MINUTES of
COUNCIL
10 SEPTEMBER 2026

PRESENT

Chairperson	Councillor R G Pratt
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor J C Stilts
Councillors	M G Bassenger, V J Bell, D O Bown, J R Burrell-Cook, J Driver, M F L Durham, A Fittock, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, K Jennings, K M H Lagan, A M Lay, W J Laybourn, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, M G Neall, U G C Siddall-Norman, N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, W Stamp, CC, E L Stephens, N J Swindle, M E Thompson and L L Wiffen

1. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some general housekeeping arrangements for the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Dodsley, J C Hughes, R H Siddall and S White.

3. MINUTES - 2 JULY 2026

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 2 July 2026 be approved and confirmed.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor J R Burrell-Cook declared an interest in relation to Agenda Item 9 – Notice of Motion as the Chairperson of the T26 Tourism Group who were also looking at a business focus group as part of the Community Interest Company (CIC).

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

6. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Former Councillor Patricia Herrmann OBE
The Chairperson advised the Council of the recent passing of former Councillor Patricia Herrmann OBE. Mrs Herrmann had been a member of the District Council from 1974 to 1995, Chairman of the Council from 1981 to 1983 and Chairman and Vice-Chairman of many Committees. She had been awarded an OBE in the 1998 New Year Honours List for her services to the magistracy and the community in Essex.

Councillor Durham paid a personal tribute to Mrs Herrmann, whom he had known for most of his life. He described her as an intelligent, eloquent and remarkable individual who had remained active in public life until shortly before her passing. He noted that she had left a significant void in the local community and across the Maldon District and that she would be greatly missed.

All Members then stood for a moment of quite reflection in memory of Mrs Herrmann.

Ufest
The Chairperson advised that, during the previous month, he had attended and officially opened Ufest, which he described as a brilliant showcase of local community activities. He reported that the event has been well organised and requested that the Chief Executive convey his thanks and congratulations to the staff involved in organising the day.

Merchant Navy Day
The Chairperson informed the Council that he attended the Merchant Navy Day event on the quay.

Essex Heritage Trust Annual meeting
The Chairperson thanked the Vice-Chairperson for attending the Essex Heritage Trust Annual Meeting at Boreham House on his behalf.

7. PERFORMANCE, GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - 15 JULY 2026

The Council considered the following recommendation coming forward from the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee for consideration. This recommendation was presented to the Council by Councillor W Stamp, Chairperson of the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee.

Review of Financial Regulations

Councillor Stamp put the recommendation which was duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) That the recommended changes to the Financial Regulations, set out in Appendix 1 to the Council Agenda, be considered and approved;

(ii) That the Financial Regulations be revised and published on the Council's website.

8. MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

The Council noted the list of Committees that had met before and since the last meeting of the Council, up until Wednesday 2 September 2026 for which Minutes had been published.

9. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR K JENNINGS (MOTION 01/2026)

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4, the Chairperson advised the Council that one Motion, duly proposed and seconded, had been received and was set out on the agenda. The Chairperson then invited Councillor Jennings to read out his Motion.

Councillor Jennings presented his Motion (as set out below) which had been duly seconded by Councillor R H Siddall.

> "To create a retail working group, that works with partners to deliver support and create retail business opportunities across the district. This should be a similar model to One Maldon District, with representatives from the retail sector, other partners and other local authorities, to ensure our high streets across the district (not just Maldon) to ensure that our high streets and retail businesses continue to grow and thrive."

The Chairperson then advised that in accordance with Procedure Rule 4(3), he would be referring this Motion, without discussion, to the Strategy and Resources Committee.

10. QUESTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 6(3) OF WHICH NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN

There were none.

11. NEW LOCAL PLAN FOR MALDON DISTRICT

The Council considered the report of the Director of Place, Planning and Growth seeking Members' consideration of whether to commence work on a new Local Plan for Maldon District under the new 30-month plan-making system.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report before inviting Councillor A Fittock, Chairperson of the Planning Policy Working Group (PPWG), to speak. Councillor Fittock advised that the PPWG had considered the report and endorsed the recommendations. He provided the Council with further information regarding the Plan.

The Council was advised that work to review the Maldon District Local Development Plan (LDP) had commenced in 2021, including public consultation, evidence gathering and a call for sites. Subsequent legislative and national policy changes introduced a new 30-month plan-making system and almost doubled the District's housing target, requiring a fundamental review of potential site allocations. As the reviewed LDP could not be submitted under the legacy system by 31 December 2026, the Council was required to publish a Notice of Intention to Commence plan-making under the new system by that date.

Members were informed that the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) required Local Plans to establish a vision and spatial strategy, allocate land to meet identified needs, identify infrastructure requirements and address local issues. It also

required a clear timetable, appropriate governance arrangements, a Project Initiation Document and robust, relevant and proportionate evidence to support preparation and adoption of the Plan within 30 months.

In his presentation of the report, Councillor Fittock referred to the recent announcement to pause Local Government Reorganisation and that the implications of this would be kept under review as the plan progressed. He highlighted the importance of a new Local Plan and explained that it would provide a ten-year vision for Maldon District, guiding development that would support the wellbeing of the District, strengthen the economy and protect the environment.

The Chairperson then proposed that the recommendations as set out in the report be agreed. In seconding the proposal, Councillor A S Fluker thanked the Planning Policy Manager for her work progressing the Local Plan.

In response to a question regarding the monies already spent on developing a Local Plan, the Planning Policy Manager advised that the monies spent had established a strong evidence base which would assist the Council in meeting the tight timescales.

The Chairperson then put the recommendations set out in the report to the Council, and these were duly agreed.

RESOLVED that the Council:

(i) notes the work undertaken by consultants Arup:
- Arup Project Initiation Document (Appendix 1 to the report)
- Arup Budget (Appendix 2 to the report)
- Arup Risk Register (Appendix 3 to the report)

(ii) agrees to commence a new Local Plan for Maldon District;

(iii) approves the Local Plan for Maldon District Project Initiation Document (Appendix 4 to the report);

(iv) agrees the Local Plan Timetable (Appendix 5 to the report) and revokes the Local Development Scheme (February 2025), as explained in paragraph 3.5.2 of the report;

(v) approves the Notice of Intention to Commence (Appendix 6 to the report) for publication;

(vi) agrees to allocate a reserve of £2,075,000 to spend on the new Local Plan for Maldon District, including an allowance for contingencies and additional staff resources to progress the Local Plan through a new plan-making system;

(vii) delegates authority to the Director of Place, Planning and Growth to amend and update the Local Plan for Maldon District Project Initiation Document (Appendix 4 to the report) and Local Plan Timetable (Appendix 5 to the report), in consultation with the Planning Policy Working Group.

12. DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chief Executive regarding developments in Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution.

The Chief Executive advised that:

- the Secretary of State had withdrawn the March 2026 decision relating to the establishment of five unitary councils in Essex and was undertaking a review of the available information;
- the Government remained committed to LGR and devolution;
- LGR activity had been paused pending the outcome of the ministerial review;
- district and parish council elections would proceed in May 2027 on existing boundaries;
- the Government had outlined a new devolution framework to decentralise power from Westminster and Whitehall, with further details expected in a White Paper later in 2026; and
- It is understood that Essex County Council, Southend City Council and Thurrock Council have written jointly to the Government seeking the resumption of the Greater Essex Devolution Priority Programme and an accelerated timetable for mayoral elections.

In response to a question regarding discussions with Parish and Town Councils on the potential transfer of assets, and whether such matters could continue to be considered following the pause in LGR activity, the Chief Executive advised that asset transfer proposals could be considered at any time and, where appropriate, decisions could be taken on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee noted the update.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that this satisfies the public interest test.

14. PURCHASE OF LAND AT LANGFORD

The Council received and considered the document introduced by the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities, which contained commercially sensitive information relating to Agenda Item 16, Purchase of Land at Langford.

In his introduction, the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities provided confidential information relating to the acquisition history of the Langford plots, indicative pricing expectations, and officers' preliminary valuation assessment. It was noted that the anticipated acquisition cost substantially exceeded both the original purchase price and the estimated market value.

There was some debate and, in response to questions raised, Officers provided further information.

15. RESUMPTION OF BUSINESS IN OPEN SESSION

RESOLVED that the meeting of the Council resumes at 8:22pm in open session.

16. PURCHASE OF LAND AT LANGFORD

The Council considered the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities seeking Members' approval to purchase two parcels of land in Langford in order to protect the existing natural habitat and reduce the risk of inappropriate future use.

Members were advised that Heybridge Parish Council had raised concerns regarding two parcels of land in Langford (as set out in Appendix 2 to the report) on the basis that the land was potentially vulnerable to inappropriate use in the future. Officers had undertaken discussions with the landowner and had ascertained that the two parcels of land appeared to be available for acquisition, subject to successful negotiation and completion of due diligence. The report advised that, given access constraints, the scope for future use of the land was limited. However, it was well suited to a naturalised use, such as a wildlife reserve, and initial discussions had taken place with the Essex Wildlife Trust.

Councillor M F L Durham referred to the Council being in the dark and how he felt the only way to progress was to seek an independent professional valuation of the land. He then proposed that, once an independent professional valuation had been obtained, the matter be brought back to the Council for further consideration. This proposal was duly seconded and agreed. Councillor K M H Lagan added his thanks to Officers for providing a comprehensive report with the relevant information to enable Members to make informed decisions.

RESOLVED that consideration of the purchase of land at Langford be deferred pending an independent professional valuation of the land and once received, this matter be brought back to the Council for further consideration.

17. QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 1 (3)(M)

Councillor M F L Durham referred to concerns regarding the increase in the district's housing requirement under the revised National Planning Policy Framework and its implications for infrastructure and speculative development. He asked whether the Leader of the Council would write to the Secretary of State seeking a review of the housing allocation. In response, the Leader acknowledged those concerns and confirmed that he would write to the Secretary of State as requested.

Councillor Bown asked whether the Council should withdraw its support for the five-unitary model following the withdrawal of the Essex LGR proposals. The Leader replied that he shared those concerns and noted that LGR had not been a significant issue for residents but stated that the matter was for the Council to determine. He added that the Government may bring forward alternative unitary proposals following the review process.

Councillor A S Fluker suggested that the name "Rainer" be considered when naming streets in future developments. In response, the Leader agreed that the suggestion could be considered.

Councillor W Stamp referred to public awareness of LGR and asked whether the Leader accepted that his earlier comments may not have been entirely accurate. In response, the Leader acknowledged that Councillor Stamp had experience of constituents with knowledge of LGR and that his earlier comments may not have been entirely accurate.

Councillor P L Spenceley asked whether the Leader of the Council would write to the Burnham-on-Crouch RNLI to express the Council's support and appreciation for its volunteers. In response, the Leader praised the work of the RNLI and confirmed that he would write on behalf of the Council. Following this, Councillor A S Fluker requested that the Leader also write to the West Mersea RNLI, which the Leader agreed to do.

Councillor Fluker referred to the legal challenge relating to the County Council elections and LGR. He questioned whether expenditure on the process should have ceased at an earlier stage and sought clarification on continued support for the proposed Mid Essex unitary authority. In response, the Leader stated that the actions taken had been in accordance with the mandate agreed by the Council and would continue unless or until that mandate changed.

Councillor K M H Lagan asked whether the Leader agreed that the Council should focus on serving the residents of the District. The Leader agreed.

Councillor Bassenger asked the Leader of the Council whether Council meetings should focus on District Council business. The Leader agreed.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 8.39 pm.

R G PRATT
CHAIRPERSON