



2023
2028



Braintree District Council

Healthy Housing Strategy

Foreword



As we introduce this new Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 to 2028, it comes at a time of change and uncertainty in both the housing and economic sectors,

and since our last housing strategy, we have all navigated through a global pandemic.

There has never been a more pressing time for us to reconsider the way we live our lives, where and how we live. Looking forward to the next five years, this strategy will become a route map to tackling the challenges we face, promoting the district and supporting the current and future housing offer and needs for those choosing to live in our fantastic district.

To enable the provision of homes for our current and future populations, 14,000 homes need to be built by 2033. But delivering new homes is about much more than just reaching housing targets. We want to ensure high-quality, secure homes that allow people to settle in a community and access local jobs.

We want well-designed homes that help create pleasant and safe neighbourhoods. By expediting the delivery of high-quality places and ensuring there is choice for everyone through a range of accommodation options, enhanced growth and further investment will inevitably follow.

The climate emergency means we must transform the way we think of housing – ensuring they are sustainable and are built at high environmental standards, considering

energy conservation and efficiency so residents benefit from reduced energy consumption, lowering bills and improving thermal comfort and well-being.

The crucial role that housing plays in the wider determinants of health is at the heart of this strategy, as good housing contributes positively to both physical and mental health.

Strengthening the links between housing, health, the environment and economy and other partners underpins this strategy. To do this, partnership working is vital to delivering our ambitions and this strategy sets out a framework to support all public, private, and voluntary sectors to achieve our housing outcomes.

We are extremely proud of services we have delivered for our residents and local businesses. Preventing homelessness has always been a priority for us, supported through our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and we will continue to improve housing options and opportunities to alleviate the homelessness pressures wherever we can.

As we implement our Healthy Housing Strategy Action Plan to deliver the strategy, which will evolve as we respond to challenges and the changing needs of residents, we hope that the positive impacts will be felt by all our residents, communities, partners, property owners and businesses.

Councillor Kevin Bowers

Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets & Skills

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Executive Summary

The aim of the Healthy Housing Strategy is to promote homes that enhance resident's health and well-being by working with our partners in health, housing, communities, economics and environment.

This strategy can be used to inform the production of future Local and Neighbourhood Plans. Although the strategy is aligned with The Local and Neighbourhood Plan, they are development plan documents, and the Healthy Housing Strategy is not. The council no longer holds any housing stock and Braintree Council seeks affordable housing through its Local Plan.

Braintree District Council has developed this strategy through a wide-ranging consultation and involvement of our residents and other key stakeholders. They will continue to play a crucial, ongoing role, delivering and reviewing the strategy through the Healthy Housing Strategy Action Plan. The strategy runs until 2028 but is a living document that will be reviewed regularly to track progress and ensure it remains fit for purpose.

The Strategy presents some of the key challenges facing housing. It sets these in the contexts of the local, regional and the national picture in the UK. We continue to work reactively to respond to the needs of specific residents, but new proactive approaches will target areas which have been identified as priorities.

The three key objectives that we will be working on with our partners are:

- **New Affordable Housing**
- **Support for Specific Needs**
- **Existing Properties**

The Council's Vision is to:

Promote healthy sustainable communities by raising the standard of existing homes and enabling provision of quality new ones; resulting in suitable, affordable, high housing for all Braintree district residents that meets their needs and enable them to live longer healthier lives, reaching their full potential.

The data and research that has been collated has provided us insight and intelligence to produce the Healthy Housing Strategy. The aim of the Healthy Housing Strategy is to promote homes that enhance our resident's health and well-being. We will achieve this by working on 3 key priorities for the next five years.

- 1** Facilitate a consistent programme of high quality, affordable homes which best meet the needs of the current and future residents.
- 2** Support communities and enabling housing across the district to meet the needs of all our residents, especially those who are vulnerable.
- 3** Improve access to and the quality of the Private Rented Sector and existing properties.

This Strategy is aligned to Braintree District Council's Corporate Strategy through its strategy priorities.

- Connecting People and Places
- Enhancing our Environment
- Supporting our Communities
- Promoting Prosperity
- Delivering and Innovation

Preventing homelessness is a priority for Braintree District and the Healthy Housing Strategy sits alongside our Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 – 2023.

The evidence base used to inform this strategy can be found at www.braintree.gov.uk/housingstrategy

About Braintree District Housing

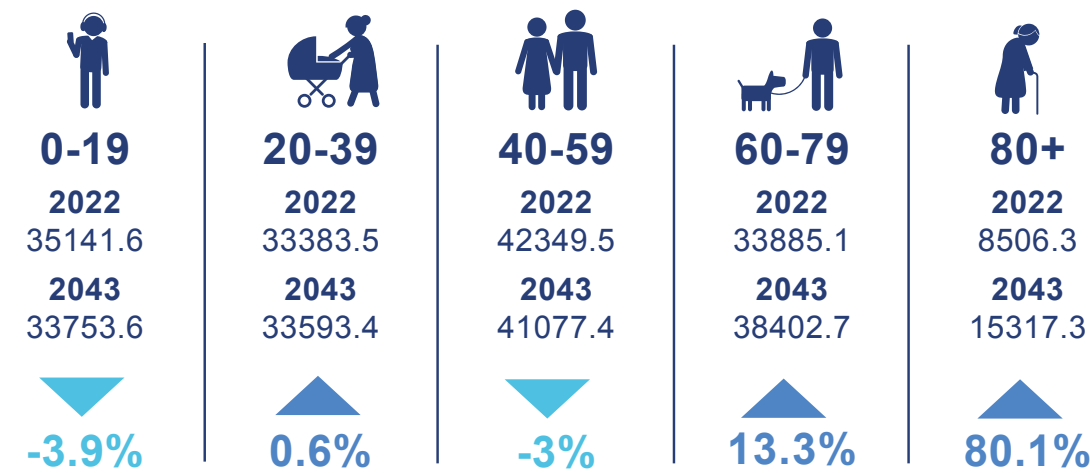
2021 Census shows:

- The 2021 census shows that the population of Braintree District has increased by 5.5%, with **155,200** residents living in the district.
- **9,529** long term health condition which limited day to day activities a lot.

Braintree District Council Housing Data shows:

- December 2022, there were **68,761** properties in the district.
- August 2022, there were **2450** applications on the Housing Register for re-housing, 27% are single households.
- Between 2018 – 2022, **167** households accepted an offer to downsize their properties.
- There are currently **62** households waiting to downsize.
- During 2017-2022, **686** household accepted offers through Gateway to Homechoice.

Braintree District Population Projection



The impact of the global pandemic and beyond

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a global pandemic and the UK Government responded to the emergency by introducing various restrictions. Inevitably, such measures impacted the construction industry and the economy more widely and it is therefore important that these are considered in the Housing action plan.

The Covid-19 demonstrated that when the economy receives an unexpected and significant change, the number of people requiring housing support increases. Combined with the changing financial landscape, unemployment, family relationships breakdown, food poverty and homelessness all increase which exacerbate disadvantage and inequalities.

The post pandemic world has significantly changed the way people work and live, with more people than ever working from home. Whilst a choice for some, people could be working and living in properties that may be in poor condition. The pandemic has highlighted the need for healthy resilient communities with our resident's wellbeing at the heart of everything we do.

To support our residents, local businesses, and communities to thrive through growth, prosperity, and opportunities we will be continuing to transition through our Corporate Plan



Who is the strategy for?

This Strategy is intended to be a framework to underpin the work we will undertake in the housing sector.

Braintree District's residents and community: This strategy sets clear objectives so residents can see what we aim to achieve with our partners. Our aim is to build suitable, affordable, sustainable, and safe housing which enables thriving communities.

Our partners: We have developed this Strategy with input from our key partners and stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We work hard to build and maintain positive relationships with partners, we do not work in isolation. This strategy provides a framework to support all sectors to achieve the outcomes set out in the strategy.

Ourselves: The strategy provides the Council with a clear direction. The delivery plan that sits alongside this strategy will drive service delivery. In these times of uncertainties, we want to make sure that we can respond to challenges quickly. The delivery plan will evolve, and it will be reviewed regularly.



Achievements from the Housing Strategy 2016 - 2021

Over the lifetime of the previous strategy, many changes took place both locally, regionally and nationally. However, through our strong partnerships, we are proud of how much has been achieved during 2016-21.

Achievements to note:

- Adoption of The Local Plan.
 - Matching supply and demand: Continuing to build the right houses that meet the needs of residents.
 - 100% nomination rights through Gateway to Homechoice on new developments.
 - Meeting the needs of households: Building properties to a high standard and meeting the needs of the vulnerable residents.
 - Striving to get all affordable homes built to Nationally Designed Space Standards (NDSS).
 - Promoting affordable properties to be built accessible and adaptable.
- During 2017–2022 the Braintree District saw 1159 affordable homes completed, averaging 232 a year.
 - In 2020-2021 the annual target to build 250 new homes was exceeded, and 417 properties were completed.
 - Disability Facilities Grants were used to support residents to live safely in their homes.
 - Supported 95 Ukrainian families under Homes for Ukraine in 2022.
 - Responded to the governments 'Everyone's In' initiative by ensuring Rough Sleepers were off the streets of the district during the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - Recruited a Domestic Violence Officer in response to Domestic Violence Bill 2021.
 - Use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to prevent homelessness.



1159
affordable homes
completed
During 2017–2022

Challenges

We recognise that there are new challenges ahead and to note:

- Consequences of the economic crisis on housing affordability.
- Consequences of the economic crisis on developers and the impact on building new houses.
- In November 2021 RICS reported material cost increases had reached a 40 year high.
- Over the past ten years house prices in The Braintree District have risen at a faster rate than national rates. Local Housing Allowance rates remain frozen at their 2020-21 levels. These will now remain in place until 31st March 2023.
- Average income in the Braintree District remains lower than the rest of Essex.
- Pockets of social isolation exist in many communities.
- To meet the housing demands of the urban and rural communities.



Increase demand

on the private rented sector



Average income

in the Braintree District remains lower than the rest of Essex



Our Priorities

This Strategy covers provision of new homes, supporting the needs of our communities and promoting the best use of existing housing within the district.

Priority 1

New Affordable Housing: Facilitate a consistent programme of high-quality housing which best meet the needs of the current and future residents

- 1** Work in partnership to deliver new, high quality, affordable homes in the district
- 2** Support a range of tenure to be built which reflect the needs of our residents
- 3** Ensure all new homes emphasise energy efficiency and the use of new renewable energy.

Whilst the district has been successful in reaching the targets for new affordable housing delivery, we must be realistic that this may not continue. National changes on economics mean that as we publish this strategy interest rates are increasing to a level where mortgages are more difficult to secure, there is a concern of a housing recession, building materials have increased and building labour is harder to secure. The country faces a lack of genuinely affordable housing. National trends reports that people are moving outside London for more space, this has increased demand on the districts housing market.

We want to support residents to live well and safely in their homes and communities and we will achieve this by working with our partners to develop suitable properties to meet the needs of all our residents. Building schemes which are made up by owner occupied, intermediate rent and affordable housing in a variety of sizes and tenures will help meet the needs and offer choice to our current and future residents.

The Braintree District Local Plan 2013-2033 has been adopted. This is a key document as it set out a vision and framework for all future development in the district in relation to new homes, jobs, and infrastructure, as well as safeguarding the environment.

The local plan states we need to build 14,000 homes by 2033 and that 30-40% of all new builds built are affordable housing sites where 10 properties or more are being built and 5% of all of these will be adapted for specialist housing.

Our Local Plan Policy LPP 71 ensures that developers are expected to demonstrate energy conservation by building developments with lower carbon emissions, increase renewable energy provision and adapt to the expected impacts of climate change.

The Councils Climate Change Strategy 2021 – 2023 has been produced and there is a clear ambition to be carbon neutral as a Council as far as practical by 2030, as well as supporting our communities to reduce the impacts of climate change across the district.

The government has announced the Future Home Standard, a set of standards which will work alongside the Building Regulations to ensure that new homes are subject to energy conservation and produce less carbon supporting the aim to be carbon neutral.



30%
of new homes
to be affordable



5%
of new homes
to be accessible

Priority 2

Support for specific needs: Support communities and enable housing across the district to meet the needs of all our residents, especially those who are vulnerable.

- 1 Support a range of accommodation to be developed within communities for the demographic shift towards an increasingly ageing population**
- 2 Work with our partners to support residents to move into appropriate properties within suitable communities as their needs change**
- 3 Continue to support our vulnerable residents with specialist provisions and housing to live independently and thrive in the community.**

National government guidance states that local authorities should plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends and needs of the different groups in society. Addressing the housing and supporting needs of the elderly will be paramount over coming years.

Residents such as the elderly or disabled, may need specialist housing provision, which is specially designed for their needs. We want to continue to support homes being developed that meet the needs of our residents. By providing lifetime home standards, dementia friendly layouts, and wheelchair accessibility, means we can support our most vulnerable residents to access and maintain high quality housing which meets their needs.

An aging population can bring greater health concerns and additional support is often needed for day-to-day activities to continue without limitation. The Council currently makes use of the Disabled Facility Grants where adaptations to properties can be made on the advice and support of social care services. This grant helps our residents with additional needs to live independently for longer.

As well as supporting our residents to remain in their properties, we recognise personal circumstances can change and a move to a more suitable property could be required. On this basis, we will work with partners to review our downsizing policy to make this process a smooth transition.

Priority 3

Improve access to and the quality of existing homes including the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

- 1 Build positive relationships with property owners and estate agents to help improve routes into the PRS**
- 2 Explore options to improve existing housing in the district**
- 3 Reduce the number of empty properties in the district by exploring options to bring them back into use.**

Housing plays a vital role in addressing health inequalities. Living in a safe, secure, and affordable home has a direct impact on people's health and happiness. Our health is influenced by many aspects around us, including education, income, living in warm and energy efficient homes, ventilation and the air quality where we live.

People living in the private rented sector often pay the highest rent and move the most often. We would like to be able to support individuals and families by increasing stability and security for people living in the private rented sector, so that they can embed and connect with the community by using local leisure facilities, applying for employment locally and sending their children to the local schools.

The issue we face as a district is that there is a lack of properties available in the private rented sector that meet the Local Housing Allowance rate. Local Housing Allowance is far lower than the properties that are available to rent locally, this means that there is a significant shortfall each month and rent arrears can quickly accrue.

The Council will work to strengthen our relationship with stakeholders, property owners and estate agents. For us to be able to do this successfully, we need to understand the barriers that they face so that we can offer support. We aim to grow our network to be able to provide a range of suitable options for our residents and we will explore incentive schemes which will support residents to access the private rented sector.

Taking into consideration the wider determinants of health, which are a diverse range of social, economic, and environmental factors which influence people's mental and physical health. There have been multiple studies which evidence that housing conditions have a direct impact on wellbeing. More vulnerable groups often face greater barriers to accessing high quality care.

Empty Properties

Homes can be empty for a variety of reasons including ownership of second homes and holiday lets. However, being left empty for a long time can mean that properties can fall into disrepair, the outside could become overgrown, the property could become damp, attract squatters and/or anti-social behaviour.

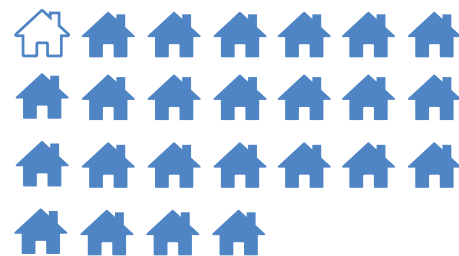
Nationally across England, **1 in every 25 homes is without residents.**

At present, we have just over 2000 empty homes in the Braintree District. Whilst we endeavour to work with property owners to try and bring them back into use, we recognise more needs to be done.

BDC data shows that 1 in 70 homes is not in use. If we just consider long term empty properties, that equates to 1 in 87 homes being currently empty.

In 2019, Braintree District Council published the policy for Second Homes, Long Term Empty Properties and determining discounts for certain dwellings. This document sets out action taken on long term empty dwellings in the district. At the end of Aug 2022 there were 62 properties paying the maximum council tax. We will continue to work with our partners to develop a set of tools to enable empty homes to be brought back into use.

Report an empty property through this online form [Report an empty property](#) – Braintree District Council



1 in every 25 homes
is without residents

Nationally across England

Consultation

Two Housing Strategy Workshops were held on 17 and 18 October 2022 and the public consultation took place between 13th December 2022 to 7th February 2023. Stakeholders highlighted that meeting the needs and supporting communities, improving home standards, access to housing and affordability are priority areas to focus on.

There was a recognition from the workshops that the strategy should include the word 'healthy' in the title to become 'The Healthy Housing Strategy'. This was supported by 65% of people who completed the public consultation.

The consultation was designed to give everyone with an interest in Housing in the district the opportunity to contribute to the review. The consultation survey was distributed through various media coverage and resulted in 246 responses to the survey.

- 80% of respondents rated 'reducing the number of empty properties in the district by exploring options to bring them back into use' as important.

- 77% respondents rated 'ensuring all new homes emphasise energy efficient' as important.
- 67% respondents rated 'continue to support our vulnerable residents with specialist provisions and housing to live independently and thrive in the community' as important

For any questions on the strategy or the consultation please contact housingstrategy@braintree.gov.uk



Housing Strategy Delivery Plan

The Housing Strategy Action Plan is the core of this Strategy. It will evolve throughout the lifetime of the strategy to ensure it responds and drives delivery through changing landscapes. Its purpose will be to set timescales and appoint lead officers who take responsibility for completing the agreed action points.

The Healthy Housing Strategy 2023-2028 and associated information including the outcome of the consultation, the delivery plan and the evidence base will be published on the Council's website.

Monitoring and Governance

The Healthy Housing Strategy will be monitored through the Healthy Housing Strategy delivery plan which will be discussed at and monitored by a Strategic Housing Board. The purpose of the Board is to develop the delivery plan with our partners and to monitor trends and performance to inform future actions.

Throughout this 5-year Strategy, new priorities may emerge and new national policies may be introduced. The Housing Strategy delivery plan is a document which ensures that the Strategic direction for housing is clearly defined and is intended to keep the Housing Strategy both responsive and proactive. It is vital that the strategy remains current by evolving and adapting with local, national, and global influences so that it remains effective.

An annual review of the strategy will be published and quarterly of the delivery plan will take place.

Annual reports will be published following an annual review.

The Action Plan will be monitored with Braintree District Council's Housing and Community Services.



Glossary

Affordable Housing: Housing provided to meet the needs of people on low income. As defined in the National Planning Policy Framework, the term includes homes for social rent, affordable rent, and shared ownership

Affordable Rent: Homes available to rent from a registered provider at a cost below 80% of the average, local market rent for a given area

Department of Social Security ‘DSS’ is a term which was previously used. LHA (local Housing Allowance), UC (Universal Credit) and HB (Housing Benefit) are what is used now to pay

Disabled Facilities Grant Uptake of the disabled facilities grant – a mandatory entitlement administered by housing authorities for eligible disabled people in all housing tenures – can enable homeowners to remain living an independent life at home.

Energy efficiency This means using energy more effectively, and often refers to some form of change in technology. Energy efficiency measures differences in how much energy is used to provide the same level of comfort, performance, or convenience by the same type of product or building

Homelessness This describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is often the

result of what is known as systemic or societal barriers, including a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural, or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination

Housing Association Independent, not-for-profit organisation providing affordable housing

Independent living Access to living arrangements and community features for disabled people, individuals with special needs, and/or diverse abilities, seniors and others that provides individuals with as much independence and autonomy as possible at home, work, school or in social and recreational settings

Land supply refers to the amount of deliverable housing land within a local authority area and, as part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Lifetime tenancies Either Secure (council) or Assured tenancies (registered provider).

Long-term health problem or disability A long-term health problem or disability that limits a person’s day-to-day activities, and has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months. This includes problems that are related to old age. People were asked to assess whether their daily activities were limited a lot or a little by such a health problem, or whether their daily activities were not limited at all.

Market Rent This refers to private sector rent levels. The rent levels used in this document are sourced from the GLA Rents map and use Valuation Office Agency data. Registered Providers will calculate market rent based on the RICS guidance “Market Rent: a guide for providers of Affordable Rented housing”

Registered Social Landlords Government funded not-for-profit organisations that provide affordable housing. They include housing associations, trusts and cooperatives.

Right to Buy: The scheme by which eligible council tenants can apply to buy their council home with a discount

Rural areas These include all land lying outside population centres and the people living within those rural areas

Social Housing providers Provider of subsidised social housing below market rent, including the council and other registered providers such as housing associations

Social Rent Rents which are kept low through state subsidy, to approximately a third of market levels. The social housing sector is currently governed by a strictly defined system of rent control to ensure that rents are kept affordable

Supported housing This is housing that provides a physical environment that is specifically designed to be safe, secure, enabling and home-like, with support services such as social services, provision of meals, house-keeping, and social and recreational activities, to maximize residents’ independence, privacy and dignity

Sustainable homes These are homes designed, built, and operated using techniques, materials and technologies that result in houses that are highly energy efficient, make efficient use of resources, have low environmental impact, are healthy to live in, are affordable, and produce as much energy as they consume on an annual basis

Vulnerable residents Persons belonging, or perceived to belong, to groups that are in a disadvantaged position or marginalised are often referred to as vulnerable groups or equity-seeking groups. In the case of the National Housing Strategy, priority groups are currently defined to include survivors (especially women and their children fleeing domestic violence); seniors; Indige nous peoples; people with disabilities; people dealing with mental health and addiction issues; veterans; LGBTQ2(+); racialized groups; recent immigrants (including refugees); and people experiencing homelessness. We recognize that people often live with multiple experiences of marginalization and thus an intersectional lens should be applied in discussion of each of these vulnerable groups.

Wider Determinants of Health: Wider determinants, also known as social determinants, are a diverse range of social, economic, and environmental factors which impact on people’s health



