

# Council AGENDA



**THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

*(Please note this meeting will be webcast and audio recorded)*

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**Date: Monday, 13th April 2015**

**Time: 7.15pm**

**Venue: Council Chamber , Braintree District Council, Causeway House,  
Bocking End, Braintree, Essex, CM7 9HB**

## **Membership:**

Councillor J E Abbott	Councillor M E Galione	Councillor F Ricci
Councillor J S Allen	Councillor C Gibson	Councillor D E A Rice
Councillor M J Banthorpe	Councillor M Green	Councillor W J Rose
Councillor P R Barlow	Councillor P Horner	Councillor V Santomauro
Councillor J Baugh	Councillor S A Howell	Councillor W D Scattergood
Councillor J C Beavis	Councillor H D Johnson	Councillor W Schmitt
Councillor D L Bebb	Councillor S C Kirby	Councillor A F Shelton
Councillor E Bishop	Councillor M C M Lager	Councillor L Shepherd
Councillor R J Bolton	Councillor C Louis	Councillor C E Shute
Councillor L B Bowers–Flint	Councillor D J Louis	Councillor C Siddall
Councillor G Butland	Councillor D Mann	Councillor G A Spray
Councillor C A Cadman	Councillor J T McKee	Councillor J S Sutton
Councillor S Canning	Councillor R G S Mitchell	Councillor J R Swift
Councillor T G Cunningham	Councillor J M Money	Councillor P Tattersley
Councillor J G J Elliott	Councillor Lady P Newton	Councillor C M Thompson
Councillor Dr R L Evans	Councillor J O'Reilly-Cicconi	Councillor M Thorogood
Councillor A V E Everard	Councillor I C F Parker	Councillor L S Walters
Councillor J H G Finbow	Councillor J A Pell	Councillor R G Walters
Councillor M J Fincken	Councillor R P Ramage	Councillor S A Wilson
Councillor T J W Foster	Councillor D M Reid	Councillor B Wright

**Members of the Council are requested to attend this meeting to transact the business set out in the Agenda.**

N BEACH  
Chief Executive

## QUESTION TIME

Immediately after the Minutes of the previous meeting have been approved there will be a period of up to 30 minutes when members of the public can speak.

Members of the public wishing to speak should contact the Governance and Members Team on 01376 552525 or email [demse@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:demse@braintree.gov.uk) at least 2 working days prior to the meeting.

Members of the public can remain to observe the whole of the public part of the meeting.

**Health and Safety.** Any persons attending meetings in the Council offices are requested to take a few moments to familiarise themselves with the nearest available fire exit, indicated by the fire evacuation signs. In the event of a continuous alarm sounding during the meeting, you must evacuate the building immediately and follow all instructions provided by the fire evacuation officer who will identify him/herself should the alarm sound. You will be assisted to the nearest designated assembly point until it is safe to return to the building. Any persons unable to use the stairs will be assisted to the nearest safe refuge.

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**Documents.** Agendas, reports and minutes for all the Council's public meetings can be accessed via the internet at <http://www.braintree.gov.uk>

We welcome comments from members of the public to make our services as efficient and effective as possible. We would appreciate any suggestions regarding the usefulness of the paperwork for this meeting, or the conduct of the meeting you have attended.

Please let us have your comments setting out the following information:

Meeting Attended .....Date of Meeting.....

Comments.....

.....

.....

.....

Contact details.....

Members unable to attend the meeting are requested to forward their apologies for absence to the Governance and Members Team on 01376 552525 or email [demse@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:demse@braintree.gov.uk)

## **INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS**

### **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, Other Pecuniary Interest or Non-Pecuniary Interest:-**

Any member with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or other Pecuniary Interest to indicate in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Such Member must not participate in any discussion of the matter in which they have declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or other Pecuniary Interest or participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting. In addition, the Member must withdraw from the chamber where the meeting considering the business is being held unless the Member has received a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer.

## **PUBLIC SESSION**

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 Chairman's Charities 2014-2015**  
The Chairman to present cheques to her nominated charities for the current Civic Year:
  - PARC Essex
  - Riding for the Disabled
  - Halstead Day Centre
  - Coggeshall Prentice Youth Work Trust
- 3 Presentation by the Chairman of the Keep Britain Tidy Diamond Jubilee Award**
- 4 Presentation by the Chairman of citations to Councillors who will not be standing for re-election in May 2015**
- 5 To receive any announcements/statements from the Chairman and/or Leader of the Council.**
- 6 Declarations of Interest**  
To declare the existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, other Pecuniary Interest or Non-Pecuniary Interest relating to items on the agenda having regard to the Code of Conduct for Members and having taken appropriate advice where necessary before the meeting.
- 7 Public Question Time**  
(See paragraph above)
- 8 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**  
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 16th February 2015 (copy previously circulated).
- 9 Task and Finish Group Scrutiny Review into North Essex Parking Partnership** **8 - 32**  
To receive the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group's Scrutiny Review and refer the recommendation to Cabinet.
- 10 Overview and Scrutiny Review into Poverty in the Braintree District** **33 - 52**  
To receive the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Scrutiny Review and refer the recommendations to Cabinet.
- 11 Amendments to the Constitution** **53 - 59**  
Please note: copies of the updated Constitution for approval have been sent to Members electronically.

12	<b>Governance Committee Annual Report 2014-15</b>	60 - 62
13	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2014-15</b>	63 - 65
14	<b>Reports from the Leader and Cabinet Members</b> To receive the following reports from each Portfolio Holder.  Oral Questions to the Cabinet:  Members are reminded that following the presentation of each Cabinet Member's report, Members may put questions to the Cabinet Member on matters relating to their portfolio, the powers and duties of the Council or the District. Questions are not restricted to the contents of the Cabinet Member's report.  Where a verbal response cannot be given, a written response will be issued to all Members. (Procedure Rules 7.1 to 7.3 apply).  A period of up to 1 hour is allowed for this item.	
14a	<b>Councillor Butland - Leader of the Council</b>	66 - 70
14b	<b>Councillor Beavis - People And Participation</b>	71 - 73
14c	<b>Councillor Bebb - Performance and Efficiency</b>	74 - 76
14d	<b>Councillor Lady Newton - Planning and Property</b>	77 - 79
14e	<b>Councillor Schmitt - Place</b>	80 - 82
15	<b>List of Public Meetings Held Since Last Council Meeting</b>	83 - 83
16	<b>Chairmen's Statements</b> To receive statements from those Chairmen who have given prior notification in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.9 and to respond to questions on such statements. <b><i>None have been received.</i></b>	
17	<b>Statements by Members</b> To receive any statements by Members of which the appropriate written notice has been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.6. <b>There are none.</b>	
18	<b>External Organisations</b> To receive reports about and receive questions and answers on the business of external organisations.	

<b>18a</b>	<b>Annual Report on the Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency</b>	<b>84 - 86</b>
<b>18b</b>	<b>Annual Report on the Citizens Advice Bureau</b>	<b>87 - 89</b>
<b>18c</b>	<b>Rivenhall Playing Fields Association Update</b>	<b>90 - 90</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Exclusion of Public and Press: - To give consideration to adopting the following Resolution: -</b> That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act.	

## **PRIVATE SESSION**

- 20    Leader's or Cabinet Member Statements - Private Session**  
 Leader's Statments or statements by Cabinet Members containing exempt information on a key issue. **There are none.**
- 21    Policy Recommendations and References - Private Session**  
**There are none.**
- 22    Reports from the Leader or Cabinet Members - Private Session**  
 To receive any reports from the Leader of the Council and each Portfolio Holder containing exempt information and to ask questions on matters contained in the reports. **There are none.**
- 23    Oral Questions from Councillors - Private Session**  
 Oral questions without notice on matters related to a particular portfolio, the powers or duties of the Council or the district containing exempt information. (Procedure Rules 7.1 to 7.3 apply). Where a verbal response cannot be given, a written response will be issued to all members
- 24    Private Meetings Held Since the Last Council Meeting**  
 To raise any matters arising from the Minutes of meetings that have been held in Private Session since the Council meeting of 15th February 2015. **There are none.**
- 25    Chairmen's Statements - Private Session.**  
 To receive statements containing exempt information from those Chairmen who have given prior notification in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.9 and to respond to questions on such statements - **There are none.**

**26 Statements by Members - Private Session**

To receive any statements by Members of which the appropriate written notice has been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7.6. **There are none.**

### **Contact Details**

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Please let us have your comments setting out the following information

Meeting Attended..... Date of Meeting.....

Comment.....

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Contact Details: .....

<b>Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015</b>	<b>Agenda No: 9</b>
<b>Task &amp; Finish Group Scrutiny Review into North Essex Parking Partnership</b>	
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>Public Report</b>

**Minute Extract:**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2015**

90. **SCRUTINY OF NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP**

**INFORMATION:** Councillor Bowers-Flint, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group presented the final report on the work of the Task and Finish Group.

**DECISION:** To consider the following recommendations and refer the report to Full Council;

1. That the NEPP reviews the SLA for off-street parking, undertaking a zero based budget as part of that exercise; and brings forward its annual budget setting process for off-street parking so that it informs its partners' own budgetary processes.
2. That the NEPP considers other income-generating opportunities to reduce reliance on PCN income by expanding its customer base; and avoids unnecessary expenditure by ensuring that utility companies reinstate lines/signs following any road-works they carry out or pay for works in default.
3. That the NEPP fills vacant CEO posts promptly to ensure that there is a full complement of staff (using agency staff if necessary).
4. That the NEPP encourages County Council Members to attend partnership meetings to reinforce the concept of partnership working.
5. That the NEPP has further discussions with ECC about the disparity in funding received by the NEPP and SEPP for TROs.
6. That the NEPP reviews the CEO patrol schedules to ensure that it is delivering the required level of off-street enforcement in the Braintree



7. That the mobile CCTV car becomes a permanent fixture (subject to changes in legislation) and the NEPP is asked to provide a schedule of planned visits within the Braintree District, as well as clarifying service standards for parking enforcement in rural parishes.
8. That the NEPP ensures that the virtual permit system (MiPermit) is sufficiently robust to deliver expected improvements in customer service in terms of access and timeliness.
9. That the NEPP improves the customer experience by:-
  - a) Issuing a comprehensive TRO user guide in consultation with partner authorities to clarify the TRO process including eligibility criteria, expected timescales, the scoring matrix and the date of committee meetings;
  - b) Publishing a quarterly or six-monthly newsletter on its website to update customers on new initiatives and issues that may be of interest;
  - c) Simplifying the TRO application form to ease completion;
  - d) Explaining enforcement relating to dropped kerbs;
  - e) Ensuring good liaison with applicants, particularly with regard to extensive or complex TROs;
  - f) Publishing its service standards; and (g) Seeking customer feedback and using this to deliver service improvements.
10. That the TRO process be amended to require applicants to clearly demonstrate majority support for their proposal from other local residents, as well as support from their local County/ District/Parish/Town Council before they submit an application. (This is the approach adopted by the Local Highways Panels for highway schemes.)
11. That the NEPP considers reinstating white advisory H-bars
11. That the NEPP considers reinstating white advisory H-bars across drives in rural areas only on request and at residents' expense, to discourage inconsiderate parking.
12. That consideration be given to creating a common/shared database for use by ECC and NEPP to avoid duplication of TROs. Customers could be given (restricted) access to enable them to track progress with their requests.
13. That the NEPP reviews staffing levels to reduce Call Centre waiting times, lets the caller know where they are in the queue and includes information that is helpful and more generic to the whole partnership (rather than just Colchester) e.g. availability of MiPermit.
14. That the NEPP challenges ECC's 5-yr policy relating to the introduction of TROs following the adoption of new roads and that consideration of TROs is included as part of the planning application process where

appropriate.

15. That the NEPP undertakes benchmarking with the SEPP and other local authorities who have formed a similar partnership for parking services (e.g. Bromley and Bexley) to demonstrate that it provides value for money.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** That the report and recommendations to Council and Cabinet be agreed.

<b>Scrutiny of North Essex Parking Partnership</b>		<b>Agenda No: 5</b>
<p><b>Corporate Priority:</b> Place: Protecting Our Environment Prosperity: Promoting and Improving our Town Centres Performance: Providing Value for Money</p> <p><b>Report presented by:</b> Councillor Mrs. L. Bowers-Flint, Chairman of the Task &amp; Finish Group (North Essex Parking Partnership)</p> <p><b>Report prepared by:</b> Paul Partridge, Head of Operations</p>		
<p><b>Background Papers:</b> Overview &amp; Scrutiny Meetings - 4 June and 16 July 2014.</p>		<b>Public Report - Yes</b>
<p><b>Options:</b> To accept or reject the Group's report and recommendations.</p>		<b>Key Decision: No</b>
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <p>Responsibility for on-street parking in the Braintree District rests with Essex County Council (ECC), as the Highway Authority, and since April 2011 has been undertaken by the North Essex and South Essex Parking Partnerships on their behalf under an agency arrangement. The North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) comprises the District/Borough Councils of Braintree, Uttlesford, Tendring, Colchester, Epping, Harlow and Essex County Council (ECC).</p> <p>Off street (car parks) parking enforcement is offered as an optional service by the NEPP and Braintree District Council has taken up this option.</p> <p>As part of its work programme for 2014/15 the Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee agreed to review the NEPP's relationship with the Council and the services it provides specifically in relation to policy, strategy and finances, parking enforcement and Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) insofar as it affects the Braintree District.</p> <p>The key findings of the Group were as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The strategic aims and objectives of the NEPP are clearly defined and its policies, protocols and procedures operate on the core principles of fairness, transparency and consistency.</li> <li>• The NEPP is a specialist in its field and offers a wealth of experience and knowledge on parking issues.</li> <li>• The governance process (Joint Committee) is well structured and interaction between Members of the constituent Authorities is good; they have a broad understanding of national, regional and local priorities. However, increasing attendance of the ECC Members at partnership meetings would add a more</li> </ul>		

strategic focus.

- The NEPP has achieved significant efficiencies and provides value for money, however, these in the main relate to the on-street function rather than the off-street function from which Districts/Boroughs directly benefit. There is some concern over the ongoing cost of the off-street operation which could be expected to reflect the efficiencies achieved.
- Difficulties are created by the timing of the NEPP's budget setting process which needs to be brought forward so that it informs our own budgetary process. Improved liaison between all partner authority accountants would also be beneficial.
- There is an over-reliance on variable PCN income (on-street) and residents-only parking schemes which leaves the NEPP financially vulnerable. This has consequence for partner authorities who are required to meet any shortfall under the Partnership Agreement.
- In terms of service delivery, this is very much technology-based (e.g. on-line transactions), with less emphasis on dealing directly with customers. Whilst this reflects the increased use of technology and is customer-led, there are some aspects of customer service that could be improved.
- The Traffic Regulation Order (TROs) process is complicated, time-consuming and cost-regulated and it's not user-friendly.
- The role and functions of the NEPP are not widely understood and need to be clarified.

The Group therefore makes the following recommendations:-

1. That the NEPP reviews the SLA for off-street parking, undertaking a zero based budget as part of that exercise; and brings forward its annual budget setting process for off-street parking so that it informs its partners' own budgetary processes.
2. That the NEPP considers other income-generating opportunities to reduce reliance on PCN income by expanding its customer base; and avoids unnecessary expenditure by ensuring that utility companies reinstate lines/signs following any road-works they carry out or pay for works in default.
3. That the NEPP fills vacant CEO posts promptly to ensure that there is a full complement of staff (using agency staff if necessary).
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10. That the TRO process be amended to require applicants to clearly demonstrate majority support for their proposal from other local residents, as well as support from their local County/ District/Parish/Town Council *before* they submit an application. (This is the approach adopted by the Local Highways Panels for highway schemes.)
11. That the NEPP considers reinstating white advisory H-bars across drives *in rural areas only* on request and at residents' expense, to discourage inconsiderate parking.
12. That consideration be given to creating a common/shared database for use by ECC and NEPP to avoid duplication of TROs. Customers could be given (restricted) access to enable them to track progress with their requests.
13. That the NEPP reviews staffing levels to reduce Call Centre waiting times, lets the caller know where they are in the queue and includes information that is helpful and more generic to the whole partnership (rather than just Colchester) e.g. availability of MiPermit.
14. That the NEPP challenges ECC's 5-yr policy relating to the introduction of TROs following the adoption of new roads and that consideration of TROs is included as part of the planning application process where appropriate.
15. That the NEPP undertakes benchmarking with the SEPP and other local authorities who have formed a similar partnership for parking services (e.g. Bromley and Bexley) to demonstrate that it provides value for money.

The full report is attached at Appendix 1.

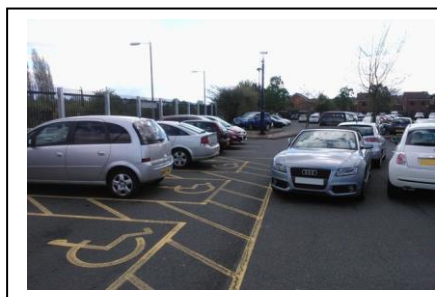
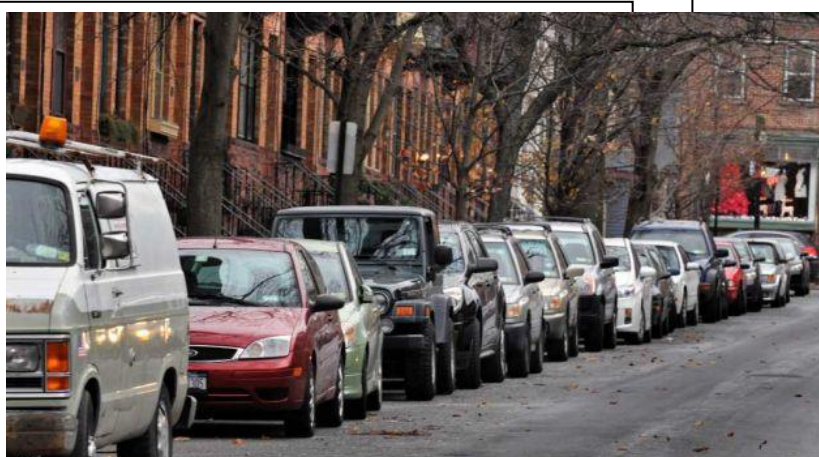
<b>Decision:</b>	
Members are invited to consider the findings and recommendations and refer the report to Full Council.	
<b>Purpose of Decision:</b> To agree the report and recommendations to Council and Cabinet.	
<b>Corporate implications</b>	
<b>Financial:</b>	Potential reduction/increase in the annual contribution made to the NEPP for the off-street function.
<b>Legal:</b>	Potential amendments to the SLA for off-street depending on any changes in service delivery required.
<b>Equalities/Diversity</b>	None
<b>Customer Impact:</b>	The report includes recommendations to improve the customer experience.
<b>Environment and Climate Change:</b>	None
<b>Consultation/Community Engagement:</b>	Consultation has been carried out with relevant stakeholders e.g. Chairman of the NEPP, Cabinet Member for Uttlesford District Council, officers of the NEPP, SEPP, ECC and Colchester Borough Council, and customers in relation to TROs.
<b>Risks:</b>	On street income is variable which poses a risk not only to the NEPP, but also each partner authority in being required to meet any deficit support. There is also the risk of a loss of income to Districts/Boroughs arising from off-street enforcement. If the NEPP's costs for off-street continue to increase, partners to the SLA will be expected to pay more.
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	
Paul Partridge	
<b>Designation:</b>	
Head of Operations	
<b>Ext. No.</b>	
3331	
<b>E-mail:</b>	
<a href="mailto:paul.partridge@braintree.gov.uk">paul.partridge@braintree.gov.uk</a>	





## Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Group

### Review of the North Essex Parking Partnership



# C O N T E N T S

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting on 4 June 2014, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee approved a programme of work for 2014/15 which included a review of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP). The Terms of Reference were agreed at that meeting and they specifically excluded the management and operation of the Council's car parks as that was reviewed in depth the previous year. The composition of the review group was approved at the Committee's meeting on 16 July 2014.
- 1.2 The review focused on the Council's partnership and its relationship with the NEPP specifically in relation to policy, strategy and finances, parking enforcement, and the process for creating Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) insofar as it affects the Braintree District.
- 1.3 The Task & Finish Group (NEPP), led by Cllr. Mrs. Bowers-Flint, met for the first time on 6 October 2014 and has met 5 times in total, supplemented by informal meetings with work stream leads and officers to update and monitor progress. A schedule of meetings is attached at Appendix 1.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following the decriminalisation of parking in Essex in 2002/4, **on-street** parking enforcement was carried out by the Essex Districts/Boroughs under an agency arrangement with Essex County Council (ECC), the cost of which was fully met by ECC on a deficit support basis. Districts/Boroughs continued to fund and manage their own off-street parking functions.
- 2.2 In April 2009, whilst still operating under the agency agreement with ECC, Braintree, Colchester and Uttlesford Councils formed a Parking Partnership, with Colchester as the lead authority, aimed at achieving efficiencies and ensuring that the parking services in the three authorities were effective and financially viable. This focused primarily on parking enforcement (on and off-street) and cash collection, with responsibility for TROs, lines and signs remaining with ECC.
- 2.3 In 2009/10, ECC took the decision to terminate the agency agreements on the basis that the deficit support was unsustainable. A review group was established to find a way of delivering a more efficient service and this resulted in the creation of two Parking Partnerships in April 2011– one in North Essex (NEPP) and one in South Essex (SEPP) – each overseen by a Joint Committee comprising a nominated Member and client officer from each partner authority and led by a single Authority (Colchester in the North and Chelmsford in the South).
- 2.4 The NEPP undertakes on-street parking enforcement, Traffic Order making responsibilities, sign and line maintenance and the business unit processes relating to permit applications, the enforcement of issued Penalty Charge Notices and other legal documentation. It also offers an optional off-street parking enforcement service (including car park ticket machine maintenance and cash collection) which it currently provides for all of its partners except Tendring.

The map below shows the composition of each Partnership, with ECC being the common link.



### 3. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE REVIEW GROUP

#### 3.1 Terms of Reference:

- To review the relationship between the Council and the North Essex Parking Partnership.
- To consider and understand the services provided and the service standards set within the arrangement and the standard of delivery.
- To consider the overall budget, cost benefit to the Council and the efficiency of the service provided.
- To understand the process for Traffic Regulation Orders and the service standards for their implementation.
- To consider customer service standards and customer feedback.
- To make appropriate recommendations for improvements to the Parking Partnership.

#### 3.2 Membership of the Group

##### Members:

Cllr. Lynette Bowers-Flint (Chairman)  
 Cllr. Bill Rose (Vice-Chairman)  
 Cllr. Phil Barlow  
 Cllr. Hylton Johnson  
 Cllr. Celia Shute  
 Cllr. Patrick Horner  
 Cllr. Tom Cunningham

##### Officers:

Paul Partridge, Head of Operations  
 Samir Pandya, Customer & Business Support Mgr  
 Carol Clayman, PA to Head of Operations  
 Sarah Sherry, Administrative Officer

### 4. KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It was agreed that Members would organise their own research, consultations and visits and produce the report and that officers would arrange the Group's meetings, distribute the agendas and minutes and offer guidance and support as and when required.

## **5. PROCESS OF THE REVIEW**

**5.1** The review was separated into three work streams, with two members appointed to each and the Chairman dividing her time between them, as follows:-

- (1) Policy, Strategy & Finances (Cllrs. P. Horner & T. Cunningham)
- (2) Enforcement (Cllrs. Ms C. Shute and H. Johnson)
- (3) Traffic Regulation Orders (Cllrs. W. Rose and P. Barlow)

**5.2** A programme of work was developed listing sources of information, consultees and issues for consideration (see Appendix 2).

**5.3** Each work stream undertook their own research and consultation and then reported back to the main group at scheduled meetings.

**5.4** Progress updates were reported to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

## **6. RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION**

### **6.1 Policy, Strategy and Finances**

- Meetings were held with Vicky Duff, (Network Management Manager) Essex County Council, David Moss, BDC Accountant and Nick Binder, (Parking Manager) SEPP.
- SEPP Business Plan and NEPP Accounts were reviewed.

### **6.2 Enforcement**

- Meetings were held with Lisa Hinman, Enforcement Area Manager and Christine Belgrove, Parking Manager, NEPP; and Brenda Baker, Chairman of Chamber of Commerce and George Yard Centre Manager.
- Two Civil Enforcement Officers were accompanied on their patrols for a day to see how enforcement works on the ground.
- A range of documents were reviewed including the NEPP Annual Report 2013/14 and the Service Level Agreement between the NEPP and its constituent authorities.

### **6.3 Traffic Regulation Orders**

- Consultation took place with Shane Taylor from the NEPP, representatives of The Grove Residents' Association, Witham, and residents of Halstead and Cressing who had applied to the NEPP for parking restrictions to be implemented on local roads.
- Documents were reviewed including 4 case studies relating to TRO applications, the Policy for TROs, Department of Transport's New Procedures for TROs (2012) and NEPP's prioritisation methodology.

### **6.4 Guest Speakers**

A presentation was given to the Group by Matthew Young, Head of Operational Services, Colchester Borough Council and Richard Walker, Group Manager, NEPP, on the background/history to the NEPP and its management and operation.

The Group also invited Cllr. Robert Mitchell, Chairman of the NEPP Joint Committee, and Cllr. Susan Barker, District & County Councillor for Uttlesford District, to attend group meetings to give an overview of the NEPP from their perspectives.

## 7. KEY FINDINGS

### 7.1 Policy, Strategy & Finances

- The strategic aims and objectives of the NEPP are clearly defined and it operates on the core principles of fairness, transparency and consistency. Enforcement is focused on dangerous, careless and negligent parking.
- The policies/protocols and procedures are robust and well-structured and comply with current legislation.
- The NEPP has a tendency to be Colchester-centric e.g. the telephone message played whilst callers are on hold relates specifically to Colchester when it should be promoting NEPP's services on behalf of the whole Partnership.
- The **on-street** income is variable from year to year and dependent primarily on the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued and Residents-Only parking schemes. This poses a significant risk as the more drivers are compliant, the less income will be received. This is recognised by the NEPP who maintain reserves in the event that a deficit occurs in any one year.
- The budgets for the **on-street** account are set by the NEPP, with the aim of reaching and maintaining a position where the service is self-financing. Any operating deficit by the NEPP has to be shared equally by the constituent partners and so it is in the interests of all partners to ensure that the NEPP achieves break-even point. At the end of 2013/14 there was a small operating surplus and this is also expected to be the case in the current financial year.
- The NEPP's budget setting process runs parallel with that of the local authorities and needs to be brought forward so that Districts/Boroughs can consider NEPP's budgetary issues alongside their own budget setting process. It should be more open and transparent which could be achieved by involving finance officers from partner authorities.
- When the two Partnerships were established, the SEPP received a higher subsidy than the NEPP from ECC to undertake TROs. This was inequitable and has enabled the SEPP to deliver more TRO schemes than the NEPP.
- The published year end accounts are extremely brief and it is difficult for customers to make any judgement about value for money.
- BDC's base contribution (£145k p.a.) for the off-street function has not changed since the *original* Parking Partnership was disbanded, despite several operational changes over the past 4 years. The existing budget contribution is based on the cost of the service that BDC previously undertook in-house. An increase of 3% has been applied each year and there is concern that this will continue to rise.
- The NEPP is open and transparent and has a wide range of specialist skills, knowledge and experience from which all partner authorities benefit. There is good partnership working and a clear understanding of local priorities and pressures faced by Districts/Boroughs in relation to both on and off-street parking.
- The relationship between officers and Members within the NEPP is very good and they work well together. However, concern was expressed about the lack of attendance by ECC Members at partnership meetings. Cllr. Mitchell has proved an excellent Chairman – a view endorsed by ECC.

- Economies of scale have been achieved throughout the Partnership and there is greater flexibility in terms of service provision and business continuity, common pricing and a consistent approach across North Essex. For Braintree's off-street function, it offers greater expertise, flexibility and service resilience. However, as the NEPP continues to deliver efficiencies, BDC would expect the savings to be reflected in its annual contribution.
- The NEPP provides a democratic forum which allows for engagement with residents. However, residents do not fully understand the NEPP's role and some see it as a means of preventing parking outside their homes. Clarifying their role would improve customer understanding.

## **7.2 Enforcement**

- The NEPP has 3 enforcement hubs based in the East, Central and West of the County, with one administrative hub at Colchester. Having an area based approach ensures that Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) have a good working knowledge of their areas and the service is more efficient operationally. In Braintree's case, it gives us direct access to staff at the central hub which is based at our George Yard Multi-storey car park.
- The demographic of the partner authorities i.e. mix of rural and urban, means that greater emphasis is placed on the urban areas where most of the restrictions are in place. There appears to be some disparity between the number of CEOs in each hub in relation to the size of the areas that they enforce. However, the number of CEOs in the Central hub comprise the original number of CEOs employed by BDC & UDC pre-NEPP and if this were increased, there would be a corresponding cost to both Authorities.
- The split between on-street and off-street patrols is 70:30 respectively. It was difficult to evidence that this was being achieved and there is a general view across the Partnership that off-street is not routinely receiving 30% of the CEOs' time.
- From April to October 2014, the number of PCNs issued in the Council's car parks was 1,261 – an average of 180 per month. This compares with 1,704 PCNs issued in the same period the previous year – an average of 243 per month.
- The PCN appeals process is explained on the reverse of the PCN. It was not possible to speak to any recipients of PCNs to gauge customer satisfaction, but the process appears to be clear and easy to understand. The NEPP does not undertake Customer Surveys for enforcement as they consider it too sensitive an area for meaningful feedback; nevertheless, they will reconsider their position.
- The CEOs adopt a sensible and pragmatic approach to parking enforcement and despite popular belief are not set targets based on the number of PCNs issued.
- Customers have the option of appealing to an independent body – the Traffic Penalty Tribunal (TPT) - if they feel that a PCN has been issued incorrectly. The TPT's decision is binding on both the appellant and the NEPP.
- Whilst on patrol with the CEOs in Braintree, Members noted that the signs in car parks are very good and the yellow lines quite clear in the town. However, in some cases where utility companies dig up the road, the lines are not always reinstated on completion of works.

- The mobile CCTV works well and has helped to control parking outside schools, on clearways and in other areas. However, the software is limited to operating within one district/borough at a time i.e. cross border working is not possible, and so the system is not as effective as it could be.
- MiPermit was introduced in the Braintree District in May 2014 and this is a more effective and efficient way of paying for parking and actively encourages people to stay longer in our car parks and town centres. Over the longer term, it will reduce back office costs in relation to residents' parking permits as this will become a paperless system ('virtual' permits).
- In terms of customer service generally, Members of the Group have had personal experience of trying to contact the NEPP by telephone and have met with lengthy delays in getting through on several occasions with the quality of the responses from NEPP staff not always to a consistent standard. There have also been unacceptable delays in receiving permits/ season tickets renewals. The latter will soon become available via MiPermit and Members would like an assurance from the NEPP that the system is sufficiently robust and will deliver the expected improvements.
- When first formed, accessing the NEPP systems and operations was mostly via postal application to the Colchester office, but the NEPP is modernising its operations and is now very much geared towards electronic transactions and payments. It has already moved more recently towards issuing 'virtual' tickets/ permits for parking, although at the time of gathering evidence, these virtual permits were not available in every locality. When complete this should simplify and speed up service delivery for the majority of customers, although there will be some who prefer a more traditional approach.
- Service standards are not easily identifiable [and therefore measurable] and should be more accessible to customers.

### **7.3 Traffic Regulation Orders**

- TROs are implemented for a variety of reasons including assisting with traffic flow, controlling or directing traffic, improving safety of road users, preserving or improving the character or amenity of an area, and preventing serious damage to roads and bridges. Prior to NEPP, these criteria may not have been adhered to on a consistent basis across local authorities.
- The TRO process (Appendix 3) is lengthy and time consuming and is cost regulated meaning that the number of TROs that can be approved is restricted and each local authority is competing for the available funding. Historically, it has been agreed that 4 schemes per Authority per TRO Committee Meeting can be considered.
- Considerable errors are found on application forms requiring additional work by NEPP to correct. Better guidance to applicants would avoid this.
- The NEPP receive a large number of requests relating to access to/from people's driveways, for which TROs are not an appropriate resolution. Better information about the type of requests that can be considered would significantly reduce workloads and manage customer expectation.
- There was evidence cited that one complex TRO needed to be revised due to the applicant not being involved in the details of the restrictions in the first Order. Better liaison between the applicant and NEPP officers would clearly have prevented this from happening.



- Parking enforcement across driveways does not require a TRO, but can be enforced at the specific request of the householder/occupier. This works well in urban areas where CEOs regularly patrol, but less so in rural areas where the vehicle may have moved by the time a CEO arrives. This is not well-communicated and would improve customer understanding if made clear.
- There is a requirement for applicants to seek consent/agreement to their proposal(s) from other residents in their road, but this is rather ambiguous in the application form. It would shorten the process and eliminate abortive work if it were made clear to applicants that local support needed to be obtained at the outset.
- There is no requirement for applicants to obtain support for their proposal from their County/District/Town/Parish Council. If that were done, by making clear to applicants that they involve their local councillors, it would help filter out any unreasonable/inappropriate requests prior to being seen by the NEPP, saving a considerable amount of time and effort (NEPP and applicant) with requests that do not meet the criteria.
- There is a common scoring matrix (Appendix 4) used by the NEPP, however, it is felt that this could be refined to more accurately reflect the true value of some of the criteria e.g. if a scheme is self-funded, it should score more highly than one that requires funding.
- The scoring matrix is not made known to applicants, but would help them understand how cases are determined. They are also not made aware of anticipated timescales for decisions, kept informed about progress of their request or dates of committee meetings. Better guidance would improve the customer experience.
- Schemes that are self-financing e.g. residents-only parking, are considered alongside those that require funding and are included in the max.4 schemes that can be put forward at each meeting. Some of these could be done *in addition to* non-funded schemes which would avoid unnecessary delays.
- It is not possible at present for authorities to access any common database and so some schemes that are generated through the Local Highway Panels (ECC-led) may also attract requests via the TRO process, resulting in duplication.
- ECC has a policy that prevents any new development being considered for TROs within 5 years of it becoming adopted highway. This results in valid requests being received that ordinarily may be supported, but are rejected on the basis of this rule. This may be something that could be improved through the planning application process whereby TROs could be considered as a condition of the planning approval.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **8.1 Policy, Strategy & Finance**

Despite the obvious challenges of six different authorities working in partnership with different corporate and political priorities, the NEPP works well, with good strategic direction. It has robust policies and procedures in place and offers a wealth of experience and knowledge relating to parking issues. The partnership would perhaps be strengthened by regular attendance of the ECC portfolio holder at its meetings and greater involvement of partner authorities' accountants in budgetary issues generally.

The NEPP relies heavily on income from PCNs and residents-only parking and this can leave it financially vulnerable.

The off-street parking service generally offers good value for money for BDC and should continue to be provided by the NEPP. However, there are some concerns around the timing of the budget setting process, staff (CEO) vacancies, the annual fixed increase on the off-street account and the anomaly relating to TRO funding from ECC.

It is RECOMMENDED that the NEPP:

1. Reviews the SLA for off-street parking, undertaking a zero based budget as part of that exercise; brings forward its annual budget setting process for off-street parking; and involves partner authorities in this process and in the preparation of accounts
2. Considers other income-generating opportunities to reduce reliance on PCN income by expanding its customer base; and avoids unnecessary expenditure by ensuring that utility companies reinstate lines/signs following any road-works they carry out or pay for works in default.
3. Fills vacant CEO posts promptly to ensure that there is a full complement of staff (using agency staff if necessary).
4. Encourages ECC Members to attend partnership meetings to reinforce the concept of partnership working.
5. Has further discussions with ECC about the disparity in funding received for TROs between the NEPP and the SEPP.

## **8.2 Enforcement**

The process, practices and procedures for parking enforcement are clear and robust. CEOs are well trained and have good local knowledge of the areas that they patrol. Priority is given to enforcement in urban areas (town centres) and we believe that the NEPP has the balance between urban and rural enforcement about right.

However, there is a perception by some Parish Councils within the Braintree District that TROs in their areas are not being enforced adequately. There is also some question as to whether the 30% allocation of CEO time to off-street parking enforcement is being fully delivered.

It is RECOMMENDED that:

6. The NEPP reviews the CEO patrol schedules to ensure that it is delivering the required level of off-street enforcement in the Braintree District.
7. The mobile CCTV car becomes a permanent fixture (subject to changes in legislation) and the NEPP is asked to provide a schedule of planned visits within the Braintree District, as well as clarifying service standards for parking enforcement in rural parishes.
8. The NEPP ensures that the virtual permit system (MiPermit) is sufficiently robust to deliver expected improvements in customer service in terms of access and timeliness.



### 8.3 Traffic Regulation Orders

The TRO process is complicated, time-consuming and cost regulated, with NEPP partners being restricted to putting forward a max. of 8 schemes each per year to the Joint Committee for approval. Schemes that are funded or self-financing (residents-only parking) are more likely to receive approval and could be considered *in addition* to the current limit of 8 p.a., subject to back office resource implications.

The timescale for processing TRO applications is overly long and there is a need to develop a smarter working process to reduce the timescale from submission to outcome. The TRO application form is not user-friendly and should be simplified to ease completion.

From a customer perspective, the process may be seen as being overly bureaucratic and the rationale for introducing TROs is not well understood, which can result in disappointment and expectation not being met. Clarifying the eligibility criteria and requiring applicants to undertake some preliminary consultation would help reduce waiting times and filter out requests that would automatically be rejected based on the assessment criteria (scoring matrix).

The ability to enforce across driveways without a TRO is not widely known and should be better advertised. However, whilst it can be effective in urban areas where CEOs regularly patrol, it is less so in rural areas where a vehicle may have moved by the time a CEO arrives. This could be perceived by some as a two-tier system.

The lack of communication between LHPs and the NEPP can result in duplicity of effort which could be avoided if information were shared.

It is RECOMMENDED that:

9. The NEPP improves customer experience by:-
  - (a) Issuing a comprehensive TRO user guide in consultation with partner authorities to clarify the TRO process including eligibility criteria, expected timescales, the scoring matrix and the date of committee meetings;
  - (b) Publishing a quarterly or six-monthly newsletter on its website to update customers on new initiatives and issues that may be of interest;
  - (c) Simplifying the TRO application form to ease completion;
  - (d) Explaining enforcement relating to dropped kerbs;
  - (e) Ensuring good liaison with applicants, particularly with regard to extensive or complex TROs;
  - (f) Publishing its service standards; and
  - (g) Seeking customer feedback and using this to deliver service improvements.
10. The TRO process be amended to require applicants to clearly demonstrate majority support for their proposal from other local residents, as well as support from their local County/ District/Parish/Town Council *before* they submit an application. (This is the approach adopted by the Local Highways Panels for highway schemes.)
11. The NEPP considers reinstating white advisory H-bars across drives *in rural areas only* on request and at residents' expense, to discourage inconsiderate parking.
12. Consideration be given to creating a common/shared database for use by ECC and NEPP to avoid duplication of TROs. Customers could be given (restricted) access to enable them to track progress with their requests.

13. The NEPP reviews staffing levels to reduce Call Centre waiting times, lets the caller know where they are in the queue and includes information that is helpful and more generic to the whole partnership (rather than just Colchester) e.g. availability of MiPermit.
  14. The NEPP challenges ECC's 5-yr rule relating to the installation of TROs following the adoption of new roads and that consideration of TROs is included as part of the planning application process where appropriate.
  15. That the NEPP undertakes benchmarking with the SEPP and other local authorities who have formed a similar partnership for parking services (e.g. Bromley and Bexley) to demonstrate that it provides value for money.
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## **Acknowledgements**

The Chairman and Members of the Task and Finish Group would like to thank all those who assisted them with research, consultation, advice and guidance, enabling them to complete their review.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Draft Programme for Task & Finish Group

Appendix 2 – Schedule of Meetings

Appendix 3 – TRO procedure flow chart

Appendix 4 – TRO Scoring Matrix

## **DOCUMENTS RESEARCHED**

### **Policy, Strategy & Finance (Work stream 1)**

- SEPP Partnership Business Plan
- NEPP Parking Partnership account document

### **Enforcement (Work stream 2)**

- Parking Partnership, Guidance for Members
- Notices of Non-Payment of Fines 1.4.2013/14 and 2014/15.
- E-mails from David Moss, BDC Accountant, giving income figures for car parks and related services.
- Parking Partnership Annual Report 2013/14
- Overview of NEPP
- Service Level Agreement dated December 2012
- Parking Partnership Organisation Diagram
- Colchester Borough Council - Core Goals for Employees (given to NEPP staff)

### **Traffic Regulation Orders (Work stream 3)**

- NEPP TRO Procedure Flow Chart
- NEPP Officer Responsibility Flow Chart.
- NEPP Prioritisation Methodology.
- Dept. of Transport - New Procedures for TROs (2012)
- 3 x TRO Applications
- NEPP – TRO General Policy

## **GLOSSARY**

**BDC** Braintree District Council

**CEO** Civil Enforcement Officer

**DOT** Department of Transport

**ECC** Essex County Council

**LHP** Local Highway Panel

**NEPP** North Essex Parking Partnership

**SEPP** South Essex Parking Partnership

**TPT** Traffic Penalty Tribunal

**TRO** Traffic Regulation Order

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Type of Meeting	Attendees	Date	Time	Meeting Room	Key Milestones
Main Group Meeting	All	13 November 2014	6pm	Cm Rm 3	<b>26<sup>th</sup> November 2014:</b> High-level progress update to Governance Team. (Report deadline 7/11/14)
Interim Group Meeting	Work Stream Leads	27 November 2014	6pm	Main Training Rm	
Main Group Meeting	All	9 December 2014	6pm	Cm Rm 3	
Interim Group Meeting	Work Stream Leads	7 January 2015 Cancelled	6pm	Cm Rm 3	
Main Group Meeting	All	14 January 2015	6pm	Cm Rm 3	<b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2015:</b> High-level progress update to Governance Team. (Report deadline 9/1/15)
Interim Group Meeting	Work Stream Leads	29 January 2015	6pm	Cm Rm 3	
Main Group Meeting	All	11 February 2015	6pm	Cm Rm 3	<b>11<sup>th</sup> February 2015:</b> Review of draft report to Overview and Scrutiny.  <b>20<sup>th</sup> February 2015:</b> Report deadline for final report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.  <b>11 March 2015:</b> Meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee.  <b>13 April 2015:</b> Meeting of Full Council.

**MAIN GROUP MEETINGS:** To bring together the work progressed by all work streams.

**INTERIM GROUP MEETINGS:** To check progress of each work stream.

<b>Policy, Strategy &amp; Finances</b> <b>CLrs. Tom Cunningham and Patrick Horner</b>	<b>Enforcement</b> <b>CLrs Ms Celia Shute and Hylton Johnson</b>	<b>Traffic Regulation Orders</b> <b>CLrs Bill Rose and Phil Barlow</b>
<p><u>Documentation</u></p> <p>Joint Governance Agreement  Parking Partnership Enforcement Policy  Parking Partnership Operational Protocol  Partnership Dispensation – Suspension Policy  Partnership Enforcement &amp; Discretion Policy  Agenda &amp; Minutes of NEPP Joint Cttee Mtg - 26 June 2014  Annual Report  Service Level Agreement between NEPP &amp; BDC for off-street parking enforcement (attached)  Parking Partnership – Guidance for Members  NEPP presentation to Task &amp; Finish Group 6 Oct 2014</p>	<p><u>Documentation</u></p> <p>Parking Partnership Enforcement Policy  Parking Partnership Operational Protocol  Partnership Dispensation – Suspension Policy  Partnership Enforcement &amp; Discretion Policy  Penalty Charge Notice  Service Level Agreement between NEPP &amp; BDC for off-street parking enforcement (attached)  Parking Partnership – Guidance for Members  NEPP presentation to Task &amp; Finish Group 6 Oct 2014</p>	<p><u>Documentation</u></p> <p>Policy for Traffic Regulation Orders  TRO process flow chart  TRO Application Form  Criteria/Scoring Sheet  Agenda &amp; Minutes of NEPP Joint Cttee Meeting - 16 October 2014  Parking Partnership – Guidance for Members  Service Level Agreement between NEPP &amp; BDC for off-street parking enforcement (attached)</p> <p><u>Case Studies</u></p> <p>The Grove, Witham (residents-only) (to Cttee 8 Aug 2013) (tranche 4) <b>APPROVED</b>  Century Drive, Braintree (tranche 4) <b>APPROVED</b>  High Street, Kelvedon (Tranche 5) <b>REJECTED</b>  Kings Road, Halstead (1007_04_57) <b>REJECTED</b></p>
<p><u>Consultation</u></p> <p>Richard Walker, NEPP Group Manager  Christine (Lou) Belgrove, Partnership Business Manager &amp; Deputy Group Manager  Vicky Duff, ECC (relationship between ECC, NEPP &amp; BDC)  David Moss, BDC Accountant (parking income and other budgetary info)  Cllr. Robert Mitchell, Chairman of the NEPP Joint Cttee  TBC – Another Member who is part of the NEPP Joint Cttee.</p>	<p><u>Consultation</u></p> <p>Lisa Hinman, NEPP (Area Enforcement Manager) <i>(You are welcome to accompany one of the CEOs on patrol if wished)</i>  Emma Day, Back Office Team Leader (Penalty Charge Notice appeals process – Challenge, Representation, Appeal)  Customer consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town Centre Strategy Groups/Chambers of Commerce (from business perspective)</li> <li>• BDC Focus Group (for non-business perspective); exit poll at say George Yard?</li> <li>• Results of any customer surveys undertaken by NEPP.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Consultation</u></p> <p>Alan Waight, Grove Residents Association  Trevor Degville, Technical Services Mgr, NEPP  Shane Taylor, Technical Team Leader, NEPP  Cllr Robert Mitchell, Chairman of NEPP Joint Cttee  Cllrs James Abbott &amp; Lady Newton (ECC ward members) and Cllrs Mike Banthorpe (local ward member) and John Clark (BALC) representing Braintree on the Local Highways Panel.  District Members and Parish/Town Councils who have had involvement with TRO requests.  Individuals /Groups who have applied for a TRO.</p>

<b>Policy, Strategy &amp; Finances</b> <b>Cllrs. Tom Cunningham and Patrick Horner</b>	<b>Enforcement</b> <b>Cllrs Ms Celia Shute and Hylton Johnson</b>	<b>Traffic Regulation Orders</b> <b>Cllrs Bill Rose and Phil Barlow</b>
<p><u>Issues for consideration</u></p> <p>Income generated from on-street parking enforcement.</p> <p>Income derived from off-street penalty charge notices -v- cost of enforcement – are we getting value for money?</p> <p>The process involved in setting money aside to offset the County’s deficit in relation to parking enforcement.</p> <p>The cost of reclaiming unpaid Penalty Charge Notices.</p> <p>The subsidy given to the NEPP in comparison to what the South Essex Parking Partnership received (was there an imbalance?)</p> <p>The content of the Joint Governance Agreement.</p> <p>The fine balance to be drawn between securing income from parking fees and enforcement and not adversely affecting the local economy or the public.</p> <p>The need to consider other options for generating income e.g. <i>should BDC consider allowing the installation of parking meters in some roads to generate more income?</i></p> <p>£150k budget for maintenance of lines and signs – is this adequate? How does it compare to what ECC spend in SEPP’s area?</p>	<p><u>Issues for consideration</u></p> <p>Use of mobile CCTV for outside schools - is it working?</p> <p>Number of CEOs patrolling the Braintree District and how they do this.</p> <p>What is the level of cover in towns and rural areas?</p> <p>Average number of PCNs issued.</p> <p>Is enforcement proportionate and measured? (Spend time out with CEOs observing the process.)</p> <p>How does on-street enforcement compare with off-street in terms of level of enforcement carried out? Is there a good balance?</p> <p>Review the customer experience for paying or challenging an off-street PCN. (In-depth look at PCN appeals process – is it clear/ easy to understand? Speak to recipients of PCNs.)</p> <p>What percentage of PCNs issued are appealed and subsequently rescinded?</p> <p>What % of appeals to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal are upheld? Does this suggest any failing on NEPPs part to ensure that PCNs are issued correctly?</p> <p>What is the overall condition of lines and signs throughout the Braintree District? Is there a programme for renewal or is it dealt with on an ad-hoc basis? Does this ensure satisfactory maintenance of lines and signs?</p>	<p><u>Issues for consideration</u></p> <p>Review the process for creating/introducing Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the governance process sufficiently robust?</li> <li>• Do the scoring criteria adequately reflect the main considerations for Braintree?</li> <li>• Improve understanding about how TROs are used and in what circumstances (to avoid unrealistic expectations). How do we get this message across to customers?</li> </ul> <p>Review the overall customer experience in terms of applying for a TRO and the decision making process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the TRO application form clear and easy to understand/user friendly?</li> <li>• Is the decision making process clearly communicated and understood?</li> <li>• Consult with applicants to seek their views.</li> <li>• Should there be advisory literature explaining in what circumstances a TRO would be considered – to help manage expectations?</li> </ul> <p>Residents-only parking schemes – how does the scheme work, who can participate, what is the cost, is it valued? (Consult with Shane Taylor, NEPP, and residents who have been through the process of obtaining a residents-only parking scheme. )</p>



## TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDERS – PRIORITISATION METHODOLOGY (July 2012)

Scheme:	Available Points	Initial Score	Final Score
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**Viability**

Contribution to economic development	6		
Sustainability – does <b>NOT</b> contribute to displacement	6		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>12</b>		

**Finance**

Support from NEPP budget	4		
Support from LOCAL budget	3		
Supports the hierarchy of routes (TRO Policy)	3		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>10</b>		

**Impact**

Parking regularly occurs within 10-15 metres of site	4		
Personal injury / collision recorded	7		
Parking has been contributory factor in personal injury	12		
Conservation Area or parking is significantly visually intrusive; <b>OR</b> Scheme significantly contributes to noise quality improvement or air quality improvement.	5		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>28</b>		

**Accessibility**

Parking inhibiting emergency services etc.	7		
Parking close to school, hospital, etc.	5		
Parking conflict residents / non-residents etc.	3		
Long-term parking restricts short-term parking etc.	3		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>18</b>		

**Localised congestion**

Parking causes localised congestion	5		
Parking causes congestion in peak periods etc.	7		
Parking in a traffic sensitive street	3		
Parking occurs on a bus route etc.	5		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>20</b>		

**Enforcement**

Parking occurs during day	3		
Parking of a long duration	4		
Parking close to existing restrictions	5		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>12</b>		

<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	<b>100</b>		
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<b>Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015</b>	<b>Agenda No: 10</b>
<b>Scrutiny Review into Poverty in the Braintree District</b>	
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>Public Report</b>

**Minute Extract:**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2015**

91. **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO POVERTY IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT**

**INFORMATION:** Members were asked to consider the final report into poverty in the Braintree District and the recommendations to Cabinet and Council.

The Chairman asked for any amendments to be proposed, seconded, debated and voted on in turn.

Councillor Barlow moved the following amendment which was seconded by Councillor Shelton:

“That the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Department of Work and Pensions to request that consideration is given to the sanctions regime to ensure that it provides the appropriate incentives to claimants to seek work without forcing them into hunger, poverty and potentially homelessness.”

When put to the vote, the motion was **LOST**.

During a general debate thanks was given to all officers who had supported the review and prepared the report. Thanks was also noted for all the organisations who had supported the review.

**DECISION:** To consider and refer the Scrutiny Review report into poverty in the Braintree District to the meeting of Full Council on 13th April 2015 and Cabinet on 15th June 2015.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommend to Cabinet:

1. Prior to the implementation of Universal Credit the Council works with the

Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus to identify those claimants who will be affected to offer appropriate support replicating the good practice established with the Welfare Reforms.

2. To improve access to appropriate advice and support, including sign posting to individuals to external organisations.
3. To provide internet access for customers in the Council reception to access advice and supporting organisations.
4. To promote schemes which help individuals to manage their finances, receive debt management advice.
5. Improve communications between Job Centre Plus, the Council, Food Banks, Citizens Advice Bureau, service providers and residential groups to ensure that those accessing food banks are aware of the support available to enable them to develop income management skills.
6. That Council works with the Credit Union to promote the availability of low interest loans as a better alternative to pay day lenders, including providing links on the Council's website.
7. To consider the opportunity for the Council to work with Greenfields Academy to provide budgeting support to residents of the district.
8. To encourage Greenfields Community Housing Association to open up its Greenfield Academy to non-tenants of the district.
9. To consider developing a programme with community groups, organisations and the Greenfield Academy to engage with schools and children to develop understanding of money management and budgeting from an early age.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** That the Committee's report to be referred to Full Council and Cabinet in accordance with the procedure rules for Scrutiny.

Scrutiny Review in to Poverty in the Braintree District		Agenda No: 6
Corporate Priority:	Encouraging flourishing communities Building a prosperous district – Boost employment skills and support businesses, Promoting and improving our town centre, Securing appropriate infrastructure and housing growth	
Report presented by:	Emma Wisbey, Governance and Member Manager	
Report prepared by:	Chloe Glock, Governance and Members Officer	
Background Papers:	Public Report	
Reports and Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 16 <sup>th</sup> July 2014, 24 <sup>th</sup> September 2014, 10th December 2014 and 28 <sup>th</sup> January 2015.		
Options:	Key Decision: No	
Executive Summary:		
Further to the Committee’s scrutiny review into Poverty in the Braintree District, Members are asked to consider the final report and recommendations to Cabinet.		
Following Members’ approval the scrutiny report will be presented to the meeting of Full Council on 13 <sup>th</sup> April 2015 and the meeting of Cabinet on 15 <sup>th</sup> June 2015.		

## **Decision**

**To consider and refer the Scrutiny Review report into poverty in the Braintree District to the meeting of Full Council on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015 and Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2015.**

**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommend to Cabinet:**

- 1. Prior to the implementation of Universal Credit the Council works with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus to identify those claimants who will be affected to offer appropriate support replicating the good practice established with the Welfare Reforms.**
- 2. To improve access to appropriate advice and support, including sign posting to individuals to external organisations.**
- 3. To provide internet access for customers in the Council reception to access advice and supporting organisations.**
- 4. To promote schemes which help individuals to manage their finances, receive debt management advice.**
- 5. Improve communications between Job Centre Plus, the Council, Food Banks, Citizens Advice Bureau, service providers and residential groups to ensure that those accessing food banks are aware of the support available to enable them to develop income management skills.**
- 6. That Council works with the Credit Union to promote the availability of low interest loans as a better alternative to pay day lenders, including providing links on the Council's website.**
- 7. To consider the opportunity for the Council to work with Greenfields Academy to provide budgeting support to residents of the district.**
- 8. To encourage Greenfields Community Housing Association to open up its Greenfield Academy to non-tenants of the district.**
- 9. To consider developing a programme with community groups, organisations and the Greenfield Academy to engage with schools and children to develop understanding of money management and budgeting from an early age.**

## **Purpose of Decision:**

To enable Committee's report to be referred to Full Council and Cabinet in accordance with the procedure rules for Scrutiny.

Any Corporate implications in relation to the following should be explained in detail	
<b>Financial:</b>	None arising out of this report.
<b>Legal:</b>	None arising out of this report.
<b>Safeguarding</b>	None arising out of this report.
<b>Equalities/Diversity</b>	None arising out of this report.
<b>Customer Impact:</b>	As set out in the report.
<b>Environment and Climate Change:</b>	None arising out of this report.
<b>Consultation/Community Engagement:</b>	As set out in the report.
<b>Risks:</b>	None arising out of this report.
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	Emma Wisbey
<b>Designation:</b>	Governance and Member Manager
<b>Ext. No.</b>	2610
<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:emma.wisbey@braintree.gov.uk">emma.wisbey@braintree.gov.uk</a>

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee Scrutiny Review of Poverty in the Braintree District

March 2015

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### Scrutiny Review of Poverty in the Braintree District

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#### 1. Terms of Reference

At its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the main topic for review would be Poverty in the Braintree District.

The purpose of the review was to examine poverty in the Braintree District with particular focus on the effects of changes to the benefits system and the forthcoming introduction of universal credit.

The terms of reference for the review were agreed by the Committee and are set out below:

- To investigate the cumulative impact of recent changes to welfare benefits; with reference to the poorest residents of the district.
- To receive and consider in the wider context the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish group on the operation of the Council Tax Support Scheme.
- Consider the trends in use and demand on Food Banks, Citizen Advice Bureau and other relevant voluntary agencies.
- Consider relevant Council policies and their impacts.
- Draw conclusions on the implications for residents and recommend changes to Council policy based on this.

Due to the District Elections on 7th May 2015, the Committee was required to complete its work and report to Council on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

It should be noted that the recommendations arising from this review will be referred to a meeting of Cabinet after the elections and it will be for the new Administration to receive and respond to the recommendations.

#### 2. Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet:

1. Prior to the implementation of Universal Credit the Council works with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus to identify those claimants who will be affected to offer appropriate support replicating the good practice established with the Welfare Reforms.
2. To improve access to appropriate advice and support, including sign posting to individuals to external organisations.
3. To provide internet access for customers in the Council reception to access advice and supporting organisations.
4. To promote schemes which help individuals to manage their finances, receive debt management advice.
5. Improve communications between Job Centre Plus, the Council, Food Banks, Citizens Advice Bureau, service providers and residential groups to ensure

that those accessing food banks are aware of the support available to enable them to develop income management skills.

6. That Council works with the Credit Union to promote the availability of low interest loans as a better alternative to pay day lenders, including providing links on the Council's website.
7. To consider the opportunity for the Council to work with Greenfields Academy to provide budgeting support to residents of the district.
8. To encourage Greenfields Community Housing Association to open up its Greenfield Academy to non-tenants of the district.
9. To consider developing a programme with community groups, organisations and the Greenfield Academy to engage with schools and children to develop understanding of money management and budgeting from an early age.

### 3. Evidence Gathering

The Committee received presentations and reports at its meeting of the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014, three evidence gathering sessions were held during its meetings of the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014 and 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015. In addition a number of public reports have been considered along with a Survey conducted by the committee to encourage public participation.

### 4. Evidence Gathering Sessions

A range of local stakeholders were identified and invited to attend the committee's evidence gathering sessions; those participating were:

Food Banks  
Citizens' Advice Bureau  
Essex Chamber of Commerce  
Greenfields Community Housing Association  
Humber Road Estate Initiative (Residential Group)  
Holdfast Credit Union  
Ignite Business Enterprise  
St Andrew's Hall Food Bank  
Witham Town Team  
Witham Chambers of Commerce

In addition to the above organisations the following Officers of the Council were identified to provide evidence.

Joanne Albini, Head of Housing and Community  
Donna Goodchild, Housing Options Manager  
Julie Rigby, Revenues & Benefits Manager  
Nicola Ridgewell, Revenues & Recovery Manager  
Colin Batchelor, Environmental Health Manager (Housing and Pollution)  
Nathan Rowland, Community Projects Officer  
Ian Hunt, Head of Governance



## 5. Survey

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee wanted evidence directly from those who are experiencing or had experienced poverty. Being mindful that, while this is an important issue for inquiry, poverty is often a sensitive issue for individuals and they may not want to be involved in public discussions. For this reason the committee commissioned officers to undertake a survey to seek more detailed information.

The survey was undertaken for a 4 week period during October 2014. It was available electronically on the Council Website and also available in hard copy in the Council's reception.

The Survey was publicised on the home page of the Council's website, on the Council's social media pages, in the local newspaper and in the Council's reception. The Survey was also sent to the Council's People Panel.

The results of the Survey were reported in detail to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3404/download\\_the\\_agenda](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3404/download_the_agenda)

Following the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> December, the Braintree and Witham Times and the Halstead Gazette both published spotlight articles on the Council's survey in December 2014 and January 2015.

A total of 25 responses were received. In comparison to other surveys carried out by the Council with similar communications and methodology this was a very low response. This indicates that either it is a very sensitive issue which individuals do not feel comfortable openly discussing; or alternatively is a topic which did not engage the interest of the wider public.

The Survey ended with an invitation, inviting participants to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak directly to Members. One member of the public took this opportunity, attending on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014, during the second evidence gathering session.

The survey informed the Committee that of those who took part in the survey:

- 52% believed their annual income was below the national average.
- 80% of people indicated that their expenses regularly exceeded their income.
- 64% are currently employed; however 25% of these are in part time work or on temporary contracts.
- 12% of participants are currently unemployed.
- 22% have required help from a food bank.
- 55% had contacted the CAB for advice.
- 40% of those interviewed are aware of someone who has previously or is currently using food banks.
- 76% of people believe that poverty in the Braintree District has increased over the past 10 years.
- 60% believe it will continue to increase for a further 10 years.

## 6. Additional Evidence/Resource considered

The Committee had access to recently published reports by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on reducing poverty and a jointly commissioned report by the Children Poverty Action Group, Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust on the use of food banks. These reports provided a national context to the work on causes of poverty and potential solutions and recommendations. Largely the scope of the published reports go beyond terms of reference of the Scrutiny Review and the Council's powers and direct influence, but yet provide an independent view into poverty.

## 7. Defining Poverty

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has defined poverty as when a person's resources are not enough to meet their basic needs. Defining poverty in this way means that in order to alleviate poverty there are two things which can be done (either alone or in combination): increasing the resources available to individuals and households, or reducing the costs of meeting their needs.<sup>1</sup> Poverty is dynamic, people's needs change throughout their lives and the resources they require to meet their need changes too.

The recorded causes of poverty at a National level<sup>2</sup> are reflected in the Braintree district. The Committee heard that the main local causes of poverty<sup>3</sup> were:

- Unemployment,
- People finding it difficult to stretch the money throughout an entire month,
- Difficulties in saving for future events and emergencies or finding money to respond to an emergency,
- The money being earned is not sufficient,
- The type of work people are in i.e. part time, weekly paid zero hours contracts,
- Obtaining employment and not being able to afford to travel to work,
- Never previously having to budget,
- Changes in personal circumstances, such as adjusting to a drop in income following breakdown of relationships, ill health, retirement or redundancy.

One of the contributors commented that "there was too much month at the end of the pay packet" for some of their service users.

This was in line with the Committee's own survey result showing that 80% of the participants indicated that their expenses regularly exceeded their income with 76% considering that poverty has increased in the last 10 years and 60% indicating that poverty will increase.

## 8. Cumulative impact of recent changes to welfare benefits; with reference to the poorest residents of the district

The Committee heard that following the housing benefit cap being introduced in July 2013, there were originally around 80 households in the district affected. This figure

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rowntree foundation – A UK without Poverty (September 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Meeting of overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014 [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3329/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3329/download_the_minutes)

<sup>3</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014

[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download_the_minutes)[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download_the_minutes)

has reduced and there are now fewer than 40 households<sup>4</sup> affected, with the majority of the change being related to people returning to work. Greenfields Community Housing Association reported that they originally had 5 or 6 households affected by the benefit cap, but this has reduced to 1<sup>5</sup>.

The Committee were also informed that the take up of the discretionary housing payments had been invaluable in assisting customers to work with the Council in adapting to the changes. The Discretionary Housing Payment Fund is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP); the fund for 2014/15 being £204,936. At the time of the evidence gathering session (January 2015) £121,000 had been paid out of the Fund to support those with a housing benefit shortfall and to assist in either keeping people in their homes or helping with the removal costs to smaller, more affordable accommodation.

The Discretionary Housing Payment Fund from the DWP for 2015/16 will be reduced by almost a third, to £162,654. The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations makes provision for Local Authorities to top up the fund. Based upon the current use of the fund and balance of the fund for 2014/15, there is no current evidence to suggest that the DWP fund will be insufficient to meet the needs of the claimants requiring assistance. Accordingly there is no recommendation from the committee to top up this fund.

The Committee heard evidence that the impact of the changes to the welfare benefits was carefully managed with clear communication and early identification of those families who would be impacted being key factors. Advice and guidance was offered and provided by a number of stakeholders and it was also noted by the Committee during the evidence gathering session<sup>6</sup> that Greenfields Community Housing Association had taken on Welfare Benefit Advisors to offer support and give advice to its customers<sup>7</sup> which was welcomed.

Concerns were raised in respect of the forthcoming phased introduction of Universal Credit, which will commence in October 2015<sup>8</sup> in the Braintree District. This will be administered by the DWP and delivered by the Job Centre Plus.

Universal Credit is a new benefit that supports people who are on a low income or out of work, and helps to ensure that they are better off in work than on benefits. The current benefit system has trapped people in poverty. Universal Credit makes sure that work is the best choice for individuals or families, and provides a route out of poverty and away from benefit dependency. Universal Credit aims to make the welfare system simpler by replacing six benefits and credits with a single monthly payment for people who are on a low income or out of work. Changing the system will help reduce poverty by increasing the rewards that are on offer as claimants move into work. Universal Credit also makes it easier for people to take short-term or part-time work, which can be a crucial step on the road to long-term employment<sup>9</sup>.

A significant change to the system is how claimants will receive their benefits. The DWP will make a single payment directly to the claimant. This will have a significant

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<sup>4</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny – 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015 - [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download_the_minutes)

<sup>5</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014

[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)

<sup>6</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014 - [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)

<sup>7</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014

[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk> - Universal- Credit-national-expansion-tranche-three-and-four

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk> – Universal Credits frequently asked questions

impact on those claimants who have not had to manage all their finances for example where housing benefits are being paid direct to landlords.

The Council will retain the responsibility for administering the benefits for those who are of pension age, in support accommodation (i.e. hostels) and the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

Universal Credit will be paid monthly in arrears, to mimic a monthly wage direct to the claimant. Universal Credit places the onus on claimants to manage the monthly payments to meet all their financial needs i.e. payment of rent, budgeting on monthly basis for food. The removal of direct payments to landlords raises concerns with the Committee for those who experience difficulties in managing their finances. Those who have had direct payment have at times clearly placed reliance on this process, and will in the future have to arrange and manage their own payments to their landlords.

The Committee heard evidence that there is a great need for debt counselling and many of the people seen by the CAB and Holdfast Credit Union have few budgeting skills and often only turn to them for assistance once in deep crisis<sup>10</sup>.

The Committee heard of the support given by the Housing Service to those seeking assistance for accessing housing, with debt often only being uncovered by the Housing Services when assessing the affordability of a property or suitability for a loan.<sup>11</sup> It is anticipated that rent arrears will increase and a greater burden will be placed on Housing Services to support those seeking assistance with retaining their home due to rent arrears or who have become homeless due to eviction for rent arrears in finding suitable and affordable accommodation. There was anecdotal evidence that in the pilot areas there are delays of up to 8 weeks in payments of Universal Credits to claimants.

Greenfields Community Housing Association reported to the Committee that a considerable proportion of their income came from housing benefit. 38% of the rent accounts were paid in full by housing benefit and 26% receive some housing benefit to meet to the rent liability; and at the end of 2013 and 2014 rent arrears were 1.7% and 1.4% respectively and for 2015, rent arrears are tracking lower than for the same period last year<sup>12</sup>. They expressed concern that this good position could be compromised if residents receiving universal credit are unable to manage their finances appropriately.

The Committee heard that it is important that the Council and other organisations retain its information streams with customers and supporting organisations during the transition to Universal Credits. There will be a need to create an awareness of the new provisions, not only to those who are currently in receipt of benefits, but also those new to the welfare system.

The committees' view is reflected in the research carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>13</sup> which suggests that Universal Credit is expected to increase benefit take-up, especially among the poorest households, but it seems likely that it will also have a negative effects. In particular:

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<sup>10</sup> Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 24th September 2014 [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download_the_minutes)

<sup>11</sup> Overview and scrutiny Committee - 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015 [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download_the_minutes)

<sup>12</sup> Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014 [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download_the_minutes)

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation- Reducing Poverty in the UK: A Collection of evidence reviews (August 2014)

- it will take time to develop awareness about the new rules, regulations and systems – additional effort will be needed to inform potential claimants, frontline delivery staff, and intermediary organisations that assist more disadvantaged groups and communities;
- there is a risk that digital delivery may reduce and deter take-up among the people who do not have access to computers and/or the necessary skills;
- there is much uncertainty about the impacts on take-up of tougher conditions for out-of-work claimants and the extension of conditions to cover over a million in-work eligible recipients. There need to be communication plan to create awareness of the new system and the impact that it will have on the organisation, in particular the Housing Service.

### **Recommendations:**

- **Prior to the implementation of Universal Credit the Council works with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus to identify those claimants who will be affected to offer appropriate support replicating the good practice established with the Welfare Reforms.**
- **To improve access to appropriate advice and support, including sign posting individuals to external organisations**
- **To provide internet access for customers in the Council reception to access advice and supporting organisations.**
- **To promote schemes which help individuals to manage their finances, receive debt management advice.**

### **9. Local Council Tax Support Scheme**

The Committee examined the work and the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on the operation of the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

In addition to reviewing the work of the Task and Finish Group, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee further examined what other steps the Council took in assisting those in receipt of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme or whose resources did not meet their needs in respect of payment of Council Tax.

During the evidence gathering session Officers<sup>14</sup> advised the Committee of the provisions available to assist customers experiencing financial difficulties following the introduction of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS). These included:

- Introduction of a reduced Court Summons Fee for new customers who did not previously pay Council Tax.
- In the first year of the LCTSS, a scheme for a reduced summons fee was introduced, with a reduced summons fee of £5.00. This system was only

<sup>14</sup> Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015 [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download_the_minutes)

available for the first year of the LCTSS to assist with the transition from former Council Tax benefit to the new scheme.

Although the reduced summons scheme has ceased, the Council has the discretion to adjust the cost of summons payable by customers where Court proceedings have been discontinued due to payment of the arrears or a recovery plan being agreed. This discretion is exercised on a case by case basis having regard to the circumstances of the customer.

- Encouraging customers to pay Council Tax over 12 months

Following the Government's introduction of the 12 month instalment scheme for the payment of Council Tax, the Council has encouraged customers to take up this option to assist them in managing their resources to meet their liabilities. There are currently 2046 customers paying over 12 monthly instalments.

- Payment plans.

The Council allows customers wherever possible to set up special payment plans to assist them in paying their council tax on time. As long as the special payment plan is fulfilled this will prevent customers from having to proceed through the recovery process.

The Committee considered that the Task and Finish Group had carried out a comprehensive review of the scheme. Following the group's recommendations<sup>15</sup>, both have been actioned by the Council.

The joint arrangements between Greenfields Community Housing Association and Braintree District Council are being replicated with other social housing providers in the district and funding has been secured for the Collections Support Officer and the Money Advice Service with the Citizen Advice Service. Both of which are welcomed by the committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has not seen any evidence which requires further recommendations for potential changes to the operation of the LCTSS.

#### 10. Trends in use of and demands on Food Banks, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and other relevant voluntary agencies.

Nationally, the use of food banks has dramatically increased over the last decade and the factors causing the increase are many and varied. Joint research carried out by Oxfam GB, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Church of England and The Trussell Trust<sup>16</sup>, examines why people are turning to food banks, how food bank use fits with their wider coping strategies, and what might be done to reduce the need that leads to food bank use.

The joint research established the following as causes of why people use food banks:

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<sup>15</sup>Report of the Task and Finish Group - Operation of the Council's Local Council Tax Support scheme Task and Finish Group  
[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3268/download\\_the\\_agenda](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3268/download_the_agenda)

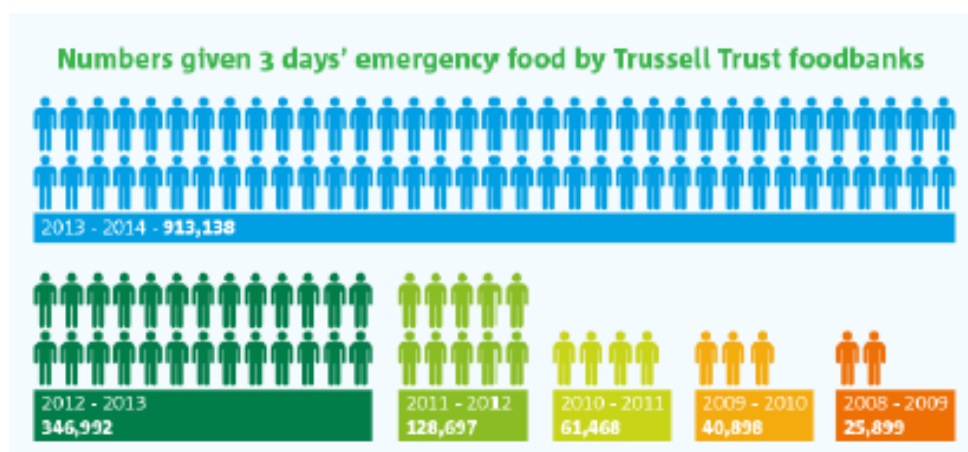
<sup>16</sup> Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK (November 2014) – Oxfam GB, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Church of England and The Trussell Trust



- Use is usually the result of an immediate income crisis
- Loss of earnings from employment
- Change in family circumstance, including bereavement
- Homelessness
- Attributed to problems with benefits
- Waiting for benefits
- Sanctions ceasing/reduction in payment of benefits
- Problems with disability benefits
- Problems with Tax Credits payments
- Ongoing severe shortage or insecurity of income

The key findings of the research showed:

- Food banks were predominantly a last-resort, short-term measure, prompted by an 'acute income crisis' – something which had happened to completely stop or dramatically reduce their income.
- Income crisis could be caused by sudden loss of earnings, change in family circumstances or housing problems. However, for between half and two thirds of the users from whom additional data was collected, the immediate trigger for food bank use was linked to problems with benefits (including waiting for benefits to be paid, sanctions, problems with ESA) or missing tax credits.
- Many food bank users were also not made aware of the various crisis payments available in different circumstances, and even fewer were receiving them.
- 19-28% of users for whom additional data was collected had recently had household benefits stopped or reduced because of a sanction and 28-34% were waiting for a benefit claim which had not been decided.
- Many food bank users faced multiple challenges, including ill-health, relationship breakdown, mental health problems or substantial caring responsibilities. Many were unable to work or had recently lost their job. The frequency of bereavement among food bank users was also a striking feature of this research.



Source: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats#Apr2013-Mar2014>

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee heard evidence during the first evidence gathering Session<sup>17</sup> which reflects the national view on the increased use and causes

<sup>17</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014  
[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)



of use of food banks as being replicated within the district. Representatives of the Braintree Area Food Banks advised that the number of people using food banks is increasing and they believed that there will always be a need for food banks in the district. Last year the Braintree Area Food Banks distributed 28.6 tonnes of donated food feeding 2116 adults and 1191 children, with 1436 food vouchers presented. Vouchers entitle users of the food bank to receive a food box containing a minimum of three days nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food.

The food banks are staffed by volunteers providing emergency food to people in crisis. Those food banks which are set up with the Trussell Trust are asked to make a £1500 donation towards the cost of setting up a food bank<sup>18</sup>.

The Food Bank in the Braintree District works with 53 agencies who are able to make referrals, including the Council, CAB, Job Centre Plus, Greenfields Community Housing Association and Humber Road Estate Community Initiative. The agencies interview potential clients of the food banks to ensure that they are truly in need of assistance.

The Committee heard that in the last year Council had issued over 200 vouchers, with Greenfields Community Housing Association and Humber Road Estate Community Initiative also making referrals to the food bank. In addition to direct referrals by the Council, Officers have also arranged for food boxes to be delivered to those in need<sup>19</sup> in exceptional circumstances.

Whilst it is acknowledged that food banks are valuable and essential resources for those in crisis, there is concern that there is reliance on the use of food banks to meet day to day needs; they should be a short term stop gap and not an overall solution to a problem.

Those who are accessing food banks should be assisted to identify in the underlying factors as to why they need a food box and supported to resolve this issue. The Committee heard that a lot of the clients of the CAB do not have budgeting skills to manage all their bills, which in the view of the Committee would be an underlying factor as to why there is a need to access food banks.

In addition to the traditional assistance provide by the CAB for debt counselling and advice, the Committee heard that there are other facilities within the community which can be accessed, although the take up has been disappointing. Greenfields Community Housing Association has created and funded the Greenfields Academy which provides life training skills for residents, offering a range of courses from cooking on a budget to money advice and management. The Humber Road Estate Initiative offers advice and assistance and intends to provide training<sup>20</sup>.

### **Recommendation:**

- **Improve communications between Job Centre Plus, the Council, Food Banks, Citizens Advice Bureau, service providers and residential groups**

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.trusselltrust.org/start-a-foodbank>

<sup>19</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny – 28th January 2015 - [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3845/download_the_minutes)

Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 24th September 2014  
[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)

<sup>20</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014  
[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)

**to ensure that those accessing food banks are aware of the support available to enable them to develop income management skills.**

According to research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, around 10% of British households have problem debt and among the general population, income drops are reported to be the major cause of financial difficulty by around 4 in 10 households.<sup>21</sup>

A key point of the review of Debt, Credit and Poverty by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>22</sup>, which examined the evidence of the links between problem debt, consumer credit and poverty was that the vulnerability of low-income households to income shocks suggests that the promotion of savings and access to preventative money guidance could also have a role to play in the anti-poverty strategy.

Holdfast Credit Union advised the Committee<sup>23</sup> that they are made aware of the difficulties people face in the community by the profiles presented to them by their Members. More people are finding it difficult to stretch their money throughout an entire month contributing to difficulties saving. The Committee heard that Holdfast Credit Union has 800 members of which approximately 300 have taken loans. They also have several hundred junior members as a result of the school savers scheme. A large number of clients are families on low incomes who are finding that they have to stretch their money further each month.

Holdfast Credit Union is self-funded, the fund available consists of what is generated by the deposits of their Members; however, that fund is under pressure due to greater provision from the budget having to be set aside year on year due for bad debt provision (including funding recovery action in the County Court) and having to be tighter with their credit controls demanding more information from their members.

Holdfast Credit Union agrees that there is a greater need for debt counselling. Holdfast Credit Union are having to make more detailed assessments of members before granting loans including about the quality of employment. It is no longer sufficient to consider if an individual is in or out of work, rather the nature of their contract is a key element.

Holdfast Credit Union reported that people are finding themselves having fewer options for credit and consequently some are resorting to payday loans putting themselves into poverty with high interest rates and charges.

As Holdfast Credit Union is not a charitable organisation it is not eligible for many grants, which creates issues for the running of the organisation, including back office functions and support. Due to its key priorities, Holdfast has a lack of funding for advertising the organisation and the support that it can provide and would welcome support from the Council in this area.

The Committee also noted the work of Holdfast Credit Union with schools to teach children about banking, lending and how money works. This work offers an opportunity to create understanding of the importance of money management at an early age, which is recognised as an important life skill.

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (August 2014) Reducing Poverty in the UK: A collection of evidence reviews.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (August 2014) Reducing Poverty in the UK: A collection of evidence reviews

<sup>23</sup> Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014

[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3414/download_the_minutes)

The Citizens Advice Bureau advised the Committee<sup>24</sup> that following the welfare reforms they have seen an increase in the number of people accessing their services. There is no particular trend but they are often overwhelmed with clients in person and via telephone calls. The biggest issue in the future is the change in the benefits to Universal Credits and changing over to monthly payments. A lot of clients seen do not have budgeting skills and do not contact the CAB until they are in deep crisis. They have seen an significant increase in the use of payday loans, but not knowingly seen anyone who has sought financial help from a unlicensed lender.

### **Recommendations:**

- **That Council works with the Credit Union to promote the availability of low interest loans as a better alternative to pay day lenders, including providing links on the Council's website.**
- **To consider the opportunity for the Council to work with Greenfields Academy to provide budgeting support to residents of the district.**
- **To encourage Greenfields Community Housing Association to open up its Greenfield Academy to non-tenants in the district.**
- **To consider developing a programme with community groups, organisations and Greenfield Academy to engage with schools and children to develop understanding of money management and budgeting from an early age.**

### **11. Other matters raised during the Evidence Gathering Session**

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>25</sup> states that poverty is a cost which the UK cannot afford, it is wasteful and risky to those who have experienced it and to the wider society and economic success. It goes on to state that when poverty does take hold it can be enduring; experiencing persistent poverty early in life increases the risk of poverty as an adult and poverty in working ages reduces people's abilities to save for retirement.

During the first evidence gathering session<sup>26</sup>, the Committee heard from Ignite Business Enterprise and the Chamber of Commerce who advised that the main area of concern of poverty is the gap between individuals finding work and being able to afford to get to work and encouraging people into employment when it is not necessary as financially beneficial as staying on benefits. Common issues for young people are travel costs, which can create barriers for business and organisations when trying to secure apprentices. Travelling costs can be disproportionate to apprentice's wages and therefore prohibitive.

In July 2014, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's review of enabling young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to participate in Employment, Education and Training looked at the issue of travel to the place of employment or training and made a recommendation to Cabinet which proposed

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<sup>24</sup> Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014 [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)

<sup>25</sup> A UK without Poverty (September 2014)

<sup>26</sup> Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014 [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3413/download_the_minutes)

Braintree District Employment Skills Board considers schemes for free public transport and a supported moped and bicycle scheme for young people for apprenticeships and vocational training and in the early stages of employment.

Cabinet responded to that recommendation<sup>27</sup>, advising that following discussions with Essex County Council a Braintree District Employment and Skills Board has been established. This will feed into the work of the Essex Employment and Skills Board.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has not seen any direct evidence which requires the earlier recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny's review with regard to the NEETS to be re-visited.

## 12. Records of evidence gathering sessions

The reports and minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during which the evidence gathering sessions were held are available on the Council's website.

[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/meetings/committee/13/overview\\_and\\_scrutiny\\_committee](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/meetings/committee/13/overview_and_scrutiny_committee)

The evidence gathering sessions were held on:

- 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014,
- 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014,
- 10th December 2014,
- 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

## 13. Acknowledgements:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to record its thanks to all those persons who took part in the scrutiny review and in particular, expresses its appreciation and thanks to the under mentioned individuals who contributed their time and expertise during the information gathering stage of the process:-

David Hall – Greenfields Community Housing Association

Davis Burch – Essex Chamber of Commerce

Councillor C Thompson – Witham Town Teams and Witham Chamber of Commerce

David Gronland – Halstead Town Team

Kenneth Davies – Humber Road Estate Community Initiative and Survey Participant

Liz Storey – Ignite Business Enterprise

Caroline Halfarce and Paul Hart – Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau

Jane Walker and David McDonald – Braintree Area Foodbanks

Ray Payne – Holdfast Credit Union

Joanne Albini - Head of Housing and Community

Donna Goodchild - Housing Options Manager

Julie Rigby - Revenues & Benefits Manager

Nicola Ridgewell - Revenues & Recovery Manager

Colin Batchelor - Environmental Health Manager (Housing and Pollution)

Nathan Rowlands - Community Projects Officer

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<sup>27</sup> Cabinet 21<sup>st</sup> July 2014 - [http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3330/download\\_the\\_minutes](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/3330/download_the_minutes)

#### 14. Reference Materials

Reducing Poverty in the UK: A collection of evidence review – Joseph Rowntree Foundation (August 2014),  
A UK without Poverty – Joseph Rowntree Foundation (September 2014),  
Emergency Use Only Understanding and reducing the use of Food banks in the UK – The Children Poverty Action Group, Church Of England, Oxfam Gb and The Trussell Trust (November 2014),  
Universal Credit One year In: The experiences of housing associations – National Housing Federation.

Benefits & Housing Advice Leaflet,  
CAB – Local Authority Referral Form to Money Advisor,  
DHP for Rent in Advance/Deposits - Procedure,  
Eligibility Criteria: Deposit Bond and Rent in Advance Loan Schemes,  
Essential Living Fund,  
Food bank – Referral Agency Handbook (The Trussell Trust),  
Homelessness Support Guide,  
NHAS Housing Debt Casework Referral Form.

<b>Amendments to the Constitution</b>		<b>Agenda No: 11</b>
<p><b>Corporate Priority:</b> Corporate Governance</p> <p><b>Portfolio Area:</b> Overall Corporate Strategy and Direction</p> <p><b>Report presented by:</b> Cllr Butland, Leader of the Council</p> <p><b>Report prepared by:</b> Ian Hunt, Head of Governance</p>		
<p><b>Background Papers:</b> The Constitution</p>		<b>Public Report</b>
<p><b>Options:</b> To approve or not to approve the recommendations.</p>		<b>Key Decision:</b> <b>NO</b>
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <p>At Council on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012 a new form of constitution was adopted which reorganised the layout of the document. It also incorporated a number of other minor changes. The constitution was further revised on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012 to incorporate the changes in relation to Member conduct. In preparation for the new Council, and as a result of some changes in legislation it was considered appropriate to update the Council's constitution.</p> <p>As part of the continual review of processes for the development management process it was noted that there were some issues with the scheme of delegation for planning. There are changes proposed to this scheme to create a more effective and efficient delegation process to fit current customer and business need and that anticipated with a likely increase in volume and complexity of applications.</p> <p>The constitution should be seen as a living document which changes to reflect the needs of the Council and changes in the wider legal background.</p>		
<p><b>Decision:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To approve the revised scheme of planning delegation, (as set out in Article 8 Section 4) as recommended by Planning Committee with the modified proposal from the Developing Democracy Group to take effect from the 8<sup>th</sup> May.</li> <li>2. To adopt the revised constitution to take effect from the 8<sup>th</sup> May.</li> <li>3. To authorise the Head of Governance to make any typographical or related consequential amendments to produce publication versions of the document.</li> </ol>		

**Purpose of Decision:**

To ensure the Council has up-to-date constitution which reflects the needs of the authority and current legal requirements.

**Any Corporate implications in relation to the following should be explained in detail**

<b>Financial:</b>	None arising directly from this report.
<b>Legal:</b>	There have been a number of changes in legislation which have fed into this report. Having an appropriate up-to-date constitution reduces legal risk.
<b>Safeguarding</b>	None arising directly from this report.
<b>Equalities/Diversity</b>	None arising directly from this report.
<b>Customer Impact:</b>	None arising directly from this report.
<b>Environment and Climate Change:</b>	None arising directly from this report.
<b>Consultation/Community Engagement:</b>	The changes to planning delegation have been consulted on extensively.
<b>Risks:</b>	Failure to have an up-to-date and appropriate constitution would expose the Council to the risk of failing to comply with its legal obligations.
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	Ian Hunt or Emma Wisbey
<b>Designation:</b>	Head of Governance, Governance and Member Manager
<b>Ext. No.</b>	2610
<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:ian.hunt@braintree.gov.uk">ian.hunt@braintree.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:emma.wisbey@braintree.gov.uk">emma.wisbey@braintree.gov.uk</a>



## **1. Background:**

- 1.1. The constitution has been updated on a number of occasions since it was first developed. At Council on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012 a new form of constitution was adopted which reorganised the layout of the document. It also incorporated a number of other minor changes. The constitution was further revised on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012 to incorporate the changes in relation to Member conduct.
- 1.2. In preparation for the new Council to be elected in May 2015 there has been a review of the constitution to ensure it meets the needs of the Council and legal requirements. There have been debates on various issues and proposed drafts at the Developing Democracy Group meetings of the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2014, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2015 and 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015. In relation to proposals to amend the planning scheme of delegation detailed consideration was given by the Planning Committee.
- 1.3. This report consolidates and presents to Council the conclusions of the review. The revised constitution is available electronically with the agenda, a limited number of paper copies will be provided in the Members Room and further copies are available on request. Once agreed by Council, the constitution will be published on the Council's website.

## **2. Planning Delegations:**

- 2.1. The Scheme of Delegation in relation to planning decisions was last reviewed 9 years ago and the level of delegation is relatively low in comparison to planning authorities of a similar size and character. There are a number of areas where there is dissatisfaction with the current arrangements. There is also likely to be an increase in the number and complexity of applications for at least the next couple of years.
- 2.2. The proposed changes will ensure that there is a more effective and efficient delegation arrangement. Increasing the number of decisions made under delegated powers will ensure that decisions on planning applications that raise no significant planning issues are made quickly. This will allow Members to focus on those applications that require additional scrutiny and where they can add most value in balancing conflicting pressures. Overall it will help the Council discharge its development management function in an efficient and timely manner, without compromising the quality of the decisions made.
- 2.3. A report was taken to the Planning Committee on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 which set out the detailed proposals, this was subject to a public consultation including all parish and town councils within the district, agents and developers and the public. Full details of the consultation responses are detailed in the report to the Planning Committee on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015. The committee also had the benefit of a representation at committee from Councillor Smith of Rayne Parish Council who spoke on the proposals.
- 2.4. The Planning Committee recommended to Full Council that there be a revised scheme of delegation to Officers incorporating an exceptions based approach to delegation. With applications will be determined at Officer level unless:



- a. A Councillor requests in writing with valid planning reasons, within 7 days of the public consultation period ending, that an application should be subject of consideration by the Committee,
  - b. The application is in the opinion of the Development Manager, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Planning Committee, of significant public interest; would have a significant impact on the environment; or should otherwise be referred to Members due to its significance in some other respect,
  - c. The applicant or landowner is Braintree District Council,
  - d. The applicant, or agent, is a Councillor or a Council employee, or the applicant, or agent, is a close relative of a Councillor or Council employee.
- 2.5. Additional safeguards have been agreed with the Planning Committee in relation to the implementation of the revised scheme with regular review and monitoring by the committee to ensure that Members have confidence in the Councils decision making.
- 2.6. The proposed changes were further considered by the Developing Democracy Group in the context of the whole constitution at their meeting of the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Concern was raised by Members that the role of Parish Councils was diminished, particularly given the level of consultation responses.
- 2.7. In debate Members recognised the role of the Parish Councils as statutory consultees, but acknowledged that they needed to provide full and clear responses on valid material planning grounds in order for their views to carry significant weight within the planning process. Members noted the limited attendance at Planning Committee by Parish Councils as another factor to be taken into account.
- 2.8. Members noted that the scheme of delegation was to be reviewed by the Planning Committee after six months, Members were of the view that this would give a period for reflection on the quality of the representations made and the impact of these and this could inform the review of the scheme.
- 2.9. The DDG therefore recommended to Council that in addition to the existing recommendation:
- Applications will be determined at Officer level unless:
    - A Parish Council requests in writing, with valid planning reasons within seven days of the public consultation period ending, that an application should be subject to consideration by the Committee,
- 2.10. The detailed wording of the delegations is set out in detail in Article 8 section 4.

### **3. Revision and Updating**

- 3.1. The Council has had over two years' experience with the revised constitution and is able to bring this experience to bear in proposing appropriate changes to the document. The proposals do not seek to change the core structure of the document, but rather seek to ensure that the changes to structure undertaken on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012 are fully reflected through the whole document.

- 3.2. The document has been refreshed to operate on a digital first principal with links as appropriate. It is designed to work on both computers and tablets. Electronic copies will (as with the current version) be available on the Councils main public website. It is also formatted to enable use with A4 print media recognising the need for limited print copies. Print copies will be maintained within the Members Room for Councillors and available for review at the Councils main offices during office hours by members of the public.
- 3.3. Revisions have been made to the management of **Council business**. At present there are specific times given for the **length of Member speeches**. This varies depending on the context, so a proposer of a motion or amendment may have 5 minutes with other Members given 3 minutes. This is broadly irrespective of the topic under debate and the complexity of issues. It is proposed that there be a unified approach with the Chairman given discretion to manage time effectively; however a guideline maximum of 5 minutes per speaker is given. This would allow the Chairman to allow a Member longer provided that they were adding to debate and not repeating themselves.
- 3.4. Clarity has been given to the management of **amendments to motions**, where there are legal and budget implications; these should be submitted by 12 noon on the day of the meeting to the Chief Executive to enable consideration by statutory officers. In addition in debates the proposer is given the final right of reply before the vote on the amendment, this clarifies the position which was previously unclear.
- 3.5. Clarity has been given to timescales, in a number of places references were made to **notification timescales**. There was an inconsistency with some being clear working days and others being working days. This has been standardised to clear working days. An example is the requirement for Members wishing to submit a Motion on Notice, this fits with the accepted practice we have been working to.
- 3.6. Clarity has been given to a number of **current Officer Delegations** whilst we are retaining the open nature delegations, greater clarity is being given in certain statutory areas, principally in relation to planning and enforcement. These are areas which are heavily litigated, and best practice is indicating that key provisions should be clearly defined. These powers are already exercised by officers, and no change of practice is anticipated, it will however clarify key delegations should we ever be challenged.

#### **4. Legislative changes:**

- 4.1. There are a number of areas where legislation has changed which require specific alterations to the constitution.
- 4.2. The first of these relates to the **recording of votes on Council tax matters**. By virtue of Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 any vote which sets the Council tax must be a recorded vote. The Council already has a procedure rule to enable Members to call for a recorded vote, however these regulations prescribe its adoption. This follows the procedure adopted at the Budget meeting this year and ensures that the minutes of the meeting will clearly indicate which Members voted for or against or abstained on specific resolutions in the setting of Council tax.

- 4.3. The second area relates to the **access to meetings**. The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 require that the Council allows a greater degree of openness to public meetings. Principally it specifically enables citizen reporting and recording of meetings, as against purely accredited journalists.
- 4.4. Key provisions surround a specific right to film, record or live report (for example on Twitter or Facebook) public meetings of the Council. The rights to not extend to any period where the meeting moves into private session, and should the exercise of these rights disrupt the business of the meeting then the usual process for excluding an individual still remain.
- 4.5. Whilst this openness has been placed on a statutory footing, its impact for the Council will be more limited than for others given we have a history of web casting meetings, and have been tolerant of appropriate use of social media at meetings. This contrasts with some other councils who have tried to ban filming of meetings and the use of social media.
- 4.6. The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 have **modified the processes in relation to the dismissal of the Head of Paid Service, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer**. The current requirement to appoint a Designated Independent Person is being removed. This is replaced by a requirement for the authority to form a committee to consider and make recommendations to Council. The Committee must include at least 2 Independent Persons appointed under the Localism Act 2011. These are the same Independent Persons who advise the Council in relation to Member standards matters. The relevant provisions are contained in the Officer Employment Procedure Rules under sections 6 and 7.
- 4.7. The following codes of practice; Councillors and Officers Engaged in the Determination of Planning Applications, Officers', and Protocol on Member Officer Relations have been updated. The key changes relate to the adoption of the new standards arrangements, and the provisions in respect of predetermination and bias in the Localism Act 2011 as well as the introduction of the Bribery Act. The update ensures that these changes are reflected.

## 5. Prospective changes:

- 5.1. The **Contract Procedure Rules** have not been reviewed at this point, Members will recall that Council recently adopted a new procurement strategy, and work is underway to design a new set of procedure rules to support that strategy. In addition to covering the existing areas it will also clarify the position where we are bidding competitively as a supplier, as well as introducing recent changes in EU procurement legislation. This work will come forward during the coming municipal year.
- 5.2. The Independent Remuneration Panel is considering **Member Allowances** and has consulted with Members. Its report will be presented to Council in May 2015 at the AGM, with detailed recommendations in respect of the scheme to be adopted by the new Council.

## 6. Recommendations:

- 6.1. The revised constitution will provide a fresh consolidated document which will ensure that the Council will be in a position to operate efficiently and effectively. The document incorporates recent legislative changes which ensures the Constitution is fully legally compliant.
- 6.2. It is therefore recommended that Council:
  1. Approves the revised scheme of planning delegation, as recommended by Planning Committee with the modified proposal from the Developing Democracy Group to take effect from the 8<sup>th</sup> May.
  2. Adopts the revised constitution to take effect from the 8<sup>th</sup> May.
  3. Authorises the Head of Governance to make any typographical or related consequential amendments to produce publication versions of the document.

<b>Governance Committee Annual Report 2014/2015</b>		<b>Agenda No: 12</b>
<p><b>Report presented by:</b> Councillor Johnson, Chairman of the Governance Committee</p> <p><b>Report prepared by:</b> Lesley Day, Audit Insurance &amp; Fraud Manager</p>		
<b>Background Papers:</b>		<b>Public Report</b>
<p><b>Options:</b></p> <p>To note the report.</p>		<p><b>Key Decision:</b></p> <p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <p>The following activities were considered by the Committee during 2014/2015:</p> <p><b><u>AUDIT &amp; GOVERNANCE</u></b></p> <p><b>Report: Annual Governance Statement 2013/2014</b></p> <p>Received for approval the Annual Governance Statement for incorporation into the Statement of Accounts. Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 require “The relevant body shall be responsible for ensuring that the financial management of the body is adequate and effective and that the body has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of that body’s functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.”</p> <p><b>Report: Annual Internal Audit Report 2013/2014</b></p> <p>Received the Annual Report on Internal Audit Activity for 2013/2014.</p> <p><b>Reports: Internal Audit Activity (quarterly)</b></p> <p>Received and noted details of the audit assignments completed together with status updates in respect of Reportable Recommendations.</p> <p><b>Report: Annual Audit Letter 2013/2014</b></p> <p>Received the external auditor’s Annual Audit Letter covering the Council’s financial audit. The Committee receives the report on behalf of the Council and may make observations to Cabinet who can decide to take action to make improvements based on the external auditor’s assessment.</p> <p><b>Report: Public Sector Internal Audit Standards</b></p> <p>Received and noted the assessment of Internal Audit against PSIAS. Approved the Internal Audit budget and resource plan for 2015/2016.</p>		

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

### **Report: Strategic Risks**

Received two reports detailing reviews undertaken of the Council's Strategic Risk Register by Management Board and Cabinet together with details of how the significant business risks are being monitored and managed by Management Board in line with the Council's Risk Management Strategy.

### **Report: Operation Risks**

Received details of the annual review of the Council's Operational Risks.

## **MONITORING AND FINANCE**

### **Report: Receipt of the Statement of Accounts for 2013/14 together with the External Auditor's Final Report to Governance Committee**

Considered and approved the Statement of Accounts for 2013/2014 having received details of the external auditors' annual governance report.

The external auditor's report is presented to the Governance Committee in accordance with the provisions of International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) 260 Communication with Those Charged with Governance, ISA 265 Communicating Deficiencies in Internal Control and Management, and the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice

### **Reports: Quarterly Performance Management Reports and Briefings**

Received and noted the quarterly Performance Management Reports. In addition, the Committee received briefings covering Performance and Project governance, Change Control process and Covalent reporting system

### **Reports: Financial Indicators (quarterly)**

Received and noted details of key financial indicators.

### **Report: Treasury Management Annual Report 2013/2014 and Mid-Year Report 2014/2015**

Noted and advised Cabinet to accept the reports.

### **Report: Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2015/2016**

Reviewed and provided comments on the draft Strategy prior to its submission to Cabinet.

## **STANDARDS**

Received the Monitoring Officer's Annual Standards Report for 2014.

### **Other reports received**

**Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)** - Noted the current situation regarding transfer to the Single Fraud Investigation Service on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015

<b>Decision:</b> <p>That Council notes the Governance Committee's Annual Report for 2014/2015.</p>
<b>Purpose of Decision:</b> <p>To note the activities of the Governance Committee during 2014/15.</p>

<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2014-15</b>		<b>Agenda No: 13</b>
<b>Report presented by:</b>	Councillor Dr. Evans, Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
<b>Report prepared by:</b>	Chloe Glock, Governance and Members Officer	
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>Public Report</b>	
<b>Options:</b>	<b>Key Decision: No</b>	
<b>Executive Summary:</b>		
<b><u>Key Scrutiny Topics 2014-15</u></b>		
<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s key areas of scrutiny in 2014-15 have been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poverty in the Braintree District (Main scrutiny topic for 2014-15)</li><li>• Council’s Budget.</li><li>• Reviewed the work of the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership for 2013/14.</li></ul> <p>Brief details on each are set out below.</p>		
<b><u>Poverty in the Braintree District</u></b>		
<p>The Committee has reviewed the issues surrounding Poverty in the Braintree District. The review focused on the District as a whole to determine how poverty can have an effect on individuals, communities and businesses. The Committee agreed the topic due to its importance within the District and recognising the national implications.</p>		
<p>The terms of reference of the review included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To investigate the cumulative impact of recent changes to welfare benefits:</li></ul>		



with reference to the poorest residents of the district.

- To receive and consider in the wider context the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish group on the operation of the Council Tax Support Scheme
- Consider the trends in use and demand on Food Banks, Citizen Advice Bureau and other relevant voluntary agencies.
- Consider relevant Council policies and their impacts.
- Draw conclusions on the implications for residents and recommend changes to Council policy based on this.

### **Task and Finish Groups**

The Committee established the following Task and Finish Groups in 2014-15:

- North Essex Parking Partnership
- Mi Community

The Committee received regular progress reports on the work of the Task and Finish Groups, both of which are completed and recommendations have been made to Council and Cabinet.

### **Council's Budget**

The Committee scrutinised the Council's budget at 2 meetings in November 2014 and January 2015 with Cabinet Members. Both meetings included presentations from the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member, Performance and Efficiency, on the Council's proposed priorities for 2015-16, Council Budget and Council Tax 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19.

The Committee's meetings on scrutiny of the budget were opened to all Council Members to attend. It is pleasing that many Members who are not Members of the Committee were able to attend these meetings and participated in the questioning sessions.

### **Councillors Capital Programme Bids**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider the Capital Programme Bids made by Councillors and to determine whether Bids should be recommended to Cabinet for inclusion in the Council's Budget for 2015/16.

One Capital Programme Bid was received. This Bid was submitted by Councillor J Abbott in regard to the creation of a 70 meter path linking Wood Grove, Silver End to the football pavilion along the edge of the Council owned Silver Street playing field.

**Scrutiny Review of Enabling Young People who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) into Education, Employment or Training Update**

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that officers undertake further research to establish the view of young people following changes implemented during the scrutiny review process.

Feedback was obtained from Support Workers who participated in the Scrutiny Review Process together with the Jobcentre Plus. It was reported back to the Committee that there had been a noticeable reduction in sanctions. This feedback was welcomed by the Committee.

**Acknowledgement**

Committee Members are grateful to all those who have attended its meetings over the year and assisted with its enquiries and studies. This includes Cabinet Members and all members attending the Committee's budget scrutiny meeting and all members of the public attending scrutiny meetings on Poverty in the Braintree District.

**Decision:**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2014-15 be noted.

**Purpose of Decision:** To note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report.

<b>LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL</b>	<b>Agenda No: 14a</b>
<b>OVERALL CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DIRECTION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY</b>	

## **Economic Development Strategy**

### **Business Support**

On 11<sup>th</sup> March I was pleased to be able to demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting new businesses by officially launching the construction of an extension to the Braintree Enterprise Centre on Springwood Drive, together with County Councillor Penny Channer and the Chairman of the Ignite Board, Nigel Harley. Together with the current centre, the extension will enable Ignite to provide a further 12 new business incubator units, on top of the 30 units currently available, together with training and conference facilities to deliver business support, and shared space for business interaction. This will create 50 direct jobs and support the creation of a total of 1100 jobs. The total cost of the project is £1.4m with the District Council contributing land and capital funding of £866,000 and Essex County Council providing capital grant aid of £300,000. Construction is on target to be completed within 12 months and the extension is planned to be operational by April 2016.

To support existing businesses to grow, and to attract businesses into the District to create jobs, the Council has set aside £500,000 in the current year's budget to establish a Business Investment Loan Fund. On 30<sup>th</sup> March, Cabinet agreed the details of that fund. £400,000 will be made available as match-funding loans to businesses to invest in capital equipment and premises, where it can be demonstrated that this will create jobs. We estimate that this will support around 10 companies to create around 50 jobs. Loan repayments will then be used to make further loans creating more jobs. We will be looking to other partners, including the County Council and the South East LEP to contribute to the fund, increasing the value of loans that we can offer. The remaining £100,000 will be invested in a scheme known as 'Funding Circle'. This is a peer lending approach, which is particularly suitable for smaller loans to small businesses, and would be ring-fenced to provide loans to District businesses.

### **Business Engagement and Partnerships**

Councillor Tom Cunningham attended the Braintree District Business Leaders Board on my behalf on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015. The Board reviewed its first 12 months in operation and discussed how to maintain the momentum of the Board, including inviting our new MP's to meet them in the autumn. The Board also commented on the Council's proposed loan fund for businesses; and a new guide for businesses on their broadband options.

I attended the Haven Gateway Board meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015 where we discussed the South East LEP's European funding programme; and plans for infrastructure improvements in Colchester. We also received updates on the A120 improvement campaign; the Partnership's input to recent strategic rail consultations; and proposals to establish a 'growth hub' across Essex to co-ordinate business support and advice.

### **Apprenticeships**

On 26<sup>th</sup> February I was pleased to be able to launch a campaign with the College at Braintree (Colchester Institute) to encourage businesses to take on apprentices. The aim of the campaign was to secure commitment from District businesses to take on 30 apprentices, over a 30 day period. The launch was well attended by businesses and included a presentation from Neil Jesse of Village Glass in Witham on how apprenticeships had helped them to grow as a business as well as putting something back into the community. At the time of writing we were well on course to achieve commitments to 30 new apprenticeships, and I will provide a verbal update at Council.

### **Education**

On 2nd March I met the Principal of Maltings Academy to view first-hand the excellent work the school are doing. They were preparing themselves for an imminent Ofsted Inspection. Then on 4th March I attended the Essex County Council People and Families Scrutiny Committee Educational Attainment Task and Finish Group to give evidence about the current Educational Performance in the Braintree District. Attached is the report that was presented to the Committee for their consideration.

### **Devolution**

On 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015 I took a report to Cabinet on the progress to date on a devolution proposal for Greater Essex. The first phase of exploratory work has been completed (January to March 2015). On 13th March 2015, a letter was sent to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government expressing an interest in devolution for Greater Essex and requesting further dialogue with Government post elections. A copy of the letter has been shared with all MPs in the Greater Essex area. Between now and the end of June, officers will continue to work on developing proposals and an evidence base. Leaders will meet again in June to recap on work to date and agree the next phase of work.

Councillor Graham Butland  
Leader of the Council

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## Report to the ECC People & Families Scrutiny Committee, Educational Attainment Task and Finish Group.

### Braintree District Educational Attainment Presented by Councillor Graham Butland, Leader of Braintree District Council

#### Introduction

In the Braintree District there are approximately 21,000 school age children making up around 14% of the overall population. Education has increasingly become an area where the Braintree District is underperforming compared to our neighbours across Essex. This report sets out the key areas where improvement is needed and highlights some of the possible longer term impacts that poor educational attainment could have on the Braintree District and wider community.

#### Schools

There are 63 state funded schools in the Braintree District including; 2 Special Schools, 12 Infants & Junior Schools, 41 Primary Schools and 8 Secondary Schools. There are also 3 independent schools offering private primary, secondary and special education provision (*These have been excluded from comparisons due to a lack of comparable data*).

As of February 2015 Ofsted ratings for schools in the Braintree District were as follows:

Primary (incl. Infant & Junior)	Secondary	Special Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 6 rated as "Outstanding"</li><li>• 35 rated as "Good"</li><li>• 10 rated as "Requires Improvement"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 rated as "Good"</li><li>• 1 rated as "Requires improvement"</li><li>• 2 rated as "Inadequate"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 rated as "Good"</li></ul>

#### GCSE Attainment

Compared to other Districts and Boroughs, the Braintree District has the lowest GCSE attainment rate in Essex, a trend which has been ongoing for several years.

- In 2014 50.3% of students achieved 5+ GCSEs at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics. (*This includes results for those students who attend school in another local authority area but live in the Braintree District*).
- 2014 results were 6.5% below the average for England, 6.2% below the average for Essex, and 16.2% below the best performing Districts and Boroughs in Essex.

For the eight secondary schools within the District:

- The combined average GCSE attainment rate (for students achieving 5+ GCSEs at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics) was 47.4%. *This 2.9% lower than the District total including all students who live in the District.*
- One school scored above the average for England and Essex, whilst all others scored below. The highest achieving school scored 63% whilst the lowest scored 38%.
- Two schools increased their GCSE attainment rates compared to the previous year, whilst all others had reductions of between 2% and 15%.

#### Early Years foundation Stage Profile

The EYFS Profile assesses children's development at age 5 based on prime and specific areas of learning, with assessments undertaken through classroom and playground observation. In 2014 the Braintree District had the lowest levels of children achieving a "Good Level of Development" (GLD) in the Essex County Council area. In more detail:

- 57.1% of students achieved GLD. This was:
  - 2.9% less than the England average of 60%
  - 3.1% less than ECC average of 61%.
  - 9.9% less than the highest achieving District (Maldon)
- 23 out of the 47 infant and primary schools in the District (49%) achieved less than the England average of 60%

*Both data from student observation scores and feedback from Link-Head Teachers for the District highlighted that children's language and communication skills were an area requiring improvement and potential barrier for children's learning later in school.*

## **Key Stage 2**

At key stage 2 students are assessed for progress on Reading, Writing and Maths, with performance benchmarked against the number of students achieving Level 4 or above in all three areas. The average for the Braintree District is line with the national and county average of 79% however:

- 20 of 47 schools scored below the average for Essex
- The District was ranked joint 6<sup>th</sup> out of 12 Districts and Boroughs for Essex.

## **Issues Affecting the Braintree District**

### *1. Education*

Despite the majority of schools receiving positive Ofsted reports, those schools with poor Ofsted ratings significantly underperform, delivering results far below what would be expected for an area with otherwise low levels of deprivation and unemployment. More is needed to help improve standards and performance at all key stages.

### *2. Growth*

As well as the impact on the life chances of individuals, low levels of educational attainment could have long term impacts on the development of the local area. In particular; Braintree District Council is currently working on a new Local Plan which will set out future sustainable development including an anticipated 14,000 new homes and 20,000 jobs required in the District. Poor educational attainment could impact on this process in the following ways:

- *Preventing Inward Investment*  
Future inward investment is likely to be in higher skilled industries and is particularly important in District's like Braintree where proximity to Stansted Airport, Cambridge etc. is a potential asset. Potential investors could be put off by low educational attainment and the overall skill level of the economically active population.
- *Restricting Growth of Existing Businesses*  
The Braintree District is also reliant upon the growth of our existing businesses to deliver the majority of jobs growth for the future. Employers will need to access a labour market that has the skills to perform the jobs that they are creating.

Employers may struggle to attract new skilled workers into the District if the education available to their children is not at a decent standard.

- *Impact on new schools and teacher recruitment*

If the District has a reputation for poor education, we may not attract the necessary teachers to be employed within the new schools being built. This could lead to overcrowding of existing school facilities, thus creating greater pressure for teachers and driving down standards. *In order to help address recruitment issues Braintree District Council would also like to know to what extent teacher recruitment is affected by affordable housing and to whether we should be considering including key worker housing for teachers in the new local plan?*

### 3. *Health*

According to the 2014 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment “The general level of educational attainment within a population is closely associated with the overall health of that population. The long-term demographic and health problems for a child born into a family with traditionally low standards of educational attainment may be severe, affecting health choice behaviour and service provision uptake into adulthood.”

**ENDS**



**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF  
PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION**

**Agenda No: 14b**

**HEALTH & WELLBEING**

**1 – Fusion Lifestyle Leisure Contract**

Over the past four year period I have regularly reported on the success of the Council's capital programme in delivering the new Witham Leisure Centre, the new gym and dry side leisure facilities at the Halstead Leisure Centre, the new gym and dry side leisure facilities at the Braintree Leisure Centre and the new gym and dry side facilities at the Braintree Swim and Fitness Centre. The capital investment by the Council, in the past four year period, has exceeded £10m.

The new Leisure Contract with Fusion Lifestyle, without doubt, is significantly contributing towards the success of the Council's leisure achievements. It is delivering better health outcomes for the people of the Braintree District inside and outside of the Council's leisure facilities. Today, this means that the people of the Braintree District enjoy a far reaching range of satellite clubs and leisure activities across the District and satisfaction levels have risen to almost 90 per cent.

**2 – Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group**

I represent Braintree District Council on the Essex County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC). Using the HOSC I have been able to ensure that regular scrutiny of Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group is carried out. The two areas that I have been particularly keen to ensure stronger outcomes on are:-

- 1) greater local political leadership across the MECCG local authority area and
- 2) better communication links between the local authority areas and the MECCG.

I am pleased to report that an Officer and Member group from across the local authority area of the MECCG has been established and has recently met. There is a commitment from the MECCG to provide a Councillor update following the meetings and I will ensure that all Councillors will start to receive this update.

At the first meeting of the group the following updates were provided:-

- Finance
- Maldon Community Hospital
- Closure of the Walk in Centre
- Closure of St. Lawrence Surgery



### **3 – Essex County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**

The Committee continues to meet every month and provides robust scrutiny in many areas of NHS services including: primary and acute care. Its work programme will ensure that scrutiny of the Essex County Council Health and Wellbeing Board will commence. A drive for services and care delivered more locally continues to occupy many agenda items. The transformational change of delivering adult social care more locally and within a community setting is becoming a priority. I have been vocal in a further two pieces of work which I believe continue to impact our District:- 1) obesity levels in young children and adults and 2) Mid Essex Prevention Strategy 2015-2020 – a driver for pro-active healthier lifestyles.

### **4 – Braintree District Health and Wellbeing Panel**

This Panel continues to meet and is the catalyst for bringing local health partners and stakeholders together. The Panel, through the banner of 'Livewell', has just considered its draft 'Prospectus 2015-2016' and I will ensure that all Members receive a copy of the final document. The document pulls together the implementation of locally based better health outcomes and this approach is being acknowledged by the Mid Essex Clinical Commission Group and Essex County Council.

### **5 – Public Health (Health Improvement Officer)**

District Councils and Essex County Council recognise their contribution to the new public health system in Essex and the value of a collective approach in improving health and wellbeing. Essex County Council and District Councils already work closely with the NHS and the Third Sector in improving outcomes across the wider determinants of health, health improvement and health protection.

Following the transfer of many public health responsibilities to Essex County Council in 2013, the public health model of support and service delivery has morphed significantly primarily as a result of the transformation agenda locally.

Senior Officers at Essex County Council have been in discussions with local District Councils to explore new ways at fostering closer collaboration in delivering on the public health agenda. This is because as partners we have a shared belief that there are strong public health roles and opportunities District/Borough/City Councils have, and are well placed to lead on.

Funding for the post will come from ECC – Public Health and there will be no cost to any of the three local authorities. The post will initially be a three year term and the post holder will be aligned to the three localities in Mid Essex. The post will support the Health and Wellbeing Agenda and develop effective links with partners, working primarily to improve resident's health and wellbeing and address local health-related issues across Mid Essex.

## **ACTIVE COMMUNITIES**

### **1 – Community Transport**

I am pleased to inform you that Cllr. Bass of Essex County Council has made a recommendation to continue to fund our Community Transport Service at the current level of £105,542.00 This will ensure that the service continues to provide a much need and loved lifeline to the most vulnerable in our District.

## **2 – Women’s Tour – Thursday 18th June 2015**

Along with Cllr. Lady Newton, I met with two professional women cyclists to promote the start of the Women’s Tour in Braintree. This was a great opportunity to reflect on the benefits of the tour starting in Braintree Town Centre. The opportunity of the tour coming to the Braintree District will undoubtedly, yet again as did the Tour de France, promote our District and ensure that the healthy lifestyle agenda remains a priority for the Council and the District.

To celebrate the Women’s Tour coming to Braintree and to promote the national cycling week, officers along with their colleagues at Greenfields Community Housing are planning a “cycling festival” which will take place on Weavers Park, Braintree on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June. This will be a family fun day to encourage participation in cycling and sport in general.

## **3 – Braintree District Museum**

I continue to support the work programme of the BDM. A packed programme of events including shows, workshops and themed receptions, continue to dominate the calendar and I would urge all members to visit. What’s On 2015 has been published and circulated.

## **4 – Warner Archive**

The Warner Archive continues to enjoy local and global interest. The range of designs is capturing the eyes of many traders and the ‘commercial’ aspect going forward is promising. Receptions, workshops and trade shows will only add to growing interest in the designs and the sustainability of the Warner Archive.

I would like to end my report by thanking all staff who have supported me personally but more importantly supported this District in delivering a transformational change in the way that the Council delivers its leisure, health and active community services.

Councillor Joanne Beavis  
Cabinet Member for People and Participation

Further information on the contents of this report can be obtained by contacting Councillor Joanne Beavis.

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**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF  
PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

**Agenda No: 14c**

**Council Tax and Business rates**

Council Tax collection rate has recovered since the Direct Debit issue in December with 97.4% collected as at 28<sup>th</sup> February (the same rate as that achieved in the previous year to end of February)

Business Rate collection rate has improved as expected. 95.7% has been collected as at 28<sup>th</sup> February (compared to 97.2% at same time last year) but with March instalments to be added due from those businesses now opting to pay over 12 months.

Council tax recovery actions show an encouraging trend with, compared to last year, a 10% reduction in required recovery actions (reminders, pre summons, summons and liability orders).

Annual Council Tax Bills and Benefit award letters have been despatched together for the first time, bringing financial savings with postage costs.

The Business Rates leaflet for 2015/16 has been expanded to include a summary of the District Economic Development Prospectus and advertisements for Pest Control services, conference facilities at the Town Hall, Commercial Waste collection service and ECC Trading Services.

**Housing Benefit update:**

The end of February caseload of 10,960 recipients shows no significant change of overall volume. We continue to be resolute in identifying Housing Benefit fraud and seeking appropriate sanctions against those perpetrators. The total for all actions (prosecutions, administrative penalties, and cautions) between April 2014 and February 2015 was 135 sanctions issued with the value of overpayments identified of just under £600,000. All Housing Benefit overpayments (fraudulent or simple error) are recoverable and an officer has been focussing specifically on the phased recovery of this debt type, resulting in a significant increase in the amount of overpayment recovered in the year.

**Financial Performance**

We are forecasting a positive variance of £540,000 (4%) against the budget of £15.2million. The main reasons are:

- A projected over achievement of income of £721,000.

- An underspend across service staffing budgets is projected to be £214,000; however, after allowing for the corporate efficiency target of £325,000, this results in a projected shortfall in achieving the target by £111,000.
- Other expenditure budgets are projected to be overspent by £70,000

The budget variance is £119,000 higher than reported in the second quarter of the year mainly due to an increase of £98,000 in the amount of additional income projected across services.

For the £10million investment into Pooled Funds, late last year, dividends received to date amount to £15,773 (Property Fund) and £74,464 (Equity Funds). Market valuation at the end of February for all four funds shows a net increase of £469,120.

### **Business Growth Loan Fund initiative**

An initiative for the setting up of a Business Growth Loan Fund, with attendant loan criteria, was presented to Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> March. This scheme sets aside a total allocation of £500,000 to facilitate growth and inward investment for local businesses within the district. It is proposed to allocate up to £400,000 for direct loans (divided £120,000 for inward investment and £280,000 for District business growth) and a further £100,000 channelled through the Funding Circle process. Funding Circle is a government backed company which provides an opportunity to invest in small and medium enterprises with a good credit rating, which is an increasingly popular peer funding approach.

### **Investment Workshop**

Cabinet and Corporate Management Board held an Investment Workshop on 5<sup>th</sup> February to review the current status of our investment strategy and evaluate options for further investment opportunities.

### **Icelandic Banks – repatriation of funds held in an escrow account in Iceland**

On 10<sup>th</sup> February, the Council participated in a currency auction, run by the Icelandic Central Bank, with the result that £73,878 was received for a proportion of the funds held in an escrow account in an Icelandic Bank which are subject to currency control restrictions. Overall, from the original £5m investment, the total amount actually received to-date from Icelandic banks is £4,628,668, with further sums anticipated of £111,000 and £33,000.

### **Ward Profiles**

These will be complete by Easter and will reflect the new ward boundaries for the District. They will have key demographic information to support decision making and to provide information to councillors on their individual wards.

### **ICT**

Plans have been developed to provide a new IT solution for members from May 2015. The aim of this is to support electronic communication and access to information for all members. This is currently being implemented and will be rolled out to members

through the induction programme following the election.

Following evaluation of various options, wholesale replacement is in hand for our servers and Windows software which are nearing end of scheduled life, and are scheduled for replacement this summer. Our server room now accommodates servers from Colchester Borough Council. A new standby back-up generator will be installed in the summer.

Councillor David Bebb  
Cabinet Member for Performance and Efficiency

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**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF  
PLANNING AND PROPERTY**

**Agenda No: 14d**

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

Rail

A response to the government consultation on the next Anglia Rail Franchise was submitted by the deadline of 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015 and made available to Members. This response was considered and supported by the District Business Leaders Board to reflect the views of the business community. The key comment made was the necessity for the franchise to specify increased frequency (a minimum of two trains per hour in each direction) and increased reliability on the Braintree/Witham Branch line, a comment echoed in Essex County Council's submission. Options for achieving this would be the introduction of a passing loop or a shuttle service.

Broadband

Superfast Essex and Braintree District Council jointly hosted a business breakfast at the Discovery Centre on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2015 to promote improvements to superfast broadband being provided by Superfast Essex through the BDUK programme and to seek feedback on a draft brochure explaining the options for broadband connectivity available to businesses. The brochure was also discussed and supported by the District Business Leaders Board and will be circulated to businesses in April. Superfast Essex is currently developing options for the broadband extension programme supported by £250,000 match funding from the District Council which specifies that the programme will support the needs of businesses. Once completed, these options will be discussed with businesses in the District through the District Business Leaders Board to ensure that the selected option meets the needs of businesses.

**TOWN CENTRES**

An officer meeting was held with Braintree Town Team, Essex County Council, and businesses affected by the recent fire on High Street in Braintree town centre on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, to discuss how the Town Team and the Councils could support those businesses. As a result, signage has been installed to encourage trade, and we are working with the Town Team on additional promotion to encourage footfall into the High Street. This will not affect the Sandpit Lane improvement scheme which is underway with detailed design of the arch and its installation being prepared by Birch Engineering.

Meetings were held with the Town Teams and Town Councils in Halstead and Witham during January, February and early March, to discuss regeneration scheme proposals prior to wider consultation. In Witham these include re-instatement of the medieval Market Place to create a 'heart' for the town and a new location for the market, and improving pedestrian links between the Newlands and Grove shopping centres. In Halstead these include public realm improvements at the top of the High Street to reduce the dominance of traffic and an improved environment for the market. Public

consultation was undertaken in March and early April which will inform the final scheme design. A tender for improved pedestrian signage in Braintree, Witham and Halstead has now been let.

## **PLANNING POLICY**

### Issues and Scoping Consultation

The first public consultation of the Local Plan Issues and Scoping Consultation in the new Local Plan process was completed on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015. There were a good number of attendees at the three exhibitions which were held in Witham, Braintree and Halstead and officers are currently processing the responses which have been received.

## **HOUSING**

### Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation

Between April 2014 and the end of February 2015 the Council accepted 126 households as being eligible, homeless and in priority need. The total number of acceptances for 2013/14 was 166 households. A forward projection based on the current position suggests a reduction on the 2013/14 figure by year end.

At the end of February 2015 there were 62 homeless households in temporary accommodation arranged by the Council, either awaiting a decision on their homeless application or waiting to be moved on to more settled accommodation after being accepted under homeless provisions.

Opportunities for preventing homelessness by helping households to secure accommodation in the private rented sector are becoming ever more limited: a discussion with Genesis Housing Association will be held in March to establish whether they may be able to assist by securing family size properties via a leasing scheme.

### Braintree Emergency Nightshelter 'BENS'

Sadly, February 15 saw the loss of BENS due to fire. Fortunately there were no serious injuries but a total of 6 single males were rendered homeless by the fire: 3 hostel residents and 3 from neighbouring flats. The Council has provided emergency assistance as required and has helped one individual secure a room in a shared house and 2 others to receive rent/deposit refunds to enable them to secure alternative accommodation. Work continues with the other 3 individuals.

### Gold Standard Programme for Homelessness Services

The first of the service's Gold Standard applications has been submitted and feedback is anticipated soon.

### Affordable Housing Development

Since April 2014 there have been a total of 98 new affordable homes.

The homes are at the following developments:

- Two developments and open market purchases by Colne Housing Society including:
  - 24 one and two bedroom flats at Hyde Farm Corner, South Street, Braintree.
  - 23 one and two bedroom properties developed on land off Constance Close, Witham.



- 3 two bedroom flats purchased on the open market in Braintree.
- Three developments and open market purchases by Greenfields Community Housing including:
  - 25 one and two bedroom homes in Walford Way, Coggeshall.
  - 4 homes (including 2 bungalows) in Ronald Road, Halstead
  - 5 homes at Bendlowes Road, Great Bardfield
  - 5 properties purchased on the open market
  - 1 home purchased under Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- 8 homes in Stisted – Rural Exception Scheme, developed by Hastoe Housing Association.

We are anticipating 75 further completions by the end of March 2015.

#### The Housing Register

Between April and the end of February 2015, 618 housing association homes were let in the Braintree District via the Gateway to Homechoice, Choice Based Lettings scheme.

As at the end of February 2015 there were 2,255 applicants on the Housing Register consisting of:-

87 – Band A

255 – Band B

593 – Band C

106 – Band D

1191 – Band E

23 – Band F

Band F is used for applicants for 'non-bidding' schemes such as Helen Court in Witham

Councillor Lady Patricia Newton  
Cabinet Member for Planning and Property

Further information on the contents of this report can be obtained by contacting Councillor Lady Patricia Newton.

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**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF PLACE**

**Agenda No: 14e**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

**Court Cases**

Two prosecutions for littering cigarette ends resulted in fines and costs totalling £720 and £980 respectively from Chelmsford Magistrates Court. Both men had refused to pay a fixed penalty notice of £75 and pleaded not guilty at an earlier hearing. The extent of the fines resulted in interest from BBC Look East who ran an article on the local news programme on 4<sup>th</sup> March.

**Fly grazing Bill clears Commons**

A Bill to give greater power to local authorities and landowners to remove abandoned horses from their land has cleared the House of Commons. The Control of Horses Bill was brought by York Outer MP Julian Sturdy whose constituency is one of several "fly grazing" hotspots in Yorkshire

**Licensing and Tackling child sexual exploitation**

Department for Communities and Local Government has published a report from an Independent Inspection of Rotherham MBC carried out by Louise Casey CB, who was appointed by the Secretary of State to undertake this in September 2014. The report evaluates the council on issues of governance, children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing. Officers have reviewed our procedures and are confident that our Policy and Procedures are generally good, having improved in recent years and will continue to be reviewed and improved if necessary. Part of the problem in Rotherham, appears to be centred on a poor culture, especially in the areas of leadership at Councillor, Management and Officer levels. Officers believe this is far from the case in this District as our procedures regarding the issue of Drivers Licences are sound.

**Solar Panels**

The week commencing 16<sup>th</sup> March the 870 panels at Braintree Leisure Centre were commissioned. This now means that our solar production results in income/savings of just over £90,000 pa, with a saving of 360 tonnes of CO2

**STREET SCENE**

**Car Parking**

The new ticket machines for blue badge holders have now been installed. These machines are DDA compliant and are set at a low level so they can be used by wheelchair users. Customers receive an extra hour's free parking at the end of the paid time in recognition of their mobility issues.

Resurfacing works at both Newlands Drive and Lockrams Lane car parks, Witham, have been completed, with minimal disruption to customers. Works were completed on time and below budget.

We have, once again, secured the Park Mark (Safer Parking) accreditation for all of our Pay and Display car parks. The Park Mark® Safer Parking Scheme is an initiative of the Associations of Chief Police Officers (ACPO/S) and is aimed at reducing both crime and the fear of crime in parking facilities. The accreditation gives users the reassurance that our car parks are safe, well lit, clean and well-maintained.

Use of MiPermit (cashless parking) continues to grow, with over 6,000 payments recorded since the facility was made available. Since December, 29% of these transactions have been in relation to the Easton Road car park, Witham.

### **ICDC (Integrated Commercial & Domestic Collections)**

The new routes and in-cab technology went live on 2 February. As expected, we are experiencing some issues with the completion of routes resulting in some customers not receiving collections on the scheduled day, but these issues will be ironed out over the coming weeks, as officer's work closely with the front-line staff. I would remind Members that the waste crews undertake 175,000 collections per week and the vast majority of these are being completed to schedule.

### **Refuse & Recycling**

Essex County Council's new Waste Transfer Station is now operational and most of the waste collected in the Braintree District is now going there for onward transmission to processing plants and/or landfill. The site has not yet been fully commissioned, but I have asked officers to arrange a visit for those Members who are interested in seeing the new facility.

Officers have been working in partnership with Greenfields Community Housing to introduce dedicated recycling facilities at their flats. So far, 20 sites have been installed and we plan to roll-out the service to a further 50 sites in the forthcoming year. This will help boost recycling and minimise waste that is sent to landfill.

The Department for Communities and Local Government announced that 46 successful bids are to receive funding through its Recycling Rewards Scheme. The scheme is aimed at helping councils increase their recycling rates by offering incentives to households, such as shopping vouchers and loyalty rewards. I am delighted to report that the Essex Recycling Partnership (led by Braintree DC and also involving Epping Forest, Harlow and Tendring District Councils) has been awarded the largest pot of cash; a total of £896,468, our portion will be £296k. Our scheme will involve collecting weekly food waste from 57 Primary Schools, mixed recycling from 275 blocks of flats in the District and 2 recycling Advisors to work predominantly with the schools and flats to educate and advise.

### **Street Cleansing**

Saturday 21 March, was Community Clear Up Day, when all residents, local clubs/community groups, parish/town councils, schools and businesses are encouraged to pitch in and organise their own litter picks and community clean-up groups. This a national initiative led by the Government in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy, and is designed to empower and recognise the local groups that work hard to tackle litter and make our local areas better places to live and work. For its part, operatives from Braintree District Council undertook a litter pick of the verges on both sides of the A120 (a distance of 12.7 miles as it traverses Braintree District) w/c 16 March and also litter-picked the verges along the A131 Notley by-pass and from Marks Farm to High Garrett.

### **Green Heart of Essex**

On the 11/12<sup>th</sup> February I was privileged, along with Tania Roberge, (Marketing and Communications Manager) to give a presentation on the Green Heart of Essex and Love Essex campaigns at the 60th Anniversary Conference of Keep Britain Tidy. I am delighted to report that the Love Essex campaign was so successful that it was awarded the 'Diamond Jubilee Partnership Award', beating the London Capital Clean-up Project, an amazing achievement and very well deserved. I also took the opportunity to have an in depth discussion with Dan Rogerson, Parliamentary Under Secretary for State. I have since been asked to meet with Keep Britain Tidy to discuss how to get better engagement with councillors.

### **Park & Open Spaces**

Essex County Council recently launched a public consultation on new parking proposals for Gt. Notley Country Park. The proposals include a variable charging model based on length of stay, upgrading the ticket machines to allow customers to pay by card as well as cash, installing a contactless payment system and introducing a 'pay on exit' system. If approved, the changes will be implemented early Summer 2015 and will provide greater convenience and flexibility for all visitors to the Park.

### **LANDSCAPE SERVICES**

**Halstead River Walk** – Public consultation on a Management Plan took place on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March and Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March. Positive response with interest shown by some attendees in the development of a Friends volunteer group.

**Hoppit Mead, Braintree** – Tree Planting volunteer days in February and March has seen the completion of additional boundary planting on London Road. A woven willow shelter has also been created further along the river bank by volunteers and the kind assistance of Essex Wildlife Trust.

**School Tree Planting Events** - hedge and copse planting has been completed with the assistance of children at Stisted Primary School and Templars Primary School, Witham. Native varieties of apple trees have been planted by local children in 3 local primary schools in Witham. 6 field maple trees were also planted by members of Witham Tree Group and children from the local primary school

**Tree and Woodland Management** – Proactive management with coppice and surgery works to woodland and boundary features on BDC land at Marks Farm, Braintree, at points along the Flitch Way and various sites in Great Notley and Barwell Way in Witham have been completed this month.

### **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

I attended the Essex Police Challenge on 12<sup>th</sup> March. The Police Commissioner publicly questioned the Chief Constable and members of the public were also able to ask questions.

Councillor Wendy Schmitt  
Cabinet Member – Place

<b>Contact:</b>	<b>Councillor Wendy Schmitt</b>
<b>Designation:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Place</b>
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COUNCIL  
13th April 2015



<b>LIST OF PUBLIC MEETINGS HELD SINCE LAST COUNCIL MEETING</b>	<b>Agenda No: 15</b>
<b>Corporate Priority:</b> Not applicable <b>Report presented by:</b> Not applicable <b>Report prepared by:</b> Emma Wisbey – Governance and Member Manager	
<b>Background Papers:</b> Published Minutes of the meetings listed within the report below.	<b>Public Report</b>
<b>Options:</b> Report for noting	<b>Key Decision:</b> No

### Executive Summary:

Since the last Council meeting held on 16th February 2015, the following Minutes have been published for meetings held in public session:

- (1) Planning Committee – 17th February 2015
- (2) Planning Committee – 3rd March 2015
- (3) Licensing Committee – 4th March 2015
- (4) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 11th March 2015
- (5) Planning Committee – 17th March 2015
- (6) Braintree District Local Highways Panel – 19th March 2015
- (7) Governance Committee – 25th March 2015 (copy to follow)
- (8) Cabinet – 30th March 2015 (copy to follow)
- (9) Planning Committee – 31st March 2015 (copy to follow)

### Decision:

Council are invited to note the Minutes published.

**Purpose of Decision:** Not applicable

**Officer Contact:** Emma Wisbey

**Designation:** Governance and Member Manager

**Ext. No.** 2610

**E-mail:** [emma.wisbey@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:emma.wisbey@braintree.gov.uk)

<b>Business of External Organisations</b>	<b>Agenda No: 18a</b>
<b>Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency (BDSVS)</b>	
<b>Corporate Priority:</b> Supporting vulnerable people in our community; encouraging flourishing communities. <b>Report presented by:</b> Councillor Sandra Howell <b>Report prepared by:</b> Councillor Sandra Howell	
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>Public Report</b>
<b>Options:</b> Report for noting	<b>Key Decision:</b> No
<p>The BDVSA is a registered charity whose aim is to give help and support to the many voluntary and community groups in the Braintree district.</p> <p><b><i>Provision of Core Support</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 265 stakeholders</li> <li>• BDVSA one of 8 partners in the Essex Connects database covering the majority of Essex</li> <li>• Fortnightly e-bulletin service started in January 2014 continues to be valued enabling the provision of timely information covering all matters of relevance to the Braintree District</li> <li>• quarterly newsletter providing information on funding opportunities, governance, volunteering, local news, information and events</li> <li>• 87 one-to-one support sessions held</li> </ul> <p>During the year BDVSA commenced 'state of the sector' work with BDC to undertake a survey of local voluntary organisations. The survey form itself is in the final stages of development and the survey will commence in June 2015.</p> <p><b><i>Representation</i></b></p> <p>BDVSA has had successful year developing it representation role. BDVSA sits on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible Authority Group and has been part of the domestic abuse task and finish group</li> <li>• Braintree District Health and Wellbeing panel</li> <li>• Active Braintree</li> <li>• Witham Health and Wellbeing Group</li> <li>• Essex Alliance</li> <li>• Braintree Advice Services Group</li> </ul>	



- Essex Rural Partnership Community Action Group
- Mid-Essex Be Safer Group

BDVSA continues to chair the voluntary and community sector partnership. Work is currently underway to review the operation of this partnership to ensure it meets revised priorities and structures. BDVSA is part of the Essex Association of CVSs and the mid-Essex strategic forum which it co-organises with Chelmsford and Maldon CVSs.

A major element of work for the year 2014-15 has been BDVSA's involvement with the mid-Essex Clinical Commissioning Group and the development of its Living Safe and Well Transformation Programme. All three mid-Essex CVSs were invited to represent the voluntary sector and contribute to the CCG's work in developing its living safe and well programme. A large-scale mapping programme was undertaken and a social prescribing project is being developed which will use the Essex Connects database. The development of social prescribing across the mid-Essex area is likely to have a substantial impact on BDVSA and the other two CVSs.

### ***The Volunteer Centre***

The Volunteer Centre has experienced quite a boost during the year 2014/15. Funding via the Public Service Reform Unit was secured for one year to develop:

- a youth volunteering project focussing on 16-24 year olds aimed at increasing their employability skills, building self-confidence and the important of contributing to community
- a Time Bank

Both projects began during autumn 2014. The youth volunteering project has 'clocked up' 264 volunteer hours by young people as at 31 March 2015. The Time Bank has been set up in partnership with Braintree District Council through the secondment of a BDC officer as the co-ordinator. This partnership is working very well. Both projects will continue to September 2015. It is planned that the Time Bank will continue after this stage and will be brought in-house to be operated by the Volunteer Centre Co-ordinator.

Overall the Volunteer Centre has registered 328 volunteers over the year, placed 81 and promoted 170 opportunities.

A major 'data cleansing' exercise has been undertaken on the volunteer database to remove old and out-of-date information.

The latter part of the year has seen much more emphasis on engaging with organisations to determine their volunteer needs which helps BDVSA find the right volunteers for the roles. More time is also given to one-to-one interviews with potential volunteers to determine their interests and skills to help find the right roles for them. The feedback on this approach has been very positive.

### ***Winter Warmth***

BDVSA once again secured funding from ECC Public Health to set up a winter



warmth initiative. Working with Braintree Community Transport, a series of weekly lunch outings for isolated older people were delivered. Winter warmth packs were provided by Halstead Day Centre and distributed to all their members ensuring their vulnerable users had essentials such as thermal socks, gloves, scarves, hand warmers, sachets for hot drinks and some sweet treats. Both strands of work have been well received.

### ***Outreach Work***

Five volunteer centre outreach sessions have taken place. BDVSA took part in a large-scale health and well-being event at Broomfield Hospital in September 2014, assisting with the delivery of the event and staffing the Essex Connects stand.

The BDVSA Annual Assembly brought in speakers from Essex Community Foundation and the Big Lottery Fund to provide detail advice and support to attendees on applying for funds from these two bodies.

### **The Future**

BDVSA applied for funding from the Big Assist programme and was successful in securing a significant amount to engage a consultant to work with the charity to devise a new strategic direction. Two workshops will take place with staff and trustees in April 2015 and a plan for the future will be devised. The consultant will also be available to help BDVSA with the implementation of the plan.

Premises remain an issue for the organisation and it is hoped that the new strategic plan will help BDVSA move to premises which will enable expansion. Discussions did take place with BDC but it was felt that space in an open plan office was not suitable for the needs of the organisation.

Finally, may I remind Members that the quarterly newsletter is now E-mailed directly to you and is a good way of keeping up-to-date with the work of BDVSA.

Council  
13th April 2015



<b>Business of External Organisations</b>		<b>Agenda No: 18b</b>
<b>Annual Report on the Citizens Advice Bureau</b>		
<b>Corporate Priority:</b> Supporting vulnerable people in our community. <b>Report presented by:</b> Councillor Jennie Sutton <b>Report prepared by:</b> Councillor Jennie Sutton		
<b>Background Papers:</b>		<b>Public Report</b>
<b>Options:</b> Report for noting		<b>Key Decision:</b> No
<p>In pursuing its charitable objectives the CAB co-operates with the following organisations:-</p> <p>Braintree District Council            Essex County Council            Witham Town Council            Greensfields Community Housing            Parish Councils            Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency (BDVSA)            Age UK – Essex</p> <p>The prime objective of the Charity is to promote charitable purposes for the benefit of the community in the Braintree District and surrounding areas. This is achieved by the provision to the public of FREE, Confidential, Impartial advice/information, signposting and assistance with negotiations.</p> <p>All this is achieved with the aid of trained volunteer advisors who are core to the running of the CAB. Without the dedication and commitment of these volunteers there would be no FREE advice service provided in our area.</p> <p>Access to the CAB is by phone, appointment or drop in. However, resources permitting home visits to housebound clients do take place. Outreach surgeries, when possible are also held in Coggeshall and Finchingfield.</p> <p>As a charity the majority of the Bureau's income originates from local Authority Grants/Service Level Agreements for which the CAB is extremely grateful. Other Income may also come from partnership arrangements such as Greenfields Community Housing – Rural Community Council for Essex and Circle Anglia Housing.</p>		

Witham Town Council, Braintree District Council and Greenfields also help additionally to support and enhance the service delivery facilities of the Money Advice Service.

The Bureau will continue to drive levels of Service up and do all that it can to cope with the current increase in demand that is evident for all to see. In effect we are seeing a double impact with the number of clients increasing and the complexity of their problems rising. This is confirmed by comparing key statistics over the past two years which show increases of 5% in the number of clients assisted and 13% in the number of activities recorded

During the course of 2014/15 concern has been expressed re the impact of the new Help to Work programme, and how this will affect people living in the rural area. This will be monitored and kept under constant review. The DWP have also gone digital and concerns are being expressed that this could mean less support for job seekers. Again this will be kept under review with a suggestion that a Districtwide Employment and Skills Board be set up.

Paul Hart District Manager visited possible alternative premises for Braintree as the lease on the present facilities is coming to an end. After several visits, some with volunteers it was decided to move to 17 Coggeshall Road. Quotes have been obtained with regard to alterations to the premises – the cost being around 20,000 pounds. Three separate funding applications have been submitted in an attempt to raise the money for the alterations, as this amount is a big drain on the CAB's small reserves.

The Social Policy Co-ordinator John Wood also made known to the board that he was retiring. So systems were put in place to find a replacement. However, this has given the CAB the opportunity to review this role and to consider the possibility of splitting it between co-ordination of social policy reporting and campaign work.

Information Assurance reports (IA) were received by the Bureau – this is a risk management strategy and process which aims to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all data employed within an organisation. Bureau are legally obliged to protect any personal information they hold and need to be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. It was recommended that the Trustee Board Appoint a Bureau IA Accounting officer. This has been done – with Don Smith now being the Bureau's IA Officer.

The BHW Bureau submitted an expression of interest for the Energy Best Deal Campaign 2014/15 – to deliver 12 sessions between October 2014 and March 2015. This campaign aims to make people aware of the savings that can be made by switching fuel providers and providing information about help that is available. This is aimed at low income consumers and front line staff who work with people at risk of fuel poverty.

The BHW CAB has received an enquiry from Witham Town Council regarding literacy work with young people in the Witham area. Witham Town Council have invited us to submit a proposal which they will consider funding.

A power surge caused by a thunderstorm on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014 badly damaged the telephone system and internet connection in Braintree. The office had to close for two days for repairs and an insurance claim for two thousand four hundred pounds has been submitted.

BHW CAB celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in October last year and it was decided to combine this celebration with the AGM. This was held at Spring Lodge Centre – Witham. Walking down memory lane was fascinating. Miall James, who was retiring was thanked by the Chairman (Lawrence Duncan) for all his hard work on behalf of various CAB's over the past 44 years.

The Organisational Audit took place also in October last year and BHW CAB achieved a straight pass without any corrective action. This is a good result.

In November Paul Hart District Manager took us all by surprise and handed in his resignation – sadly leaving the Bureau in December. Vigorous efforts are being made to find a replacement. In the meantime we have a temporary manager Tim Clark. Lawrence Duncan and I wrote to Halstead Town Council to ask them to continue their 5,000 pound grant, started in 2013 to help towards the running costs of the Halstead CAB Office. This they agreed to do.

Two new Trustees were recruited to the Board in January 2015 and we also had our Quality Advice Audit. Where I am pleased to say we received an outright pass of 80%. Tim Clark (Acting Manager) pointed out the significance of this result, as only 25% of Bureau's have attained this result – putting BHW in the top 10 in the country. I think you will agree a fantastic result.

<b>Business of External Organisations</b>		<b>Agenda No: 18c</b>
<b>Rivenhall Playing Fields Association Update</b>		
<b>Corporate Priority:</b> Encouraging flourishing communities. <b>Report presented by:</b> Councillor James Abbott <b>Report prepared by:</b> Councillor James Abbott		
<b>Background Papers:</b>		<b>Public Report</b>
<b>Options:</b> Report for noting		<b>Key Decision:</b> No
<p>The RPFA AGM held on January 27th reported a successful year with increased income and usage of Rivenhall Village hall. The RPFA run the hall and nearby open space, leased from BDC.</p> <p>As well as continued use of the hall for established local groups, private hire, village events and the parish council, the RPFA runs a coffee morning every Friday and a pre-school group is also now a regular hall user.</p> <p>A further recent development is the fitting of a audio/visual system at the hall, linked to a super-fast broadband connection. This has been designed by Cllr. Howard Bills, who is a parish councillor with experience in the music industry. Rivenhall was one of the first rural communities in Braintree District to secure superfast broadband, which was installed in 2014.</p> <p>The RPFA meets monthly and as district council representatives to the RPFA we attend their meetings as often as we can.</p>		