

Leaders Budget Speech

I am pleased to present to you the proposed budget for the next financial year. This represents a significant improvement to the position reported at this time last year.

Following the Finance Peer Review in early 2023 and at the Council meeting in July, members agreed an ambitious target of setting a fully balanced budget for 2024-2025. This was to be achieved without relying on the use of reserves and balances which have been needed in recent years.

With the Council's agreement to the income and savings proposals recommended by its Strategy and Resources Committee, we can tonight realise that ambition and set ourselves in good stead to achieve financial sustainability for the Council and our residents in the years ahead.

We have got to this position, through the hard work of officers and Members over the last twelve months, and in particular the work that has taken at the Finance Member Group. I would like to thank all officers in coming forward with the proposals and for the finance team for their work. The finance member group demonstrated how we can work together constructively. I would also like to thank Cllrs Durham and Fittock for the chairing of the group. The group have carefully considered the options available to the Council, to enable it to achieve its Corporate Plan and to do so within the councils available resources.

All political groups, have worked closely together and have recognised the need for cross party co-operation for us to work effectively as a Council. We have held a series of workshops over the last few months, facilitated by the LGA, and bringing together the Group Leaders and Deputies of all groups and Chairs of the main committees, along with the Corporate Leadership Team to ensure a shared vision for the Council. At the same time we have maintained appropriate challenge and scrutiny. Last month the LGA conducted a review of the finance peer review action plan and their feedback in a nutshell was 'very good'.

During the last twelve months we have achieved a significant amount through working together for the benefit of our residents and the district.

Our commitment to delivering good quality services continues, we have extended our waste contract with Suez for a further eight years and we are half-way through the Flex Collect plastics trial. Our response to residents enquiries, exceeds those of other councils in Essex.

Whilst we remain focused on delivering excellent cost-effective services as a council, we also recognise that we can't achieve everything on our own, and have therefore sought to strengthen our partnerships across the district.

One Maldon District continues to flourish, delivering its action plan and regular community hub events, that due to an increase in partners, now runs out of the Maldon town hall.

We are continuing to maximise the opportunity to utilise the Council offices as a hub for partnership working, to enhance community safety, working with the Police, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Maldon District CVS, and Barclays bank continue to offer a much-needed service. We have also met our refugee emergency response duties, delivering support to those displaced from their home countries.

We have also strengthened our relationship with the NHS and Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board, including jointly funding a management role to deliver Health Integration, prevention services and outcomes from our community partnerships.

We are working with the NHS currently to ensure that health services remain the district. As a council we need to do all that we can to keep outpatient services within the district.

We have had great success in bidding for and securing over £200k of funding specifically for community and wellbeing projects. We continue to deliver against our £1 million allocation of UK Shared Prosperity funding. Today, we launched our Rural England Prosperity Fund, distributing an allocation of over 400k to businesses and community organisations across the district. We should be immensely proud of our ability to attract funding of what is in excess of £1m over the course of the last year and in addition to our core revenue budgets.

In addition to this, tourism continues to play a vital role in our local economy, this is reflected in the latest Volume and Value report, showing that since the pandemic, the Maldon district is attracting a higher number of day trippers in comparison to the rest of the county.

We have also increased our profile within the North Essex Councils group and I am proud to now chair the North Essex Economic Board. We should look forward to working more collaboratively with our neighbouring councils over the coming months and years. We are ensuring that the actions planned by NEEB, reflect the range of businesses across the district and that it includes the small to medium businesses that flourish within Maldon District. North Essex Councils provides, the opportunity to work collaboratively with other authorities and to look at how and the way we share services.

Like all councils we will continue to face significant challenges, not least the ongoing financial pressures which will need to be addressed through continued efforts to transform and deliver our services in the most efficient way. We have to make tough choices about what and how we deliver as a Council and our corporate priorities. Members will have the opportunity later in the year to review our corporate plan and establish what our priorities are from 2024 through to 2027.

I am under no illusion as to the scale of these challenges; however I remain optimistic that by continuing our trajectory of improved collaborative working, and I am sure all members welcome the opportunity to continue this within the council and I would like to thank all those in groups and the non-aligned for that collaboration.

With the demands that we face, working with our external partners is crucial to the lives of residents and the success of organisations with the district. I am sure we can deliver the best possible outcomes for our district over the next three years and beyond.