

Report for Parish Councils from Cllr Iona Parker, Braintree District Council – Feb/March 2024

1. The Council's budget for 2024/2025 of £19.6m was approved at the meeting of Full Council on 19th February. Despite ongoing cost pressures and increased demand for services, the Council remains in a sound financial position for the forthcoming year compared to other councils.
2. There remains a forecast deficit over the medium term to 2027/28 of £2.3m. The Council will be looking at ways to address this and will be developing a "Fit for the Future" transformation programme to look out how resources can be used more effectively and how we can work better with other partners. A sum of money has been set aside for this work from the New Homes Bonus the Council receives from the Government. A further sum has been set aside from the NHB to add to the risk reserves to recognise the uncertainties over future costs and demand.
3. Full Council also passed a resolution on Council Tax for the forthcoming year. The Braintree District Council element of Council Tax will rise by 2.96% which represents an increase of 11p per week for a band D property.
4. The main highlights from the Budget as far as my ward is concerned are:
 - Councillor Community Grants to continue – each Councillor to be allocated £1250 to award to community projects in their ward.
 - Street cleansing grants to Parish councils to continue.
 - The garden waste subscription service has proved more popular than anticipated with a take up of over 50% bringing in an income to the Council of around £900k.
 - The Council is looking to charge a Council Tax premium of 100% on second homes in the district with effect from 1st April 2025.
5. The Council has updated its Livewell Health and Wellbeing strategy in conjunction with partners in the health services. The aim of the strategy is to focus on prevention and early intervention and to move beyond simply treating health conditions after they have arisen. The intention is to create an environment where everyone has the right facilities available to them to actively participate in improving their own health and wellbeing. The data shows a strong link between deprivation and poor health and we are particularly conscious that parts of Braintree and Halstead feature in the 20% most deprived areas in the country.
6. I have been trying to find out what is happening about the new health centre in Sible Hedingham. I am told the Integrated Care Board is due to consider the final business case very shortly. Once it is approved the land can be transferred to One Medical who can then start construction. We are continuing to keep the pressure on the ICB.