



First Quarter Performance Management Report

1st April to
30th June 2024



Braintree
District Council

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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 first quarter of 2024/25 in relation to our Annual Plan 2024/25. 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 2024 – 2028. 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 quarter

Corporate Priorities	Status of projects and actions				
					
Communities	-	13	2	-	-
Prosperity	1	12	1	-	-
Environment	-	13	1	-	-
TOTAL	1	38	4	-	-




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 quarter

Status of indicators			
			Data Only
9	2	6	4

KEY:

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

Summary Position

The performance in the first quarter is broadly in line with expectations with the majority of projects now underway and progressing well. 38 projects are on track at the end of the first quarter.

One project completed in the first quarter, where the Green Business Expo was delivered in June.

Four projects have an amber status. The reasons for amber status are: delays in obtaining street-works licences in relation to the Witham and Halstead Town Centre Improvements, delays incurred by our NHS partners in developing the Thriving Places Index, challenges identifying a delivery partner for community walking activities, and a delay to the adoption of the Essex Waste Strategy due to the Parliamentary Election.

Further information regarding the completed, on track and amber statuses can be seen within the detail for the respective projects.

Nine performance indicators have met or exceeded target and eight have not met target. For the performance indicators that have not met target, two have missed target by less than 5% and six have missed target by more than 5%.

Collections for Council Tax and percentages of invoices paid on time missed target by less than 5%.

The following indicators missed target by more than 5%: Number of affordable homes delivered, number of visitors to our leisure centres, kilograms of residual waste per household, percentage of calls resolved at first point of contact, time taken to process housing benefit claim changes, and percentage of stage one complaints dealt with in timescales.

Further details of all performance indicator out turn can be found in the 'Performance Indicators in detail' section of the report.



Section 2: Delivering our Corporate Strategy

Communities

Priority 1: Improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life for individuals and families and reduce health inequalities focusing on prevention and early intervention

1.1 - Working with the Mid-Essex Alliance, develop a programme of local activities targeted towards addressing the priorities outlined in the Thriving Places Index. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) are leading the phase-two development of the Thriving Places Index. A date has been set in July to start to move this work forward with the Mid Essex Alliance partners where next steps will be agreed. Due to existing pressures in the health system the Mid Essex Alliance have been slow to mobilise the partnership to develop the next phase of the Thriving Places Index. Braintree District Council have offered to support with this and continue to work within the timelines and parameters of the partnership.

1.2 - Continue to support residents and communities impacted by the cost-of-living crisis through initiatives raised by the £1m new homes bonus. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Council has reached out to all Parish Councils to identify further opportunities to extend the Community Supermarket offer. Funds have been allocated to purchase period products for people in need whilst facing homelessness. Products will be available from Causeway House with awareness posters for customers on how to request assistance discretely. Anglian Water have agreed to provide free water saving items at community events including; low flow shower and garden hose heads, water saving garden planting kits and water saving bath accessories for babies. The Council is also exploring the opportunity to fund subsidised gym and swimming sessions at Fusion Leisure Centres across the district.

1.3 - Subject to a successful bid for funding from the Football Foundation, build the new 3G Pitch at Witham Sports Ground. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Council has submitted its bid for the new 3G pitch and is waiting to hear back the results of the bid from the Football Foundation in July, after which delivery of the new pitch can begin.

1.4 - In partnership with Healthwatch Essex, host a Fellas Fair event in the district. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Fellas Fair event aims to encourage open discussions and raise awareness surrounding mens' health issues, providing a platform for men to engage with health and care professionals in a supportive environment with guest speakers throughout the event. Meetings have been scheduled between Braintree District Council and Healthwatch Essex to progress and plan this event.

Priority 2: Provide affordable, high quality and safe homes that meet the needs of our residents

2.1 - Deliver the Home Upgrade grant phase 2 for people living in cold homes or struggling with winter fuel bills. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The first quarter mailout has identified a further 200 households to engage with. A further mailout is planned for later in the year. The Council has a target of 177 referrals by March 2025, and at the end of the first quarter there have already been 128 referrals. 9 homes are currently under survey, two are awaiting works to commence, three are in progress and one home upgrade has already been completed.



2.2 - Introduce a landlord incentive scheme. End date: March 2025

- ▶ A pilot Landlord Incentive and Tenancy Sustainment Scheme launched in November 2023 and continues to be evaluated. Between April and June 2024 six households were supported to maintain their existing privately rented accommodation or secure new privately rented accommodation. In total since the start of the pilot scheme, 15 households have been supported to the same outcome.

Priority 3: Reduce social isolation and loneliness and support communities to build positive social networks and connections.

3.1 - Launch round 2 of the Halstead Community Fund. End date: December 2024

- ▶ The round 2 award completed in the first quarter with three organisations receiving funds. Halstead Town Football Club received £56,116.80 to contribute towards the upgrade of floodlights to LED lighting, saving energy and reducing maintenance. Halstead Town Football Club was awarded £51,375 for the purchase of pitch maintenance equipment. Holy Trinity Primary School received £26,896 for an all-weather shelter within the playground. Following the successful completion of round 2, £70,000 remains in the fund and work has already begun towards arranging a further round of applications for early autumn.

3.2 - Continue to work with partners to deliver various activities and initiatives supporting people experiencing loneliness or social isolation. End date: March 2025

- ▶ To mark Loneliness Awareness Week, three pop up longues were arranged with one each in Braintree, Halstead and Witham on 18 - 20 June. The Salvation Army Donation Centre provided furniture, delivering and collecting it on each day free of charge. Members of the Community Services Team along with representatives from United in Kind, Carers First and other members of the Braintree District Social Isolation and Loneliness Forum had conversations with over 160 people across the 3 days. The next meeting of the Braintree District Social Isolation and Loneliness group is scheduled for July.

3.3 - Award contract and start to build Witham Community Centre. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The design and construction tender is underway and is due to conclude at the end of July. A contract for reptile migration and fencing installation has already been awarded.

3.4 - Provide a Community Garden through funding from the Changing Futures Programme. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Braintree Community Garden at the Rec was completed in April and a drop in session took place in May for local partners and service users to see the space. An official launch took place at the end of May with attendees from The Council, Wilderness Foundation UK, Braintree Recreation and Cressing Temple Community Shed. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is being applied to for a grant agreement to deliver sessions for adults with complex needs throughout 2024/25, with the first sessions having already taken place in June.



3.5 - Support and expand community-led walking activities to 10 in the district.

End date: March 2025

- ▲ The aim of community-led walks is to reduce social isolation and loneliness and improve overall physical and mental wellbeing of residents. The Council is working on a business case with Intelligent Health to set up a 'Beat the Street' mass participation walking programme in the district in which participants are incentivised to visit landmarks and key destinations around the district in return for points and prizes. The council is also working to secure a new delivery partner for existing events, as the existing delivery partner is no longer able to fulfil this. As a result, until the future of those events can be secured, the project is marked as amber.

Priority 4: Develop safer and more resilient communities empowering residents to take ownership of local projects and initiatives

4.1 - Through the safer streets funding, prevent violence against women and girls in public, neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour in Halstead. End date: September 2025

- ▶ Essex Police and Braintree District Council engaged with young people at the Essex Police 999 boys and girls football tournament in June gathering their views and feedback, and a further engagement event took place at Halstead Leisure Centre as a part of the 20th anniversary event. A range of local partners attended the J9 Domestic Abuse awareness training that took place in May. The outreach sports programme saw over 750 attendees in the first quarter with activities ranging from self defence, to dance and yoga. The enhanced education programme concluded with 12 students celebrating the completion of the course having benefitted from money management, food safety, first aid and employability courses.

4.2 - Continue to administer the Councillor Community Grant Scheme. End date: March 2025

- ▶ A total of 20 grants to the amount of £13,139 has been awarded in the first quarter. A grant of £300 was awarded to the Great Yeldham Men's Shed for the hire of a mini digger to clear ground. Notley Green Community Association received a grant of £670 to purchase items for use at their new Repair Café where people can drop in to have broken household items fixed that would otherwise be destined for landfill.

4.3 - Oversee the coordination of the Community Safety Action Plan to increase awareness of child exploitation, domestic abuse, fraud and cybercrime. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Community Safety Action Plan is delivered in partnership with numerous other organisations in the district, including Essex Police, Fire and Rescue, Essex County Council and Eastlight Community Homes. A monitoring report is being prepared to capture partner activity across the first quarter and will be completed in August. During the first quarter, Braintree District Council has delivered four child exploitation awareness training sessions to staff and partners, secured funding for Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) and Violence Against Women and Girls operations with Essex Police, carried out five ASB case reviews, supported Essex Police to deliver two 999 football tournaments and delivered a social media campaign during the European Football Championship around domestic abuse.

4.4 - Continue to support local investment in communities through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (year 3). End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Council continues to explore options to deliver local investment and community resilience, and is working with various providers to develop a programme. Anglia Ruskin University have been delivering Social Spark in other areas of the county, which focuses on building community resilience, and The Council has met with them to discuss how this would look for the Braintree District.

Prosperity



Priority 1: Ensure district growth is sustainable and accessible with strong connectivity and infrastructure

1.1 - Deliver physical improvements to Halstead and Witham Town centres. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The application for street works licences with Essex County Council (ECC) was finalised in June, and has taken longer than expected which has caused a delay in the project timeline. This delay has been exacerbated by a need to include applications for retrospective licenses for some existing street furniture. All applications have now been submitted and approved. Following the approval of the street works licences a revised scope of works will be confirmed by mid-July. The lead in time for the landscape works is 6-8 weeks which will be from mid-July to early-September. Modelling for the proposed road layout changes will occur between the beginning of August and end of September. This will be followed by the landscape construction works between mid-September and mid-January 2025. **As a result, the project target date has been extended to March 2025.**

1.2 - Work with communities to implement neighbourhood plans in Steeple Bumpstead, Hatfield Peverel and Earls Colne. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Neighbourhood Plan for Steeple Bumpstead is undergoing examination. Hatfield Peverel's plan is awaiting approval for a referendum, and the plan for Earls Colne is currently awaiting regulation 16 submission which allow the Council to publicise the plan.

1.3 - Revise the Local Plan in line with recent changes to National Planning Policy Framework. End date: June 2025

- ▶ The 'call for sites' has completed, which invited developers to identify sites within the district for future growth. The evidence base to support the plan is in production. Committee Meetings regarding the progress of the Local Plan revision are due to take place in September and October.



1.4 - Develop an affordable housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

End date: December 2024

- ▶ Approval of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination Statement for the SPD is due to take place in August, following which the document will be put to consultation.

1.5 - Develop a design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). End date: June 2025

- ▶ The timeline for the design SPD is being developed and will be finalised in the second quarter. Work has begun to prepare for the initial consultation where the high-level themes and scope will be established, which is due to take place in September and is the first key milestone in the project.

Priority 2: Attract and support growth, providing high quality employment opportunities in high growth sectors and industries

2.1 - Develop the Council's inward investment activity in association with the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB). End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Action Plan was presented to and accepted by the NEEB board on 12 June, including numerous activities to coordinate young start-ups and young entrepreneurs, securing further research and development investments, convening local business support organisations, and promoting green potential. Work will now begin to procure these services.

2.2 - Create an additional meeting area and multi-media space at the Plaza. End date: September 2024

- ▶ The Council have reviewed the options available for the space at The Plaza and agreement is being sought to purchase and install meeting pods which can be used for private meetings or recording. Space for additional offices has also been identified, and work is being scoped to begin the conversion process.

2.3 - Provide planning permission for the remaining plots at Horizon 120. End date: October 2024

- ▶ The planning application for Plot 5 has been submitted, and is due to be presented to the Planning Committee in the second quarter. Planning applications for Plots 6, 7 and 8 are currently being reviewed.

2.4 - Confirm the viability of the Council delivering the enterprise site at Witham.

End date: December 2024

- ▶ A new cost estimate for one of the options for the site has been drafted and consideration of this estimate will take place into the second quarter.



Priority 3: Provide tailored business support and access to funding to help businesses thrive and innovate

3.1 - In association with the North Essex Economic Board, provide business support services focused on enhancing digital skills, financial management and business growth. End date: March 2025

- ▶ In the first quarter the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) saw continued engagement and uptake from businesses. 20 businesses received some form of financial support (excluding grants), 146 received non-financial support. 20 businesses adopted new technologies or processes. 10 jobs were created and 15 safeguarded, and a total of 10 training courses were delivered. Liaison continues between all five Councils forming NEEB to identify specific needs of businesses in these areas. NEEB is also working with the Greater Essex Careers Hub to develop activities with schools across the area, as well as with DWP activities with the self-employed and HMP Chelmsford.

3.2 - Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, deliver a Green Business Expo. End date: June 2024

- ✔ The Green Business Expo took place in June at The Plaza. 17 exhibitors and 12 guest speakers presented to 33 businesses across the day covering various themes to support businesses towards Net Zero. Topics included skills, e-transport, case studies and funding opportunities. 94% of exhibitors found the day useful and would be interested in future events. 72% of attendees stated they would be taking action as a result of the expo, 50% indicated they would be upskilling or training staff, and 26% stated they would employ a new form of energy or a decarbonisation plan.

3.3 - Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, deliver a Digital Business Expo. End date: October 2024

- ▶ The Enhance Digital Skills showcase has been organised to take place over two days in September and October. The September event will focus on residents, and the October event aimed at businesses. The residents' event has already been booked to capacity.

Priority 4: Develop skills that are attractive to employers and support residents to access opportunities to improve their economic well-being

4.1 - Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, deliver a green skills programme. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The tender process is currently underway to find a provider to deliver the programme, with an award anticipated in the second quarter.

4.2 - Organise and deliver a jobs fair in the district. End date: October 2025

- ▶ The Jobs Fair has been booked to take place at Queen's Hall, Halstead on 2 November in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions. Work is ongoing to develop the strategy to deliver the event.



Environment

Priority 1: Ensure district growth is sustainable and accessible with strong connectivity and infrastructure

1.1 - Enhance the play areas at Meadowside in Braintree, and Oxford Meadow in Sible Hedingham. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The tender process is underway and was released at the end of June. The Council is awaiting responses from potential contractors for the project.

1.2 - Develop a renewable energy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). End date: December 2024

- ▶ The Renewable Energy Supplementary Planning Document is being drafted by planning officers ahead of the next stages of review and consultation.

1.3 - Upgrade the skateparks at Spa Road in Witham and Weavers Park in Braintree. End date: October 2024

- ▶ The Ramsey Road skatepark was completed and opened on 28 June, with the play area expected to complete by the end of July. Construction work has begun at Weavers Park, with the old ramps having been dismantled. The work at Spa Road is due to commence in August.

1.4 - Revise The Council's Tree Strategy. End date: March 2025

- ▶ A management protocol for The Council's tree stock has been developed. It sets out the methodology for assessing risk and defining the details of what is recorded and stored as part of a tree inspection. The document will be used by officers going forward and will form a working part of the revised tree strategy.

Priority 2: Continue to deliver a cohesive and integrated response to climate change adaptation and mitigation

2.1 - Develop a local Air Quality Strategy. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The Council has compiled evidence on air quality in the district, continues to monitor air quality across the district, and attends the regular Essex Air Quality Working Group. The Working Group are investigating whether it would be suitable to create an Essex Wide Air Quality Strategy in partnership and background research for this is underway. The Council will attend the next Working Group meeting in July to hear the outcome of a potential Essex Air Quality Strategy, after which The Council will decide whether to progress with a district strategy or support an Essex Wide Strategy.

2.2 - Procure 14 Electric Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs). End date: September 2024

- ▶ The order for the new Electric Light Commercial Vehicles has been placed, and delivery is anticipated in the second quarter. In the meantime, work has been scheduled for July to install the infrastructure to support electric vehicle charging, and livery designs for the electric fleet are being worked on.



2.3 - Install solar panels at Witham Leisure Centre. End date: March 2025

- ▶ A Project Initiation Document has been completed for the project and site visits have taken place. The roof has been assessed, there is capacity for more solar panels than first anticipated. A roof condition survey shows that there are only minor remedial works which need to be undertaken. The car park has been inspected to understand any site limitations of the solar array. The Sustainability Team have met with the Planning Department and it has been decided that, although this is within permitted development guidelines, the Council will review if a Lawful Development Certificate for the works upon completion is necessary. The Sustainability Team are now starting the procurement process to award contracts.

2.4 - Take part in establishing a Climate and Environment Partnership and work programme across the North Essex Councils. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The first three meetings of the North Essex Climate Partnership took place across the first quarter. All nine partners were asked to present on their own Climate Strategies and their reporting methodology as well as key opportunities and challenges. Numerous opportunities for collaboration were identified across shared skills and resources, policy collaboration, joint messaging, joint procurement and community support. The next meeting is due to be held in August and a range of potential topics was shared for feedback on their priority for Councillors.

Priority 3: Support residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and be more resilient to climate related impacts

3.1 - Allocate funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support at least ten Community Infrastructure initiatives in relation to decarbonisation. End date: April 2025

- ▶ The application stage for the Community Infrastructure Grant closed on 14 June. The Council received 11 applications for a total of £107,036.26. On first review, all applicants are eligible for the grant award and officers are currently reviewing each application in detail; reviewing applications against UK Shared Prosperity Fund guidance. Once the applications have been thoroughly reviewed, a report will be submitted for review and approval.

3.2 - Deliver a campaign to encourage motorists around schools to switch off their engines when stationary outside schools. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The campaign toolkit is now live and available to schools via the Council website. In addition to teaching materials, including an assembly presentation and lesson plans, posters and targeted communications for parents and carers were also provided. The campaign linked to the Essex County Council School Travel Plan accreditation scheme, who will provide support to individual schools where it is requested. All eligible schools were contacted tying the campaign in with Clean Air Day on 20 June. Further collaboration with the Communities Team is planned to explore ways to encourage engagement with schools, including teacher workshops to highlight the importance of the issues.



Priority 4: Improve the way that we manage waste and encourage residents and businesses to reduce, reuse and recycle more

4.1 - Collaborate with other Essex Authorities to establish and adopt a new Waste Strategy for Essex. End date: July 2024

- ▲ The Cabinet report was to be presented to Cabinet at the 1 July meeting. However, as a result of the pre-election period for the Parliamentary Election, Essex County Council have delayed their adoption and therefore Braintree District Council's adoption will be delayed until the next Cabinet meeting in September.

4.2 - Work with other authorities, including Essex County Council, to develop and deliver waste minimisation and recycling initiatives that deliver on the requirements of Waste Reforms and the Essex Waste Strategy. End date: March 2026

- ▶ Meetings have taken place with key stakeholders to establish the baselines required for options to be formed ready for presentation in the coming months. The sub-project groups are set up and starting to collate data and commence early project work. The proposals will soon start to make their way through key officer boards, anticipating presentation to Cabinet in November, and ensuring compliance for March 2025 for businesses and March 2026 for households

4.3 - Develop a waste Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). End date: December 2024

- ▶ Operations are currently reviewing the Waste Supplementary Planning Document, to ensure that the guidelines laid out for developers support the operational requirements of our Operations Team. Once approval is given the document will go out to consultation.

4.3 - Deliver a behaviour change campaign to increase recycling, reduce waste and encourage reuse. End date: March 2025

- ▶ The campaign is in the research stage to identify possible approaches and select the most effective. A page is being written for Contact Magazine, which is due to be delivered across the district in September.

Climate Change Action Plan



Introduction

In Quarter 1 2024-25 the 2024-25 Climate Action Plan was finalised for presentation to Councillors.

In April 2024, changes to the Council's Cabinet welcomed Cllr Diana Garrod as deputy portfolio holder to Cllr Tom Cunningham, leading on Climate Change and several briefings have taken place to update Cllr Garrod on progress to date.

The North Essex Climate Partnership met, and all local authorities made a short presentation on the status of climate action within their own council. Further collaborative opportunities were discussed.

Officers attended a development course on greenhouse gas emissions reporting and are considering how this can inform future annual reporting.

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

Resources

Media channels featured World Refill Day with a promotional case study on social media and in the Environment Newsletter on Ecolnes Refillery, which also stocks locally produced food. Case studies were featured on social media on the Greenstead Green Farm village shop and for three local vineyards on our Visit Braintree District social media channel, for English Wine Week. The Council continued with promotion of the street markets, which sell local produce, and the Shop Local campaign.

Working parties have been created to look at behaviour change around bulky waste and fly-tipping. An initial meeting has taken place and those that attended were asked which group they preferred to sit on. Officers will sit in on both the bulky waste group and the fly-tipping group and initial meetings are planned for early July.

Preparation work continues for the Waste Strategy for Essex - the project is now at the stage for each partnership council to take adoption decisions which are targeted to take place over the summer period.

169 members of desk-based staff have now completed the online training course on climate change.

Energy Conservation

Final confirmation was received for the allocation of £375,350 from the Central Government's Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund which supports the reduction in running costs and carbon emissions for swimming pool facilities (see below). £64,500 has been allocated for the replacement of the current lighting throughout Witham Leisure Centre for LED lighting, with an estimated carbon reduction of 25.5 tonnes annually. A Project Initiation Document has been written and a draft specification document is reaching completion. The Council will invest £137,197 of funds from the Climate Reserve on a solar canopy for the car park and £311k of Sport England Funds will be invested in solar photovoltaic panels for the canopy structure as well as some additional solar pv panels for the rooftop of the Leisure Centre. This has an estimated carbon reduction of at least 25 tonnes. Work will be completed by 31st March at the latest.

The Council have actively been auditing gas, electricity and water meters across the Estate and this will continue into the year ahead.

The Council have identified which meters are analogue and will require replacing with AMR (Automatic Meter Recognition) meters and will schedule this works to be completed before they will no longer be functional.

An audit of the current streetlighting owned and managed by the Council is still underway. A specification for the tender has been drafted. Once the results of the asset audit are received, the tender process will begin.

The asset audit has highlighted that land transferred to BDC via Section 106 agreements also includes some lampposts which should be incorporated into the appendices for this tender.

Officers have discussed the opportunities for replacement LED lamp heads supplied by Essex County Council with the Highways Team. More up-to-date details have been supplied and promotion of this is scheduled for after the pre-election period.

Built Environment

The application screen on the HUG 2 Warmworks website has been updated to better filter out those applicants that would not be eligible to both avoid disappointment and work on non-viable leads. A recent Essexwide mailout has generated over 200 additional leads so far. A further mailout will take place once datasets have been reviewed. Doorstep engagement activity by the managing agent Warmworks of targeted households/properties that are known to be eligible has been delayed until 8th July. There have been 146 referrals to date.

Applications closed for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Community Infrastructure Grant on 14 June. The Council received eleven applications with a total value of £107,036.26. Every application is from an eligible local organisation and all applications demonstrate at least a 5% carbon reduction. Officers have analysed each application against a comprehensive scoring matrix, based on UKSPF criteria and a delegated decision report has been created for the portfolio holder. An initial grant agreement has been created.

Transport

The Council attended the Essex County Council webinar on on-street charging infrastructure on 21 May. ECC have identified two locations in Braintree district for installing on-street charging - Church Street, Coggeshall and Rickstones Road Witham. ECC will be submitting their final LEVI bid submission by 19 July 2024 and ECC are hoping to make the first installations of new on-street charging points in July-August 2024.

As part of the £8.38m Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund, ECC are hoping to install hundreds of charging points with approximately 80% of these being on-street.

Following the parish council consultations, which the Council promoted to our own parish councils, 51 responses were secured across Essex. ECC are currently reviewing these for their feasibility and will inform parish councils of their decisions in due course. These will be on a 15 year concessionary rate.

This year, Central Government released the Charge Point grant which offers a grant of up to £350 to residents who already have a cross pavement solution in place. The Council were advised to signpost resident queries on this through to ECC.

The Council's Anti Idling campaign was launched on the Climate Change webpages as a comprehensive resource pack targeting teachers. A link to this pack was sent to every school within the district and Officers are discussing further ways to engage schools with this campaign, including a potential workshop for teachers to link with green travel. The project will be measured by the amount of pledges received by

families of school children and schools will be awarded a digital badge if the Council received 25 or more pledges.

Four new electric taxis were introduced to the fleet which equates to 4.5% of the entire fleet (not including private hire vehicles). A press release for this was delayed due to the pre-election period and is scheduled for July.

Business and the Green Economy

Essex County Council ran the Smarter Travel for Essex Network (STEN), a group of workplaces across the county who share best practice and opportunities in terms of supporting sustainable travel to work. As it stands the only Braintree member is the district council itself. In addition, ECC are often required to comment on travel plans submitted to the planning department. In 2023-2024, only one travel plan came through for Braintree, an industrial unit in Witham.

ECC also support schools to develop their School Travel Plans (STP). Whilst they're not businesses as such, they are workplaces, and ECC try to develop opportunities for staff as well as students to take the most sustainable options. There are two schools in the district who are fully engaged in the STP process.

The Council have reached out to the Sustainable Travel Team at ECC and asked how we could further engage with their work to improve these results in the future.

As part of Essex County Council's Great Start project which The Council is piloting, businesses will be signposted to the program of learning and development for businesses wishing to increase their sustainable practices. The project will also highlight excellence in Braintree business and these businesses will be promoted and awarded a kite mark by ECC for their environmental practices in order to not only recognise their achievements but to inspire and support others.

The Council hosted a Green Business Expo in June 2024 which showcased sustainable best practice in the district and invited local businesses to learn more about sustainability and Climate Change.

The Council have been awarded up to twenty business places for the Lean to Green business support package funded through Essex County Council. The project will support businesses to create a decarbonisation plan.

A tender is also out, funded by UKSPF for a Green Skills delivery training programme, to skill up those unemployed and upskill and retrain those already in employment to be able to access job roles requiring green skills. Braintree District Council (BDC) Economic Development team also have representation on the Longfields Solar Farm Working Group and feed into their Skills, Employment and Supply Chain Plan they are developing in conjunction with this and have met with National Grid and their consultant working on community benefits including skills and employment in relation to their pylon project running from Bramford to Twinstead and will be attending and providing input to future meetings conducted around this. Talks have also commenced with ECC and will be picked up with the Section 106 Officer regarding future content, and monitoring of Employment and Skills Plans from pre-engagement stage with developers which could incorporate a green skills element.

Natural Environment

The Council have been attending regular, monthly meetings with Essex County Council to support with the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Council received the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy on 17 July for the 28 day pre-public consultation phase.

The secondary legislation from the Environment Act relating to air quality has now been published by central government. This legislation is being reviewed and the Council will now have an understanding of the requirements of central government's Air Quality Strategy 2023. The Council are in a position now to

progress with the findings to create a methodology review. This is on the agenda for the first strategic briefing with the relevant portfolio holders in July 2024.

Officers are due to meet a representative of Essex Rivers Hub at Bocking Blackwater Nature Reserve in July to discuss opportunities for river maintenance on the site. Opportunities for restoration of the river bank at the Straits Mill millpond will be high on the list of priorities - a site where dogs regularly enter the water and erosion has impacted the riverbank.

Work is underway for the launch of the UKSPF Community Gardens and Orchards grant scheme and several stakeholders have been informed of the upcoming grant in preparation.

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.

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.

The Council has informed stakeholders of the invasive species the Asian Hornet and to report sightings of the insect to the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

An article is underway on flood resilience which will be published in the Contact Magazine in autumn 2024. The article will have links to various partners including for Property Flood Resilience Grants and flood preparation.



Fit for the future

The transformation programme moved into full mobilisation in the first quarter, with progress made across all planned workstreams and the programme as a whole.

Programme delivery and design

An All-Members briefing was held on 25 April to provide greater detail on the challenges that we are facing as an organisation, what transformation means and the principles of the programme. Members were also updated on the workstreams that make up the programme and the governance framework. Following this update, monthly briefings for Opposition Group Leaders are now scheduled and taking place. The programme will require additional resource to deliver and recruitment processes to fill key roles were undertaken during this quarter. The Head of Transformation recruitment process was begun, with the interviews scheduled for very early in the second quarter. Two additional project managers were offered fixed term positions and will begin working with the organisation in the second quarter. Additional resource to support the programme in the Finance team was in place for the quarter. Agreement has been given to the recruitment of a further resource to support the communications element of the programme and the recruitment will be undertaken during the second quarter.

Agile and Flexible

Following the approval of the Causeway House Refresh business case by Cabinet, there have been a number of briefing sessions with staff over the period to provide more information on the project and designs of the space. Further progress on the let of the delivery contract has been delayed due to lack of resource but the allocation of project management resource following the recruitment process mentioned above mean that this work will be able to push forward in the second quarter.

Shared Service

Work is continuing on the shared back office project with Epping Forest District Council and Colchester City Council with proposals for a shared HR team expected to be the first to be considered. Work is underway to develop a business case for the proposal, supported by the all the HR teams involved. A joint senior leadership team event across the three organisations was held in the quarter to explore other opportunities of better collaboration and shared working beyond the back office project. Work is continuing to further develop the Essex Procurement Partnership, including discussions with new potential partners and strengthening the partnership as it stands.

Asset Management

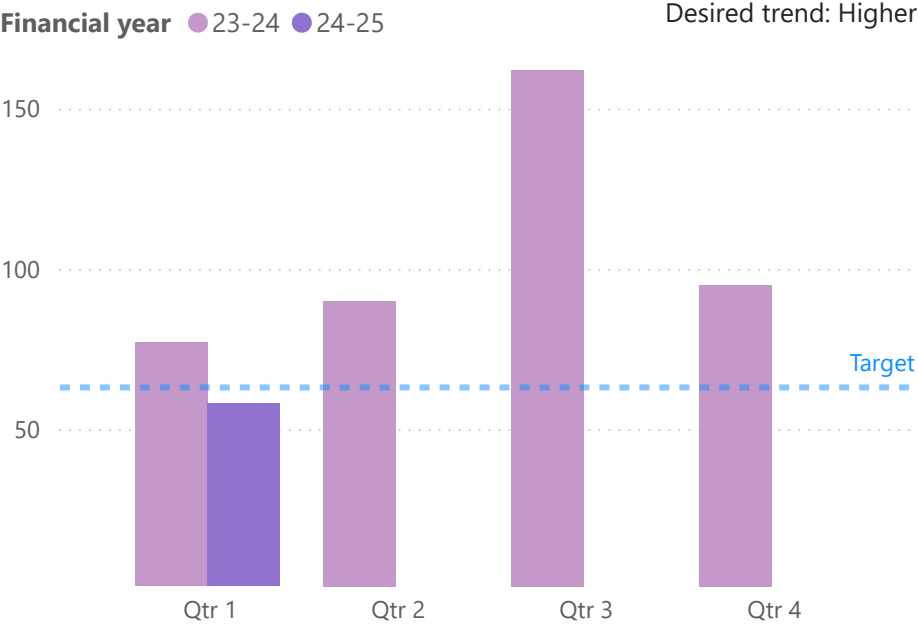
CIPFA have been appointed as a delivery partner for the Asset Management Strategy framework and worked closely with the BDC team on drafting the policy and strategy through the period with drafts now complete. The roles and resources within the team have been strengthened during the quarter with appointments to be made in the second quarter.

Service Reviews

A joint CMT and Cabinet workshop was held to co-design the methodology for the reviews. Work on prioritisation of the reviews and timetabling of the reviews over the period has been undertaken and consultation with key stakeholders on the proposed schedule is underway. Further socialisation on the methodology and scheduling is planned for the next quarter ahead of the kick off of the first reviews. Project management resource has now been allocated to this workstream.

Performance Indicators in detail

Number of affordable homes delivered

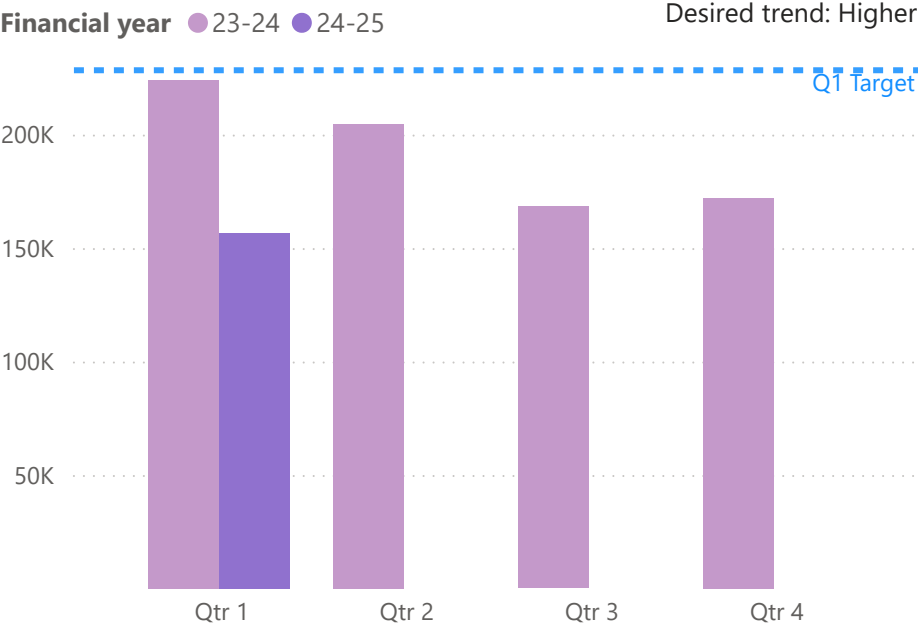


Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	77	90	162	95
24-25	58			

Target: 63 Status: ●

Comments: The Council has delivered 58 affordable homes in the first quarter, which is below the target of 63. Across the previous year the number of affordable homes has delivered significantly above target, and the reduction in the first quarter is due to the non-linear completion of developments across the district.

Number of visitors to our leisure centres



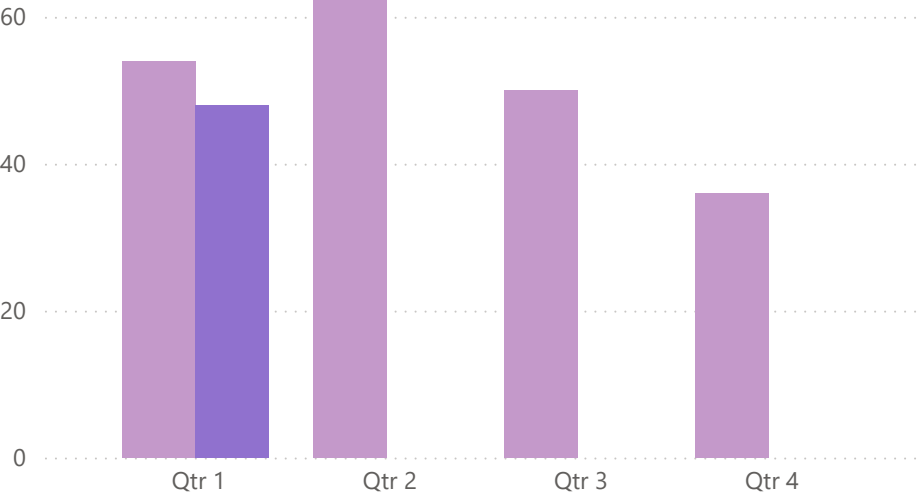
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	223864	204842	168300	172071
24-25	156554			

Target: 228,341 Status: ●

Comments: The target of 228,341 is based on a percentage increase upon the previous year's performance. 23/24 saw a particularly high out turn which has not been replicated in 24/25. The Council is working with its leisure partners to understand this trend.

Number of homelessness cases prevented

Financial year 23-24 24-25



Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	54	67	50	36
24-25	48			

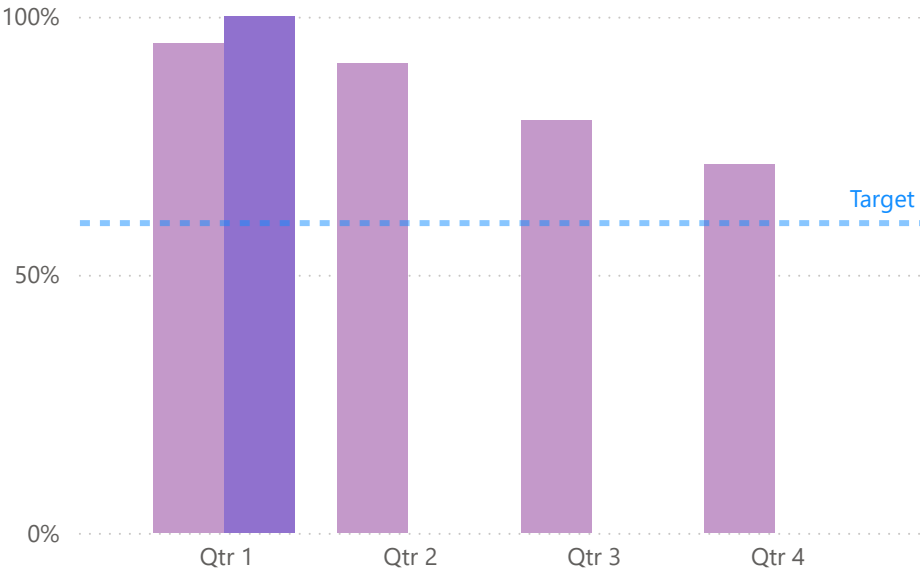
Data only

Comments: The number of homelessness cases is not a targeted measure, and continues on a broadly level trend from 23/24 into 24/25.

Percentage of major planning applications decided on time

Financial year 23-24 24-25

Desired trend: Higher



Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	94.74%	90.91%	80.00%	71.43%
24-25	100.00%			

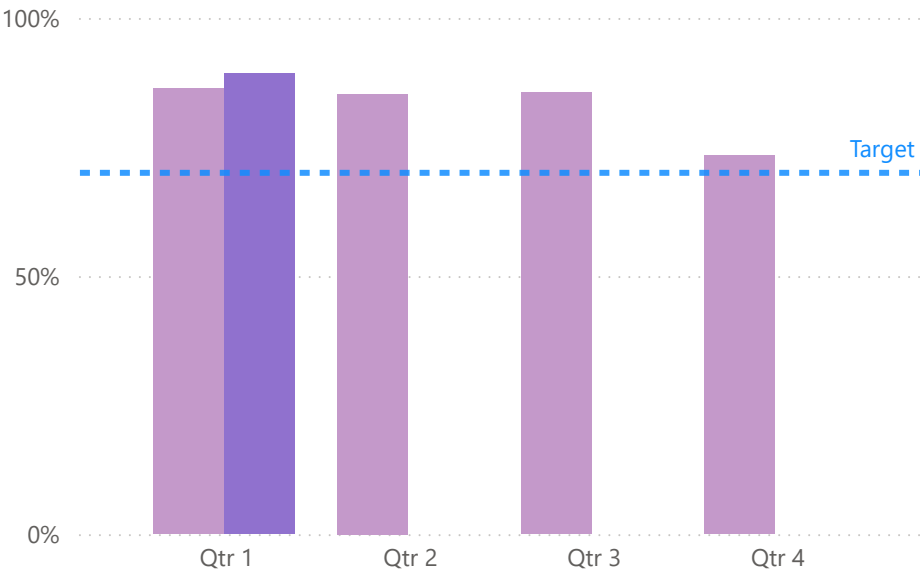
Target: 60% Status: ✔

Comments: In the first quarter 100% of major planning applications were decided on time. This out turn continues the trend from last year where the target of 60% was exceeded in all quarters.

Percentage of minor planning applications decided on time

Financial year 23-24 24-25

Desired trend: Higher

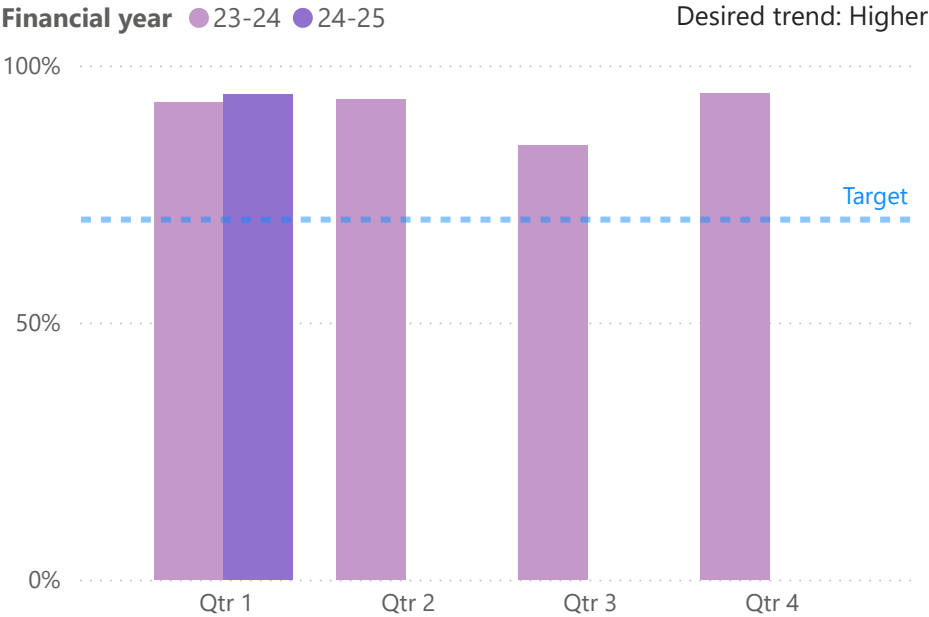


Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	86.36%	85.26%	85.58%	73.33%
24-25	89.29%			

Target: 70% Status: ✔

Comments: In the first quarter 89.29% of minor planning applications were decided on time. This out turn continues the trend from last year where the target of 70% was exceeded in all quarters.

Percentage of other planning applications decided on time



Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	92.86%	93.53%	84.44%	94.70%
24-25	94.41%			

Target: 70% Status: ✔

Comments: In the first quarter 94.41% of other planning applications were decided on time. This out turn continues the trend from last year where the target of 70% was exceeded in all quarters.

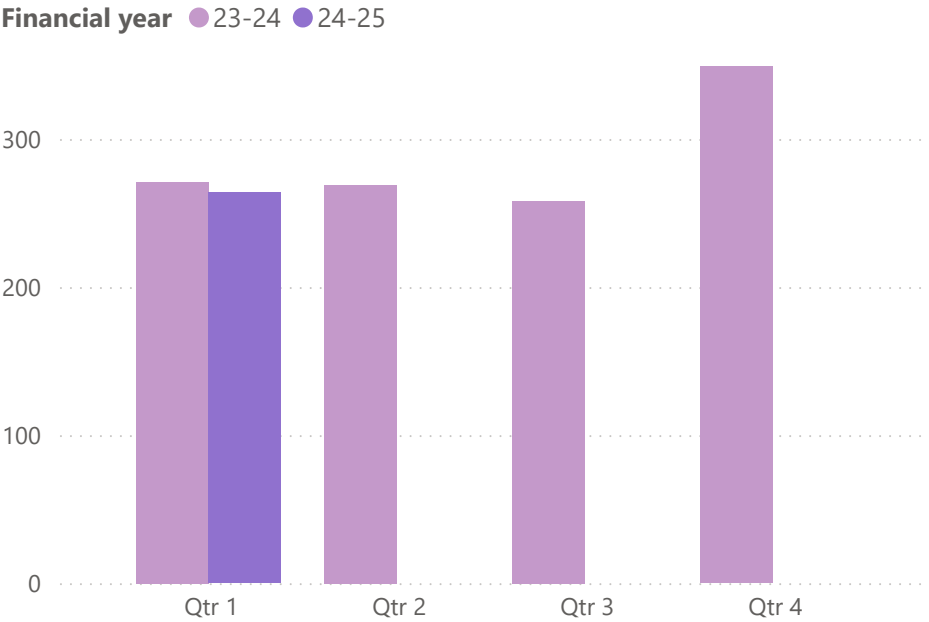
Percentage planning applications overturned on appeal

Target: 10% Status: Reported annually

Comments: The measure of percentage of planning applications overturned on appeal is an important metric to indicate the strength and accuracy of planning determinations made by the Council. This information is collected on a quarterly basis and reported to central government to provide an overall picture across a 2 year period. Due to the length of time an appeal can be made after a determination, and the timescales for determining the outcome of the respective appeals, there is a significant reporting lag between the end of the quarter and the resolution of any appeals made relating to determinations made in that quarter. The Council is working to develop a reporting methodology to provide this information as quickly as possible following the end of a quarter.

The out turn for the period July 2021-June 2023 was 4.7% for major developments and 1.7% for non-major developments. Whilst both indicators are significantly below the target of 10%, the indicator for major development is above the East of England average of 2.9% and the average for England which was 2.3%. For the period Jan 2022-March 2022, 3 major appeals were allowed. When the rolling period changes, these 3 major appeals will no longer be included in the calculations and therefore there is likely to be an improvement in future out turns.

Number of new start up businesses



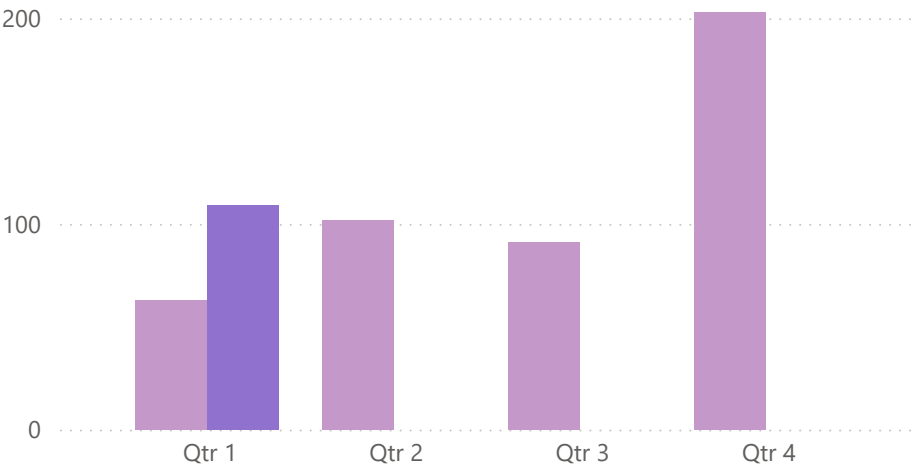
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	271	269	258	349
24-25	264			

Data only

The Council saw 264 new businesses in the first quarter compared to 271 in the same quarter last year. This continues to remain at a steady level, with the exception of the fourth quarter 23/24 where 349 new businesses were registered.

Number of businesses accessing business support

Financial year 23-24 24-25



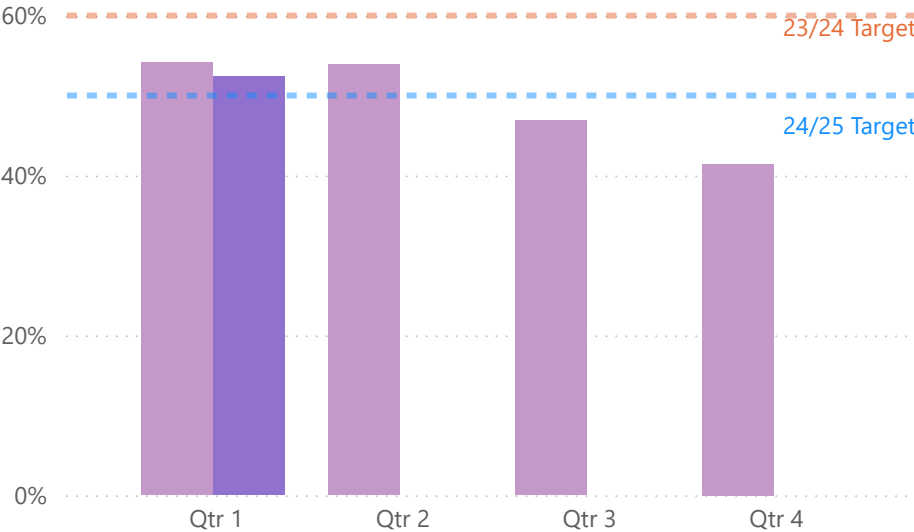
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	63	102	91	203
24-25	109			

Data only

The Council saw 109 businesses accessing support in the first quarter, an increase of 46 on the same quarter in the previous year.

Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting

Financial year 23-24 24-25



Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	54.14%	53.88%	46.87%	41.44%
24-25	52.39%			

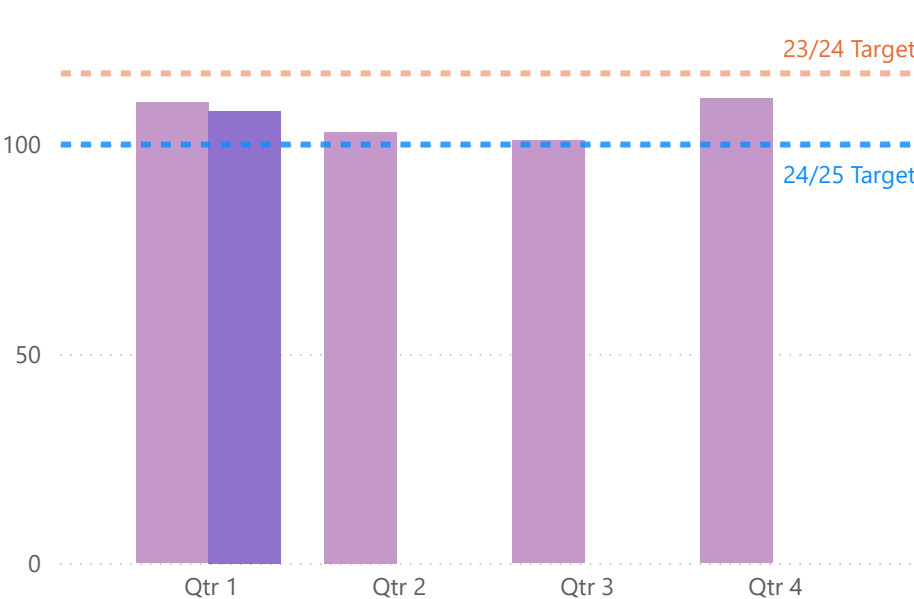
Target: 50%

Status: ✓

Comments: In the first quarter The Council has seen an increase in recycling rate compared to the previous quarter, following the resumption of garden waste collection after the winter suspension. A rate of 52.39% was achieved in comparison to a new 50% target.

Kilograms of residual waste per household

Financial year 23-24 24-25



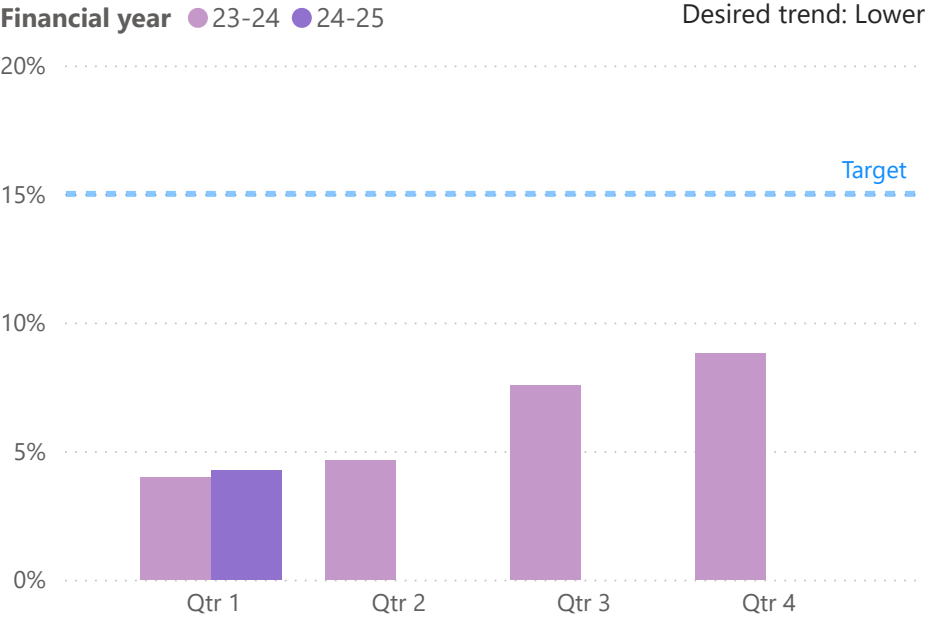
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	110	103	101	111
24-25	108			

Target: 100kgs

Status: ●

Comments: The first quarter saw a decrease compared to the previous year (-2kg), and whilst the new lower target was missed by 8kg there was a month on month decrease compared to the previous year. April saw the introduction of a stronger approach to excess (side) waste, and the Council will continue to monitor the impact this will have on residual collections throughout the year. This year will see waste composition analysis with Essex County Council which will enable the Council to target reductions in residual waste and improve the use of food waste bins through communication and education campaigns.

Percentage of recycling contamination

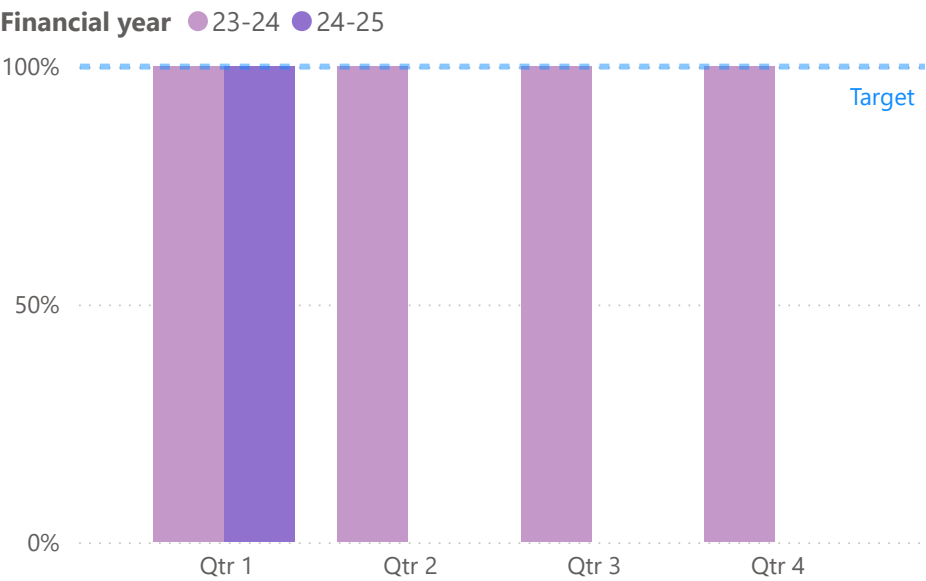


Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	4.00%	4.66%	7.55%	8.80%
24-25	4.24%			

Target: 15% Status: ✔

Comments: The Council achieved a 4.24% recycling contamination rate below the 15% target, and a small increase on the previous year. This metric is affected by seasonal suspension of the garden waste collection seen in the last two quarters of the previous year, as less total recycling is processed over the winter. In 24/25, garden waste collection will not be suspended as it has been previously.

Percentage of fly tips cleared within 24hrs (numbers reported within table)



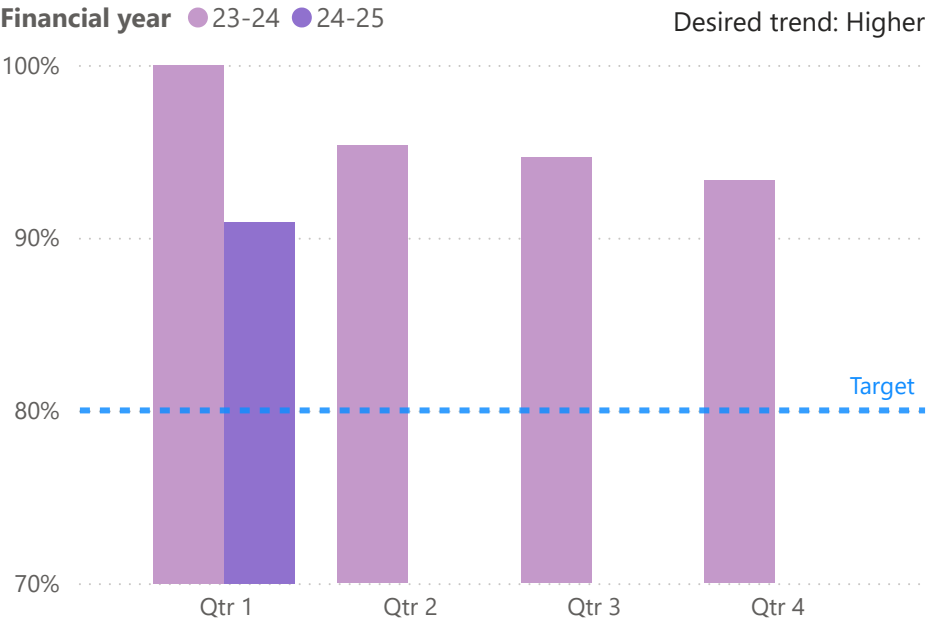
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	294	323	236	196
24-25	173			

Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	100%	100%	100%	100%
24-25	100%			

Target: 100% Status: ✔

Comments: The Council continued to achieve clearing 100% of fly-tips within a 24hr period. The last four quarters have seen a reduction in the total number of fly tips being reported.

Percentage of DFGs approved on time



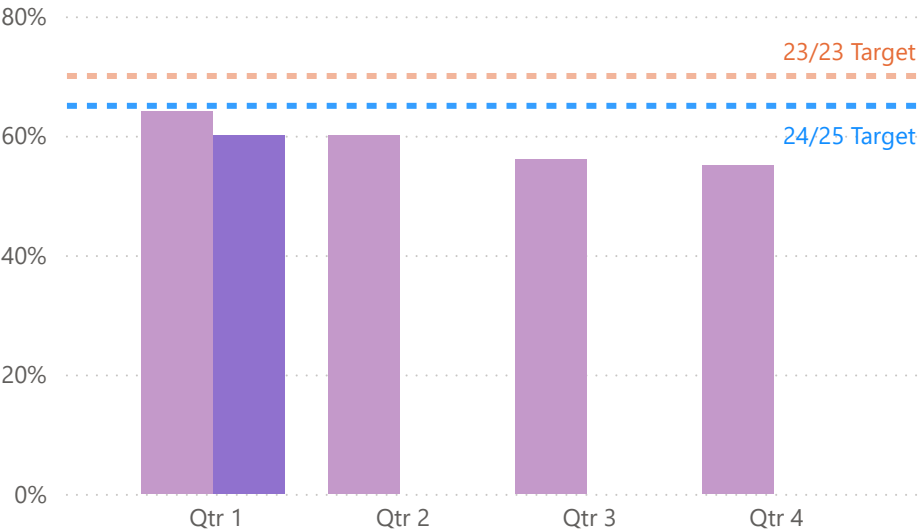
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	100.0%	95.4%	94.6%	93.3%
24-25	90.9%			

Target: 80% Status: ✔

Comments: The council has observed a steady reduction in the percentage of Disabled Facilities Grants approved on time, but has continued to achieve the target of 80% for the fifth consecutive quarter. The approval of DFGs within timescales remains well above target.

Percentage of calls resolved at first point of contact in the customer service centre

Financial year 23-24 24-25



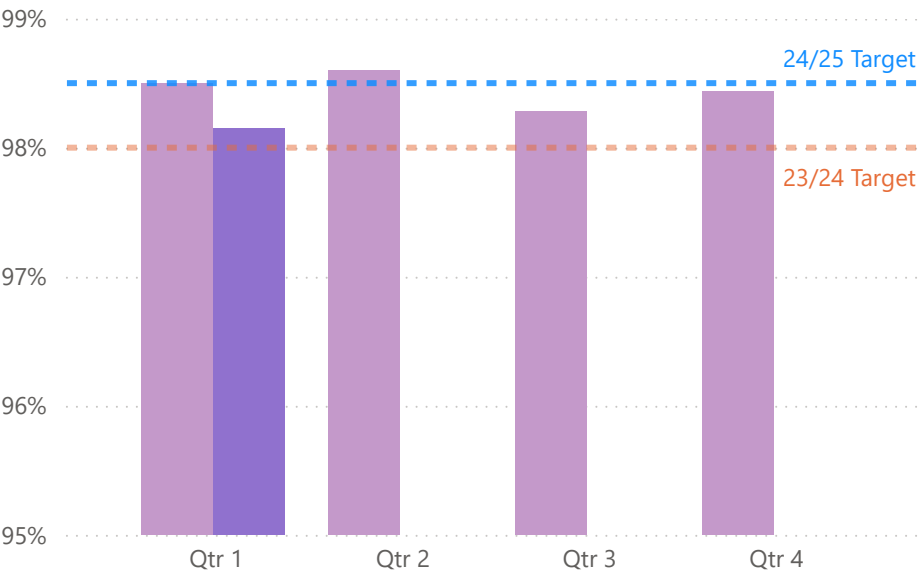
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	64%	60%	56%	55%
24-25	60%			

Target: 65% Status: ●

Comments: During the first quarter the Council resolved 15,076 calls at first point of contact out of a total of 24,969. Of the calls unable to be resolved by the Customer Service Centre 3,218 were attributed to Housing services, 2,679 to Council Tax services, and 1,483 calls were received by residents in relation to voting arrangements ahead of the Parliamentary Election. The performance against this indicator is reflective of the proportion of calls received relating to complex or specialist topic areas which cannot be resolved by the Customer Service Centre, and is influenced by the shift of simple enquiries to online channels.

Percentage of invoices paid on time

Financial year 23-24 24-25



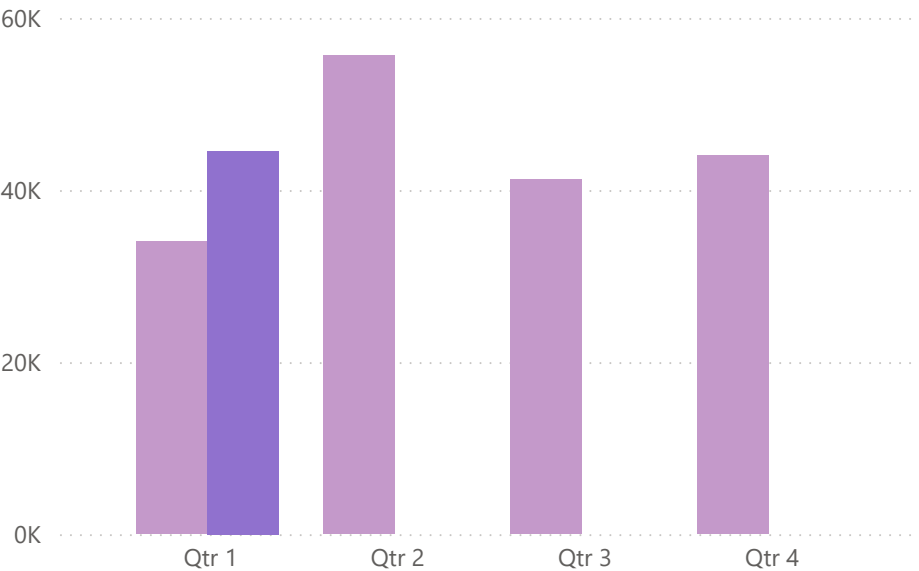
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	98.5%	98.6%	98.3%	98.4%
24-25	98.2%			

Target: 98.5% Status: ▲

Comments: The Council increased its target of invoices paid on time from 98% to 98.5% from 23/24 to 24/25, and as a result has fallen short of the new ambitious target in the first quarter. Training is being provided to staff to further increase performance against this measure.

Number of people transacting with the Council online

Financial year 23-24 24-25



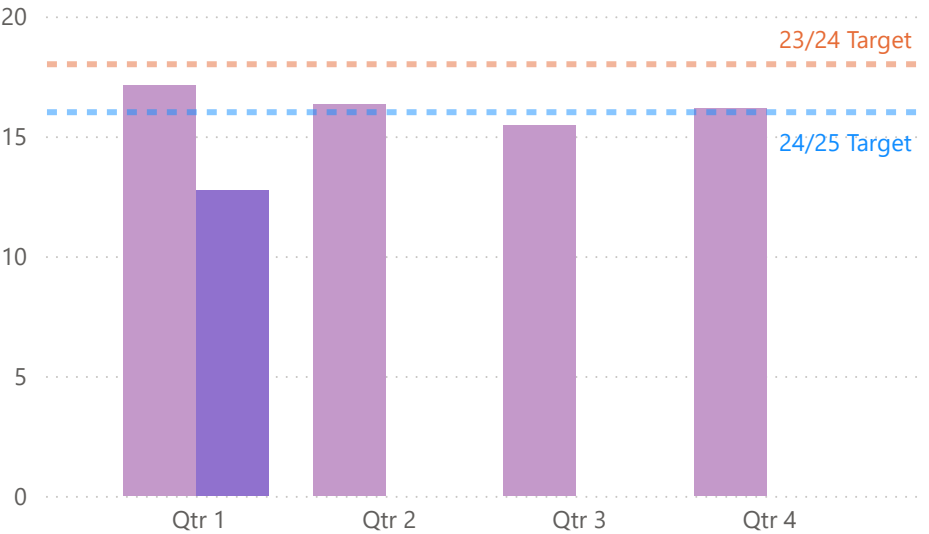
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	33995	55634	41222	43982
24-25	44532			

Data only

Comments: The Council has shown growth in online transactions compared to the first quarter last year, increasing transactions by nearly one third year on year.

Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit new claims

Financial year 23-24 24-25



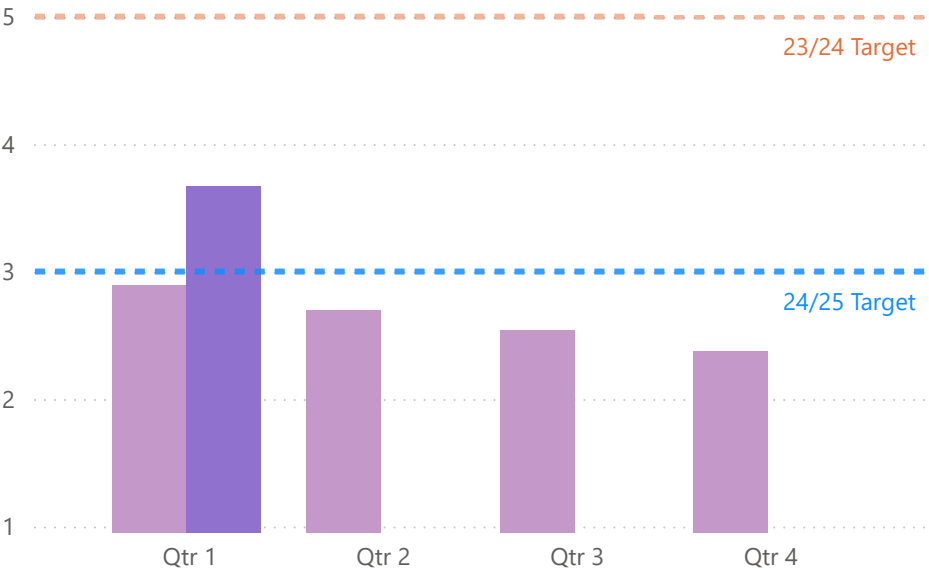
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	17.13	16.31	15.47	16.18
24-25	12.73			

Target: 16 days Status: ✓

Comments: The Council reduced its target in 24/25 and in the first quarter has achieved the new target by some way. On average new housing benefit/council tax benefit claims were processed in 12.73 days compared to the target of 16.

Time taken to process housing benefit claim changes

Financial year 23-24 24-25



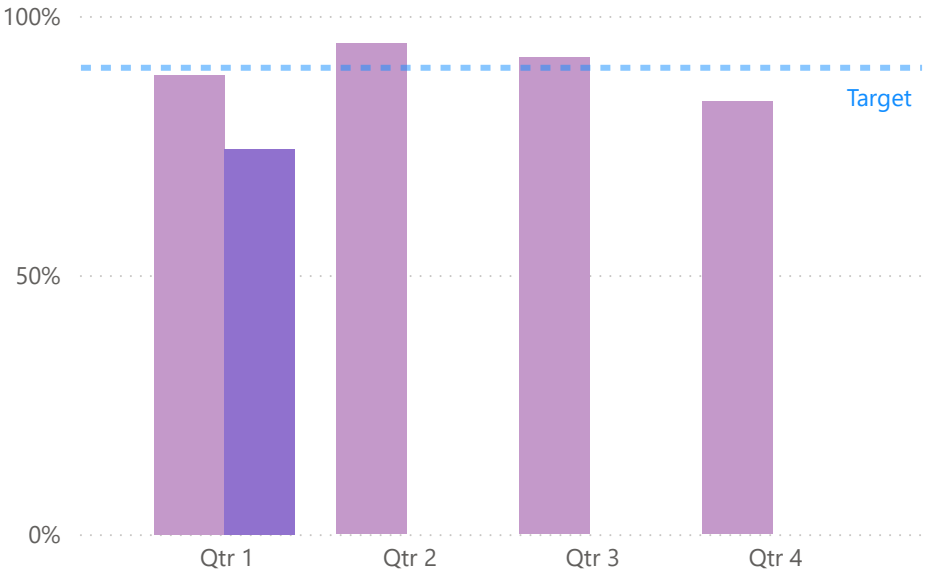
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	2.89	2.69	2.54	2.38
24-25	3.67			

Target: 3 days Status: ●

Comments: The new local council tax support scheme resulted in a positive fall in overall caseload; however, this does mean that the remaining benefit claim changes are the more complex cases impacting on the average processing time. The Council has also set a more ambitious target this year resulting in a missed target by 0.67 days in the first quarter.

Percentage of stage 1 complaints dealt with in timescale

Financial year 23-24 24-25



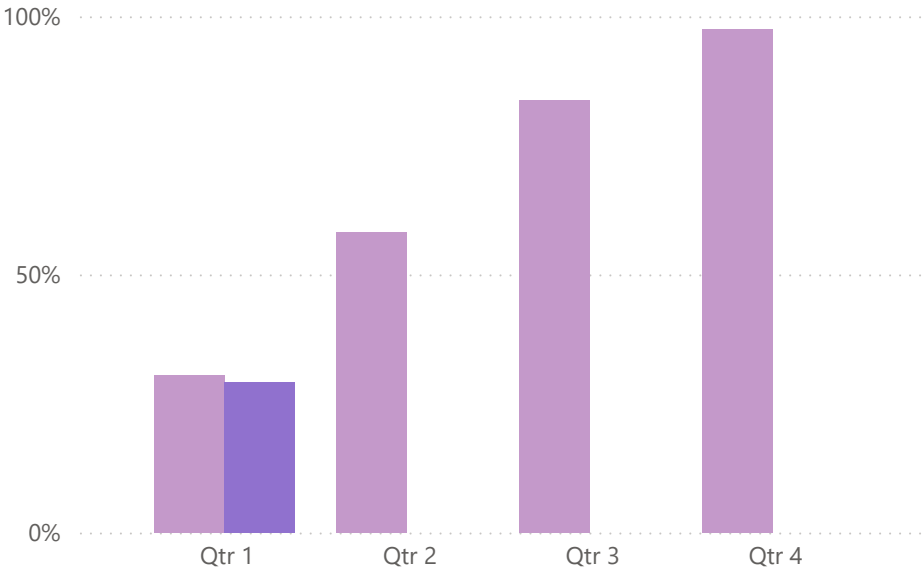
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	88.61%	94.74%	92.04%	83.46%
24-25	74.33%			

Target 90% Status: ●

Comments: The first quarter saw a significant increase in the number of complaints received by the Operations service, predominantly in relation to garden waste collection. Due to Operations complaints forming the majority of Council complaints, the large increase in complaint volume has impacted the ability to respond to first quarter complaints within the 7 day target. Further detail can be found in the complaints section of the report.

Collection rate for Council Tax

Financial year ● 23-24 ● 24-25



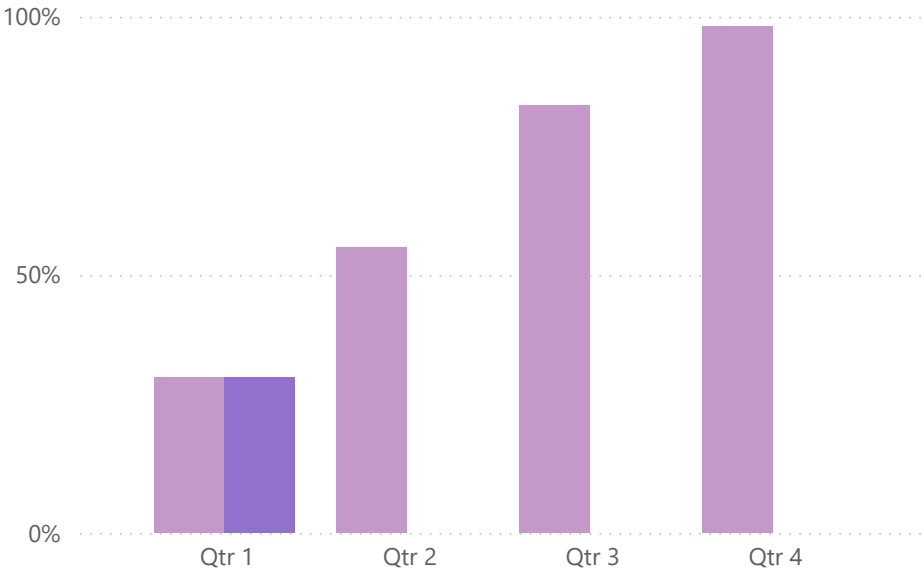
Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	30.45%	58.24%	83.81%	97.59%
24-25	29.06%			

Target: 30.45% Status: ⚠️

Comments: The collection rate for Council Tax fell marginally below the target, which is derived from last year's collection rate. Dividend paid in 23/24 increased collection rate in the first quarter resulting in this raised target. Collection rate for 24/25 is above the Essex average, which has seen a trend in reduced collection for first quarter.

Collection rate for Business Rates

Financial year ● 23-24 ● 24-25



Financial year	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
23-24	30.12%	55.37%	82.90%	98.13%
24-25	30.17%			

Target: 30.12% Status: ✅

Comments: The Council has increased its business rate collections above the target of last year's collections.

Complaints

The quarterly complaints analysis is detailed below. This is compared with the previous year's figures shown in brackets. The figures represent all three stages of the complaints process.

Complaint Category	Q1 2024/25	Q2 2024/25	Q3 2024/25	Q4 2024/25	TOTAL
Justified	115 (43)	(95)	(56)	(64)	(258)
Not Justified	62 (23)	(40)	(35)	(41)	(139)
Partially Justified	14 (13)	(17)	(20)	(20)	(70)
Not known	5 (0)	(0)	(1)	(4)	(5)
Total	196 (79)	(152)	(112)	(129)	(472)

Comments

In comparison to the previous quarter and the preceding year, the Council has seen an increase in the number of complaints received during the first quarter of this year. Five complaints were escalated to stage 2, four of which were escalated further to stage 3. All stage 3 complaints were in relation to Planning functions.

The Operations service area continues to receive the highest number of complaints, 178 - a 2.5x increase on the same quarter last year - and has seen a significant increase in the number of complaints relating to green bin collections compared to the previous year. 77 complaints were received in the first quarter 24/25 relating to green bins, compared to 7 complaints received last year. Due to the high uptake of the garden waste service, some rerouting has been necessary and this led to additional missed and repeat missed collections, which is expected to reduce in the second quarter. Additionally, the introduction of the "no side waste" policy in April led to an increase in complaints relating to this restriction.

As a result of the significant increase in complaints to Operations, and a reduction in staff levels in the first quarter owing to vacancies and unexpected absence, response times have been strained causing the overall performance of the Council's complaint response times to drop below target. A review of the complaints process within Operations is ongoing with improvements expected in the second quarter.

A summary of Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases:

In the first quarter of 2024/25, the Council received new initial enquiries in relation to the handling of two complaints for Housing Services and Operations.

No new complaints have been raised by the LGO, and no decisions have been issued.

Our Organisation

The following is a selection of our people performance measures:

People: Indicators of Performance (previous year figures in brackets)	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Change on previous period	Yearly Target
Total headcount	499 (482)	(489)	(502)	(501)	- 2	-
Total staff FTE	458.52 (435.98)	(444.29)	(457.18)	(458.54)	- 0.02	-
Level of employee turnover	2.40% (3.94%)	(1.84%)	(1.99%)	(3.39%)	- 0.99	-
Number of leavers	12 (19)	(9)	(10)	(17)	- 5	-
Number of starters	10 (15)	(16)	(23)	(16)	- 6	-
Working days lost to sickness per employee*	6.22 (1.34*)	(1.73*)	(5.87)	(5.9)	+ 0.32	8.0
Percentage of staff with nil sickness	80.80% (84.56%)	(68.30%)	(55.18%)	(48.7%)	Cumulative	-
Number of learning hours	688 (1078)	(617)	(751)	(833)	- 145	-
Number of delegates	345 (200)	(235)	(347)	(379)	- 34	-
Number of apprentices **	21 (19)	(20)	(20)	(21)	-	-

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

* From the third quarter 23/24, 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
	<i>(2023/24 figure in brackets)</i>			
Total number of reported accidents/ incidents, calculated from:	5 (13)	(22)	(12)	(5)
<i>Accidents/ incidents to employees</i>	5 (12)	(22)	(9)	(5)
<i>Accidents/ incidents to contractors</i>	0 (0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
<i>Accidents/ incidents to non-employees</i>	0 (1)	(0)	(3)	(0)
Time lost in days due to employee accidents/ incidents	25 (14)	(9)	(45)	(19)
Number of reported verbal/ physical incidents to employees	3 (1)	(4)	(2)	(5)
Number of near miss incidents	0 (2)	(1)	(0)	(0)
Number of Accidents/ incidents registered resulting in insurance/ compensation claim	0 (2)	(1)	(1)	(1)
Number of claims settled	0 (0)	(1)	(3)	(2)

Comments: There were a total of five incidents recorded in the first quarter, a reduction of eight compared to last year. All five incidents occurred to employees and all five occurred in relation to lifting or handling objects.

A total of 25 days were lost due to these incidents. One RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) incident resulted in 21 days of lost time following a back injury from moving bins. The other 4 days were incurred from cut to the hand whilst moving a sharp object.

There were three verbal or physical incidents reported. Two incidents occurred by telephone where the caller was abusive to staff. One physical incident occurred affecting two staff members.

Financial Summary

Summary

The review of the financial performance and projection for the year at this first quarter shows an overall positive variance of £1.4 million and two main areas contribute to this position. Firstly, treasury management income, which is projected to outperform budget due to a combination of higher-for-longer interest rates as the Bank of England takes a cautious approach to relaxing monetary policy; and higher cash balances driven by the spend and financing requirements of the capital programme, the 2023/24 outturn, government grants, and other funds held for future distribution to preceptors. Secondly, take-up on the new garden waste subscription service has continued to increase, even after the end of the discount period, and the level of income profiled into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by 2025/26 has been achieved. There are risks to this net income forecast as collection route capacity remains under review and preparations are made for the next subscription year.

Asset Management and Sustainable Development are projecting an adverse position. Vacant commercial units and letting space within Causeway House contribute to the variance for Asset Management along with the extra net cost of temporary resourcing to support a period of transition for the service.

The main reason for the budget variance for Sustainable Development is a projected underachievement of income from planning applications. Income from this source is volatile and subject to market conditions where the position can change significantly, particularly for major applications.

A central provision has been made for the estimated additional cost that would be incurred by the council if the current staff pay offer is confirmed. Service budgets will be adjusted once a settlement is achieved with a budget transfer from overachieved income.

Finance will work with services to review the forecast position to identify any ongoing risks and opportunities for budget planning for 2025/26 and the updating of the four-year MTFS.

Capital expenditure to the end of the first quarter was £1.09 million, with the main areas of spend being on community facilities, climate change projects, and grants for residential disability adaptations. There is currently a projected underspend on several projects totalling £443k, although this position remains subject to formal project closures.

Background

Full Council agreed a net budget of £19.6m. Budgets may be updated during the year in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure, and monitoring is then against the updated budgets.

The financial review is a collaborative process between the Finance Team and Service Managers, and which considers the position at the end of quarter in order to create a projection of the outturn position for the year. The assessment uses information that is available at the time with forecasts made based on previous experience and assumptions over the remainder of the year. The projection set out below is therefore subject to changing circumstances, recognising that many aspects of financial performance are affected by external factors and service demands.

Forecasts are updated on a quarterly basis.

General Fund Revenue Spending

The tables below show the projected outturn for the year by service as forecast at the end of Q1.

Business Plan Service	Updated Budget £'000	Forecast Spend for the year £'000	Current Forecast Variance £'000	Forecast RAG Status
Asset Management	(2,819)	(2,651)	168	R
Community & Leisure	922	929	7	A
Corporate Management Plan	1,642	1,636	(6)	G
Economic Development	188	106	(82)	G
Environment	940	920	(20)	G
Finance	876	(51)	(927)	G
Governance	1,408	1,456	48	A
Housing Services	1,003	1,000	(3)	G
ICT & Facilities	2,085	2,026	(59)	G
Marketing & Communications	697	699	2	A
People & Performance	1,142	1,140	(2)	G
Operations	7,456	6,320	(1,136)	G
Strategic Investment	149	149	0	G
Sustainable Development	1,607	1,803	196	R
Service Total	17,296	15,482	(1,814)	G
Corporate Financing	2,605	2,528	(77)	G
Pay award provision	-	186	186	
Vacancy allowance	(300)	-	300	
Net Total	19,601	18,196	(1,405)	G

Business Plan Service	Staffing Expenditure			Other Expenditure			Gross Income		
	Updated Budget	F//Cast	Variance	Updated Budget	F/Cast	Variance	Updated Budget	F/Cast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Asset Management	610	653	43	1,244	1,320	76	(4,673)	(4,624)	49
Community & Leisure	886	879	(7)	539	540	1	(503)	(490)	13
Corporate Management Plan	1,791	1,772	(19)	93	106	13	(242)	(242)	0
Economic Development	220	138	(82)	(32)	(32)	0	0	0	0
Environment	1,836	1,828	(8)	107	111	4	(1,003)	(1,019)	(16)
Finance	2,839	2,786	(53)	25,939	26,024	85	(27,902)	(28,861)	(959)
Governance	904	898	(6)	776	830	54	(273)	(273)	0
Housing Services	1,454	1,454	0	46	43	(3)	(497)	(497)	0
ICT & Facilities	1,037	1,033	(4)	1,048	993	(55)	0	0	0
Marketing & Communications	563	561	(2)	282	291	9	(148)	(153)	(5)
People & Performance	1,070	1,063	(7)	72	77	5	0	0	0
Operations	7,758	7,651	(107)	6,672	6,570	(102)	(6,973)	(7,900)	(927)
Strategic Investment	358	358	0	(148)	(148)	0	(61)	(61)	0
Sustainable Development	2,883	2,784	(99)	519	610	91	(1,795)	(1,591)	204
Service Plan Total	24,209	23,858	(351)	37,157	37,335	178	(44,070)	(45,711)	(1,641)
Corporate Financing	763	828	65	3,538	3,334	(204)	(1,696)	(1,634)	62
Pay award provision	0	186	186	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vacancy allowance	(300)	0	300	0	0	0	0	0	0
Net Total	24,672	24,872	200	40,695	40,669	(26)	(45,766)	(47,345)	(1,579)

General comments:

- Staffing projections are based on vacancies and other known changes at the end of Q1 and reflect service expectations for the remainder of the year. Changes are likely to occur across the year which will impact future quarterly reviews
- A pay award provision of £186k has been made for the additional cost of the offer made by the National Employers. The current offer represents an increase of c1% above the assumption of 3% reflected in service budgets
- A vacancy allowance of £300k is included in the base budget anticipating that staffing costs may be lower than budgeted due to staff turnover and other changes

Specific comments on the main service variances (+adverse/ -positive)**Asset Management**

- Additional staffing cost due to short-term interim support partially offset by vacant posts (+£43k).
- Reduced income at the Plaza from the Makerspace partially offset by income from Shared Prosperity Fund initiatives and lower operating costs (Net +£34k)
- Lower income at Victoria Square due to vacant units partially offset by lower service charge costs (+Net £57k)
- Net other property related variances including Causeway House letting space remaining vacant (+£34k)

Economic Development

- Economic Development staffing underspend due to vacancies (-£82k) but as the service is part funded from reserves, this has been offset by a commensurate reduction in the use of reserves shown under Corporate Financing, leaving a net nil variance

Finance

- Additional treasury management income due to higher-for-longer interest rate environment and higher cash balances (-£1.016m)
- Net underspend on staffing due to vacancies, and reductions in contracted hours or staff appointed at lower scale points than assumed (-£53k)
- Projected shortfall in Local Tax and Housing Benefit cost recoveries assuming similar position to recent years' outturns (+£62k). Cost-of-living will be impacting as liabilities relate to low-income households
- Increased system related costs for the Revenues and Benefits system (+£38k)
- Other variances relating to banking charges, postage, and audit fees, partially offset by lower insurance premiums (+£42k)

Governance.

- Provision for member allowances following approval of a new scheme by Full Council backdated to April 2023 (+£53k)
- Net other variances (-£5k) including higher Land Charges income partially offset by under-recovery of sealing fees

ICT & Facilities

- Corporate ICT systems maintenance (-£35k)
- Net other underspend (-£24k) mainly on Causeway House operating costs (e.g. energy and maintenance)

Operations

- Net saving on staffing costs due to vacancies and restructure (Net -£107k).
- Car parking income has been overachieved mainly on pay & display, partially offset by increased collection costs (-£105k)
- Cemeteries is projecting higher income and lower costs which appear to relate to the current profile of requests for burials and interments (-£49k).

- The subscription-based garden waste collection service is projected to generate additional net income (-£508k) bringing forward the achievement of the cumulative MTFS target assumed by 25/26. The position remains subject to demand for the service and the potential for additional costs due to collection route capacity and preparation for the year two and longer-term subscription model
- Income from the sale of recyclate material, composting credits and tipping away payments are projected to be higher for the range of materials collected due to changes in market prices and tonnages, and diversion of waste from Cordons Farm (-£166k)
- Demand for commercial waste and bulky waste services continues to increase resulting in a forecast of net additional income (-£58k)
- There are forecast budget variances across all Operations in the main due to lower vehicle costs (maintenance, fuel, insurance, spot hire) from a combination of investment in replacement vehicles and changes in market prices (-£121k)
- There is a saving on the Bartec waste management system annual licence costs (-£22k)

Sustainable Development

- Net staffing variance due to vacancies in Development Management and Landscape Services, partially offset by agency cover (-£99k).
- Projected cost of planning appeals based on prior year spend, and which exceeds the current balance held in the appeals reserve (+£45k)
- Landscape services spend with ECC, and tree maintenance contractor costs are projected to be higher, but partially offset by net savings (+£46k)
- Projected shortfalls in Planning Application income (after allowing for the full-year effect of statutory price increases) and Pre-application income, partially offset by additional income forecast from Planning Performance Agreements. Income can be highly variable and subject to economic conditions and may be impacted by recent announcements by government on planning reforms (Net +£204k)

Corporate Financing

- The income gainshare from the council tax sharing arrangement with preceptors is projected to be lower due to a fall in council tax collection performance at the first quarter (+£40k). Figure is provisional and subject to the performance achieved across all Essex authorities.
- Staffing costs recharged to capital are estimated to be lower than assumed in the budget, based on current project officers' timesheet data (+£30k)
- External interest costs are expected to be lower due to internal borrowing defraying the requirement to increase capital investment related debt (-£229k)
- Reduction in use of reserves to part fund Economic Development (+£82k)

Capital Programme

The current capital programme totals £13.8m excluding prior year spend on projects in-progress. The table below shows the budget amount profiled to be spent in 2024/25; actual spend to the end of the first quarter; and, where applicable, a forecast variance:

	Budget Profiled 24/25 £000	Actual Spend 24/25 £000	In-year Variance 24/25 £000	Slippage (-or deduction from future budget) £000	Forecast Project Variance 24/25 £000	Expected Remaining Spend 24/25 £000
Horizon 120 business park infrastructure	238	19	219	0	0	219
Horizon 120 - The Plaza	253	15	238	0	-238	0
Manor Street regeneration	107	0	107	0	-105	2
Witham community centre	1,400	29	1,371	0	0	1,371
Town centre improvements	716	0	716	0	0	716
Industrial estate improvements	21	13	8	0	-8	0
Property planned maintenance	836	78	758	0	-3	754
Information technology systems & equipment	383	71	312	0	-9	303
Community facilities, play areas, parks & open spaces	1,147	213	934	0	0	934
Cemetery improvements	11	0	11	0	0	11
Paths, cycleways, and other infrastructure	73	6	66	0	0	66
Operational equipment	383	92	291	0	-58	233
Sports and leisure facilities improvements	265	5	260	0	8	268
Climate change initiatives	853	131	723	0	0	723
Shared and rural prosperity fund projects	623	42	581	0	0	581
Housing renovation & disabled facilities grants	1,141	297	844	0	0	844
Capital salaries	230	78	152	0	-30	122
Total	8,681	1,090	7,591	0	-443	7,148

Capital Receipts & Other Resources

During the quarter two residential site land sales were completed generating total receipts of £646k. There were no right-to-buy sales generated in the quarter, although the council has been advised that eleven applications are in progress. With high mortgage rates and a slowdown in the housing market, this position represents a continuation of the fall in sales that was experienced during 2023/24.

Other capital grants and receipts totalled £1.7m, including £1.1m of Better Care Funding for the disabled facilities grant programme.

An award of grant of £375k was made by Sport England to funding climate change related investment at the Witham Leisure Centre.

Treasury Management

At the start of the year the council had £56.3m. During the first quarter the average amount under management was £71.7m with a peak amount of £78m. New investments of £44m were made, and £24.2m matured, resulting in £76.1m being held at the end of the quarter.

The council retained £19m across a range of long-term pooled funds with varying exposures to property, equities, and other financial assets, with the remainder of funds under management held in short-term investments comprising money market funds; Debt Management Office Account (UK Government); bank deposits; and liquid cash held with Lloyds Bank.

Dividend income earned to the end of the quarter was £311k and interest on short-term investments was £684k, a total of £995k, or an annualised return of 5.57%.

The market value of shares and units in long-term pooled funds at the end of the quarter was £21.8m, representing an unrealised gain of £2.8m.

General Fund Balances

General Fund balances are currently estimated to be £9.8m by the end of the year, a net increase of £1.2m.

The level of reserves is currently being reviewed as part of preparations for the 2025/26 budget.