

**Budget Speech from the Leader of the Council to the extraordinary meeting of the Council on Tuesday 23 February 2020.**

Just before I go onto the actual speech that I am going to make, I thought I would pay prudence to last year's budget speech that was delivered by previous Leader. Only a couple of things, I won't go repeating it again, but It was a very good budget and one of the things I do wish to refer to when Councillor Fluker stood up was the recommendation or how they were looking to meet with Thames Sailing barge operators on a regular basis to ensure that that their needs of the Council are properly understood. So I think that was an excellent part, I think the whole budget was very good Councillor Fluker but I thought I would give that a mention of you taking consideration part of the Wharfage fees that we're actually looking at tonight. So rather than steal Councillor Fluker's thunder I will deliver my speech.

I present the 2021/22 Budget to you.

It's difficult to imagine a more challenging time in which to prepare a budget. However, what we have achieved as a District over the past year has been incredible. We have come to the aid of those most vulnerable, assisting those without a home, supporting the delivery of food parcels to those shielding and made payments to individuals and businesses hardest hit by the pandemic, to name but a few. Over £20m of support grants were paid out to local businesses over the year. We have also maintained the core services throughout the pandemic and we thank our partners including Suez and Appletons for continuing without interruption despite the challenges of Covid to collect waste and recycling from the kerbside and emptying the bins around our towns and villages. So thank you.

In addition to the grants provided we have worked to support business in other ways. We have made changes in areas such as the High Street in Maldon to create a safer shopping environment by slowing traffic and helping people social distance. Signage and reminders have been added to footways and our website has been adapted to keep the public informed. Our parks and open spaces have remained open with only minor adaptations throughout 2020 allowing people to exercise safely with their families. It hasn't only happened in Maldon High Street, it's also happened in Burnham- and our other villages as well. So thank you for that.

The community has come together to unite in its response. The Council is leading the way in the recovery efforts recording, testing and vaccination centres. The Council offices have been provided to enable the NHS to start vaccinating people since December and has been a model centre, demonstrating the excellent corporation between the Council and the NHS.

The response, of course, has not been without its financial costs and although it is absolutely right that we continue to put people before pounds, we are forecasting a £700k overspend as a result of the pandemic despite government support.

As we enter 2021/22 it is clear that uncertainty will remain, and we must recognise that and the inevitable increased demand on our services. There is significant financial risk in particular around our leisure centres, car parking and events. The pressures are outlined in more detail in sections 5 and 7 of the budget setting report. A COVID contingency fund of £371k has been created for next year from the government COVID support grant to allow a cushion for the budget pressures that will be faced, albeit unknown, Chairman. 2021/22 has seen another one-year settlement from central government and as we look beyond next year the future of the New Homes Bonus grant is worth £930k to the Council will remain and have

significant implications. Though the Medium Term Financial Strategy assumes the grant will go completely by 2023/24 it is expected that funding will remain in some form which will improve the financial outlook, and I look forward to the outcome of the government's consultation on the future of the New Homes Bonus.

During the budget setting process the cross-party Finance Member Working Group has met on several occasions to provide input into the budget. I'm pleased that members have had the opportunity to work together and collaboratively and share their views at these and other meetings. Part of the process has been ensuring that any growth is kept to a minimum recognising significant financial challenges and unknowns ahead of us.

However, where it is right to invest we have done so. This includes additional staffing to ensure our services have the capacity to operate. Continuing with process improvement, which will be so vital in meeting future challenges and driving efficiencies. Investing in our commercial activity to bring forward income generation and wider benefits for the District.

Our Local Development Plan is due for review and the news that our housing land supply has fallen below five years highlights the importance of doing this. With this in mind we have allocated £1m from reserves over the next three years to complete the vital work. It is essential that we have an up to date Local Development Plan to ensure that development is appropriate, housing needs are met and that we maximise the benefits for our community. The new plan will also reflect the climate and environmental challenges we face and seek to bring forward development that supports the aspirations of the District to move towards a zero carbon future as set out in the Climate Energy Statement declared by this Council in February this year.

Given the significant financial pressures and need for sustainability, we are therefore proposing that Maldon District Council's Band D Council Tax is increased by £5 per annum; this equates to 42p per month for a band D Property.

This budget provides increased resources for our services, so they can deliver for our community. Investment, to bring forward commercial aspirations and make efficiencies. A break-even budget with robust reserves for next year. And, although we cannot predict what will happen in the future we have given ourselves a strong foundation to respond to all these challenges and capacities to support our community.

This budget meets our fiscal responsibility and follows the advice and guidance of the Section 151 officer as it has in previous years Mr Chairman.

**CHAIRMAN I COMMEND THE BUDGET TO THE COUNCIL.**