



**MINUTES of
COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026**

PRESENT

Chairperson	Councillor K M H Lagan
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor R G Pratt
Councillors	M G Bassenger, V J Bell, J R Burrell-Cook, S Dodsley, J Driver, M F L Durham, CC, A Fittock, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, J C Hughes, K Jennings, A M Lay, 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, CC, E L Stephens, J C Stilts, N J Swindle, M E Thompson and S White

1. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

The Chairman apologised for the slight delay to the start of the meeting due to a technical issue. He then welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some general housekeeping arrangements.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D O Bown, S J Burwood and L L Wiffen.

Councillor S White left the meeting at this point and did not return.

3. MINUTES - 12 FEBRUARY 2026

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 12 February 2026 be received.

Declaration of Interest

Councillor J R Burrell-Cook advised that the penultimate sentence should read "...working with Gwyn Owen...". This amendment was noted.

2026 / 27 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (Council Tax 2026 / 27)

Councillor A S Fluker referred to the first paragraph of this Minute, advising how he had commented that the reserves of the Council belonged to council tax payers and fundamentally achieved by the sale of the Council's housing stock. He also advised that he had highlighted how only £8,000 of the £2.7m spend had been spent in the Southminster ward. In response the Chairperson advised that the Minutes would be amended to ensure that his first point was included.

Subject to the above amendments the Chairperson moved the approval of the Minutes, which was duly agreed.

RESOLVED

- (ii) that subject to the above amendments the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 12 February 2026 be confirmed.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor J R Burrell-Cook declared an other Registrable Interest in Agenda Item 11 – Culture and Heritage Update as he worked with Cultural Engine through the Tourism Group (Community Interest Company) and the Maldon Tourism Group.

Councillor M F L Durham declared an other non-registrable interest in Agenda Item 11 – Culture and Heritage Update as he was the Chairperson of Visit Essex.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

In accordance with the Council's public speaking protocol, it was noted that the following question had been received from Mr David Sismey who was in attendance and read out his question:

Question:

Please confirm how many reports of planning enforcement breaches have been made about the North Heybridge Garden Suburb since construction began and how many times the council has actually taken enforcement action. Almost 18 months on from when the western part of the relief road - the key infrastructure commitment of this development - was required by planning condition to be fully completed, why is it still not fully complete and what action has the council taken to have the developer deliver this commitment and remove the temporary works and detritus from this site?

The Leader of the Council read out the following response which had been published prior to the meeting:

Response:

"Since the first receipt in May 2021 of a service request to investigate a possible breach of planning control relating to the North Heybridge Garden Suburb, the Planning Enforcement Team has received eight allegations of breaches of planning control and opened subsequent investigations into each allegation.

The eight cases were received from a total of three sources, with a fourth interested party in one instance.

The eight cases comprised of:

- six cases of alleged breaches of planning conditions.
- one case of alleged illegal advertisement.
- one case of alleged removal of a hedgerow.

Five of the eight cases are now closed, with one case of unsubstantiated / unclear allegation, three cases of compliance through either a ceasing of the breach or retrospective consent being granted and one case of no material breach of planning control occurring.

Of the three remaining open Enforcement cases:
one is pending closure due to the approval of a Variation of Condition Application to resolve the matter.
one remains under investigation and the Council is seeking compliance and remedial action from the developer to mitigate any harm.
the third open case was only received on 23 March 2026 and is pending allocation to an Officer for investigation and assessment.

Maldon District Council is responsible for the overseeing and seeking assurance that the developer is complying with their planning obligations, as conditioned. The imposing of those said conditions is often, as in this instance, done via consultation with third party authorities during the planning consultation phase. Where the developer is required to engage with and is delayed by any such interactions with third party authorisers, the Council is expected to take a proportionate and pragmatic approach, due to such matters being beyond the developer to control or mitigate.

Formal Enforcement action should, as per Council policy and Government Guidance, be used proportionally where compliance cannot or is unlikely to be achieved through informal negotiation. Any formal action taken would need to be in the public interest and be specific on what steps the developer needs to take in a specified time to comply. If actions are beyond the developer's ability to take due to third party authorisation being legally required first, formal enforcement action would be inappropriate and highly unlikely to withstand challenge at Appeal, resulting in likely costs against the Council."

6. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairperson advised that he had recently attended the 60th anniversary celebrations of the RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) in Burnham-on-Crouch and highlighted the importance of the visit and the kindness shown by staff providing a tour of the lifeboat station. He extended the Council's thanks to the generosity and work of the RNLI, commenting that it should never be underestimated.

The Chairperson referred to how he had recently completed ten 5k runs in March raising money for Cancer Research, an amazing organisation. He reported that this had currently raised £630 for the charity and thanked everyone for their support.

7. 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 18 March 2026 for which Minutes had been published.

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

There were none.

9. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairperson advised that in line with the Constitution Part 4(4)A he would be varying the agenda and moved to Agenda Item 15 – Outline Business Case for Maldon Museum Extension Project.

10. OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE FOR MALDON MUSEUM EXTENSION PROJECT

The Chairperson referred to the Monitoring Officer for an update.

The Monitoring Officer advised that in light of the decision released the previous day (Wednesday 25 March 2026) by the Government in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Officers were requesting that this item of business be deferred to the meeting of the Council on 2 July 2026. This would allow time for Officers to consider the implications of LGR and to ensure that any recommendations reflected the revised strategic and governance context. The deferral would also enable additional community engagement to be undertaken.

Members noted that should the deferral be agreed, this would require a revised project timetable and meant that the scheme was unlikely to be fully delivered by vesting day in 2028.

The Chairperson proposed that this report be deferred to the Council meeting on 2 July 2026, acting on the guidance of the Monitoring Officer. This proposal was duly seconded.

In response to questions raised, the Monitoring Officer highlighted that there was an LGR update later on the agenda, however reported that additional information from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had been received at 4pm today (Thursday 26 March 2026) which Officers had not had the time to fully digest. A timeframe along with the Section 24 notice were awaited. The proposed deferral would allow discussions with the proposed new neighbouring authorities and whilst there was no statutory requirement to do this she felt it would be good business sense along with looking at the full implications of LGR. The pause would also ensure that Members had all information required to make a decision on the Museum project.

The Chairperson then moved the proposal to defer this item of business. This was duly agreed. He thanked all Officers involved, particularly the Capital Projects Director.

RESOLVED that this item of business be deferred to the Council meeting scheduled to take place on 2 July 2026.

11. TERMS OF REFERENCE - STRATEGIC HOUSING WORKING GROUP

The Council considered the report of the Strategic Housing Working Group (SHWG) seeking Members' consideration of the SHWG Terms of Reference (ToR) attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

It was noted that the SHWG had been established to oversee and provide strategic guidance on housing delivery in the Maldon District and its purpose was set out in the report. The proposed ToR defined the SHWG's role, scope composition, meeting procedures, ensured clarity, governance and accountability. Members were reminded that the SHWG did not consider individual housing applications, appeals or complaints but received reports on trends to inform strategic decision making.

The Leader of the Council (Chairperson of the SHWG) introduced the report referring to the Head of Housing Operations who presented the report and highlighted the number of households in temporary accommodation, open homelessness cases and applicants on the housing register with a level of housing need. A full strategy rewrite had been commissioned, and proposals were being developed to acquire additional temporary accommodation locally. Work with Registered Providers continued, and the Private Rented Sector Access Scheme had supported 11 households. Homes England had approved the joint Maldon District Council / Chelmsford Housing Partnership bid for Westcombe Park, an affordable housing delivery scheme, in Heybridge. It was noted that progress was ongoing toward gold-standard domestic abuse accreditation, and the Housing Team had recently been named Team of the Year.

During the debate that followed and in response to questions raised, the Head of Housing Operations advised that:

- she would ask the Housing Development and Allocations Manager to provide a response regarding any affordable housing delivery schemes planned for Burnham-on-Crouch or Southminster.
- following due diligence, the proposed housing scheme with Chelmsford City Council and Chess Development had been deemed not viable and not a good investment for the Council. This was why the Council was now looking to acquire its own units locally. In response to further questions around the reasons for not continuing with the housing scheme, the Monitoring Officer advised that Officers would confirm the details regarding this outside of the meeting.

In response to a question regarding the Council's budget and addressing the housing needs of the District, the Leader of the Council provided an update on work being undertaken and it was noted that a report regarding this would be brought to a future meeting of the Council.

The Chairperson put the recommendation as set out in the report which was duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Housing Working Group Terms of Reference (at Appendix 1 to the report) be agreed.

12. DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Council received a verbal update from the Director of Legal and Governance on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

Members were advised that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had confirmed its decision to implement the Five Unitary Model (FUA), which aligned with Maldon District Council's supported business case. A follow-up letter had been received from the MHCLG at 4pm, and officers were currently assessing its implications, with full details to be reported to Members in the coming days. It was noted that the proposals would proceed following Parliamentary approval of the required structural change order, expected in June or July, with a Section 24 Notice to follow in the autumn. Maldon District Council would continue to operate until 1 April 2028, after which it would become part of the new Mid Essex Council alongside Chelmsford City and Brentwood District Councils. Elections for the shadow councils were scheduled for May 2027, with elected councillors serving a five-year term. Joint Committees would be established beforehand to oversee transition work. MHCLG also announced at least £900,000 in funding for each new unitary authority. A meeting of

Leaders and Chief Executives was due to take place the following day, with a further Chief Executives meeting planned for April. Members would continue to be updated as more information became available.

The Director agreed with a comment regarding the speed that everything was moving and reassured Members that they would be kept up to date.

In response to a comment regarding financial constraints the Leader of the Council advised that there were none at this time, but it was essential that the Council worked with the new authorities. The Director of Finance reiterated this advising that now the Council had better clarity with regards to what was happening.

Councillor W Stamp referred to a radio interview she had heard, and a comment by the interviewee that issues regarding highways and potholes would be reduced following introduction of the new unitary authorities due to the local decision that would be made. She commented on the current difficulty to get such matters resolved.

RESOLVED that the update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation be noted.

13. CULTURE AND HERITAGE UPDATE

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive updating Members on progress of the Culture and Heritage activities being undertaken, seeking an extension to the Culture and Heritage Strategy (the Strategy) development until June 2026 along with related delegation to develop and submit the Strategy. Approval was also sought to use budget allocated to fund a special event performance in 2027 and develop an expression of interest in relation to the Town of Culture 2028 competition.

The following declarations of interest in relation to this item of business were raised:

- Councillor J R Burrell-Cook declared he was Chairperson of the Maldon Festival who also received a grant along with a Where Quality of Life Matters grant funding for the Maldon Festival. He also declared he was a Member of the Visit Essex Advisory Board
- Councillor J Driver declared he was mayor of Maldon
- Councillor M F L Durham declared that the Maldon Festival as part of the cultural festival received a grant from Essex County Council and he was involved with the grant approval.
- Councillor A Fittock declared he had made a financial donation to the Maldon Festival
- Councillor N R Spenceley declared he was a trustee of the Maldon Festival
- Councillor P L Spenceley declared she was a trustee of the Maldon Festival

The Head of Economic Development introduced the report and gave a short presentation which outlined some of the recent and upcoming engagement, the proposal deferral of the special event performance to 2027 and highlighted key points in relation to the Town of Culture 2028 competition and the benefits of this. It was noted that Cultural Engine had been appointed as the Council's consultants. The presentation slides were circulated to Members during the meeting and would be available online afterwards.

Members were reminded of the recent decision by the Strategy and Resources Committee to allocate monies to allow detailed event planning and secure the headline act for a special event performance in 2026. Due to the availability of the headline act, it was proposed that the performance be moved to June 2027 and the Council was requested to agree to commit the funding to this date.

The report set out the themes which the Strategy would focus on, and it was noted to enhance stakeholder and resident engagement Officers were proposing that the engagement and development timeline be extended. This would allow for improved quality, depth and reliability of data collection and ensure that outcomes were evidenced and aligned with local priorities.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) had recently launched the first UK Town of Culture competition to spotlight contributions that towns make to the national cultural landscape. The report provided further details of the competition. It was proposed that the Council supported a UK Town Culture bid for Maldon Town, with Officers developing the work alongside appointed Culture and Heritage Strategy consultants. Appendix 1 to the report highlighted the key dates and significant benefits for the District.

Members expressed excitement at the opportunity the Strategy and Town of Culture competition would offer to the District. Councillor Durham advised that Essex County Council had recently hosted a trade and tourism delegation from America and provided further details regarding this.

In response to a question regarding stakeholders, the Head of Economic Development advised that if the recommendations were approved Officers would be consulting with key stakeholders.

The Head of Economic Development gave her assurance that if the Council reached the application stage the District as a whole would be covered and referred to the work done by the consultants, particularly the evidence base they had put together. Giles Tofield from Cultural Engine provided Members with an update on the work they had undertaken, including the areas they had focused on, recent presentation to the blackwater partnership and response from the public consultation. He highlighted the importance of including stories and how the Battle of Maldon was an original story which brought together a number of points of interest.

The Chairperson then moved the recommendations which were duly seconded and agreed. The Chairperson asked that his dissent in respect of recommendation (iv) be recorded).

The Head of Economic Development advised that there was an error and recommendation (iv) should read as follows:

“that subject to approval of recommendation (iii), development and submission of the ~~Town of Culture 2028 and Heritage Strategy Competition Expression of Interest~~ be delegated to the Senior Leadership Team in consultation with the Leader of the Council by the deadline of 31 March 2026”

The Chairperson put this amendment to the Council, and this was duly agreed.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the extension to the Culture and Heritage Strategy development to June 2026 be approved;

- (ii) That the budget allocated for the Special Event Performance Funding to be utilised for a performance in 2027 be approved;
- (iii) That officers develop the Council's Town of Culture 2028 competition expression for interest;
- (iv) That subject to approval of recommendation (iii), development and submission of the Town of Culture 2028 Competition Expression of Interest be delegated to the Senior Leadership Team in consultation with the Leader of the Council by the deadline of 31 March 2026.

14. QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 1 (3)(M)

Councillor A S Fluker referred to a letter the Council had sent to major developers regarding consultants being appointed to review the Local Development Plan and asking them to bring forward new sites in the District for development. He asked the Leader if he could explain why this information hadn't been shared with Members and why developers had been asked to place shape the District ahead of Members. In response the Leader commented the Council was using a consultant to help it shape the LDP work and review what work could be used in the new process. He explained that the Council could call for sites at any time which is what it had done.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 8.40 pm.

K M H LAGAN
CHAIRPERSON