



2024
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Braintree District Council

Healthy Housing Strategy

Annual Report 2025-2026



Braintree
District Council

Introduction

This report provides an update on delivery of the Healthy Housing Strategy 2022–2028 during Year 3 (April 2025 – March 2026), and an opportunity to review the strategic direction for the remaining period.

The Strategy aims to ensure that residents have access to safe, suitable and sustainable homes, while addressing wider health inequalities. Delivery over the past year has taken place within a challenging context, shaped by affordability pressures, increased demand and national policy changes.

Over the past year, there has been a clear shift in how housing services are operating, with increasing emphasis on prevention, early intervention and system-wide coordination.

This shift towards prevention has reduced pressure on temporary accommodation and improved earlier intervention, supporting more sustainable housing outcomes

The Healthy Housing Strategy is structured around three priorities:

Priority 1

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

Priority 2

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

Priority3

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

These priorities are interdependent, with progress in one area contributing to wider outcomes including reduced homelessness, improved health and increased housing stability.

Delivery of the Healthy Housing Strategy is closely aligned with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the emerging Supported Housing Strategy. Together, these strategies support a joined-up, system-wide approach to housing, prevention and support across the district. This alignment is particularly important in:

- reducing reliance on temporary accommodation
- improving move-on pathways into settled housing
- supporting residents with complex needs to access and sustain suitable accommodation

The emerging Supported Housing Strategy will play a critical role in strengthening this system, providing the bridge between temporary accommodation and long-term housing stability. The Healthy Housing Strategy therefore supports both homelessness prevention and long-term housing outcomes as part of a single, integrated housing system.



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



The Healthy Housing Strategy recognises that good housing is fundamental for better health outcomes, and our priorities support strategic alignment with the Council's joint health and wellbeing **Livewell Strategy 2024-2028**, enabling creative collaboration and knowledge sharing. Both strategies operate under a whole system approach principle, acknowledging their interdependencies.

This alignment ensures that housing interventions contribute directly to improved health outcomes, reduced inequalities and more coordinated service delivery across the district.



Why we developed a strategy

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

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

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

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

Future challenges and our planned response for 2025-26

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

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

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

Our Priorities and Outcomes 2025-2026

Priority 1

Affordability:

To facilitate a consistent supply of affordable housing while reducing housing-related costs and improving affordability across the district.

- 1 Work in partnership to deliver new, high quality, affordable homes in the district
- 2 Support a range of tenure to be built which reflect the needs of our residents
- 3 Ensure all new homes emphasise energy efficiency and the use of new renewable energy.

Affordability is no longer just about building new homes. It is increasingly about:

- helping residents manage the cost of housing
- improving the quality and efficiency of existing homes
- making better use of homes that already exist

This also helps prevent homelessness by keeping people in their homes and making it easier for others to move on from temporary accommodation.

Through the Government's National Plan to End Homelessness, the Government has made a commitment to achieve long term sustainable change to address the root causes of homelessness. Their immediate plan is to boost funding in communities to halve the number of entrenched rough sleepers and eliminate the unlawful use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families. To reduce homelessness their ambitious long-term plan is to build 1.5 million homes.

Over the past year, work has focused on increasing housing supply and addressing affordability pressures across the district. Affordable housing delivery reached 233 completions, slightly below the annual target of 250, reflecting continued delivery in a constrained market, with delays caused by construction challenges and reduced pipeline activity.

Despite the reduction in new affordable houses being developed, 731 properties were let in the district through Gateway to Homechoice.

Work to strengthen engagement with Registered Providers has progressed, including identifying opportunities to increase delivery through Section 106 agreements 're-establishing the Registered Providers (RP) Forum and the Housing Sub-group which provides the opportunity for RP's to seek support with households who may be struggling to manage their tenancy.

Challenges:

- There are a variety of reasons why affordable housing completions have remained lower than anticipated during the year. These include fewer development schemes being actively on site and under construction compared with previous years, delays within build programmes and a general slowing in construction activity across the sector. This all impacts housing delivery.
- Building affordable homes continues to be affected by wider market pressures.
- Rising living costs are making it harder for residents to afford housing.
- Fuel poverty remains an issue for many households.
- Not having enough suitable housing also means people stay in temporary accommodation for longer, which puts pressure on the whole system.

Next steps:

We will:

- Keep working closely with housing providers to increase delivery
- Make better use of existing homes through monitoring and targeted action
- expand energy efficiency and retrofit work to help reduce costs
- strengthen links with economic development and local businesses
- Make sure that new and existing housing helps people move on from temporary and supported accommodation into longer-term homes.



233

**affordable homes
delivered
in 2025/2026**

Priority 2

Support for specific needs: To support vulnerable households and ensure housing meets the needs of residents with complex requirements through prevention and partnership working.

- 1** Support a range of accommodation to be developed within communities for the demographic shift towards an increasingly ageing population
- 2** Work with our partners to support residents to move into appropriate properties within suitable communities as their needs change
- 3** Continue to support our vulnerable residents with specialist provisions and housing to live independently and thrive in the community.

A key focus for all local authorities this year has been the implementation of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023, which introduced a new duty for local housing authorities in England to prepare and publish a Local Supported Housing Strategy. Statutory guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2026 set out the framework councils must follow. The first strategy must be published by 31 March 2027, cover a five-year period, remain under regular review and be updated at least every five years, alongside annual reporting requirements thereafter. To support this work, we have been collaborating with Essex County Council and the Housing LIN to develop a robust evidence base that will inform a supported housing strategy designed to meet the current and future needs of residents, while taking account of changing demand and demographic pressures across the district.

To ensure that we develop a new strategy for the district, the Council has been an active member of the Supported Housing county-wide advisory board, established collectively by the Essex local housing authorities.

We have provided data to inform a Essex-Wide Supported and Specialist Housing Needs Assessment which was published by ECC during 2024/25 and provides estimates of future need for supported and specialist housing.

Housing services are now playing a much bigger role in preventing homelessness, rather than only responding when people reach crisis point.

Housing is also increasingly recognised as being closely linked to health and wellbeing.

Public Health Integration

Closer integration with public health will enable more targeted interventions, particularly for residents experiencing multiple disadvantage.

This will include:

- Targeting issues like fuel poverty and poor housing conditions as health concerns
- Using health data to better understand where support is needed
- Aligning housing services with wider health and wellbeing priorities

This will help us tackle the root causes of housing issues and improve outcomes for residents, particularly those facing inequalities.

Challenges:

- People coming to us for help often have more complex needs than before.
- Demand for supported and specialist housing is increasing.
- We don't yet have full access to all the health and housing data we need to target support as effectively as possible.

Next steps:

Officers from Braintree, Colchester and Tendring will continue to work together to discuss the emerging requirements to develop a coordinated strategy

Priority 3

Access: To improve access to suitable housing and ensure the quality of existing homes.

- 1 Build positive relationships with property owners and estate agents to help improve routes into the PRS
- 2 Explore options to improve existing housing in the district
- 3 Reduce the number of empty properties in the district by exploring options to bring them back into use.

Having enough suitable housing is essential to keep the housing system moving effectively. When there are limited housing options available, it becomes increasingly difficult to support households to move on from temporary accommodation. The absence of a stable home can have significant impacts on mental wellbeing, children's development and future opportunities, while also placing households under increased financial and physical pressures.

The private rented sector remains one of the main ways people access housing, but it also reflects the wider pressures within the housing market.

In the Braintree District Council, the main reason for households presenting as homeless continues to be the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy within the private rented sector, demonstrating the ongoing challenges around affordability, housing security and the availability of suitable accommodation.

The Private Rented Sector Scheme supported 51 households into private rented accommodation in 2025/26, with 102 households supported since its launch in November 2023. The PRS Scheme has now been extended until 2027.

The private rented sector continues to contain some of the poorest quality housing, with national estimates suggesting that around 25% of homes are considered non-decent. Feeling secure in your home provides stability, and longer tenancies can help residents to build connections within their communities, reduce isolation and improve overall wellbeing. The

Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is used to identify hazards within private rented homes that could impact residents' health and safety, and the council has a duty to take action where serious hazards are identified. In Braintree, the recent Homes Condition Survey found that 12% of privately rented properties across the district contain Category 1 HHSRS hazards. Whilst this is below the national average, we will continue to work with landlords and tenants to improve housing standards through the Decent Homes Standard and the implementation of the Renters' Rights Act, ensuring that privately rented homes are safe, secure and meet the required standard.

A collaborative Empty Homes Working Group, involving strategic housing, environmental health and council tax teams, continues to coordinate activity to address long term empty properties. During 2025–26, 109 properties were brought back into use through owner-led action, achieved through sustained monitoring, communication and follow-up rather than formal enforcement. District-wide monitoring during the same period identified between approximately 2,670 and 2,810 empty homes at any one time, highlighting the ongoing scale of the issue relative to available capacity and the importance of prioritised monitoring.

Next steps:

We will:

- Improve access to the private rented sector through targeted support and landlord engagement
- Monitor the impact of the Renters Rights Act
- Develop a more targeted approach to improving housing conditions
- We will also strengthen pathways from temporary and supported accommodation into settled housing, helping people move on at the right time.

Challenges:

- Rent in the private rented sector is continuing to rise. The gap between Local Housing Allowance and actual rent levels makes it difficult for many residents to access housing.
- There are fewer properties available in the private rented sector, which increases competition.
- When people can't access housing, they stay in temporary accommodation for longer, creating pressure across the system.
- Limited access to the private rented sector continues to be a key barrier, increasing reliance on temporary accommodation and slowing system flow.

Summary

Overall, the past year has seen a clear shift towards a prevention-led housing system. This is helping to reduce pressures on temporary accommodation, improve outcomes for residents and create a more sustainable housing system. However, ongoing challenges in affordability, access and complexity of need mean that continued focus on early intervention, partnership working and system-wide coordination will be essential.

