

## Report for Parish Councils – January 2025

### Cllr Iona Parker, Braintree District Council

- Devolution – The Government published a White Paper on 16<sup>th</sup> December on devolution and local government reorganisation in 2 tier areas (ie areas with county and district councils). Devolution would see powers in areas such as transport, skills, housing and economic growth given to local authorities. Local Government reorganisation would see the abolition of District and County Councils which would be replaced by unitary authorities and a mayor. At an extraordinary Council meeting on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January, Essex County Council decided to submit an expression of interest to the Government in the Devolution Priority Programme and to commit to a reorganisation of local government in Essex. ECC also included a request to postpone the ECC elections due to take place this May.
- Waste – Legislative changes have come into force requiring Councils to collect more recyclable material at the kerbside. Essex County Council have also introduced a new waste strategy with a tiered approach aimed at increasing recycling and reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. This strategy has been adopted by Braintree District Council. As a result of these changes, Braintree has been conducting a review of our waste collection. There have been three areas of focus; aspiration to increase recycling (our current recycling rate has flat lined and compares poorly with other councils), impact on Council finances and ease of use for residents. The review has looked at a number of options and has resulted in a preferred option. The most significant changes in the preferred option are that the grey bin will be collected every 3 weeks and the recycling sacks will be replaced by two bins, one for paper and card and one for other recyclates including bottles which will be collected on an alternate 2 week cycle. A consultation on the proposal has now launched and ends on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. I would be grateful for your help in publicising this consultation. No decisions have been made and we are keen to hear the views of residents on the proposal. The consultation can be found on the main Council website.
- Medium term financial strategy (a 4 year period) - This was considered by the Scrutiny committee (of which I am a member) and the Cabinet at meeting in the beginning of December. The Council is facing a budget gap of £731k for 2025/26 and a cumulative gap over the 4 year period of just over £3m. This is subject to clarification on government funding. The MTFs is made up of many items of expenditure and income. The Councillor Community Grants Scheme is proposed to continue for 25/26 and there will be no increase in charges for garden waste. The Council has already instigated a transformation programme to address the

budget gap over the medium term based on 4 work streams; agile and flexible working, service reviews, asset management reviews and shared service and partnerships to look at reducing cost and increasing income.

- Local Plan – the Council has started the process of review its Local Plan up to 2041. Under government changes to how housing targets are calculated, the housing target for Braintree has increased to 1098 houses per year, an increase of 35% over the current target. The call for sites has already taken place and various evidence base documents have been produced. A document on Issues and Options was considered by the Local Plan subcommittee (of which I am a member) in December. A consultation on the document will commence on 20<sup>th</sup> January which will enable the public and other consultees to raise issues they want to be considered in the local plan and to comment on the vision and objectives of the plan. There will be a series of weekly meetings of the Local Plan subcommittee in May and June to allocate sites. I must stress that far more sites than are needed have been put forward in the call for sites.
- Affordable housing – we are on track to meet our affordable housing target of 250 per year.
- Healthcare – additional capacity for patients at the Elizabeth Courtauld surgery in Halstead will be provided at the Halstead hospital part funded by s.106 contributions. Work is due to start early in the new year.
- There is of course much going on across the whole of the District but I have tried to focus this report on matters which might be of relevance to you. Please get in touch if you have any questions on the report or anything else.