Fourth Quarter and Annual Performance Management Report

1 April 2025 to
31 March 2026

Braintree
District Council

Contents

Section 1: Introduction and Summary

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to demonstrate the performance of the Council at the end of the fourth quarter, and the end of the year, in relation to the Annual Plan 2025/26. This sets out the key activities being implemented to deliver the corporate priorities and summarises the measures in place by aligning key performance indicators to the 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, 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 year

Corporate Priorities	Status of projects and actions				
Communities	11	5	-	-	-
Prosperity	12	1	1	-	-
Environment	7	4	-	-	1
TOTAL	**30**	**10**	**1**	**-**	**1**

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 year

Status of indicators			
			Data Only
7	3	6	5

KEY:

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

Summary Position

At the end of the fourth quarter, delivery remained strong, with 18 projects completed during the period. These included a broad range of community, economic and environmental initiatives delivered both within the quarter and across the year. Key achievements included the continued delivery of the LiveWell Strategy, allocation of Health and Wellbeing and Councillor Community Grants to a wide range of local partners and groups, and targeted use of the Winter Pressure Fund to support vulnerable and homeless individuals.

Work to address social isolation and loneliness progressed throughout the year, alongside the assessment and testing of temporary accommodation options. In addition, the Council and its partners successfully delivered the actions of the Community Safety Action Plan, and individual initiatives were implemented through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Economic growth and place-shaping activities also progressed in the fourth quarter, including the finalisation of the approach to Horizon 120 Zone A, development of the North Essex Growth Plan, and advancement of options for the Witham Enterprise site. Business support activity was delivered through the North Essex Economic Board, and inward investment activity continued throughout the year. Support was also provided to Parish Councils developing Neighbourhood Plans, alongside initiatives to strengthen school engagement with universities and deliver year two of the Green Skills programme. Environmental priorities were addressed through fuel poverty support initiatives and waste minimisation and recycling work in partnership with Essex County Council.

By year end, overall project performance remained positive, with a total of 30 projects successfully completed and a further 10 projects on track. Two projects were off track, comprising one amber-rated project and one cancelled project. The amber project relates to the Witham and Halstead Town Centre regeneration, where approval of the street lighting design remains outstanding and revisions to the project completion date cannot be determined without input from Essex County Council. In respect of the cancelled project, work on the Renewable Energy Supplementary Planning Document, was paused during the third quarter until publication of the local plan so that the supporting guidance on renewable energy can be informed by the content of the local plan.

Performance against performance indicators in the fourth quarter was mixed. Eight performance indicators met or exceeded their targets, while eight did not. Of those that fell short, three missed their targets by less than 5%, namely fly tips cleared within 24 hours, and Council Tax and Business Rates collection rates, indicating performance remained close to expected levels. However, five performance indicators missed target by more than 5%, including the number of affordable homes delivered, percentage of recycling, residual waste per household, timely approval of Disabled Facilities Grants, and the proportion of stage 1 complaints resolved within timescales.

Looking at the full year position, seven performance indicators met or exceeded target, while nine did not. Of those below target, three missed targets by less than 5%, again relating to fly tip clearance and Council Tax and Business Rates collection rates. A further six indicators fell short by more than 5%, including affordable housing delivery, percentage of recycling and residual waste per household, timely approval of Disabled Facilities Grants, customer service centre first contact resolution, and stage 1 complaints resolved within timescales.

Overall, while a number of core service areas performed well or close to expectations, the year-end position highlights continued challenges in specific operational and demand-led areas.

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

Project title & progress	Target date & status
1.1 - Support residents and communities impacted by the cost-of-living crisis through initiatives raised by the £1m new homes bonus. A range of targeted interventions has been delivered in the fourth quarter to support residents with cost-of-living pressures. Microgrant funding enabled Family Solutions to improve digital inclusion by providing tablet access for families, helping them engage with online services such as mental health support, parenting programmes and benefits. The funding also supported 16 families with essential furniture, including beds and bedding. Additional practical support was secured through Community Dental Services, providing 200 dental care packs for residents experiencing immediate homelessness. Financial resilience activity has continued in partnership with AgeWell East, securing over £68,000 in additional annual income for residents through previously unclaimed benefits, largely identified via GP referrals. Investment in community-based provision has also had a positive impact, with funding enabling Braintree Foyer to upgrade its gym, supporting low-income residents and those in recovery, with early signs of improved wellbeing and behaviour. Alongside service delivery, analytical work has strengthened the Council's understanding of needs, with a data dashboard developed to identify areas of higher cost-of-living pressures. This approach has been positively received at a system-wide level, with interest in expanding it across Essex. A full annual report will be published later in the year to provide a comprehensive overview of the cost-of-living initiatives delivered in 2025/26 and the positive impact they have had on residents and communities. Funding has also been agreed to continue supporting residents and communities impacted by the cost-of-living crisis up to March 2028.	August 2026
1.2 - Deliver activities to support the priorities of the LiveWell Strategy. In the fourth quarter, work took place to finalise the Business Case for a new Active Rewards programme with Freedom Leisure that will commence from April 2026 providing subsidised or free access to leisure activities for up to 12 weeks. It is hoped funding from Active Essex will allow the programme to run for three years instead of the original two years intended with the remaining funds coming from the Councils Public Health Grant and Cost of Living funding.	March 2026

£9,000 worth of Public Health Grant was ringfenced to support partner projects under the Compassionate Communities workstream. The Council received 25 applications with six being successful. Those that have not been successful have been contacted and sign-posted to other funding opportunities (for example the Councillor Community Grant Scheme). A joint-partnership bid with Healthwatch Essex to the Specialist Centre for Public Health to develop a social research programme on the impact of the Cost-of-Living Partnership was submitted, and the Council has received notification this has been successful in principle. This is the second year of successfully delivering the activities and initiates of the LiveWell Strategy and we will continue to work closely with partners, stakeholders and residents to ensure the strategy delivers meaningful and lasting improvements through to 2028.	
1.3 - Administer the Health and Wellbeing Panel Grants. The Council receives Public Health funding from Essex County Council to distribute to projects that meet one or more of the Braintree District's Livewell Strategy priorities. Ten small grants, three large grants and six compassionate communities grants were successful in 2025/26. The ten small grants (up to £1000) were awarded to: Fusion Lifestyle, CARA Essex, Carers Connect, Healthwatch Essex, Crossroads Braintree and Chelmsford, Chappel Community Care Transport, Braintree Mencap, Rayne Boxing Club, Witham Boxing Club, Essex Dementia Care and the Braintree District Cultural Education Partnership. These grants supported a range of different activities and equipment procurement. The three large grants (up to £10,000) were awarded to: Wilderness Foundation UK to deliver 'Down to Earth' at Braintree Community Garden, Healthwatch Essex to deliver the Braintree District Fellas Forum and Braintree District Cultural Education Partnership to deliver 'Action Art Play'. The allocation of the remaining public health money will be carried forward to 2026/27.	March 2026 ✔
1.4 - Procure and implement a 3-year contract for leisure services in the Braintree District. A new leisure contract was successfully procured and the new contract with Freedom Leisure commenced on 1 September 2025.	October 2025 ✔

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

2.1 - Revise the Local Plan in line with recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.	December 2026

The Regulation 18 consultation on the draft Local Plan launched in the fourth quarter and is due to conclude on 17 April 2026. The draft document sets out proposals for how the district will develop over the coming 15 years and invites residents to provide feedback on the proposals. Following the conclusion of the survey, feedback will be reviewed and incorporated into the Local Plan prior to its completion in 2026. The end date for this project was amended via change control in the third quarter from June to December 2026.	
2.2 - Work with Essex County Council on the outcomes of the research from the Housing Learning and Improvement Network to develop a Supported Housing Strategy. The Supported Housing Strategy programme is in its early development phase, with governance arrangements, strategic direction and partnership working now being established at a countywide level. National policy requirements and Essex-wide coordination provide a clear framework for delivery, but further work is required to develop the local evidence base, define priorities and delivery actions and align partners around a shared strategic approach. Progress is expected to accelerate over the coming months as authorities begin to translate this framework into locally defined Supported Housing Strategies.	December 2026
2.3 - Establish a Landlord Register as part of the regulations introduced by the Renters Rights Bill. The Council established a cross-departmental working group to develop a response to the Renters Rights Bill. This group continues to work through the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG) local authority checklist in order to prepare the organisation, supported by training provided by Shelter to officers from multiple service areas. Phase one of the Councils website to provide information and guidance links to residents and landlords was completed and went live in February 2026. An online form is in development to direct enquiries to the relevant service and will go live ahead of the new legislation going live on the 1st May 2026. Comms campaigns used approved MHCLG media material and continued to issue updates on all social media platforms and Landlord Forum will be held in April to provide updates.	March 2027
2.4 - Through the Homelessness Prevention Partnership distribute the rough sleeping Winter Pressure Fund. Activity through the Winter Pressures Fund was limited in the fourth quarter, reflecting both the seasonal operational pressures associated with SWEP and the reduced number of cases suitable for financial intervention during the early part of the quarter.	March 2026

Throughout the year, the Winter Pressure Fund has provided targeted financial support to prevent homelessness and support vulnerable households, particularly those at risk of rough sleeping. Funding has primarily been utilised for essential household items, food and hygiene support, and tenancy sustainment interventions, alongside higher-cost preventative measures such as rent in advance and arrears clearance. The fund has operated effectively as a targeted prevention tool, aligned with wider casework and multi-agency support, ensuring that financial assistance contributes to sustainable housing outcomes rather than short-term relief alone. The community-based element delivered through Peabody supported lower-level preventative interventions; however, overall spend was lower than anticipated. This reflects a combination of delivery approach and the level of demand locally, which has been more concentrated around higher-cost housing interventions such as rent in advance and arrears. It has been agreed to reallocate £15,000 of the remaining balance to the Council to support targeted housing interventions, with a smaller balance retained by Peabody to continue community-based support. This approach ensures that funding is directed where it can deliver the greatest and most immediate benefit in preventing homelessness.	
2.5 - Develop options and feasibility to provide Temporary Accommodation that is fit for the future needs of the district. Following work throughout the year to assess the options available to the Council, and their feasibility, a range options have been identified. There is a now requirement to assess the viability of a business case for the preferred option ensuring the needs of residents are met. This activity will continue into the next financial year and will be reported in future performance reports.	March 2026 ✔

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

3.1 - Build Witham Sports Ground 3G Pitch. Practical completion of the 3G Pitch was achieved on 30 May 2025, providing a high quality, all weather playing surface for all to use.	June 2025 ✔
3.2 - Continue to work with partners to deliver various activities and initiatives supporting people experiencing loneliness or social isolation. Work continued in the fourth quarter to support and promote the range of inclusive activities already on offer within the district, to ensure that residents have clear and accessible pathways to community support. Focus in the fourth quarter has been on cross-referring to various initiatives and partners, like linking veterans to the Fellas Forum and sign posting to Adult Social Care when residents present with support needs. Promotion of the 'Dementia Drop-In' has continued, ensuring it remains a welcoming and inclusive space focussed on supporting anyone affected by dementia. Residents have identified this service as providing a strong sense of belonging, and in March alone was attended by 70 residents, highlighting the impact and continued demand.	March 2026 ✔

Work has also begun to implement the actions arising from the Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey report. Findings identified mental health as the most significant contributing factor to social isolation, followed by physical health. One of the key recommendations was to increase opportunities for walk and talk activities. Work has taken place with The Recovery College to schedule and promote walks over the spring and summer. Preparations have also been made to bring the pop-up lounges back to Braintree, Witham and Halstead in June to mark Loneliness Awareness week (15-21 June). This is being delivered in partnership with Kinder Essex, and interest has already been received from other partners who wish to attend and support the lounges. The activities and initiatives delivered in 2025/26 have provided numerous opportunities for individuals to connect with each other. This is a key area of focus for the Council, and we will continue to deliver activities and initiatives over the next few years.	
3.3 - Award contract and start to build Witham Community Centre. The building is now watertight with all external doors and windows installed. Floors have been screeded, plasterboard and fireboard installation is underway and cabling and pipework has been installed. External cladding is progressing, blockwork in the car park is nearing completion and the tarmac has been laid. The request for Non-Material Amendments, scheduled for consideration at the 31 March Committee, has prevented Essex Highways from issuing the S278 agreement. Initial written assurance has enabled Highways to begin preparing the licence, however, there will be a 14-week period before agreement is in place and works can commence. As highway works are expected to take approximately three weeks, this will result in an overall project delay of around 10 weeks. The revised anticipated completion date is 28 July, using all contingency within the project timeline. Essex Highways have agreed that the Council's contractor can commence with the highways work on Council land, which is positive news. The project remains on track despite the delay incurred, but any further delays will necessitate a change in target date.	July 2026

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. The safer streets programme in Halstead concluded in September delivering a positive impact on the residents of Halstead. Halstead Town Council noted that there has been a significant reduction in anti-social behaviour and shoplifting, particularly due to employing the Street Warden who regularly patrols the areas of the town.	September 2025

4.2 - Continue to administer the Councillor Community Grant Scheme. 12 grants were allocated in the fourth quarter, taking the total for the year up to 87 projects. 59 projects were funded by individual councillors, and 28 were funded jointly by two or more councillors. Across the year, a total of £61,633.72 has been allocated to community projects, with an average grant size of £1400. This concludes the allocation of grants in 2025/26. The Councillor Community Grant scheme will continue into 2026/27 with refreshed allocations for all councillors.	March 2026 ✓
4.3 - Oversee the coordination of the Community Safety Action Plan to increase awareness of child exploitation, domestic abuse, fraud and cybercrime. Patrols of the Braintree Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) have been ongoing by Essex Police and the Street Scene Protection Team of BDC. 19 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued to persons witnessed breaching the PSPO since its implementation in October 2024. On 18 March, to coincide with National Child Exploitation Day, a Community Safety engagement event was delivered in Braintree Town Centre. The event was held in partnership with key agencies including Essex Police, Open Road and Children's Social Care, with a focus on raising awareness of exploitation, promoting safeguarding, and engaging directly with members of the public. On 27 March a multi-agency Night of Action took place in Braintree Town Centre, coinciding with Essex Police Operation Vigilant. Operation Vigilant focuses on tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) within the night-time economy, through visible patrols, early intervention and intelligence gathering. As part of the operation, Essex Police officers were deployed across the town centre in plain clothes, proactively patrolling the area and responding to any incidents or concerns that arose during the evening. On 31 March 2026, Braintree District Council's Community Safety Officer and Specialist Domestic Abuse Officer supported Sage Homes with a community engagement event in Kelvedon. The event was delivered in response to a high volume of complaints received relating to anti-social behaviour and suspected drug dealing within the area. The Community Safety Officer continues to attend the monthly 'Parish Council Forum' facilitated by Essex Police. This forum provides an opportunity to discuss community safety concerns and explore preventative measures collaboratively with Parish Councils, Essex Police, Braintree District Council and other members of the Community Safety Partnership. Operation Guardian continues to be delivered in Braintree Town Centre and remains in place until the end of March. The initiative provides dedicated funding to support out-of-hours weekend patrols, as well as the delivery of targeted days and nights of action aimed at addressing anti-social behaviour and serious violence within the town centre.	March 2026 ✓

There are currently 2 Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews in progress for the District, and 17 ASB case reviews have been requested since April 2025. The annual CSP Action Plan 2026/27 has been completed using the data/evidence from the strategic assessment. The Action Plan provides clear, practical actions and initiatives aimed at reducing harm, protecting vulnerable people and improving feelings of safety within communities. The Action Plan 2026/27 along with the Strategic Assessment will be presented to the Responsible Authority Group at the end of April 2026 for approval.	
4.4 - Continue to support local investment in communities through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (year 4). The 2025/26 delivery plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) has been successfully implemented. The programme has supported a diverse portfolio of projects that collectively address all UKSPF and REPF themes and missions, aligning with both national priorities and local strategic objectives. Under UKSPF, a total of 18 projects have been delivered, comprising 3 capital and 15 revenue projects, with some revenue allocations converted to capital where appropriate. These initiatives have included mental health training, anti-social behaviour workshops, employability skills development, and a wide range of business support measures. Importantly, the programme has facilitated engagement with new delivery partners and enabled the development of projects that respond directly to identified local needs and Council strategies. The REPF programme was successfully re-launched, primarily as a grant scheme supporting both business and community initiatives. A total of 20 projects have been supported, including 9 business-led, 10 community-based, and 1 public sector project. The majority of agreed outputs were delivered by 31 March 2026 and have been reported back to central government. However, it is recognised that some longer-term outcomes will not be fully realised or measurable until after the final claim period has closed. An extension has been agreed to allow a small portion of REPF business grant funding to be spent beyond the original 31 March 2026 deadline. UKSPF funding has had a meaningful and positive impact across the Braintree District, supporting vulnerable residents, educational initiatives, local organisations, businesses, and community groups. It is acknowledged, however, that certain outcomes—particularly those relating to skills development and employment progression—require a longer timeframe to fully materialise than the standard reporting period allows. The Council has maintained a proactive communications approach throughout the programme, including regular publicity, press releases, and social media engagement. Notably, one REPF-funded project, Tuffon Hall, recently hosted a visit from John Powell, Head of DEFRA Agricultural Sectors. This engagement provided an opportunity to discuss key issues including farming profitability, resilience, regulatory frameworks, and sector standards, highlighting the wider strategic value of funded projects beyond their immediate outputs.	March 2026 ✔

Prosperity

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

Project title & progress	Target date & status
1.1 - Deliver physical improvements to Halstead and Witham Town centres. Signage and paving works have been completed in Witham, and lamp column painting is currently being completed. The new bench was installed in Halstead, additional railings painted, electrical bollards tested and lamp columns painted. The paving in Halstead will be completed when the major lamp column work is carried out. Essex Highways are reviewing the street lighting design and have advised it will be made a priority. The contractor is staying in contact with Highways and scheduling a meeting to review transport management plans and discuss road space booking, whilst the Council wait on design approval. Whilst the design of the street lighting is awaiting approval, the target date for installation is uncertain, resulting in the project being marked as amber status. The target date for this project was amended in the third quarter, moving from September 2025 to April 2026.	April 2026
1.2 - Support the development and adoption of Neighbourhood Plans in Earls Colne, Wethersfield and Finchingfield and Bures/Bures St Mary's. The Earls Colne Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in July 2025, whilst the Bures Neighbourhood Plan is awaiting examination. The Finchingfield and Wethersfield Neighbourhood Plan will shortly be the subject of a formal public consultation. The Planning Policy Team continues to support the development of neighbourhood plans when it is possible to do so taking into account the demands of the Local Plan Review Project, and though the work towards this has concluded for this year's reporting, it will continue into the next financial year.	March 2026
1.3 - Develop a design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Focused workshops on the Design Code are due to take place in April in line with the project plan. It is planned that the draft design code will be completed by December 2026 moving to the final consultation process and adoption by June 2027. In light of the Government's reforms which removed the ability for Local Planning Authorities to produce SPDs, the process for adopting the Design Code is under consideration.	December 2026

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

2.1 - Build on inward investment activity through the North Essex Economic Board to create an action plan for Braintree. A video case study of ACS Aviation on Springwood Industrial Estate for the Locate website and other social media channels was filmed on 10 March 2026 and the revolving banner video for the front page of the Locate website is nearing completion. Following some further input from The Council, The North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) Inward Investment brochure is also nearing completion and publishing. Since the delivery of these actions is now complete, the Economic Development team are looking to commission a social media company to further market the Locate website as it continues to be populated into the next financial year, and are looking at a series of themed films for the Locate website including innovation opportunities and skills. The action plan produced earlier in the year has been used as internal guidance to shape the continued programme of Inward Investment activity planned for 2026-2028. This project is now complete.	March 2026
2.2 - Complete the final infrastructure delivery elements of Horizon 120 by removing excess soil. Contracts to sell the remaining plots with the soil in situ were agreed in September 2025 with the developer. This project is now complete.	September 2025
2.3 - Finalise an approach to zone A at Horizon 120. The Horizon 120 approach to Zone A project has now been completed. All agreed actions relating to the approach have been delivered as planned. Ongoing activity has transitioned into business as usual, with Asset Management now liaising directly with the developer to progress and oversee the agreed planning use arrangements. This project's target date was extended in the third quarter, from December 2025 to March 2026.	March 2026
2.4 - Sell plots 5 – 8 at Horizon 120. Contracts to sell plots 5 – 8 were agreed with the developer in September 2025 completing this project.	September 2025
2.5 - Take forward the recommended option from the viability study for the Witham Enterprise site. The Council is now moving forward with a plan to take the Witham Enterprise site to market. This particular aspect of the project is now complete, and reporting will continue on the progress of the site development plans in the coming financial year.	March 2026

2.6 - Support the work on developing a North Essex Growth Plan that will inform and promote positive engagement with the emerging plans for Devolution in Greater Essex. The North Essex Growth Plan has been completed and is being used by partners to feed into the preparatory work for devolution.	March 2026 ✅

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 focussed on enhancing financial management and business growth. North Essex Economic Board activity has now concluded for the year, with fourth quarter events taking place in other district areas. Across the financial year 140 unique businesses attended support events, 34 of which attended more than one event. 80% of attendees had more than 10 employees, and 70% had been established for greater than two years. Across all interactions (events and other business support channels) 164 unique enterprises were supported and 202 unique individuals supported. Of these, 169 (84%) had not received previous Local Authority-sponsored support.	March 2026 ✅
3.2 - Support businesses and residents across the district through delivery of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (year 4) projects. This project completed in December 2025, having fully delivered 18 free memberships to the hatchery space in the Plaza for sole traders.	March 2026 ✅

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

4.1 - Support school engagement to access University of Essex open days. Following challenges in arranging university visits highlighted in the third quarter, the Council has commissioned an education consultant to deliver an alternative programme – 'Pathways to Possibilities' – to schools which were unable to arrange visits. This featured an in-person session with university staff and students with a question and answer, as well as a video tour of the university campus and information to support students in applying and identifying higher education opportunities. This project is now complete however, two schools in the district have been successful in securing visits in June 2026, and the Council will be providing funding to facilitate transportation.	March 2026 ✅
4.2 - Organise and deliver jobs fairs in the district. This project completed in November 2025, following the delivery of three jobs fairs across the district successfully connecting people to prospective employers and enabling people to explore new career opportunities.	March 2026 ✅

4.3 - Through the Shared Prosperity Fund, deliver year 2 of the Green Skills Programme. 11 learners have completed their training, with 23 still studying. A further 19 learners have been identified and are in the pipeline to commence the programme. The programme has exceeded the target of providing training to 35 people and enabling them to complete a green skills qualification. This project is now complete.	March 2026

Environment

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

Project title & progress	Target date & status
1.1 - Enhance the play areas at Beckers Green Braintree, Kings Rd Halstead, Spa Rd Witham and Rickstones Rd Witham. Following procurement activity, the award of the contract was successful and works are due to commence in June. This project was extended in the third quarter, from March to July 2026.	July 2026
1.2 - Develop a renewable energy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This project was paused in the third quarter, following a decision to wait until publication of the Local Plan so that the supporting guidance on renewable energy can be informed by the content of the local plan.	December 2025
1.3 - Work with partners on the requirements to deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy across Essex. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been adopted by Essex County Council and was published on the Essex County Council website on 10 July 2026.	March 2026
1.4 - Revise The Council's Tree Strategy. Following the development of a project plan and full scoping of the project in the fourth quarter, the project has been through the change control process to move the end date from March 2026 to December 2026 and will continue to be reported on in the next financial year. The three key elements underpinning the Tree Strategy have been decided: Good design for new developments (supported by the design code). Management of current tree stock (aligning with the existing tree management protocol). Capital delivery projects for new tree planting.	December 2026

Work will now commence on setting out the overarching approach and aims and objectives. The Landscape Services team also continue to perform survey work on the Council's existing tree stock as well as other business-as-usual activities alongside the development of the Tree Strategy.	

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

2.1 - Work with Essex Air Consortium to finalise and adopt a joint Essex Air Quality Strategy. Following the adoption of the Essex Air Quality Strategy at Essex County Council's cabinet in September 2025, the Council (Braintree) adopted the Air Quality Strategy at its own cabinet in November 2025, marking the project as complete.	December 2025 ✅
2.2 - Through the North Essex Councils Climate Partnership, develop a shared risk register and best practice for adapting to climate change events. The local climate risk register was approved by Chief Executives of North Essex Councils in the third quarter. The risk register will provide a better understanding of collaborative approaches to mitigations and will be reviewed on a regular basis.	March 2026 ✅
2.3 - Work with partners to address the complex challenge of fuel poverty. The Council has continued to support residents through a range of domestic energy efficiency programmes, including The Green Doctor and the ECO4/Flex and Warm Homes Local Grant schemes, which have continued to be actively promoted. Complementing this, the Council's Handyman Service delivered 71 measures to support vulnerable residents in improving the safety and energy efficiency of their homes. The work to assist residents who face the challenge of fuel poverty will continue into the next financial year.	March 2026 ✅

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

3.1 - Work with Essex County Council and our partners in Essex to promote the Essex Flood guide. The Essex Flood Guide was published in July 2025 providing a single reference point for residents to identify appropriate contacts during a flood. The Council promoted the guide on social media, in the summer Contact Magazine and on the Council's website.	September 2025 ✅

3.2 - In partnership with Groundworks, deliver the extended Green Doctor Service, advising residents on energy efficiency. The Green Doctor Service offers residents who are in fuel poverty or struggling to keep their homes warm, support in controlling energy usage. The service, which is in pilot, has secured additional funding to extend the provision until March 2028. Officers in the sustainability team continue to direct residents to the service and assisted 77 residents in accessing the service in the fourth quarter. Across the year the Green Doctor Service has assisted over 200 residents.	March 2026

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

4.1 - Implement new waste collection arrangements following the conclusion of the waste service public consultation and Cabinet decision The fourth quarter has seen significant progress cleansing and validating communal property data, with uploads underway and analysis guiding where site visits are required. Engagement with Housing Associations and managing agents continued throughout, supporting assessments of properties potentially transitioning to communal collections. Website pages were created, including a calculator for bin sizes and preparation of correspondence to managing agents for February progressed accordingly. Follow up letters have been sent and work remains to finalise the roll out for communal properties based on the feedback awaited from the managing agents. Key infrastructure work was completed at the Plaza site, enabling the initial delivery of 30,000 bins to the Council, with further deliveries aligned to resident distribution. Bin-delivery routing was successfully tested and remained on track for rollout of bins to residents which started in February. Routing remains under development, subject to ongoing work within the project groups and feedback from crews. IT support saw steady progress, with the Delivery Tracker operational, crew tablet rollout advancing, and development of the Bulky Waste portal underway. The Absorbent Hygiene Product (AHP) service design has advanced with the establishment of a new working group, alongside a review of Assisted Collection and capacity-based services to ensure alignment with future service models and policy direction. The expected go-live date for the new AHP service for applications is by the end of April with contractor discussions around sacks in place. Continued focus was placed on policy alignment, strengthening back-office processes, and refining system workflows. Communications activity was integrated into the main programme workstreams. Development of external materials, including Contact magazine content, councillor communications, social media assets, business cards, and parish posters, progressed throughout the fourth quarter. Internal communications, such as posters, screensavers, depot materials and updates via the internal employee newsletter, were prepared and delivered in early February, supporting staff awareness and readiness.	June 2026

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 the Waste Reforms and Essex Waste Strategy The Council continued to advertise the garden waste subscription service using all digital channels including social media and newsletters, to encourage residents to re subscribe or sign up for the service, ahead of new subscriptions starting at the beginning of April. During the course of the fourth quarter the focus of waste communications shifted heavily towards the upcoming Waste Service changes, with a campaign of communications designed to raise awareness of the service change due to commence June 2026.	March 2026
4.3 - Develop a waste Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). In the third quarter, the project was paused awaiting clarification in respect of the process for developing a supplementary plan within the new plan-making system. This has now been received, and the waste SPD has been prioritised in order to ensure adoption occurs under the existing system, prior to the cut off at the end of June 2026. The SPD is out to consultation which closes on the 5th June. It is then intended that the waste SPD will be presented to Full Council before the 30 June deadline for adoption of plans under the previous scheme. To reflect the change in timescales, the project has gone through the appropriate change control process to amend the target date from December 2025 to June 2026.	June 2026

Climate Change Action Plan

Introduction

During this period, activity focused on progressing delivery of the Council's climate programme, including the development of a refreshed Climate Action Plan (CAP) for two years (2026-2028) in alignment with Service Business Plans and wider corporate priorities. This was supported by detailed project planning, scoping and costing. This reflects a continued shift toward structured, coordinated delivery across key themes including energy, transport, waste and resilience, underpinned by strengthened regional partnerships and targeted resident-focused programmes.

A key milestone was the appointment of the new Climate Change Project Manager, in January 2026. Since joining, she has led engagement with internal services and external partners to develop the new plan, and spearheaded the focussed, cost-effectiveness and co-benefit focussed structure for the projects, which has now been approved by Cabinet and is progressing through its final stages ahead of publication.

In parallel, work has commenced on data collection and analysis for the Annual Climate Change Report, establishing a more robust evidence-base and ensuring future reporting aligns with agreed performance measures.

Resources

During this quarter, the Council entered the final phase of the rollout of the new kerbside collection system, including the delivery of recycling bins and boxes to households across the district. This is in preparation for the implementation of the new waste collection arrangements commencing in June 2026. Communications activity was significantly increased during this period to ensure residents are well informed about upcoming changes and service requirements.

The Council has continued to promote garden waste subscription services, supporting both increased participation and cost recovery. This has been complemented by targeted campaigns to improve recycling performance, including a particular focus on food waste and textiles recycling initiatives.

Strategic work has also progressed through ongoing collaboration on the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) with UK Power Networks and Essex authorities, supporting longer-term planning for local energy infrastructure. Alongside this, a programme of communications, including newsletters and contributions to Contact magazine have continued to support behaviour change and raise awareness of sustainability initiatives among residents.

Energy Conservation

Significant progress has been made in strengthening the Council's strategic and operational approach to energy conservation. Detailed delivery plans have been developed for the new 2026 – 28 CAP, with clearly defined milestones, delivery frameworks and measures of success.

Work has continued to advance renewable energy projects, including the preparation of business cases and procurement activity for a solar PV installation at Silver End Village Hall. In parallel, procurement has begun on the replacement and insulation of the Village Hall roof, enabling the solar project to progress subject to funding once works are completed.

Energy efficiency improvements have also been delivered across the Council's estate, including the installation of innovative e-glass coating, to reduce overheating and reliance on air conditioning. In addition, Display Energy Certificates (DECs) have been completed for all publicly accessible Council buildings, ensuring compliance and transparency.

The Council has continued to support residents through a range of domestic energy efficiency programmes, including:

- The Green Doctor Service, which delivered 77 energy-saving measures in residents' homes during the quarter and has secured funding through to March 2028
- The ECO4/Flex and Warm Homes Local Grant schemes, which have continued to be actively promoted

Complementing this, the Council's Handyman Service delivered 71 measures to support vulnerable residents in improving the safety and energy efficiency of their homes.

Strong engagement has been achieved through energy switching initiatives. The Essex Energy Switch programme generated high levels of interest, with over 500 resident registrations recorded, although market volatility in March meant that suppliers were unable to offer tariffs below the energy price cap.

The Council has also continued to promote national initiatives, including the Warm Homes Plan and Solar Together, ensuring residents are aware of available opportunities to improve energy efficiency and reduce costs.

Transport

The Council has continued to support the delivery and expansion of sustainable transport options across the district. The DigiGo demand-responsive transport service has expanded its fleet to 14 electric vehicles, with its contract extended to 2028, representing a significant step forward in low-emission transport provision.

Engagement activity has been undertaken to better understand future transport needs, including promotion of a Digital Demand Responsive Transport survey, the findings of which will inform future funding bids and service development.

In addition, the Council has supported consultation activity led by the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) on proposed parking changes designed to encourage more sustainable travel behaviours.

Work is also progressing on the replacement of the Council’s electric vehicle charging infrastructure contract, which will support improved provision for both public and staff use across the Council’s estate.

Built Environment

The Council has continued to embed climate change considerations within the built environment and planning system. Work has commenced with Planning colleagues to support the development of the new Local Plan, ensuring that climate and energy policies are integrated into future development standards.

The Council has maintained promotion of the Green Skills Programme, supporting local capacity in retrofit and low-carbon construction, and contributing to workforce development aligned with decarbonisation goals.

In parallel, targeted improvements to the Council’s estate have been delivered to reduce emissions and improve building performance, supporting wider organisational carbon reduction objectives.

Business and the Green Economy

Activity during the quarter has focused on strengthening the local green economy and supporting businesses to transition towards more sustainable practices. The Council has promoted reuse initiatives and highlighted local good practice through the publication of case studies featuring sustainable businesses. The launch of the next round of the Love Essex Fund has also been promoted to encourage local innovation.

Partnership working has been a key focus, with collaboration between Braintree District, Colchester, Tendring, and regional organisations including COLBA and NEEB to develop proposals for SME-focused sustainability support. This includes the exploration of future delivery mechanisms such as events, online platforms, and signposting packages.

The Council has also contributed to Essex County Council’s “Sustainable Essex” initiative, supporting the development of case studies and climate action advice resources aimed at businesses, communities, and schools.

Engagement with young people has been expanded through delivery of a Green Skills, Careers and Green Technology event, reaching over 400 students and supporting the development of future skills within the green economy.

In addition, the Council has promoted sustainable local businesses and behaviours, including plant-based food initiatives and sustainable food education, helping to raise awareness of lower-carbon lifestyle choices.

Natural Environment

The Council has taken forward a range of actions to support the natural environment. Braintree District Council formally adopted the Essex Air Quality Strategy, which sets out shared priorities and actions to improve air quality across the district and wider Essex.
Work has also progressed on a £70,000 tree and bulb planting programme, including design development and site identification, contributing to biodiversity enhancement and carbon sequestration.

The Council has continued to recognise and support community-led environmental activity, including volunteer work focused on river maintenance and litter removal. Engagement with wider regional and national initiatives relating to biodiversity, ecosystem resilience and water infrastructure has also ensured that local activity is aligned with broader environmental priorities.

Adapting to Climate Change

The Council has continued to strengthen its work on climate adaptation and resilience throughout Quarter Four. This has included the ongoing provision of flood risk communications, with warnings and advice issued to residents in response to storm events and flood risks.

The Council has remained an active participant in the Essex Flood Executive and has contributed to the development of the Integrated Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, helping to shape a coordinated approach to managing flood risk across the county.

Operational preparedness has been enhanced through participation in multi-agency resilience exercises, including Exercise Briar, and associated training activities. These exercises have strengthened both strategic and tactical response capabilities.

In addition, the Council has supported the development and approval of the Essex Community Resilience Strategy, including the establishment of key performance indicators and a one-year action plan, providing a structured framework to improve community preparedness and response to climate-related risks.

Fit For The Future

During the fourth quarter the Council has continued to make steady progress in delivering its Fit for the Future transformation programme. Work has focused on improving how services are delivered, making better use of digital technology, and ensuring the organisation is well prepared for future changes. Across all areas, the emphasis has been on delivering practical improvements that make it easier for residents to access services and for staff to work efficiently.

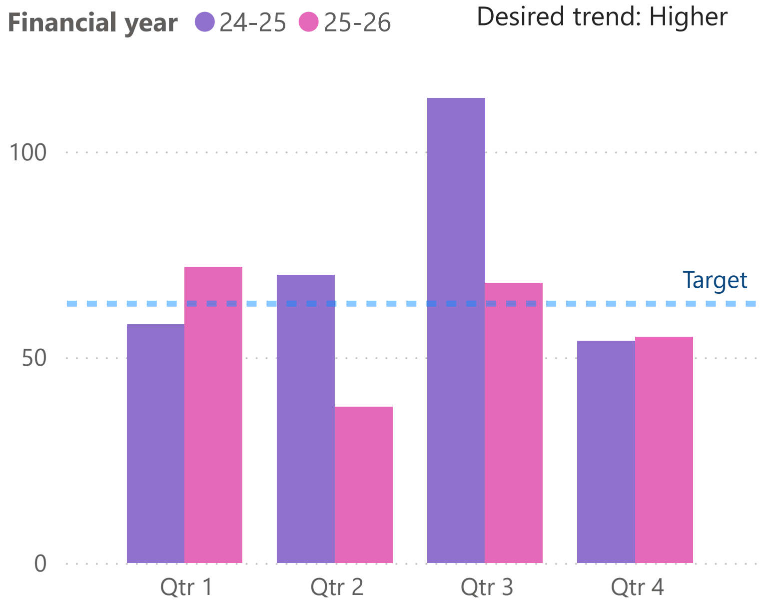
Several service reviews have moved forward this quarter, helping the Council better understand where improvements can be made and where resources can be used more effectively. In some areas, changes have already been put in place to simplify processes, reduce delays, and improve the customer experience. This includes clearer procedures, better coordination between teams, and a stronger focus on responding to resident needs.

Digital improvements have continued, with steps taken to make more services available online and easier to use. This includes improving forms, reviewing how people access information, and making systems more reliable. These changes are helping to reduce the need for residents to contact the Council multiple times and are supporting staff to resolve enquiries more quickly.

Work to support staff and strengthen the organisation has also been a key priority this quarter. This includes ongoing efforts to build skills, support wellbeing, and promote a positive and inclusive working environment. Clearer ways of working and stronger collaboration across teams are helping to ensure that services are resilient and able to respond to change.

Overall, the programme remains on track, with good progress made in many areas. Some work will continue into the next quarter, particularly where changes are more complex or depend on wider developments. The focus will remain on delivering tangible improvements for residents, ensuring value for money, and preparing the Council for the future.

Number of affordable homes delivered



Status:

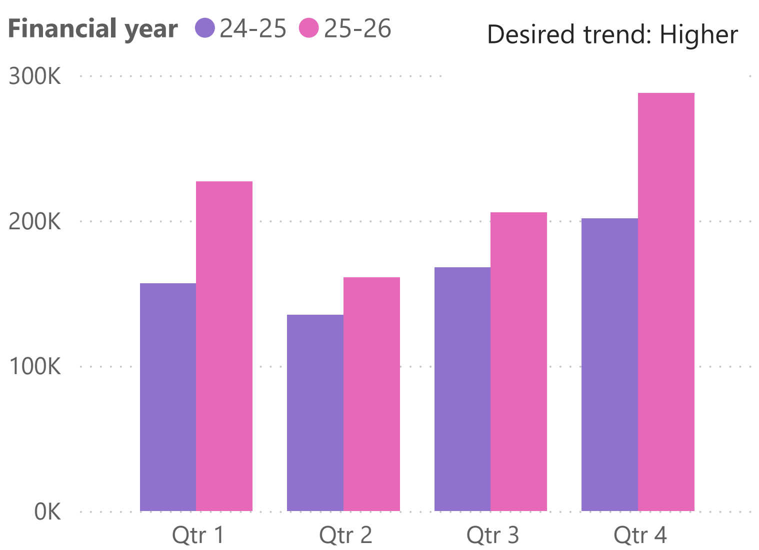
Year to date position:

233

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	58	63
24-25	Qtr 2	70	62
24-25	Qtr 3	113	62
24-25	Qtr 4	54	63
25-26	Qtr 1	72	63
25-26	Qtr 2	38	62
25-26	Qtr 3	68	62
25-26	Qtr 4	55	63

Comments: Despite this year's just below threshold shortfall against the annual target of 250 homes to be delivered in 2025/26, the Council continues to work proactively with developers, Registered Providers and other partners to maximise affordable housing opportunities through the planning process and regeneration schemes. Delivery of affordable homes is heavily influenced by external factors, including the housing market, viability of development schemes, construction costs, interest rates, planning and regulatory requirements, and the pace at which Registered Providers and developers bring forward sites. These factors are largely outside of the Council's direct control. Affordable housing delivery remains strong over the longer term, with an average of 317 affordable homes delivered each year over the last five years, demonstrating the ongoing commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing across the district.

Number of visitors to our leisure centres



Data only: This metric does not have a target.

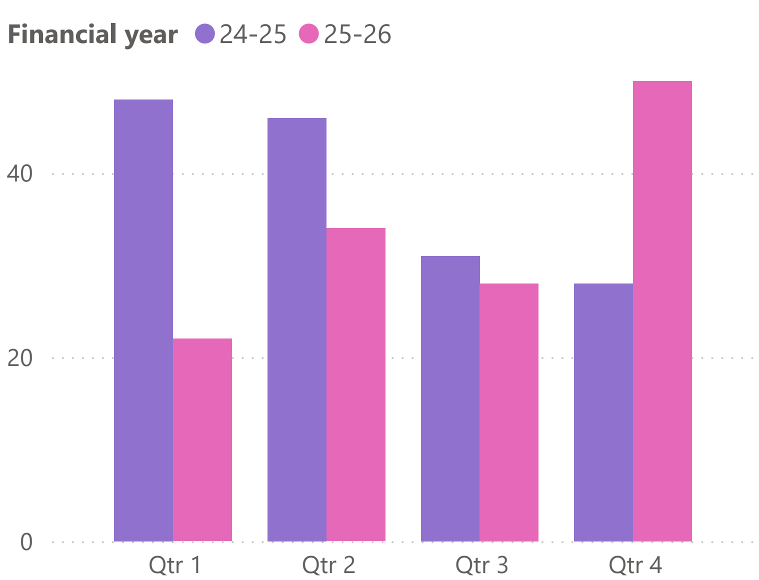
Year to date position:

882,348

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	156,554	228,341
24-25	Qtr 2	134,916	208,939
24-25	Qtr 3	167,508	171,666
24-25	Qtr 4	201,461	175,513
25-26	Qtr 1	226,836	
25-26	Qtr 2	160,874	
25-26	Qtr 3	205,545	
25-26	Qtr 4	289,093	

Comments: Leisure centre visitors increased again in the fourth quarter, compared to the previous quarter and the same period last year. This continues a positive upward trend of visitor numbers in all quarters compared to the previous year.

Number of homelessness cases prevented



Data only: This metric does not have a target.

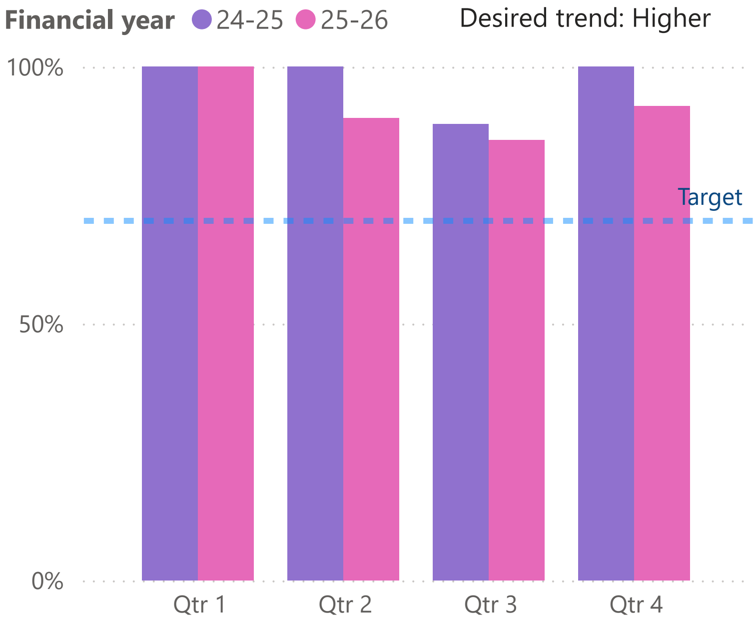
Year to date position:

134

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn
24-25	Qtr 1	48
24-25	Qtr 2	46
24-25	Qtr 3	31
24-25	Qtr 4	28
25-26	Qtr 1	22
25-26	Qtr 2	34
25-26	Qtr 3	28
25-26	Qtr 4	50

Comments: The number of homelessness cases prevented increased in the fourth quarter compared to the third quarter, returning the highest outturn in the past two years. Whilst this can be an indicator of demand, the metric only captures where a formal duty of homelessness was owed and prevented.

Major planning applications decided on time



Status: ✔

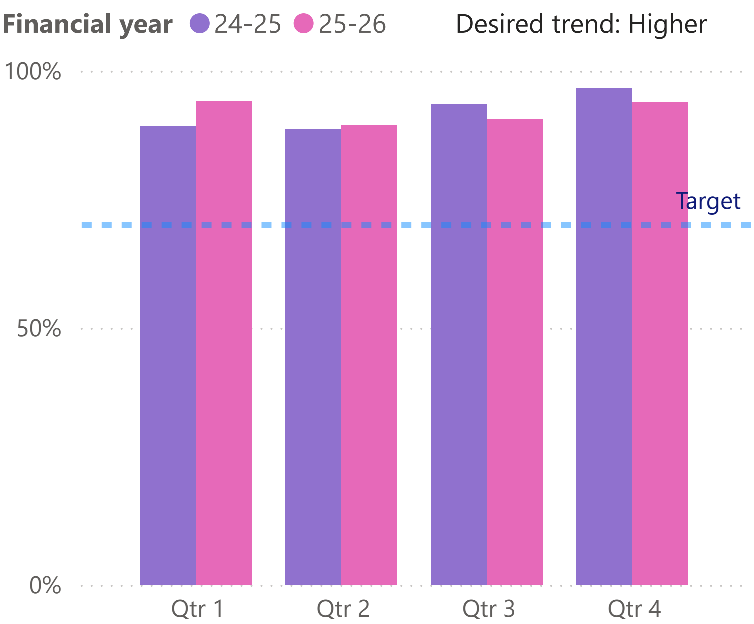
Year to date position:

91.89% ✔

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	100.00%	70%
24-25	Qtr 2	100.00%	70%
24-25	Qtr 3	88.89%	70%
24-25	Qtr 4	100.00%	70%
25-26	Qtr 1	100.00%	70%
25-26	Qtr 2	90.00%	70%
25-26	Qtr 3	85.71%	70%
25-26	Qtr 4	92.31%	70%

Comments: 12 out of 13 major planning applications were decided on time in the fourth quarter. Overall across the year 34 out of 37 major applications have been decided on time, resulting in a 91.89% outturn.

Minor planning applications decided on time



Status: ✔

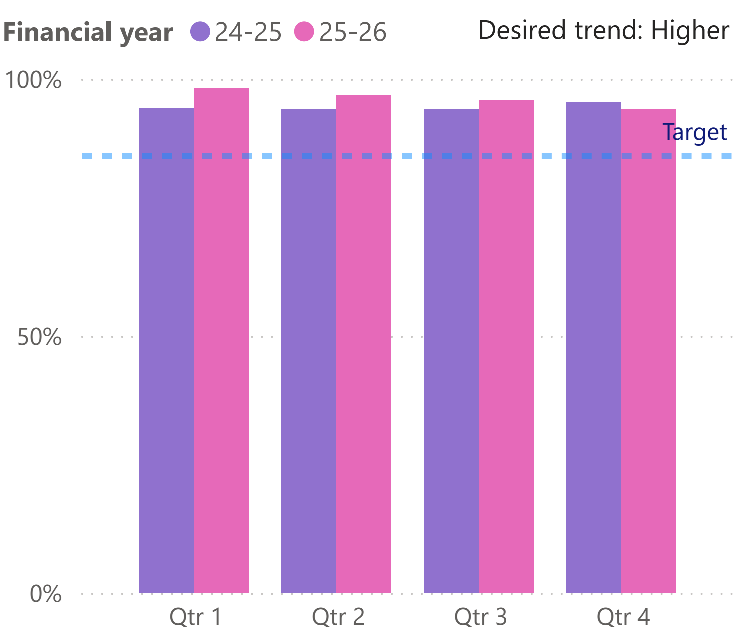
Year to date position:

92.68% ✔

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	89.29%	70%
24-25	Qtr 2	88.71%	70%
24-25	Qtr 3	93.42%	70%
24-25	Qtr 4	96.67%	70%
25-26	Qtr 1	93.98%	70%
25-26	Qtr 2	89.47%	70%
25-26	Qtr 3	90.48%	70%
25-26	Qtr 4	93.85%	70%

Comments: 90.48%, 61 out of 65 minor planning applications were approved in time in the fourth quarter. Across the year 266 out of 287 applications were approved in time, resulting in an overall outturn of 92.68%.

Other planning applications decided on time



Status: ✔

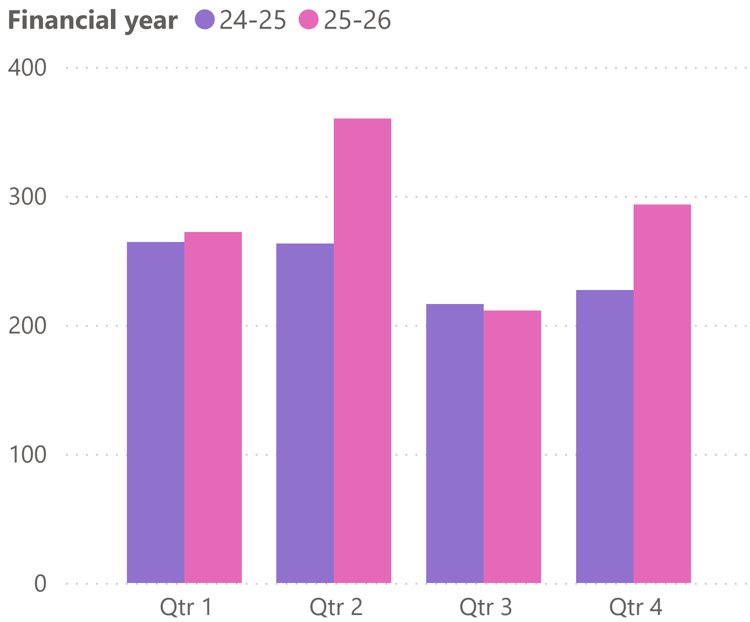
Year to date position:

96.35% ✔

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	94.41%	85%
24-25	Qtr 2	94.05%	85%
24-25	Qtr 3	94.16%	85%
24-25	Qtr 4	95.52%	85%
25-26	Qtr 1	98.17%	85%
25-26	Qtr 2	96.82%	85%
25-26	Qtr 3	95.86%	85%
25-26	Qtr 4	94.16%	85%

Comments: The fourth quarter outturn for other planning applications decided on time was 94.16%, representing 129 out of 137 applications. The overall position for the year is 581 out of 603 total applications across the year resulting in a 96.35% outturn.

Number of new start up businesses



Data only: This metric does not have a target.

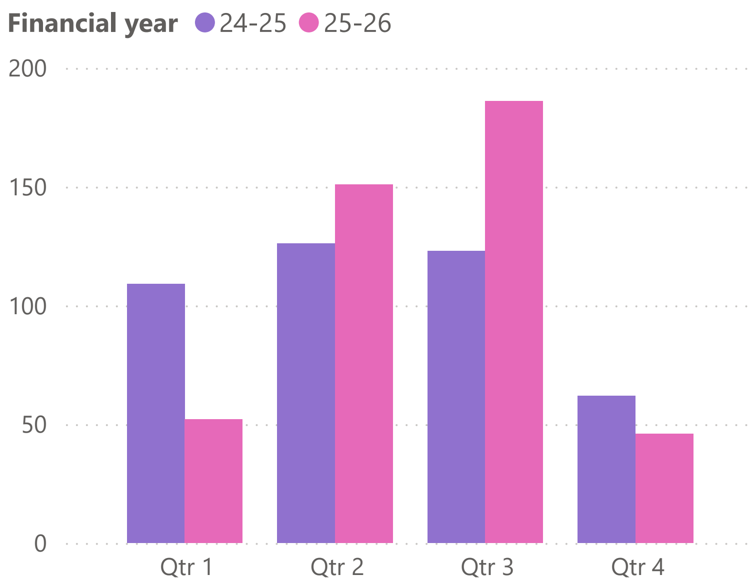
Year to date position:

1136

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn
24-25	Qtr 1	264
24-25	Qtr 2	263
24-25	Qtr 3	216
24-25	Qtr 4	227
25-26	Qtr 1	272
25-26	Qtr 2	360
25-26	Qtr 3	211
25-26	Qtr 4	293

Comments: 293 new businesses were registered in the fourth quarter, which is has exceeded the outturn in the same quarter last year. Following a strong outturn in Q2 and Q4, the year to date position finalised at 1136, which is an increase of 166 on the previous year.

Number of businesses accessing business support



Data only: This metric does not have a target.

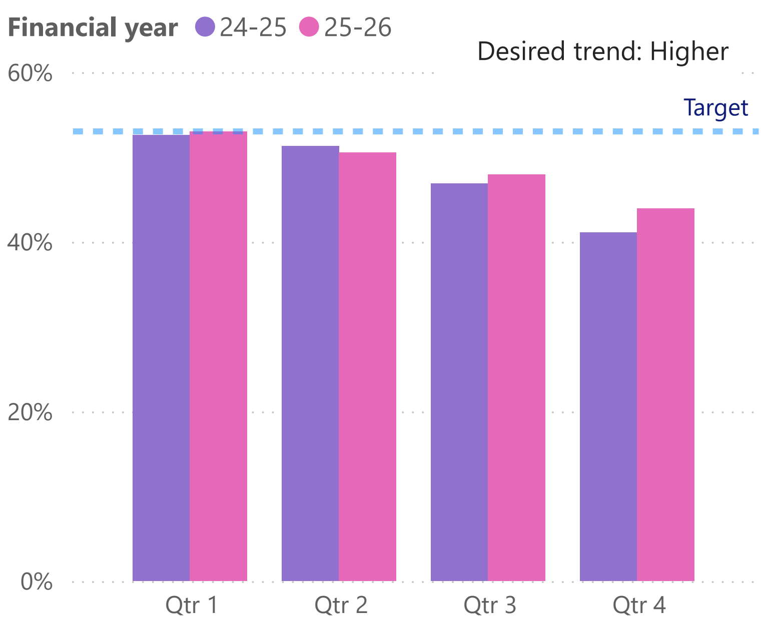
Year to date position:

435

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn
24-25	Qtr 1	109
24-25	Qtr 2	126
24-25	Qtr 3	123
24-25	Qtr 4	62
25-26	Qtr 1	52
25-26	Qtr 2	151
25-26	Qtr 3	186
25-26	Qtr 4	46

Comments: The number of businesses accessing business support reduced considerably in the fourth quarter. This is in part due to the end of UK Shared and Rural Prosperity Funds, and in part due to the remaining NEEB events taking place outside the Braintree District. The outturn for the year has still exceeded the previous year, 435 vs 420.

Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting



Status:

Year to date position:

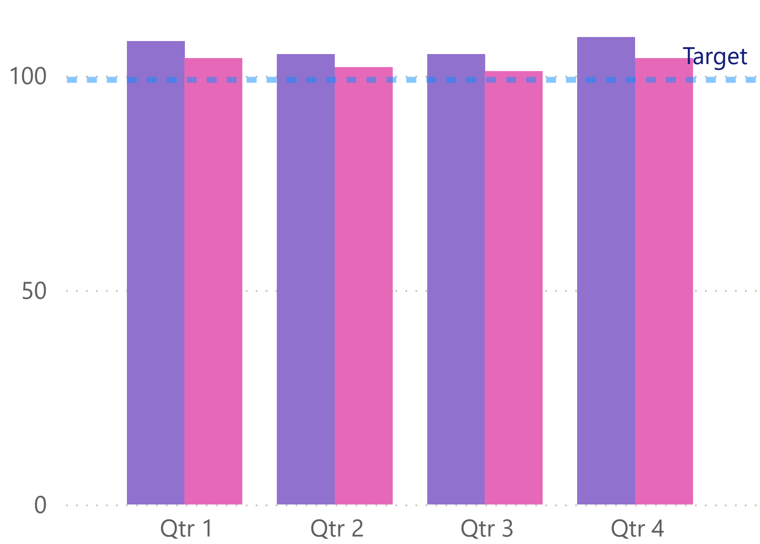
49.01%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	52.5%	50%
24-25	Qtr 2	51.3%	50%
24-25	Qtr 3	46.8%	50%
24-25	Qtr 4	41.1%	50%
25-26	Qtr 1	53.0%	53%
25-26	Qtr 2	50.5%	53%
25-26	Qtr 3	47.9%	53%
25-26	Qtr 4	43.9%	53%

Comments: Percentage of household waste recycled did not achieve target in the fourth quarter returning 43.9%, and did not achieve target for the year, returning 49.01% against a target of 53%, due to residual waste exceeding recycling tonnages. However, three out of four quarters returned an increase compared to the previous year, and the fourth quarter recycling rate showed a significant increase (41.1% to 43.9%) due to increased tonnages of recycling collected.

Kilograms of residual waste per household

Financial year ● 24-25 ● 25-26 Desired trend: Lower



Status:

Year to date position:

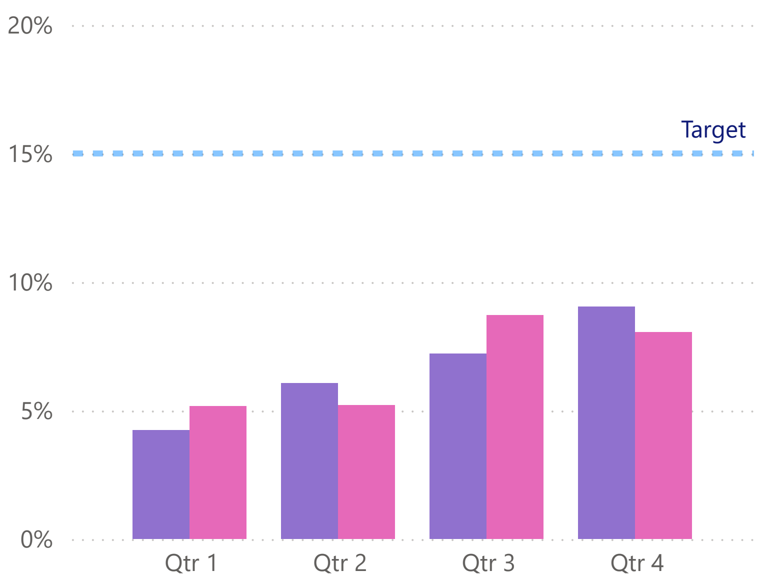
411

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	108	100
24-25	Qtr 2	105	100
24-25	Qtr 3	105	100
24-25	Qtr 4	109	100
25-26	Qtr 1	104	98
25-26	Qtr 2	102	97
25-26	Qtr 3	101	97
25-26	Qtr 4	104	98

Comments: Kilograms of residual waste per household failed to achieve target in the fourth quarter (104 vs 98kgs), and missed target for the year overall (411 vs 390kgs), reflecting how households are still generating high volumes of residual waste. However, despite missing the lower targets this year, every quarter demonstrated a reduction on the year before indicating a positive downward trend.

Recycling contamination rate

Financial year ● 24-25 ● 25-26 Desired trend: Lower



Status:

Year to date position:

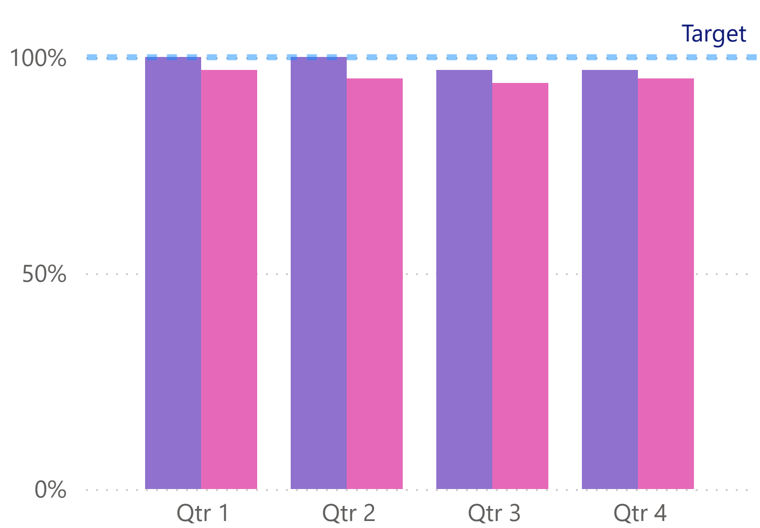
8.04%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	4.24%	15%
24-25	Qtr 2	6.06%	15%
24-25	Qtr 3	7.21%	15%
24-25	Qtr 4	9.03%	15%
25-26	Qtr 1	5.17%	15%
25-26	Qtr 2	5.21%	15%
25-26	Qtr 3	8.71%	15%
25-26	Qtr 4	8.04%	15%

Comments: Recycling contamination rate achieve target in the fourth quarter and overall for the year. The fourth quarter also demonstrated a reduction in contamination rate compared to the previous year.

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

Financial year ● 24-25 ● 25-26 Desired trend: Higher



Status:

Year to date position:

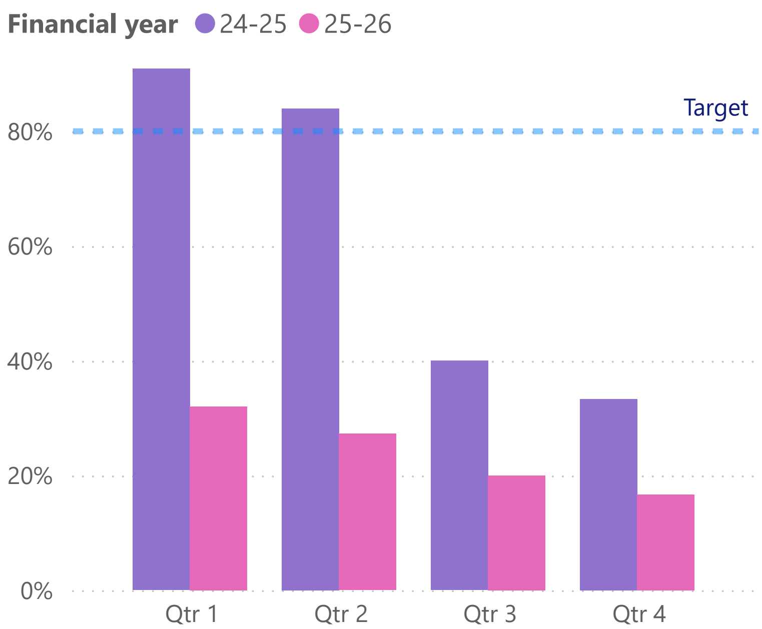
96%

Financial year	Quarter	Number	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	173	100%	100%
24-25	Qtr 2	218	100%	100%
24-25	Qtr 3	196	97%	100%
24-25	Qtr 4	214	97%	100%
25-26	Qtr 1	224	97%	100%
25-26	Qtr 2	240	95%	100%
25-26	Qtr 3	260	94%	100%
25-26	Qtr 4	278	95%	100%

Comments: In the fourth quarter, 95% of fly tips were cleared within 24 hours (267 out of 278). The main reason for the delayed clearances resulted from difficulty in accessing the location of the fly-tips. Across the full year 959 out of 1,002 fly-tips were cleared on time, an overall outturn of 96%, with the missed 4% due to vehicle breakdowns and additional enforcement activity before clearance.

Percentage of Disabled Facilities Grants approved on time

Desired trend: Higher



Status:

Year to date position:

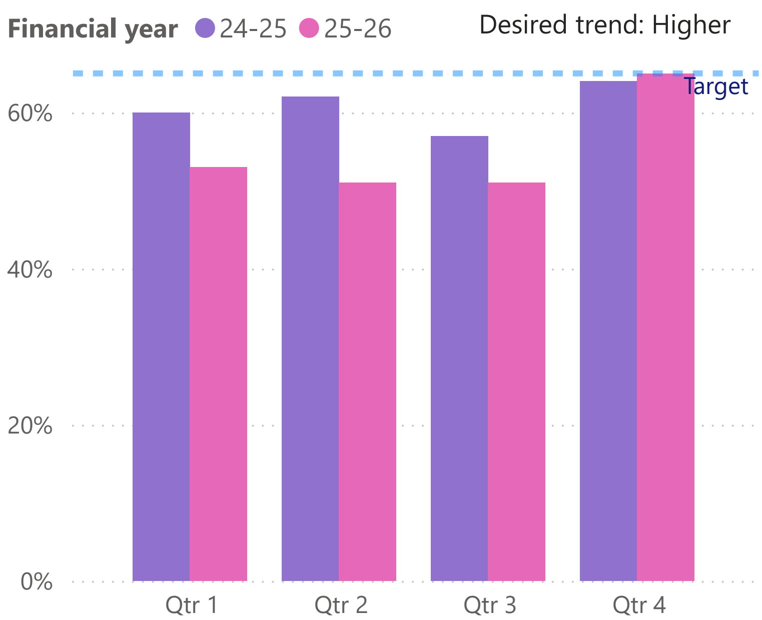
30.56%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	90.9%	80%
24-25	Qtr 2	84.0%	80%
24-25	Qtr 3	40.0%	80%
24-25	Qtr 4	33.3%	80%
25-26	Qtr 1	32.0%	80%
25-26	Qtr 2	27.3%	80%
25-26	Qtr 3	20.0%	80%
25-26	Qtr 4	16.7%	80%

Comments: 6 out of 36 disabled facilities grants were approved within timescales in the fourth quarter. The approval of 36 grants this quarter reflects the highest number of grants approved in a quarter since Q1 2024/5. This indicator will remain low whilst the backlog of applications due to funding challenges is cleared, and older applications are approved. However, successful recruitment to the team has increased capacity, and will further improve clearance of the backlog, though this will take time to reflect in this indicator.

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

Desired trend: Higher



Status:

Year to date position:

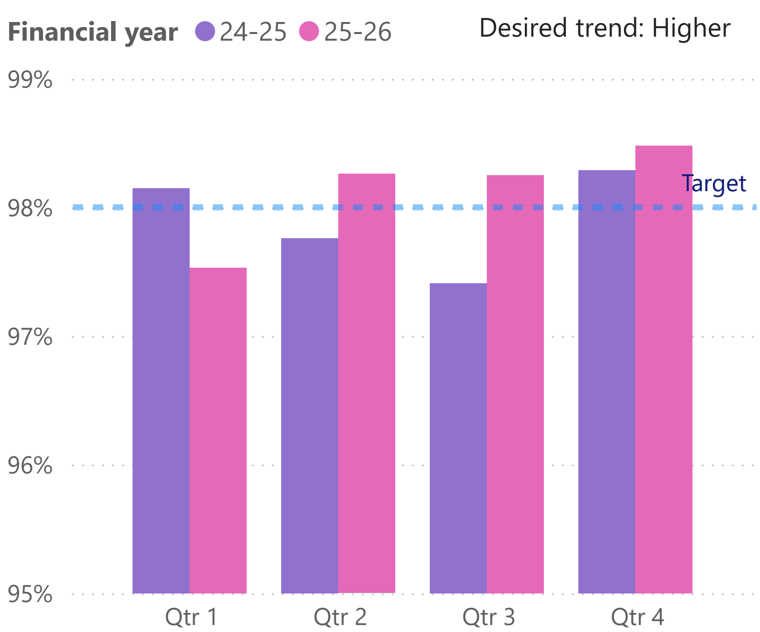
65%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	60%	65%
24-25	Qtr 2	62%	65%
24-25	Qtr 3	57%	65%
24-25	Qtr 4	64%	65%
25-26	Qtr 1	53%	65%
25-26	Qtr 2	51%	65%
25-26	Qtr 3	51%	65%
25-26	Qtr 4	65%	65%

Comments: In the fourth quarter, the Customer Services team supported 18,069 callers, successfully resolving 9,199 enquiries straight away (65%), driven by an increase in garden waste-related calls. Overall outturn for the year was 58%, as more complex matters are passed through to the relevant departments ensuring the callers receive the right expertise. A review of Customer Services is looking at opportunities to enhance how the service operates and making it easier for residents to access the support they need.

Percentage of invoices paid on time

Desired trend: Higher



Status:

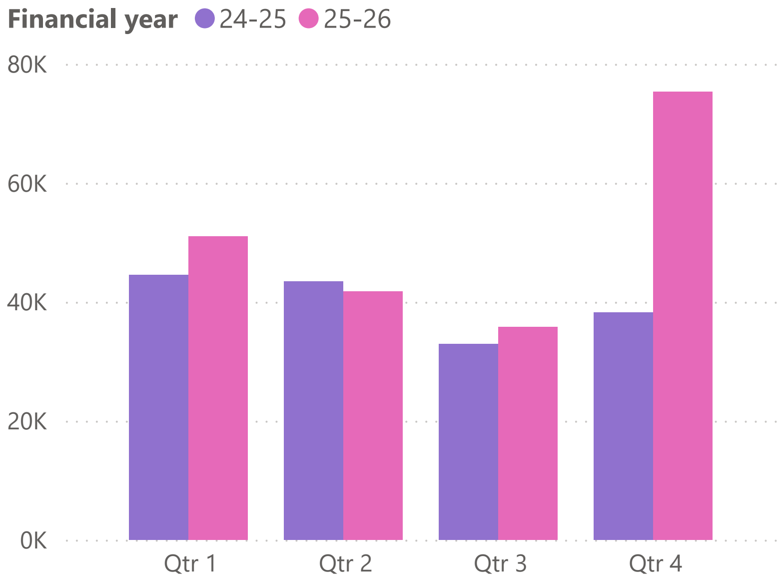
Year to date position:

98.14%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	98.2%	98.5%
24-25	Qtr 2	97.8%	98.5%
24-25	Qtr 3	97.4%	98.5%
24-25	Qtr 4	98.3%	98.5%
25-26	Qtr 1	97.5%	98.0%
25-26	Qtr 2	98.3%	98.0%
25-26	Qtr 3	98.3%	98.0%
25-26	Qtr 4	98.5%	98.0%

Comments: The percentages of invoices paid on time continued strong performance in the fourth quarter returning 98.5%. The overall outturn for the year also achieved target despite a lower outturn in the first quarter, and achieved an overall position of 98.14%.

Number of people transacting with the Council online



Data only: This metric does not have a target.

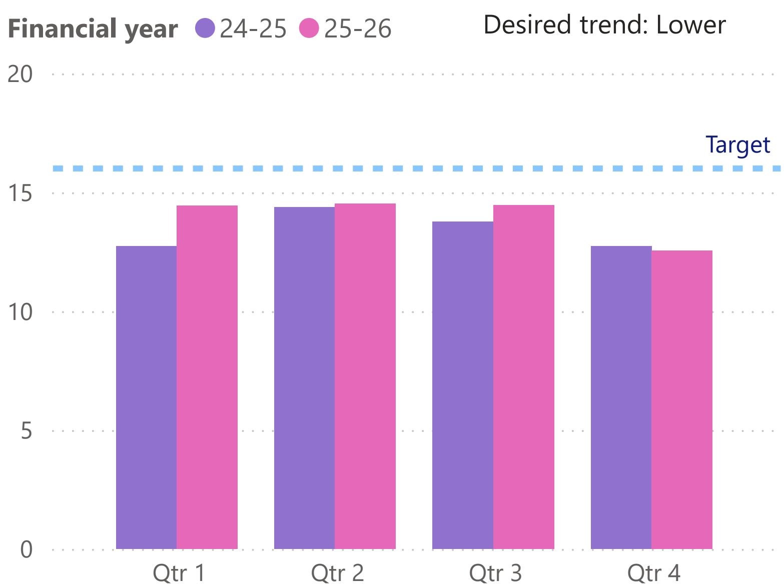
Year to date position:

203,899

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn
24-25	Qtr 1	44,532
24-25	Qtr 2	43,440
24-25	Qtr 3	32,904
24-25	Qtr 4	38,253
25-26	Qtr 1	50,991
25-26	Qtr 2	41,776
25-26	Qtr 3	35,778
25-26	Qtr 4	75,354

Comments: The Council observed a significant increase in online transactions in the fourth quarter, nearly double compared to the year previous. This was driven by a significant number of residents renewing garden waste subscriptions online. The Q4 outturn has driven an all-time high figure for the year of over 200,000.

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



Status:

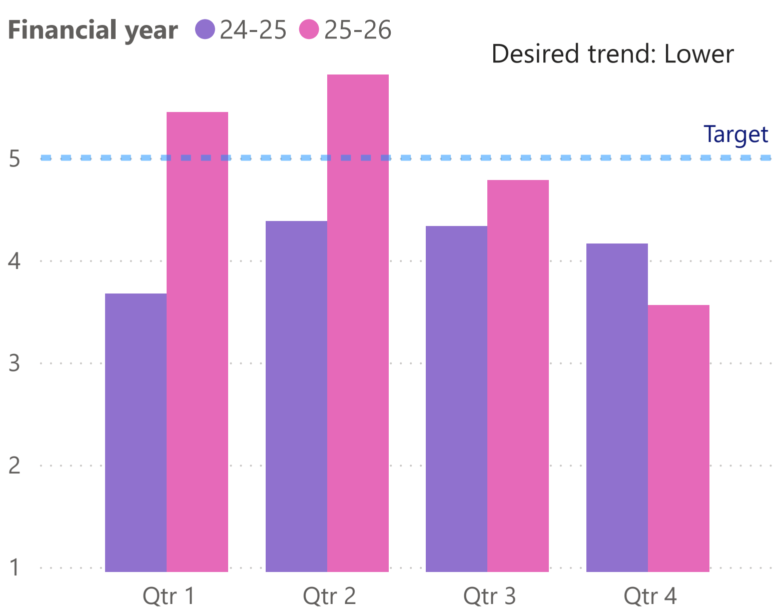
Year to date position:

13.99 days

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	12.73	16
24-25	Qtr 2	14.37	16
24-25	Qtr 3	13.77	16
24-25	Qtr 4	12.74	16
25-26	Qtr 1	14.44	15
25-26	Qtr 2	14.52	15
25-26	Qtr 3	14.47	15
25-26	Qtr 4	12.54	15

Comments: The time taken to process new benefit claims has reduced in the fourth quarter with an outturn of 12.54 days, returning the lowest figure - and therefore best performance - in the last two years. The overall outturn for the year was 13.99 days, also below target.

Days taken to process housing benefit claim changes



Status:

Year to date position:

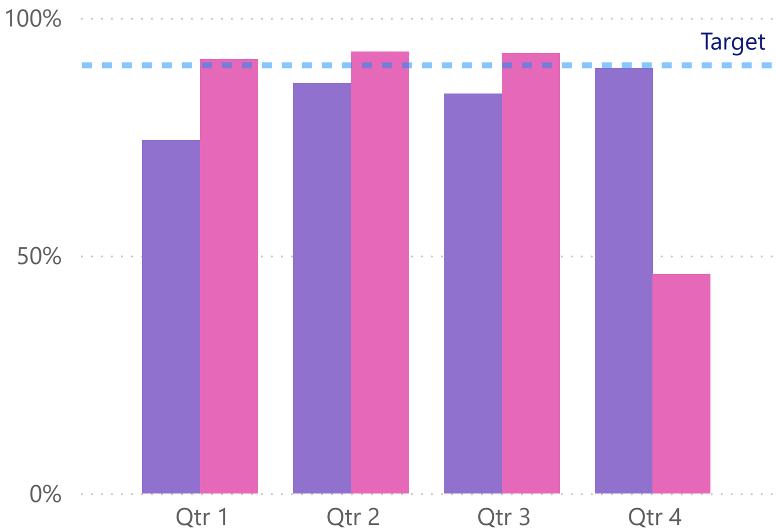
4.90 days

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	3.67	3
24-25	Qtr 2	4.38	3
24-25	Qtr 3	4.33	3
24-25	Qtr 4	4.16	3
25-26	Qtr 1	5.45	5
25-26	Qtr 2	5.81	5
25-26	Qtr 3	4.78	5
25-26	Qtr 4	3.56	5

Comments: Days taken to process housing benefit claim changes achieved its target again in the fourth quarter, returning 3.56 days, the best performance in the last two years. Strong performance in the fourth quarter has offset a challenging first half of the year, and has resulted in the overall target for the year being met also.

Percentage of stage 1 complaints dealt with in timescale

Financial year 24-25 25-26 Desired trend: Higher



Status:

Year to date position:

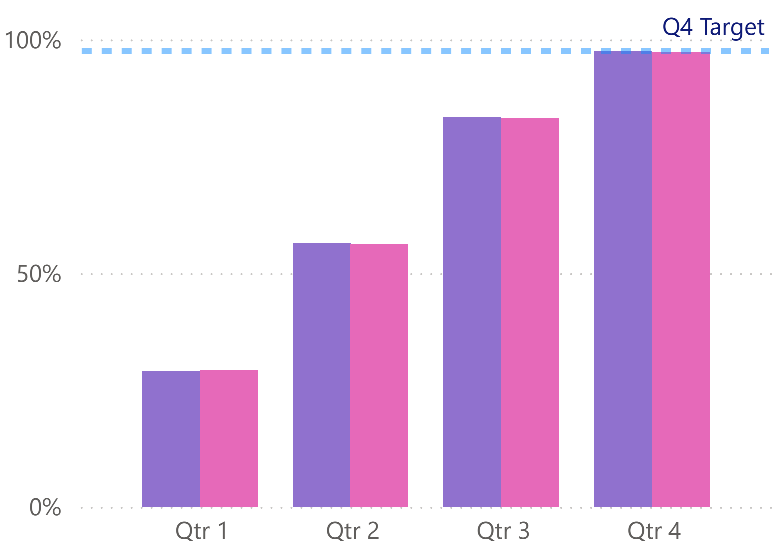
70.14%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	74.33%	90%
24-25	Qtr 2	86.27%	90%
24-25	Qtr 3	84.09%	90%
24-25	Qtr 4	89.47%	90%
25-26	Qtr 1	91.35%	90%
25-26	Qtr 2	92.91%	90%
25-26	Qtr 3	92.56%	90%
25-26	Qtr 4	46.13%	90%

Comments: The percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to on time reduced significantly in the fourth quarter with 46.13% responded to on time compared to a target of 90%. This was driven by large volume of complaints received by the operations department, compounded by staff absence and annual leave, predominantly in March. This Q4 performance has resulted in an overall outturn of 70.14%, and a missed target.

Collection rate for Council Tax

Financial year 24-25 25-26 Desired trend: Higher



Status:

Year to date position:

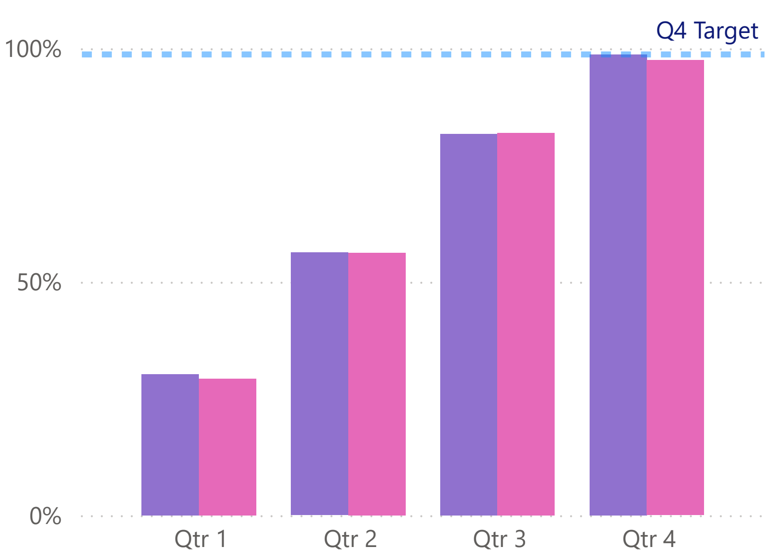
97.37%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	29.06%	30.45%
24-25	Qtr 2	56.41%	57.42%
24-25	Qtr 3	83.38%	83.81%
24-25	Qtr 4	97.55%	97.59%
25-26	Qtr 1	29.18%	29.06%
25-26	Qtr 2	56.27%	56.41%
25-26	Qtr 3	83.11%	83.38%
25-26	Qtr 4	97.37%	97.55%

Comments: The collection rate for council tax ended the year at 97.37%, a small reduction compared to the target of 97.55%, represented by 0.18 percentage points. Year to year variances are expected, and this figure represents council tax collected in year. Collection efforts for the remaining value will continue into the next financial year.

Collection rate for Business Rates

Financial year 24-25 25-26 Desired trend: Higher



Status:

Year to date position:

97.44%

Financial year	Quarter	Outturn	Target
24-25	Qtr 1	30.17%	30.12%
24-25	Qtr 2	56.27%	56.40%
24-25	Qtr 3	81.70%	82.90%
24-25	Qtr 4	98.68%	98.13%
25-26	Qtr 1	29.27%	30.17%
25-26	Qtr 2	56.19%	56.27%
25-26	Qtr 3	81.90%	81.70%
25-26	Qtr 4	97.44%	98.68%

Comments: Comments: The collection rate for business rates ended the year at 97.44%, a reduction compared to the target of 98.68%, represented by 1.24 percentage points. Reliefs have been reduced and businesses are facing increased cost pressures. There was also a significant late adjustment to the Rating List which inversely impacted collection rate. Performance remains favourable compared to the national and county-wide picture.

Complaints

The quarterly complaints analysis is detailed below. The figures represent all three stages of the complaints process.

Complaint Category	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26	Q2 25/26	Q3 25/26	Q4 25/26
Justified	115	102	56	74	83	93	64	**274**
Not Justified	62	33	25	26	16	48	57	**90**
Partially Justified	14	23	11	12	2	10	2	**0**
Not known	5	1	2	2	4	4	4	**1**
Total	196	159	94	114	105	155	127	**365**

Comments:

The Council received a total of 365 complaints in the fourth quarter, which is a significant increase on previous quarters, and is a result of a large volume of complaints to the Operations service concerning missed bin collections, the garden waste service and the new waste service. As a result of the increase in volume, response times suffered in the fourth quarter, which is highly unusual for a service that has normally been consistent with its response rate. This performance was significantly impacted by a number of factors in the Waste Service in February and March 2026. The new waste service rollout generated a large increase in the number of enquiries and complaints that were required to be dealt with, alongside staffing pressures generated by annual leave and sickness in specialist operational roles.

This has been identified as an issue and resources have been increased and redeployed to support the team to deal with the increased number of enquires and complaints, as well as deal with the increase in workload required to support the rollout of the waste changes. Performance will continue to be monitored to ensure that response times improve.

The Council continued to observe a low number of escalated complaints into the fourth quarter, with only 3 complaints progressing to stage 2, and none being considered at stage 3. This further emphasises the effectiveness of the remedies of stage 1 complaints, despite the higher volume.

A summary of Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases:

January
One complaint made to the LGO prematurely in respect of a Planning Decision.

February
One complaint made to the LGO prematurely in respect of a Code of Conduct Complaint against a Parish Councillor.

Two initial enquiries on a complaint handling, one in respect of a Housing complaint and one in respect of Council Tax.

March
One initial enquiry on a complaint handling in relation to a planning Enforcement Case.

Across the fourth quarter there were no complaints referred to formal investigation by the LGO and no Final Decisions Notices.

Our Organisation

The following is a selection of our people performance measures:

People: Indicators of Performance	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26	Q2 25/26	Q3 25/26	Q4 25/26	Change on previous period	Yearly Target
Total headcount	499	509	505	506	503	513	524	526	+2	-
Headcount – Permanent employees	463	467	464	467	467	474	482	484	+2	-
Headcount – Fixed term contract	36	42	41	39	36	39	42	42	-	-
Total employee FTE	458.52	467.96	465.91	467.21	466.63	475.32	485.94	486.79	+0.85	-
Level of employee turnover	2.4%	3.1%	1.98%	2.17%	3.18%	1.56%	0.95%	2.66%	+1.71%	-
Number of leavers	12	16	10	11	16	8	5	14	+9	-
Number of starters	10	26	6	12	13	18	16	16	-	-
Working days lost to sickness per employee (rolling)	6.22	5.65	6.01	6.85	7.27	8.52	8.77	9.46	+0.69	8.0
Percentage of employees with nil sickness	80.8%	67.4%	51.5%	45.3%	79.9%	66.3%	54.4%	45.1%	Cumulative	-
Number of learning hours	688	842	1068	895	1235	753	840	892	+52	-
Number of delegates	345	314	363	377	289	234	245	279	+34	-
Number of apprentices *	21	20	23	23	20	26	25	27	+2	-

Year on Year Headcount	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	492	499	492	486	501	506

* BDC's apprenticeship programme runs throughout the year. The figures reflect various apprenticeships ranging from level 3 through to a level 7.

Comments:
The continuing increase of sickness remains due to long term absence, with this continuing to make up two thirds of total absence. The prevalent reasons are stress/depression/mental health and musculoskeletal/injuries.

The highest levels of absence remain in Operations and Housing/Community. With stress/depression/mental absence figures equally high in both services. In Operations, the underlying cause for stress/depression/mental health is split between mental health conditions and work-related issues, in Housing/Community it is predominately work-related issues. The majority of musculoskeletal absence falls within the Operations Service. There are also a number of cases of long-term absence due to cancer.

Recent focus has been given to discussing absence management at both Management Board and Corporate Management Team, with work also in progress to update the sickness policy.

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 employees, 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 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26	Q2 25/26	Q3 25/26	Q4 25/26
Total number of reported accidents/ incidents, calculated from:	5	16	16	10	9	10	10	**13**
Accidents/ incidents to employees	5	14	14	10	9	9	9	**13**
Accidents/ incidents to contractors	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	**0**
Accidents/ incidents to non-employees	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	**0**
Time lost in days due to employee accidents/ incidents	25	0	10	0	0	38	13	**19**
Number of reported verbal/ physical incidents to employees	3	2	2	4	1	5	3	**5**
Number of near miss incidents	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	**0**
Number of Accidents/ incidents registered resulting in insurance/ compensation claim	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	**0**
Number of claims settled	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	**0**

Comments:
13 accidents/incidents were reported in the fourth quarter. Eight occurred as a result of lifting or moving objects, 3 slips/trips/falls, and 2 as a result of being hit by something stationary. No accidents/incidents were reported relating to third parties. The 2025/26 year has seen an overall reduction in incidents, falling from 47 last year to 42 this year.

19 days were lost due to accidents/incidents in the fourth quarter. One incident resulted in 18 days off where an employee injured their back, and 1 day was lost due to a needle injury. Overall the 25/26 year has seen an increase in accident/incident related absence days, climbing from 35 last year to 70 this year.

Five verbal/physical incidents were recorded in the fourth quarter, with four being only verbal and one being a combination of verbal and physical. There has been no change across the year compared to last year, with both years recording 14 such incidents.

Financial Summary

The revenue outturn position shows an overall positive variance of £2.1 million, after allowing for approved carry forwards totalling £335,000.

Sustainable Development shows a positive variance due to staffing vacancies and overachievement of income, the latter partly due to changes in statutory fees for household planning applications and also from major planning applications received in the year.

Treasury management income was higher due to interest rates and larger cash balances being managed. Income from pooled fund dividends was exceptional for the year.

Operations, Governance and ICT show favourable variances driven by staffing vacancies, reduced operating costs, and higher-than-budgeted income within Operations

Asset Management, Environment, and Strategic Investment reported adverse outturns. Asset Management had reduced income due to vacant or under-utilised units and higher utility and property maintenance costs. Environment reported a shortfall in income as well as additional staffing costs from interim arrangements in Building Control.

Strategic Investment (now Programme Management Delivery Team) overspent due to increased staffing costs following a restructure and recharged less of the service cost to capital projects as the team now focuses on wider project management across the organisation.

The Housing service incurred higher staffing expenditure due to service demand and unplanned absences which resulted in a greater use of agency staffing. Consultancy support was used to support on the Housing Service Review. More was also spent on demand-led temporary accommodation. Extra Homelessness Prevention Grant received in the year largely offset the adverse position and impact on the General Fund account.

The outturn position is subject to audit of the final accounts. Significant variances contained in the reported position have already been reflected in the current year's budget; however, further work is being undertaken to assess whether further adjustments are necessary as planning for next year's budget cycle starts.

Capital expenditure was £9.8 million, with the main areas of spend being on the Witham Community Centre; preparing for changes to the household waste and recycling collections; a new 3G artificial pitch in Witham; grants for disabled facilities adaptations; and investment into Council owned property and community assets. There was an underspend across several projects totalling £928,000, and £3.9 million of budgets have been reprofiled into the current year for continuing projects and rolling programmes.

<u>Background</u>

Full Council agreed a net budget of £21.2m. 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 Finance and Service Managers.

General Fund Revenue Spending

The tables below show the outturn by service:

Business Plan Service	Updated Budget £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Total Variance £'000	Carry Forwards £'000	Net General Fund £'000	RAG Status
Asset Management	(2,972)	(2,732)	240	0	240	R
Community & Leisure	1,070	1,061	(9)	0	(9)	G
Corporate Management Plan	1,751	1,716	(35)	0	(35)	G
Economic Development	177	124	(53)	0	(53)	G
Environment	1,016	1,194	178	0	178	R
Finance (incl. Treasury Management)	382	(501)	(883)	90	(793)	G
Governance	1,688	1,518	(170)	7	(163)	G
Housing Services	1,073	1,089	16	0	16	A
ICT & Facilities	2,210	2,106	(104)	50	(54)	G
Marketing & Communications	760	697	(63)	0	(63)	G
People & Performance	1,242	1,175	(67)	63	(4)	G
Operations	7,482	6,947	(535)	125	(410)	G
Strategic Investment	345	412	67	0	67	R
Sustainable Development	2,175	988	(1,187)	0	(1,187)	G
Service Plan Total	**18,399**	**15,794**	**(2,605)**	**335**	**(2,270)**	G
Corporate Financing	3,117	3,004	(113)	0	(113)	G
Vacancy Allowance	(300)	0	300	0	300	
Net Total	**21,216**	**18,798**	**(2,418)**	**335**	**(2,083)**	G

	Staffing Expenditure			Other Expenditure			Gross Income		
Business Plan Service	**Updated Budget £'000**	**Spend for the Year £'000**	**Variance £'000**	**Updated Budget £'000**	**Spend for the Year £'000**	**Variance £'000**	**Updated Budget £'000**	**Spend for the Year £'000**	**Variance £'000**
Asset Management	576	536	(40)	1,327	1,459	132	(4,875)	(4,727)	148
Community & Leisure	1,323	1,293	(30)	1,072	1,089	17	(1,324)	(1,320)	4
Corporate Management Plan	2,228	2,194	(34)	(178)	(177)	1	(299)	(301)	(2)
Economic Development	199	117	(82)	286	329	43	(309)	(323)	(14)
Environment	1,975	2,210	235	260	277	17	(1,219)	(1,293)	(74)
Finance	2,982	2,795	(187)	22,573	22,663	90	(25,172)	(25,958)	(786)
Governance	1,016	819	(231)	951	980	29	(279)	(247)	32
Housing Services	1,911	1,918	7	572	725	153	(1,410)	(1,554)	(144)
ICT & Facilities	1,198	1,153	(45)	1,012	954	(58)	0	(1)	(1)
Marketing & Communications	599	530	(69)	337	321	(16)	(176)	(154)	22
People & Performance	1,161	1,080	(81)	195	209	14	(114)	(114)	0
Operations	8,682	8,736	54	8,607	8,587	(20)	(9,807)	(10,376)	(569)
Strategic Investment	400	409	9	6	14	8	(61)	(11)	50
Sustainable Development	3,122	2,655	(467)	840	947	107	(1,788)	(2,615)	(827)
Service Plan Total	**27,372**	**26,445**	**(961)**	**37,860**	**38,377**	**517**	**(46,833)**	**(48,994)**	**(2,161)**
Corporate Financing	821	734	(87)	5,542	5,385	(157)	(3,244)	(3,113)	131
Efficiency Savings Target	(300)	0	300	0	0	0	0	0	0
Net Total	**27,893**	**27,179**	**(748)**	**43,402**	**43,762**	**360**	**(50,077)**	**(52,107)**	**(2,030)**

Main changes from the previous quarter

The change in forecast from the Third Quarter is a positive variance of £655k. The main reasons for this change relate to the following areas:

- **Sustainable Development (-£355k)** – Income from planning applications increased significantly in the final quarter, primarily from four major applications received earlier than expected. Developers pay major applications, and the timing of these payments can be uncertain. An increase in minor applications during the period also contributed to the additional income, along with a significant increase in street-naming income received in the final quarter.

- **Finance (-£220k Net)** – The main movement relates to dividend income from pooled funds and other interest, which increased in the final quarter despite market volatility from tensions in the Middle East. Pooled funds delivered an overall exceptional return of 5.47%.

- **All other services (-£80k Net)** – a net positive variance mainly on staffing.

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

Asset Management
- Net income at the Plaza from the Makerspace and causal lettings (+£96k)
- Vacant units at Victoria Square have resulted in adverse income variance (+£57k), with associated expenditure costs relating to these units (+£33k).
- Net reduction in staffing costs from vacant posts (Net -£40k)
- Overspends on repairs, professional fees, and fire risk surveys for public halls, partly offset by backdated rent (+£12k).
- Backdated non-recoverable service charges in relation to Victoria Square (+£32k)
- Overspend on general expenditure budgets including advertising and training(+£36k)
- Net other variances, mainly related to properties (Net +£14k)

Community and Leisure
- Net saving on staffing costs mainly in Community Transport due to vacancies (-£30k)
- Community Transport income is lower due to difficulty finding volunteer drivers (+£40k). The Service is currently undergoing review as part of the Service Review programme.
- Increased bookings at the Town Hall, driven primarily by wedding ceremonies, have generated a favourable variance (-£28k), partially offset by minor works required for boiler repairs (+£13k)
- Other variances include increased bookings at the Town Hall, driven primarily by wedding ceremonies net (-£4k)

Corporate Management
- Net saving on staffing costs from vacant post and roles being filled at a lower grade than originally budgeted (-£34k).
- Other minor variances (-£1k)

Economic Development
- Economic Development underspend due mainly to vacancies (-£53k) but, as the service is part funded from reserves, this has been offset by an adjustment under Corporate Financing. The Economic Development team is now funded in base budget.

Environment
- Staffing variance due to an extremely challenging labour market. Interim staff were appointed to the Building Control service to cover vacant permanent posts, resulting in net additional costs of £235k. The outturn variance reduced from the previous quarter as the service has been able to recruit some permanent staff.

- Shortfall in the income on the Building Control fee earning account (+£90k)
- Higher recharge of service costs to capital to support an increased Disabled Facilities Grant programme (-£57k)
- Increased fees and charges for pest control on internal transactions (-£41k)
- Income from solar panel installations and electric vehicle charging infrastructure (-£47k). An element of solar panel income was not included in the original budget as the related capital project was approved afterwards and was also dependent on the new leisure management contract
- Licensing fee income under achieved by £48k; however, as the account operates under a statutory regime, any shortfall has been met by a ringfenced reserve rather than General Fund.
- Other minor variances (net -£2k)

Finance

- Additional treasury management income due to higher cash balances, higher-for-longer interest rates, and better performance of strategic pooled funds (-£927k).
- Housing Benefits Subsidy lower than budgeted (+£211k)
- Net underspend on staffing due to vacancies, and reductions in contracted hours or staff appointed at lower scale points than assumed (-£187k)
- One-off cost associated with asset valuations for 2025/26 (+£31k)
- Current level of Council Tax discounts for annexes exceeds the grant received from government (+£29k).
- Additional income from Local Tax and Housing Benefit cost recoveries (-£31k).
- Increased system related costs for the Revenues and Benefits system (+£64k).
- Underspend following Insurance contract annual renewal (-£20k) and payment card transaction costs (-£15k)
- Net additional external audit fees (+£15k)
- Other income variances (-£15k), DWP grants unbudgeted (-£25k)
- Other minor variances (-£13k)

Governance.

- Staffing variances across the service (-£231k). Ongoing recruitment and retention challenges particularly in Legal Services where two senior lawyer posts have been vacant.
- Member allowances higher due to increased National Insurance contributions partly as a result of increases to the Basic Allowance (+£34k).
- Shortfall in net income from Land Charges searches, partially offset by reduction in payments to Essex County Council, and Legal sealing charges (+£22k).
- Net other variances (+5k)

Housing

- Increased staffing costs due to ongoing service demands combined with the need to use agency staff to cover unplanned absences (+£203k) which has been funded by additional Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- The service incurred higher costs due to an increase in the use of nightly lets and temporary accommodation (+£76k) which has been funded by additional Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- Consultancy costs in relation to a review of the Housing service (+£51k). which has been funded by additional Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- Additional costs in relation to Winter Pressures, Early Intervention and Private Rental costs funding by Housing Prevention Grant (+£89k).
- Agreed funding to support an element of accommodation costs at Digby’s court and New Directions (+£195k). It was agreed that this would be part funded by the Additional Homelessness Prevention Grant but also from an additional drawdown from the housing reserve.
- Additional Housing prevention Grant received in-year reduced the required drawdown from reserve (+£16k).

ICT & Facilities

- Corporate ICT systems maintenance (-£66k)

- Net saving on staffing costs due to vacancies and reduction in hours (-£45k).
- Other minor variances (+£7k)

Marketing and Communications

- Net saving on staffing costs due to vacancies (-£69k)
- Net Income from Sponsorship and Advertising underachieved (£19k)
- Other variances including reduced expenditure cost in relation to Graphics Design and Reprographics partially mitigated by increased postage costs (-£13k)

People & Performance

- Net saving on staffing costs due to vacancies (-£82k)
- Othe minor variances including increased system costs (+£15k)

Operations

- Use of agency staff to ensure service continuity partially mitigated by savings on vacant posts (+£54k)
- The subscription-based garden waste collection service generated additional income but partially offset by increased operational costs (-£125k)
- Postage costs related to garden waste service were lower than originally budgeted as these were included in the contract for printing of bin labels, and computer related expenditure is lower as re-routing work is being undertaken as part of the planning for changes in household collections from June (-£89k)
- Demand for commercial waste and bulky waste services continues to increase resulting in net additional income (-£91k).
- Income from recycling materials, composting credits, and tipping-away payments was higher than budgeted due to changes in market prices and tonnages collected (-£156k); however, this was partly offset by increased transportation costs and tipping away payments (+£82k).
- Additional costs of plant hire at Cordons Farm pending replacement equipment (+£24k).
- Sub-contractor costs paid for street cleansing was less due to delay for which a carry-forward has been approved (-£91k).
- Car parking income overachieved mainly on pay & display, partially offset by increased collection costs (-£82k).
- Income received from recycled glass from higher market prices (-£34k)
- Other minor variances (-£27k).

Strategic Investment (now Programme Management Delivery Team)

- Increase in staffing costs following a review of the service (+£10k) and a reduction in service costs recharged to capital as the work of the team is being refocused to support on wider project management (+£50k).
- Other minor variances (+£7k)

Sustainable Development

- Net staffing variance due to vacancies mainly in Development Management and Planning Policy (-£305k) and Landscape Services (-£156k), partially offset by agency cover and recruitment costs (+£23k). Posts within the Landscape Service have now been appointed.
- Overachievement in Planning Application income (-£507k) due to increases in the statutory charges for household applications and major applications received during the year, including four received in March totalling £174k. Other income overachieved included: Pre-application income (-£65k); and Planning Performance Agreements (-£52k). Income can be highly variable and subject to economic conditions.
- Additional income from street naming (-£165k) due to the number of major applications in year.
- Unbudgeted grant in relation to Pathways to Planning and Biodiversity Net Gains received in-year (-£44k).
- Increase in Tree maintenance costs (+£52k)

- Other variances (+£32k).

Corporate Financing

- Council Tax Sharing Agreement – Council Tax yield and collection performance for the Council and other Essex authorities was better than the baseline leading to a 7% share-back from preceptors (-£22k)
- Other staffing related underspends such as the employee leave purchase scheme, central staff retention provision, and lower pension fund costs (-£130k).
- Legal settlement costs (+£40k).
- Net withdrawal (-£27k) from reserves as a contra to the projected variances shown under Economic Development and Housing
- Staffing costs recharged to capital lower than assumed in the budget (+£27k).
- Reduction in central bad debt provision (-£41k)
- Other variances, including leased car scheme, apprentice levy, business rates transitional adjustments, and other grant funding (-£13k)

Capital Programme

The current capital programme is £18.5m. The table below shows the budget amount profiled to be spent in 2025/26; actual spend for the year and, where applicable, slippage and project variance.

Programme Summary

- The overall programme increased by £0.82m from Q3 due to the acquisition of light commercial vehicles (£644k) funded from the Vehicle Replacement Reserve and new plant mowers (£180k) funded from the Plant Reserve.
- Actual spend for the year was £9.8m against a profiled budget of £14.6m, resulting in an in-year variance of £4.8m. Budgets for continuing or delayed projects carried over into 2026/27 total £3.9m.
- A net underspend of £928,000 will relinquish capital resources for other purposes, the majority of which was included in planning the 2026/27 Budget.
- Programme slippage, includes:
  - Waste Review project £1.8m as collection changes continue to be implemented with phased delivery of new bins from the supplier.
  - Town Centre Improvements in Witham and Halstead (£0.4m) due to delays in finalising permissions with Essex Highways and receiving the contractor’s estimate for Phase 2 completion.
  - Operational Equipment (£0.38m) relating to Food Waste transition for flats due to be rolled out following an initial trial.
  - Sports & Leisure facilities (£0.4m) due to focus on Leisure Centre compliance works following the change in contract. Planned works across several facilities are pending further review and assessment of works required.

Capital resources

Capital receipts from a variety of sources and asset sales totalled £5.4m:

- Eastlight agreements: Right-to-Buy sales (number completed 16); VAT shelter; and sales under clawback arrangements.
- The sale of several plots at Phase 1 of Horizon 120
- Sale of land for residential use
- Other minor receipts.

New capital grants and contributions received in the year total £1.8m consisting of:

- Better Care Funding of £1.4m for Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs), with further funding contributions from Housing Associations.
- Capital grants of £176k and £63k received from the Rural England Prosperity Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Sports England/Football Foundation grants of £189k received in relation to Artificial Grass Pitch at Witham Sports Ground. These grants are claimed retrospectively as project expenditure is incurred.

Treasury Management

Investments at the start of the year totalled £73.1m and increased over the year with an average amount under management of £88m, peaking at £100m. New investments of £157.2m were made and £159.0m matured, resulting in a closing balance of £71.3m at the end of the year.

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

Dividend income earned for the year was just over £1m and interest on short-term investments totalled £2.9m, a combined total of £3.9m; representing an overall annualised return of 4.41%.

The closing market value of shares and units in long-term pooled funds was £23.9m, giving an unrealised gain of £4.9 million.

General Fund Balances

The closing balance on General Fund balances at 31 March 2026 was £13.75m.