



2024
2029



Braintree District Council

Healthy Housing Strategy

Annual Report - April 2025



Braintree
District Council

Braintree District Council published its 5 year Healthy Housing Strategy in March 2023. The aim of the Healthy Housing Strategy is to promote homes that enhance resident’s health and well-being by working with our partners in health, housing, communities, economics and environment.

As we move into the third year of delivering the Healthy Housing Strategy it is important to look back at what we have achieved and the successes of the second year, to acknowledge where we encountered challenges and where the strategy will focus in the year ahead.

The Housing Strategy is progressed and monitored via its Action Plan. Reviewing and reporting individual actions with lead officers and partners each month, leading to quarterly and annual updates with senior leaders to keep the strategic aims on track.

The Healthy Housing Strategy is part of a family of strategies that all contribute towards Braintree District Councils vision to create a district of equal opportunity for all our communities.



The three priority areas of the Healthy Housing Strategy are:

Priority 1

Affordability: Facilitate a consistent programme of good quality homes which best meet the needs of our current and future residents.

Priority 2

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

Priority 3

Access: Improving access to and the quality of existing properties including the Private Rented Sector.

These priorities are reflected in our Corporate Strategy under the Communities theme. Every action in the strategy is linked to one of the themes key priorities:

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



Our strategy recognises the work other services are undertaking to improve the health, wellbeing and environment for Braintree's residents, and we have aligned our actions to support and enhance the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-2028.

In particular, our focus is on helping to meet the seven key themes in the action plan including:

Energy Conservation – By improving energy efficiency of existing housing stock.

Built Environment - By reducing energy use in existing households by retrofitting energy efficient measures by working with registered housing providers and registered landlords to progressively increase the energy efficiency of social housing stock.



The Healthy Housing Strategy recognises that good housing is fundamental for better health outcomes, and our priorities support strategic alignment with Braintree's joint health and wellbeing **Livewell Strategy 2024-2028**, enabling creative collaboration and knowledge sharing. Both strategies operate under a whole system approach principle, acknowledging their interdependencies. The Healthy Housing Strategy actions recognise and align themselves with the Livewell strategy's key themes of Startwell, Staywell, Feelwell, Bewell, Agewell and Diwell.



Why we developed a strategy

Housing continues to be a key government priority. There is much discussion around the changing demographic trends, particularly an aging population, and a focus on how health and care services and housing can develop an integrated system in the community.

While there is no statutory requirement for a housing strategy, it provides a clear vision and direction to guide the Council's housing activity and can aid the Council in delivering an effective future housing service over its lifetime.

Braintree's Healthy Housing Strategy is built upon the needs and requirements of those who choose to live in our district, and was designed to meet those needs following public consultation and discussions with key representatives including the NHS, volunteer services and housing providers.

By facilitating homes that are energy efficient, promote health and wellbeing, address the needs of our growing population, and foster resilient communities with access to opportunities, this strategy enables Braintree District Council to deliver its strategic plan. It also supports and aligns with other key strategies and policies, and drives the key themes that were prioritised after the consultation with residents and partners.

Consultation

The responses to the consultation highlighted the following areas of work to prioritise

- Tackle empty homes
- Support energy efficiency
- Build affordable homes
- Focus on ensuring a good supply of supported housing
- Help people access secure tenancies in the private rented sector

Better infrastructure
Loss of green spaces
Too many new builds
Retrofitting
Social housing issues
Unaffordable homes
Resident consultation
Affordable homes
Prevent rent increases
Empty homes
Energy efficiency
Overpopulation
Work with small developers
More parking
Supported housing
More homelessness support
Lack of PRS properties

Future challenges and our planned response do for 2025-26

- **Local Government Reform** is in its early stages in Essex and, as a member, Braintree District Council has committed to both the devolution priority programme and the local government reorganisation. Final plans for the reorganisation are expected in the Autumn of 2025, and the establishment for a mayoral county combined authority by April 2026. While the priority will be to ensure no disruption to our statutory services, there is likely to be structural changes made to both service areas and strategic plans, and this may have an impact on the delivery of some of our strategy actions. We will continue to monitor this to respond promptly to the changing environment.
- **Cost of Living** continues to impact those with existing disadvantages and vulnerabilities within our communities to put many households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced opportunities and wellbeing. Braintree District Council is committed to delivering and facilitating support and advice to do what we can to protect our residents against the impact of rising costs of food, fuel and other essentials. Our Healthy Housing Strategy acknowledges the

importance of horizon scanning and data analysis to keep ahead of the trends and risks associated with these issues and we will continue to monitor and report trends on data and research around housing.

- **Climate, national policies and funding streams.** Climate change, international conflicts and national priorities can affect our lives through changes in legislation and policies. The strategy acknowledges this by ensuring BDC is ready to respond to the impacts of legislation and political changes on housing and homelessness, which includes Accommodation Based Housing Related Support, Renters Rights Bill, the Supported Housing Strategy and Essex Housing Protocols. Our strategy includes an action to maximise and share opportunities for external investments through funding and grants, and we will continue to monitor all avenues available to keep up to date on all national and regional funding opportunities that support our aim to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

Our Priorities and Outcomes 2024-2025

Priority 1

Affordability:
Facilitate a consistent programme of good quality homes which best meet the needs of our current and future residents

- The Council have, for a number of years, exceeded our target of building 250 affordable homes. 2024-2025 saw BDC facilitate the delivery of 295 affordable homes across the district. We have been successful in delivering policy compliant affordable housing in the Braintree District on a scheme-by-scheme basis over 2024-2025.
- Our planning teams have refreshed the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for the Braintree District, providing an up-to-date picture of the district's housing needs, and guiding development priorities for the future.
- The Housing StatNav has been updated, to enable BDC to map current affordable housing and to influence future housing delivery to make sure we are fit for the future. www.braintree.gov.uk/housingstatnav/
- The Council have lead a registered providers forum, where we have created a collaborative space for information sharing on managing anti-social behaviour and tenancy sustainment. The forum also highlights the work across many organisations, including the Rough Sleeper Initiative and Community Safety Partnership.
- Our Environment service achieved a two-year funding extension on the Green Dr Service, helping us to support homeowners, tenants and landlords with energy efficiency advice and advice on keeping rented properties to a decent standard. In 2024-25 we supported

Challenges:

Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, new government housing targets and economic impacts have been slowing the speed in which developments are progressing across the UK, and it is likely this will impact affordable housing delivery as we head into 2025-26. We acknowledge that as we go forward into the next year, our priority will be to continue to meet our targets for affordable housing and to work with all our partners to ensure that housing in Braintree meets the needs of our residents.



295
affordable homes
delivered
in 2024/2025

Our next steps for 2025-26

- Continue to monitor and report on national and local trends which impact housing development in the district
- Ensure that all new development sites over 15 units contain a reasonable number of affordable properties which reflect the needs of the district - a minimum 30% or 40% affordable properties (depending on urban and rural location)
- Continue to support homeowners and landlords with energy efficiency advice and advice on keeping rented properties to a decent standard
- Revise the Local Plan in line with recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Priority 2

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

The Thriving Places Index is a diagnostic tool which focuses on the causes of ill health. The Mid Essex Alliance and the Council have been

able to design a framework which identifies the gaps and opportunities at local level using the Thriving Places index.

Working with the Mid Essex Alliance partners, four overarching themes were identified as priorities for Mid Essex (Braintree, Maldon and Chelmsford districts) through the development of the tool. The council are working collaboratively to address:

- Healthy Housing – focusing on the impact on respiratory conditions

- Thriving Childhoods – ensuring children, young people and families have the best start in life
- Economic Wellbeing – acknowledging the links between deprivation and health status
- Connectivity – focusing on addressing loneliness, and access to services
- Over the last year BDC has been working collaboratively with Essex County Council and Housing Learning Information Network develop the evidence needed for a supported housing strategy for the district. We have jointly conducted a review of all sheltered housing stock to ensure all relevant parties understand the sheltered schemes available and how we can meet the needs of both our current and future residents.
- The Environmental Health Team has been supporting landlords and tenants through the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process to ensure that more people are able to live in homes that meet their needs for longer. In 2024/25 102 DFG applications were completed.

Challenges:

The Disabled Facilities Grant grant was not sufficient to cover the demand for 2024-25 and, as a result, The Council were one of a few local authorities without a surplus at the end of the year. Additional funding has been confirmed for 2025-26 but this has shown the funding may not meet the demand if the trend continues.



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Disability Facility Grants funded completed work in the community.

Our next steps for 2025-26

- Work with Essex County Council on the outcomes of the research from the Housing Learning and Improvement Network to develop a Supported Housing Strategy
- Work with our partners to support residents to move into appropriate properties within suitable communities as their needs change, by providing a report which reviews Supported Housing pathway arrangements.
- In collaboration with Registered Social Landlords, the Council will support the development of a Rightsizing Policy to help residents live in homes suitable for their needs.
- Continue to support our vulnerable residents with specialist provisions and housing to live independently and thrive in the community - including ensuring sufficient DFG provision.
- By linking health with housing, this has enabled the opportunity for a Public Health Practitioner degree apprentice to be based within the Housing and Communities Service for 3 years.

Priority 3

Access: Improving access to and the quality of existing properties including the Private Rented Sector

- After recruiting an Empty Homes and Private Rented Sector (PRS) Officer in 2023, BDC now have a comprehensive empty homes database in place, and a process to monitor all properties empty for 6 months or longer. A new Empty Homes Working Group - a collaborative effort between strategic housing, environmental health and council tax teams - has been established to tackle long term empty properties and are undertaking a test case for an enforcement process for empty properties with multiple debts and multi-agency involvement. In total, 52 long term empty properties have been brought back into use in 2024/25.
- To help improve the condition of properties in the district, the Environmental Health Team have undertaken a home conditions survey to map the quality and tenure of properties in the district. This will form the basis of our work in 2025-26 to align the results with our poverty report and strategic housing market assessment. The end results will enable a more holistic approach and responsive services to tenants and homeowners.
- We have continued to develop and promote our Private Rented Sector Scheme and tenancy sustainment support to support those at risk of homelessness. The scheme continues to spend an average of £2,000 per case to accommodate households within the PRS. The total number of households placed is 43. Within the number of households placed, there have been 50 adults and 27 children.
- The Housing and Communities Service has introduced a social return on investment tool to develop a framework that quantifies the value of social, environmental, and economic outcomes generated by our activities and produced a report on the value gained by our tenancy sustainment scheme.

Challenges:

The Renter's Rights Bill has been confirmed as a priority for the government for 2025 and is expected to be introduced by the summer. It is likely that this will have a significant impact on the Private Rented Sector (PRS). The aim of the policy is to end Section 21 'no fault evictions' and improve standards in the private rented sector. While there is no certainty as to exactly how this will change the landscape of the private rented sector, it is likely there will be some short-term impacts on both private tenants and landlords. It is predicted that landlords may exit the market, possibly resulting in less properties available within the private rented sector. We will be monitoring this closely to ensure we are able to support tenants through the process.

Rent in the private rented sector is continuing to rise, and we are taking steps to monitor the numbers of people presenting to us on rent affordability issues. Our Private Rented Sector Scheme has been extended for a further 2 years to support those living in, attempting to access, or leaving the private rented sector.

Our next steps for 2025-26

- Establish a Landlord Register as part of the regulations introduced by the Renters Rights Bill. The aim is to improve the quality and conditions of private rented sector properties in the district.
- Increase the number of households entering the PRS and reduce pressure on temporary accommodation. Sustain tenancies of those who have been placed in the PRS by the scheme and deliver year 2 and year 3 of the private rented sector scheme.

