



2024
2028

Corporate Strategy



Foreword



Welcome to Braintree District Council's Corporate Strategy 2024 to 2028, setting out our high-level ambitions and priorities for the next four years.

A thriving district bursting with opportunity, strong, safe and vibrant communities where businesses can flourish and everyone enjoys a good quality of life, with accessible services meeting people's needs. That's at the heart of our vision.


This strategy reflects our commitment to collaboration and is shaped by feedback from residents, stakeholders and members. Insights from consultations have been instrumental in developing our priorities, ensuring our strategic direction aligns with the aspirations of those who live and work in our district.

Like everywhere, we have our challenges. Too many families are living in poverty and life expectancy and quality of life is impacted by where you live. All of this has been compounded by COVID and the cost-of-living crisis. We remain committed to tackling inequality and making a positive impact in the communities we serve.

The requirement to safeguard our environment has never been more evident. Understanding the close link between the environment and human health is crucial. It enables us to integrate sustainable practices into our lives to reduce the impact of climate change and use our open spaces to support the health and well-being of current and future generations.

In navigating our path ahead, it is imperative that we safeguard the Council's ability to deliver and protect services that our residents and businesses rely on and value, by re-evaluating our approach to service delivery, recognising that continued success relies upon working closely with our partners across Essex and beyond. Our Fit for the Future transformation programme is a dynamic initiative aimed at ensuring our district remains resilient and adaptable in an ever-evolving landscape, positioning us to proactively meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Building on our track record of service delivery, this plan represents our commitment to maintaining and enhancing the high standards we have set in providing quality services, as we pave the way for a district that thrives on the strengths of its communities, businesses and environment and the shared commitment to a brighter future.


Graham Butland
Leader of Braintree District Council



Introduction



This strategy sets out our priorities over the next four years and describes the context in which our services will work to drive forward the actions needed to achieve our vision.

Providing equal opportunities is at the heart of everything we will be striving for - to support our communities to be strong, safe and vibrant and our businesses to thrive in a resilient local economy, whilst protecting our environment for all to enjoy.

We are an ambitious Council and strongly believe that reducing the impact inequalities have on local people and communities is of paramount importance. It will not always be easy. With ongoing uncertainty over government funding, continuing inflationary pressures and greater demand on our services, we will need to find ways to ensure we can balance our budgets, maintain our ambition and change and adapt to support the delivery of services in future years.

With that in mind, this strategy outlines our three key themes:

- **Communities**
- **Prosperity**
- **Environment**

Each theme sets out our priorities and what we will do to achieve them. We need to be a forward-thinking council and make prevention and early intervention key ways to tackle the issues affecting our communities, supporting us all to navigate the challenges we face.

Our vision

To create a district of opportunity – a place where our communities can thrive, our people prosper and our environment is cherished for all to enjoy

We cannot do this alone. To shape our future, we need to work in collaboration with our partners and enable our residents and businesses to thrive by listening and working with them. We also need to be innovative and take appropriate risks to usher in a new era of providing quality services that positively impact the lives of our residents and businesses.


Dan Gascoyne
Chief Executive of Braintree District Council

About the district

The Braintree district is **236 square miles** and a predominantly rural area. However, 50% of the population live in our three largest market towns of Braintree, Halstead and Witham.

Most people in the district identified their ethnic group within the 'White' category (**94.7%**) in 2021. Around 1.7% identified their ethnic group within the 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh' category, 1.2% identified as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African' category, 1.9% identified as 'Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups' and the remaining 0.5% identified their ethnic group as 'other ethnic groups'.

There are an estimated **155,300 residents** according to census 2021. The population has grown by 5.5% since 2011. Like most of the UK, we have an aging society with the over 65's making up 20.5% of our population, up by nearly 30% since 2011.

Over **60%** of residents are employed or self-employed with around 70% of working residents working more than 31 hours a week.

The average life expectancy for males at birth is **80.2 years** and for females at birth is **83.5 years**.

An estimated **17%** of the population were disabled in 2021, with just under 7% stating their day-to-day activities were limited a lot.

69% of households in the district own their home in 2021, with 15% living in privately rented properties and 13% of households living in socially rented properties.

Just over **4%** of residents in 2021 said they provided at least 20 hours of unpaid care in a typical week.

Just under **26%** of residents aged 16 years and over indicated their highest level of qualification was Level 4 or above in 2021, lower than the England average of 33.9%.

18.4% had no qualifications, which is on par with the England average of 18.1%. Gross weekly pay in the district averages **£695.20** which is the lowest in Essex.

There are pockets of higher deprivation within the district but most areas have relatively low levels, as measured by the 2019 Indices of Deprivation. **Four wards in the district fall within 20% of the most deprived areas within England.**

Between 2011 and 2021, crime incidents on average grew by **6.3%** each year, with non-residential burglary being the fastest growing type of crime, increasing by 76.6% between 2011 and 2021. In 2021, most of the district's residents described their health as 'good' or 'very good' (**83%**), around 13% described their health as 'fair', with the remaining 4% of the population describing themselves as having 'bad' or 'very bad' health.

Just under **30%** of residents in the district travelled more than 10 kilometres to work with 48% of residents having more than two cars or van in their household. Just under 14% of residents use public transport, cycle or walk to work.



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Our Priorities

Our priorities are designed to ensure the focus of our efforts are on the things that make the most difference to our residents and businesses. We want to make the most positive impact on what matters to you, improving outcomes for all whilst tackling inequality.

Our communities, our prosperity and the environment in which we live are intrinsically linked and our strategy for improving them also needs to be so, ensuring equality of opportunity to all.

This strategy will be supported by our Fit For the Future programme, ensuring that our key services are delivered in the most efficient and effective way.



FIT FOR THE FUTURE



Communities

We know that vibrant communities are crucial in addressing the future challenges we have as a district and we want to enable more people to participate and have a role in how things are done on matters that impact them and where they live. Communities have the ability to improve people's quality of life and the support they can bring is also essential to reducing health inequalities.

Helping residents to help themselves to stay healthy and well is key to tackling inequality of life expectancy. Providing affordable housing and initiatives aimed at providing safe and decent living conditions can also contribute to the improvement of people's health and wellbeing. The Braintree district has an ageing population with more people likely to be living in worse health in their later years. The impacts of the COVID pandemic have widened existing inequalities across physical, mental and social health (for example issues of loneliness).

What we heard from our residents, communities, members and stakeholders highlighted the following:

- The importance of feeling safe within their communities and the link this has with being able to thrive in an area.
- The importance of supporting our more vulnerable residents, creating a friendlier environment and a sense of belonging.
- The need to support communities to feel connected by informing and involving people in local activities.
- The importance of accessing health services with a focus on mental health and leisure services for young people to enable healthier lifestyles.
- The importance of having more affordable, sustainable homes.

We will work with our partners to reduce inequalities, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our residents and build on the strengths and resilience of our communities across the district.

Our Key Priorities:

- Improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life for individuals and families and reduce health inequalities focusing on prevention and early intervention.
- Provide affordable, high quality and safe homes that meet the needs of our residents.
- Reduce social isolation and loneliness and support communities to build positive social networks and connections.
- Develop safer and more resilient communities, empowering residents to take ownership of local projects and initiatives.

We will do this by...

Better understanding the wider determinants of health through data and research to target prevention and early intervention efforts where they are most needed.

We will work in partnership to integrate healthcare services with community-based services and engage with families and children at a young age to instil healthy habits that can last a lifetime as well as providing residents with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their health emphasising the importance of regular exercise and opportunities to lead active and healthy lifestyles.

As well as providing more affordable homes, we will collaborate with our partners to address causes of homelessness such as unemployment, mental health and domestic abuse and establish programmes and initiatives to prevent homelessness in the first place.

We will work with the Community Safety Partnership to develop effective community safety initiatives as well as empowering residents to take ownership of their safety and wellbeing and feel safer within the areas they live and visit.



We recognise and appreciate the contributions our volunteering community make and will do more to align volunteering opportunities with community needs. We will encourage residents to participate in local projects in their community, providing access to grants to support community projects and simplifying the process that may hinder people getting involved in community-led initiatives.



Prosperity

Economic growth plays a crucial role in improving the health and wellbeing and living standards of our residents. We want to create the conditions for sustainable economic growth within the district and ensure that all residents can benefit as a result.

We will actively contribute to the district's economic growth by supporting innovation and ensuring the district remains an attractive place to live and do business. We will work with partners and the business community to help align skills provision with current and future needs so that residents are able to access employment opportunities and businesses can thrive.

What we heard from our residents, communities, businesses, members and stakeholders highlighted the following:

- The importance of having thriving town centres for socialising and business opportunities with a diverse and unique range of shops.
- The need to encourage new businesses into our district.
- The importance of helping existing businesses to thrive and be supported by our communities.
- The need to grow local employment opportunities including further training for adults taking account of future skills demand.
- The need for good transport links to jobs including infrastructure and public transport.
- The importance of developing local services and providing infrastructure when growing the district.

Our Key Priorities:

- Ensure district growth is sustainable and accessible with strong connectivity and infrastructure.
- Attract and support business growth, providing high quality employment opportunities in high growth sectors and industries.
- Provide tailored business support and access to funding to help businesses thrive and innovate.
- Develop skills that are attractive to employers and support residents to access opportunities to improve their economic wellbeing.

We will do this by...

Developing an integrated planning approach that considers the long-term vision for the district, taking into account environmental, social, and economic factors. We will implement our local cycling and walking infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to ensure a long-term approach is taken to developing local cycling and walking networks as well as promoting public transport, walking and cycling as alternative modes of travel to the car, highlighting the environmental, health and economic benefits.

We will forge partnerships with businesses and industry experts to gain a deeper understanding of market trends, emerging technologies, and industry-specific challenges. Research will be carried out to better understand the direction in which the business landscape is moving to provide training and upskilling opportunities in the right areas. We will continue to organise networking events, workshops and conferences where local businesses can connect with each other, industry experts and potential partners or customers and facilitate access to funding sources for local businesses by providing information about grants, loans and other financial assistance programmes.



Our role in driving inclusive economic growth is crucial as we aim to enhance wealth and create fair and meaningful work opportunities for all. We are committed to developing skills provisions around the needs of the district and support the creation of higher paid/skilled jobs in emerging sectors to ensure people are well-equipped to thrive in the evolving job market.



Environment

Our district is an attractive place full of opportunities, offering clean, safe and green spaces for all to enjoy. Our spaces are important in supporting people's health and wellbeing, providing opportunities to enjoy the natural environment as well as access to high-quality built environments.

We need to protect our environment to safeguard it for current and future generations. Through our Climate Change Strategy, we will work with people, partners, developers and other businesses across the district to help them fulfil their responsibilities and be mindful of their impact on the local environment.

What we heard from our residents, communities, businesses, members and stakeholders:

- The importance of protecting our countryside.
- The need for green space which is clean and safe.
- The need for developments to consider the environmental impacts and the need for healthy spaces.
- The importance of continuing to address the impacts of climate change.
- The importance of tackling recycling behaviours and reducing littering across our district.
- The need to educate people on caring for the environment in which they live and work.



Our Key Priorities:

- Protect and enhance our built and natural environments across the district, providing good access to open spaces and increasing biodiversity.
- Continue to deliver a cohesive and integrated response to climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Support residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and be more resilient to climate related impacts.
- Improve the way that we manage waste and encourage residents and businesses to reduce, reuse and recycle more.

We will do this by...

Ensuring we have the right policies and guidelines in place to encourage developers to adopt sustainable processes, incorporating green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in our urban planning such as creating parks, green corridors and wildlife friendly landscapes.

It is important that we continue to raise awareness of why we need to protect our natural environment and habitats and highlight how this contributes to the overall well-being and quality of life for residents while preserving the natural heritage for future generations. We will ensure that our public spaces including parks, playgrounds and trails are kept clean, safe and inviting for all to use, improving access to our open spaces and looking at how we can develop cycling and walking trails to connect people to parks and open spaces.

We will raise awareness and help to educate people on the environment so individuals, communities and businesses can get involved and have a better understanding of the importance of sustainability and their role in reducing their environmental impact. It would be ideal if individuals and businesses set personal sustainability goals, such as reducing energy consumption, adopting eco-friendly

transportation options and practicing waste reduction and for businesses to set goals to reduce emissions, adopt sustainable supply chain strategies and implement energy efficient practices. We will ensure that as a Council we do this too and encourage our staff to adopt their own goals.

Through campaigns we aim to nudge behaviours by highlighting the benefits of sustainability and showcase stories to inspire others to take action, sharing innovative ideas and providing access to resources and funding to tackle climate change. We will also regularly monitor and evaluate data related to climate change impacts and emergency response efforts to help guide decision making and identify areas which most need our support in developing more effective and tailored solutions to address climate change challenges that may be specific to our district.

We want to ensure that we work with our partners to implement and improve our waste management strategies looking at ways in which we can prevent waste at its source by encouraging concepts such as responsible consumption and re-use.



Fit for the Future

Change and responding to emerging need has been a fundamental part of what the council has done since our inception in 1974, it is part of our DNA.

We have risen to the recent challenges of COVID and the cost-of-living crisis but it becomes increasingly obvious that volatility and complexity are increasing and this is both a risk and an opportunity. As a sector we will need to respond to this in new and innovative ways to ensure that we can keep delivering for our residents and businesses. The demand on our services is increasing and those who seek our help often have complex needs requiring appropriate responses. We must find a way to ensure that public services can be delivered in a sustainable way with the resources that are available to us.

What we heard from our residents, communities, businesses, members and stakeholders:

- The importance of helping people to help themselves and have less reliance on Council services.
- The need to use technology more widely to support delivery of services.
- The need to work in partnership and share services to add resilience and reduce costs.
- The need to use council buildings and land to generate additional income.
- The importance of being more efficient in managing council funds.
- They are least accepting of reducing spend on frontline services or introducing charges or increasing council tax to generate additional income to spend on services.

To be able to deliver the priorities set out in this strategy, we need to rethink how we work and how we deliver and we must have financial sustainability to continue delivering. We can't do this alone; we will need to work with and closely align with our partners across the Essex and beyond.

As an organisation we need to build our flexibility, resilience and collaboration. We need to foster innovation and appropriate risk-taking to be able to do things differently. This will include:

- Using the opportunities that new technology offers us to improve services, remove demand and reduce costs.
- Working more closely with our partner organisations in Essex and beyond to share resources, assets and information to deliver better outcomes for our residents and businesses.
- Becoming an organisation that can flex and be responsive to changes as the volatility in our world continues.

- Finding new ways of delivering which allow us to meet the needs of our residents and businesses while continuing to be financially resilient as demand increases due to demographical and other changes.
- Understanding and putting plans into place for the skills our workforce will need in the future.
- Making sure that we continue to be an employer of choice, offering fulfilling and rewarding careers for our people.



How will we measure success?

We will ensure accountability for our performance against these priorities through the development of Annual Plans. These will be regularly refreshed to reflect completed work and the development of new approaches informed by ongoing engagement with partners and residents.



In reporting on our progress and achievements, we will maintain transparency by clearly outlining what we can be held accountable for and where we will be working in a more enabling and influencing role with residents, business and our partners. Additionally, we will set out how we will measure success, even in areas where we have ambitious goals but limited control over the results.

Performance against our priorities will be reported quarterly to Cabinet providing detail of progress made against outcomes and performance of operational performance indicators against targets, providing commentary where issues arise to show steps being taken.

Underneath our Annual Plan sit individual business plans for each service. The purpose of these service-specific business plans is to provide a detailed roadmap for how each service will contribute to the overall goals and objectives of the organisation. They outline the key actions, projects and initiatives that will be undertaken by each service to support the delivery of the

Annual Plan and the Corporate Strategy. They will also establish clear targets, timelines and performance indicators that will be used to monitor progress and measure success.

Regular monitoring and reporting on these business plans enable us to track progress, identify any challenges, or gaps and make adjustments as needed. It also allows for transparency and communication across the organisation, as well as accountability for the delivery of the Annual Plan and the Corporate Strategy.





