



**MINUTES of
COUNCIL
6 JULY 2022**

PRESENT

Chairman	Councillor R G Boyce MBE
Councillors	M G Bassenger, Miss A M Beale, Mrs P A Channer, M R Edwards, Mrs J L Fleming, CC, A S Fluker, M S Heard, M W Helm, B B Heubner, J V Keyes, C Mayes, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, N G F Shaughnessy, P L Spenceley, W Stamp, CC, Mrs J C Stilts, Mrs M E Thompson and S White

125. CHAIRMAN'S NOTICES

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

126. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors V J Bell, R P F Dewick, M F L Durham cc, K M H Lagan, S P Nunn, R H Siddall, N J Skeens, E L Stephens and C Swain.

127. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillors Mrs J L Fleming and W Stamp declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of Essex County Council in any matters pertaining to the County Council.

128. MINUTES OF THE STATUTORY ANNUAL COUNCIL - 12 MAY 2022

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Statutory Annual Council meeting held on 12 May 2022 be approved and confirmed.

129. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

It was noted in accordance with the Council's public speaking protocol the following question had been received from Mr Lance Peatling:

“Can the council clarify the comments by the officer at the previous meeting with respect to a grant of monies to undertake the proposed feasibility study with regard to new council offices. The officer insinuated that by virtue of a grant that the tax payers of MDC would not be bearing the cost of the study. This is blatant obfuscation by council officers as all public monies are either raised on the back of taxpayers or grafted onto their backs through the issuance of public

debt. Can the council clarify that this is the case, mind officers of the council as to not making misleading comments and commit to clarity with respect to spending public money, however so derived?"

The Leader of the Council advised that the Council was given an £80k grant from One Public Estate to undertake a feasibility study regarding the Council Offices. If following feasibility and a subsequent full business case the decision was taken to proceed with the final phase of development, £60k of the grant was repayable and the Council had the opportunity to apply for further funding opportunities. If rejected the grant was not required to be repaid.

One Public Estate was an established national programme delivered in partnership by the Office of Government Property (OGP) within the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association. It provided practical and technical support and funding to councils to deliver ambitious property-focused programmes in collaboration with central government and other public sector partners.

130. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman of the Council referred the Vice-Chairman and himself attending a number of functions. He advised the Council and asked it be noted that Bryan Harker had been given the Freedom of Heybridge Basin. The Chairman informed the Council of the recent passing of former Councillor David Howse who had been a Member for 16 years from 1995 – 2011 and twice Vice-Chairman of the Council. A few moments of quiet contemplation were then held in memory of Mr Howse.

131. STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 25 MAY 2022

Councillor S White, Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee presented the recommendation coming forward from her Committee, regarding the following Motion.

With regards fiscal propriety, public interest, and value to customers the Director of Resources in his role under S151 Local Government Act 1972 brings forward an Autumn Budget for consideration by Council.

Councillor White proposed that the Motion in the name of Councillor A S Fluker not be agreed. This proposal was duly seconded.

In response to a question, the Chairman explained that when this and the other Motions under this agenda item had been referred to Committees the Monitoring Officer had advised that they would come back as a recommendation to the Council.

Councillor Fluker spoke to his motion and following this the Chairman moved the proposal which was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that the Motion in the name of Councillor A S Fluker (as detailed above) not be agreed.

132. PERFORMANCE, GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - 9 JUNE 2022

Councillor W Stamp, Chairman of the Performance, Governance and Audit (PGA) Committee presented the three recommendations coming forward from her Committee to the Council.

Agenda Item 6 – Notice of Motion – Council Constitution and Scheme of Delegation

RESOLVED that the Council notes the position as now advised by Councillor K M H Lagan to withdraw his Motion and takes no further action on this Motion.

Agenda Item 7 – Notice of Motion – Council Constitution and Questions to the Leader

Councillor Stamp presented this Motion (as set out below) and referring to the recommendation from the PGA Committee proposed that it not be agreed. This proposal was duly seconded.

Part 4 of the Rules of Procedure, Rule 1, 3 (m) be amended from:

(m) Questions (which may be made without notice) to the Leader of the Council (or in his absence the Deputy Leader) (other than at the Annual Meeting, and at the meetings referred to in (h) above) for a maximum of 15 minutes and not beyond 10.00pm unless such period is extended with the mutual agreement of the Chairman of the Council and the Leader (or Deputy Leader).

to:

(m) Questions (which may be made without notice) to the Leader of the Council (or in his absence the Deputy Leader) (other than at the Annual Meeting, and at the meetings referred to in (h) above) for a maximum of 15 minutes allocated to the asking of questions. Where the Leader or (Deputy Leader in their absence) is unable to answer a question, the answer will be given by a written response from the Leader to all members within 5 working days.

Councillor Fluker presented his motion which he advised was about allowing the right amount of time at Council meetings for spontaneous scrutiny of the Leader of the Council. He then called on the Leader of the Council to change her mind and propose that the recommendation from the PGA Committee was not agreed and agree the Motion as tabled. A brief debate ensued.

In response to a question regarding the debate of the Motion, the Chairman provided further clarification as to why these Motions were coming forward as recommendations from Committees. He explained that the Monitoring Officer had prepared a report for the next meeting of the Corporate Governance Working Group to address the issue and make the constitution clear that once a motion is referred to a Committee it becomes the property of that Committee to resolve.

The Chairman moved the proposal and upon a vote being taken this was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that the Motion in the name of Councillor A S Fluker (as detailed above) not be agreed.

Agenda Item 14 – Notice of Motion – Referred by Statutory Annual Council

RESOLVED that the Council notes the position as now advised by Councillor A S Fluker to withdraw his Motion and takes no further action on this Motion.

133. JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 16 JUNE 2022

Councillor Mrs J L Fleming, Chairman of the Joint Standards Committee presented the recommendation coming forward from her Committee (as set out on the agenda) regarding the following motion from Councillor A S Fluker:

“With regards to openness, transparency, and public interest the Council writes to the Planning Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State, Mr Terrence Kemmann-Lane JP DipTP FRTPI MCMI, asking him to evidence his findings of ‘substantive’ ‘unreasonable behaviour’ and pre-determination by ‘elected members’, and that the Council appoints an Independent Person to conduct a review of the decision notice and report their findings to Council.”

The Chairman suggested that the matter be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as he felt this was the most appropriate Committee.

It was proposed and duly seconded that that in respect of the Motion the Council rejects the call for an external investigation but accepts the findings of the Inspector, that Council emphasises the need for more objective and evidence-based decision-making in the future and that the matter of planning decision making be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Fluker presented his motion and referred to further correspondence and a breach in the code of conduct which he requested be made available to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In response the Monitoring Officer explained this related to Member investigation and was confidential until brought forward to the Joint Standards Committee. The issue regarding whether there was a breach in the code of conduct had been dealt with under the complaints procedure and resolved.

The Chairman moved the proposal which upon a vote being taken was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that in respect of the Motion (detailed above) the Council rejects the call for an external investigation but accepts the findings of the Inspector, that Council emphasises the need for more objective and evidence-based decision-making in the future and that the matter of planning decision making be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

134. MINUTES OF 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 Tuesday 28 June 2022 for which Minutes had been published.

135. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Mrs P A Channer, Leader of the Council (the Leader) made a statement (attached at **APPENDIX 1** to these Minutes) setting out the Council’s report and programme for the remainder of the municipal year. The statement referred to a number of areas, including:

- the challenges faced due to the increased cost of living, including the prioritisation of resources, partnership working and investing time and effort to fulfil core services;
- supporting residents and communities to improve quality of life and increase social value;
- the Commercial Strategy, essential to the Council’s financial sustainability.
- the new ‘One Maldon District’ Group which brings together agencies such as the Police, NHS, schools and the Council.

- partnership working, progressing commercial activities, bidding for government funds and giving younger residents a voice through a Youth Council.
- working with Essex County Council to develop a transport strategy and launch the Council's Investment Prospectus;
- the return of tourism to the District and the planned reopening of the Splash Park in the summer;
- updating the Customer Engagement Strategy;
- continuation of the Local Development Plan review and beginning work on to renew the Council's Corporate Plan;
- engaging with communities and partners to support climate action, recover and boost the Council's economy and build capacity and resilience of communities.

The Leader thanked Officers for their continued dedication, commitment, professionalism and passion. She finished presentation of her statement to the Council advising how the Council continued to strive and do more than the minimum and looked forward to seeing what could be achieved with partners and communities in the coming months.

In her response to the statement from the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Mrs J L Stilts thanked the Leader for allowing her to have a copy of her speech ahead of the meeting. She commented that the Opposition commended the statement, was pleased to see the Council's reception open and that it was supporting residents. She noted that the Council was committed to the Climate Action Plan and improving healthcare in the District and supported the work undertaken by the One Maldon District Group. Councillor Stilts advised the Opposition was pleased that tourism had opened up and looked forward to seeing what could be achieved by the Council working together with partners for the future.

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

In accordance with Procedure Rule 6(3) the Chairman advised that the following question had been received from Councillor A S Fluker:

With reference to the Decision Notice and Costs Decision Notice regarding the Planning Appeal determined on 24 March 2022 Ref/APP/X1545/W/21/3281036 Land South of Charwood and East of Orchard House, Stoney Hills, Burnham-on-Crouch, CM0 8QA, can the Council confirm why the appeal was not defended and why a rebuttal was not sent to the Planning Inspectorate?

The Director of Service Delivery responded advising that the planning application was refused planning permission by the District Planning Committee contrary to Officer recommendation. It was standard practice for the Local Planning Authority to defend all planning appeals submitted against the decision of the Council.

Whilst the planning appeal was allocated to a planning officer there was an error on the part of both the managing officer and the case officer in managing the workload and as a result a defence of the appeal was not submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. On behalf of the service, the Director of Service Delivery apologised for this oversight.

As previously highlighted to Members one of the key issues appeared to revolve around the management of officer's workload and the ability of officers to easily have

an overview on what deadlines individual officers have approaching. This process issue was something that the Planning Team had already looked to deal with including changing the approach to case conferences and the delivery of the planning dashboard. This issue would be further refined through the Planning Improvement Plan mentioned at the last meeting of the Performance Governance and Audit Committee.

137. NOTICE OF MOTION

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4, the Chairman advised of the receipt of two motions proposed by Councillor A S Fluker and seconded by Councillors R P F Dewick and M W Helm.

In respect of Motion A (as set out below) the Chairman determined that this would be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for resolution.

Motion A:

1. That Council considers the Inspectors Notice and in particular paragraph 18 and takes the appropriate action.
2. That Council considers whether the 'unreasonable behaviour' of members in determining the application resulted in the appeal being lost and a costs of £230,000 being paid to the appellant and takes the appropriate action.
3. That Council considers, bearing in mind members overturned the Planning Officers recommendation to approve the application, why no members attended the appeal to evidence and give weight to their decision.
4. That Council considers why members went against the Officers decision to approve the application, the advice that Council was unlikely to win any appeal and considers why under those circumstances the appeal was defended at a cost of £30,000.

Councillor Fluker presented his second Motion (Motion B) to the Council and outlined his reasons for bringing the Motion forward which included to ensure that the Council received updates on the plans for the Princes road site so any proposed plans could be brought forward quickly. He then proposed that Motion B (as set out below) be agreed.

Motion B:

That Council receives regular updates from the Director of Service Delivery regarding the delivery of his plan to improve the service area and that extraordinary costs associated with the delivery of the plan are reported to Council.

In response the Leader of the Council explained that the Director of Service Delivery was acting diligently to deliver the plan and both herself and the Deputy Leader had regularly meetings with him. She advised that an all Member briefing and further briefing of the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee had recently taken place and outlined how all Members would be involved in the decision making through the remit of Committees. The Leader recommended that the Council did not support the Motion for the reasons she had outlined.

Following further discussion and in response to a question from the Chairman, Councillor Fluker confirmed he did not wish to withdraw his Motion and commented that a number of the Council's customers were desperate to see this plan delivered.

The Chairman put the Motion in the name of Councillor Fluker to the Council and upon a vote being taken this was declared lost. The Chairman advised that the Motion was therefore not agreed.

RESOLVED

- (i) That Motion A (as set out above) be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for resolution.
- (ii) That Motion B (as set out above) not be agreed.

138. MAKING THE GREAT TOTHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Council considered the report of the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance seeking approval to formally 'make' the Great Totham Neighbourhood Plan (GTNP) (Appendix 1 to the report) and the Village Design Statement (Appendix 2), part of the Development Plan. It was noted that following referendum the GTNP automatically became part of the statutory Development Plan for the District.

The GTNP had been developed by the Parish Council through extensive engagement, culminating in a Referendum on 9 June 2022. The report presented the results of this and explained that as 89% of the votes cast were in favour of the plan the District Council was required to complete the statutory process by formally 'making' the GTNP part of the development plan for the District. The Decision Statement (attached as Appendix 3 to the report) would also be published.

The Leader of the Council moved the recommendation set out in the report. This was duly seconded and agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that the Council 'makes' the Great Totham Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with Section 38(A)(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

139. PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER - CONSULTATION REVIEW

The Council considered the report of the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance seeking Members' approval to continue with the legislation of dog control in specific places (as set out in Appendix 3 to the report) within the District under the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) section of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. It was noted that if approved this legislation would be valid for three years.

Members were reminded that on 1 February 2019 the Council had implemented a PSPO to manage dog control across the District which allowed Officers to enforce against dog fouling by way of issuing fixed Penalty Notices to those failing to 'pick up' after their dogs. A consultation to extend the PSPO for a further three years had been undertaken between 20 April and 31 May 2022 and Appendix 1 to the report detailed the consultation responses received. Maps of those specific public places where dogs would continue to be required to be on a lead during specific times of the year were detailed in Appendix 2.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the contents of the report be noted;

- (ii) that the proposed legislation of dog control in specified placed within the (District under the Public Space Protection Order section of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, be adopted without further amendment as detailed within Section 5 and Appendix 3 to the report.

140. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP

The Council considered the report of the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance seeking appointments for two outside bodies and a vacancy on the Corporate Governance Working Group, as follows:

- **Safer Essex Group** – A Member representative had been requested on this Group and its Terms of Reference were attached as Appendix A to the report.
- **Police, Fire and Crime Panel** – The Panel had advised that representatives had to be from the same political group and therefore the Council was asked to revise the appointments made at the Statutory Annual Council meeting in May 2022.
- **Corporate Governance Working Group** – Councillor Mrs P A Channer had been appointed to this Group by the Council but was also allocated a seat as the Leader of the Council. There was therefore a vacant seat on the Working Group which needed to be filled.

The Leader of the Council presented the report and proposed that Councillor B B Heubner be appointed to the Safer Essex Group and Councillor Mrs J L Fleming to the Corporate Governance Working Group. This proposal was duly seconded.

Councillor Mrs J L Stilts proposed that Councillor C Mayes be appointed as the substitute Member on the Police, Fire and Crime Panel. This proposal was duly seconded.

In response to a question, the Leader advised that all Members should make sure that Minutes of Outside Bodies were loaded onto Mod.Gov for all Members to view.

The Chairman put the proposals to the Council and upon a vote being taken these were duly agreed.

RESOLVED

- (i) that Councillor B B Heubner be appointed to the Safer Essex Group for the remainder of the municipal year;
- (ii) that Councillor C Mayes is appointed as the substitute Member on the Police, Fire and Crime Panel.
- (iii) that Councillor Mrs J L Fleming is appointed to the vacancy on the Corporate Governance Working Group.

141. CHANGE OF DATE TO STATUTORY ANNUAL COUNCIL 2023

The Council considered the report of the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance seeking a revision to the date of the Statutory Annual Council meeting in 2023. The proposed change was to allow time for Members onboarding and constitutional processes following the planned District Council elections in May 2023.

RESOLVED the date of the Statutory Annual Council meeting for 2023 is moved to Thursday 18 May 2023.

142. BUSINESS BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERED BY THE CHAIRMAN TO BE URGENT

There were none.

143. 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that this satisfies the public interest test.

144. LEGAL ACTION

The Council considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery providing Members with an update on the current position of an ongoing matter and seeking Members' agreement of the next steps.

The report provided detailed background information regarding the matter and how the related licence was due to expire at the end of August 2022. The Senior Specialist Legal outlined the action available to the Council following expiry of the licence.

A debate ensued and in response to questions raised Officers provided the Council with further information.

Councillor A S Fluker proposed that recommendation (ii) as set out in the report be amended to detail a weekly rate of £1,000 and that this be agreed by the Council. This proposal was duly seconded and upon a vote being taken was agreed.

RESOLVED that if contractors have been confirmed to remove the vessel within 28 days of the expiry of the licence that the licence be extended for this period at a weekly rate of £1,000 per week.

145. COMMERCIAL OPTIONS FOR PRINCES ROAD - UPDATE

The Council considered the report of the Director of Resources providing an update on progress made with the Commercial Options for the Princes Road project following the Council's approval in March 2022 to commence a feasibility review.

An update on the three key workstreams identified was set out in the report. Officers provided further updates at the meeting and it was noted that feedback was currently being sought from staff and Members regarding specific office space requirements which would feed into the specifications. It was noted that Officers would be working with the Corporate Projects Working Group prior to reporting back to the Council in September.

RESOLVED that Members note the contents of the report.

There being no other items of business the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.26 pm.

R G BOYCE MBE
CHAIRMAN

Leader's Summer Statement

In my Budget speech to Council back in February, I spoke of how 2021/22 had been a challenging one for Maldon District Council both financially and operationally. In today's speech I want to look forward and wish to focus everyone's thoughts on the challenges we all face due to the increased cost of living, the additional financial pressures on this authority and on all public services. With these pressures must come opportunity and a renewed focus.

In times of austerity, we can't just simply blame everything on lack of funds. We must ensure our approaches, behaviours, and governance act as positive enablers and not as barriers that prevent us from doing the right thing. We often forget to look back and recognise that we do things now for less money, with better outcomes. It hasn't been easy, but it has sharpened our thinking and has tested our most talented staff.

Whilst we must continue to prioritise our resources, work in partnership where possible and invest our time and effort in areas that will fulfil core services, we also need to help support our residents and communities to improve quality of life and increase social value and support them with the increased cost of living that we are all experiencing.

To really add value, we must first ensure that our core services are being delivered effectively and efficiently and that we are focussing on our finances and delivering a balanced budget for the coming years. We continue to seek opportunities with other authorities to identify where services can be shared, something that is becoming common practice for all financially pressured local authorities.

In March this year, the Council published its Commercial Strategy, which is essential to our financial sustainability in the long term. This strategy and commercial thinking are vital to generate income from our assets and estate and to realise the projects in our commercial pipeline.

As well as bringing forward commercial projects, one of the key aims of the commercial strategy is to 'Be more commercial in our approach across all viable activities'. Through our new Corporate Strategy, I want to see the same approach to quality of life and social value, in that we look at how we achieve them through the way in which we deliver all of our services, and that we are taking the opportunity to build social value into everything we do.

A good example of this is how we ensure that we maximise the health and wellbeing outcomes from our leisure contracts. As well as ensuring value for money, I want to ensure that they are accessible to all of our residents and enable health benefits that will contribute to the well-being of the whole community. It is striking to see the impacts of the pandemic, we must help to prevent additional burden on the NHS and enable residents to live healthier, more active lives.

Again, in March, we held the first meeting of the new 'One Maldon District' Group. Our health is influenced by a range of factors, including access to housing, employment, education, exercise and living in a safe community. This group brings together agencies such as the police, NHS, schools, and Maldon District Council, alongside businesses and voluntary groups to look at how, collectively we can improve the health and wellbeing of the District. Through this group we want to build on the learning and partnership working we developed through our Districts covid response.

In addition to this, I also want to put a spotlight on the current funding bids and investment plan work we have underway for Levelling Up and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as these are a priority

for the Council at the moment. All funding we successfully secure for the District is going help bring forward exciting projects that achieve outcomes for our people, place, and communities.

Alongside partnership working, progressing commercial activities, and bidding for government funds, we also have a responsibility to give our younger residents a voice through a Youth Council and encourage them to feed their views into initiatives that help them gain new skills and to encourage them to lead climate action.

Our Climate Action Strategy, Our Home, Our Future continues to deliver activities against our pledges and officers are working with Essex County Council to develop a transport strategy. Our new Climate Action Officer starts with us in at the end of August and will help to engage with communities and enable further positive change.

We are all pleased that the District is open again for tourism and inward investment, both of which were impacted by the pandemic. We must ensure we help to promote the District and will be doing this through working with partners at Essex County Council through the Promoting Essex project and through the launch of our Investment Prospectus.

Residents and visitors have welcomed recent events and we look forward to the opening of the Splash Park this summer, delivered through our latest contracts with Places Leisure and Amphora. We mustn't forget however that a lot of time and effort still goes into event planning and delivery. To avoid becoming victims of our own success and to support this, I expect to see an events and concessions strategy come forward in the autumn.

During this year, we will also update our Customer engagement strategy. We have made great strides in developing improved online access to our services and support, and we've had great feedback on how accessible our online services are. Even so, we are ensuring that our new Customer Engagement Strategy takes an Equality led approach to ensure that all members of the community have a route to contacting us and accessing our services that is appropriate to them and their needs. Currently if an in-person appointment is required this can be arranged at our reception desk and will be offered between 10am and 4pm Monday-Friday.

Our Local Development Plan Review will continue during 2022/2023 with the next step being for the Council to formally review the comments and opinions people kindly gave in response to the Issues and Options Document consultation at the start of this year. We appreciate the time invested by residents, businesses, and communities to make responses and we will consider this feedback when reviewing the LDP, as well as how we can ensure the council meets its legal and national policy obligations.

So, we will engage, when/where appropriate, in opportunities to support climate action, recover and boost our economy, build the capacity and resilience of our communities. But we are not without challenges and we must continue to look and work with our partners in areas like:

- (i) Economic and cultural renewal; following the pandemic and development of jobs that underpin our wellbeing
- (ii) Equality of opportunity; through connectivity infrastructure, public transport, access to education and skills, that will maximise potential and supporting our young people in getting the best start in life.
- (iii) Tackling social challenges, social isolation, physical and mental well-being, access to health and care and pockets of deprivation.

The Levelling Up White Paper and subsequent Bill presents an opportunity to reset the relationship between central and local government and put councils at the heart of delivering the Government's ambitious programme to improve opportunities in all parts of the country.

We are already playing an active role in the North Essex Economic Board. Together with 5 other North Essex authorities, the Board is responsible for driving and delivering growth to a population of 835,000 and 41,000 businesses.

Through engagement of the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives discussions about Levelling Up and devolution it is planned, via working groups, to explore the potential opportunities that devolution could offer in terms of improving outcomes for residents and businesses.

In September, we will begin work to renew our Corporate Plan. This will give the authority, along with our residents and local businesses the opportunity to inform and set out priorities for the future. I am keen that we use this opportunity to focus on the quality of life of residents.

We have achieved a lot in the last two years even though gripped in the restrictions and impacts of the pandemic. We now march forward with positivity, ambition and with intent on collaborative working to enable delivery of the best outcomes we can for our communities.

I want to close by saying all of this work and more is delivered by only 197.62 FTE (headcount 223) number of staff . I thank each and every one of them for their continued dedication, commitment, professionalism and passion. As a small local authority, prioritising what can be delivered will always be a tough decision to make and one that has to be balanced against budgets, demand, and capacity to deliver. This authority continues to strive to do more than the minimum. I look forward to seeing what we can achieve with our partners and communities in the coming months.