

LEADERS SPEECH 30/06/2021

The Council by-elections in May this year consolidated the position of the Independent Group as the largest group on Maldon District Council. We are now established as the administration of the Council and are looking to bring stability, a renewed focus on service delivery and corporate plans and projects, to the residents and businesses of the District.

I want to start by remembering the residents, business owners, friends, family and loved ones that have suffered loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic and to be mindful of those who are still struggling with the anxieties and challenges that the Coronavirus has brought to everyday lives.

Right now, livelihoods, and health are my main concerns, including mental health.

Residents need a Council that is understanding, engages more and takes positive action, that puts our homes, and our futures firmly at the centre of all our decisions, conversations and policies.

The Council Office continues to operate as a vital NHS resource, providing vaccines to protect our residents and to help us regain our confidence and freedoms. I want to praise all the NHS staff, key workers and volunteers for their tireless hard work and thank them for the care they have given and continue to.

From crisis, comes opportunity and there is a definite sense of hope and community, but this comes with an understandable cautiousness about what we still don't know of the pandemic and of what a potential third wave might bring.

The longer-term impacts from the pandemic are not yet fully known. National data is starting to show us that in the Maldon District women were furloughed more than men and that retail, leisure and tourism have been hit the hardest. There are also concerns for the construction industry as access to skilled workers and materials is challenging. This adds to the current cost of living, so the need to safely welcome back visitors to our beautiful District and supporting our local businesses is paramount for our future success.

Like many public sector organisations and businesses, the Council's finances remain challenging. The pandemic has seen an increase demand for council services yet income from sources such as parking, planning and local tax collection rates is down. Although the Council is well placed to respond, the longer-term impact is more uncertain. Therefore, we must continuously adapt and look for ways to keep vital services running. This means we need to continue to think commercially and look for revenue generating opportunities, BUT I must point out that we also need to ensure public value is the focus for every commercial decision made. We will continue to question 'is this the right thing to do', as well as seek to raise funds from some of our projects and assets.

The updated Corporate Plan, we published in February of this year, clearly sets out the Council's priorities, and is consistent with the statement I made in December of last year, upon becoming Leader. The Plan maintains the 3 key themes of Place, Prosperity and Community, but brings a greater focus to our activities and particularly around the environment, the economy and our work with communities to support the great work they are doing.

Looking ahead there are positives to focus on. We're excited about bringing forward our commitment to climate action, as many of our Councillors and residents are passionate about the environment and initiative we can take. We are going to reach out to our young people and communities to give them the opportunity to take climate action and to be part of

the 'Our Home, Our Future' engagement group, to ensure they have an active voice in making long-term, accessible change.

The title reflects that this is a strategy to be owned by us all as it affects everyone's future.

We have continued to support businesses in both surviving the challenges of the Covid Pandemic through 27 million of direct grant support, whilst also looking forward to the future and how the economy of the district can grow and thrive as restrictions ease. We have introduced initiatives such as 'Click and Collect' to help local retailers to compete with online offers to protect the vitality of our High Streets. We are working with partners to deliver a wide range of business support including business start-up funding and capacity building for existing businesses. Work is also underway on the Maldon District Investment Prospectus to attract new businesses to locate in our District.

We continue to build on our excellent partnerships and work with the community. Whilst Covid has been, and continues to be a challenge, we have been proud to be part of the amazing community response we have seen in the District. This includes the work we have done with the CVS and community partners to support the community hubs, and also the work we have done with the NHS to provide the vaccination centre at the Council Offices. A huge thank you to all for everything everyone has done no matter how large or small. I have no doubt we have many unsung heroes and heroines within this room alone as well as in our wonderful wider community.

We continue to work with partners and are keen to build on the partnerships that have been formed to enhance support to our communities as we hopefully move past this pandemic and embrace the opportunities of a new future.

We will be bringing forward initiatives to strengthen these partnerships, including the 'One Maldon District' approach that will be presented to Council this evening, as a model of how we capture the benefits of working in partnership and achieve more by working together.

The other part of our corporate plan was the introduction of a shared set of corporate values – signed up to by both Officers and Members. Following a year of political turmoil and unfortunate conflict at the Council, this shared set of values and the buy in of the whole Council is seen as vital to our ability to move forward together. We are a team that has shaped a new set of core values that must be embedded to create a culture of feeling safe and connected, and that helps to openly and respectfully challenge issues and ideas. We want to attract talented people to work for the Council and retain the great staff we have. We also want local people to want to become elected members of the Council. Our time is best spent delivering services, ensuring policies are fit for purpose and seeking opportunities for the District, not on efforts that distract us from what we are here to do. that wastes time or is an attempt at points scoring. Any behaviour that prevents us from being successful has to be challenged. We won't tolerate any negative behaviour that unfairly or disrespectfully attacks Councillors, Staff and the Council, especially at a time when the Council has been working in exceptional circumstances and under immense pressure.

Other key priorities for the year include the review of our Local Development Plan, which we will be consulting on later in the year. It is an opportunity to shape the district and provide homes and services for local families and residents who want to live in the district and continue to build their lives here. This review is key to the future of the district, as we will be asking for your views as we seek to put in place a plan that will deliver growth in a sustainable way, that meets the needs of residents in terms of homes and economic growth, but also focuses on sustainability, appropriate infrastructure and the protection of all that is already great about the unique character of our District.

We have put together a dedicated Team to ensure our Local Development Plan is delivered effectively, and we have switched resources away from the Bradwell B Project, as the development programme from BRB has slowed this year. We will re-engage fully in that work in due course and as necessary, but it is vital that as a Council with relatively limited resources, we do focus those resources in the areas where we need to deliver. With that in mind, as we seek to deliver the Corporate Plan, focussing on those priorities I have highlighted, as well as a renewed commercial delivery to support financial sustainability, I will be asking our Directors to ensure that the structure and resources we have in place are fit for purpose to deliver that agenda. Whilst we recognise the needs for councils to live within their means we also recognise that if staff are being asked to deliver, they need to have the right resources and we will be seeking to ensure those resources are in place and that our approach is geared to delivery.

We are proud of how we have delivered our services and additional support for the community through the challenges of the pandemic, and we are determined that as we now go forward we continue to deliver and maintain that momentum to deliver not only to the minimum required but additional services and support to meet the challenges in the future.

I would like to thank all the members of staff who work at MDC for all the hard work and challenges they have faced and still face. I also wish to thank the members of the Independent Group for all their hard work, commitment, trust, heated discussions and support not only of me and Cllr Nunn, my excellent deputy but the leadership team and hope we can continue to work with all Political Parties and/or groups in the future.

After all working together is far better for our residents for the reasons I have just presented in my leaders speech.

Mr Chairman I present this speech to the Council with sincere belief and a determination to do the right thing for the Maldon District.

Thank you

Councillor Wendy Stamp
Leader
Maldon District Council