

Leader's Budget Speech 2026 - Presented to Council, 12 February 2026

Good evening Members, officers, and residents. It is my privilege to once again present the proposed budget for the financial year 2026-2027. The annual budget and MTFs - Medium Term Financial Strategy are the result of months of collaborative work between officers and Members.

This budget builds on the strong foundations we have laid over the past few years and marks our ambition of investment, financial sustainability and excellent service provision for our district.

Reflecting on last year, we set ourselves the challenge of delivering a fully balanced budget without substantial use of our reserves. I am pleased to confirm that, through the dedication of officers and Members, and the constructive collaboration across all political groups and the nonaligned, we exceeded this objective and making a contribution to our reserves at the end of the year.

Together, we have developed a financial strategy that supports the Council's strategic priorities, invests and maintains our assets, and provides opportunities to create new assets for the future. At a time of change in local government, we are ensuring that we provide a long term legacy for the district.

We need to ensure that we leave the Maldon District in a good place and that we have plans in place to ensure that we are focused upon preserving Maldon's unique identity and what we can do for the long-term benefit of the district.

Collaborative Efforts

Our financial progress is rooted in teamwork. I wish to recognise the commitment from our officers, led by our Director of Finance, Mr Jay and the Finance team, whose expertise and diligence have ensured clarity and strength in our financial planning.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to this achievement. Our Finance Member Working Group, for their diligent scrutiny and creative thinking, and the constructive contributions of elected Members from all political groups and the non aligned who have fostered a spirit of shared purpose and constructive challenge.

Strategic Priorities and Corporate Plan Alignment

In response to the recommendations from the financial peer review, our budget and financial strategy are now closely aligned with our Corporate Plan, ensuring we deliver on our commitment to residents, businesses, and visitors. Service plans are directly linked to the budget, enabling us to focus on what matters most for Maldon District.

Investment and supporting our Community

We continue to invest in improving the district for all.

Working together, we have continued to deliver for our residents. Our waste contract with Suez is delivering consistent, high-quality service, and the extension of Flex Collect plastics initiative, demonstrates our commitment to environmental responsibility. We can be proud to be the best recycling council in Essex, with the reintroduction of green food bags last year. Whilst other councils are still introducing food waste, we have implemented the service to all homes in the district.

The new contract with Places Leisure has enabled exciting new facilities at our leisure centres such as the new gym, adventure climb facility with more being developed this year,

The budget includes £5.1m of new investment for 2026/27, on top of the existing £13.5m base budget and £7.9m capital programme. This means there is £26m planned for local services and amenities to support residents and visitors.

We have a further £2.3m investment in parks and open spaces, including £1.3m to the Promenade Park in Maldon as well as Dengie 100 where there is a further £100,000 investment is proposed in addition to the existing £435,000; as well as a further £220,000 proposed to improve the roadways at Riverside Park. Beyond Maldon and Burnham, we also propose £1.4m for play sites and £200,000 for public conveniences - £1.6m for residents and visitors across all areas of the District. These investments will ensure these valued amenities will be enjoyed by many people long after reorganisation in Essex

This year's budget focuses on short-term, targeted investment to protect important local assets ahead of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Government is expected to clarify its plans for reorganisation before the new financial year. The 2027/28 budget will be the year of a Shadow Council and will largely be about preparing for LGR, limiting the ability to start new capital projects or contracts. Decisions will

increasingly be made jointly with the emerging shadow authority arrangements in place.

Partnerships

We recognise, however, that we cannot achieve everything alone. Our health and community partnerships have been fruitful, delivering health and well-being activities, prevention campaigns, and the work of One Maldon District Partnership.

Through this collaboration, we have allocated £60,000 to support organisations across the district. We have supported four community-based projects to enhance delivery and further support residents in areas of mental health, reducing social isolation and access to services.

Our popular UFest community event has grown from strength to strength, providing a showcase for our community organisations to engage and support our community with 2025 being the most successful so far.

Our Council offices have become a vibrant hub for partnership activity, **supporting** community safety and providing crucial services in partnership with the Police, Citizens Advice Bureau, Maldon and District CVS, and our housing partners.

I am also delighted to announce that very shortly a new Banking Hub will open in our offices, until their permanent premises are ready.

We have maintained our commitment to supporting those in need, meeting our refugee emergency response duties and strengthening our relationship with the NHS and the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board. This includes continuing the work to maintain St Peters and working with the NHS to deliver the long term future of health services within the district.

Our UK Shared Prosperity funding continues to support growth and opportunity, and we are proud of our track record in creating value for our district.

We created the community grant scheme aimed at delivering against the four outward facing Corporate Plan Priorities and have allocated around £300,000 for this fund from our own reserves. This recognises the Council's commitment to ensuring the District is a place 'Where Quality of Life Matters'.

Tourism continues to flourish, with the latest data showing increased overnight visitor numbers and a thriving local economy. The Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival continues to grow with nearly 900 people taking part last year.

Members tonight you will also be asked to agree our annual schedule of Fees and Charges. Thanks to our financial prudence I am pleased to propose that our car park fees and charges will remain the same. This is good news for our high street businesses.

In terms of the **District Council** element of Council Tax, we are only proposing an average increase at Band D of 13p per week or an additional £6.76 per year. The important thing to recognise, is that although we collect council tax, the majority goes to other areas of local government. If we do not raise council tax, and as we have seen in other authorities across the country where the tax has not been increased and promises have been made, subsequently it leads to larger increases at a later date. There is a government expectation for all authorities to raise council tax and again we need to ensure we take a long term view.

Facing Challenges and Embracing Opportunities

We recognise that the local government landscape is evolving, with local government reorganisation and devolution presenting new challenges and priorities. Our new leadership structure encourages close collaboration and continuous improvement, ensuring we are prepared for change and focused on long-term benefits for our community.

In order to meet the challenges that lie ahead, the Council has embarked on a two phase Transforming Together programme which will create an organisation that empowers staff, supports clear and effective decision making, and ensures accountability at every level.

Phase 1, which has already been completed, has seen the replacing of the previous CLT+ consisting of the Chief Executive, plus 9, a Deputy Chief Executive and eight Assistant Directors and the introduction of a streamlined Senior Leadership Team with the Chief Executive, supported by five Directors, and is organised around five key Directorates—Neighbourhood Services & Communities, Place, Planning & Growth, Finance, Legal & Governance, and Strategy & Improvement.

We are currently in Phase 2 of our Transforming Together programme, which is the final phase, and will see the rest of the organisation structured in a way which will remove further layers of management and

invest in front line posts and enable staff to realise their full potential, deliver on ambitious goals and continue to provide the highest level of service to our residents.

Members, tonight you are asked to support a budget and financial strategy that reflect our collective ambition for Maldon District. We have the resources, the dedicated workforce, and the leadership to meet the challenges ahead.

It is only by working together that we can deliver for the district, we have shown that over the past 2.5 years. Thank you members for your continued spirit of cooperation and the excellent working relationships, we have with officers. It is through these principles that we can deliver for the district.

I urge you to endorse the proposed budget and MTFS, so that we may continue the vital work of serving our community and together, we will continue to deliver excellence for Maldon District now and into the future.

Thank you members and recommend the budget items 9a 9b 9c and 9d