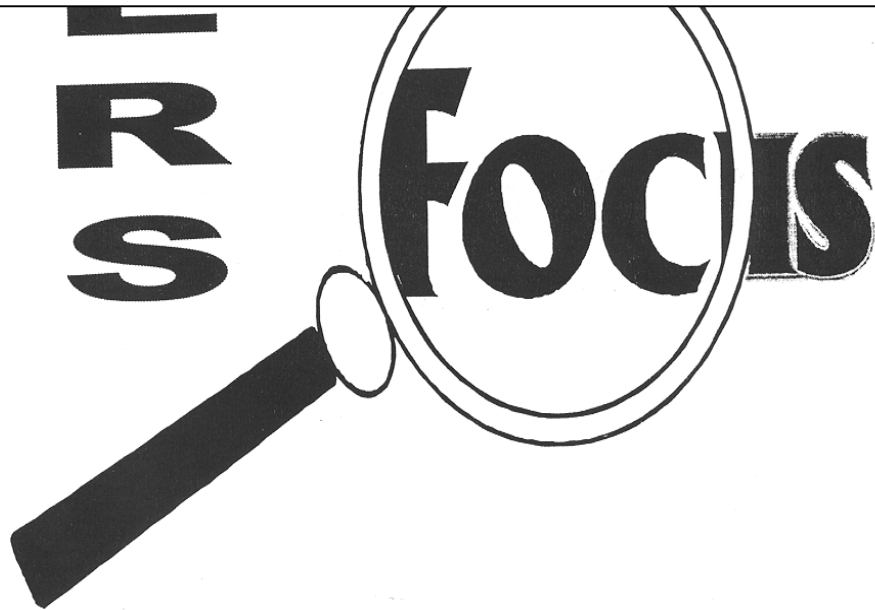


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*Members' Focus is available on-line at www.braintree.gov.uk
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then "Members Focus".*

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Focus

January 2006

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AREA: All

CORPORATE THEME HEADING: Helping People Feel Safe and Well

SUBJECT: Business Continuity Management	Contact Officer: Kathy Brown
TEL/EMAIL No.: 01376 557753 katbr@braintree.gov.uk	BACKGROUND PAPERS: Civil Contingencies Act 2004 & Emergency Preparedness Guidance Chapter 6
<p>INFORMATION:</p> <p>The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 placed a duty upon Local Authorities as a Category 1 Responders, to have a robust Business Continuity Plan. The Business Continuity Plan outlines how the District will continue to deliver their Services to the Community whilst responding to a disruption in a Service or an emergency situation. The Act also places a duty upon the Local Authority to promote Business Continuity Management to businesses within their community.</p> <p>To address the new duties of Internal and External Business Continuity Management placed on the Authority the expertise of the Insurance and Risk Manager and Economic Development Manager are being utilised alongside their everyday roles. They are supported by the Emergency Planning Team.</p> <p>The Insurance and Risk Manager has conducted interviews with all Service Managers to help them ascertain the risks which may affect their core business, and identify ways in which they may build in resilience to their everyday practices. A database is being compiled from all of this information to feed a corporate Business Continuity Plan for the Council.</p> <p>The Economic Development Manger has been liaising with local businesses and Chambers of Trade and Commerce to assist in promoting Business Continuity Management.</p> <p>An Essex Business Continuity Promotion Strategy has been developed in partnership with Essex County Council and Districts was accepted by the Essex Chief Executive Association in September 2005. As part of the strategy a Seminar was held on the 28th November 2005 to launch the concept of Business Continuity Management for Essex Businesses. The Government booklet 'Expecting the Unexpected' is being distributed to Chambers of Commerce and Trade and an advert will appear in the Business Rates leaflet which will be sent out to 60,000 homes and about 4000 businesses with wording to the effect of;</p> <p><i>Would your business survive a crisis?</i></p> <p><i>A crisis that threatens the survival of your business could happen at any time. The most common threats are the same whether you run a large enterprise employing many staff or a family corner shop.</i></p> <p><i>But planning for the continuity of your business in an emergency is not difficult, need not be expensive and will definitely increase the likelihood of your business surviving a crisis or business interruption.</i></p> <p><i>Developing a Business Continuity Plan does need careful preparation and planning – but</i></p>	

MEMBERS' FOCUS

help is available (see below). The time spent is a worthwhile investment, as it will also ensure the safety and protection of your biggest asset, your people.

Before trying to assess the specific risks, it's important to determine what would constitute a crisis for your business.

Common business crises could include:

- *Fire/Flood*
- *Bomb/Terrorism threat*
- *Denial of access to your premises*
- *Legal/regulatory action*
- *Utilities failure*
- *Burglary*
- *Vandalism*
- *Staff sickness/resignation*

It would be a major undertaking to have a separate plan for each possible crisis that your business could face, but written carefully, a good plan can be adapted to suit the circumstances at the time.

Start by asking yourself these questions:

- *If there were a fire that put your premises out of use for several weeks or a power failure that lasted for days, how would you continue to operate?*
- *If your premises were burgled and computer equipment stolen together with all your business data, how would you gain access to customer/supplier details, and what if sensitive information fell into the hands of a competitor?*
- *If the telephone system failed how would you communicate?*

All of these factors need to be considered within the District Council and its' contracted out services to ensure that we comply with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and that we can continue to serve the residents of Braintree District whilst dealing effectively with an emergency or disruption to the delivery of one or all of our Services.

MEMBERS' FOCUS

AREA: Exchequer, Finance

CORPORATE THEME HEADING:

Technical Update Associated with Business Rates and Council Tax

SUBJECT: Various	CONTACT OFFICER: Dave Ekins Local Tax Manager 22 December 2005
TEL/EMAIL No.: 2910 davek@braintree.gov.uk	BACKGROUND PAPERS:
INFORMATION: NON KEY DECISIONS REQUIRED - Cannot be called in.	
<u>PURPOSE OF REPORT</u>	
<u>To advise members on current developments in the arena of Business Rates, Council Tax and Benefits</u>	
DEVELOPMENTS	
<u>2.1 Civil Partnership Act 2004.</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enables same-sex couples to obtain legal recognition of their relationship and became effective on 5 December 2005. Does not affect Council Tax billing until 1 April 2006.• The partnership is formed when the second party signs the partnership document.• Implication is that civil partners have parity with spouses.• Implication for Benefits is that same-sex couples were treated as single claimants and are now treated one claimant, based on whoever decides to claim.	
<u>2.2 Lyons Inquiry</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Lyons inquiry was set up to report on local authority funding formula. In September, a decision was made to postpone Council Tax revaluation until after the next General Election – probably in 2009 or 2010. Other elements of the Lyons inquiry continue – most notably local services, funding and accountability. Preliminary thinking on local accountability suggests that Business Rate collection should be brought under local control. Another strand of the Lyons inquiry is the option for pensioners in England to defer payment of Council Tax until after their death, with the outstanding balance being recouped from their estate. The scheme would be voluntary.	
<u>2.3 Improving Collection rates</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) is allocating funds under a £6.2m e-Innovations budget to develop a data sharing between councils aimed at catching people evading council tax. A private company TDX, is developing the project with Mid Sussex District Council and it should go live in 2006.	

MEMBERS' FOCUS

2.4 Small Business Rate Relief

- Currently, businesses have to register for rate relief every year by declaring to the Council that they are eligible. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister propose that registration should take place once within the five-year business rate revaluation cycle. Members may wish to know that we will be sending out forms in two months time to enable registration for rate relief in 2006/07, but it is hoped that in March 2007, businesses can register for 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 and then we move to the five-year cycle.

MEMBERS' FOCUS

News

Help wildlife and win £200

Page 1 of 1

Projects helping wildlife in the Braintree District could win £200 in a Biodiversity Competition being run by The Braintree Wildlife Advisory Group. Any wildlife project underway can be entered such as tree planting, bird & bat boxes or building bug boxes for ladybirds, bees or spiders, etc. The competition is also open to management projects such as coppicing, pond clearance or planting wild flowers.

School groups, parish councils, community groups or individuals are encouraged to enter. The competition is open until November 2006 and entries will be assessed throughout the year. For more detail on the competition or to request an application form, interested parties should call Landscape Services on 01376 557743 or River Colne Countryside Project on 07702 918980.

Simon Amstutz, project officer of the River Colne Countryside Project, comments: "Helping wildlife is very rewarding for everyone involved and the competition is open to all biodiversity projects, big or small. In the Braintree District we are lucky to be surrounded by some of the most beautiful countryside in Essex and we hope the competition will encourage more residents to help wildlife in their area."

ENDS

For more press information, contact: Simon Amstutz on 07702 918980.
Issued by: Braintree DC PR 4 November 2005

MEMBERS' FOCUS

Diary date

Council in partnership with parishioners

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On Thursday 5th January 2006, parishioners of St. Michael's Church Braintree signed a partnership agreement with the Council to help keep the churchyard and surrounding area looking clean and attractive.

The church members will carry out litter picks, remove fallen leaves where appropriate and monitor cleanliness in the churchyard and surrounding area. The group will also liaise with the Council for equipment plus the prompt removal of fly tips and graffiti.

Cabinet member Michael Gage comments: "Working together with the St. Michael's parishioners we can help keep this Braintree landmark attractive and litter-free. The parishioners take great pride in their church and its beautiful surroundings, we hope other communities will be encouraged to make a difference and help make the District a more pleasant place to live."

ENDS

For more press information, contact: PR Section 01376 557752

Issued by: Braintree DC PR 29 December 2005

MEMBERS' FOCUS

AREA: Planning

CORPORATE THEME HEADING:

SUBJECT: Planning and Technology	CONTACT OFFICER: Alan Southerby, Head of Planning Control
TEL/EMAIL No.: 2514	BACKGROUND PAPERS:
INFORMATION: Do you want to see the latest ICT developments that are going to help Planning improve and move forwards? Do you want to see what Planning presentations will look like at the committees of tomorrow? Then come along to our 'drop-in' afternoon/early evening session on 16 February 2006 in the Committee area at Causeway House between 4.00pm and 7.00pm where we will be able to show you all that is happening. This is an open invitation to all Members and is a result of the feedback that we've had from Area Committees and Member ICT pilot briefings. You told us what you wanted so come along and see how we're doing. For further information, please contact either Alan Southerby or Cherie Root.	

MEMBERS' FOCUS

AREA: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

CORPORATE THEME HEADING: PLANNING

SUBJECT: Planning Appeals	CONTACT OFFICER: Alison Webb
TEL/EMAIL No.: 01376 551414 Ext. 2614 alison.webb@braintree.gov.uk	BACKGROUND PAPERS: Nil
INFORMATION: To provide details of recently lodged planning appeals and appeal decisions.	

INFORMATION: APPEALS LODGED

Appellant: Mr P Everett
Site: 6 Newtown, Coggeshall Road, Kelvedon
Development: Erection of two storey side extension
Application No: 05/01342/FUL
Start Date: 2nd December 2005

Appellant: Mr B Oliver
Site: Land rear of 9 Recreation Ground, Sible Hedingham
Development: Erection of detached two bedroom bungalow
Application No: 05/00680/FUL
Start Date: 7th December 2005

Appellant: Hutchison 3G UK Limited
Site: Land opposite Queenborough Meadows, Queenborough Lane,
Braintree
Development: Installation of 15m slimline monopole incorporating 3 no. 1.7m
antennas, 1 no. 200mm transmission dish with NEC Node B equipment and ancillary
development
Application No: 05/00818/T56
Start Date: 9th December 2005

Appellant: Mr and Mrs W J Hadley
Site: Little Sixpenny, Colne Park, Colne Engaine
Development: Temporary removal of condition 2 of planning permission
BTE/664/83 – lifting of agricultural restriction for 10 years
Application No: 05/01907/FUL
Start Date: 15th December 2005

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Appellant: Mr D Bayes
Site: Sloe Lodge, Sloe Hill, Halstead
Development: Erection of detached garage and store
Application No: 05/01729/FUL
Start Date: 21st December 2005

Appellant: Mr P Smith
Site: 4 Levens Way, Great Notley
Development: Felling of one cherry blossom tree
Application No: TPO 3/60
Start Date: 21st December 2005

INFORMATION: APPEAL DECISIONS

Appellant: Mr R Gowers
Site: Land adjacent to 1 Brookside Cottage, Fuller Street, Fairstead
Development: Erection of one no. cottage
Application No: 05/00745/FUL
Decision & Date: DISMISSED - 28th December 2005

Appellant: Mr C Hoy
Site: 28 Mountbatten Road, Braintree
Development: Repositioning of 6ft fence to edge of boundary
Application No: 05/01099/FUL
Decision & Date: DISMISSED – 4th January 2006

MEMBERS' FOCUS

AREA: Exchequer, Finance, Council Tax

CORPORATE THEME HEADING: Closure of Witham Cash Office.

Below is a list of local payment outlets to enable cash-paying customers to pay their Council Tax bills once Witham Cash Office closes on 27 January 2006. This list is limited to outlets within and on the fringes of our area. It should be noted that outlets are UK-wide and payments can be made wherever a Post Office or Paypoint site is located.

MEMBERS' FOCUS

PayPoint Outlet

<u>PayPoint Outlet</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Post Code</u>
Chelmsford Star Co-op	Challis Lane		Braintree	CM 7 1AN
Chelmsford Star Co-op	174 Cressing Road		Braintree	CM 7 3PL
Chelmsford Star Co-op	62 Church Street		Braintree	CM 7 5JY
Gemco News	12 Queens Road		Braintree	CM 7 5UA
Somerfield Stores	George Yard	Rayne Road	Braintree	CM 7 2QP
Texaco Star	Rayne Road		Braintree	CM 7 2QS
Bhavani General Store	17 High Street	Kelvedon	Colchester	CO 5 9AG
Co-Op - Colchester	37 High Street	Earls Colne	Colchester	CO 6 2PA
Paperchain	237 High Street	Kelvedon	Colchester	CO 5 9JD
Spar	4-6 Church Street	Coggeshall	Colchester	CO 6 1TU
Co-Op - Ipswich & Norwich	2-13 Weaver's Court		Halstead	CO 9 2JN
Co-Op - Ipswich & Norwich	Swan Street	Sible Hedingham	Halstead	CO 9 3HP
Total Service Station	140 Swan Street	Sible Hedingham	Halstead	CO 9 3PP
Alldays	1 Spa Road		Witham	CM 8 1NE
Crossroad Stores	39 Cross Road		Witham	CM 8 2NA
Honeysuckle Stores	144 Honeysuckle Way		Witham	CM 8 2YD
Lynfield Motors Ltd	London Road		Witham	CM 8 1ED

Post Office

Bocking Church Street	Bocking Church Street		Braintree	CM7 5JY
Braintree	George Yard Shopping Centre		Braintree	CM7 2QB
Finchingfield	Bardfield Road	Finchingfield	Braintree	CM7 4LS
Great Bardfield	Great Bardfield		Braintree	CM7 4SP
Jubilee Oak	12-14 Cressing Road	Jubilee Oak	Braintree	CM7 3PP
Masefield Road	Masefield Road		Braintree	CM7 1AA
Panfield Lane	194 Panfield Lane		Braintree	CM7 5RJ
Wethersfield	Silver Street	Wethersfield	Braintree	CM7 4BP
Great Leighs	103 Main Road	Great Leighs	Chelmsford	CM3 1NN
Hatfield Peverel	1/3 The Street	Hatfield Peverel	Chelmsford	CM3 2DL
Terling	The Street	Terling	Chelmsford	CM3 2PG
Coggeshall	3-7 Market End	Coggeshall	Colchester	CO6 1TP
Earls Colne	72 High Street	Earls Colne	Colchester	CO6 2QY
Kelvedon	17 High Street	Kelvedon	Colchester	CO5 9AG
Wakes Colne	Colchester Road	Wakes Colne	Colchester	CO6 2DF
Stisted	c/o Wickham St Paul PO, The Green,	Wickham St Paul	Halstead	CO9 2PT
Castle Hedingham	Mortimer Stores	St James Street, Castle Hedingham	Halstead	CO9 3EJ
Gosfield	Maurice Rowson Hall, Church Rd,	Gosfield	Halstead	CO9 1UD
Great Yeldham	The Post Office	High Street, Great Yeldham	Halstead	CO9 4ES
Halstead	46 High Street		Halstead	CO9 2JA
Parkfields	Abels Road		Halstead	CO9 1EW
Sible Hedingham	130 Swan Street	Sible Hedingham	Halstead	CO9 3PR
Stambourne	Chapel End Way		Halstead	CO9 4NX
Toppesfield	Church Lane	Toppesfield	Halstead	CO9 4DR
Wickham St Paul	The Green	Wickham St Paul	Halstead	CO9 2PT
Audley End	Store And Po	Audley End	Saffron Walden	CB11 4JB
Great Braxted	Tiptree Road	Great Braxted	Witham	CM8 3EF
Powers Hall End	Spa Road		Witham	CM8 1NE
Rivenhall	9 Church Road	Rivenhall	Witham	CM8 3PQ
Silver End	The Broadway	Silver End	Witham	CM8 3RQ
White Notley	1 The Street		Witham	CM8 1RQ
Wickham Bishops	6 The Street	Wickham Bishops	Witham	CM8 3NN
Witham	76 Newland Street		Witham	CM8 1AH

Submitted by Dave Ekins Local Tax Manager 01376 551414 ext 2910. 10 January 2006.

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AREA: CORPORATE

CORPORATE THEME HEADING: IMPROVE PERFORMANCE
AND DELIVER BETTER VALUE

SUBJECT: Review of Code of Conduct	CONTACT OFFICER: P J Dempsey, Monitoring Officer
TEL/EMAIL No.: Ext. 2620 Email: patrick.dempsey@braintree.gov.uk	BACKGROUND PAPERS: ODPM consultation paper-Standards of Conduct in English Local government
INFORMATION:	

On 15 December 2005, the government published a consultation paper – '*Standards of Conduct in English Local Government: The Future*'.

The paper can be viewed at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162582> or a copy can be provided by request to the Monitoring Officer.

This paper draws together the government's views on the future of the conduct regime for local government in England. It sets out a vision for the future regime and provides a co-ordinated response to a series of recent recommendations, reviews and consultations relevant to conduct issues in local government.

In particular, the paper incorporates the government's response to:

- the tenth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Graham Committee) – 'Getting the Balance Right – Implementing Standards in Public Life';
- 'The Role and Effectiveness of the Standards Board for England' – Report of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee;
- recommendations following consultation on the Code of Conduct for Members by the Standards Board for England.
- 'Review of the Regulatory Framework Governing the Political Activities of Local Government Employees', which was the subject of an ODPM consultation paper in August 2004; and a 'Model Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees' – an ODPM consultation paper, August 2004.

The government's responses to these reviews and recommendations reflect the fact that local authorities in England have a strong track record of high standards of conduct and are based on the continuing need:

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- to maintain high standards of conduct for local authority members and employees
 - to define effectively what standards of conduct are expected of members and officers, and for such rules to be fair and clear
 - for an effective means of taking action when breaches of the rules occur, and for such means to be fair, clear, proportionate, rigorous and thorough; and
 - to ensure that measures are in place to guarantee public confidence in the appropriateness of the ethical regime.
- 1.5 The government's vision is for the different elements of the conduct regime – including the members' Code of Conduct, the Standards Board, local Standards Committees and Monitoring Officers – to work effectively together and be an integrated whole.

2. **The changes**

- 2.1 The overall approach to conduct set out in the paper would involve the following principal changes to current arrangements:
- initial assessment of all misconduct allegations to be undertaken by Standards Committees, rather than the Standards Board
 - Local Standards Committees to be responsible for investigating and determining most cases
 - the Standards Board to adopt a more strategic, advisory and monitoring role but retaining responsibility for investigating the most serious misconduct allegations; and
 - improvements to the operation and composition of local Standards Committees, with independent chairs and committees to include independent members with a balance of experience.

These changes are designed to secure public confidence in giving Standards Committees powers to make initial assessments of all allegations.

- 2.2 In order to ensure the independence and thoroughness on which public confidence in such a locally-based system depends, there is seen to be a fundamental need to improve the independence of Standards Committees and encourage the building up of the capacity and capability of the committees to undertake their new role. The changes will also mean the evolution of the Standards Board into a strategic, arm's-length body dealing only with the most serious cases nationally, and ensuring capacity is increased at local level through increased support, advice and guidance.
- 2.3 Standards Committees should be at the heart of decision-making within the conduct regime. Standards Committees are in the lead in ensuring high standards of conduct at the local level, and are increasingly taking on a greater role in the determination of cases. The government wishes to continue this

MEMBERS' FOCUS

development, and consider that it would be a logical step to extend their role further to take on the initial assessment of all allegations. Monitoring Officers would be responsible for arranging to undertake the investigation of most allegations, and committees would make determinations in most cases. Only the most serious cases would be referred to the Standards Board for investigation.

- 2.4 A more locally-based regime would provide an appropriate way for local knowledge of the authority and its members to be fed into the decision-making process. It would enable the experience and skills of the Monitoring Officer to be used more effectively, including potentially allowing more opportunity for local mediation or other intervention falling short of investigation, which might allow disagreements to be diffused before they turn into full-blown allegations. Such a regime might also give an opportunity for Standards Committees to spot politically inspired or vexatious complaints, which might mean that unworthy cases could be rejected as soon as possible, but handled with an understanding of local pressures and sensitivities. Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees would need to become central, not only in investigating but also in promoting and championing high standards, and ensuring that standards become embedded as an intrinsic part of the local culture. In taking ownership of this issue in this way, Standards Committees would become the main means of increasing councils' awareness of standards issues. There are clear links here to the increasing importance of governance and standards in the CPA process.
- 2.5 The government's paper states that Authorities will need to do more than at present to ensure that Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees are:
- properly supported;
 - of the appropriate quality; and
 - able to promote high standards of conduct throughout each authority, so that concern for conduct issues is embedded in every aspect of councils' work.
- 2.6 The government accepts the Graham Committee's view that to retain public confidence in the independence and rigour of a more locally-based regime, Standards Committees should be required to have an independent chair. Braintree District Council's constitution requires the chairman of its Standards Committee to be an independent person but this is a local decision. It is not, at present, a statutory requirement. The government does not, however, accept that standards committees should be required to have a majority of independent members. The question of the number of independent members on the Standards Committee is an issue on the Committee's Work Programme and will be considered at its next meeting.

3. Changes to the Code

- 3.1 It is also proposed to simplify and clarify the Code of Conduct for members, so that it better reflects the way modern councils work and is easier for

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members and others to understand and use. The government has welcomed the recommendations the Standards Board has presented, arising from its consultation on the review of the Code of Conduct for members and agreed that amendments to the Code should be made along the lines suggested by the Board, including:

- making the Code clearer and simpler; but
- maintaining a rigorous approach to the identification of serious misconduct;
- amending the regime for declaring interests and speaking at council meetings particularly for members who also serve on other public bodies;
- making changes to the arrangements for determining whether conduct in private life should fall within the ambit of the Code; and
- amending the rules on the reporting of allegations by members to reduce the number of vexatious complaints.

3.2 The government also accepts the Board's recommendation that a clearer balance needs to be set between the need for an authority to protect genuinely confidential information and members' rights to make information available in the public interest, in the light of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. The Board's recommendation that a specific provision should be added to the Code to clarify that bullying behaviour constitutes a breach of the Code is also accepted.

3.3 The following key changes are proposed to the Code:

- (a) The general principles, currently contained in a separate Order, should be published alongside the Code which I believe is to serve as a reminder of the guiding principles for member conduct and give a positive tone to the provisions of the Code.
- (b) Certain behaviour outside official duties should continue to be regulated, but this should be restricted only to matters that would be regarded as unlawful.
- (c) In relation to appointments to other public bodies amendments to the Code will adopt a solution involving the member making a declaration of personal interest at the time when s/he speaks on a relevant issue (rather than at the start of the meeting). In addition, even where the member has a prejudicial interest in the matter relating to the body he represents (eg where the matter has a direct impact on the body concerned, or where the member is involved in regulatory matters in a decision-making capacity such as in respect of planning and licensing), s/he should be allowed to remain in the meeting to speak on behalf of the body, or on behalf of a campaign that s/he supports, but should withdraw before the vote.
- (d) A similar approach is to be adopted to members having a personal or prejudicial interest in a planning application.

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- (e) The 'whistleblowing' obligation to report breaches of the Code will be abolished.
- 3.4 In parallel, the conduct regime relating to local authority employees will be made more systematic, in particular, by the introduction of a Code of Conduct for employees, taking into account lessons learnt in the operation of the Code for members. The current rules requiring senior local authority posts to be politically restricted will be retained but with changes to raise the pay limits for political assistants and removal of limitations on the changes.
- 3.5 The government believes this approach will provide the conduct regime that local government will need in future as it develops the kind of strategic role encouraged as part of the 'Local Vision' debate. A number of the ideas for change require legislation which will occur at the next convenient opportunity that Parliamentary time allows. No information is provided as to when this might be, but it is not expected until at least the 2006/7 Parliamentary Session.

4. Conclusion

The government seems to have accepted the thrust of the original Nolan Committee recommendations to ensure that standards issues are largely dealt with locally, bringing in strategic regulation at a national level.

The proposed changes will go a long way towards resolving some of the criticisms of the Code itself and the enforcement regime. The further consultation proposed and the need for legislation will mean the changes will not all happen as quickly as some would like. The test of commitment will be the extent to which all involved will move forward in the spirit of the new regime in anticipation of the changes being formalised.

MEMBERS' FOCUS

AREA: Rural

CORPORATE THEME HEADING: Access To Services

SUBJECT: Rural Services Survey	CONTACT OFFICER: Kitty Barrett
TEL/EMAIL No.: 01376 557746. kitty.barrett@braintree.gov.uk	BACKGROUND PAPERS: Rural Policy and Action Statement
INFORMATION: One of the Action Points in the Rural Policy and Action Statement was to carry out a Rural Services Survey.	
<u>PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY</u> To provide information about the services and facilities that are available to residents living in rural settlements. To establish the number of settlements with and without key services. To gather information about the condition of community facilities and the need for physical improvements. To find out which, if any, rural villages are considered to be service centres for other settlements. To gather information about communication, information and meetings within parishes.	
<u>USE OF THE SURVEY</u> To provide information for the Local Development Framework Evidence Base. To provide information for the Community Strategy and Action Plan. To provide information for the Rural Policy and Action Statement. To provide information for Ward Profiles.	
<u>METHODOLOGY</u> A questionnaire was sent to parish council clerks. The questionnaire comprised two sections, the first asking about services and facilities in each rural settlement or hamlet and the second asking for information about publications and communications of the parish as a whole.	
<u>RESPONSE</u> All 52 rural parishes responded (the town parishes of Witham and Halstead were not included in the survey). Surveys for 71 settlements were returned.	
<u>SUMMARY OF RESPONSES</u>	
Key Services	80% have a hall 70% have a pub 42% have a primary school 38% have a post office 28% have a grocery store 18% have a doctors surgery 13% have a cash point 69% have broadband

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8.5% (6 settlements) have **all** the above services

A further 5 settlements have all except a cash point

25% have no public transport services to their nearest centre for key services

37% identified their centre for key services as being outside of Braintree District

82% consider their community facilities are in good condition

92% have a parish magazine

36% have a web site

ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The following is a summary of the responses provided by parish councils. In processing the responses it has been noticed that, where a settlement does not have a service or facility, the location identified by the parish may not actually be the nearest to the settlement.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Of the 71 settlements/hamlets:

57 have a hall or meeting place (80%)	
50 have a pub (70%) and 20 (28%) have more than 1 pub	
20 have a grocery store (28%), the large villages having more than 1	
28 have at least one mobile retail service (39%)	
28 have other shops in their village (39%)	
27 have a Post Office (38%) although 2 have limited opening hours	
71 have a post box (100%) number of post boxes per village range between 1 and 10	
9 have a cash point (13%) and only 1 has a bank	
23 have a venue for indoor sports (32%) which is the village hall or the school hall.	
50 have a play area (70%)	
44 have a sports pitch (62%)	
34 have a pre-school, play school or a nursery (49%)	
30 have a primary school (42%)	
4 have a secondary school (5.5%), There are five schools two of which are private	
13 have an after school club (18%)	
61 have a mobile library service (86%)	
6 have a library building (8.5%).	
3 have a police station (4%) one of them is unmanned	
25 have a mobile police unit service (35%)	
13 have a doctors surgery (18%)	
3 have a dentist (4%)	
3 have a mobile health service (4%) which is chiropody or a health visitor	
6 have a vet (8.5%)	
69 have a local information notice board (97%)	
9 have community ICT access (13%)	

MEMBERS' FOCUS

9 have community ICT access (13%)	
49 have broadband (69%)	
33 have small business units (46%)	
5 have a youth club (8%)	
17 have a mobile youth facility (24%)	
38 have a club for the elderly (53%)	
63 have a church/faith group meeting place (89%)	
26 have accommodation (Hotel or B&B) (37%) 1 village is getting one soon	
10 have a café (14%) some larger villages have 2	
10 have a good neighbour scheme (14%)	
51 have a "Neighbourhood Watch" scheme (72%)	
15 have a community bus (21%)	
17 have a car park (24%)	

CONDITION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES

58 (82%) consider that their community facilities are in a good condition.

Of those that were not in good condition the defects recorded were:

- Kitchen run down, no public toilets, old play areas have no equipment
- Village hall needs total rebuild
- Village hall in need of work.
- Paper shop very dilapidated

IMPROVEMENTS TO COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

37 (52%) are considering improving their services/facilities

These include projects relating to: -

Buildings and their associated facilities

- Village hall/memorial hall improvements including refurbishment of kitchens and toilets
- Applied for grant to improve leisure facilities at village hall. Hoping to secure tenure of hall which is owned by ECC
- Raising funds for village hall
- New Public Convenience
- Toilets refurbishment

Car Parks

- Improve village hall car park
- Provision for a car park on parish land

Leisure Activities

- Play areas and upgrading play equipment
- Providing an all weather play area
- New Play Area Project,
- Play area notice boards
- Skate- ramp

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- BMX track
- Ensuring that playing fields comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 95
- New Sports Pavilion Project
- New Pavilion notice board,
- Provide sports facilities
- Youth Activities
- Tennis courts
- Youth club soon,
- Nature Trail

Transport

- Local Transport Survey (3)
- Community bus

Other

- Dog Bins
- Sign Boards
- CCTV
- ICT access
- New Doctors surgery
- Redevelopment of shops

Service Centres

The 71 rural settlements identified 14 towns and villages that they consider to be service centres for their needs. Six of these are outside Braintree District.

Number of Settlements

identifying	Town/Village
17	Braintree
12	Sudbury
12	Halstead
7	Witham
6	Haverhill
4	Clare
4	Sible Hedingham
2	Earls Colne
2	Long Melford
1	Great Dunmow
1	Colchester
1	Hatfield Peverel
1	Wethersfield
1	Terling

There is some disparity between the town / village identified as a service centre and the nearest town or village where key services are located. For example, two settlements identified Sible Hedingham as their service centre when Great Yeldham is actually stated as the nearest village with a post office, grocery, primary school, doctor's surgery and pub. Another settlement identified Colchester as its service centre but looked to Kelvedon as its nearest village for key services. The term 'service centre' may be thought to relate to locations with significant retail and leisure provision.

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The following villages in Braintree District recognised themselves as a service centre for other rural villages for some services (those with an asterisk have all of the 'key services' listed in the executive summary): -

Bures Hamlet	Great Yeldham	Silver End*
Coggeshall*	Hatfield Peverel*	Sible Hedingham*
Earls Colne*	Kelvedon*	Steeple Bumpstead
Great Notley		

Surprisingly, Great Notley is not mentioned by any of the settlements as its nearest location for services that are not available within their parish. Similarly, none of the settlements named Silver End as the nearest location for services. Some of the villages on the district boundary may be service centres for settlements outside Braintree District even though not mentioned by the settlements included in this survey.

ACCESS TO SERVICE CENTRES

The time taken to travel by car to the nearest service centre as identified by each settlement ranges from 2 minutes to 20 minutes with 45 settlements (62%) being 5 to 10 minutes away.

Public transport to the identified service centre is as follows:

18 (25%) have NO BUS SERVICE	
15 (21%) have one bus per week	
5 (7%) have two buses per week	
2 (3%) have one bus per day	
1 (1%) has three buses per day	
3 (4%) has a bus every 2 hours	
27 (38%) has a bus hourly /half hourly (but most are without evening service and a reduced	

The 18 settlements with no bus service are also lacking key services and rely on the car to access their nearest location. Only 2 have a post office and grocery store, none have doctors or a cash point, 5 have a primary school, 7 have a pub and 9 have a village hall.

The 15 settlements with one bus per week are similarly lacking in key services.

PARISH INFORMATION

Of the 52 rural parish councils:

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large files

42 prefer evening meetings (81%)

SERVICES UNDERTAKEN BY PARISH COUNCILS

Of the 52 rural parish councils:

37 state that they undertake services for Braintree District Council (71%) of which: -

30 provide litter collection and street scene reporting

10 provide grass cutting services

4 provide bins and waste skips

4 clean public toilets

2 maintain play areas

1 provide footway lighting

1 provide a doctors car (NB this is not a BDC service)

In addition, 7 parishes that answered 'No' to this question are signed up to the BDC street cleaning partnership.

22 state that they undertake services for Essex County Council (42%) of which: -

14 provide grass and verge cutting services

10 are members of the Parish Paths Partnership (P3)

2 maintain parish owned street lights

PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Of the 52 rural parish councils:

19 parish councils meet monthly (36%), of these 6 do not meet in august and 2 do not meet in December

3 meet every 6 weeks (6%)

1 meets eight times a year

9 meet six times a year (17%), months vary

2 meet five times a year (4%)

1 meets four times a year

1 meets twice a year

VILLAGE EVENTS

A schedule of regular events held in parishes has been drawn up from the information provided. It may be possible to carry out consultations or disseminate information at these events.

OTHER COMMENTS

Comments emphasised the lack of public transport (7), the need for broadband (2), need for

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local policing (2), the importance of the public telephone boxes (1) and the need for additional facilities (hall, post office, shops) (3).

Two responses pointed out the problems associated with recruiting and retaining volunteers and the need for support to run youth and elderly groups. Another response advised that the work of the clerk had grown beyond the paid hours.

Some settlements pointed out additional services and facilities e.g. Fire Station, undertaker, PCSO office, open air swimming pool, youth hostel, community information point (CIP) for tourist info as well as social information, delivery of newsletters, phone boxes, public seats, bus shelters.

Castle Hedingham commented on local tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

Many rural communities in Braintree District lack key services. Access to basic retail and health services is particularly limited. A significant number of rural settlements has a community building (a hall, a pub or a school), the majority of which are reported to be in good condition; only 8 (12%) settlements was without a hall, pub and school, although 5 of these has a church.

The gap in provision of retail services may to some extent be overcome by mobile shop services. However, of the 51 settlements without shops, only 14 have a mobile grocery service. The major supermarkets offer home delivery services across the district but only 9 settlements have community ICT access (for those without a home computer), 8 of which also have a grocery store.

Post office and GP services cannot be provided as a mobile service as they need premises that meet particular requirements. There are examples across Braintree District of community buildings being adapted to provide a part time service, for example a post office in Toppesfield village hall, in Feering police station and in a White Notley pub. However there are no examples to our knowledge of innovative provision of GP services.

The lack of key services would be less serious problem if there were adequate public transport services to the nearest location of each service. However the survey showed that 25% of rural settlements had no bus service to their identified service centre. The rural settlements with the lowest levels of key service provision were also those with the poorest levels of public transport.

65% of rural parish council's have email addresses but only 38% would prefer to receive information electronically. 31% of rural parishes are still without access to broadband. This may create difficulties in the short term with meeting targets for e-government.

The results of this survey provide totals and percentages for the district as a whole, but also enable us to focus attention on parishes and settlements with particular need.

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ISSUES FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

It is recommended that further consideration be given to the following issues, including identifying those partners best placed to take them forward and how it might be achieved.

In addition to further involvement with Parish Councils other possible partner organisations have been identified enclosed in brackets against each issue.

The Issues

- Share this survey information (and the underlying detail) with partner organisations to enable them to target services more effectively. (Braintree Association of Local Councils, and our Local Strategic Partnership -PACT)
- Use the survey results to provide focus for the action plan in the Rural Policy and Action Statement e.g. identify which villages do not yet have a web site, parish magazine etc so that assistance can be targeted effectively. (Braintree District Council, Essex County Council)
- Strengthen support for parish councils to increase their use of ICT to access and disseminate information electronically. Explore the possibility of increased community ICT availability, particularly in parishes without shops. (Braintree Association of Local Councils, Essex County Council, Braintree District Council)
- Explore the possibilities for provision of key services in community buildings through initiatives such as 'multi-purpose village centres', 'the pub is the hub' and the 'extended schools programme'. Also explore the use of churches for service provision in settlements where this is the only remaining community building. (Essex Rural Partnership, Essex County Council, Braintree District Council, Rural Community Council of Essex)
- Identify the towns (and rural villages) that are service centres. Identify gaps in transport provision from surrounding villages to these service centres and investigate possible solutions. Ensure that this information is used to develop strategies and policies for the Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework. (Local Strategic Partnership -PACT, Essex County Council, Braintree District Council, Essex Rural Transport Partnership)
- Undertake further profiling to link this information to census data and establish the numbers of people to whom this service provision information relates. (Braintree District Council,)
- Consider the impact of eGovernment and the emphasis on all transactions becoming electronic.

There has been a 100% response to this survey and Braintree District Council would like to thank all Parish Councils for supplying this very useful information.

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If you would like any further information please contact Jan Cole or Kitty Barrett at Braintree District Council, Causeway House, Bocking End, Braintree, Essex CM7 9HB

Kitty Barrett on 01376 557746 at Braintree District Council , email kitty.barrett@braintree.gov.uk

Jan Cole at the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) on 01245 352046 Ext 111 email jan.cole@essexrcc.org.uk

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AREA: All

CORPORATE THEME HEADING: A better place to live, work and play

SUBJECT: Affordable Housing Development Update Jan 2006	CONTACT OFFICER: Tim Lucas, Maria Preston
TEL/EMAIL No.:01376 551414 ext. 2124, 2182 timlu@braintree.gov.uk marpr@braintree.gov.uk	BACKGROUND PAPERS: None
INFORMATION:	
<u>Development Programme Update – 2005/06</u>	
Site Acquisitions, New Starts and Completions third quarter 2005/06:	
<u>Site Acquisitions:</u> one new site acquisition this quarter: North Crescent, Steeple Bumpstead site transferred to Hastoe Housing Association in October	
<u>New Starts - 50 units:</u> Bridge Hospital, Witham started on site in October with 24 rental and 18 shared ownership units. North Crescent, Steeple Bumpstead started on site late December with 8 rental units	
<u>Completions 15 units:</u> St Michaels Hospital site in Braintree had 6 completions in December – this site is part of the Stanstead Area Partnership where our other partners (Harlow, East Herts and Uttlesford) share nominations. From these 6 completions 3 houses have been allocated to families from Braintree district and one house has been allocated to a family from each of the three partner districts.	
Maltings Lane, Witham had 9 completions in the third quarter, all rental units.	
<u>New developments currently in progress:</u>	
Braintree – St.Michaels Hospital: 48 units started on site January 2005, first of the units completed December 2005. Site completion estimated November 2006.	
Braintree – Bartram Avenue: 4 units started on site April 2005, completion was held up in December and handover will now take place in January 2006	
Witham - Maltings Lane (LP3): 32 units started on site in December 2004, first of the units due for handover February 2006. Earlier completion estimated May 2006.	
Witham – Maltings Lane (LP8): 11 units started on site in December 2004, first three houses were handed over in November 2005.	
Witham – Maltings Lane (LP9): 10 units started on site in December 2004, Six of the units were completed during the third quarter. Site completion estimated February 2006	
Braintree - Gypsy Corner: 59 units started on site February 2005, first of the units due for handover January 2006 and site completion estimated May 2006.	
Witham – Bridge Hospital (young person leaving care scheme): 8 units started on site April 2005, completion on target for January 2006	
Witham - Maltings Lane (LP 6 & 7): 37 units rental and shared ownership. Started on site September 2005	
Steeple Bumpstead - North Crescent: 8 rental units. Developer on site late December	
Witham - Bridge Hospital: 42 units - rental and shared ownership. Started on site October 2005	
Braintree – Warley Close: 10 units rental and shared ownership started on site May 2005	

January 2006

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due to complete August/September 2006.

Braintree – Coggeshall Road (extra Care scheme): 34 units due to complete October 2006

Housing Corporation funding / RSL funding has been received for the following developments with a start on site during this financial year (2005/06):

Halstead - Abels Road: 10 units – redevelopment of BDC garage site, site transfer to Swan Housing Association due fourth quarter – delay due to Anglia Water pipes which resulted in losing 1 unit on the development. Transfer of land and start on site due in fourth quarter

Halstead – Tidings Hill: 13 units - rental and shared ownership. Redevelopment of BDC allotment site. Planning application granted December 2005. Transfer of land and start on site due in fourth quarter

Belchamp Walter – Gestingthorpe Road – 4 units shared ownership/equity. Planning application granted December 2005. Transfer of land and start on site due in fourth quarter

New Development Cumulative figures 2005/06:

These figures are potential development figures for this financial year however due to the nature of new developments dates of deadlines can change - site acquisitions and weather, are some of the factors which could move dates around, also larger developments may have some properties completed on a weekly basis which could change the potential completions.

Potential Site Acquisitions: 5 sites with 46 units: 1 site with 10 units in 1st quarter, 1 site with 8 units in third quarter and 3 sites with 28 units in 4th quarter

Potential Start on Site: 11 developments with 166 units: 56 in 1st quarter, 33 in 2nd quarter, 50 in third quarter and 27 in 4th quarter.

Potential Completions: 8 developments with 115 units: 2 in 1st quarter, 15 in 3rd quarter and 98 in 4th quarter. Estuary Homebuy has funding for 10 units totaling 115 new units.

(Attached database for 2005/06 show developments in detail)

From the above completions to date (3rd quarter):

47% of units have been built on brown field sites, 53% on green field sites

53% of units have ECO ratings classed as 'good'

