



**MINUTES of
COUNCIL
10 JULY 2025**

PRESENT

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| Chairperson | Councillor K M H Lagan |
| Councillors | M G Bassenger, V J Bell, S J Burwood, S Dodsley, J Driver, A Fittock, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, J C Hughes, W J Laybourn, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, M G Neall, 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 and L L Wiffen |

1. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

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

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D O Bown, J R Burrell-Cook, M F L Durham CC, A M Lay, R G Pratt and S White.

3. MINUTES OF THE STATUTORY ANNUAL COUNCIL - 15 MAY 2025

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Statutory Annual meeting of the Council held on 15 May 2025 be approved and confirmed.

4. MINUTES - 17 JUNE 2025

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17 June 2025 be received.

Minute No. 5 – Chairperson's Announcements

Councillor S Dodsley advised that reference to her in the first sentence should refer to 'Dodsley' and not Dodson. The Chairperson advised that this would be corrected.

Minute 8 – Maldon District Growth Options

Councillor A S Fluker queried the resolution in respect of this Minute item as he felt that further testing on Options 3 and 5 with the inclusion of Althorne and Land at Stow Maries had been agreed. In response the Chairperson advised that the sites referred to were included as part of Option 5 and therefore the Minutes would stand as written.

RESOLVED

- (ii) that subject to the above amendment the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17 June 2025 be confirmed.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were none.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

7. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

In accordance with Part 4 Rule 8(3) of the Constitution, the Chairperson advised that he would be suspending the need to stand.

The Chairperson referred to having recently attended the heavy military vehicles event at Promenade Park with other Members. He referred to it being a joyful occasion, with an enormous turnout and how the highlight had been a fly past by a Lancaster bomber. The Chairperson felt the event had showed the District off and thanked everyone involved.

8. STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 12 JUNE 2025

The Chairperson advised the Council that the recommendations coming forward from this meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee were the subject of separate reports on the agenda:

- Agenda Item 17 – Budget Growth Request
- Agenda Item 18 – Princes Road – Replacement Fire and Building Security Systems

9. MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor A S Fluker raised a query regarding publication of the Strategy and Resources Committee minutes from the meeting on 12 June 2025 and proposed that noting of these Minutes be held over to the next Council meeting. Subsequently the Chairperson agreed that any Minutes not published would be brought back to the next Council meeting.

The Council noted that with the exception of any Minutes not published, the list of Committees that had met before and since the last meeting of the Council, up until Wednesday 2 July 2025 for which Minutes had been published.

10. 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 appointment of Mr Doug Wilkinson as the Council's new Chief Executive, following a review of the Council's corporate leadership team structure. Mr Wilkinson had been working with the Local Government Association to undertake a review of the Council's organisational structure, and this would be considered at an extraordinary meeting of the Council on 7 August 2025.
- Community investment in both Burnham-on-Crouch and Maldon, which had been funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and S106 developer contributions. The Leader commented on the work of the Council's officers who through administration of the UKSPF had supported projects totaling over £831k and £717k from the Rural Community Council for Essex. The Council would continue to invest in projects across the district as well as enhancing its parks and assets.
- The new Leisure Contract with Places Leisure brought changes but also a number of benefits, including delivery of outreach work across the district. The Council would look to ensure that health and financial benefits were realised. The Leader advised that he had asked the Corporate Leadership Team to undertake a post-implementation review of the contract and would be asking officers to bring forward a Terms of Reference for a new Wellbeing and Leisure Working Group.
- How the One Maldon District partnership continued to play a strategic role in helping the Council bring together senior representatives from local statutory, voluntary and private sectors.
- The work being done following the appointment of Culture Engine who would be supporting the development of a Culture and Heritage Strategy for the District.
- The Council had published the draft accounts for 2024 / 25 which set out its position at the end of 2024 / 25 and the Leader welcomed Mr Ben Jay, the Council's new Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer. On behalf of Members, he thanked the Finance team for their excellent work in managing the Council's finances.
- The forthcoming changes as part of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the business case options that would be submitted to the Government for consideration. The Council would be receiving a report on this at its extraordinary meeting on 25 September 2025.
- Work was taking place to replace play equipment at the West Maldon Community Centre as a tribute to Flo Shaughnessy and the service she had given to the local community.
- The work of the Save Maldon's Medical Services Group and all those who had supported the fight to retain medical services at St. Peter's hospital. The decision of the Integrated Care Board on the future of St. Peter's would be known in the next few days.
- The changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly the Council's Five-Year Housing Land Supply and the work being done by Officers to address these challenges.

The Leader thanked Members and Officers of the Council for the continued hard work and dedication they had put into the delivery of the Council's public services over the last year. He was keen that the Council continued to build on the positive steps taken to allow the Maldon District to grow and prosper and hoped Members would share his vision for this.

The Chairperson advised that there were currently three Leaders of the Opposition and in accordance with Procedure Rule 1(12) he would allow them each five minutes to respond to the statement made by the Leader of the Council.

Councillor J C Stilts, Leader of the Maldon District Support Group, advised how her Group welcome the organisational review being undertaken by the Chief Executive, along with future smart ways of working. She referred to investment in Promenade Park and hoped this would be extended to other parts of the District. In respect of the Leisure Contract, Councillor Stilts asked for reassurance that all groups had been accommodated with any concerns addressed. She thanked Officers for their hard work in delivering all grants to the community and supported the Leaders' suggestion of a Health, Well-being and Leisure Working Group. In congratulating the Section 151 Officer on his appointment thanks were given to both him and the last Officer for bringing forward early the draft accounts for auditing. The Group looked forward to receiving all information regarding LGR, including the evidence relating to both the three and five authority models being proposed to form a beneficial outcome for the residents of the District. Highlighting the need to ensure that housing needs were met for everyone in the District, Councillor Stilts commented how her Group looked forward to the challenges of working with other Groups to shape the future of the District. Finally, the Group hoped that the new Local Development Plan had infrastructure, schools, doctors, transports and connectivity at its forefront.

Councillor S J N Morgan, Leader of the Conservative Group, thanked the Leader of the Council for his speech and commended the Chief Executive for his work including that coming forward in his reorganisation of the Council. On behalf of his Group, Councillor Morgan welcomed Mr Jay and thanked all officers for their hard work over the year and looked forward to future working with them. He agreed with the Leader that the achievements over the year had been done with all four political Groups and non-aligned Members to move the District forward and develop projects. The Group was encouraged that all possibilities were being considered in respect of LGR. Councillor Morgan highlighted the recent cancelling of the A12 road widening and the Group noted the significant implications this would have on wards, the District and county. In conclusion, Councillor Morgan, referred to the forthcoming municipal year, working together and putting residents' interests forward.

Councillor J Driver, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, thanked the Leader of the Council for his speech and referred to the growth of the Liberal Democrat Group with the recent election of Councillor Sarah Dodsley. He advised that the Groups commitment continued, to work collaboratively with all parties and independent Members to ensure stability at such a crucial time in the Council's history. The Council had much to celebrate at this time, including the new pontoon at Burnham-on-Crouch, investment in play equipment and skateboard parks at Burnham-on-Crouch and Maldon and repairs to the amphitheatre. Councillor Driver advised that he had recently attended a One Maldon District partnership meeting and commented that the work of the partnership needed wider recognition. He noted how the UKSPF and Rural England Prosperity Fund had helped to deliver a number of projects across the District. The Group acknowledged the work of Mr Jay and the finance team and how the Council must continue to be careful whilst also being bold in its desire to use its reserves to benefit residents. The Council faced pressures from Government housing targets and there was an urgent need for a robust Local Development Plan. Councillor Driver highlighted how the Council had taken a clear stand on St. Peter's Hospital and must continue to keep the pressure to secure the range of health services required by its community. Progress in respect of LGR should not be undermined by political distractions as residents deserved a Council focused on their interest. In conclusion, Councillor Driver referred to the Council having many opportunities and how continuing to work together would ensure great success for it.

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

There were none.

12. COMMUNITY GRANT FUND

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking approval for the establishment and operational framework of the new Maldon District Council (MDC) Community Grant Scheme, including its funding priorities, tiered structure, eligibility criteria and assessment methodology.

The report reminded Members of the agreement in April 2025 that the proposed projects be delivered through the Maldon District's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) allocation with 100% match funding provided from the Council's reserves. This included the delivery of a Community Grant Scheme.

A Community Grant Scheme aimed to streamline and enhance the Council's ability to provide financial assistance to a broad range of local organisations and the proposed "Where Quality of Life Matters Grant Scheme" had been designed to fund local initiatives that directly contributed to the four resident, community and business focused Corporate Plan Priorities. The report provided further detail regarding the Scheme and Appendix 1 set out the proposed applicant guidance, including funding priorities, eligibility criteria, what could and couldn't be supported, tiered grant values, the application process and deadlines. Appendix 2 set out the tiered scoring matrices which would form the robust and transparent assessment process.

An addendum circulated prior to the meeting provided updates to the report and Appendices following feedback from Members.

The Leader of the Council presented the report before the Lead Specialist Prosperity took Members through a detailed presentation which set out the types of projects that could be taken forward, the application window, the application type, funding levels, scoring matrices and proposed scoring panel composition.

The Chairperson moved the recommendation set out in the report and this was duly seconded.

Councillor W Stamp advised that she didn't agree with the proposal to fund businesses as the Council supported them in other ways. She referred to the work she had been involved with to section S106 funding for a project in Burnham-on-Crouch and felt that Community Grant Fund monies should be used by Parish / Town Councils and Community Groups.

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

The Chief Executive gave reassurance on the format of the proposed approvals process and that this would ensure independence and fairness in governance. He advised that Officers hoped Ward Members would encourage community groups to bid for funding.

A lengthy debate ensued and in response to a number of concerns and queries raised, the following information was provided by Officers:

- The Scheme had been based on the UKSPF but had been changed to encourage communities to bid for the grants first.
- The small grant didn't relate to the size of an organisation, it was about the size of the bid. There was no limit in terms of bids.
- It was hoped that the scheme would give opportunity to work with villages, towns etc. and to get them to come forward with bids for these grants.
- The framework and governance process for which approval was sought included criteria for the scoring mechanism which would provide reassurance that all bids were scored fairly and efficiently.
- It was hoped that Ward Members would support projects in their area, although it was appreciated that there may be occasional conflicts, and Officers highlighted the point at which Ward Members were asked for their support.

Councillor A S Fluker proposed that the Chairperson put the recommendations.

Councillor M G Bassenger suggested that consideration be given to four Members being on the Assurance Panel (detailed within Appendix 2 to the report). Speaking in support of this Councillor Stamp proposed that Councillors A Fittock and P L Spenceley be two of the members that sat of the board to finalise the applications. This proposal was duly seconded.

The Chairperson then moved an amendment to the recommendation, to update Appendix 2 to include four Members of the Council on the Assurance Panel. This was duly seconded.

The Chairperson then put the amendment to vote, and the voting was as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors M G Bassenger, V J Bell, S J Burwood, S Dodsley, J Driver, A Fittock, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, J C Hughes, K M H Lagan, W J Laybourn, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, M G Neall, R H Siddall, U G C Siddall-Norman, N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, W Stamp, E L Stephens, J C Stilts, N J Swindle, M E Thompson and L L Wiffen.

Against the recommendation: There were none.

Abstention: There were none.

The Chairperson advised that the amendment was therefore agreed.

At this point Councillor Stamp withdrew her request for a recorded vote on the substantive motion.

The Chairperson then put the substantive motion to approve the Grant Scheme, accompanying applicant guidance (Appendix 1) and the amended tired scoring matrix (Appendix 2). This was duly agreed.

The Chairperson thanked the Lead Specialist Prosperity for her excellent hard work and speed of which things were pulled together. He then called for nominations of the four Members to sit on the Assurance Panel.

Councillor Stamp nominated Councillor A Fittock and P L Spenceley. Councillor J C Stilts nominated Councillor L J Hawyood and Councillor R H Siddall nominated

Councillor M E Thompson. These nominations were duly seconded. The Chairperson put them to the Council, and they were agreed.

RESOLVED that the establishment of the "Where Quality of Life Matters Grant Scheme" be approved, as detailed in the report, the accompanying Applicant Guidance (attached as Appendix 1 to the report) and the tiered scoring matrix (Appendix 2 to the report updated to include Councillors A Fittock, L J Haywood, P L Spenceley and M E Thompson on the Assurance Panel).

13. PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER CONSULTATION EVALUATION

The Council considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive seeking Members' approval to renew the current Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) relating to the powers for managing dog control in specified places within the district. If agreed the order would be valid for three years from 18 July 2025.

The report advised that implementation of the Anti-Social Behaviour and Policing Act 2014 by the Government in 2014 had given local authorities and the Police more effective powers to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). Amongst these tools were PSPO's which provided Councils with a flexible power to implement local restrictions to address a range of ASB issues in public places in order to prevent future problems. Further details of PSPOs was set out in the report.

The proposed PSPO was attached at Appendix 1 to the report and had been informed by a public consultation. Details of the public consultation process and the results of the consultation were set out in the report and Appendix 3, including comments from the consultation.

The report set out the proposed conditions of the PSPO, including those which resulted in no change, changes to existing controls and new controls proposed.

Following a presentation of the report by the Assistant Director - Customer Services and Operations, the Chairperson moved the recommendations set out in the report. These were duly seconded.

In response to a question regarding signage the Assistant Director advised that the Council would be making amendments to existing signage, as signage was critical, and publicity would follow this to ensure that dog walkers were aware. It was also noted that a soft launch was proposed following approval of the PSPO.

The Chairperson then put the recommendations which were duly agreed.

RESOLVED

- (i) That Members note the outcome of the public consultation as set out at Appendix 3 to the report;
- (ii) that the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) (Appendix 1 to the report) be renewed for three years from 18 July 2025;
- (iii) that the amended conditions as set out in paragraphs 6.2.1 – 6.2.4 of the report, be agreed;
- (iv) that the new conditions as set out at paragraphs 6.3.1 – 6.3.2 of the report, be agreed.

14. RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO PLANNING COMMITTEES

The Council considered the report of the Chairperson of the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee (PGA) Working Group seeking Members' approval of the Council's response to the Government's consultation on changes to Planning Committees.

Once the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (published in March 2025) gained Royal Assent this would grant the Secretary of State (SOS) powers to instruct, by Regulations, which types of applications should be delegated to planning officers and which should be determined by a planning Committee. On 25 May 2025 the Government published a consultation on its proposals for how this would work.

Councillor W Stamp, Chairperson of the PGA Working Group, introduced the report and advised that the Working Group had met on 24 June 2025 to discuss the proposals and form a recommended response (attached as Appendix A to the report) for the Council to consider and approve. Councillor Stamp proposed that the recommendation set out in the report be approved. This proposal was duly seconded.

The Assistant Director – Planning and Implementation presented the report and highlighted how the scope of the consultation affected the delegation of planning functions related to development management. He highlighted the areas affected and how if the changes came into effect there was legislation in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (currently going through Parliament) which would bring in a number of new powers for the Secretary of State. He then proceeded to take Members through these new powers.

In response to a question regarding the suggested Planning Committee membership of 11 Members and how the required training would work in terms of appointing substitutes, the Assistant Director explained that the PGA Working Group had felt more than 11 Members would require training, although this was open for future debate. The Government had outlined that a Planning Committee could have to 11 Members and would have to be quorate to operate.

The Chairperson put the proposal in the name of Councillor Stamp and this was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that the consultation response (attached at Appendix A to the report) be approved for submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 23 July 2025.

15. BUSINESS BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERED BY THE CHAIRPERSON TO BE URGENT

The Chairperson announced that in accordance with Section 100b(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 he had agreed to allow the Chief Executive to raise an urgent item of business in response to the recent Council decision to receive an update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation at every meeting.

16. DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION UPDATE

The Chief Executive provided an update on Devolution explaining that work continued at pace with workshops beginning the following week. Essex County Council (ECC)

had organised a broader summit on 16 July and Officers were due to attend an economic growth session on 17 July. Work continued to prepare the processes and the target operating model in readiness for day one of the Mayoral County Combined Authority. The Chief Executive advised that there was no feedback from the Government on the Devolution consultation response.

With regards to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), Members were advised that ECC had confirmed they would be progressing a three authority case which would see Maldon District Council form a large unitary with Tendering, Colchester and Braintree Councils, serving a population size of 578,000 people. It was understood that Thurrock Council may also be progressing a four unitary authority case and Rochford were exploring a three / four unitary model. The five unitary authority business case was on track, content had been drafted with a complete draft being available by the end of July. The five unitary model consultation had started on 26 June and as of the previous week had seen over 2,600 responses.

The Council's Devolution and LGR Member Working Group had held its first meeting and was due to meet again on 21 July, with two further Working Groups planned between now and the submission of the proposal on 26 September. This would give opportunity for Members to view the draft business case and for the Council to provide feedback. All staff had received a briefing on Devolution and LGR through the Chief Executive Connects meeting this week and the Chief Executive explained that these would continue on a monthly basis to provide an update to staff on progress.

At this point the Chief Executive referred to the Assistant Director - Strategy, Partnerships and Communications to go through the presentation which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The Assistant Director - Strategy, Partnerships and Communications then gave a short presentation which provided Members with the latest update in respect of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

In response to questions raised, the Leader of the Council advised that the Council had now received invites to all meetings relating to the three authority model. These meetings had been scheduled by ECC every two weeks, and he would be attending along with the Chief Executive. The Council had initially not been invited to these meetings, but this had since changed, and the Leader confirmed that Maldon District Council would be working with all Leaders and Chief Executives in Essex on both the three and five authority models.

In response to further comments, the Chairperson reminded the Council of the Devolution Working Group where further detail would be available.

17. 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 Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that this satisfies the public interest test.

18. BUDGET GROWTH REQUEST

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive seeking approval of a budget to fund a full time role to support the delivery of a service detailed within the report.

The report provided background information regarding the service and the reason behind a reduction in resources as part of the 2023 / 24 budget savings programme. The current position and why it was not possible to deliver the service without additional resources was also set out in the report.

It was noted that the Strategy and Resources Committee had considered this report at its meeting on 12 June 2025 and recommended that the requested budget be agreed.

The Chairperson moved the recommendation set out in the report. This was duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED that a budget of £43,100 to enable the recruitment of a full time permanent Officer (as set out in the report), be approved.

19. PRINCES ROAD - REPLACEMENT FIRE AND BUILDING SECURITY SYSTEMS

The Council considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive seeking Members' approval to drawdown funds to replace fire and building security systems.

The report provided background information following consideration of a report in March 2025 by the Strategy and Resources Committee (S&R) to replace fire and security systems at Princes Road. The Committee had made a number of recommendations to the Council; however, it was noted that when considered by the Council in April 2025 they were not agreed. Further detailed information in respect of each of the systems was set out in the report.

It was noted that on 12 June 2025 the S&R had considered this report and recommended to the Council that the recommendations set out within it be approved.

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to an addendum to the report that had been circulated prior to the meeting and provided further supporting information to aid Members in their consideration of the report.

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report and took Members through each section outlining the reasons behind the request for drawdown from Council Reserves. The Chairperson then moved each recommendation individually and each was duly seconded.

A lengthy debate on each request ensued and in response to questions raised by Members Officers provided further information and clarification.

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

The Leader of the Council clarified that the amounts detailed were the maximum amounts. As each area progressed this would be presented back to the Strategic Asset Working Group, along with the figures, before being reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee and the Council.

Further debate ensued.

At this point, in accordance with Procedure Rule 1(6)(i) the Chairperson advised that he would be allowing the meeting to continue past 10pm.

The Chairperson then put recommendation (i), as detailed in the report, to the Council and the voting was as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors M G Bassenger, V J Bell, S J Burwood, S Dodsley, J Driver, A Fittock, L J Haywood, J C Hughes, W J Laybourn, R H Siddall, N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, E L Stephens, J C Stilts, N J Swindle and M E Thompson.

Against the recommendation:

Councillors A S Fluker, K M H Lagan, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, M G Neall, U G C Siddall-Norman, W Stamp and L L Wiffen.

Abstention: None.

The Chairperson declared that recommendation (i) was agreed.

The Chairperson then put recommendation (ii), as detailed in the report, to the Council and the voting was as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors V J Bell, S J Burwood, S Dodsley, J Driver, A Fittock, J C Hughes, R H Siddall, N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, E L Stephens and N J Swindle.

Against the recommendation:

Councillors M G Bassenger, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, K M H Lagan, W J Laybourn, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, M G Neall, U G C Siddall-Norman, W Stamp, M E Thompson and L L Wiffen.

Abstention:

Councillor J C Stilts.

The Chairperson declared that recommendation (ii) was not agreed.

The Chairperson then put recommendation (iii), as detailed in the report, to the Council and the voting was as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors M G Bassenger, V J Bell, S J Burwood, S Dodsley, J Driver, A Fittock, L J Haywood, J C Hughes, K M H Lagan, W J Laybourn, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, R H Siddall, U G C Siddall-Norman, N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, W Stamp, E L Stephens, J C Stilts, N J Swindle, M E Thompson and L L Wiffen.

Against the recommendation:

Councillors A S Fluker and M G Neall.

Abstention: None.

The Chairperson declared that recommendation (iii) was therefore agreed.

The Chairperson then put recommendation (iv), as detailed in the report, to the Council and the voting was as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors S J Burwood, S Dodsley, J Driver, A Fittock, J C Hughes, R H Siddall, N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, E L Stephens, J C Stilts and N J Swindle.

Against the recommendation:

Councillors V J Bell, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, K M H Lagan, W J Laybourn, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, M G Neall, U G C Siddall-Norman, W Stamp, M E Thompson and L L Wiffen.

Abstention:

Councillor M G Bassenger.

The Chairperson declared that recommendation (iv) was not agreed.

The Chairperson put recommendation (v), as set out in the report, and this was agreed by assent.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the drawdown from Council Reserves as set out in Section 4 of the report be approved to deliver the scoped requirements and mitigate the identified risks illustrated;
- (ii) that the drawdown from Council Reserves as set out in Section 6 of the report be approved to deliver the scoped requirements and mitigate the identified risks illustrated;
- (iii) That progress on the projects be reported back to the Strategic Assets Working Group.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 10.07 pm.

K M H LAGAN
CHAIRPERSON

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.