

Minutes

Council Meeting



27th July 2020

These Minutes principally record decisions taken and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions. A webcast 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 D Bebb	Yes	Councillor R Ramage	Yes
Councillor K Bowers	Yes	Councillor S Rehman	No
Councillor G Butland	Yes	Councillor F Ricci	Yes
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	Yes
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	Yes	Councillor P Thorogood	Yes
Councillor S Hicks	Yes	Councillor N Unsworth	Yes
Councillor P Horner	Yes	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
Councillor D Hume	Yes	Councillor D Wallace	Yes
Councillor H Johnson	Yes	Councillor T Walsh	Yes
Councillor Mrs A Kilmartin (Chairman)	Yes	Councillor Mrs L Walters	Yes
Councillor D Mann	Yes	Councillor Miss M Weeks	Yes
Councillor T McArdle	Yes	Councillor Mrs S Wilson (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
Councillor J McKee	Yes	Councillor J Wrench	Yes
Councillor A Munday	Yes	Councillor B Wright	Yes
Councillor Mrs I Parker	Yes		

14 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 1st June 2020 were approved as a correct record.

15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:-

Councillor J Abbott declared a number of Non-Pecuniary Interests; firstly, as a member of the 'Better Braintree' Facebook page, which had covered topics in regard to the Local Plan, and he was also known to Ms R Pearson, Lead Petitioner in respect of Agenda Item 6, "Petition - Call for the Leader of the Council to Resign." Councillor Abbott was also the publisher of the Green and Independent Facebook page, which had previously held discussions around the Local Plan. Furthermore, Councillor Abbott was an Elected Member at Essex County Council (ECC) which had been involved with the Local Plan, and was also a member of the ECC Climate Change Commission.

Councillor Mrs J Beavis declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6, "Petition - Call for the Leader of the Council to Resign," as she was known to Ms R Pearson. Councillor Mrs Beavis was also the administrator for the 'Better Braintree' Facebook page and the 'Residents for Braintree District' Facebook page, as well as a member of the Green and Independent Facebook page. Councillor Mrs Beavis was also an Elected Member at ECC, and she declared a further interest under Agenda Item 11, "Cabinet Report to Council," as there was a reference to the East of England LGA and she was associated with south east employers.

Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 8, "The Section 1 Local Plan - Next Steps," as the Council's representative on the board of North Essex Garden Communities (NEGC), and in Agenda Item 11, "Cabinet Report to Council," as he intended to make reference during this item to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Ltd (SELEP), for which he was also a board member. Councillor Butland was also an Elected Member at ECC.

Councillor S Hicks declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as he was a member of the 'Better Braintree' Facebook page and a number of other local Facebook forum pages.

Councillor Miss M Weeks declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as she was a member of the 'Better Braintree' Facebook page and a member of the Green and Independent Facebook page.

Councillor Mrs W Schmitt had a Non-Pecuniary Interest to declare as she was an Elected Member at ECC.

Councillor Mrs G Spray declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6, "Petition – Call for the Leader of the Council to Resign" and Agenda Item 8, "The Section 1 Local Plan - Next Steps," as she had attended meetings of NEGC Ltd as a non-voting participant. Councillor Mrs Spray had also been in contact previously with Ms R Pearson, Lead Petitioner, in respect of Agenda Item 8.

Councillor P Thorogood declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6, "Petition - Call for the Leader of the Council to Resign," as he was known to Ms R Pearson,

Lead Petitioner through her campaign work with CAUSE (Campaign Against Urban Sprawl in Essex) and through her Twitter account. Councillor Thorogood was also a member of the 'Better Braintree' Facebook page.

Councillor N Unsworth declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as he was a member of the Green and Independent Facebook page, an administrator for the 'Residents for Braintree' Facebook page and a member of the 'Better Braintree' Facebook page. Councillor Unsworth was also known to Ms R Pearson, Lead Petitioner in respect of Agenda Item 6, "Petition - Call for the Leader of the Council to Resign." Furthermore, Councillor Unsworth was a member of the 'Parishes Against Incinerator' group, and a Non-Remunerated Director of the 'Community Action' group.

Councillor D Wallace declared a Pecuniary Interest in the Urgent Item of the Agenda, "Phased Reopening of Leisure Provision," as he was an employee at Fusion Lifestyle for the Braintree District sites. Councillor Wallace therefore confirmed that he would leave the meeting during the deliberation of this item.

Councillor T Walsh declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Items 5, 6 and 8, and he was known to Ms R Pearson, Lead Petitioner in respect of Agenda Item 6, "Petition - Call for the Leader of the Council to Resign" and to other members of CAUSE (Campaign Against Urban Sprawl in Essex). Councillor Walsh was also a member of the 'Residents for Braintree District' Facebook page and the Green and Independent Facebook page.

Councillor B Wright declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as he was known to Ms R Pearson, Lead Petitioner, as part of Agenda Item 6, "Petition - Call for the Leader of the Council to Resign." Councillor Wright was also a member of the Green and Independent Facebook page.

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

16 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: Before the commencement of this item, the Chairman advised Members that although a request to make a statement at the meeting had been submitted by the Straits Mill Action Group, the Chairman had elected to decline the request as the content was substantially similar to two previous statements that were submitted by said Group and read at the meetings of Full Council held on 1st June 2020 and the Planning Committee held on 23rd June 2020. A full response to those statements was subsequently provided. There was therefore only one statement made, and this was read out by Miss J Mann, Governance and Members Officer, on behalf of Mr Mike Moser.

Mr Moser's statement regarded the impact of the Planning Inspector's rejection of the proposed Garden Communities and the response of the Council going forward.

The statement would receive a written response following the meeting.

Principally, these Minutes record decisions taken only and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions.

17 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Chairman was saddened to announce that Honorary Alderman Mr Rodney Bass, OBE, had passed away. Mr Bass was Chairman of Essex County Council from 2010-2012. For those Members who knew Mr Bass, a book of condolence was available and a link had been provided for those who wished to leave a message.

The Chairman then expressed her gratitude towards members of the Council's staff for their continued support during this era of virtual meetings, the arrangements for which were likely to continue for some time yet.

The Leader added that he would make his announcements at the start of Agenda Item 11, "Cabinet Report to Council."

There were no more announcements to make.

18 **PETITION - CALL FOR THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO RESIGN**

INFORMATION: Before the commencement of this item, Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, and Deputy Leader of the Council, gave a preliminary statement. In his statement, Councillor Cunningham explained that although the petition had not met the 1,000 eligible signature threshold for it to be considered by Full Council for debate, he had requested that the petition be debated irrespective of this, in order to promote the Council's wish to be open and transparent in regard to such matters. Furthermore, the Lead Petitioner, Ms Rosie Pearson, had been invited to attend the meeting in order to introduce the petition and provide her own statement.

In response to concerns that had been raised by members of the public about the process surrounding the validation of signatures, Mrs Kim Cole, Head of Governance, was invited to address the meeting and outline the Council's validation process. Mrs Cole subsequently advised Members that, in accordance with the Council's petition scheme, Officers had carried out the validation of signatures, which involved ensuring that the addresses of each signatory was within the Braintree District. Any addresses that were identified as being outside of the District were discounted.

The Chairman then invited Ms Rosie Pearson, Lead Petitioner, to introduce the petition to Members. In her address, Ms Pearson expressed concern as to the effectiveness of the Council's validation process, highlighting that many signatories, both internal and external to the District, would be impacted by the planned Garden Communities. Mrs Pearson also made reference to the recent rejection of the Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate and the Leader's alleged role in facilitating this, despite the trepidation exhibited by local residents.

Following Ms Pearson's statement, the Leader was invited to respond to the matters that were raised. The Leader welcomed the Authority's decision to present the petition to Full Council, but drew attention to a number of deficiencies contained within its makeup and its representation of only a minority of the views of the District's electorate. The Leader also referred to the involvement of the four other Local Authorities that comprised the North Essex Garden Communities Ltd (NEGC) in the decision making that surrounded the Local Plan, and the petition's failure to reflect this.

In his conclusion, the Leader was explicit in his rejection of the contents of the petition, but stressed that the outcome would ultimately rely on the determination of other Members.

There followed a general debate on the petition by Members. Further to the debate, Councillor T Cunningham proposed a Motion in response to the petition. The Motion was as follows:-

“To move a motion that no further action is required.

The Council acknowledges receipt of the petition calling for the resignation of its Leader. It accepts that some of the signatories have genuine and strongly held views on the issue. The Council however rejects the contents of the petition believing that at all times the Council, and not just the Leader, has acted in good faith. The Council also rejects the accusation against its Leader that he has acted inappropriately in respect of his position as Braintree District Council’s representative on the Board of North Essex Garden Communities Ltd. The Council therefore resolves to take no further action in respect of the petition.”

There followed a general debate on the proposed Motion by Councillor Cunningham. Upon being put to vote, a recorded vote was taken, the results of which were as follows:-

For the Motion:

Councillors: Baugh, Bebb, Bowers, Coleridge, Courtauld, Mrs M Cunningham, T Cunningham, Mrs Dervish, Euesden, Everard, Mrs Garrod, Hensman, Horner, Hume, Johnson, Mrs Kilmartin, Mann, McArdle, McKee, Munday, Mrs Parker, Mrs Pell, Pritchard, Radley, Ramage, Ricci, Rose, Miss Santomauro, Mrs Scattergood, Mrs Schmitt, Schwier, Mrs Spray, Tattersley, van Dulken, Wallace, Mrs Walters, Mrs Wilson, Wrench (38).

Against the Motion:

Councillors: Abbott, Mrs Beavis, Hicks, Thorogood, Unsworth, Walsh, Miss Weeks, Wright (8)

Abstained:

Councillor: Butland (1).

Absent:

Councillors: Mrs Sandum, Rehman (2)

DECISION: The Motion was declared **CARRIED.**

19 **APPROVAL OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE - CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK – INABILITY TO ATTEND MEETINGS**

INFORMATION: Before the commencement of this item, a short adjournment was taken due to some technical difficulties experienced by the Chairman in the Chamber. The virtual broadcast for the meeting was therefore stopped at 8.33pm and the meeting was adjourned. The meeting then recommenced at 8.36pm.

Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, was invited to introduce the report. Since April 2020, the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility

of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 had enabled councils to hold meetings remotely via video conferencing systems such as MS Teams or Zoom. This did not, however, include the suspension of the six-month rule for Members.

The Council had re-introduced its schedule of meetings in May 2020; however, it was recognised that some Members could still experience difficulty in attending meetings for reasons such as illness. Due to the infrequency of meetings of Full Council, Members were still subject to the six-month rule as it was not always possible for the Council to consider absences on an individual basis. In order to avoid the risk of Members losing their seats, it was proposed that the Council approved the absence of any Member connected with the outbreak of the Coronavirus. The Leader was pleased to add that the proposal had the full support of all Political Group Leaders.

DECISION: That under section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council approved the following as reasons for non-attendance at meetings until the next annual meeting of the District Council:

- a) Being unable to attend a meeting as a result of illness;
- b) Being unable to attend a meeting as a result of a failure of an internet connection or electronic device failing to operate correctly;
- c) Cancellation or non-convening of meetings, or;
- d) Any other reason which is reasonably connected with the outbreak of coronavirus in the United Kingdom.

20 **THE SECTION 1 LOCAL PLAN – NEXT STEPS**

INFORMATION: Members gave consideration to a report from Councillor Mrs G Spray, Chairman of the Local Plan Sub-Committee. Following the hearings for the Section 1 Local Plan in 2018 and in January 2020, the Inspector wrote to the three North Essex Authorities (NEAs) with suggested modifications that would enable the Section 1 Plan to be found sound. The Inspector offered two options; the first option was for the NEAs to accept the modifications to the Plan and to proceed to a six-week consultation on those modifications. The alternative option was for the NEAs to reject the modifications proposed and withdraw the Plan altogether. Should neither option be deemed acceptable, there was the possibility of a third option, whereby the NEAs could choose to challenge the Inspector's letter and request the Secretary of State to approve the Plan in its current format. It was stressed to Members that the second and third options would incur significant costs and involve considerable delay to the Local Plan process. In addition to this, it was necessary for each of the NEAs to reach the same decision as to how to proceed with the Local Plan going forward. It was therefore recommended by the Local Plan Sub-Committee that the Council elected to accept the suggested modifications to the Section 1 Plan and proceed to a six-week consultation, the option of which was supported by both Colchester Borough Council and Tendring District Council.

Councillor Mrs Spray then drew attention to the letter received by the Council from the Planning Inspector on 2nd July, which referred to the newly released housing figure projections issued by the ONS (Office for National Statistics). The new figures represented a notable change from that of the previous housing figure target for the Braintree District. In the letter, the Inspector requested that the Council provide an evidence-based statement that detailed its opinion on the latest housing projections.

Due to the complexity of the data provided by the Inspector and the need for it to be examined further by housing consultants, the Council had submitted a request for an extension to the original response deadline of 24th July 2020; the Inspector had since agreed to this, and the deadline was subsequently amended to 31st July 2020. In advance of the deadline, Councillor Mrs Spray would provide a briefing to all political Group Leaders on 30th July 2020. The response, once provided, would also be made available to all Members and published on the examination website. It was stressed that any decisions in relation to the housing projections for the District would be made solely by the Inspector.

Before the consideration of the recommendations from the Local Plan Sub-Committee, it was highlighted to Members that an additional sixth recommendation, "F", had also been included from Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Development.

There followed a discussion by Members, during which a number of questions were asked and responded to. There was one question raised that required a written response from Councillor Mrs Spray in regard to the approximate costs and timescales of the two main options to withdraw and modify the Local Plan.

DECISION: That Council agreed:-

- a) To note the findings of the Planning Inspector's letter dated 15th May 2020 and his recommended modifications;
- b) To accept the Inspector's suggested main modifications to remove both the Colchester Braintree Garden Community and the West of Braintree Garden Community from the Section 1 Local Plan for the purpose of soundness;
- c) That subject to the views of the other North Essex Authorities (Colchester Borough Council and Tendring District Council), to notify the Planning Inspector of the intention to continue with the present Local Plan process, formally request his finalised schedule of recommended main modifications for soundness and establish the timescales for the consultation exercise and subsequent stages in the process;
- d) To note that public consultation would be undertaken on all 'main modifications' recommended by the Planning Inspector to make the Local Plan sound; and
- e) To note that an update to the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the Modified Section 1 Local Plan would need to be produced and published for consultation alongside the Inspector's main modifications and that consultants LUC were already instructed to undertake this work;
- f) That should a reduced OAN figure be considered to be an accurate position of the housing need in the District, Braintree District Council would, during the consultation, make representations and encourage residents to make representations, that an updated figure be adopted for the District of Braintree.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide Full Council with the Local Plan Sub-Committee's recommendation on the next steps for the Section 1 Local Plan.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WORK UNDERTAKEN SO FAR BY THE CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP AND A REVISED SCHEDULE FOR PRODUCTION OF THE STRATEGY

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to a report which updated Members on the latest progress of the work undertaken by the Climate Change Working Group and the revised schedule for the production of the Strategy. Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, was invited to introduce the report. Members were made aware of an update to the membership of the Group; due to the recent transition of Greenfields Community Housing Ltd to Eastlight Community Homes, Mr Richard Gormley, Executive Director at Greenfields, had been replaced by Ms Charlotte Todd.

At the first meeting of the Group in October 2019 it was decided that, due to the broadness of the subject matter, the Group would focus its future meetings and resources on areas within the Council where the most significant impacts could be made. The topics for review by the group included areas such as resources, energy use, planning and development, transport, assets and operations, etc. However, due to the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, it became necessary to postpone the planned schedule of meetings for the Climate Change Working Group and revise the timetable. A meeting of the Group had since taken place in July 2020. Furthermore, Councillor Mrs Schmitt and Mr Mark Wilson, Sustainability Manager at the Council, were invited to attend a meeting of the Essex Climate Action Commission, along with the other Essex Authorities. At the meeting, Braintree District Council was one of two Authorities asked to deliver a presentation on the work that it was undertaking in terms of Climate Change. The Cabinet Member was pleased to report that the presentation was positively received by all in attendance on the day, and requests for cross-border working with other Authorities were already being received. On a less positive note, the Cabinet Member was saddened to report that since the start of the pandemic, there had been an increase in the rate of litter left across the District, with much of this found to be disposable PPE.

DECISION: That Council:-

1. Noted the progress of the Climate Change Working Group.
2. Noted the revised schedule of meetings and approved the new date for the delivery of the new strategy and action plan.

REASON FOR DECISION: To support the development of a new Climate Strategy and an action plan for the Council to enable it to become carbon neutral, where practicable, by 2030.

INDEPENDENT PERSON

INFORMATION: Councillor D Bebb, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, was invited to introduce the report.

Members were informed that under Section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011, it was a statutory requirement for Braintree District Council (the Council) to have appointed an Independent Person (IP) to discharge the statutory role in relation to any complaints received by the Council under the Council Code of Conduct (the Code).

During the discussion following the report, it was noted by a Member that there were a few errors within the wording of recommendations “1” and “4” of the report. Members subsequently agreed that the wording of the recommendations would be amended accordingly and reflected in the Minutes.

DECISION: That Full Council:-

1. Approved the extension of the term of the Independent Person, Tony French, original term until the next Council AGM in 2021, at a rate of £300 per annum.
2. Approved the commencement of a recruitment process no later than January 2021 for one Independent Person and up to two Reserve Independent Persons.
3. Approved the establishment of a Committee comprising of the Chairman and two Members from the Corporate Governance Group to deal with the recruitment process of the Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons, before making a recommendation to Full Council.
4. Delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Governance Group and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance Management, to determine the remuneration and expenses for the Independent Person and any Reserve Independent Persons as part of the proposed recruitment process.

REASON FOR DECISION: Ongoing compliance with statutory obligations.

23 **PHASED REOPENING OF LEISURE PROVISION – URGENT ITEM**

INFORMATION: Before the consideration of this item, Councillor D Wallace left the meeting in accordance with his declaration of interest. Councillor Wallace indicated that he would retire from the meeting for the remainder of the evening.

The Chairman advised that the report was an urgent item which had been circulated to all Members on Friday, 24th July 2020. Councillor D Bebb, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, and Councillor P Tattersley, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, were both invited to present the report.

Members were informed that on 20th March 2020, following the Government's decision to shut leisure centres as part of its actions to slow the spread of Covid-19, all Fusion operated Leisure Centres in the Braintree District closed. The ramifications of this continued to be experienced by the entirety of the leisure industry. The Government had recently announced that indoor gyms and swimming pools would be allowed to reopen from 25th July 2020 onward, on the provision that they adhered to strict safety measures.

Members were informed that as well as financial provision, a number of alternative options had been considered as to how the Council might provide support to Fusion in respect of the reopening of its leisure centres. These options included the closure of one or more of the leisure centres, the possibility of re-tendering the Council's leisure contract to another provider, bringing the leisure service back in-house or arranging a partnership with another Local Authority. Ultimately, it was determined that the

potential financial implications of each of these options would be too significant to the Council than if it provided direct financial aid to Fusion instead.

In the months that preceded the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, leisure centres in the District had experienced a significant increase in users of the facilities. As at the end of February 2020, over 93,000 people used the District's leisure centres in the month alone, which represented a year on year increase in visitors of 25%. During the preparation of the Council's contract documents with Fusion, it was relayed that the Council had used the opportunity to impose contractual conditions to ensure the availability of the centres for unrepresented groups in a manner that would not have been possible with privately funded centres. As a result of this, the leisure centres had experienced a significant increase in centre usage by groups such as the over 60s and under 16s. Furthermore, the leisure centres also included facilities for groups of residents who suffered with issues related to mental health or physical disabilities (e.g. specially adapted swimming pools and changing areas). In terms of wider benefits, the leisure centres offered the District's residents the opportunity to utilise facilities that were accessible, affordable, clean and safe.

The costs involved with reopening leisure centres were notable, and this was particularly so where centre closures had remained in place for a number of months with no financial income received during that time, as had been the case with the Fusion Centres. There was also the need for extensive health and safety measures to be implemented at the centres in compliance with the latest Covid-19 Government guidance (such as gym and swimming lane reconfiguration to ensure social distancing would be possible), in addition to the need to bring back members of staff who had been furloughed.

Members were reminded that the impact of the lockdown on Fusion formed part of a national leisure "crisis." The Council had subsequently provided monetary relief to Fusion in the sum of £55.8k per month during April, May and June 2020 to support the local leisure centres to combat the costs that were incurred during that period. This sum consisted of the waiving of the management fee (£48.3k), a grant of £113.7k towards the residual costs to be paid by the Council, and a waiver of £5.4k against the outstanding PV Panel Recharge owed by Fusion to the Council. It was reported that estimated financial support for the remobilisation of Fusion amounted to £483.7k between August 2020 and March 2021, in addition to the continuation of the Management Fee waiver for this period, with an income loss to the Council of £128.8k. It was believed that this financial support could fluctuate throughout the planned period due to the time it could take for customer participation to increase once more, and the evolving nature of the Covid-19 restrictions. It was added that a bid had also been made by the MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) and the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) to the HM Treasury for a total support package of £770m for the leisure industry; if successful, it was reported that the Council would submit a bid for grant funding to help offset some of the budgetary impacts.

In light of the situation regarding leisure provision, it was requested that the Council established a provision of up to £700k for the future drawdown in support of Fusion's remobilisation costs between August 2020 and March 2021.

Further to the conclusion of the report, there followed a discussion by Members. The actions set out below were subsequently agreed in response to the questions raised.

Councillor P Tattersley agreed to provide written replies in response to a number of questions raised by a Member, which were in regard to the following:-

- The quality of Fusion's communication with the Council in comparison with its own staff and clientele.
- An e-mail sent to Fusion customers on 5th June 2020, which stipulated that regular updates would be circulated up until the re-opening of centres.
- Whether Fusion would continue with its intended redundancies, should the Council agree to Fusion's funding request.
- Fitness instructor positions that might be terminated and whether those positions would be replaced, and if this would put place users at risk by not ensuring a minimum retained level of fully qualified health and fitness experts.
- The funding requested by Fusion and the potential impact of this, should the funding be agreed.
- How the Council intended to retain security over its funds in the event that Fusion were unable to remain solvent, and whether officers would be scrutinising Fusion's operations on a regular basis going forward.
- Whether any alternative options were being considered by the Council in relation to Fusion as a contingency.
- The assumption that the Council was in a "difficult" position in respect of its contract with Fusion.

Councillor P Tattersley and Councillor D Bebb also agreed to provide a joint written reply in response to a question raised by another Member in relation to "Total Monetary Relief" and the figures for the July 2020 period.

DECISION: Full Council approved the provision of up to £700k for the future drawdown in support of Fusion remobilisation costs between August 2020 and March 2021. Funding was to be provided by a transfer from the Council's unallocated balance.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the leisure provision to reopen within the Braintree District at the earliest opportunity; and

Support the Council's leisure provider in line with guidance provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) and Procurement Policy Note (PPN) 04/20.

24 **CABINET REPORT TO COUNCIL**

INFORMATION: The Chairman invited the Leader to introduce the Cabinet Report to Council. Following this, the Chairman invited Members to ask questions. Questions were not limited to the content of the reports and could be about matters relating to a portfolio, the powers and duties of the Council, or the District.

Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council explained that there had been some positive news received from the Government in respect of potential funding for the Horizon 120 project. It was reported that the Government had allocated a sum of approximately £900m to help the economy, and from this amount, SELEP (South East Local Enterprise Partnership) were awarded £85m which would encompass Essex, Kent and East Sussex. The federated board of SELEP for North Essex was 'Success Essex,' who were asked to submit projects forward which could be eligible for the funding; the Leader was delighted to announce that the Horizon 120 project had since been put forward for this.

The Leader also wished to forewarn Members in regard to an upcoming Government paper which was expected to be issued in September 2020. Although the exact date of issue had not been confirmed for the paper, the Leader wanted to reiterate to Members that upon its issue, it was expected to include some notable reforms in respect of Local Government working. Political Group Leaders were briefed on this matter on Thursday, 23rd July 2020, and discussions were ongoing with the Leaders of Colchester, Chelmsford, Maldon and Tendring Councils as to how the Authorities might jointly approach the changes expected. The Leader added that there was to be a an 'Essex Summit' meeting on Friday, 31st July 2020 with all Councils invited to take part in the discussions around this.

Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure and Deputy Leader of the Council, also gave an address to Members. Councillor Cunningham was pleased to welcome the Government investment in the vaccine centre at Braintree. This was very positive news for the area as Braintree had been selected for the location of a new, state of the art centre that would manufacture doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. Whilst the initiative had a very serious objective in helping to alleviate an international health crisis and formed part of the national response, it was hoped that the social and economic benefits that the new centre would bring to the District, in conjunction with the Horizon 120 Project, would be for the long-term (e.g. through the creation of new jobs for local residents).

Members asked several questions arising from the report. A webcast of the questions to and responses of Cabinet Members is available on the Council's website at www.braintree.gov.uk.

The main topics raised were as follows:-

- Cllr J Abbott asked a question in relation to the work of the Council in incorporating partners and volunteers to help address Covid-19 related issues across the District. It was also requested that the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance advised all Groups on the Council at the earliest opportunity should the situation arise where a budgetary shortfall was expected, including the consequences of this on the Council's services.
- Councillor Abbott's second question related to the Local Plan advert that was included on behalf of the Leader in the Braintree and Witham Times and the Halstead Gazette, and whether this was appropriate use of public money.
- Councillor Abbott asked a question of Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, in regard to the latest green initiatives included in her

report, and whether even more facilities for the public to recycle would be provided in place of the former kerbside collection service.

- Councillor Abbott asked a second question of Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, in relation to the Great Notley replacement floodlights.
- Councillor Miss M Weeks asked a question of Councillor Mrs Schmitt, in regard to whether confirmation could be given that all Parish and Town Councils would be consulted in the Autumn in respect of the future programme of work for grass verges.
- Councillor Miss Weeks asked a second question of Councillor Mrs Schmitt, which regarded the future protection of wildflowers on grass verges.
- Councillor Unsworth asked a question of Councillor Mrs G Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, as to whether any news could be provided in respect of Woodhouse Farm.
- Councillor Rose had a number of questions for Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure, which were all in relation to the poultry factory site at the Freebournes Industrial Estate, Witham. A query was raised in relation to the current status of the poultry factory, and whether there was any progress to report in regard to the purchasing or marketing of the poultry factory at Freebournes Industrial Estate. The future of the site was also queried.
- Councillor Mrs Beavis asked a question of Councillor P Tattersley, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing. It was requested that any information on the levels of childhood obesity in the Braintree District due to the closure of many of the District's public open spaces and leisure facilities in response to the current situation, be provided.
- Councillor Mrs Parker asked one question of Councillor P Tattersley which was in relation to mental health programmes that were aimed specifically at young people.

The following actions were agreed in response to questions raised by Members:-

- Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, agreed to provide written replies to Councillor Abbott and Councillor Miss Weeks in response to their questions.
- Councillor Mrs G Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, agreed to provide a written response to the question raised by Councillor Unsworth.
- Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure, agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Rose in respect of his questions.
- Councillor P Tattersley, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, agreed to provide written responses to Councillor Mrs Beavis and Councillor Mrs Parker in response to their questions raised.

During the course of the discussions, Members moved, seconded and agreed, as required by the Constitution, that the meeting be extended for 30 minutes beyond 9.45pm to enable the remaining items on the Agenda to be transacted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 10.45pm.

Councillor Mrs A Kilmartin
(Chairman)