

BRAINTREE PARISH CLUSTER MEETINGS

Background

In October 1998 Braintree District Council (BDC) invited representatives from all Parish and Town Councils, as well as other community partners, to 1 of 3 meetings across the District and agreed a way forward based on the clustering of neighbouring parishes with common interests and concerns into groups. The Parish Clusters were first formed in 1999 and were based on District Ward Boundaries. (See Table of Cluster Groups)

The Purpose of the Parish Cluster

The meetings provide parishes with the opportunity to meet representatives from Braintree District Council, the Police, Essex County Council and the Health Authority and to ask questions directly to appropriate representatives on topics that have been chosen by the Parish. The Clusters also provide the opportunity to share common concerns and solutions. They are a forum that has representatives from all three tiers of local government attending to discuss local issues.

The Process

There are 12 Parish Clusters. They are held twice a year usually between March – June and Sept - Nov.

Each Parish takes it in turn to host the cluster which involves chairing the meeting, agreeing the agendas with the other parishes in their cluster and organising the venue.

Who does what?

The Role of the Parish Cluster Clerk is to carry out the administration for the Cluster Meeting. This involves:

- Confirming with Braintree District Council that they are hosting the Cluster.
- Liaising with the other parishes within the Cluster to ask for agenda items.
- Contacting the Parish Clerks within the Cluster, Braintree District Council Parish Liaison Officer, agreeing and booking the date, time and venue for the Cluster.
- Preparing and distributing a joint agenda, inviting the appropriate organisations to attend the meeting and arranging for minute/meeting notes to be taken and then circulated to all those attending.

The Role of BDC Parish Liaison Officer is to co-ordinate the administration and organisation of the Parish Cluster meetings for Braintree District Council and support the Parish Clerk through the whole process. This involves:

- Contacting the Parish Clerks at the start of the Cluster Round.
- Preparing and providing Parish Clerks with the BDC Newsletter “ The Parish Update”.
- Liaise with the Parish Clerk over the agenda items that may require further clarification.
- Liaise with BDC Officers, Councillors and partner organisations regarding the agenda items and the need to prepare for the meetings.

- Ensure that all BDC representatives have a copy of the agenda and the minutes/meeting notes of the previous meeting.
- Liaising with the BDC Officers and Parish Clerks to ensure the action points raised at the Cluster meetings have been followed up.
- Co-ordinating responses against each action point raised, to ensure that Parish Councils are being kept informed.
- Contacting other organisations to inform them of any issues raised, where appropriate.

The Role of the BDC Officer attending the Cluster Meeting is to represent Braintree District Council by attending the meetings and answering any questions raised at the meeting. Where further action is required by Braintree District Council ensure the appropriate officer or BDC Councillor is informed. Inform the Parish Liaison Officer of any issues that have arisen from the Cluster meetings.

The Role of the BDC Member is to represent Braintree District Council and the Parishes in their ward at the Cluster meetings. Informing and exchanging information at the more strategic level.

Examples of ways of enhancing Parish Cluster Meetings – Have you thought of?

These are your meetings and you may, if you wish, make changes to suit your cluster group. Possible suggestions could be: -

1. Having one dedicated Cluster Clerk (one Cluster has this arrangement)
2. Inviting speakers from appropriate organisations to talk on specific topics that interest your parishes. For example it might be on:
 - Playground Equipment
 - Health and Safety
 - Fund Raising
 - Community Safety initiatives
 - ICT
 - Quality Councils
 - Recycling
 - Climate Change
 - How to conserve energy
 - Youth Issues/facilities/councils
 - The Rural Community Council of Essex
3. Using the time to identify and develop joint projects.
4. Looking at transport needs as a group.
5. Considering different formats of the evening i.e. how formal or informal you would like the evening to be. (One Cluster Group includes a refreshment /networking break half way through).
6. Having a less formal layout at the meeting.

Contacts

If you need help or advice regarding the Parish Clusters, either setting the agenda, inviting organisations to attend your meeting or with issues arising out of a meeting please **telephone 01376 551414 and ask for:**

Linda Hadley - Parish Liaison Officer

Or by email: linda.hadley@braintree.gov.uk

Contact details for each Parish Clerk

These can be found on the Braintree District Council website www.braintree.gov.uk and click on Council and Democracy and then Parish information. On the right hand side of this page, under useful links, click on Parish Clerks.