

Report for Annual Parish Meetings 2023

Cllr Iona Parker

Here is a written report for the meeting. Do get in touch if you have any questions.

1. Council Tax

BDC recognises the cost of living pressures faced by residents and have tried to keep the increase in Council Tax as low as possible. The Council Tax increase for the next financial year will be 2.5% which is less than the maximum allowed. In addition, BDC will be giving Council Tax payers a £25 rebate which will result in a reduction in the overall amount of money due, with the greatest percentage reduction afforded to those in the lower tax bands (bands A-C). This money has come from a fund set aside to contribute to a slip road project in Braintree which now looks unlikely to receive funding from Government

2. BDC budget

The BDC budget for 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Strategy for the next 4 years was agreed by the Council at its meeting in February. The budget was set against a background of inflation of more than 10% and staff pay increases which were higher than anticipated. This had led to a large budget gap over the MTFS of £2m which had to be addressed.

Main highlights of relevance to my ward are:

- £1m to be distributed through community organisations such as foodbanks to help those facing serious difficulties with the increase in the cost of living;
- £400k to deliver a plan for economic growth and a housing strategy;
- Councillor Community Grant Scheme to continue;
- No reduction in Street Cleaning grant to parish councils for the forthcoming year;
- Recycling calendars to be withdrawn as information available on BDC website (paper copies will be available for those without access to the internet);
- Investigation into the possibility of making a small charge for garden waste collection to help meet budget gap (the majority of councils now charge for garden waste collection). This will be subject to provisions in the Government's Environment Bill.

3. Local elections

Elections for Braintree District Council will take place on 4th May. Voting in person will require presentation of Voter ID. Acceptable ID includes a UK or EU passport, a photocard driving licence, a blue badge, a bus pass or a PASS card. If residents do not have ID, they can request a Voter Authority Certificate from BDC.

4. Main achievements for BDC over the last year

- Adopted a new Local Plan for the District, helped communities deliver Neighbourhood Plans, set up Planning Forum to enable earlier input from planning committee members and parish councils on larger developments, in 2021/22

delivered 417 affordable homes against a target of 250 (figures not available yet for 2022/23).

- Pedestrianised Braintree town centre, developed Horizon 120 business park and Plaza enterprise centre in Gt Notley to encourage businesses to set up in the District, part of North Essex Economic Board which supports businesses and skills.
- Investment in new all weather surfaces for sports pitches in the District, ran activities for those with dementia.
- Sound financial management of the Council and Investment Development Programme to generate income for the Council from programmes which also provide community or economic benefit.
- Successful apprenticeship programme at BDC which has supported 78 apprenticeships since it started in 2017, many of whom have gone on to become full time employees at the Council.

5. Health

A Community Diagnostics Centre will be opening in Braintree which will be able to provide CT and MRI scans amongst other things. The ward space which has opened in Halstead Hospital is also to become permanent.