

REPORT FOR PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING – 2025/2026

I am pleased to provide this report giving an overview of the District Council's work, and my activities, over the last Council year.

The focus for the year has been very much on continuing to support our residents through challenging times with the cost-of-living still a major issue for many people. The food banks throughout the District continue to see a great demand for their services; the Council's **Cost of Living Fund** has supported people who are struggling with day-to-day living. Unfortunately, it is not anticipated that this situation will change for the better over the coming months; many residents live in the more rural parts of the District and rely on oil for heating and hot water so the war in the Middle East, and subsequent rise in fuel prices, is having a particularly severe impact on some family finances.

With this in mind, a decision to freeze Braintree Council's share of the **Council Tax** for 2026/27 was approved in February. The Council hopes this will provide some help to residents; there will be no cuts to frontline services.

In response to government requirements, and following a lengthy consultation period, changes to the **Waste Collection Service** were agreed. The kerbside collections of recyclable materials will begin in June with the new bins (or boxes) already being delivered to properties throughout the District. The aim is to increase the amount of waste we recycle and drastically reduce the amount sent to landfill. A survey conducted by the Operations team found that, currently, 30% of the contents of the grey bins is food waste that should be going into the food waste caddies!!

In my role as Cabinet Member for Planning and as Chair of the Local Plan sub Committee I had an extremely busy year. The District's **Local Plan** is required to be reviewed and updated every five years and as ours was adopted in 2021 that review is underway. Following a call-for-sites exercise, over 300 sites were submitted and those most suitable for development came to the Committee for consideration over a series of meetings running from April – September 2025. Four Strategic Sites – those proposing over 500 homes - were allocated into the draft Plan: Land NE/SE Halstead, Kings Dene Kelvedon, East of Braintree and Land North of the A12 Hatfield Peverel. A number of smaller sites spread across the District were allocated. In total, the Council needs to find 1,264 new homes per year until 2041, an increase from the previous target of 716 p.a. All comments submitted via the Regulation 18 public consultation will be considered and amendments may be made to the draft Plan. There is another public consultation, scheduled for late summer/early Autumn this year, before the final version is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination in 2027. The District needs to have a Local Plan found sound and in place to comply with government planning rules and, most importantly, to protect the District from unwanted, speculative developments. Detailed work on the infrastructure needed for the large sites, including improvements to roads, is underway and will continue for several months. Nothing is yet decided, no final decisions made and there is much work still to be done by BDC planning officers and the Councillors on the Local Plan sub Committee.

I am delighted that both Councillor Courtauld and I managed to distribute our **Councillor Grant funds** around all four villages in our Ward. We supported some excellent projects. The good news is that the **Councillor Grant Scheme** will continue for 2026/27 and has been increased to £1500.00 per Councillor for this year. Get your bids in!

Finally, I would like to thank the Parish Councillors and the Clerk for the sterling work they have undertaken over the year. The amount of time they spend on village matters is hugely appreciated.

With best wishes

Cllr Gabrielle Spray

The Colnes Ward