Author: Zoe Myddelton Regeneration and Economic Development Officer

Background:
This is the third quarterly report for the Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board (ED&TPB). The report draws on information and intelligence from the District, and comments on progress being made by partners and stakeholders towards the achievement of outcomes identified in the Economic Development Action Plan 2009-2011.

Economic Overview

Labour Market:

- Figures for the last 3 months (Sep/Oct/Nov) show that unemployment in Braintree has dropped by 4% from 3,028 in September to 2,966 in November. We have not seen a rise in JSA claimants since August and before that since May. This is 3.4% of the working age population in Braintree District, this is the same as across the East of England and slightly below the Great Britain average of 4.1%.

- In the previous report the number of over 50’s who are unemployed was highlighted as a potential issue for the district with 20.3% of those claiming JSA being aged 50 or over, 3% higher than the East of England. In the last 3 months this dropped slightly in September but rose again in October and November and is currently at 20.2%. The 50-not out programme was highlighted by Jenny Coates at Essex County Council at the last meeting and BDC will look for opportunities to promote this moving forward.

- The number of people unemployed for up to 6 months has remained fairly constant since the last report and is currently 66.2% for November, a drop of 14.1% since February.

The number of people unemployed for 6–12 months dropped by 130 claimants, from 755 to 625, between August and November (from 24.5% to 21.4% of all JSA claimants). Local figures are now in line with numbers for the East of England and the UK.

Worryingly, the number of people long term unemployed (over 12 months) continues to rise and is now at its highest since August 1998. There was a significant increase from 275 claimants in October, to 370 in November. This indicates that there is a cohort of approx 100 people who lost their jobs around this time last year and are still looking for suitable employment. This group
equates to 12.6% of the total number of JSA claimants – in line with the average for Great Britain but higher than across the East of England.

As noted in previous meetings long term unemployment has implications for service provided by the Jobcentre Plus, CAB and benefit administration teams. There are social and psychological implications for those experiencing difficulties in finding work, meaning more support may be needed in areas such as healthcare support and housing.

Job Centre Plus is offering a new service to try and stop people becoming long term unemployed, they have a new telephony team to support the district. Customers will be called between their regular adviser meeting dates and in addition to their signing dates to offer extra help to get them back to work. All advisers encourage employers to offer work trials when applying for jobs as well as selling self employment and the other national long term programmes which are available.

- For the Heart of Essex sub-region (Chelmsford, Brentwood, Maldon and Braintree) Braintree has the highest levels of unemployment, 3.6% against 2.9% in Maldon, 2.7% in Chelmsford and 2.4% in Brentwood.

Even relative to its immediate neighbours there is evidence that Braintree has seen a shift towards longer-term unemployment. 12.6% of JSA claimants in Braintree have been claiming for over 12 months compared to 11.6% in Maldon, 10.9% in Chelmsford and 7.2% in Brentwood.

- Recently published data from central government’s Annual Business Inquiry shows that the profile of employment in Braintree District changed significantly between 2007 and 2008. The data shows those employed by firms in Braintree rather than those resident in the district.

Overall, the data shows that the number of people employed within the local economy contracted by 1.9%. The major reductions were in the finance sector (-38%), the construction sector (-10%), and in public sector administration (-7%). These are significant sectors in the local economy, accounting for over 6,500 jobs between them.
Employment did increase in some sectors, most notably the water supply sector (48%), real estate (33%), and mining/quarrying (32%). However, these industries have only a small presence in the district and account for fewer than 900 local jobs.

A chart showing the breakdown of jobs in the Braintree District economy can be found in Annex a.

- Figures published for December 2009 suggests that the number of young people (16-18) who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education of Training) is higher in Braintree than in comparator areas.

The number of NEETs in Braintree is around 3% more than figures for Essex, and England as a whole, and is higher than any other district in the Heart of Essex sub-region. The high number of local NEETs increases further in the period between June and October each year as a new cohort of young people leave education. Even with this annual pattern in mind, the data suggests that 2008 and 2009 brought a sustained increase in NEETs in Braintree relative to comparative areas.

% of NEETs in Braintree compared with Essex and England, April 2007 – Dec 2009

% of NEETs in Braintree compared with other Heart of Essex Districts, April 2007 – Dec 2009
The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has published comparative data on GCSE achievement for individual schools and for local authorities across England. This data provides the best single measure of local school performance.

The data shows that on average schools in Braintree achieve similar results as across Essex and England as a whole. This represents a significant improvement against 2008. However, achievement at this level is heavily reliant on the performance of Gosfield School and Notley High School. Improvements across all schools in the district could play a valuable role in attracting inward investment and ensuring a productive labour force in the long term.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 achieving 5+ A*-C (and equivalent) including English and maths GCSEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex average</td>
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<tr>
<td>Braintree District average**</td>
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<tr>
<td>England (maintained schools only)</td>
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<td>England (all schools)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Braintree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alec Hunter Humanities College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notley High School</td>
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<td>Tabor Science College</td>
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<tr>
<th>Halsted</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gosfield School</td>
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<td>Hedingham School and Sixth Form</td>
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<td>The Ramsey College</td>
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<tr>
<th>Witham</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maltings Academy</td>
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<td>New Rickstones Academy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

** Data provided by Essex CC
Source: dcsf.gov.uk

Property:

Highlights from discussions with Joscelyn Chase, estate agents in Braintree:

**Retail Space**
- There has been high demand for the vacant Hannay unit in Bank Street, currently have an offer and waiting for the formalities to be completed.
- Retail unit in Silver End has been let for a new opticians and glasses shop.

**Office Space**
- Old St Michaels on Rayne Road has seen interest and discussions are taking place with one company potentially for two units.
- A new exhibition company has taken 4,800 sq ft at Braintree Business Park on a 4 year lease. GT Exhibitions have offices in the UK and Canada, previously based at Little Braxted they are an established company, offering a full range of exhibition logistics and associated exhibition transport services, for both domestic and international events.
• GT Law solicitors (not related to GT exhibitions) have taken 1,600 sq ft of office space and 455 sq ft storage space at Park Farm in Black Notley. They specialise in industrial legal claims.

• There are more positive signs in the market and Joscelyn Chase expect more movement at locations like Old St Michaels and Braintree Business Park for 2010 at a steady pace.

Industrial Space
• Countryside Properties has forward sold a new 67,270 sq ft warehouse facility on 3.49 acres fronting the A120 at its Nexus, Skyline 120 development to Coopers of Stortford. A sale price of £6.4 million has been agreed for the new purpose built facility, subject to a satisfactory planning consent, and Coopers of Stortford plans to occupy the building at the end of 2010. The acquisition will bring the amount of space let or sold at Skyline 120 in the second half of 2009 to in excess of 170,000 sq ft. Coopers of Stortford is one of the largest privately owned mail order companies in the UK. It is a long established family business which also operates a traditional department store in the centre of Bishop’s Stortford.

• It is thought that one of the elements which have attracted so many new companies to Braintree is the encouraging approach from the District Council planning department, especially in relation to planning consent for units at Skyline 120.

• Looking into the coming year, as more industrial units are taken up there are few ‘new’ units available. There is a shortfall in property available on a freehold basis. There is a risk of a shortage of good quality options for those looking to expand or relocate into the district and it is not expected that developers will be investing in new projects any time soon. The market does not expect a return to speculative development which has been seen over recent years as generally all types of deal are taking a long time to complete, funding for freeholds is still an issue.

Comments were also made about the recent Meet the Buyer event as a good opportunity to showcase Skyline 120 and that it was successful at bringing local companies together.

Also the Inward Investment video created by Braintree District Council is seen as a good way of showcasing the district to potential new businesses as it contains a wide range of businesses.

The town centre continental market was also welcomed as a positive focus on Braintree’s retail area and Joscelyn Chase look forward to potential market improvements in the future.

Concern was expressed over the potential move of the council offices from Braintree to Witham – it is thought that this would have a significant negative effect on Braintree town centre as the council is such an important employer.

Other:
• The proposed 42 bedroom hotel at Ivy House, Long Green Cressing, was refused planning permission and there were significant objections from local residents who expressed concern over a new building in the area and access.

• RICS UK housing market survey published on 10 November 2009 which show that the East of England is the only region to have seen a fall in buyer enquiries.
Of those surveyed, 19 per cent reported a fall rather than a rise, from 35 per cent reporting a rise rather than a fall in September 2009. Meanwhile transaction levels have fallen in the East of England, with sales per surveyor edging down to 19 from 26 over the past three months. However, this puts the region at a level with the national average. The closely watched sales to stock ratio—a measure of market slack and a lead indicator of future prices—climbed a little further. It has now risen for ten consecutive months and stands at 30.

- A business survey is to be undertaken across Essex by an external marketing company; analysis of the responses will feed into the Essex Economic Assessment and the quarterly reports on business and economic conditions that the sub-regions are delivering for EEEDA. The questions for businesses focus on business location, workforce training and recruitment, environmental factors and business health. This will provide data about businesses in the district and across the sub-region of Heart of Essex. 250 companies will be contacted in Braintree across a range of sectors and initial findings expect to be released in late March-early April.

- Essex County Council (ECC) has set up an arm’s length company, Essex Trade & Investments Ltd in order to establish a new office in Nanjing, Jiangsu, China. A chief representative will be appointed to provide a permanent presence. An ECC trade mission to Chelmsford’s sister city, Wuxi took place in November.

- A county-wide fund of £330,000 has been set aside for 64 young people in care who are not in education, jobs or training, to help plan their careers.

- ECC has been awarded Government funding to create up to 1,000 apprenticeships across the county under the Group Training Association model. This will provide extra support and resources for SMEs to take on more apprentices and provide more security for the apprentices themselves.

- 178 business people attended the latest seminar in the Essex FSB ‘Beat the Recession’ series. This was held at Weston Business Centre in Stansted.

**Economic Development Action Plan Update:**


**Local Economic Indicators:**

Number of people claiming job seekers allowance was down in November and December. We have not seen a rise in JSA claimants since August, and before that since May.

Number of land searches and subsequent income continues to fluctuate but has remained more stable around £20,000 per month since a low of £13,000 in April and £15,000 in May. This did drop again in December but that is normally a slow period for the housing market. The general upward trend is a positive sign of more movement in the housing market.

Number of Council tax benefit recipients appears to have seen little movement across the year, however there has been a slow increase, on average 1% per month, which means there are an additional 175 claimants in November than in March this year and an extra 274 by December. This is similar for the number of Benefit recipients of which there are an additional 218 in November versus March this year and 226 by December. The threshold for
accessing such benefits will increase from November for those of pensionable age so these numbers may increase slightly in the coming months.

Number of notified job vacancies has continued to increase, we have seen a rise each month since August. This is still approximately 50% less than in 2008.

Parking income has fallen significantly in November in December, there is no real explanation for this when queried just that other areas not just Braintree experienced a similar fall and it was hoped that December will provide improved figures. This is however in line with footfall figures and would indicate less visitors to the area during these months than expected.

Leisure usage has dropped slightly in November, There have been on average 82,812 users per month since March. The drop in December is normally seen during this time of year, 2008 figures were 51,850.

The number of people seeking advice on employment is down but the number of people seeking advice on benefits is up, to the highest level since April.

Building control income for November is down 44% vs October, the average amount collected in building control income each month from April-November is £33,073.24. Overall, income during 2009-10 has been Q1 £93,000, Q2 £99,000 and Q3 £101,000. This shows a slow trend towards improvement although the winter conditions of the last month, being much more severe that over the last 10 years, will have an impact and it is expected that the final quarter will not be continue this positive trend.

The number of business properties has hardly changed all year, this does not tell us exactly what business in operating or exactly what is happening in a property but it does show the classifications have not changed significantly. It does mean that there have been very few new registrations for business properties and also that we have not lost too many properties to requests for change of use , which is encouraging.

NDR Collection Rate - the NDR deferral is 0.46% The business rates deferral scheme is a government scheme which allows business on application to defer part of their 2009/10 debt for payment in 2010/11 and 2011/12. To date 202 business have deferred £180,750 or 0.46% of this year’s debt for payment in future financial years. A collection difference of 0.01% on NDR equates to approximately £3,900. A collection difference of 0.01% on Council tax equates to approximately £6,700

Note on number of business empty properties - the initial figures did not include some properties which pay empty property business rates such as advertising billboards, telephone masts, public toilets and other sites which could actually never be used for employment use, however these are no longer filtered from the list.

Zoe Myddelton
Regeneration and Economic Development Officer
18th January 2010
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>April vs March</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>May vs April</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>June vs May</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>July vs June</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>Aug vs July</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Sep vs Aug</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>Oct vs Sep</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Nov vs Oct</th>
<th>Dec</th>
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<td>Benefits Advice Enquiries Received Total</td>
<td>11,066</td>
<td>11,122</td>
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<td>10,882</td>
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<td>Planning Applications Processed (determined)</td>
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<td>121</td>
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<td>150</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>131</td>
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<td>18%</td>
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<td>Planning Applications Income</td>
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<td>£36,182</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>£56,913</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>£41,707</td>
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<td>£90,797</td>
<td>118%</td>
<td>£38,896</td>
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<td>£40,925</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>17%</td>
<td>£37,129</td>
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<td>Number of completed dwellings - actual</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-50%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-220%</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>-18%</td>
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<td>Completion notices sent late</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>-60%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-25%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-60%</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>-67%</td>
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<td>Number of new jobs identified in Planning Application</td>
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<td>126</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-68%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-75%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>-39%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-26%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-99%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-330%</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Major / Minor Land Searches Accepted</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>-24%</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>442</td>
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<td>363</td>
<td>-18%</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>247</td>
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<td>Major / Minor Land Searches Income</td>
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<td>£13,381</td>
<td>-41%</td>
<td>£15,378</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>£20,418</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>£19,046</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>£17,897</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>£21,889</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>£18,147</td>
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<td>£19,150</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>Building Control Income</td>
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<td>-37%</td>
<td>£29,261</td>
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<td>£41,553</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>£29,117</td>
<td>-30%</td>
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<td>Parking spaces income (including penalty notices)</td>
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<td>£7,050</td>
<td>-27%</td>
<td>£12,100</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>£11,203</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>£11,155</td>
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<td>£11,385</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>£5,625</td>
<td>-51%</td>
<td>£5,790</td>
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<td>Leisure Usage</td>
<td>91599</td>
<td>79191</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>80,040</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>85,064</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>95,683</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>85,022</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>83,295</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>80,984</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>58,034</td>
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<td>Sale of Recyclates</td>
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<td>£6,948</td>
<td>-43%</td>
<td>£5,897</td>
<td>-15%</td>
<td>£4,398</td>
<td>-15%</td>
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<td>£5,096</td>
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<td>Council Tax Collection Rate (cumulative %)</td>
<td>9.78</td>
<td>Cumulative 20.1</td>
<td>Cumulative 30.85</td>
<td>Cumulative 40.39</td>
<td>Cumulative 49.87</td>
<td>Cumulative 59.66</td>
<td>Cumulative 68.52</td>
<td>Cumulative 75.19</td>
<td>Cumulative 83.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDR Collection Rate (cumulative %)</td>
<td>9.84</td>
<td>Cumulative 19.94</td>
<td>Cumulative 30.87</td>
<td>Cumulative 40.45</td>
<td>Cumulative 49.17</td>
<td>Cumulative 59.02</td>
<td>Cumulative 68.28</td>
<td>Cumulative 77.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Number of Business Properties</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>4,293</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4,294</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>4,283</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Business Empty Properties</td>
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<td>560</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>-22%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>632</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council Tax Benefit recipients</td>
<td>2,694</td>
<td>2,750</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2,739</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2,776</td>
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<td>2,813</td>
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<td>2,809</td>
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<td>2,818</td>
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<td>2,846</td>
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<td>2,868</td>
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<td>Housing Benefit recipients</td>
<td>8,372</td>
<td>8,372</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8,143</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>8,302</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8,279</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8,337</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8,346</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8,479</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8,590</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade Waste Income</td>
<td>£54,907</td>
<td>£43,479</td>
<td>-21%</td>
<td>£43,437</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>£54,100</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>£43,173</td>
<td>-20%</td>
<td>£42,875</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>£53,217</td>
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<td>£42,570</td>
<td>-20%</td>
<td>£45,896</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All people claiming Job Seekers Allowance (USA)</td>
<td>3,041</td>
<td>3,099</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3,059</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3,015</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>3,089</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3,028</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>3,022</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2,986</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total notified job vacancies</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>-21%</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>-8%</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>-71%</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>-10%</td>
<td>510</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people seeking advice on employment</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>-23%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>-18%</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people seeking advice on education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-60%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-380%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-100%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-90%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-33%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people seeking advice on benefits</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>-10%</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>-22%</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>-10%</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>252</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness formal applications received</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-10%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-11%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Breakdown of jobs in the Braintree economy 2007 and 2008 (figures shown for 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and retail</td>
<td>9,559</td>
<td>6,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>6,717</td>
<td>5,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; social work</td>
<td>4,556</td>
<td>3,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3,879</td>
<td>3,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>3,275</td>
<td>3,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific and technical</td>
<td>3,202</td>
<td>2,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>2,725</td>
<td>2,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and food</td>
<td>2,524</td>
<td>1,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and storage</td>
<td>1,948</td>
<td>1,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; entertainment</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and communications</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Business Inquiry, 2009

Purpose of Report:

To update the Economic Development Partnership Board on progress being made towards achieving outcomes detailed in the districts existing economic development strategy and action plan, and to identify any issues that need to be considered for action by the ED&TPB moving forward.

Background:

Braintree District’s Economic Development Strategy was endorsed by the partnership Board at the 9th February 2009 ED&TPB meeting. The strategy and action plan were launched at the Braintree Economic Summit on 10th June 2009.

The Economic Development Strategy was developed to help Braintree District address the challenges of the current and future economic situation. The strategy outlines a new approach on behalf of businesses and residents in the area.

In 2006, Cambridge Econometrics produced “Braintree District Futures” for the District Council. This report identified three distinct visions for the future of the Braintree District. Throughout the winter of 2008/09 these alternative visions were developed and steered by several local business-led working group meetings. These sessions identified a preferred vision of the district: ‘where ideas take shape – developing the Braintree District Economy as a key part of the region’s knowledge and innovation economy.

Five priorities emerged: the improvement of infrastructure; supporting the entrepreneurial spirit; supporting business growth and diversification; attracting inward investment and enhancing local skills.

Under each priority, which is outlined below, there are objectives and key tasks which form the actions which will see delivery of the aims and priorities outlined. The action plan for 2009-2011 gives details of the actions together with outcomes and performance measures where possible. It is these actions and milestones together with specific data available on that topic, which are to be monitored to see how progress is being made towards each priority and therefore the overall aims of the strategy plan.

Summary:

The has been good early progress towards achievement of the priorities articulated in the Economic Development Strategy 2009 -2011. The strategy has been in place for a short time and it will be important to subject it to continually review if similar progress is to made in the future.

Although work to promote the prioroites articulated in the strategy is progressing,
challenging economic conditions have impacted on Braintree District and surrounding
districts and will have a sustained impact in the coming months. Evidence on
economic conditions within the district highlights challenges which could be
addressed through work by Braintree District Council and its partners:

- The number of young people (16-18) who are NEET (Not in Employment,
  Education or Training) is significantly higher in Braintree than in Essex, and
  England as a whole, and is higher than any other district in the Heart of Essex
  sub-region.

- The number of over 50’s who are unemployed is higher in Braintree than
  comparator areas. 20.3% of those claiming JSA are aged 50 or over, 3% higher
  than the East of England.

- The number of people long term unemployed (over 12 months) is at its highest
  since August 1998.

Some work to address these issues is included within the Economic Development
Strategy, and no substantive changes are required to the strategy. However, the
partnership board may wish to consider how these themes might be given greater
emphasis within the strategy in the short to medium term.

**Priority One: location, infrastructure and land**

This priority is focused on overcoming infrastructure deficiencies which form a barrier
to the growth potential of the district. Reducing congestion which is an economic cost
to the district and clarifying the alignment with neighboring authorities so as to benefit
from economic investment and funding opportunities.

**January 2010:**

- Braintree has proactively engaged with the Regional growth agenda through
  workshops attended with Essex County Council on housing projections and Job
  forecasts for the East of England RSS Review so as to ensure Braintree District
  are proactively involved in shaping the future growth opportunities for the sub-
  region.

  In addition Braintree Business Council discussed the proposals and provided a
  response to the East of England Plan from a local business perspective.

  Braintree District Council held an open workshop for key issues to be discussed
  which informed the official response from Braintree District Council.

- Improving rail connectivity to Braintree through improving capacity on the
  Braintree line and introducing a passing loop at Cressing. This has been raised
  with Environment, Sustainability and Highways at Essex County Council and they
  will continue to work with the District Council and the train operating company to
  lobby the Department for Transport and Infrastructure to improve the level of
  service between Witham and Braintree.

- To ensure bus timetabling and routeing are in line with what is required by those
  who travel to work. Braintree District council has a task and finish group for Bus
  and Rail services and a report on service provision was completed in October
2009. Recommendations have been sent to Essex County Council for consideration.

Essex County Council also completed a Braintree Bus Service Review, the results found that the satisfaction levels for bus services were very high in the district, therefore little action will be taken. Provision is lacking in the northern most districts which border with Suffolk where the bus services are often only once a week – clearly not sufficient for those travelling for work. Community transport will be used to provide ‘shopper services’ to enable more members of the community to access healthcare etc but this will not provide for those travelling for employment purposes.

- To boost the attraction of town centres as retail, cultural and leisure centres Braintree District Council have agreed to a new post of a Town Centre Manager (TCM). This will encourage town centre initiatives and events and hopefully enable better relationships with the businesses located in the centres of Braintree, Witham and Halsted. The TCM role aims to improve the retail and leisure offering and create vibrant retail centres that people want to visit with increased footfall. This will include the management and improvement of the market offering in Braintree in particular.

Priority Two: Business Creation and Survival

More one to one sustained support for small businesses to start up, grow and survive beyond 3 years.

January 2010:

- Braintree has actively engaged in sub-regional working together with the districts of Chelmsford, Brentwood and Maldon to produce economic overview and business intelligence reports to EEDA on a quarterly basis, outlining the state of the sub-regional economy. A robust process to monitor and review local economic conditions has been created and will continue for 2010 and 2011.

Together with these partners and Essex County Council a detailed business survey will be competed in early 2010. This survey will seek to understand the challenges facing business and will specifically focus on business location, workforce training and recruitment, environmental factors and business health. Telephone interviews in February 2010 of 250 businesses across a range of sizes and sectors in Braintree.

There are key business events planned for 2010 to include businesses from the 4 districts in the sub-region and to identify what the key challenges are to undertaking businesses in the area and what businesses would like to see offered or improved for the future.

- For the period 2007/08 and 2008/09 Braintree has seen 4 companies take on Shell Step placements, which provide 8 week placements for graduates with the aim of improving skills levels within SME’s in the district.

- ‘Thriving in a recession’ courses were organised in April 2009, 15 companies completed the survival skills course for small businesses. Initially it was thought that these courses may run on an ongoing basis, however the introduction of
Business Link’s ‘Recession Proofing’ course filled the gap so the courses were not continued to avoid replication. Follow up one-to-one sessions were organised in May for those participating in the initial course.

- Shop local initiatives - ‘Wish you were here’ event organised for the end of October in Braintree town centre including a continental market, free parking on Saturday and retail offers. The event aimed at encouraging local residents back into the high street is estimated to have increased visitor numbers by 7,000 – 10,000 that weekend and approximately £50,000 additional revenue was created in the local economy.

Christmas events in Witham and Halsted were also organised together with partners and provided a positive focus on each centre and it’s offering.

- There are 2 main schemes to assist local companies with paying their business rates, these are aimed at supporting local companies, especially with cash flow during the recession. There is a national scheme where 60% of the increase in business rates can be deferred until into the next 2 financial years, from this, 248 businesses in the Braintree District have benefitted. The local scheme offers extended payment plans over 12 months instead of 10, of which the take up has been lower but it has still helped some companies. To take advantage of these schemes businesses need to request in writing for the national scheme or call Braintree DC for the local scheme.

- Stock of registered and inspected tourist accommodation has actually fallen in the past year, 38 in December 2009 vs 40 in December 2008. Since Dec 20008, 2 accommodation providers have achieved Silver Awards for their customer service.

Priority Three: “Business Growth and Innovation”
To promote the high quality of life and environment of the district, as good place to startup a new business and locate. To attract more high value jobs, increase local earnings and reduce levels of out-commuting.

January 2010:

- Witham Industrial Watch (WIW) Business Improvement District (BID) has been formalised and a ‘Meet the buyer’ event has been held for the businesses in the area to encourage trading locally.

WIW have hired a new post to administer and run the partnership moving forward.

- George Yard has introduced a ‘STEP’ programme to provide opportunities for retail companies to start up and grow. So far, 2 companies, Little Tinkers and Syoki Jewellery in George Yard have taken advantage of the scheme which offers easy in–easy out terms.

- A rural study is being undertaken which is being funded by Essex County Council to understand how rural businesses may diversify their offering and to try and
help them to survive and grow. Braintree will have the opportunity to feed into this study.

- A European rural jobs research project is also being undertaken by the University of Southampton to identify new sources of employment (both land-based and non-land-based) for rural areas and looking at support for rural job creation. Braintree have contributed to this study and are currently awaiting outcomes and recommendations.

- In supporting the manufacturing sector, due to its significance in providing employment in the district, the EMIG Programme was launched in February. The programme which is delivered by Essex County Council as a joint innovation project with the University of Cambridge’s Institute for Manufacturing and supports existing small and medium-size manufacturing firms to develop and grow their businesses by helping them focus resources on the right things. So far 9 companies in the district have been assisted through this programme.

- Business link figures for the first quarter of 2009-10 (3 months to June) show Braintree as having the second highest number of new businesses behind Chelmsford in Essex with 6,270 compared to Chelmsford’s 6,385. Of this 6,270, there are 378 at pre start up stage, 40 at Start Up, 740 established businesses.

Business link figures for the second quarter 2009-10 (6 months to September) show the number of businesses supported per month continues to increase.

Comparing 2008-09 figures with 2007-08, there were 7% more businesses supported and of these 42% more individuals were assisted. In line with this higher volume, 8% more new businesses were created or supported in their first 12 months.

In 2009-10, business support in all areas has increased, again significantly more individuals have been assisted. This is expected to continue in the coming months. This sectors to which business link gave most support are Property and Business Services (26.8%) and Construction (15.3%).

Priority 4: “Inward Investment and International Trade”
To derive more economic benefit from the proximity to Stansted and to have a co-ordinated ‘can-do’ approach and a clear offer to attract and retain business investors

January 2010:

- Through discussions with Invest Essex regarding how to market the district to potential new companies and inward investors, there is potential to establish a working group to look at ‘What Braintree wants to be in the future’ so Invest Essex can market the district together with other areas of Essex, as effectively as possible.

- An inward investment video has been created which features local businesses and representatives from the commercial property sector and some partners to promote the Braintree District to new businesses and tourists. Invest Essex have been consulted for their opinion on how best to promote ‘place’ to businesses and to ensure the video compliments their campaigns. The video will be available on the Braintree DC website moving forward.
• Braintree District Council exhibited at the Destination Growth event hosted by EEDA, held at Airspace Duxford, over 800 companies attended with the aim of supporting small and medium enterprises to thrive during the recession. Seminars and key speakers provided advice to such organisations and Braintree was able to promote itself as a good location for small business to locate with its excellent work-life balance and transport links.

• Essex hotel Futures study is being conducted by Hotel Solutions for Essex County Council which will assess the current offering of hotels and highlight potential areas and demand for development for the future, Braintree is actively participating in this project and actively encouraging existing hotels in the district to improve their offer and to attract new hotel brands to the area.

Priority 5: “Workforce Development and Employment”
Improve secondary school performance levels and basic literacy and numeracy skills in the workforce. Address the high numbers of adults with no skills and poor NVQ attainment levels in the district.

January 2010:

• Job seekers allowance is being claimed by 2,966 people in the Braintree District. This is 3.4% of the working age population, this is the same as the eastern region as a whole (November 2009 data) compared to 1,827 for Nov 2008 which was 2.1% of the working age population, and similarly 2.2% for the Eastern region. While this is a significant increase, it is reassuring to see that Braintree is replicating what is being seen in other areas of the region and that the district does appear to be suffering disproportionately in the recession with the number of people unemployed.

• The number of jobs available in the district in 2009 was down by 49% than in 2008. It would initially seem that the 49% drop in 2009 is due to 2008 being an exceptional year with many jobs available and companies keen to take on new staff. However when 2009 is compared with 2007 and 2006 there is still an exceptional reduction in the number of opportunities available in the district.

• The number of people economically active fell by 5.2% in 2008/2009 vs 2007/2008. In 2007/2008 83.9% of the working age population were active vs 79.5% by 2008/09.

• Number of companies notifying redundancies to Job Centre Plus in the Braintree District in 2009 were 14. Assistance in the form of talks, information days, help with skills analysis and training was provided to 9 of those.

Information packs were sent to 3 companies and 2 companies didn't want help. Up to 576 people were affected but this is not definite as some companies did not reduce their workforce by the original numbers notified

Skills analysis was carried out for the majority of people who attended the information sessions. In many cases this resulted in work related training being arranged to up skill the customer for future employment.

• Through the LSP funding The College at Braintree are partnering with BCT Consortium to offer skills audits to local companies so as to better understand the
skills gaps in the district. They are also looking to engage with local businesses to understand what type of apprenticeships would be desirable for them to improve skill levels in their workforce.

So far 100 companies have been contacted and 3 potential new courses have been identified for The College at Braintree to offer, that would be welcomed by local employers. Local companies often prefer for employees to study in within the vicinity rather that travel if possible. These potential new courses include Dentistry, Media and Print and Multi-skills course (bricklaying, plastering and carpentry). This will be discussed with the relevant heads of Departments at The College at Braintree to see if it is feasible for them to deliver.

Zoe Myddleton
Regeneration and Economic Development Officer
18th January 2010