



**MINUTES of
COUNCIL
13 JULY 2023**

PRESENT

Chairperson Councillor K M H Lagan

Councillors M G Bassenger, D O Bown, S J Burwood, J Driver,
M F L Durham, CC, A Fittock, A S Fluker, L J Haywood,
K Jennings, A M Lay, N R Miller, S J N Morgan, M G Neall,
N G F Shaughnessy, R H Siddall, U C G Siddall-Norman,
N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, W Stamp, CC, E L Stephens,
J C Stilts, N J Swindle, M E Thompson, S White and
L L Wiffen

143. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the extraordinary meeting of the Council and went through some general housekeeping arrangements for the meeting. He advised that he was suspending Procedure Rule 4(8)3 standing to address the Chairperson.

144. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors V J Bell, J C Hughes, W J Laybourn, C P Morley and R Pratt.

145. MINUTES OF THE STATUTORY ANNUAL COUNCIL - 18 MAY 2023

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Statutory Annual meeting of the Council held on 18 May 2023 be approved and confirmed.

146. MINUTES - 8 JUNE 2023

RESOLVED

(i) that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 8 June 2023 be received.

**Minute 62 – Questions to the Leader of the Council in Accordance with
Procedure Rule 1(3)(M)**

Councillor R H Siddall proposed an amendment to the last paragraph of this Minute, that the second sentence be amended to read "...he referred to *not* being in coalition *but* working informally...". This amendment was duly noted.

Minute No. 49 – Leaders and Composition of Political Groups

Minute No. 53 – Appointment of Membership of Committees of the Council

In relation to both these items, Councillor E L Stephens highlighted that reference to Maldon Independent Group should be Maldon *District* Independent Group. This was duly noted.

Councillor Stephens also referred to an Appendix and the incorrect recording of Political Group names within it. It was noted that this was the report Appendix and not those Appendices to the Minutes.

Minute No. 50 – Adjournment of the Meeting

Councillor Stephens raised and it was duly noted that this Minute should refer to the proposal of Councillor R H Siddall and not Councillor A S Fluker.

Minute No. 47 – Notice of Motions

In respect of Motion Three and a question from Councillor A S Fluker as to why this had not been actioned, the Chairperson advised that the Director of Strategy and Resources would be providing Members with a verbal update on Devolution at Agenda Item 7.

Minute No. 52 – Leaders and Composition of Political Groups (continued)

Councillor Fluker referred to the last paragraph in this Minute regarding the Leader of the Opposition and questioned why it had not been actioned as the meeting recording indicated it had been agreed by assent. In response the Lead Legal Specialist and Monitoring Officer advised that this had not been a decision of the Council although the Chairperson confirmed that he had declared this at the time.

The Lead Legal Specialist and Monitoring Officer clarified that at that time he had provided the Chairperson advice, which he had accepted, according to the Council's constitution. There had been no motion or vote in respect of this.

The Chairperson then moved that the Minutes be confirmed, subject to the above amendments and this was duly agreed.

RESOLVED

- (ii) that subject to the above amendments the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 8 June 2023 be confirmed.

147. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were none.

148. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

149. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairperson advised that on behalf of the Council he had sent a card to former Councillor R G Boyce who had been unwell. Members wished Mr Boyce a speedy recovery and sent their best wishes to his family.

150. VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND RESOURCES

At this point in the meeting and as part of the Chairperson's announcements, the Chairperson advised that he had agreed for the Director of Strategy and Resources to give a brief update in relation to Devolution.

The Director drew attention to a presentation he had circulated to all Members which provided a background to Devolution in Greater Essex. He outlined that:

- devolution deals were not about local government reform, reorganisation, taking powers or funding from existing Local Authorities. They were made with upper authorities over a fixed functional area or countywide area.
- the upper tier authorities of Essex – namely Essex County, Southend and Thurrock - following their expression of interest having been accepted were in discussions with the Government 'Greater Essex'. Should a combined authority be developed District Council's would have a voice.
- there were three levels of devolution deals and Members were advised that level three offered the greatest benefit in terms of the powers and funding that would devolved from Government.

The Director of Strategy and Resources advised Members he was happy to receive any questions outside of the meeting or could arrange an all Member briefing. It was noted that the Devolution Working Group (appointed at the last meeting of the Council) was due to meet on 17 July 2023 to discuss the slides, proposals, and opportunities for Maldon District within any agreed Devolution deal.

151. STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 22 JUNE 2023

The Council considered the recommendations set out on the agenda coming forward from the Strategy and Resources Committee for consideration.

Agenda Item 10 – Area of Special Control for Advertisements

RESOLVED that the Area of Special Control Order for Advertisements attached at Appendix 1 to the Agenda, is reconfirmed.

Agenda Item 11 – Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief

RESOLVED that the Discretionary Non-Domestic Rate Relief Scheme at Appendix 2 to the agenda be updated to include an additional scheme.

152. 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 Wednesday 5 July 2023 for which Minutes had been published.

153. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor R H Siddall, 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 recent District Council elections and the opportunity it provided for different political groups to work together in the best interests of the Council, its residents, and the District. He advised that how the different political groups were not working together and had found a solution for administering the Council.
- The Local Government Association's (LGA) recent work with the Council, recommendations coming forward from a recent Finance Peer Review undertaken and future work planned with the LGA, Members and Officers.
- The need to support officers in the delivery of their roles and for the District. He referred to the recent structure changes within the Service Delivery directorate and the benefits this would bring.
- A new Customer Service Strategy was being worked on and the Leader referred to the importance of how residents contacted and interacted with the Council.
- The financial pressures on the Authority and the ongoing work in relation to this.
- The Local Development Plan (LDP) and how it gave Members opportunity to shape the future of the District and the need to create a sustainable District. Including improving its link to wider infrastructure and working with Partners to deliver this.
- Building connections to Town and Parish Council, which would help build a community network across the District.
- The Council's Corporate Plan for 2023 to 2027 set out the Council's vision, priorities and guiding principles.
- Working with other Local Authorities would help the Council to engage and improve the delivery of services both in the District and across Essex.

The Leader explained his aim was to put politics aside and ensure that the Council worked hard to support the challenges residents were facing through these hard times. He referred to the Council's vision (where quality of life matters) and the need to delivery on this and provide sustainability for residents, businesses, the environment and partners.

The Chairman advised that there were currently two Leaders of the Opposition and he would allow both to response to the statement made by the Leader of the Council.

Councillor J Driver, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, advised how his Group would work constructively with other political groups to enable the Council to function and had supported the Leader of the Maldon District Independent Group leading the administration. Councillor Driver highlighted some of the issues facing the Maldon District and how in order for improvements to occur the Council needed to function effectively with all Political Groups working together.

Councillor J C Stilts, Leader of the Maldon District Support Group, advised the Council that her Group were not aligned with the Maldon District Independent Group and looked forward to working with the other Groups. The Maldon District Support Group would work for the people of Maldon, businesses and customers to ensure they got the best service and value the Council could deliver. It would challenge the administration, including the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Working with Officers to achieve balanced budgets along with Members to meet the aims and visions of the corporate plan

At this point, Councillor W Stamp requested that the Chairperson consider allowing Councillor Morgan (Leader of the Conservative Group) to respond to the statement of the Leader of the council. She asked that her request be Minuted.

On consideration of the request, the Chairperson invited Councillor Morgan to speak. Councillor Morgan advised how the Conservative Group would stand for Conservative principles but had a responsibility towards the residents in their respective Wards. Referring specifically to the Local Development Plan and devolution Councillor Morgan advised that the Conservative Group would work constructively together with the other Group to make sure that Maldon District Council moved forward.

Councillors S White and L L Wiffen leave the chamber during this item of business and do not return.

154. MOTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR A S FLUKER (MOTION 08/2023)

Motion 1:

Councillor A S Fluker provided some background information to his Motion and presented Motion 1, as set out below, to the Council:

That Councils resolves to agree that on the basis, that the members of the Maldon District Independent Group a registered Political Party, the members of the Conservative Party Group and the members of the Liberal Democrats Party Group voted in unison, alliance and partnership to appoint into the roles of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice Chairman of the Council, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Performance Governance and Audit Committee and Overview and Scrutiny the political groups so mentioned become the administration of the Council and that the Maldon Support Group becomes the official opposition.

In accordance with Procedure Rule No. 13 (3) Councillor A S Fluker requested a recorded vote. This was duly seconded.

During the discussions that followed Councillor W Stamp sought clarification from the Conservative Group Leader regarding previous coalition discussions. She asked that her request be Minuted. Councillor S J N Morgan as Conservative Group Leader responded to this.

The Chairman then put the Motion in the name of Councillor Fluker to the Council and the voting was as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors A S Fluker and W Stamp.

Against the recommendation:

Councillor M G Bassenger, D Bown, S J Burwood, J Driver, M F L Durham, T Fittock, K Jennings, N R Miller, S J N Morgan, N G F Shaughnessy, R H Siddall, N Spenceley, P L Spenceley, E L Stephens, N Swindle and M E Thompson.

Abstention:

Councillors L J Haywood, K M H Lagan, M G Neall, U G C Siddall-Norman and J C Stilts.

This Motion was therefore not agreed.

Motion 2:

Councillor Fluker advised that he wished to withdraw this Motion. The withdrawal was supported by the seconder of the Motion.

155. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR S J N MORGAN (MOTION 12/2023)

Councillor S J N Morgan presented the following Motion to the Council:

That for the remainder of this municipal year, the opposition leadership should be equally split between the leaders of the Conservative, Maldon Support and Liberal Democrat groups

The Chairman put the Motion to the Council and this was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that for the remainder of this municipal year, the opposition leadership should be equally split between the leaders of the Conservative, Maldon Support and Liberal Democrat Groups.

156. MOTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR W STAMP (MOTION 09/2023)

The Chairperson advised Councillor W Stamp that that the Council would go through each Motion individually. He explained the different voting requirements for each of the following Motions.

Motion 1:

Councillor W Stamp presented Motion 1, as set out below, to the Council.

To disband the Joint Standards Committee in its current form as proposed at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 8th June 2023.

In response to a question the Lead Legal Specialist and Monitoring Officer referred to the Council's Constitution and the current make-up of the Joint Standards Committee.

The Chairperson put Motion 1 to the Council and upon a vote being taken was agreed.

RESOLVED that the Joint Standards Committee be disbanded in its current form as proposed at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 8 June 2023.

Motion 2:

Councillor Stamp presented Motion 2, as set out below, to the Council.

The council waives the overall political control of the authority (political balance) to reconstitute the Joint Standards Committee.

The Chairperson advised Members that should they be minded to exclude political balance provisions, this would need to be a unanimous vote.

In accordance with Procedure Rule No. 13 (3) Councillor W Stamp requested a recorded vote. This was duly seconded.

The Chairperson put Motion 2 to the Council and a vote was taken. However, the recorded vote was stopped by the Chairperson, advising that because one Member had voted against the Motion it fell.

Motion 3:

The Chairperson advised that there was no basis for this Motion to be put.

Motion 4:

Councillor Stamp presented Motion 4, amending it as set out below, to the Council.

The Chair and Vice Chair to be appointed ~~by~~ *for* different political groups, and/or non-political groups.

The Lead Legal Specialist and Monitoring Officer advised the Council that following agreement of Motion 1 the Joint Standards Committee was now disbanded and no longer existed as a Committee. He explained the difficult situation Officers were now in and if Members were rethinking this decision because of the six-month rule under Rule 4 a Motion from ten Members of the Council would need to come forward.

This Motion was not voted on.

157. MOTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR R H SIDDALL (MOTION 10/2023)**Motion 1:**

Councillor R H Siddall presented Motion 1, as set out below, to the Council:

To prevent the paralysis of Council business at full council meetings and to ensure that the council delivers on its business, that at a full council meeting only one motion per political group made in accordance with procedure rule 4, can be put forward to the full council meeting. The nonaligned councillors will also be counted as one group.

Councillor E L Stephens proposed an amendment to the Motion, that if the Motion was agreed this would take effect from the next Council meeting. The Chairperson advised that the amendment could be accepted.

During the debate that ensued reference was made to the work of the Corporate Governance Working Group and some Members raised concern that if agreed the Motion would remove some democracy. Councillor A S Fluker raised a Point of Order referring to Procedure Rule 4 stating that all Motions except the one from Councillor Morgan and his own should be referred to the appropriate Committee.

The Chairperson put the Motion to the Council. Upon a vote being taken this was duly agreed. In response to a query regarding the amendment raised by Councillor Stephens, the Chairperson advised this Motion would take effect from the next Council meeting.

RESOLVED that at a full council meeting only one motion per political group made in accordance with procedure rule 4, can be put forward to the full council meeting. The non-aligned councillors will also be counted as one group.

Motion 2:

Councillor R H Siddall presented Motion 2, as set out below, to the Council:

Despite the recommendation of the recent members remuneration panel about allowances for special responsibility. It did not reflect the work and responsibilities of the Vice Chair of the council and the Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, and this motion recommends that the special allowances for these positions, are brought into line with other Vice Chair of committees and that they are set at 25% of the basic allowance.

In response to a query regarding whether this item had already been considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor P L Spenceley, current Vice-Chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked the Council not to consider this Motion and the proposed change be put off until the next year.

The Chairperson put the Motion to the Council and upon a vote being taken this was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that the special allowances for the following positions, be brought into line with other Vice-Chairperson of Committees and that they are set at 25% of the basic allowance:

- Vice-Chairperson of the Council;
- Vice-Chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor P Spenceley left and returned to the meeting during this item of business.

158. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR E L STEPHENS (MOTION 11/2023)

Councillor E L Stephens presented the following Motion to the Council:

To prioritise essential business at full council meetings, motions at each full council meeting shall be debated at the end of the public part of the meeting, subject to time.

In response to a question the Chairperson clarified that 'the end of the public part of the meeting' referred to before any business due to be conducted in private session was considered. He then put the Motion to the Council and upon a vote being taken declared the Motion was lost.

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

There were none.

160. APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES

The Council considered the report of the Director of Strategy and Resources seeking appointment of Members to vacant Committee positions for the remainder of the municipal year.

It was noted that at the Council meeting on 8 June 2023 appointment of a non-aligned Member to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with District Councillors to the Joint Standards Committee (JSC) had been deferred. The reasons for these deferrals were outlined in the report. In respect of the JSC and the Council decision on 23 June 2020 regarding the political make-up of this Committee, the report outlined further guidance received from the Monitoring Officer that this decision stood only for that particular municipal year.

Appendix A to the report outlined the expected political allocation of seats for the JSC and Appointments Board and it was noted that nominations for the Appointments Board remaining two seats would be required. A change to the Licensing Committee membership was also proposed following the resignation of Councillor J Driver.

The Director of Strategy of Resources advised that following the earlier Motion agreed, recommendation (ii) was deferred. In respect of recommendation (iii) he suggested that the three Opposition Leaders be allocated the remaining seats on the Appointments Board which would then equate to a politically balanced Board.

In response to a question from Councillor J C Stilts about giving up her seat (as an Opposition Leader) and nominating another Member, the Monitoring Officer clarified that this was not possible as the seats were assigned on their designations and the Board had to be politically balanced.

In response to further comments regarding membership of the Appointments Board the Monitoring Officer referred Members to Procedure Rule 15 and advised that should the Opposition Leader be unable / didn't want to sit on the Board then their deputy would sit in their place. He then went on to provide further guidance regarding the Constitution.

The Chairman moved to recommendation (i) and sought nomination of a non-aligned Member to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Leader of the Council nominated Councillor U C G Siddall-Norman and this was duly agreed by the Council.

The Chairman then put recommendation (iii) to the Council, amended to read that "...three Opposition Leaders' are appointed to the Appointments Board...". This was duly agreed along with recommendation (iv).

RESOLVED

- (i) That Councillor U C G Siddall-Norman be appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023 / 23;
- (ii) That the three Opposition Leaders be appointed to Appointments Board, for the Municipal Year 2023 / 24 and the Appointments Board membership be confirmed as follows;
 - Leader of the Council (Councillor R H Siddall)*
 - Leaders of the Opposition (Councillors J Driver, S J N Morgan and J C Stilts)*
 - *or their deputies
 - Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson of the Strategy & Resources and Performance, Governance and Audit Committees
- (iii) That Councillor N J Swindle is appointed to the vacant Liberal Democrat seat on the Licensing Committee for the Municipal Year 2023 / 24.

161. ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

The Chairman advised that an adjournment as not required as the Joint Standards Committee had been disbanded.

162. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION FINANCE PEER CHALLENGE

The Council considered the report of the Interim Chief Finance Officer reporting results of the Local Government Association (LGA) Finance Peer Challenge undertaken from 27 February – 1 March 2023 (attached at Appendix 1 to the report). The report also sought Members' agreement of recommendations made in response to this.

The report provided a summary of the Peer Challenge findings which were detailed in Appendix 1 to the report and set out the six key recommendations. The Council had created an Action Plan (attached at Appendix 2) which set out the Council's draft response to the six recommendations and the broader findings.

An updated Terms of Reference for the Finance Member Working Group was detailed in Appendix 3 and it was suggested that this Group be renamed, and its membership reviewed.

The Leader of the Council presented the report and moved the recommendations as set out within it. This proposal was duly seconded.

Councillor P L Spenceley referred to recommendation (v) and proposed an amendment to include political balance and allow substitutions. This proposal was duly seconded.

In response to a question regarding the proposed change to the Finance Working Group and adhering to the six-month rule, the Lead Legal Specialist and Monitoring Officer referred Members to Procedure Rule 12 and clarified that the Officers' report was made under Rule 5(6) so therefore Rule 12 did not apply.

Councillor N J Swindle left the meeting at this point.

Councillor A S Fluker referred to the excellent work of the LGA on the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and raised some questions in respect of the recommendations detailed in the report. He then proposed an additional recommendation that in the best interest of value for residents, businesses and customers and the protection of our resident's cash reserves the Finance Working Group delivers a cost neutral budget for the municipal year 2024 / 25.

Councillor Swindle returned to, and Councillor A M Lay joined the meeting at this point.

A debate ensued and some comments were raised in respect of the individual recommendations contained in the report appendices. It was noted that Appendix 4 should refer to the Maldon *District* Independent Group.

Councillor R H Siddall proposed that the membership of the Finance Working Group be increased to ten Members for the remainder of the municipal year with additional Members from the Liberal Democrat and District Support Groups to ensure it was politically balanced. This proposal was duly seconded.

In response to a question, it was clarified that although called a Group the Finance Member Group would operate in the same way as a Working Group.

At the request of the Chairperson, Councillor Fluker repeated his motion adding in the words 'endeavor to'. The Chairperson confirmed that this had been seconded and he would now move each recommendation individually.

Recommendations (i) – (iv) were duly agreed, along with the proposed amendment to recommendation (v). Councillor K M H Lagan asked that his dissent regarding recommendation (ii) be recorded.

Councillor Fluker confirmed his proposal, that in the best interest of value for residents, business and customers and customers & residents cash reserves the Finance Board Working Group endeavours to delivers a cost neutral budget for the municipal year 2024 / 25. This was duly agreed by assent.

The Chairperson advised the Council that it needed to appoint the two additional Members to the Working Group. Councillor J C Stilts nominated Councillor M G Neall and Councillor J Driver nominated Councilor N D Spenceley. Both nominations were duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the contents of the Finance Peer Challenge report at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (ii) that the Council's response to the six key recommendations (1 - 6) set out in the draft Finance Peer Challenge Action Plan at Appendix 2 to the report, be approved;
- (iii) That approval of the Council's response to the other recommendations (7 - 36) set out in the draft Finance Peer Challenge Action Plan at Appendix 2 to the report, be delegated to the Finance Member Group;
- (iv) That the revised Terms of Reference for the Finance Member Group as set out at Appendix 3 to the report be approved subject to an amendment to the Membership to include Councillors M G Neall and N D Spenceley, as detailed in the response to recommendation 5 of the draft Finance Peer Challenge Action Plan;
- (v) that the revised membership of the Finance Member Group be approved, as detailed in the response to recommendation 5 of the draft Finance Peer Challenge Action Plan at Appendix 2 to the report and summarised at Appendix 4.
- (vi) that in the best interest of value for residents, business and customers and customers & residents cash reserves the Finance Board Working Group endeavours to delivers a cost neutral budget for the municipal year 2024 / 25.

163. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE AND SAVINGS STRATEGY

The Council considered the report of the Interim Chief Finance Officer updating Members on the revised Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) position and setting out the need to identify a Savings Strategy to address the budget gap.

The report provided background information regarding approval of the Council's budget and MTFS assumptions for 2023 / 24. Updated forecasts for the periods 2023 / 24 – 2025 / 26 were also set out within the report. It was noted that urgent work to identify a Savings Strategy was required to address the projected budget gap. Members were advised that the Finance Working Group would be tasked with leading this work and making clear recommendations to the Strategy and Resources Committee / the Council for agreement.

The Interim Chief Finance Officer presented the report and highlighted paragraph 3.11 of the report emphasising the need for the Council to identify a savings strategy and set out clear recommendations which would address the budget gap.

The Chairperson put the recommendations as set out in the report and these were duly seconded.

In response to questions raised during the debate, Members were provided with the following additional information:

- Officers were looking at statutory and non-statutory services and the related costs and would be taken to the Finance Working Group at the earliest opportunity for consideration.
- Although the interest rate income had contributed towards the position reported for the financial year 2022 / 23 interest rates had been high as a result of high inflation rates which had significantly contributed to the cost pressures that the Council faced.
- Local Government authorities were not the subject of and therefore not directly impacted by the recently agreed the public sector pay increase.

The Chairperson moved the recommendations which were duly agreed.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the revised Medium-Term Financial Strategy position be noted;
- (ii) That the requirement to urgently identify a Savings Strategy to address the budget gap be agreed.

164. PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2022 / 23 REPORT PRESENTED TO THE STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON 22 JUNE 2023

The Council considered the report of the Interim Chief Finance Officer seeking Members' approval of the recommendations within the Provisional Outturn 2022 / 23 report (attached at Appendix A to the report). These recommendations had previously not been approved by the Strategy and Resources Committee (S&R) at its meeting on 22 June 2023.

The report provided a brief outline of the discussions that had taken place at the S&R meeting and background information around each recommendation was provided. Members were advised that if the recommendations were not approved the Council would be unable to fulfil its statutory and legal commitments and many existing projects would have to cease or be paused while a review of all commitments was undertaken.

The Leader of the Council presented the report to the Council and highlighted the importance for Members to seek clarification and gain understanding of reports prior to attending a meeting. He noted that Officers were willing to work with Members and assist with any questions they may have. The Leader explained that the decision of the S&R would have a detrimental impact on Council projects. He then moved the recommendation set out the report.

In her presentation of the report the Interim Chief Finance Officer drew Members' attention to paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 of the report which highlighted three of the recommendations (set out in Appendix A) and how if not approved the Council would not be able to fulfil its statutory commitments. In respect of the movement in earmarked reserves it was noted that the Council had already approved the majority of these during previous financial years and therefore the majority were just for noting.

Councillor A S Fluker commented on the report and requested that when Committees were dealing with high impact corporate recommendations that these be recommended to the Council for approval rather than resolved by a Committee. He expressed concern regarding use of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) to support the General Fund and how additional business rate monies should be used to support and attract new businesses to the District. Councillor Fluker then proposed that no funds from these two reserves be allocated without approval of the S&R.

In response the Interim Chief Finance Officer provided some clarification regarding the NHB and business rates income and how had they not been used as detailed in the report the pressure on the Council would have increased and left the budget gap unaddressed.

There was some discussion about the Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS) in Heybridge and the Leader of the Council advised that the Environment Agency (EA) had the monies in place for this FAS which would be coming forward in the future for completion. The Director of Strategy and Resources provided further background information regarding the FAS and his understanding that it could be fully funded by the EA who would consult on the options in the coming months.

The Chairperson moved the recommendation set out in the report and this was agreed by assent. In response to a query from Councillor Fluker regarding his proposal, the Chairperson advised the proposal had been seconded and could therefore be included.

Post Meeting Note: Although the Chairperson was of the view that the proposal had been seconded adding an extra item to the recommendation of the report, that was subsequently shown not to be the case and the Chairperson rules that Councillor Fluker's proposal was never seconded and could not form part of the decision to assent the proposals.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the Provisional Outturn position for the 2022 / 23 financial year be noted;
- (ii) That the Revenue Commitments detailed in Appendix 2 to the report be approved to be brought forward into 2023 / 24;
- (iii) That the movement in Earmarked Reserves in Appendix 3 to the report be approved;
- (iv) That the Capital Commitments set out in Appendix 4 to the report be approved to be brought forward into 2023 / 24;
- (v) that £421k of additional business rates income is used to close the budget gap for 2023 / 24.

165. WEST MALDON COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

RESOLVED that Councillor N G F Shaughnessy be appointed as the Council's representative on the West Maldon Community Association Management Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 10.15 pm.

K M H LAGAN
CHAIRPERSON

Statement from the Leader of the Council (presented to the Council on Thursday 13 July 2023)

The results of the election produced a council that at first glance would appear to be unstable due to the number of different groups. This however provides the opportunity for different political groups have to work together in the best interests of the council, residents and the district. That's what we all need to do, as surely that's why we stood for election.

Over the past few weeks, the different groups have found a way through and found a solution for administering the council. We now have the Maldon District Independent group in a minority administration, we all know however that we can only run the council together through consensus and collaboration. We all need to find agreement and demonstrate to residents that we can act in their interests.

The different groups and those that stood as independent councillors at the election, may have said different things during the election. Some may have even run negative campaigns and made negative statements, politics is a funny game, as you certainly would not be able to get away with that in most other situation. However, as the outgoing Chairman of the LGA James Jamieson said recently 90% of what we do in local government has nothing to do with politics. We therefore move on progressively and work together in the best interests of the district.

I would like to thank the LGA for the support it has provided during the past 2 months. We will continue to work with the LGA and seek their advice and expertise. This will enable all of us to change the organisation progressively. As part of that change there will be an away day next month, where leaders both political and corporate, alongside our respective LGA group peers and LGA officers will get together. This will provide an opportunity for all representative to work together for the interests of the council. I am sure that everyone wants to demonstrate their commitment to the council and to creating change by attending. It is through these initiatives we can create change and also demonstrate to a wider audience, that we want to move the organisation on from the past problems.

We all want to make that difference and deliver for our residents and businesses, and I know the Maldon District group members feel the same, then we can all look forward to working together.

This also applies to the way we work with officers. We should be professional in the way we deal with officers, after all we are all working together and for the same organisation. We need to support Officers in the delivery of their role and challenge them in an appropriate manner, However In the cut and thrust of debate we must respect the difference between challenge and confrontation.

We have to ask ourselves do we want to be seen as an organisation that is constructive, positive and motivating for both members and officers. Where we create culture of inclusivity and trust, so we have a positive image externally and it is an organisation where officers and members look forward to interacting. The alternative is something we should challenge.

We need to let officers get on and deliver. We have processes and procedures defined, and our constitution states officer decision making. Those decisions and actions are reported back to working groups and committees in a timely manner. We need to let that happen and build trust with officers. If we want to be involved in operations then we should be officers not councillors. If there is a problem or a complaint, we need to inform officers and then for the work to take place to rectify the situation.

To ensure that officers can deliver for the district, we have recently changed the structure of Service Delivery. This now creates distinct roles and structure within each of the different teams. This will enable the planning department to focus upon all aspects of strategy and delivery. Like all local authorities, it can be a challenge to retain and recruit staff in planning, Maldon can be proud of the work it is doing in this area and is leading on this in Essex and working with the Local Government Association.

Officers are working on a new customer service strategy, which I am sure we are all looking forward to seeing. The way we interact with residents and how they can contact us, needs to reflect the requirements of our residents. Not all residents are able to access services digitally. and we need to ensure that they can speak to an officer if they require. We also need to explore and develop our online interaction, and how residents can interact with us through online chat and chatbot functions.

Leading from that change we need to look at how the organisation and leadership is structured. We are unusual in not having a chief executive. We need to come up with the right structure for the organisation and also learn from other authorities and what has worked for them. We have therefore asked the LGA for advice on this matter, and they will present possible structures for our size of council.

We need to go back to previous LGA advice and look at how our planning committees are structured and how we make planning decisions. We also need to ensure that our constitution is updated for multi-party politics, as that is unlikely to change in future elections.

The LGA finance peer review took place earlier this year and this week we had a briefing and we will be discussing the recommendations later in the meeting. Like all local authorities we are under financial pressure and need to focus on what and how we need to deliver. We are an authority that is debt free as in the past the council has been risk averse to commercial strategies.

That also has a negative consequence for the council, as unlike other authorities, we have no commercial income. We are therefore reliant currently on our revenue from tax, the government, revenues and fees, and grants. Commercial strategies should have been developed when the opportunities were allowed by Government, however previous administrations did not develop or exploit that situation. Those opportunities are much narrower now and has been complicated by the lack of resources and appetite for risk.

We need to review our corporate projects and be creative in what other opportunities may be available to the council. We need to look at our assets and how they can be utilised in the best interests of the district. We need to establish how and the way we might partner with other organisations. That means having an up-to-date asset management plans and strategies.

If we set up the finance group with its new terms of reference, it will enable all political groupings and representatives to make the right recommendations and explore how, what and the way that we deliver. We are in a situation where we have strong reserves, however if we do nothing those reserves will diminish within a few years.

Our Local development plan project is at a crucial stage of development and we are unsure at this stage what the Government might decide on the NPPF. This has resulted in 51 authorities pausing their local plan projects. The council is now in a good position with its 5-year housing land supply. There will always be targets set by Government for authorities to deliver housing and we need to recognise that factor.

The local development plan is something all members should demonstrate their commitment to, as it is your opportunity to shape the future of the district. We need to create a sustainable district, which balances the need for new homes and businesses, along side protecting our environment. We need a district that is sustainable in all senses of the word. As an authority we need to recognise where we can directly make decisions and areas where we can create influence.

Our high streets and towns are already attractive places to visit and are known for their character. We need to enhance them and in the long term make them places where events and other attractions take place. Making them person friendly and focused on the pedestrian rather than the car. We need to have clear high street plans and strategies.

We need to restore our link to the wider infrastructure and how we connect Maldon via a rapid transit link to the rail network. We need to look at creating a transport hub, with sustainable transport methods. This will relieve pressure on roads and create opportunities for both businesses and residents. In the rural parts of the district, we need to ensure that in the long term and further investment, so that public transport is sustainable and meets the needs of residents. The we need to exploit opportunities to have sustainable long term transport strategies.

One of those areas of influence is to ensure we work with our partners to deliver on infrastructure. We all had similar doorstep conversations during the election and the emails we receive, about roads and infrastructure, public transport, NHS facilities and schools. Working with our partners to ensure deliverer and for our officers to continue to lobby, as strongly as possible for the investment, delivery and implementation.

One of the key partnerships we have created is One Maldon District. This partnership now has a clear action plan and will provide more benefits in the longer term. We need to ensure that all our partners commit to delivering for our communities alongside ourselves and that it provides the opportunity to improve health and well being outcomes for residents. This alongside the support the council provides, is particularly important at the moment, where many of our residents are dealing with the cost of living crisis.

We need to build our connection to parish and town councils, so that a community network can be built across the district. We already have the Parish and Town council engagement forum. This is going through a process of change and it needs to become a forum for both Clerks, Chairman and Mayors to meet representatives from the district. We can then inform, engage and empower parish and town councils, and respond more directly to needs of the Parishes.

Our approved Corporate Plan for the period of 2023 to 2027 was developed earlier this year and sets out our vision, our priorities and our guiding principles. It demonstrates that we are a local authority where quality of life matters, and it is our aim to improve this over the next four-year period. It is also vital that we make sure we have a sustainable district in social and economic terms where we protect our characteristics and environment and that we seek investment for the future, supporting existing and attracting new businesses.

Our Corporate Plan is well evidenced and has a vision that staff are committed to with clear priorities. Our service managers have set out their delivery plans and we as members need to support them in enabling delivery and meeting the challenges we face as an authority. Expectations of what local authorities can deliver are higher than ever from partners who also face financial burden, and no doubt this means making some tough decisions about what can actually be achieved over the next 4 years.

Where we can, we need to ensure that our projects are ready for future levelling up funding. In addition to this, we also want to put a spotlight on the Government designating the district as a Priority 1 level area for Levelling Up. We are committed to delivering our £1 million UK Shared Prosperity Funding Plan and will continue our efforts to secure funding. All funding we successfully secure for the district is going to help bring forward investment and exciting projects that achieve greater outcomes for our people, place, and communities.

It is through partnerships with other local authorities that we can engage and also improve the delivery of services both in the district and across Essex. All local authorities are under financial pressure and we need to establish both in the short and long term how we might work with other authorities to explore any opportunities that are available. We are already part of North Essex Economic board and the North Essex association of local authorities. It is through these and other external working groups that we can establish combined approaches and strategies. It is important that we are a positive voice in those meetings and engage constructively.

It seems that no matter who wins the next election, that some form of devolution will be on the cards. That does not threaten the sovereignty of this council. We need to work with whatever level of devolution deal is secured to maximise what is best for the district, its residents and businesses. By taking this approach we will maximise the opportunities.

A statement that has been made about myself is that I am ambitious, my ambition is to achieve more for the district, which I hope that is something where we all have agreement. As councillors that should be something that motivates us all, that we want the best for the district and that we are ambitious for our residents. Together as councillors we need to focus on making a difference, delivering and creating a legacy. That's why I stood a councillor.

As I said last week my aim and I hope yours is, is to put politics aside and to ensure the Council works hard to support the challenges our residents are facing through these really hard times.

We all need to deliver on making a difference and delivering on the pledge to make where we live a place where the quality-of-life matters for all. Together all these aims, ensures we have a district that is truly sustainable in all senses of the word. Delivering for now and also creating strategy for the future. Sustainability for residents, businesses, the environment, our partners and those who come after us. Making a difference to the quality of life.