



# **FOURTH QUARTER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

1 JANUARY TO 31 MARCH 2024

**and**

# **ANNUAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

1 APRIL 2023 TO 31 MARCH 2024



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## Section 1: Introduction and Summary






### Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to demonstrate the performance of the Council at the end of the fourth quarter of 2023/24 and the end of the financial year in relation to our Annual Plan 2023/24. This sets out the key activities being implemented to deliver our corporate priorities and summarises the measures in place by aligning key performance indicators to our priorities within the Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2024. Further detail is given in relation to a set of business performance indicators covering finances, customer focus, our people and health and safety.






This report does not contain details of the numerous activities ongoing in each service area that also contribute to delivering what is important and will make a difference to all in the District. Full details of all projects and performance indicators used to measure the outcomes are available upon request.

### Summary of the Corporate Projects current position for the end of the financial year

The following table provides updates for the end of the financial year in relation to our key activities.




Corporate Priorities	Status of projects and actions				
					
Connecting People and Places	1	11	4	-	-
Enhancing our Environment	10	5	1	-	-
Supporting our Communities	4	5	-	-	-
Promoting Prosperity	1	4	1	-	-
Delivering and Innovating	5	5	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

#### KEY:




-  Project completed
-  Project on target
-  Project scope/target date requires attention
-  Project requires amendment
-  Project aborted/closed

## **Summary of the Key Performance Indicators position for the end of the financial year**

The following table shows the performance for the end of the financial year in relation to key performance indicators.

Corporate Priorities	Status of indicators			
				Data Only
Connecting People and Places	1	-	1	-
Enhancing our Environment	2	-	1	-
Supporting our Communities	2	-	-	2
Promoting Prosperity	-	-	-	3
Delivering and Innovating	4	2	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>

### KEY:

-  Performance Indicator has achieved or exceeded target
-  Performance Indicator is up to 5% below target
-  Performance Indicator is 5% or more off target

## **Summary Position**

Across the projects undertaken in this financial year a total of 21 projects have been completed. 30 longer term projects remain on track to be completed into the next year and beyond. A number of projects have been through the appropriate change management process to amend the end date due to being re-prioritised or re-scoped as necessary to accommodate new and competing demands on the Council. As a result the year concludes with six projects at amber status, with no projects having been cancelled throughout the year. Amber statuses reflect budgetary constraints and delays, amongst other challenges which are detailed in the report.

As at the end of the year nine performance indicators have met or exceeded target, two missed target by less than 5% and three missed target by more than 5%. The collection rate of council tax and collection of business rates ended the year less than 5% below target. Performance indicators missing target by more than 5% were in relation to the number of homes granted planning permission, recycling rates, and enquiries resolved at first point of contact in the Customer Service Centre.

This year is the last year of the 2020-2024 corporate strategy, with a new corporate strategy agreed to take the Council through to 2028 focussing on Communities, Prosperity, and Environment.




## Section 2: Delivering our Corporate Strategy

# CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES












### Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<b>Complete the physical improvements to Witham and Halstead town centres to improve public realm</b>		
<p>The revised licence applications required for the works on Essex County Council land have been submitted and are awaiting approval. Braintree District Council (BDC) continue to work closely with both town councils to keep them updated on the progress of the project.</p> <p>BDC are working with Essex County Council on the next steps to progress the proposed road layout changes.</p> <p>A change control notice has been actioned, revising the end date from December 2023 to July 2024.</p>	July 2024	▶
<b>Improve the district's housing stock by addressing energy efficiencies and exploring best practice to tackle empty homes</b>		
<p>The council continues to explore ways to address energy efficiency with the private rented sector and social housing partners, targeting grant schemes and initiatives, working towards the long term goal of 2030.</p>	March 2030	▶
<p>The Empty Homes policy was approved at Cabinet in January. Since approval, 77 engagement letters have been sent to owners of empty properties in the district, encouraging them to provide an update to the Council of their intentions for the property.</p> <p>26 responses have been received so far, and work continues to engage with more property owners.</p>	March 2025	▶
<b>Develop a revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 to 2028</b>		
<p>The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was presented to Cabinet in January, following which a public consultation was launched which ran from February to April. The evaluation of the consultation will be provided alongside a full Cabinet report for adoption in May 2024.</p> <p>The target date has been amended from March to May 24 to allow time for the public consultation and return to Cabinet.</p>	May 2024	▶

<b>Improve our health and leisure facilities by replacing the studio and sports hall floors at Braintree Leisure Centre and refurbishing the wet and dry changing facilities at Halstead Leisure Centre</b>		
Work continues on the specifications and the logistical requirements to replace the studio floor. Since the initial scope for this project was agreed there has been a significant increase in financial pressures on the leisure industry, in addition to the growing cost of construction materials. The Council need to assess whether the original budget agreed for the replacement of the floors is sufficient to complete the works to the desired standard. To ensure the viability of this project both financially and operationally, the timelines for this project require extension to fully consider the options available.	March 2025	
Work continues on the specifications and the logistical requirements to replace the sports hall floor. Since the initial scope for this project was agreed there has been a significant increase in financial pressures on the leisure industry, in addition to the growing cost of construction materials. The Council need to assess whether the original budget agreed for the replacement of the floors is sufficient to complete the works to the desired standard. To ensure the viability of this project both financially and operationally, the timelines for this project require extension to fully consider the options available.	March 2025	
The scope of the works has been agreed, and the tender process is nearing completion to identify a contractor to complete the construction. The target date has been amended from March to September 2024, to allow the works to take place over the summer to minimise disruption.	September 2024	

### **Actions carried out in partnership with others**

<b>Project description and comments</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Engage in the pre-application and examination processes for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) in and around the district</b>		
Longfields Solar Farm – Landscaping works at the site have commenced, planting trees and hedgerows ahead of construction on the main site. This is intended to allow the trees and hedgerows to establish early on in the development.	December 2026	
A12 Widening scheme – In January the Development Consent Order (DCO) was approved by the Secretary of State for Transport. However, a legal challenge has been made to the Secretary of State challenging this decision. This is at a very early stage, and the High Court have not yet considered whether to progress with the challenge. Until the challenge is resolved, work on the scheme cannot commence, reflected in the amber status.	December 2028	
Bramford to Twinstead reinforcement – The Examining Authority has completed its examination of the application for development consent. The Examining Authority now has up to three months to prepare a recommendation report for the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. The Secretary of State will then have up to a further three months to decide whether to grant consent, meaning a decision is to be made before the end of September.	November 2028	

Norwich to Tilbury – Pre-planning application discussions continue and a statutory consultation is anticipated in Spring 2024. The Development Consent Order is expected towards the end of 2024, with construction not due to start until 2027.	March 2030	
Rivenhall Integrated Waste Management Facility (IWMF) and Energy Centre – The Development Consent Order application has been accepted and is now in the pre-examination stage. The preliminary meeting is scheduled for April. This stage is where the examination is planned out and is anticipated to take up to 3 months.	December 2025	
<b>Develop our plans to introduce walking and cycling networks across the district</b>		
The consultation on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plan (LCWIP), hosted by Essex County Council (ECC) concluded in January. Braintree District Council are now awaiting the report summarising the consultation so that the feedback generated can be considered, prior to our opportunity to adopt the LCWIP.	December 2025	
<b>Enable the delivery of a new build, multipurpose community centre in Witham bringing people together to socialise, learn and access key services</b>		
<p>The Planning Committee has granted permission for the community centre, with conditions. The tender for the project is nearing completion, and preparation of a consultation is underway regarding the transfer of open public space.</p> <p>The project remains at amber status as the budgetary requirements will not be clear until the construction tender is completed.</p>	June 2025	
<b>Continue to facilitate the delivery of a purpose-built medical centre in Sible Hedingham</b>		
The Integrated Care Board (ICB) approved the business case for the Sible Hedingham Medical centre in March. Due to the length of time taken to make a decision on the full business case, the target date has been amended to allow for the transfer of the site, which could not take place whilst the approval of the business case was outstanding. This is anticipated to be completed by the end December.	December 2024	
<b>Work with the Integrated Care Board to enhance the delivery of health and wellbeing services at the Victoria Square development</b>		
The Hub is now operating at capacity and mainly providing clinical services. Bi-monthly meetings will continue to explore further opportunities for the development.	March 2024	






# ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT



## Actions carried out by Braintree District Council





Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<b>Enhance biodiversity by refurbishing the wildlife garden in Halstead Public Gardens</b>		
New flower beds have been successfully installed in the wildlife garden. This project is now completed.	November 2023	✓
<b>Improve the facilities in our skate parks at Weavers Park in Braintree and Spa Road in Witham</b>		
In February user feedback sessions took place, which provided valuable and positive feedback on the designs. Improvements to the designs have been made based on the feedback received in these sessions. A decision to fund an additional mini-wheels ramp at Spa Road is being presented to Cabinet in May.	July 2024	▶
<b>Deliver improvements to the recreation ground at Ramsey Road, Halstead</b>		
In February user feedback sessions took place, which provided valuable and positive feedback on the designs. Improvements to the designs have been made based on the feedback received in these sessions. However, there is a requirement to undertake sewer surveys which will need to be considered in the delivery timeline, resulting in an amber status.	July 2024	▲
<b>Respond to the requirements of the Environmental Act 2021 in relation to air quality, biodiversity, water and waste reduction</b>		
The review into the Council's air quality monitoring methodology was undertaken, and the independent review of Braintree District Council's air quality monitoring methodology confirmed that the Council was monitoring in accordance with best practice and legislation. Actions from the review are now underway.	March 2024	✓
The introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of 10% was introduced in February and this now being implemented, with the first application liable for BNG already received. Work on training staff continues as they gain experience dealing with these applications.	March 2024	✓
A baseline audit of the Council's water usage identified a substantial leak. Rectifying the leak has prevented further water wastage. The facilities team continue to monitor for leaks and other areas within the estate which present immediate opportunities to reduce water waste.  The Council has also investigated various approaches to reducing water use and recycling water across the estate. However, these measures would require	March 2026	▶




substantial investment with no financial return. As a result, the findings of these investigations whilst considered are not planned to be progressed at this stage.  The Council plans to meet with Anglian Water in April to identify any support that may be available to the organisation and to discuss how both parties can work in partnership to improve education, engagement and behavioural changes for residents and businesses.		
The Council responded to the formal consultation issued by DEFRA, and has provided its views on the legislation set out within the Environment Act. Further changes to the Council's recyclable waste collection will be implemented in line with the fundamental waste collection review ahead of the legislative requirements in 2026.	March 2024	
<b>Protect our communities by implementing the requirements of Martyn's Law</b>		
The Council has finalised its preparations for the implementation of Martyn's Law, confirming all properties and venues covered by the proposed legislation.  Following the scrutiny phases of the legislative process, significant changes are being made to the bill prior to its return to Parliament. The Council has responded to the consultation hosted by central government, however until such a time the detail of the legislation is made known to The Council no further work can take place and this project is complete as far as possible. Once legislation is published, a new project will be created to track the implementation of the specific requirements.	March 2024	
<b>Deliver campaigns and work with our communities to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Report litter offenders who throw litter from their vehicles</b></li> <li>• <b>Minimise food waste to help households save money and avoid unnecessary waste</b></li> <li>• <b>Improve awareness and understanding of climate change</b></li> </ul>		
The 'See it – Report it' campaign will continue to be a marketing campaign to encourage members of the public to submit dashcam footage of people littering from their vehicles.  In February, Cabinet supported an increase in the fine amounts for fixed penalty notices for littering. Digital posts and a press release were published to inform the public of the change. This was also published in the Council newsletter.	March 2024	
The 'Love Essex' campaign ran until the end of December 2023, and with the support of Braintree District Council was hugely successful. The campaign reached nearly 3,000,000 residents, three times the target, and saw engagement of over 230,000, over three times the target.  Residents pledged to reduce their food waste in 2023, entering a competition to win £60 of supermarket vouchers available each month. Following a boost in December, Braintree District placed first in the number of pledges received by residents finishing ahead of all other waste collection authorities in the county.	March 2024	
In the fourth quarter six bimonthly newsletters were sent reaching 7,825 subscribers by the end of the quarter, up from 7,680 at the start of January. Two double page spreads were published in the Council's printed publications, Contact Magazine and the Business Rates leaflet on water saving measures at home and writing a green staff travel plan.  Partner organisations' climate change projects were promoted on our social media channels, website and newsletter including; Essex County Council (ECC), Halstead and Witham Town Councils, and Solar Together. We also promoted community action including: Hatfield Peverel Wildlife Champions, community	March 2024	

<p>action in the Great British Spring Clean and our litter picking volunteers the Green Heart Champions.</p> <p>Support continued for local food suppliers, running case studies on Blackwells and Spencers farm shops on all our channels, as well as Veganuary reels and a cookbook giveaway in collaboration with local vegan cafe, The Natural Way. Regular promotion of our street markets and local shops was also published.</p> <p>The Community Infrastructure Grants scheme launched at the start of March, offering funding for carbon reducing projects in publicly accessible buildings through a press release picked up by two local channels, our website and our newsletter.</p> <p>An ECC funded project, Lean2Green, launched offering free carbon cutting advice with a consultant to 20 businesses, to support the green economy. The upcoming Green Business Expo for Economic Development was also publicised.</p> <p>The Council supported green travel choices by promoting walking with Walk to Work day on social media, cycling with Bikeability training and public transport with DigiGo expansion information in our environment newsletter.</p> <p>Support was given to recycling with post-Christmas food waste messaging, promotion of the garden waste subscription service and changes around electrical item recycling. Stories also ran in our environment newsletter encouraging people to report flytipping.</p>		
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### Actions carried out in partnership with others

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<b>Deliver projects in our Climate Change Action Plan to contribute to our long term aims of being a carbon neutral district such as working with communities and businesses to build climate resilience, developing baseline data for a tree strategy, piloting the ECC green accreditation scheme (before rolling out to businesses) whilst continuing to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels</b>		
Details of the projects being delivered in our Climate Change Action Plan are detailed in the next section of this report.	March 2030	
<b>Develop opportunities for increasing the renewable energy and fuel security within the district</b>		
<p>The Council has successfully received funding from the application for Sport England's Shared Prosperity Fund "Swimming Pool Support Fund" grant. £64k was received for replacing internal lighting with LED lights and £313k for solar panels on a solar canopy in the car park of Witham Leisure Centre.</p> <p>A Carbon Mapping and Forecasting tool has been created, allowing The Council to understand the measures it would have to take to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 and the associated costs; outlining many alternative options. Renewable energy projects would make up a large part of this.</p>	April 2025	
<b>Increase biodiversity and the attractiveness of the district by re-wilding open spaces and wild seed highway verges</b>		
Planting was suspended over the winter months and is set to resume in the second quarter.	December 2025	
<b>As part of a two-year safer streets programme, tackle enviro crime in the focused area of Witham</b>		
The Council's Grounds Maintenance team continue to regularly review the environment of Cut Throat Lane to ensure it is maintained. Environmental improvement of Cut Throat Lane was completed in December.	December 2023	

The official launch of the Dog Watch Scheme took place on 15th April 2023 in Witham with over 200 visitors. The aim of the event was to encourage local residents to sign up to the Essex Police led Dog Watch Scheme where local dog owners will become guardians for the local area while exercising their dogs, reporting criminal damage or anti-social behaviour. A total of 65 people signed up to the Dog Watch scheme on the day.	April 2023	
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## CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS

### **Introduction**

In the fourth quarter 2023/24, the Climate Action Plan 2024-25 was created in draft format. Projects within the current Climate Action Plan were scrutinised for progress to date and closure. Early preparation work was started for the Climate Action Plan 2023-24 Annual Report.

The online Climate Change Awareness course continued to be delivered through the online learning platform The Learning Hive. The training for frontline staff has now been scheduled for early in the first quarter 2024-25.

The first meeting of the North Essex Climate Partnership was hosted on 18 March at The Plaza to host eight North Essex local authorities and Essex County Council (ECC). The council hosted the event and the nine Councils discussed potential future collaboration projects.

The Council undertook a desktop exercise to map all Climate Change Partnerships across service areas in order to understand the wider scope of all portfolio holders with projects across the Climate Action Plan.

The Climate Action Plan is classified under seven themes and individualised progress on these themes is outlined below:

### **Resources**

Two Officers represented The Council at the ECC Climate Summit on water where Essex County Council's Water Strategy was launched. The Council's Spring edition of Contact Magazine featured a two-page article on water reduction in the garden. The Council have continued to promote the subsidised water butt scheme through Essex County Council. The Council have a meeting scheduled with Anglian Water to discuss behavioural change initiatives for the reduction in water use.

The Council have continued to support the food waste campaign run through Love Essex.

The Council promoted Veganuary in January and continued to promote local food producers including Blackwells Farm Shop in Coggeshall.

### **Energy Conservation**

The Council was awarded funds through the Sport England Grant in the amount of £375,350 for solar panels on the roof and on a solar canopy in the car park at Witham Leisure Centre and for the replacement of current lighting to LED lighting. The projects jointly shall reduce carbon emissions by an anticipated 50.5 tonnes annually.

The Community Infrastructure Grant was launched on 1 March 2024. The guidance notes, application form, press release and other communications have been published, alongside direct emails to parish councils. Expressions of interest have been received and further support has been offered.

Communications were shared regarding Essex Climate Commission's Carbon Cutting application across channels and Braintree have now secured second place in Essex for sign-ups to the app.

The Sustainability Team and The Waste Reduction Team attended Halstead Town Council's Climate Change and Community Energy Event where The Colne Valley Community Energy Project was presented to residents. We promoted our Climate Strategy at the event.

An audit exercise for all street lighting managed by the Council is underway to understand the costs for converting all of our street lights to LED heads. An email was sent to all parish councils to enquire as to their managed street lights and the responses to this have been collated and followed up. With the support of The Council, Rayne Parish Council received pre-used LED lamp heads from Essex Highways for replacing within the parish.

### **Built Environment**

The Home Upgrade Grant was launched, offering eligible Braintree residents in off-gas areas part of £2.466m for energy efficiency home improvements. 900 targeted letters have been sent to eligible residents in off-gas areas. The original benchmark for eligibility was for households with a maximum household income of £31,000 and this has now been increased to £36,000.

Referrals are actively being sent through to the Managing Agent Warmworks. 41 Applications have been made on the portal since the launch of the scheme.

The Council have begun to investigate the opportunity to provide a Biodiversity Net Gain site at Witham at the A12 replacement land from National Highways.

The Council submitted a Statement of Intent for the ECO Flex scheme for approval by OFGEM. The scheme is open to residents living in energy inefficient properties, with EPC ratings of D or below, living on a low income and/or vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home.

iChoosr launched a Spring energy switch auction on 9 January 2024. Data by 8 February shows that there were 999 registrations for the January's Energy Switch with 49 accepted so far. Although the savings for residents have been quite low, at approximately £50 saving on annual energy bills, this does still offer residents reassurance to know their energy tariff is fixed and priced below the OFGEM Price Cap during this ongoing Cost of Living Crisis.

### **Transport**

Site visits have been made to Lakes Road to continue preparations for the electric charging infrastructure required for 14 new electric vehicles. The tenders for the installation work have been released and legal documents are being drafted. Work has begun on the livery for these vehicles which are scheduled for delivery in September 2024.

A Licensing Committee report was presented on 25 January which had an option to issue 8 taxi licences and an option to allocate 4 to Electric vehicles. This was agreed at the committee meeting and a set of questions have been written for distribution to the trade in order to understand the level of interest in electric vehicles. Investigations are underway for rapid charging points at or near taxi ranks. The 4 charging points at the White Horse Lane Car park in Witham, which is close by to the rank, has been identified as a potential site for the trade to use at present.



## **Business and the Green Economy**

The Council has been chosen to pilot Essex County Council's green business support initiative "Lean 2 Green" to support businesses to write decarbonisation plans. The support package is worth £500 and support is offered to Braintree and Uttlesford businesses. The initiative has been launched through various media channels including the Business Newsletter.

Preparations continue for the Green Business Showcase at The Plaza in June 2024 to provide support for businesses interested in developing sustainable practice.

A Green Travel article was published in the Business Rates booklet.

## **Natural Environment**

The Council published a story on our social media channels on the council's Street Scene Protection Team tackling illegal waste carriers.

An Officer represented The Council at the Essex Rivers Hub meeting, with partners including the Environment Agency, Anglia Water, Essex & Suffolk Water, Natural England and Essex County Council. The Council are looking to secure opportunities to support water quality, biodiversity and flooding projects on the Rivers Pant and Blackwater. The Council has offered support with facilitating Citizen Science work through the Essex Rivers Watch scheme.

Ten standard trees were planted through the Essex Forest Initiative at Bradford Meadows.

The Woodland Trust have now established a quarterly meeting with The Council to understand how we can develop partnership work.

The Council attended Hatfield Peverel Wildlife Champions tree planting event on 23 February and followed this up with external comms and a story for the Climate Change pages of the website.

## **Adapting to Climate Change**

The Council have continued to publish and promote severe weather warnings, including Yellow Weather warnings, flood warnings and winter ready preparation communications.

Storm Henk occurred on 2 January 2024, Storm Isha occurred on 19 and Storm Jocelyn occurred on 22-23 January 2024

The Council have continued to take an active role in the Essex Resilience Forum to monitor and plan for extreme weather events amongst other emerging risks.

The Council continues to engage with town and parish councils both on a one-to-one basis and through regular wider meetings such as the Supporting Communities webinar.

Work continues with partners on the management of watercourses across the district, including continued discussions with Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust to investigate and develop a Nature-Based approach to flood alleviation.

The Environment Newsletter continues to be published on a 2-3 monthly basis. In February 2024, the newsletter had 7,748 subscribers.



Climate Change case studies and stories have been published across all available media channels including Contact Magazine, wider electronic newsletters and the Business Rates magazine as well as on the Climate Change pages of The Council's website. In March, The Council uploaded an information story onto the Climate Change pages of the website to inform residents of flood alleviation and blue-green infrastructure at Horizon 120.

# SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES









## Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<p><b>Over a two-year period, use £1m of New Homes Bonus to support residents of the district through the continued cost of living crisis by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Providing food security and access to essential goods across the district</b></li> <li>• <b>Helping community groups and organisations provide additional support to our most vulnerable residents</b></li> <li>• <b>Enabling physical and emotional health and wellbeing support with a focus on young people who find it difficult to access these services</b></li> </ul>		
<p>In the fourth quarter the Council has recruited 12 volunteers to assist in running the food bank. As a result there is consideration to open on Saturdays with the view to expand to another day in the week. Work continues to recruit volunteers through the Council's comms network and utilising partnership networks.</p> <p>A report covering the period 01 November 2023 to 31 January 2024, for the food bank was published, highlighting 198 deliveries made feeding 537 people and 81 interventions made by the Outreach Worker.</p> <p>Internal staff training for food bank referrals has resulted in over 2,000 referrals between the first three quarters, with training now being extended to our Housing Options team.</p> <p>Work continues with partners to identify opportunities for a community supermarket.</p> <p>The small grants scheme launched in February and received applications from trusted partners, these included: a fridge for Community Fridge in Halstead, funds to pay for collectors' costs to pick up food for First Stop, food for a new Men's Talking Group at Witham Hub, food pantry stock for Witham United Reform Church, and a fridge for Wethersfield Community Pantry. The scheme remains open until mid-April for grants up to £10,000. The microgrants scheme for grants up to £1,000 will remain open until the pot of £15,000 has been depleted.</p> <p>Further applications for the small grants scheme have been received from Witham Hub, Tori's Pure Health &amp; Wellness Centre, Witham All Stars Majorettes, Witham Town Lunch Club, Witham Boys &amp; Girls Brigade, and House of Grace in Witham.</p> <p>Two staff members have attended training and are now able to issue Fuel Vouchers for people in need.</p>	March 2025	▶

<p>A Data Bank has been created to help with proving sim cards with data allowances for residents, to strengthen people's ability to find and apply for jobs.</p> <p>Discussions have taken place with Active Braintree about funding a Holiday Activity and Food programme extension, as they are able to expand with more funding. Consideration will be given to what opportunities for expansion exist. These include:</p> <p>Camp for Champs - whole family support to include &amp; host Family Celebration Events. This includes fun activities for children and a marketplace with local organisations coming to speak with the families.</p> <p>Making it Mindful - a 6-week Food Education Programme which gives families the knowledge and skills to make healthy, nutritious meals. The families also get to take home the equipment, recipes and skills to embed in their everyday lives.</p> <p>Alphabake - whole family cooking and activity days which will allow families the time to create something together, play together and eat together.</p> <p>The Council is working with Active Essex to investigate opportunities to run the Pedal Power programme. Free Bicycles, helmets, locks, lights, safety courses &amp; maintenance lesson are provided to those most in need. Targets are set for recipients to use their bicycle, which is tracked through the programme, and if the targets are achieved the bike is gifted to the recipient for free.</p>		
<b>Support local projects and initiatives through the Councillor Community Grants scheme</b>		
<p>In the fourth quarter 19 grants were made totalling £9,750.</p> <p>St Mary's Church in Bocking received £500 and Kelvedon URC received £300 to help make available a place for people to go, stay warm and have refreshments as well as finding some company.</p> <p>Halstead Community Shed received £500 towards the purchase of office furniture. White Cone and Great Yeldham Parish Councils, Halstead Cricket Club, and Little Chestnuts Pre-School were among other recipients in the fourth quarter. In total this year the sum awarded is a total of £33,154, which is 54.1% of the funding available.</p> <p>Eight members have used their full allocation. It has been agreed that members are able to carry forward any underspend from this financial year into the 2024/25 financial year.</p>	March 2024	
<b>Support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless on their pathway to independent living through supported housing and move-on accommodation</b>		
<p>The Council have been working closely with Peabody to deliver this project and have been receiving regular updates over recent weeks. All work for completion of refurbishment works are on track to be delivered by early April.</p> <p>Dates for connection of electricity and water supply are still to be confirmed, with gas connection scheduled for mid-May.</p>	June 2024	

## Actions carried out in partnership with others

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<b>Build more resilient communities to respond to emerging issues</b>		
Work continues with Essex County Council to develop a business plan for the next stage of the Levelling Up rural pilot, which will include a request for resource to continue the community engagement work. A sponsors meeting has been held between Braintree District and Essex County Council and the Mid & South Essex Integrated Care System.	March 2025	
<b>Equip young people with the skills required to face challenging situations by delivering crucial crew workshops to schools across the district in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership</b>		
Three crucial crew events took place between 3 - 6 July 2023, delivering workshops to 289 children from 7 primary schools across the district.	March 2024	
<b>Review our Livewell Strategy to support the changing needs of our residents and wider health and care priorities</b>		
The Livewell Strategy was adopted at Cabinet in January. The strategic action plan priorities have been agreed and implementation of the plan will begin next year.	February 2024	
<b>Address the health inequalities of the district through the Mid-Essex Alliance partnership by designing integrated health services in local communities and neighbourhoods</b>		
Managers from across Housing and Communities have been participating in leadership group meetings with the NHS. Concerns were raised by The Council around the duplication of meetings within the current system, which prevents full attendance by council officers. Our Health and Wellbeing manager is working to develop the approach and explore synergies with existing forums.	October 2024	
<b>Oversee the delivery of a safer streets programme to tackle perception of violence against women and girls in the night-time economy and neighbourhood crime for identified areas in Witham</b>		
Wayfinding signage has been installed along River Walk with the intention of increasing footfall and navigational information to residents and tourists. The outreach sports programme aimed at young people in Witham, to promote mental health and wellbeing, saw 108 attendees in the fourth quarter and over 650 across the year.	March 2024	
The safer streets programme in Witham has now concluded, with 18 individual projects contributing to its success including the provision of personal safety alarms and the launch of the Ask Angela campaign. Partners including Witham Town Council, Fusion, Cara, Eastlight, Essex Police and Neighbourhood Watch have been asked for feedback on the project, and a final steering group meeting took place in March.		
<b>Deliver two changing places toilets in Witham and Halstead allowing people with complex needs to have greater access to public places to take part in everyday activities</b>		
Work in Halstead has completed with the facilities now open at Halstead Leisure Centre, allowing those with complex disabilities to access the swimming pool, which would not have been possible before.	May 2024	
Planning permission was granted for the additional works required at Witham Town Hall in February. Work on site has commenced, with particular attention paid to the beams in the listed part of the structure, with the support of a structural engineer. The works are anticipated to complete by the end of May 2024. A change control notice has been issued to amend the end date, reflecting the delays encountered.		




# PROMOTING PROSPERITY





## Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

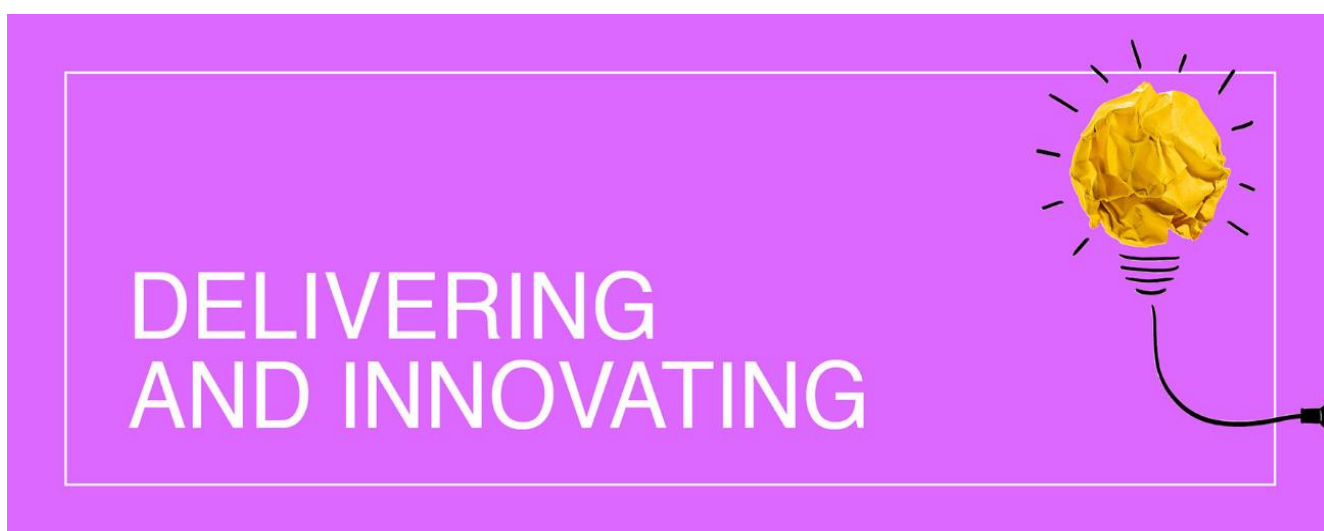
Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<b>Build on the current success of the Horizon 120 Business and Innovation Park by selling the remaining site plots and promoting the development of the phase two land</b>		
<p>It is anticipated the decision to approve the transfer agreement between The Council and the developer for the phase two land will be presented to Cabinet in May.</p> <p>A survey and volume estimate of the soil on the remaining phase one plots has been undertaken, and work has since begun to understand the budgetary and ecological implications of the work. A plan to undertake the groundworks will be devised during the first and second quarter of 24/25, with work anticipated to complete in the third quarter.</p> <p>The target date has been amended from March to December 2024 to allow for the approval and other subsequent arrangements to be made with respects to the phase two development, and for groundworks to be completed over the autumn with respects to the remaining plots.</p>	December 2024	▶
<b>Continue to develop the Witham Enterprise Units to bring forward new business premises for SME's</b>		
<p>Work continues to explore options for the delivery of the Witham Enterprise Units. Given increases in construction cost and changes to the demand for certain property types subsequent to the Covid pandemic, the viability of the project is an important aspect to confirm before progressing with the chosen design.</p> <p>The current design proposal has pre-application planning approval and the financial viability will now be considered before moving forward.</p> <p>It is anticipated that a way forward for the project will be confirmed in the next quarter.</p>	September 2026	▲

<b>Develop and deliver a business support programme based at the Plaza to help District businesses start, grow and increase productivity, especially in key sectors</b>		
37 members have enrolled on the scheme, with 3 places left.	March 2025	
To date, 29 businesses have advised that as a result of this intervention, they have taken up offers of non-financial business support. 29 have adopted new-to-the-firm technologies or processes. 34 have seen an increase in their revenue. 19 new businesses have been created, 14 jobs have been created, 15 jobs have been safeguarded, and 14 businesses have progressed from pre-start to business ready.		

## **Actions carried out in partnership with others**






<b>Project description and comments</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>In partnership with NEEB, deliver a shared prosperity funded programme of support focusing on:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Financial and debt management support and advice alongside signposting to other areas of financial support to create and safeguard jobs across north Essex</b></li> <li><b>Digital skills support to businesses across the district enabling them to grow digitally</b></li> </ul>		
<p>The North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) is funding a two-year business support programme with Let's Do Business Group to help businesses in North Essex by delivering high-quality, independent advice to businesses either looking to start or established businesses looking to take their next step and grow.</p> <p>Support offered is categorised into four key areas: Businesses in Rural Areas supporting businesses specifically outside our urban hubs, Blueprint for Business offering workshops and 1:1 events to help drive growth, Development of New Products supporting businesses with a new product or service to bring to market, and Externally Funded Innovation Support to assist businesses utilise other funding to support growth and innovation.</p> <p>The partnership has delivered support across multiple areas throughout the year and achieve 3 of the 5 targets set:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Businesses receiving non-financial support – 177 (target 150)</li> <li>Jobs created – 27 (target 20)</li> <li>Jobs safeguarded – 22 (target 30)</li> <li>New businesses created – 7 (target 20)</li> <li>Training courses delivered – 28 (target 6).</li> </ul> <p>The business support program will continue into the 24/25 financial year.</p>	March 2025	
<b>Facilitate a series of employer led school visits/workshops to introduce students to new industries and sector course pathways</b>		
<p>1,500 year 10 students from 8 schools attended the Apprentice Fair in February. The fair showcased apprenticeship schemes from employers and training providers across the Braintree District. Braintree District Council funded the transport for all students to enable attendance.</p> <p>The objective of the fair was to raise career aspirations and attainment, in addition to creating more awareness of alternative post 16 vocational options and career pathways available to students.</p>	March 2024	

The Council continues to work with employers and training providers to offer apprenticeships in other capacities and connect employers directly with schools to raise aspirations further. There is work ongoing to facilitate a visit to Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult in Stevenage for a cohort of students, with transport costs again funded by the Council.		
<b>Support productivity and prosperity in our rural areas through the allocation of grant funding from the Rural England Prosperity Funding</b>		
<p>All Rural England Prosperity Funding applications have been assessed and have been notified as to whether they have passed the threshold for acceptance.</p> <p>Year 1 projects have been sent grant agreements to sign and year 2 projects have been informed about their positions on the waiting list ahead of next year.</p>	March 2025	▶







### Actions carried out by Braintree District Council

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<b>Develop plans to sustainably close our budget gap by capitalising on commercial opportunities to increase our income stream and identifying a deliverable efficiencies programme</b>		
<p>Commercial group meetings have taken place quarterly throughout the considering commercial ideas, the pipeline of projects, and traded service performance with those leading these activities. This group reviews this activity and the commercial programme as a whole in line with the response to the scrutiny report on Commercialisation.</p> <p>The Investment and Capital Programme group meetings have been developed with monthly officer meetings taking place to review project progress, capital and revenue project performance and shared services. The Investment and Development Board and Capital Programme Boards are alternated each month for Councillors to review, support and challenge this activity.</p> <p>The review of services conducted by Commercial Gov identified a number of potential opportunities for the organisation. Primarily a review of fees and charges, where each service was considered with charges benchmarked against other Authorities, to consider where charges were out of alignment with other Authorities. Changes were made in fees and charges across a number of areas, resulting in an increase in income of £123,000, with a plan to develop this further.</p>	March 2024	✅

The review also identified opportunities for new business and increasing our existing business. Consideration will be given to the resource required to implement these recommendations as a part of the Fit for the Future Programme.		
<b>Develop an Asset Management Strategy to implement a more coherent approach to all property interests across the district</b>		
<p>The Council is working with CIPFA to produce an Asset Management Strategy, with supporting documents such as policy and action plan. The draft of the strategy is due to be delivered in May 2024, after which it will be presented to Cabinet for a decision to adopt the strategy.</p> <p>The target date has been amended from March to September, to allow review and approval of the strategy once the draft has been received.</p>	September 2024	
<b>Consider an operating model for residents and businesses to potentially subscribe to the garden waste collection service</b>		
<p>The garden waste collection service is now live with collections taking place. Over 35,000 residents signed up to the service, with 85% having taken advantage of the early-bird subscription offer.</p> <p>A second phase of this project will be developed next year to implement a resident portal, allowing residents to log in and pay for the renewal of their subscription into the 25/26 financial year.</p>	March 2024	
<b>Continue to develop our online and digital services to support changes in customer demand and expectations</b>		
<p>A further increase in My Account users was seen in the fourth quarter, taking the total number of users to over 3,550. This has allowed customers to access services online in a way which was not available previously, including quicker completion of online forms, progress saving of forms, and tracking completed forms. Additionally, the ability to subscribe to the garden waste collection service was included into this year's development.</p> <p>Functionality will continue to be improved into next year, with inclusion of Single Sign On integration for third party portals, mobile enhancements, push notifications and an improved online booking system.</p>	March 2024	
<b>Understand the impacts of the reforms to national planning policy and mainstreaming biodiversity net gain in the planning system</b>		
<p>Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has been implemented into the planning system, and the implications of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill are undergoing consultation and consideration at other legislative stages. Some changes have been enacted, but as many others require further consultation before implementation, a definitive end date for the bill cannot be put forward.</p> <p>The Council will await the outcomes of the consultations and other changes to be enacted and implement these accordingly as and when the details are made available.</p>	January 2024	
<b>Provide fit for purpose car parking machines across our car parks</b>		
The installation of the remaining 14 ticket machines across 7 car parks in Braintree and Witham is due to take place in mid-April. The project is anticipated to be completed ahead of schedule by the end of April.	March 2025	































## Actions carried out in partnership with others

Project description and comments	Target Date	Status
<b>Inform and influence negotiations with Government around a Greater Essex Devolution deal to ensure the benefits are felt locally for residents and businesses</b>		
Progress has been made towards agreeing a devolution deal for Greater Essex, where the Government confirmed that Greater Essex would enter into negotiations with the aim of agreeing a deal by the Autumn Budget Statement on 22 November 2023. Unfortunately a deal has not yet been agreed. The Government remains geared towards devolution, and whilst a deal is still yet to be agreed, the work completed together in Essex has forged strong partnerships and deepened our understanding around what is needed to improve outcomes in an array of policy areas. A new strategic partnership has been established across North Essex along with a commitment to resourcing our collaborative work.	November 2023	
<b>Deliver on the plan for North Essex Authorities to work more closely together on shared priorities and improving resilience</b>		
North Essex Councils (NEC)'s Chief Executive Officers and leaders have continued to meet to discuss the priorities for the programme this coming year. NEC has appointed a new Director, who once in post, will lead the work on delivering the programme in 2024/25.	March 2025	
<b>Drive forward Levelling Up for the district including the rural pilot with Essex County Council</b>		
The draft business case for the project has been received and senior leaders from Braintree District Council, Essex County Council and the NHS Integrated Care Service (ICS) have met to discuss the plan in detail.  Further discussion with the ICS have taken place in relation to on-going support and resources, whilst wider funding is considered within the business case.	March 2025	
<b>Review and adopt a new Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex</b>		
Following the public consultation on the strategy, the Essex Waste Delivery group reviewed the feedback and updated the strategy. It is anticipated that the strategy will be presented to Essex County Council's cabinet in June, and conditional to its adoption, will be presented to Braintree District Council Cabinet in July 2024.  The timeline for this project has been extended to reflect the reliance on Essex County Council's cabinet process to take place prior to our adoption of the strategy.	July 2024	

## Section 3: Managing the Business

### Our Performance Indicators in Detail

Performance Indicator	2023/24								
	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	Target for the Quarter	Status at the end of the Quarter	Yearly Outturn	Target for the end of the year	Status at the end of the year
CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES									
Number of affordable homes delivered	77	90	162	95	63		424	250	
Cumulative number of homes granted planning permission (outline and full)	119	173	253	305	796		305	796	
Comments: The submission of applications and therefore the rate of applications granted remains unpredictable. A further 52 applications were granted permission in the fourth quarter. The overall target for the year has been challenging, given changes in the market caused by cost-of-living issues (such as borrowing rates and build cost). Furthermore, the anticipated submission of some large applications to the Council have not yet been received. The planning department have been processing numerous speculative applications, however developers continue to be cautious given the current economic climate.									
ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT									
Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting	54.14%	53.88%	46.87%	41.44%	60%		49.08%	60%	
Comments: The fourth quarter result includes months where garden waste collection was still suspended, returning a lower result. It is hoped that with the new garden waste subscription collections running year round, a more consistent figure should be returned over the winter months in 2024/25. The 60% target is an ambitious target set the Essex Waste Partnership, and the target will be amended in 24/25 to reflect an achievable goal for Braintree.									
Kilograms of residual household waste collected per household	108kgs	108kgs	101kgs	111kgs	117kgs		424kgs	468kgs	
Number and percentage of accessible non-hazardous fly tips on public land cleared within 24 hours of being reported	100% (309)	100% (323)	100% (236)	100% (196)	100%		100% (1,064)	100%	
Number of residents assisted in installing energy saving measures	Annually reported						293	Data only	n/a
SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES									
Percentage of Disabled Facilities Grants approved within timescales.	95.35%	100%	94.64%	93.33%	80%		95.51%	80%	
Participation levels across all our sports centres (# of attendees)	177,126	204,842	168,300	172,071	162,194		769,007	653,292	
Participation of adults being active for 150 minutes per week	Annually reported						66.7%	Data only	n/a
Comments: There has been an increase of +3.6% compared to last year, and an increase of +16.6% to the baseline figure from 2015/16.									

Performance Indicator	2023/24								
	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	Target for the Quarter	Status at the end of the Quarter	Yearly Outturn	Target for the end of the year	Status at the end of the year
Number of customers using out Handyman scheme	79	69	84	85	Data only	n/a	317	Data only	n/a
Number of homelessness cases prevented	54	67	50	34	Data only	n/a	205	Data only	n/a
PROMOTING PROSPERITY									
Percentage of people in the district claiming out of work benefits rate (aged 16 – 64)	2.7%	2.7%	2.9%	2.9%	Data only	n/a	2.9%	Data only	n/a
Number of new business start-ups across the district	271	269	258	349	Data only	n/a	1,147	Data only	n/a
Number of businesses that have contacted us for business support	63	102	91	203	Data only	n/a	459	Data only	n/a
DELIVERING AND INNOVATING									
Percentage of calls resolved at first point of contact in the Customer Service Centre	64%	60%	56%	55%	70%		58%	70%	
The calls dealt with at first point of contact by customer services are falling short of their target, primarily due to the shifting of simple and straightforward calls to online channels leaving customer services to handle more complex calls requiring transfer to the relevant service area. In 2023/24, a total of 52,812 calls were dealt with at first point of contact out of a total of 90,373 calls into the service.									
Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days of receipt (cumulative)	98.50%	98.60%	98.28%	98.44%	98%		98.44%	98%	
Number of people transacting with us online	33,995	55,634	41,222	43,982	Data Only	n/a	174,833	Data Only	n/a
Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit new claims	17.13 days	16.31 days	15.47 days	16.18 days	18 days		16.27 days	18 days	
Time taken to process housing benefit claim changes	2.89 days	2.69 days	2.54 days	2.38 days	5 days		2.63 days	5 days	
Percentage of Stage 1 complaints responded to within 7 working days	88.61%	94.74%	91.96%	83.46%	90%		90.12%	90%	
Comments: An increase in complaints regarding the garden waste subscription service in March lead to a number of overdue complaints, which resulted in 13 out of 70 complaints responded to outside of 7 working days in the fourth quarter.									
Collection rate for Council Tax	30.50%	58.24%	83.81%	97.59%	97.71%		97.59%	97.71%	
Comments: Collection rate for the year was marginally below target. Performance was above the Essex average of 97.1% for the year.									
Collection rate for Business Rates	30.12%	55.37%	82.9%	98.13%	98.92%		98.13%	98.92%	
Comments: Late Valuation Office Rating List adjustments and review of small business rate relief increased the collectable amount in the final quarter impacting collection rate by around 0.4%. The actual rate achieved was higher than the Essex average of 97.75%									

## **Complaints**

The quarterly complaints analysis for the third quarter of 2023/24 is detailed below. This is compared with 2022/23 figures shown in brackets. The figures represent all three stages of the complaints process.

<b>Complaint Category</b>	<b>Q1 2023/24</b>	<b>Q2 2023/24</b>	<b>Q3 2023/24</b>	<b>Q4 2023/24</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Justified	43 (40)	95 (87)	56 (45)	64 (57)	258 (229)
Not Justified	23 (61)	40 (65)	35 (32)	41 (39)	139 (197)
Partially Justified	13 (27)	17 (15)	20 (28)	20 (29)	70 (99)
Not known	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1)	4 (0)	5 (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>79 (128)</b>	<b>152 (167)</b>	<b>112 (108)</b>	<b>129 (125)</b>	<b>472 (526)</b>

### **Comments:**

The fourth quarter saw a minor increase in complaints compared to the third quarter. In addition to complaints regarding missed bin collections, the Operations service saw complaints regarding the new garden waste subscription service following the start of the service in the fourth quarter. A small number of complaints were received for the Customer Service Centre, Governance and Environment.

This year there has been a 10% reduction in overall complaint numbers compared to the previous year. The total number of justified complaints has increased, and non-justified or partially-justified complaints decreased. This indicates that valid complaints are being recognised and remedied, whilst better information about our services and standards are better communicated to our residents.

In total for the year, three complaints escalated to stage 2 in 2023/24, with no complaints escalating to stage 3. This further indicates that we are effectively remedying complaints at the earliest stages of the complaints process.

### **A summary of Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases:**

One initial enquiry was received in February regarding noise nuisance and barking dogs caused by a neighbour. The matter was being dealt with and had not been considered as a formal complaint to the Council. The enquiry was closed by LGO in March as a premature complaint.

In total for the year, the Council received two complaints from the LGO, both of which were closed as premature complaints with neither having been presented to the Council to consider as formal complaints.



## **Our Organisation**

The following is a selection of our people performance measures:

<b>People: Indicators of Performance</b>	<b>Q1 23/24</b>	<b>Q2 23/24</b>	<b>Q3 23/24</b>	<b>Q4 23/24</b>	<b>Change on previous period</b>	<b>Yearly Target</b>
Total headcount	482	489	502	501	- 1	-
Total staff FTE	435.98	444.29	457.18	458.54	+ 1.36	-
Level of employee turnover	3.94%	1.84%	1.99%	3.39%	+ 1.4	-
Number of leavers	19	9	10	17	+ 7	-
Number of starters	15	16	23	16	- 7	-
Working days lost to sickness per employee*	1.34 days	1.73 days	5.87 days*	5.9 days*	+ 0.03 day	8.0 days
Percentage of staff with nil sickness	84.56%	68.30%	55.18%	48.7%	Cumulative	-
Number of learning hours	1078	617	751	833	+ 82	-
Number of delegates	200	235	347	379	+ 32	-
Number of apprentices **	19	20	20	21	+ 1	-

Year on Year Headcount Analysis	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	481	492	499	492	486	501

\* From the third quarter, the council has moved to reporting working days lost to sickness on a rolling 12 month basis, to allow a more meaningful comparison going forward.

\*\* BDC's apprenticeship programme runs throughout the year. The figures reflect various apprenticeships ranging from level 3 through to a degree level 6

## **Health & Safety**

The following is a selection of our health and safety performance measures. The data is for information purposes only.

Health and safety is a crucial responsibility of everyone within the organisation. This information is used to improve the management of health and safety of staff, our customers, residents and other non-employees we come into contact with. Monitoring is undertaken by the corporate health and safety committee and action plans will be put in place where necessary.

Health & Safety: Indicators of Performance	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Notes
	(2022/23 figure in brackets)				
Total number of reported accidents/ incidents, calculated from:	13 (13)	22 (5)	12 (15)	5 (13)	
Accidents/ incidents to employees	12 (12)	22 (5)	9 (15)	5 (13)	Accidents were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Slip/trip/fall.</li><li>• Moved bin door and hurt shoulder</li><li>• RIDDOR (explained below),</li><li>• nail from waste - cut chest,</li><li>• stood on black ice and slipped</li></ul>
Accidents/ incidents to contractors	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	
Accidents/ incidents to non-employees	1 (1)	0 (0)	3 (0)	0 (0)	
Time lost in days due to employee accidents/ incidents	14 (37)	9 (35)	45 (16)	19 (1)	RIDDOR makes up the 19 days. Fell from waste vehicle and cracked ribs
Number of reported verbal/ physical incidents to employees	1 (3)	4 (2)	2 (1)	5 (5)	Verbal abuse and violent behaviour make up the 5 incidents.
Number of near miss incidents	2 (1)	1 (1)	0 (2)	0 (0)	
Number of Accidents/ incidents registered resulting in insurance/ compensation claim	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)	
Number of claims settled	0 (4)	1 (0)	3 (1)	2 (1)	

## **Financial Performance - Fourth quarter and end of year position:**

### **Background**

Full Council agreed a budget of £17.5m in February 2023. During the year budgets may be updated in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure.

On 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Full Council approved a budget transfer of up to £600k between Treasury Management income and all service staffing budgets to offset the in-year additional cost of the April 2023 pay award settlement. Full Council also approved the allocation of up to £300k for the Council's own legal costs relating to appeals against the use of the former Wethersfield air base for an asylum centre, costs to be met from general balances. Costs awarded against the Council would be additional to the agreed spend limit.

A further presentational change was made to the budget to reflect the switch in government grants from specific service grants to Revenue Support Grant. This resulted in an updated budget amount of £17.6m for reporting purposes only.

### **Executive Summary**

The financial position for the year is as follows:

- **A net positive variance of £1.129m (after carry forwards)**, comprising overachieved income and underspends on staffing costs, partially offset by additional expenditure.
- The provisional outturn is being reviewed to ensure on-going variances have either been reflected in the 2024/25 budget or are taken into account when preparing for the 2025/26 budget and updating of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- An initial review of the savings and additional income indicates that c£1m included within the outturn position has already been reflected in the 2024/25 Budget. Further work is being undertaken including on the pressures that have impacted the position.
- The net change in the **General Fund unallocated balance** is an **increase of £459k**.
- **Capital spending** for the year totalled **£5.1m** including £1.6m on housing improvement and disabled facilities grants; with the balance spent on a mixture of community projects, planned property maintenance, investment into ICT infrastructure and systems, and acquisition of operational vehicles and equipment used in the delivery of front-line services.

## General Fund Revenue Spending

The table below shows the outturn for the year.

Business Plan Service	Updated Budget £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Total Variance £'000	Carry Forwards £'000	Net General Fund £'000	RAG Status
Asset Management	(2,819)	(2,557)	262	0	262	R
Community & Leisure	800	877	77	0	77	R
Corporate Management Plan	1,498	1,533	35	0	35	A
Economic Development	237	230	(7)	0	(7)	G
Environment	944	1,013	69	16	85	R
Finance	660	(689)	(1,349)	50	(1,299)	G
Governance	1,325	1,279	(46)	22	(24)	G
Housing Services	958	944	(14)	0	(14)	G
ICT & Facilities	2,045	1,879	(166)	0	(166)	G
Marketing & Communications	648	620	(28)	0	(28)	G
People & Performance	1,027	889	(138)	77	(61)	G
Operations	7,518	7,164	(354)	0	(354)	G
Strategic Investment	36	36	0	0	0	G
Sustainable Development	1,500	1,746	246	0	246	R
<b>Service Plan Total</b>	<b>16,377</b>	<b>14,964</b>	<b>(1,413)</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>(1,248)</b>	<b>G</b>
Corporate Financing	1,691	1,009	(682)	142	(540)	G
Wethersfield Legal Challenge	0	234	234	0	234	
Efficiency Savings Target	(425)	0	425	0	425	
<b>Net Total</b>	<b>17,643</b>	<b>16,207</b>	<b>(1,436)</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>(1,129)</b>	<b>G</b>

RAG Status: G = favourable or zero variance, A = up to 5% adverse variance or <£50k, R = > 5%

- **Efficiency & Income Allowance** – the budget includes an allowance of £300k for staffing and £125k for income to reflect that historically staffing costs are lower than budget due to in-year staffing changes; and fees & charges income has overachieved budgets.

## Main Changes from Q3

The main changes from the position reported at Q3 relate to the following factors:

**Treasury Management Income (+£209k)** - Cash balances remained significantly higher than forecast allowing for additional short-term investments. The return on the Council's Pooled Funds was higher in the final quarter than previously expected based on historical returns.

**Investment Property Income & Service Charges (+£136k)** – Income achieved from commercial, and property rent reviews increased including backdated adjustments. Services charges in respect of H120 allocated to the Council was lower than previously forecast.

**Sustainable Development (-£124k)** – Planning application income was lower than forecast due to a delay in several major applications that had been anticipated at Q3. These were received in the first quarter of 2024/25.

**Wethersfield Legal Challenge (+£156k)** – £300k has been allocated in respect of the Council's own legal costs relating to legal appeals against the Home Office on the use of the former Wethersfield air base for an asylum centre. To date, £234k has been incurred (£10k in 2022/23). Further costs are anticipated in 2024/25.

The table below breakdowns the Total Variance:

Business Plan Service	Salaries			Other Expenditure			Gross Income		
	Updated Budget	Actual	Variance	Updated Budget	Actual	Variance	Updated Budget	Actual	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Asset Management	594	509	(85)	1,088	1,359	271	(4,502)	(4,426)	76
Community & Leisure	998	1,002	4	1,019	1,054	35	(1,217)	(1,179)	38
Corporate Management	1,577	1,561	(16)	335	386	51	(414)	(414)	0
Economic Development	366	312	(54)	14	62	48	(142)	(143)	(1)
Environment	1,913	2,080	167	355	345	(10)	(1,324)	(1,412)	(88)
Finance	2,622	2,510	(112)	26,319	26,541	222	(28,281)	(29,740)	(1,459)
Governance	1,016	858	(158)	660	676	16	(352)	(256)	96
Housing Services	1,534	1,535	1	329	325	(4)	(905)	(916)	(11)
ICT & Facilities	1,009	925	(84)	1,040	958	(82)	(4)	(4)	0
Marketing & Communications	537	524	(13)	290	284	(6)	(180)	(189)	(9)
People & Performance	950	813	(137)	180	179	(1)	(103)	(103)	0
Operations	7,389	7,299	(90)	6,594	6,704	110	(6,465)	(6,839)	(374)
Strategic Investment	248	324	76	(148)	(153)	(5)	(64)	(135)	(71)
Sustainable Development	2,820	2,580	(240)	487	652	165	(1,808)	(1,487)	321
<b>Service Plan Total</b>	<b>23,573</b>	<b>22,832</b>	<b>(741)</b>	<b>38,562</b>	<b>39,372</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>(45,761)</b>	<b>(47,243)</b>	<b>(1,482)</b>
Corporate Financing	951	782	(169)	3,930	3,780	(150)	(3,190)	(3,553)	(363)
Wethersfield Legal Challenge	(300)	0	0	-	234	234	-	-	-
Efficiency Savings Target	(300)	0	300	0	0	0	(125)	0	125
<b>Net Total</b>	<b>24,224</b>	<b>23,614</b>	<b>(610)</b>	<b>42,492</b>	<b>43,386</b>	<b>894</b>	<b>(49,076)</b>	<b>(50,796)</b>	<b>(1,720)</b>

## Commentary on Main Service Variances (+Adverse/ -Positive)

### Asset Management

- Higher cost of interim management arrangements and additional surveyor to complete outstanding rent reviews (+£111k), however, these have been offset by a lower spend on staffing at the Plaza (-£196k).
- Victoria Square – additional site operating costs (+£113k) primarily due to unrecoverable service charges for void units, the bus park, and Eastlight service charge cap. Other costs include a backdated business rate adjustment and increased insurance premia. Reduced lease rent income due to void units (+£64k).
- Lower income from the Hatchery and Makerspace compared to the original business plan and increased estate costs (+£124k). Taking the underspend on staffing into account, the net position on the Plaza is positive variance of -£72k.
- Causeway House - £31k of reduced income due to un-let vacant space. Cost in relation to intervention at the PARC building in order to bring the property back into reasonable condition for re-occupation (+£30k)
- Additional cost of Industrial sites from back-dated rents paid that are sub-let (+£78k) & net increase in rental income from industrial units following rent reviews (-£84k).

### Corporate Management

- Cost of recruitment for the Head of Operations and Head of Planning roles £40k.

### Community and Leisure

- Casual bookings at the Town Hall lower than budget (+£38k) partly due to groups diverting to other venues. This is partially offset by an increase in wedding income (-£13k).



- Extra cost for interim strategic leisure support (+£48k)

## **Economic Development**

- Economic Development is part funded from reserves. The budget assumed £241k of reserves being used compared to the outturn position of £137k. The difference is reflected in a contra movement in earmarked reserves. The reason for the lower use of reserves was due to staffing underspends (-£58k) and underspends in other service related expenditure (-£46k). There was a further variance on expenditure incurred on Business Support activities (-£7k).

## **Environment**

- Building Control net additional agency staff costs incurred due to continuing difficulties in recruitment combined with a high service demand (+£220k), partially offset by additional income generated from new fees and charges schedule introduced for non-statutory ancillary building control services (-£33k).
- Net underspend from vacancies within Environmental Protection and Carbon Management Unit (-£60k)

## **Finance**

- Net underspend on employee costs due to vacancies, reduced hours and staffing starting at lower scale points than budget (-£112k).
- Local tax and housing benefit cost recoveries are lower than budget (+£93k). The cost-of-living is considered to be impacting recovery as most of the liabilities relate to low-income households.
- External audit fees in relation to housing benefit subsidy claim (+£37k).
- Housing benefits net cost of benefits paid (+£155k) – due to an increasing number of claimants in temporary/ bed & breakfast type accommodation used by Housing; and higher rents charged in supported housing schemes.
- Unbudgeted new burdens funding in relation to DWP grants and Energy Rebates / Household support payments (-£85k).
- Treasury Management investment income due to higher interest rates / cash balances (-£1.2m). The variance is against the updated budget after the virement approved by Full Council. Dividends from Pooled fund investments exceeded budget (-£221k).

## **Governance**

- Difficulties with recruitment in legal services led to underspends in the first half of the year (-£159k), partially offset by extra costs incurred via the Local Legal Partnership (LLP) where capacity was provided (+£28k).
- Land charges income from residential searches is lower than budget (+£74k) which reflects the slowdown in housing activity; however, this is partially offset from extra income from commercial searches and a reduction in payments to ECC (-£18k) for their input to searches.

## **ICT & Facilities**

- Corporate ICT systems maintenance (-£54k) and staffing variances (-£51k).
- Causeway House maintenance is overspent (+£42k) whilst energy costs have been lower than budget (-£84k).

## **Operations**

- Net saving on staffing costs due to vacancies (Net -£90k).
- Waste Management and Street Cleansing expenditure is higher due to additional vehicle hire and maintenance costs, partially offset by a combination of a reduction in the market price of diesel; less tonnages of material collected; diversion of waste disposal to

alternative site from Cordons Farm; and lower costs in relation to the Bartec in-cab system (Net +£165k)

- Other expenditure variances across Operations (+£41k) include: provision for additional dilapidation costs at Unit 4 (£35k); lower cost of the replacement of recycling caddies (-£24k); and non-achievement of saving from transfer of community assets (£21k).
- A reduction in income from dry recycling material due to a combination of less tonnage being collected and sharp fall in market price has been offset by higher income from glass where market prices remain higher than allowed in the budget (-£94k).
- Increase in income due to higher demand for the bulky waste collection service (-£61k) and trade waste (-£32k).
- ECC recycling credits are lower due to reduced tonnage being collected (+£58k).
- Increase in waste management income under the Inter-Authority Agreement from ECC (-£80k) due to annual inflationary adjustment from ECC.
- Income from Interments and other related cemetery income is higher and related expenditure (-£73k)
- Horticultural & Plant Workshop additional income (-£36k) from external contracts following a re-pricing exercise.
- Green Waste Charging net income from the new subscription service which started in early March 2024 (-£95k). Increased in credits from ECC due to additional green tonnage (-£31k)
- Car parking income variance (-£30k) reflecting usage continuing to improve with income offsetting the delay in the implementation of the new parking tariffs. Running and maintenance costs are higher including the statutory Parking Order (total £51k).

### **People and Performance**

- Staffing and other variances largely due to recruitment delays, offset by agreed carry-forward (-£61k).

### **Sustainable Development**

- Staffing variance due to current vacancies within the service in relation to the enforcement roles (-£142k)
- Additional costs from external contractors and ECC to cover staff shortages in Landscape services, consultancy, and reactive tree maintenance (+£161k) partially offset by vacancies within the service (-£67k)
- Overall, planning income underachieved by £323k. A shortfall of planning application income (+£419k) after making allowance for the recent uplift in statutory fees by government. At the third quarter, several major applications were expected to be received in the year; however, a number of these were delayed and received in the new financial year. Planning Performance Agreement has exceeded budget by (-£164k), partially offset by lower Pre-application income (+£70k).

### **Corporate Financing**

- Council Tax Sharing Agreement – Council Tax collection performance for the Council and across other Essex authorities was better than the agreement baseline leading to an increase in share-back from preceptors (-£393k).
- Staff time charged to capital projects from service project managers is less than the budget allowed (+£40k).
- The Council's higher cash position resulted in delaying the need to externally borrow and instead use internal cash balances leading to a saving on interest costs. combined with a reduction in the Minimum Revenue Provision required (-£385k).
- The provision for corporate debt has increased (+£252k).

## Wethersfield

- The Council's own legal costs relating to appeals against the former Wethersfield air base for an asylum centre for 2023/24 was £182k (£10k spent in 2022/23). Further costs are anticipated in the 2024/25 year out of the £300k previously agreed allocation. Third part costs currently stand at £52k.

## Capital Programme

Current capital programme totals £14.6m of which £7.8m was profiled into 2023/24:

	Budget Profiled 23/24 £000	Actual Spend 23/24 £000	In-year Variance 23/24 £000	Slippage (-or deduction from future budget) £000	Remaining Variance 23/24 £000
Horizon 120 Business Park infrastructure	501	263	238	-238	0
Horizon 120 - The Plaza	282	29	253	-253	0
Manor Street regeneration	142	35	107	-107	0
Witham Community Centre	200	75	125	-125	0
Town Centre improvements	619	43	576	-576	0
Industrial estate improvements	46	24	21	-21	0
Property planned maintenance	473	346	127	-116	11
Information technology systems & equipment	802	563	239	-239	0
Community facilities, play areas, parks & open spaces	1,088	669	419	-417	2
Cemetery improvements	95	93	2	0	2
Paths, cycleways, and other infrastructure	77	62	16	-16	0
Operational equipment	1,119	877	242	-217	25
Sports and leisure facilities improvements	343	75	268	-268	0
Climate change initiatives	101	0	101	-101	0
Shared / Rural Prosperity Fund	180	31	149	-149	0
Housing renovation & disabled facilities grants	1,427	1,627	-199	179	-21
Capital salaries	351	337	14	0	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,846</b>	<b>5,149</b>	<b>2,697</b>	<b>-2,665</b>	<b>32</b>

### Programme summary.

- Totals spend for the year was £5.1m against a profiled budget of £7.8m, resulting in a net variance of £2.7m.
- The updated programme and spend reflects the capitalised costs of recently acquired sweepers as part of the vehicle replacement programme (£645k) the longer-term financing of which is to be finalised e.g. by leasing or similar credit arrangement; and IT spending funded from revenue contributions (£91k).
- Additional S106 monies have been agreed for Witham Town Park improvements (£75k).
- Programme slippage into 2024/25 is £2.7m.
- The overall programme variance was a £32k underspend.

### Capital resources generated.

- Eastlight Agreements: Right-to-Buy sales – 7 sales were completed, generating £735k (in 2022/23 10 sales were completed resulting in £1.6m); and VAT shelter £389k.
- Better Care Funding received of £1.2m which has been used to fund expenditure on disabled facilities grants.
- Capital grants received from the Shared Prosperity Fund (£33k) and Rural Prosperity Fund (£148k).
- Additional funding of £642k was received from SELEP for the Horizon 120 Plaza building – funding is conditional and has been used to reduce the overall project borrowing requirement.
- Other receipts totalling £170k.

## **Treasury Management**

### **Investment activity**

The Council's treasury management activity to the end of the year third quarter is summarised in the table below:

Amount Invested at start of the year	Activity for the year		Amount Invested at end of March
	New Investments	Investments Matured	
£47.1m	£124.3m	£114.5m	£56.9m
Average amount invested for the year to date			£68.0m
Highest amount invested in the year to date			£77.3m

Investments totalling £19m were maintained across a range of long-term pooled funds with varying exposures to property, equities, and other financial assets. The remaining balance of investments have been held in short-term investments comprising money market funds; Debt Management Office Account (UK Government); bank deposits; and liquid cash held in a current account with Lloyds Bank.

Dividend income earned for the year was £1m and interest on short-term investments was £2.4m, a total of £3.4m, equivalent to an annualised return of 5.06%.

The market value of shares and units in long-term pooled funds at the end of the quarter was £21.2m, representing an unrealised gain of £2.2m over the amount originally invested.

### **Investment portfolio**

At the end of the year the Council's investment portfolio comprised the following:

- Long-term pooled fund investments £19m (allocated: £3m property fund; £13m across four equity funds; and £3m in two diversified asset funds)
- Low volatility Money Market Funds (MMFs) (5 x £5m) £25m
- Variable net asset value MMF £4m
- Short Term Fixed Deposits £7.5m
- Lloyds current account £1.4m

## **General Fund Balances**

General Fund balances are held for the following reasons:

- As a contingency against unforeseen events
- To meet short-term or non-recurrent one-off costs that are not provided in the base budget and/ or are incurred to achieve future savings and efficiencies.

Based on the outturn set out above, the net movement on the General Fund balances is an addition of £459k:

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Balance at 1 April 2023</b>	<b>8,093</b>
Addition/(deductions):	
Budgeted reduction	(644)
Funding for one-off investment / costs	(206)
Carry-Forward balance from 22/23 / Prior Year Adj.	180
Outturn variance (net carry forwards)	1,129
<b>Sub-total Net Change</b>	<b>459</b>
<b>Balance at 31 March 2024</b>	<b>8,552</b>

Movements shown on the General Fund balance include:

- The Budget for the year was approved based on using balances of £644k
- One-off investment costs include a contribution towards the operating costs of the Plaza £121k and Green Waste Service implementation £85k
- Unused Carry-forwards requests from 2022/23 returned to balances and a prior year adjustment, total of £180k