MINUTES of
COUNCIL
2 JULY 2026

PRESENT

Chairperson	Councillor R G Pratt
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor J C Stilts
Councillors	M G Bassenger, V J Bell, J R Burrell-Cook, S J Burwood, S Dodsley, J Driver, M F L Durham, A Fittock, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, 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 and M E Thompson

122. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

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

123. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D O Bown, J C Hughes, K Jennings, K M H Lagan, A M Lay, N J Swindle, S White and L L Wiffen.

124. MINUTES OF THE STATUTORY ANNUAL COUNCIL - 14 MAY 2026

RESOLVED

(i) that the Minutes of the Statutory Annual meeting of the Council held on 14 May 2026 be received.

Minute No. 16 – Appointment of Membership of Committees of the Council
Councillor U G C Siddall-Norman highlighted that the bullet points in this Minute regarding the Investigating and Disciplinary (I&D) Committee and I&D Panel contained incorrect references to the Joint Standards Committee. It was further noted that reference to Councillor V J Bell under the I&D Panel bullet should refer to Councillor U G C Siddall-Norman.

RESOLVED

(ii) that subject to the above amendments the Minutes of the Statutory Annual meeting of the Council held on 14 May 2026 be confirmed.

125. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor J R Burrell-Cook declared a registrable interest in Agenda Item 17 - Outline Business Case for Maldon Arts and Culture Centre Project as he sat on the Visit Essex Advisory Board, was Chairperson of the Maldon District Tourism Group and the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism CIC.

Councillor M F L Durham declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 17 - Outline Business Case for Maldon Arts and Culture Centre Project as a Member of the Arts Council South East Board.

126. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

127. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairperson referred to the following events he had attended, thanking the Vice-Chairperson for her support and attending some events with him:

- Civic Service at Chelmsford Cathedral, invited by the Mayor of Chelmsford
- Garden Party held by the newly appointed High Sheriff
- Armed Forces Service
- Launch of the new health initiative Street Tag

128. PERFORMANCE, GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - 4 JUNE 2026

The Council considered the following recommendation coming forward from the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee for consideration. This recommendation was presented to the Council by Councillor W Stamp, Chairperson of the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee.

Council Constitution - Scheme of Delegation to Officers - Environmental Health Powers and Duties – Update

Councillor Stamp put the recommendation which was duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED that the Renters' Rights Act 2026 be included within the list of legislation and statutory provisions in the Scheme of Delegation and delegated to the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities together with the ability of the Director to authorise appropriate Officers to undertake the new powers and duties on behalf of the Council.

Councillor M G Bassenger joined the meeting at this point.

129. STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 11 JUNE 2026

The Council considered the following recommendations coming forward from the Strategy and Resources Committee for consideration. These recommendations were presented to the Council by Councillor A Fittock, Chairperson of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy Review

Councillor Fittock put the recommendations which were was duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) that the revised and updated Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) 2026 and tariff (attached at Appendix 1 to the Council agenda) be approved, superseding the current RAMS 2018-2038;

(ii) that the new RAMS tariff of £500 per new dwelling or qualifying unit (index linked and inclusive of a 5% admin fee) be applied to new development from 1 August 2026;

Note: the current fee is £175.55 and benchmarks as low compared to tariffs nationally, while the new fee is mid-range. The new fee includes increased expectations of eligible housing units, and is considered not just for the implementation period, but also for the maintenance period.

(iii) that the adopted Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) be revoked, noting that its content is no longer aligned with the updated RAMS;

(iv) that Members agree in principle to replace the Essex Coast RAMS SPD with an Essex Coast RAMS Technical Advice Note (TAN), recognising that this will provide a consistent mechanism to guide decision-making for local authorities within the RAMS partnership area;

(v) that delegated authority be granted to the Director of Place, Planning and Growth, in consultation with Planning Policy Working Group to agree and publish the TAN once drafting is complete.

Pay Policy Statement 2026 / 27

Councillor Fittock put the recommendation which was duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED that the 2026 / 27 Pay Policy Statement attached at Appendix 2 to the Council agenda be approved.

130. 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 24 June 2026 for which Minutes had been published.

131. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor S J N Morgan. Leader of the Council (the Leader) made a statement (attached at **APPENDIX 1** to these Minutes) setting out the Council's priorities and programme for the remainder of the municipal year. The statement referred to a number of areas, including:

- leadership through Local Government Reorganisation;

- collaborative working across the Council;
- financial responsibility and careful use of reserves;
- health and wellbeing initiatives;
- planning, infrastructure and the Local Plan;
- regaining the five-year housing land supply;
- supporting business, tourism and economic growth;
- protecting the District's environment and natural assets; and
- customer-focused services, performance and accountability.

In summary, the Leader emphasised the need for strong leadership, responsible financial management, support for communities, sustainable growth, environmental protection and ensuring local voices were heard during Local Government Reorganisation.

Councillor J Driver, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, thanked the Leader of the Council for his speech and stated that the change in administration represented a significant shift in the political direction of Maldon District Council. He expressed concern that the new political arrangements risked returning the Council to short-term decision-making, particularly in relation to Council Tax, use of reserves, investment in services and assets, and local government reorganisation. He referred to the progress made over the previous three years in rebuilding financial resilience, strengthening governance and restoring confidence in the organisation, and argued that the Council should continue to protect services, invest in communities and pursue a positive agenda for residents. He concluded that the Liberal Democrats would support proposals that genuinely benefited residents but would oppose decisions which, in their view, threatened the long-term interests of the District or repeated previous mistakes.

The Leader responded to Councillor Driver's comments, clarifying that there was no form of coalition. He stated that he wished to work collaboratively going forward, noted that Council Tax had not been referred to as being frozen in his speech, and indicated that he believed there would be areas of shared support across the Chamber.

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

There were none.

133. APPOINTMENT TO WORKING GROUP

The Council considered the report of the Director of Legal and Governance seeking appointment of a Member to the Strategic Housing Working Group (the Working Group).

Members were advised that following appointment to the Working Group at the Statutory Annual Meeting of the Council one Member had confirmed that they were unable to continue. The Council was therefore required to nominate one Member to the Working Group. Details of the existing Working Group membership were set out in the report.

Councillor P L Spenceley nominated Councillor J Driver. This proposal was duly seconded and there being no other nominations was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor J Driver be appointed to the Strategic Housing Working Group.

134. NOMINATION TO TOLLESBURY COMMUNITY LAND TRUST STEERING GROUP

The Council considered the report of the Director of Legal and Governance seeking appointment of a Member to the Tollesbury Community Land Trust Steering Group.

Members were advised that the Tollesbury Community Land Trust had invited a member of the Council to sit on its steering group. The draft Terms of Reference for the Steering Group were attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor R H Siddall nominated Councillor E L Stephens. This proposal was duly seconded and there being no other nominations was duly agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) That Councillor E L Stephens be appointed to Tollesbury Community Land Trust Steering Group;

(ii) That as the Council's representative to the Tollesbury Community Land Trust Steering Group the Member appointed be responsible for sharing minutes of any meetings attended; to be stored centrally on the Modern.Gov library as per the details in section 3.4 of the report.

135. DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Director of Strategy and Improvement provided an update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) advising that:

- the Government had confirmed that Greater Essex had passed the legal tests for devolution and that work towards a Mayoral Combined County Authority could proceed. The decision followed the consultation held between February and April 2025.
- the Secretary of State had confirmed the government's decision to establish the five new unitary authorities, with secondary legislation expected to be considered by Parliament later in the autumn.
- Officers were developing a programme of delivery to ensure safe and legal councils were established by April 2028.
- Leaders and officers from Chelmsford, Maldon and Brentwood Councils had met to discuss LGR and working together.
- Key programme Officers had met to establish the Mid Essex project management office and identify activities.
- An Essex-wide programme delivery approach had also been agreed by Chief Executives. Detailed work was being undertaken, including working with services to identify how areas were amalgamated.

- It was noted that Essex County Council’s new administration was challenging the Government’s decision, but work was continuing to the agreed timelines to maintain momentum.

In response to a comment, the Chief Executive advised that Officers were only able to work with the information currently available but acknowledged there was a lot of related political complexity. He confirmed that discussions had taken place with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government officials regarding the Structural Change Order, which was being drafted along with the accompanying explanatory notes. Members were advised that Officers would continue to progress work on the basis of the current information, monitor the outcome of any judicial review, and update Members as matters developed.

136. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Councillor W Stamp referred to the Leaders ‘speech and, in the interests of openness and transparency, stated that she felt the information being considered in private session could have been presented differently, allowing it to be discussed in open session. She requested that it be recorded that she did not support the following item of business being discussed in closed session. This was duly noted.

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that this satisfies the public interest test.

137. OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE FOR MALDON NEW ARTS AND CULTURE CENTRE PROJECT

At this point, the Capital Projects Officer introduced the documents presented. The Council considered commercially sensitive information which related to Agenda Item 17 – Outline Business Case for Maldon New Arts and Culture Centre Project.

138. RESUMPTION OF BUSINESS IN OPEN SESSION

RESOLVED that the meeting of the Council resume at 8:22pm in open session.

139. OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE FOR MALDON NEW ARTS AND CULTURE CENTRE PROJECT

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive presenting the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the design, construction and operation of a New Arts and Culture Centre (NACC) Project and seeking Members’ approval to progress to a Full Business Case (FBC).

Members were reminded of the Promenade Park Management Plan (PPMP) adopted in June 2025 and the work done by Officers since then to progress the concept for the Promenade Park NACC to OBC, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. Key milestone dates were set out in the report.

It was noted that the OBC set out the project against a standardised business case model of strategic, economic, management, socio-economic and financial cases.

These were summarised in the report. Appendix 2 to the report provided a number of detailed background papers relating to the OBC for the NACC Project.

The Capital Projects Director gave a detailed presentation which set out:

- the key outcomes of the public engagement;
- details of the NACC project and what it could achieve;
- further benefits of the project;
- a summary of the June 2026 engagement survey results;
- references from the Maldon District Culture and Heritage Strategy Survey (August 2025);
- proposed questions discussed at recent target group meetings and the feedback received.

In conclusion, the Director highlighted that the consultation showed strong support for safeguarding the Maldon Museum and investing in its future, but there was no clear consensus on the scale or form of development. Further community engagement was required to define the project's scope and objectives.

In response to concerns raised regarding the proposed development and its timing, the Director advised that the Strategic Asset Working Group (SAWG) had considered the options and decided to take forward the largest option.

Councillor R H Siddall thanked the Capital Projects Director for the work he had done on this project and provided the Council with details of the proposals presented to SAWG. He noted that when this option was agreed the funding was estimated as £1m and he agreed that the £3m now requested could not be justified at this time.

Councillor J R Burrell-Cook commented on the report and felt that the ambition of an Arts and Culture Centre in Maldon should not be rejected but further work was required, highlighting the benefit of having such a Centre. He then proposed that should Members be minded to accept recommendations (vii) and (viii) that a further recommendation be added, that Members support a new feasibility study and proposal seeking an alternative place for an arts and cultural centre with funding being sought externally through Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage funds, and partnership working. This proposal was duly seconded.

During the lengthy debate that followed a number of Members expressed concerns regarding the proposed scheme, including the extent of the consultation carried out, the burden on the authority of borrowing £2.7m, whilst acknowledging that the Council wanted a legacy for the Maldon District. In response to questions raised the Capital Projects Director advised that:

- accessibility of the current building was an issue, particularly above the ground floor and how it was not practical to install a lift without extending the existing building.
- the biggest risk, especially in construction, was uncertainty along with the details of the project and who the NACC would serve. However, costs were at a very early stage and therefore contained significant contingency values, these figures would be refined at each design stage and the Director advised that he would expect them to reduce over time.

Councillor A S Fluker declared at this point that he had been involved in some projects which Stace had also been involved in.

Councillor Burrell-Cook declared that he was Chairperson of the Maldon Festival which put on music, arts and cultural events over Maldon town. He then clarified his earlier proposal to add a further recommendation to support a new feasibility study to seek an alternative place for an arts and cultural centre with funding being sought from external sources such as Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage and partnership working to reduce the burden on the taxpayer.

The Chairperson then moved recommendation (i) as set out in the report. Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously agreed that this not be approved. The Chairperson declared that as recommendation (i) was lost recommendations (ii) – (vi) also failed.

The Chairperson then moved recommendation (vii) and upon a vote being taken this was agreed.

Councillor A S Fluker proposed an amendment to recommendation (viii) that the Outline Business Case is brought to the September meeting of the Council. This proposal was duly seconded. The Director of Legal and Governance advised that the September Council agenda was already quite large and was unable to comment if Officers would be able to meet the September deadline. Councillor Fluker withdrew his proposal at this point.

The Chairperson then moved recommendation (viii) and upon a vote being taken this was agreed.

Members were then reminded of the proposal in the name of Councillor Burrell-Cook and upon a vote being taken this was duly agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) that the Council does not approve taking the Maldon New Arts and Culture Centre project forward and that officers undertake no further work on this;

(ii) that officers bring an Outline Business Case for the renovation of the Maldon Museum back to the Council for consideration;

(iii) that the Council supports a new feasibility study and proposal seeking an alternative location for an arts and cultural centre, with funding being sought externally through Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage funds, and partnership working.

140. 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 he had agreed to allow the Director of Legal and Governance to raise an urgent item of business.

141. URGENT BUSINESS - APPOINTMENT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Council considered the urgent report of the Director of Legal and Governance seeking appointment of a non-aligned Member to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) for the remainder of the municipal year following the resignation of Councillor V J Bell.

It was noted that this matter was brought forward for consideration as the O&S was next to meet on 30 July 2026 and it was necessary to appoint this vacancy prior to that meeting.

Following an introduction of the report by the Leader of the Council, Councillor J R Burrell-Cook nominated Councillor A M Lay as the non-aligned Member to the O&S for the remainder of the municipal year. This proposal was duly seconded. The Chairperson advised that should Members be mindful to agree this proposal it would be subject to Councillor Lay being in agreement as he was not in attendance. This was duly noted and there being no other nominations the proposal was agreed.

RESOLVED that subject to him accepting the position, Councillor A M Lay be appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2026 / 27 municipal year.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 9.37 pm.

R G PRATT
CHAIRPERSON

This page is intentionally left blank

Speech by Leader Cllr Simon Morgan, to Council on 2 July 2026

Good evening, Chairman, Members and Residents of Maldon District.

Tonight I wish to set out before you my priorities for the year ahead. My starting point in identifying what these priorities are, what matters most to our residents, communities, businesses and the environment, has been the Council's Corporate Plan. So they are not just my priorities, but our priorities. We should all own them

Those of you who are familiar with the phrase: may you live in interesting times will, I am sure, also be aware that far from being a benign exhortation it is in reality meant to be a curse. Interesting times are likely to be times of trouble and turmoil.

The Local Government Reorganisation process has begun which on present plans will see this District Council pass into history in April 2028. However, this is being challenged by the Reform led Essex County Council and we have yet to learn what view the next occupant of Number 10 Downing Street will have on the process.

Whatever subsequently transpires there can be no doubt that this coming year will therefore be one of change, but I believe that it can also be one of opportunity. I see it as my responsibility to lead a council that will provide steady, visible and practical governance, that will protect and enhance the identity of the Maldon District, and continue to deliver outcomes that will seek to preserve and enhance our residents' quality of life.

Put simply I will look to provide strong leadership through this time of change, to stand up for our District, and to deliver for residents. To achieve these aims I fully commit myself to working collaboratively across all political groups and non aligned members of the council.

This is a Conservative led administration, but our rosettes have been put away and we all believe that collaboration between members is fundamental to delivering the best outcomes for our residents.

By working together across the political spectrum with respect and a shared focus on local priorities, I believe that we can deliver improvements for the communities we all serve.

The Government has approved the Five Unitary Authority model for Local Government Reorganisation in Greater Essex, which this Council supported, and we will continue to provide strong leadership to deliver this. We will also work constructively with partners across Mid Essex, and champion the needs, strengths and identity of our District.

We will maintain our excellent relationships with Town and Parish Councils, support community empowerment, and help local people and organisations build resilience. Change should not mean losing local connection. It should mean finding better ways to work together.

Residents rightly expect us to balance the budget, use public money carefully, and be transparent about the decisions we make. I wish to work closely with the Finance Members Working Group, the Chairs of Strategy and Resources and Performance Governance and Audit to adopt a prudent approach to our finances and, whilst maintaining our high level of service to residents, will do what I can to minimise the burden on council tax and business rate payers as well as reviewing car park charges.

Because the immediate future is uncertain, I believe we should be careful about our use of the reserves and not fritter them away, or, worse still, go into debt pursuing implausible projects

We look to support our communities by seeking to deliver health initiatives that promote good physical and mental wellbeing, central to a good quality of life. We will continue to work with the NHS and our partners to support prevention, early intervention, strengthen volunteering and community networks, and help communities support one another. We will also lobby for government funding to create a possible neighbourhood health centre in the heart of the District at St Peters

Planning plays a vital role in investing in our district, helping us to deliver sustainable growth, protect the qualities that make our communities unique and provide the homes, jobs and infrastructure that residents need.

As regards infrastructure, we must focus on lobbying partners to improve the it within the District, making it more sustainable and accessible

I am pleased to report that we have now received draft work from our consultants which will place the Council in a strong position to consider commencing work on a new Local Plan later this year.

Members will, of course, have the opportunity to make a formal decision on this matter at full Council in September but the preparatory work undertaken to date means that we are well placed to move forward should that decision be taken.

We are awaiting the publication of an updated national planning policy, expected later this year, which will help shape the framework in which we prepare our Local Plan and make planning decisions. Progressing the evidence base and preparatory work for a new Local Plan ensures that valuable local knowledge, community priorities and technical evidence ensures that local communities have a strong voice in shaping the places where they live, work and invest.

However, we need to be honest with each other and with our residents. If we are not to be at the mercy of speculative developments or, worse still, lose our planning rights altogether, we must regain our 5 Year Housing Land Supply as soon as possible and that can only be achieved by granting planning permissions.

Of course, I do not want to see our beautiful District disappear beneath concrete and asphalt but the best way to avoid this is with a 5 Year Housing Land Supply rather than without one.

As well as planning and infrastructure we will look to grow our economy by supporting businesses, town centres and the visitor economy, which are vital to the life of the District.

Maldon District is a fantastic a place to visit, invest and do business, but we must ensure that tourism is sustainable and brings benefits to local communities.

We have a unique story, shaped by the coast, countryside, towns, villages, heritage and people. We must celebrate and protect this identity.

Our natural assets are part of what makes this District special. By protecting our environment, we will care for our coastline, countryside and open spaces, while promoting sustainable approaches that safeguard them for future generations.

Finally, we will focus on ensuring our Residents are able to access efficient, responsive and customer-focused services. We will strengthen performance and accountability, and work in partnership across Essex where that helps deliver better outcomes.

Together, these priorities provide a clear framework for decision-making and investment. They are driven by our Corporate Plan, support a shared narrative for engagement with residents and partners, and they keep our focus firmly on delivery, outcomes and accountability.

Conservatism at its best is about stewardship: leaving things stronger than we found them, protecting what is valuable, and making careful improvements where they are needed.

That is the approach I intend to take as Leader.

We will stand up for Maldon District. We will be responsible custodians of public money. We will support our communities, protect our environment, encourage enterprise and economic growth, and ensure that local voices continue to be heard throughout the reorganisation process.

Above all, we will remain focused on the people we serve.

Maldon District is a remarkable place, rich in history, character and community spirit. It is worth fighting for, worth preserving and worth improving for future generations.

That is my commitment, and I look forward to working with the officers and all Members of this Council to deliver it.

Thank you.

Cllr Simon Morgan Leader of the Council