

## Report for Parish Councils – September 2025

Cllr Iona Parker, Braintree DC

1. **Local Government Reform** – The Government is to replace Essex County Council, 12 district councils and 2 unitary councils in Essex with a number of unitary councils. (Unitary councils are councils which provide all council services in their area as opposed to some being provided by county councils eg highways and social care, and some being provided by district councils eg planning and refuse collection.) The Government has asked the current Essex councils to put forward their proposals for the best arrangement for Essex by the end of September. The proposals must meet a number of criteria laid down by government. Essex CC and Epping are proposing a 3 unitary authority (UA) model comprising north, mid and south Essex UAs, with Braintree, Uttlesford, Colchester and Tendring joining a north Essex UA. Thurrock and Rochford have put forward different proposals for a 4 model UA with Braintree combining with Chelmsford and Uttlesford in Thurrock's model and with Colchester and Tendring in Rochford's model. Members of Braintree DC will be debating what in their view is the best model for Local Government Reform for Essex at their meeting of full Council on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> September. The Government will then launch a consultation on the proposals that have been submitted which meet the criteria. The decision on which option to pursue will be announced at the end of March. Braintree DC will be a consultee on that consultation.
2. The criteria laid out by the Government are broadly as follows:
  - a. The new unitary structures must achieve for the whole of the area covered.
  - b. They must be the right size to achieve efficiency, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
  - c. They must be able to prioritise high quality and sustainable public services.
  - d. Proposals must show how Councils have worked together and that they have taken into account local needs and views.
  - e. New unitary structures must support devolution (mayor and combined authority).
  - f. New unitary structures must enable stronger community engagement.
3. **Local Plan** – Braintree DC is undertaking a review of its Local Plan to provide additional sites for housing and employment for the period up to 2041 to comply with the Government's mandatory housing targets. The Local Plan sub committee (which I am on) has considered all sites which have been submitted for less than 500 dwellings and will now be going on to consider the 500 plus

sites that have been put forward. We need to find sites for an additional 8,000 dwellings from these sites. We will also be revisiting some of the smaller sites which were rejected at earlier meetings. It is important that we select some sites which can be built out early to prevent speculative housing applications on sites which have not been allocated. Most of the large sites are around Braintree and Halstead and along the existing A120 and A12 corridors.

4. **Leisure Centres** – Following a difficult period, Braintree DC have now appointed new operators to run its 4 Leisure Centres, one in Halstead, two in Braintree and one in Witham. The new operators are called Freedom Leisure. They are experienced operators who run other leisure centres in the country and we hope they will provide a better service than the previous operators who ran into difficulties.
5. **Business briefings** – Braintree DC, in conjunction with the Federation of Small Businesses, is running a series of free briefings for small and medium size businesses to help them stay competitive, make connections and gain insights into key topics. The briefings take place at the I-Construct centre on the Springwood Industrial Estate in Braintree and start on 30<sup>th</sup> September. Please visit [www.braintree.gov.uk/businessbriefings](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/businessbriefings) if you are interested.
6. **Bus consultation** – Essex CC passenger transport team are running a consultation on bus routes that they support. This includes the DaRT minibus service that operates in my ward. If you know of anyone who uses or might like to use a bus service, please encourage them to respond to the consultation. Essentially the question asked is whether residents would like to keep the existing service or have a regular once a week service. Please see [www.consultations.essex.gov/itpu/localbus2025](http://www.consultations.essex.gov/itpu/localbus2025). The consultation closes on 27<sup>th</sup> October.