

## **Statement by Braintree District Council**

The Petition calling for the Leader of the Council to resign was submitted to Braintree District Council on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020, by the Better for Braintree Group, the Petition Organiser.

This was in PDF form and consisted of 76 pages and contained the names and addresses of 1628 individuals. The Council did not receive an updated petition after this date, and therefore worked with the version provided by the Petition Organiser.

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme officers reviewed the Petition and the carried out the validation process. This process involves confirming that those signing the Petition are from within the District, and this is done based solely on the addresses provided within the Petition. The Council is not able nor is it required to go behind those address or begin to make assumptions as to their accuracy. It is for the Petition Organiser to ensure that those signing the Petition comply with the Council's Petition Policy and that they provide the appropriate address at the point of signing.

In the first review all those providing an address overseas are discounted. Examples of these within this Petition were from Nigeria, India, North Carolina, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Cape Town.

Following that all addresses which are outside the District are also discounted. Examples included, London, Glasgow, Poole, York, Liverpool, Birmingham and Cardiff.

In carrying out this review Officers had identified individuals bearing the same surname. However, there are occasions where those individuals have provided different addresses. Where an address was provided within the District this signature was counted, and where the address was outside the District is was discounted. Whilst it is possible to suggest that those with the same surname are from the same household and therefore by accepting one the Council should have accepted all, it is not possible to make this assumption on addresses alone. The addresses may have been the same household, but it is also possible that they were family members living in the different location, so for example an individual and an extended member of the family. With no information to confirm the link, the Council has to use the details provided.

In the same way that there are some names provided which the Council are may be aware of the individual, as being individuals who have previously engaged with the Council on a wide range of issues. Again these names have been discounted were the addresses have been provided as being outside the District. The Council cannot make any assumption of the names provided and are not required to go behind the details submitted by the Petition Organiser.

As a result of this process, Officers discounted 1057 signatures. Ordinarily this would mean that the matter would not be brought before the Council. However, in recognition of the content and the clear public interest in the matter, the Council approved the petitions progression to Full Council for debate. Therefore the fact that the signatures have been discounted has not distracted from the substance of the petition which was fully considered by the Council at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

If any person feels that their name is missing completely or that they were wrongly excluded by virtue of their place of residence not being correctly displayed they should contact the Petition Organiser direct, as only the Petition Organiser can refer the matter to Change.org.

Dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020