supplementary questions and no statements may be made.

Where a response cannot be given during the meeting, a written answer will be issued within 10 working days of the meeting and circulated to all Members.

The Chairman stated that a period of one hour was normally allowed for this Item. However, as the time was 9.52pm there was only 25 minutes remaining for the consideration of this Item. Subsequently, a Motion was put forward by Councillor Abbott, as required by the Constitution, that the meeting be extended beyond 10.17pm by an additional 15 minutes to enable sufficient time to ask questions of the Cabinet Members under this item. Following a vote the motion was lost.

INFORMATION: The Chairman invited Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council to introduce the Cabinet's report to Full Council.

Councillor Butland advised Members that, as this marked the last Full Council meeting of the administration, it seemed appropriate to reflect on what the Council had achieved collectively over the last 4 years.

The Leader along with Cabinet Members highlighted the following points:

Councillor Butland put on record his thanks to all staff at BDC who had worked tirelessly to keep the organisation running throughout increasingly difficult times.

Councillor Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities commented on the following topics:

- Community safety achievements
- Success of security initiatives in the Witham area
- Braintree District Museum
- Cycling Strategy
- Councillor Community Grants Scheme

Councillor McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation commented on the following:

- Grant funding
- Energy rebates
- Member online training courses
- Treasury management

Councillor Tattersley, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing raised the following issues:

- Support during the Covid pandemic

Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment, commented on the following:

- Awards of the Essex Playing Fields Association
- Grass verges
- Big community project
- Refurbishment of play areas
- Removal of fly-tips
- Installation of litter bins
- Handy man service

Councillor van Dulken, Cabinet Member for Operations and Commercialisation commented on the following topics:

- Outstanding performance of the Waste and Collection Service
- Recycling rates
- New parking protocol
- Licence applications
- Commercialisation

Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth commented the following:

- Supporting the economic strategy
- Member reference group

Full details on the topics discussed can be found on the Council's YouTube channel at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w29pShz_F8

The Chairman advised Members that as the time allowed for the meeting had been exceeded there would not be sufficient time to consider the remaining Cabinet Members reports. Members were invited to submit written questions to the Cabinet in response to their reports.

The meeting commenced at 7.17pm and closed at 10.17pm.

Councillor A Hensman
(Chairman)