

District Councillor's Annual Report to Parish Councils - April 2025

Cllr. Diana Garrod - Braintree District Council Member for the Bumpstead Ward

As your District Councillor, I have pleasure in providing this end of year report which outlines some of the activities and achievements relating to Braintree District Council. It is not exhaustive, but contains subjects which will probably have an impact on the Bumpstead Ward.

Braintree Local Plan Review to 2041

A Call for Sites Call was undertaken, where developers, landowners, residents, businesses, parish councils and other stakeholders were invited to put forward suggested sites which might be suitable for many uses including housing, commercial, retail, health care, business, leisure, community facilities, open spaces, wildlife sites, biodiversity net gain or education in the District. Over 300 sites have been submitted throughout the District.

Early Engagement July 2024

In July 2024 officers issued an invitation for the public, communities, developers, town and parish councils and all groups and organisations on its consultation database, to comment on what they would like to see and what issues they would like considered during the Local Plan Review.

The consultation attracted 481 respondents the majority of which came from the public. Some of the issues raised were;

Concerns on housing growth and types of homes available, education, health care, infrastructure, traffic, public transport, protection of agricultural land, brownfield development sites, rural employment and tourism.

Infrastructure – Many comments were received which highlighted concerns about existing infrastructure in the district. Of particular concern is traffic congestion. Residents are keen to ensure that development is accompanied by appropriate infrastructure including roads, education and services.

Health – Is of particular concern with complaints about the availability of GP and doctor surgery appointments, access to dentists and other health related services.

Environment – Concerns about the loss of agricultural land, and the impact of new homes on air quality and increased pollution are significant issues raised by members of the public.

Many of the responses were about specific site submission from the Call for Sites. These comments will be considered by both officers and members when the site submissions are assessed and considered for the towns and villages by the Local Plan Sub-Committee.

The Council received responses from statutory consultees such as Natural England, Historic England, Anglian Water, as well as Essex County Council. Comments from Natural England state that the Local Plan should address the impacts on and opportunities for the natural environment and set out environmental policies for the area. Suggestions include;

- Promote Biodiversity Net Gain and protect priority species.
- Mitigate the impacts of climate change in particular looking at ways that manual carbon storage and sequestration could be supported through the Plan.
- Green and blue infrastructure should be provided as well as a specific urban greening policy.

- Blue infrastructure which is things like water courses and water bodies should be subject to a mitigation hierarchy.

The location of development should consider the proximity of sites with statutory designations, preferably with a criteria based policy for the protection of such sites. These sites would include statutory sites such as SSSI and non-statutory sites such as Local Wildlife Sites. Other issues which should be considered are the strategic impacts of development on water quality and resources (a comment echoed by Anglian Water), air pollution, soils an access and rights of way.

A new policy is suggested on the need for energy efficiency and retrofitting of existing historic buildings to be able to take place when appropriate. A policy around this subject would be supported by officers as many of the historic areas in the district such as Finchingfield have poor levels of energy efficiency in their buildings. This does however have to be balanced against the need to protect the historic environment and character or areas.

Anglian Water comments primarily concern regarding water, climate and other environmental concerns. They have suggested that the most efficient allocation size would be in the region of 2000 dwellings as this would enable the provision of more efficient water and sewerage infrastructure. Anglian Water are seeking to minimise drought and flooding within the area and recognise the importance of protecting river quality and climate change. Policies on the provision of renewable energy should be flexible to enable companies and infrastructure providers to meet their net zero targets. Anglian Water are also working toward achieving less than 110 litres of water use per person per day for people within its area. The provision of infrastructure needs to align with proposed housing trajectories for growth.

The Issues and Options Consultation has recently ended. The main areas consulted on were:

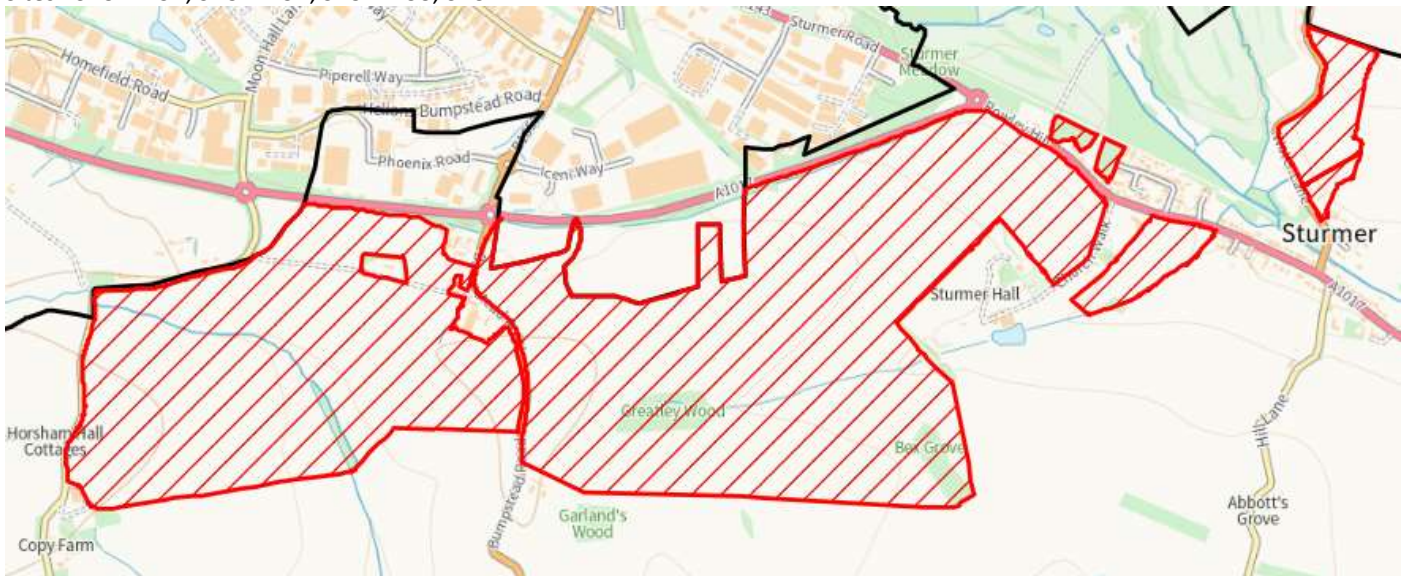
- The vision and objectives
- The key issues and options for each main topic in the Local Plan
- Existing policies
- The Spatial strategy and principles

Milestone	Indicative date
Call for Sites	May – October 2024
Evidence Base	Ongoing as identified
Early engagement	July/August 2024
Issues and Options Consultation	January-March 2025
Consultation on the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (known as ‘Preferred Options’)	October/November 2025
Amendments to the Local Plan to create the Submission Local Plan	Winter 2025/2026
Consultation on the Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) (known as ‘Pre-Submission’)	Spring 2026
Preparing the Local Plan Submission to the Planning Inspectorate/Examination	June 2026
Examination of the Local Plan	6-9 process from submission date
Adoption of the Local Plan	Estimated December 2026-February 2027

Decisions will be made at the Local Plan Sub-Committee meetings, currently scheduled; 14th April, 15th, 22nd 28th May, 5th, 12th, 19th, 25th June, 31st July, 24th September, 30th October 2025.

You can watch these from home on the Council's YouTube channel. I am anticipating those in the Bumpstead Ward will be considered at the June meetings. The agenda is published about a week before. Due to the number of sites to be discussed (probably around 70 per meeting), early discussions would indicate that if residents wish to speak at the meeting, one member from the Parish Council and one member of the public from the village is preferred. Speakers must register the week before the meeting.

Sites: STUR2291, STUR2292, STUR2293, STUR2424.



Sites: STEB2281, STEB2282, STEB2283, STEB 2284, STEB2285, STEB2423



Sites: HELLI2206
NB: Site STUR 2293 above, is partly within Helions Bumpstead



Further details about the sites can be found at:
<https://www.braintree.gov.uk/planning-building-control/local-plan-review-2/3>

Click on the button 'Site Submissions' to see the whole map. Click on the site.

Sites: BIRD2402, BIRD2012, BIRD2014



Sites: BIRD2013, BIRD2401, BIRD2403, BIRD2404, BIRD2405

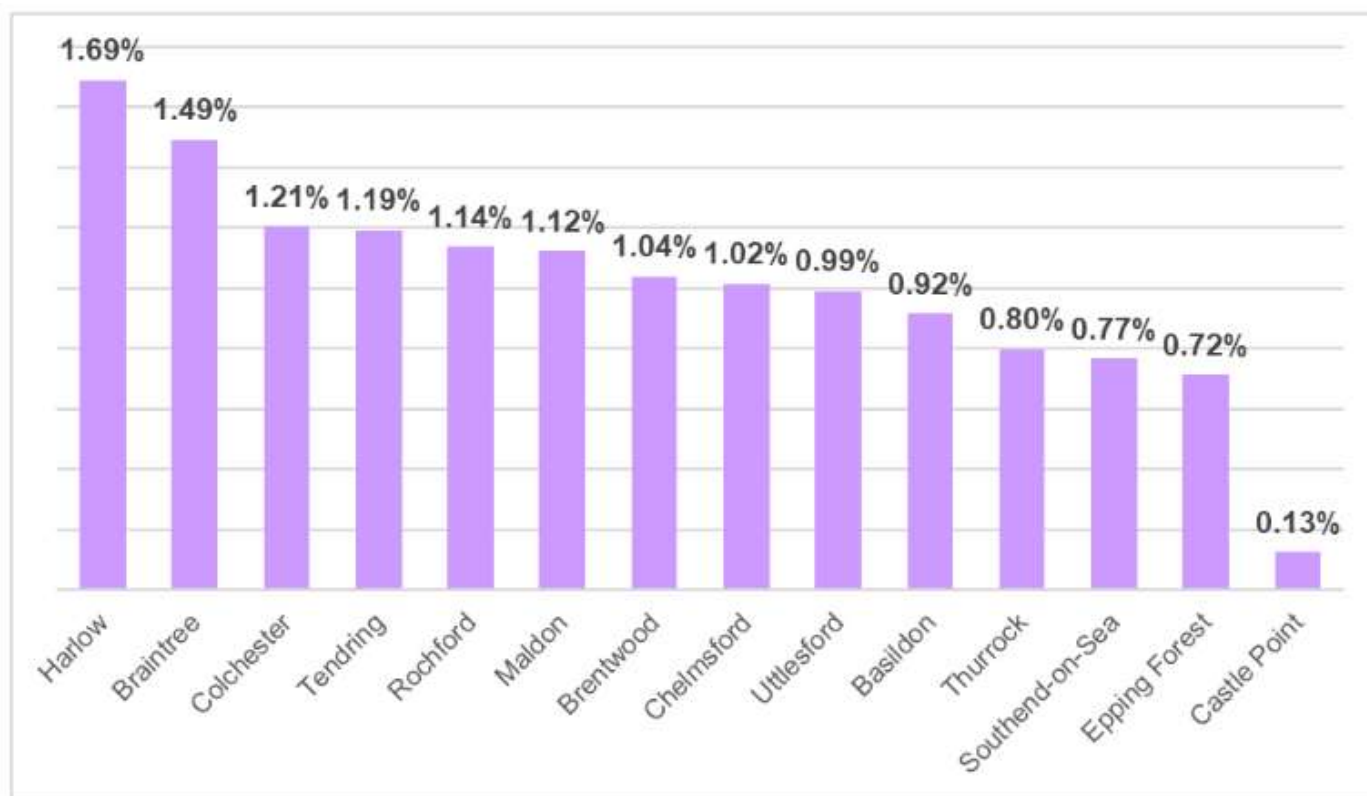


The current Government directive is that 1115 homes must be built per annum.

NB: The site submissions are not allocations. Not all sites received during this exercise are automatically marked for development, nor do they gain any special status. Every site is now being assessed to determine whether they are suitable, available and achievable for development or designation within the updated Local Plan.

Population of the Braintree District

The population of the District is around 160,000 (mid-2023). This is the fourth highest population in Essex. The population grew by 10,700 (7%) over the past decade 2013-2023. Growth has accelerated in recent years. The estimated increase in population 2022/2023 was the highest in Greater Essex and the second highest in Essex in percentage terms:



The median age of the population of the District was 43.1 in 2023. This compares with average figures for England, East of England region and Essex of 40.4; 41.7 and 42.5 respectively.

Essex Accepted into Government's Devolution Priority Programme

In February 2025 BDC was advised that Essex has been accepted into the Government's Devolution Priority Programme. A request was submitted by Essex County Council, Southend-On-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council (known as Greater Essex) in January. Essex County Council and Thurrock Council also requested the postponement of elections scheduled for May this year in their areas. The Government agreed their request to:

- Commit to take part in the Devolution Priority Programme. This would see a new Strategic Authority established in April 2026 and a mayoral election take place in May 2026
- Commit to explore local government reorganisation (LGR). Essex has the most complex local government system in the country so future reorganisation will mean less confusion, less duplication and more joined up services for residents and businesses. Our focus on essential day-to-day services remains important
- Postpone Essex and Thurrock's May 2025 elections for an initial period of one year, though this is likely to be extended.

A consultation exercise on Devolution proposals for Essex has just closed and more information will be provided in due course. Essex proposals will be subject to the Government approving a business case later this year and any changes would take place over several years. Councils are looking into more detail at timings and next steps. Early conversations are taking place and last week a majority of Essex Leaders

indicated a preference for five unitary authorities, but it's important to note that no decisions have been made.

What is Devolution?

Devolution is the transfer of powers and funding from UK government to local authority level. It is important because decisions are made closer to the local people, communities and businesses they affect. Devolution would provide greater freedoms and flexibilities for councils to work more effectively to improve public services and outcomes for residents and businesses.

A devolution deal would create a new single body, known as a Strategic Authority, for Essex. It would initially take the form of a combined county authority. These arrangements would be agreed prior to the first Mayoral election, which would take place in May 2026. The key functions of the strategic authority would include strategic transport functions, such as support for buses, trains and concessionary fares, skills and driving economic growth.

What is a Strategic Authority?

A Strategic Authority is a legal body set up using national legislation, with its own board and governance arrangements. This would enable a group of two or more councils to collaborate and make collective decisions across council boundaries.

The UK government is looking to create a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Greater Essex by May 2026. If this happens in Essex, we expect the Mayor would ultimately take on the current role of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex. The Mayor would be directly elected by the people of Essex. The elected Mayor would have the ability to speak directly to government ministers and secure funding for local projects. They would also be able to make strategic decisions, help attract investment and improve infrastructure.

Local Government Reform (LGR)

The government's long-term vision is for simpler council structures, which make it clear who is responsible for services. At present, in the Essex County Council area, services are split between the County Council, and one of 12 city, borough or district council in a 'two-tier' arrangement. The government believes reorganising and simplifying councils can drive economic growth while delivering better public services. Reorganisation would see all 15 councils in Essex – including all those in the ECC area, along with Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council which are already unitary councils - replaced with a number of all-purpose 'unitary' authorities who are responsible for all local authority services in their area.

All 15 councils in Essex would be replaced with a number of unitary councils. Reorganisation isn't mandatory but the White Paper sets out the case for it and invites places to come forward with proposals. The white paper has stipulated the government thinks the optimum size for new unitary councils to be at least 500,000 people. However, there may be some flexibility on this, and each case will be considered on its own merits. Greater Essex has a population of around 1.9 million, meaning – based on the maths - the most likely number is three or four unitary councils.

As far as LGR is concerned, ECC and BDC have also committed to reorganisation. They would have to submit interim plans in March 2025 followed by full plans in the autumn. Timelines for the remainder of the LGR process are subject to the proposals received. However, elections to shadow authorities could be expected in May 2027 following the 2026 consultation, with new unitaries going live in April 2028.

Braintree District Council Annual Plan 2025/26

In March Cabinet accepted the Council's new Annual Plan, which sets out the Council's objectives. These are some highlights:-



To create a district of opportunity – a place where our communities can thrive, our people prosper and our environment is cherished for all to enjoy.

PRIORITY 1

Improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life for individuals and families and reduce health inequalities focusing on prevention and early intervention.

Title: Deliver activities to support the priorities of the LiveWell Strategy
Outcome: Reducing health inequalities, improving mental well-being, promoting active lifestyles, empowering residents, supporting the vulnerable and enhancing community capacity.
End date: March 2026

Title: Support residents and communities impacted by the cost-of-living crisis through initiatives raised by the £1m new homes bonus.
Outcome: Targeted assistance provided enabling residents to easily access food and essential goods.
Additional support reaching those most in need to help address the underlying challenges of the cost-of-living crisis.
Young people can access physical and emotional health and wellbeing support.
End date: August 2026

Title: Administer the Health and Wellbeing Panel Grants
Outcome: Distribution of Public Health Grant funding to projects across the district that reduce health inequality
End date: March 2026

Title: Procure and implement a 3-year contract for leisure services in the Braintree District
Outcome: Residents and visitors to the district will have access to improved leisure facilities
 Achieve value for money through a cost-effective agreement
End date: October 2025

PRIORITY 2

Provide affordable, high quality and safe homes that meet the needs of our residents.

Title: Revise the Local Plan in line with recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.
Outcome: To set a refreshed framework for sustainable development across the district until 2041.
End date: June 2026

Title: Work with Essex County Council on the outcomes of the research from the Housing Learning and Improvement Network to develop a Supported Housing Strategy
Outcome: Strategy developed alongside an action plan to enhance supported housing options and provide tailored support that meets residents' needs.
End date: December 2026

Title: Establish a Landlord Register as part of the regulations introduced by the Renters Rights Bill

Outcome: Create a transparent system where landlords must be officially recognised and held accountable for their properties ensuring only compliant landlords are permitted to operate.
End date: March 2027

Title: Through the Homelessness Prevention Partnership distribute the rough sleeping winter pressure fund.
Outcome: Additional support provided to safeguard vulnerable people at risk from sleeping rough
End date: March 2026

Title: Develop options and feasibility to provide Temporary Accommodation that is fit for the future needs of the district
Outcome: Provide affordable temporary accommodation options that meet the needs of our residents.
End date: March 2026

PRIORITY 3

Reduce social isolation and loneliness and support communities to build positive social networks and connections.

Title: Build Witham Sports Ground 3G Pitch
Outcome: Provision of a high quality, all weather playing surface that will encourage more people to get involved in sports.
End date: June 2025

Title: Continue to work with partners to deliver activities and initiatives supporting people experiencing loneliness or social isolation.
Outcome: Providing opportunities for individuals to connect with each other
 Implementation of targeted interventions to address loneliness and social isolation.
End date: March 2026

Title: Build Witham Community Centre
Outcome: Provision of a modern Community Centre bringing people of all ages together for various activities and events.
 Provision of a Sport England sized badminton court.
End date: July 2026

PRIORITY 4

Provide affordable, high quality and safe homes that meet the needs of our residents.

Title: Deliver projects to prevent violence against women and girls in public, neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour in Halstead, with the support of the safer streets funding
Outcome: Delivering practical support and change for women and girls across communities within Halstead.
 Investment in transformative crime prevention initiatives.
 Change in attitude and behaviours, lowering crime rates.
End date: September 2025

Title: Deliver a Councillor Community Grant Scheme for Councillors to support local projects and groups in their ward.
Outcome: Distribution of funds across the district to non-profit organisations for community projects and initiatives.
End date: March 2026

Title: Work with partners to deliver the Community Action Safety Plan to increase awareness of child exploitation, domestic abuse, fraud and cybercrime.
Outcome: Collaboratively address community safety issues and interventions implemented to reduce crime and disorder enabling residents and communities to feel safe in their local area.
 Strategic assessment carried out to aid future local, strategic decision making.
End date: March 2026

Title: Support local investment in communities through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (year 4)
Outcome: Funding provided for community activities and initiatives to support a wide range of interventions building resilience in place and improving life chances.
End date: March 2026



Prosperity

To create a district of opportunity – a place where our communities can thrive, **our people prosper** and our environment is cherished for all to enjoy.

PRIORITY 1

Ensure district growth is sustainable and accessible with strong connectivity and infrastructure.

Title: Deliver physical improvements to Halstead and Witham Town Centres

Outcome: Providing enhanced urban environments with diverse community appeal through improved signage, wayfinding, and street furniture.
End date: September 2025

Title: Support the development and adoption of Neighbourhood Plans in Earls Colne, Wetherfield and Finchfield and Bures/Bures St Mary's.
Outcome: Enabling communities to play a role in shaping their areas.
Neighbourhood Plans used in the determination of planning applications.
End date: March 2026

Title: Develop a design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Outcome: Support planning policies by providing detailed guidance to ensure the future development of the district is of the highest design standards.
End date: December 2026

PRIORITY 2

Attract and support business growth, providing high quality employment opportunities in high growth sectors and industries.

Title: Build on inward investment activity through the North Essex Economic Board to create an action plan for Braintree
Outcome: Attract new businesses and grow existing businesses.
Bring new and better jobs into the district.
End date: March 2026

Title: Complete the final infrastructure delivery elements of Horizon 120 by removing excess soil.

Outcome: Final plots are levelled and prepared for sale and development to offer new employment sites.
End date: September 2025

Title: Finalise an approach to zone A at Horizon 120

Outcome: Alignment with the overall vision for Horizon 120 to deliver quality buildings to support the Braintree economy.
End date: December 2025

Title: Sell plots 5 –8 at Horizon 120

Outcome: Attract further investment into Horizon 120 and support key industries to locate and stay in our district.
End date: September 2025

Title: Take forward the recommended option from the viability study for the Witham Enterprise site
Outcome: Ensuring a financially viable option is progressed for the Witham Enterprise site.
End date: March 2026

Title: Support the work on developing a North Essex Growth Plan that will inform and promote positive engagement with the emerging plans for Devolution in Greater Essex.
Outcome: North Essex and Braintree District Councils views are reflected in the emerging work of the economic growth and infrastructure work of the shadow Mayoral County Combined Authority
End date: March 2026

PRIORITY 3

Provide tailored business support and access to funding to help businesses thrive and innovate.

Title: In association with the North Essex Economic Board, provide business support services focussed on enhancing financial management and business growth.
Outcome: Businesses are supported to grow and innovate.
End date: March 2026

Title: Support businesses and residents across the district through delivery of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (year 4) projects.
Outcome: Funding provided for projects to support a wide range of interventions supporting businesses to thrive across the district.
End date: March 2026

PRIORITY 4

Develop skills that are attractive to employers and support residents to access opportunities to improve their economic wellbeing.

Title: Support school engagement to access University of Essex open days
Outcome: Year 9 students experience University opportunities
End date: March 2026

Title: Organise and deliver jobs fairs across the district.
Outcome: People are connected to prospective employers to explore new career opportunities.
End date: March 2026

Title: Through the Shared Prosperity Fund, deliver year 2 of the Green Skills Programme.
Outcome: Supporting people to gain qualifications and employment in green skills that are needed in new and existing sectors.
End date: March 2026



Environment

To create a district of opportunity – a place where our communities can thrive, our people prosper and our environment is cherished for all to enjoy.

PRIORITY 1

Protect and enhance our built and natural environments across the district, providing good access to open spaces and increasing biodiversity.

Title: Enhance the play areas at Beckers Green, Braintree, Kings Rd, Halstead, Spa Rd, Witham and Rickstones Rd, Witham

Outcome: Play areas fully refurbished incorporating inclusive play equipment that improves play value for individuals of all ages.

End date: March 2026

Title: Develop a renewable energy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Outcome: Detailed guidance on the range of renewable technologies accepted by the Council including how to calculate the renewable energy requirement for future developments.

End date: December 2025

PRIORITY 1

Title: Work with partners on the requirements to deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy across Essex

Outcome: Clear framework for protecting natural habitats, promoting sustainable land use and increasing green infrastructure in alignment with local and national environmental goals.

End date: March 2026

Title: Revise the Councils Tree Strategy.

Outcome: Manage and maintain the Councils own tree stock.

Secure new landscaping through the planning process.

End date: March 2026

PRIORITY 2

Continue to deliver a cohesive and integrated response to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Title: Work with Essex Air Consortium to finalise and adopt a joint Essex Air Quality Strategy

Outcome: Action plans developed to help improve air quality and reduce the impacts of air pollution on people's health.

End date: December 2025

Title: Through the North Essex Councils Climate Partnership, develop a shared risk register and best practice for adapting to climate change events

Outcome: Better understanding of collaborative approaches to mitigations.

Ability to prioritise and plan policies around severity of risk

End date: March 2026

Title: Work with partners to address the complex challenge of fuel poverty

Outcome: Providing households with access to more affordable and sustainable energy sources as well as enhancing energy efficiency in homes.

End date: March 2026

PRIORITY 3

Support residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and be more resilient to climate related impacts.

Title: Work with Essex County Council and our partners in Essex to promote the Essex Flood guide.

Outcome: Single reference point for residents to identify the appropriate contacts during a flood.

Support business and residents to develop their own flood plans.

End date: September 2025

Title: In partnership with Groundworks, deliver the extended Green Doctor Service, advising residents on energy efficiency

Outcome: To support residents to improve energy efficiency and reduce costs of energy consumption.

End date: March 2026

PRIORITY 4

Improve the way that we manage waste and encourage residents and businesses to reduce, reuse and recycle more.

Title: Implement new waste collection arrangements following the conclusion of the waste service public consultation and Cabinet decision.

Outcome: Compliance with the Governments waste reforms (Simpler Recycling). Divert as much waste as possible from landfill and increase recycling

End date: April 2026

Title: Work with other Authorities including Essex County Council to develop and deliver waste minimisation and recycling initiatives that deliver on the requirements of the Waste Reforms and Essex Waste Strategy

Outcome: Influence and change attitudes and behaviours to reduce waste, reuse and recycle.

End date: March 2026

Title: Develop a waste Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Outcome: Support planning policies by providing detailed guidance on the storage and management of recyclables and waste and the implementation of high-quality on-site waste management systems.

End date: December 2024



Fit for the Future

Priorities:

- Using the opportunities that new technology offers us to improve services, remove demand and reduce costs.
- Working more closely with our partner organisations in Essex and beyond to share resources, assets and information to deliver better outcomes for our residents and businesses.
- Becoming an organisation that can flex and be responsive to changes as the volatility in our world continues.
- Finding new ways of delivering which allows us to meet the needs of our residents and businesses while continuing to be financially resilient as demand increases due to demographic and other changes.
- Understanding and putting plans into place for the skills our workforce will need in the future.
- Making sure that we continue to be an employer of choice, offering fulfilling and rewarding careers for our people.

Actions that will be undertaken in year:

- Review the Fit for the Future programme to align with work to support Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)
- Develop the transitional approach to new local government structures within Essex
- Deliver service reviews to align with the fit for the future priorities and implement outcomes of reviews as appropriate
- Evaluate the level of maturity and effectiveness of the council's data management practices to identify areas for improvement and enhance our data-driven decision-making capabilities.
- Carry out workforce planning to assess gaps and interventions required to ensure we have the right people, with the right skills, in the right places, at the right time to fulfil our strategic objectives.
- Consider the suitability for refurbishment of operational assets ahead of Local Government Reorganisation and refine plans to best fit for both short and medium-term requirements
- Review the Council's digital strategy to align with revised fit for the future programme and identify early technology opportunities relating to Local Government Reorganisation.



Measuring success

Comments and Feedback

KPI	Target
Number of affordable homes delivered	250
Participation levels across our sport centres	Data only **
Number of homelessness cases prevented	Data only
Percentage of major planning applications decided on time	60%
Percentage of minor planning applications decided on time	70%
Percentage of other planning applications decided on time	70%
Percentage of planning applications overturned on appeal	10%
Number of new startup businesses	Data only
Number of businesses accessing business support	Data only
Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting	53%
Kilograms of residual household waste collected per household	390 kgs
Percentage of recycling contamination	15%
Percentage of accessible non-hazardous fly tips on public land cleared within 24 hours of being reported	100%
Percentage of Disabled Facilities Grants approved within timescale	80%
Percentage of calls resolved at first point of contact in the customer service centre	65%
Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days	98%
Number of people transacting with the Council online	Data only
Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit new claims	16 days
Time taken to process housing benefit claim changes	5 days
Percentage of stage 1 complaints dealt with in timescale	90%
Collection for Council Tax	97.5%
Collection for Business Rates	98%

** This Performance Indicator will be 'Data Only' for one year while the Leisure Contract is being finalised

We always welcome comments, suggestions and feedback (critical or otherwise) on our plans and improvements and in the way that we write our documents and communicate them.

- You can go online and make a comment at www.braintree.gov.uk/comment
- You can e-mail our Customer Service Centre at csc@braintree.gov.uk.
- You can drop written comments off at our main office - Causeway House, Braintree
- You can telephone our Customer Service Centre on 01376 552525.
- You can speak to your local Councillor who will be able to pass your comments back if you wish. Contact details for your Councillor can be found on our website: www.braintree.gov.uk

Assuring you of my attention at all times.

Cllr. Diana Garrod
Braintree District Councillor - Bumpstead Ward