

Chairman, Members

The leaders speech gives us an opportunity to reflect on our progress as a Council over the last twelve months, and I think a good summary would be a year of Investment, Partnership and Change. With the changes being implemented by the government, this and the following years will be further challenges and some great opportunities for our council.

This time last year I said, 'I hoped as councillors that we use our strategic and preventative powers to improve prosperity and wellbeing in our communities'. I think when we can reflect on that, and say that by working together we have certainly done that.

Last year, we took the opportunity to review the structure of our Corporate Leadership Team and this concluded with the appointment of Mr Wilkinson as Chief Executive and Mr Dodson appointed as Deputy Chief Executive, this was followed by the retirement of Mr Holmes.

Mr Wilkinson has been us with for nearly 9 months and he has made a difference both internally and externally, which has changed the dynamics of the organisation. As a continuation of this process, we as members gave him the steer to continue with the process and through consultation, he has been working with the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a review of our organisational structure.

This review, will be considered by Members on 7 August, we need to ensure that the council is in the best possible position for the future.

### **Community Investment**

Over the last 12 months, we have significantly invested in our Community with the installation of a replacement pontoon in Burnham-on-Crouch, new play equipment supported through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and a much improved skateboard park which was made possible through S106 developer contributions.

In Maldon, we have seen replacement play equipment in the Promenade Park partly funded by UKSPF, and a new skateboard park in West Maldon and soon to start, will be a much improved skateboard park in Promenade Park to replace the existing one, again these have been possible through S106 developer contributions. We will also see the completion of the re-designed Amphitheatre. Our Officers are currently exploring opportunities to increase the use of this, for example by buskers and local bands to use it over the summer. If you know a local band or performer who you think could use this opportunity, then please contact officers.

### **Leisure Contract**

The announcement about the changes at Places Leisure have planned for Blackwater Leisure Centre has been challenging. There will be a lot of benefits from the changes and we need to ensure that the provider and officers, manage the next 18 months effectively.

The contract will deliver a range of outreach work across the district focusing on some harder to reach individuals and encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle.

Ultimately the improvements planned by our contractor Places Leisure will provide both substantial financial benefits to this Council and our successors. We need to ensure that the health and financial benefits are realised.

I have asked CLT to ensure that a post implementation review is undertaken, so that we can establish lessons learned from the process. I also believe that we need a health, well being and leisure working group should be established and we should ask officers to bring forward a TOR for September's full council meeting.

### **UKSPF and REP Funding**

These projects would not have been made possible without the tremendous work of the council's officers who, through the administration of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund have supported projects totalling £831,013 last year.

We were also successful in delivering a number of projects through the Rural England Prosperity Fund, working with our partners at the Rural Community Council for Essex amounting to £317,069 which has supported 20 organisations across the District. This investment in our community is set to continue with further support for projects across the District under the next round of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Tonight subject to Members agreement, the 'Where Quality of Life Matters' Community Grant scheme, which will further support some of our communities across the District will shortly be launched.

### **OMD**

The One Maldon District partnership continues to play a strategic role in helping us to bring together senior representatives from the local statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

One such example of collaboration, is our annual community wellbeing festival, Ufest, which is scheduled for Friday 15 August with over 80 of our partners providing information, activities, advice and entertainment throughout the day.

### **Culture and Heritage Strategy**

We can be proud of the eclectic mix of culture and heritage across the District, however what has been missing from the council has been our own Culture and Heritage strategy, which brings together all the elements across the District and opens the doors to potential funding opportunities.

We have just started work on this strategy, with the appointment of Cultural Engine, who will support the development and delivery of our new Culture and Heritage Strategy. A crucial element of the development of the strategy will be member involvement, especially in what we want the outcomes, events and how we work across the district. There will be workshops and briefings with the members, to ensure we take the lead in its development.

### **MTFS update**

Turning to our financial position. Members will be aware, that at the end of the last financial year, we were in a positive position, reporting an £853k underspend against budget. This leaves the Council with a strong balance sheet position from which to engage with future challenges and aspirations.

In the past week the government has published its Fairer Funding report and we are beginning to establish the impact that it may have on the council. From initial analysis it appears that it will put Maldon at a disadvantage with drop in our funding. We therefore need to be careful and budget realistically so that we can continue to secure the benefits we want to deliver for residents.

I am pleased to say that the Council has published the draft (pre-audit) accounts already, ahead of many other councils, setting out the position at the end of 2024/25 – knowing clearly where we are is important in helping us to plan for the future.

I would like welcome Mr Jay to the organisation and this is the first time we have had a permanent S151 officer for several years. On behalf of members I would like to thank our finance team for their excellent work in managing the Council's finances in such and exemplary manner.

### **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation**

Both Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation are progressing at pace. The Council is involved in both and is actively involved in helping to shape the 5 unitary authority model. We are cooperating and collaborating with those authorities who are working on the 3 model, and myself and the CEX attending a meeting on Monday.

All options, whether if that be 3, 4 or 5 unitary councils will be considered by government once the Greater Essex proposal is submitted at the end of September. The report that will be presented to full council will consider all business cases that are being submitted.

We will be working with partner authorities, in both the 3 and 5 models, to ensure we are ready once the government makes the decision. Myself and Mr Wilkinson will therefore be working not only Chelmsford and Brentwood leadership, but also Colchester Braintree and Tendring. As this work progresses, it will be important to involve all group leaders.

Ultimately the government will decide on what they consider to be the best option or options. That will then be put to public consultation. We must do our best to support officers in shaping and preparing for major reorganisation. Our aim is to ensure we get the best result for our residents and for this council to part of a well set up future unitary.

### **Looking ahead**

Chairman, whilst the changes in the local government landscape will be challenging not least in the additional workload for us all, but we will continue to strive to deliver for our community over this next municipal year.

I am also very pleased to announce that work is in hand to replace the play equipment at West Maldon Community Centre, as a fitting tribute to Flo Shaunessy who served her community so well. This project will be presented to Strategy and Resources.

We will continue to support our community with the district's UK Shared and Rural England Prosperity Fund which will see an additional £456,223 investment from Government in 2025/2026.

We will continue to invest in projects across the district, enhancing the promenade park and our assets across the district. Exploring opportunities to improve the museum, hythe, seating area and creating a memorial walk. Ensuring that over the next few years we invest in our play areas and parks and enhance these assets. Officers have developed an excellent plan and this will enable us to continue to invest our visitor attractions.

In the next few days (17 July), we will know what the decision of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) will be for St. Peter's and at this point I know that as members we would like to commend all those who have supported the fight to retain medical services and in particular the 'Save Maldon's Medical Services' group who were instrumental in making the ICB think again, We await the decision of the ICB with interest.

We all know the challenges we face due to the changes in the NPPF and the impact it had on our 5 year housing land supply. We are working with officers to ensure that we are comfortable with our supply number. Our local plan options are now being modelled, and will establish what sites are possible to be included. In the autumn members will have the opportunity to shape the district with workshops on our design guides and the principles of how we will create a district for the next 15 years.

The Council remains concerned that these nationally imposed targets have been given to us without any regard to our sensitive local environment, nor the reality of our infrastructure which has been struggling to keep pace with the demands placed on it. The news that the A12 widening has been cancelled by the Government has come at the wrong time in the context of higher housing numbers and Maldon, like other councils in the East I am sure, will continue to lobby the Government for better transport, health, education and social infrastructure and not just new homes.

Chairman, I would like to end by thanking all Members, and all officers of the Council, for the continued hard work and dedication they have put into the delivery of our public services over the last year.

I know we are all eager for us to build on the positive steps we have taken, to allow the Maldon District to grow and prosper further over the coming year. That by working together we can support this approach and enable us to realise our vision and leave the council in a better place for future changes and help us realise the fantastic opportunities for the district and all those who are lucky enough to live, work or visit, the place we call home.