



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND IMPROVEMENT**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
24 SEPTEMBER 2026**

MOTION REFERRED TO THIS COMMITTEE FROM THE COUNCIL

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information to inform Members' considerations of the Motion referred to the Strategy and Resources Committee by the Council at its meeting on 10 September 2026.

2. MEMBER MOTION

- 2.1 In accordance with Procedure Rule 4, the following motion was proposed by Councillor K Jennings, and seconded by Councillor R H Siddall.

“To create a retail working group, that works with partners to deliver support and create retail business opportunities across the district. This should be a similar model to One Maldon District, with representatives from the retail sector, other partners and other local authorities, to ensure our high streets across the district (not just Maldon) to ensure that our high streets and retail businesses continue to grow and thrive.”

3. OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO MOTION

- (i) That the Committee requests officers to investigate the feasibility and viability of a business and economic engagement forum, aligned to the priorities of the Corporate Plan.
- (ii) That, subject to the approval of (i) above, the outcome of this work is presented to this Committee to make an informed decision on the establishment of a business and economic engagement forum.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Council has previously undertaken a range of initiatives aimed at supporting town centres and high street activity. These include delivery of improvements identified through the Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan (CAMP), support for Maldon Market, regeneration projects, public realm improvements and partnership working with businesses and other stakeholders. A Member-led High Street Focus Group was established following adoption of the CAMP to champion the interests of Maldon High Street and support partnership working on town centre improvements. The Terms of Reference for that Focus Group note that its original purpose was to support delivery of Lower High Street improvements and broader town centre initiatives. With the agreement of the Chairperson, this Focus Group was dissolved in January 2026.

- 4.2 The Council recognises the important role that retail businesses, markets and town centres play in supporting the local economy, providing employment opportunities, attracting visitors and maintaining vibrant communities across the District. The District's retail function is not limited to Maldon High Street and includes the town centre of Burnham-on-Crouch, the centre in Heybridge, and a wider network of village and neighbourhood areas serving local communities.
- 4.3 More recent evidence identifies significant changes affecting the retail sector, including the growth of online shopping, changes in consumer behaviour, rising operating costs and wider economic uncertainty.
- 4.4 Statistical analysis¹ of the businesses across the District identifies the largest sectors as follows:

Industry	Number of businesses	Position
Construction	795	1
Professional, scientific and technical	450	2
Business administration and support services	295	3
Retail	265	4
Manufacturing	235	5

- 4.5 The Council delivers a comprehensive programme of business engagement and support through its Supporting Local Business Programme, which includes direct business engagement activities, sector engagement, regular networking opportunities and signposting to wider support services. The programme seeks to support business growth, resilience, investment and collaboration across all sectors of the local economy. In addition, the Council's partnership with the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB), delivers business support, business events and economic growth initiatives across the wider North Essex area. The NEEB programme is specifically designed to enhance existing business support activity and avoid duplication, while creating opportunities for businesses to discuss challenges, share best practice and identify opportunities for growth.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Any new business engagement forum would need to be developed as part of, and complementary to, the Council's existing work. This would help ensure a coordinated approach to business engagement, avoid duplication of existing networks and activities, maximise available resources and create a single strategic forum through which the Council can engage with businesses on matters relating to economic growth, investment, regeneration, workforce development, skills and town centre vitality. By bringing together businesses from a range of sectors, the forum could provide a stronger evidence base for decision-making and a more effective mechanism for supporting sustainable economic growth across the District.

6. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

6.1 Supporting our communities

- 6.1.1 The creation of a new engagement forum could provide an opportunity to strengthen engagement between the Council, local businesses and community stakeholders.

¹ UK Business Counts 2025

The forum could help identify local challenges and opportunities affecting town and village centres, supporting vibrant and sustainable communities across the District.

6.2 Investing in our District

- 6.2.1 By bringing together key stakeholders, opportunities may be identified to support investment, improve local centres and enhance the visitor experience.

6.3 Growing our economy

- 6.3.1 The forum could provide a mechanism for businesses to share insights, identify barriers to growth and inform future economic development initiatives. The feasibility work would assess the potential value of such a forum and its alignment with Council priorities.

7. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** - The Council's customers include local businesses, residents, visitors and community stakeholders. Exploring the feasibility of a forum may help identify opportunities to improve engagement with businesses and better understand issues affecting town and village centres. However, there is a risk that expectations may be raised regarding future interventions or investment which may not ultimately be deliverable. Any future proposals would require clear objectives and stakeholder communication.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** - No direct equality implications have been identified at this stage. Should proposals to establish a forum be developed, consideration would be given to ensuring fair and inclusive representation from businesses of different sizes, sectors and locations across the District, together with compliance with the Council's equality duties.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** - There are no significant strategic or fraud risks associated with undertaking the proposed feasibility work.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** - The Council's current business support programme is scheduled to conclude on 31 March 2027 and there is currently no identified budget allocation for business support activity beyond this date.

Should the feasibility work identify a need for ongoing officer support, business engagement activity, project delivery or other interventions arising from the work of any future group, there is a risk that the Council may have limited capacity to support significant activity unless additional funding or resources are secured. Any future financial implications and resource requirements would be reported to Members for consideration before any decision is taken regarding the establishment of a working group.

- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** - Officer resources would be required to undertake the feasibility work and potentially support any future working group. Should the demands on officer time outweigh the identified benefits, alternative approaches to business engagement may need to be considered. The feasibility exercise will assess resource requirements before any substantive proposal is brought forward.

- (vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** - There are no significant LGR related risks associated with undertaking the proposed feasibility work.

Background Papers: None.

Enquiries to: Patrick Cole, Head of Economic Development.