MINUTES of
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
24 SEPTEMBER 2026

PRESENT

Chairperson	Councillor A Fittock
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor M G Bassenger
Councillors	J R Burrell-Cook, S Dodsley, J Driver, A S Fluker, K M H Lagan, S J N Morgan, P L Spenceley and M E Thompson (Substitute for M F L Durham)
In attendance	Councillor(s) K Jennings

1. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

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

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTION NOTICE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M F L Durham and U G C Siddall-Norman.

It was noted that in accordance with notice duly given Councillor M E Thompson was attending as a substitute for Councillor Durham.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED

(i) that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 July 2026 be received.

Minute No. 6 – Anti-Corruption Policy Suite
The Chairperson advised that an amendment was required to this Minute to remove the reference to Appendix E (Whistleblowing Policy) as this Appendix was not circulated with the report and therefore was not considered by the Committee at this meeting. This amendment was duly noted.

RESOLVED

(ii) that subject to the above amendment the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 July 2026 be confirmed.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Councillor J R Burrell-Cook declared, that in relation to Agenda Item 6 – Motion Referred to this Committee from the Council, he was the Chairperson of the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group and the T26 Maldon District Tourism Group. He explained that a high street sub-group had already been planned and discussed. In response to a question to the Monitoring Officer, it was confirmed that Councillor Burrell-Cook was not required to leave the meeting for this item of business.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No requests had been received.

6. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR K JENNINGS (MOTION 01/2026)

The Committee considered the following Motion proposed by Councillor K Jennings and seconded by Councillor R H Siddal referred to the Committee by the Council. Further consideration was given to the report of the Director of Strategy and Improvement which provided information regarding the Motion and set out a number of recommendations for Members consideration.

> **Motion:**
> "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."

The Chairperson drew members' attention to the report of the Director of Strategy and Improvement which included two recommendations for Members' consideration. These were duly seconded.

The Director of Strategy and Improvement introduced Mr Cole, Head of Economic Development, to the Committee, advising that both officers were happy to answer any questions.

During the debate that followed and in response to questions raised the following information was provided.

- The North Essex Economic Board had a full programme of projects which runs to March 2027 and, alongside this, the number of Maldon District business breakfasts had increased. District-wide engagement platforms were not sector specific but inclusive of all business sizes and sectors. It was noted that priority was given to employment size rather than sectors.
- The Council did not currently provide specific high street support, as all business support programmes were designed to encompass small and medium-sized enterprises. However, there could be capacity to review this provision should Members wish support to be provided.
- There were a number of regional and national business groups, such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Essex Directors, and the Essex Chamber of Commerce, that supported place making on a larger scale. Sector-specific representation for high streets did not generally exist.

- The Council had previously supported Burnham-on-Crouch and Maldon Business Boards. An example was given of a high street-specific externally funded campaign which provided the Council with funding to work with businesses.
- Essex County Council were due to host a high street workshop in the coming week, and this would be attended by the Head of Economic Development. The focus would be on high streets and microbusinesses, and Officers were keen to identify any opportunities that could be brough forward as a result.

Following further discussion, Councillor Jennings provided Members with additional detailed information about his Motion and the concept behind it.

It was clarified that the recommendations within the report were to give opportunity for Officers to understand and digest all information and then compile that information into a full report to this Committee. The report would include associated costs, over and above business-as-usual activity, to allow Members to make an informed design around whether the proposed Group should be started. The Chief Executive suggested that retail should be considered within the wider economic development agenda, alongside other areas such as business engagement, skills education and tourism rather than in isolation. Through recommendation (i) Officers would explore mechanisms to support and engage with retail and other business sectors in a meaningful way, taking account of resource capacity, alignment with the Corporate Plan and the Council's investment priorities.

Councillor J R Burrell-Cook drew Members' attention to the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Community Interest Company, launched in March 2026 with support of Officers, which brought together high street businesses, producers, food producers, maritime operators and a range of other businesses to form the sub-groups that would help to drive tourism from a regenerative tourism perspective. He felt that the Motion proposed to be duplicating some of the work already started. The Chairperson clarified that recommendation (i) proposed that Officers consider all projects to identify any gaps that could be addressed through a focus group and the Chief Executive confirmed that Officers would not seek to duplicate work already being undertaken.

The Chairperson then moved recommendation (i) as set out in the report. This was duly seconded and upon a vote being taken was agreed. He then moved recommendation (ii) which was duly seconded and agreed. Councillor Burrell-Cook advised that he had abstained from both votes.

RESOLVED

i) That Officers investigate the feasibility and viability of a business and economic engagement forum, aligned to the priorities of the Corporate Plan.

ii) That, subject to (i) above, the outcome of this work is presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee to make an informed decision on the establishment of a business and economic engagement forum.

7. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 1

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance providing an updated financial position for the period ended 30 June 2026 (quarter one (Q1)). It was noted that Q1 was early in the financial year and may be subject to changes in the coming months.

The report provided the Council's financial forecast for the full year ending 31 March 2027, including revenue and capital forecasts and the impact these would have on retained reserves. It highlighted that performance was closely aligned to budget which demonstrated good financial management in operational areas.

The Director presented the report and Members noted the detailed information set out in the report including:

- Appendix 4 to the report detailed a £110k virement to align the directorate salary budgets following the recent staffing restructure.
- **Revenue Budget Monitoring (Q1)** – It was noted that, overall, the Council was within 0.71% of the budget, with a target of 1% above or below the budget. The most material individual forecast overspend related to planning appeals and, to mitigate the uncertainty within the service base budget, the use of an earmarked reserve was being considered as a mechanism to manage these costs. Appendix 1 to the report provided detail of the underspend relating to savings from vacant posts across all directorates.
- **Capital Budget Monitoring (Q1)** – The forecast for the capital budget projected an overspend of £65k against the revised 2026/27 Capital Programme, and the main project details were set out in Appendix 2 to the report.
- **Reserves** –Members noted a number of items highlighted in the report which were expected to impact on the reserves position in Quarter two. Reserves brought into 2026 / 27 were set out in Appendix 3 to the report.

In response to a question regarding planning appeals, further information was provided by the Director of Finance. It was confirmed that the Director was working closely with other Directors, particularly the Director of Place, Planning and Growth to look at better understanding the outlook around appeals, especially in light of the new National Planning Policy Statement.

Reference was made to Appendix 2 – Capital Forecast and it was highlighted that the total of the column 'Q1 Forecast: Capital Outturn 2026/27' appeared to be incorrect. The Director of Finance highlighted that this was not an error but a result of the figures being rounded and Officers would look to correct this.

In response to a question from Councillor A S Fluker regarding resurfacing Orchard Meadows Car Park in Southminster, the Chairperson advised that Officers would provide Councillor Fluker with the information requested outside of the meeting.

The Chairperson then moved the recommendations and these were duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) That Members acknowledged, as set out in the report and Appendix 1, that the forecast revenue outturn as at 30 June 2026 was £101,000 over budget (0.7%)

(ii) That Members considered, as set out in the report and Appendix 2, the forecast capital outturn as at 30 June 2026 which was for a total capital programme delivery of £7,054k against the revised budget of £7,119k.

(iii) That the balances within the Earmarked Reserves and General Fund set out in Appendix 3 to the report be acknowledged;

(iv) That the revenue budget reconciliation set out in Appendix 4 to the report be acknowledged.

8. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance presenting the revised Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), set out at Appendix 1 to the report, as the framework within which the budget for 2027 / 28 would be prepared.

The Director of Finance introduced his report which provided an update on the following areas:

- **Timetable** - The report set out the timetable for preparing the 2027/28 budget, with options developed and refined ahead of approval by the Council in February 2027.
- **Funding gap** - The report outlined an estimated funding gap of £1.498 million, arising from inflationary pressures of £1.119 million and reduced government funding of £379,000. It highlighted that Core Spending Power was expected to remain broadly flat at around £11.5 million, with future council tax increases offset by reductions in government funding.
- **Impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** - The report highlighted uncertainty over the timing of LGR and assumed an implementation date of April 2029 for financial planning purposes.
- **Options** - The report considered three financial strategy options and recommended combining budget savings with prudent use of reserves.
- **Proposed Strategy** - The report proposed combining budget reviews, savings and cost controls with prudent use of reserves to support LGR readiness and long-term financial sustainability. Appendix 1 to the report provided the updated MTFS.
- **Strategy Implementation** - The report proposed closer scrutiny of spending and income to reduce service costs towards available funding levels, with any remaining gap met from reserves. The Director confirmed that services would be protected through stronger oversight and cost control rather than specific savings targets.
- **Next Steps** - The report proposed detailed scrutiny of spending, with revised budgets and savings options due to be presented to the Committee in November 2026.

Councillor A S Fluker commented that the report was well-written and provided all the information required by Members. He proposed that the recommendations set out in the report be agreed. This proposal was duly seconded.

In response to a question, the Director of Finance confirmed that figures presented were based on a Council Tax increase of 2.99%.

The Chairperson then moved the recommendations which were duly agreed by assent.

RESOLVED

(i) That the timetable for the preparation of the 2027 / 28 be endorsed;

(ii) That Members noted the risks faced by the Council and how the Medium-Term Financial Strategy would help to address them;

(iii) That the overall financial strategy proposed and the resulting actions be endorsed.

9. DISCRETIONARY FEES AND CHARGES POLICY 2027/28

Prior to consideration of the report, Councillor A S Fluker sought clarification from the Monitoring Officer regarding whether he had a disclosable interest in this item of business as he had a building regulations application being determined by the Council. In response, the Monitoring Officer advised that this was not necessary as the report related to the Council policy rather than any individual fees.

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance setting out the overarching principles through which Discretionary Fees and Charges would be set for 2027 / 28. It was noted that the detailed Fees and Charges would be updated based on these policies and brought forward alongside the budget proposals for 2027 / 28.

The Director presented his report, advising that it set out the principles through which the Council would endeavour to set the fees and charges to be applied, and that it aligned with the budget process. He reminded Members that a large proportion of fees and charges were set nationally. For nationally set fees and charges, the Council was required to advertise them and apply the charges in line with national guidance.

The table at paragraph 3.2.2 of the report set out the locally set ('discretionary') fees and charges and the factors that needed to be considered in setting charges for the coming year. If agreed, the Director would proceed to work through the exact levels of fees and charges for recommendation to the Council for consideration at its February 2027 meeting.

In response to a question regarding fees and charges for planning services, the Director advised that this was one of the areas he was discussing with the team.

Councillor K M H Lagan referred to Principle G, as set out the report, and highlighted the importance of this referring to concessionary reductions as the Council supported some local organisations through reductions.

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

RESOLVED that the overarching principles for Discretionary Fees and Charges policies, as set out below be approved.

Ref	Principle	Commentary
A	Annual review	All discretionary fees and charges should be reviewed annually in terms of the tariff applied, recent activity trends, and the overall income achieved.
B	Promote access to services	The Council exists to provide important services to local people. Fees and charges should be applied in a way that promotes access to discretionary services. They should not be a barrier to services.
C	Full cost recovery	Fees and charges for council services should be set on the basis of full cost recovery. That is, charges should be calculated such that all costs are recovered as part of the overall charge – direct delivery costs, indirect service management costs and overhead support costs (such as ICT, HR (Human Resources), accommodation etc.).

Ref	Principle	Commentary
D	Non-profit making	Fees and charges are calculated to recover the full cost of the service provided, not to make a surplus or profit. Some cross subsidy may occur between charges levied in the same service area, but the overall objective is to support the cost of discretionary services not to secure a commercial profit.
E	Income = tariff x take up	The tariff or charge applied is one part of a wider value chain. The other part is the activity volume. Together, tariff and volume generate the overall income to the Council.
F	Standard +2% uplift	The MTFS (Medium-Term Financial Strategy) assumes a standard uplift of 2% per year on income from fees and charges. This may mean that • all charges increase by 2% per year; or • that some charges increase by more (or less) than 2%, with an expected overall increase of 2%; or • that activity is expected to increase by 2% in order to secure and overall income increase of 2% with no change to the tariff applied. However, where actual inflationary pressures are higher than 2%, it is expected that income is similarly increased to maintain the full cost recovery approach.
G	Inclusive	Options for concessionary reductions in fees and charges can be considered in line with wider council policies. How concessions are evidenced and applied should be simple, efficient and appropriate.
H	Benchmarked	The level of charges set be compared to similar charges levied by local commercial competitors or other local authorities.
I	Flexible over time	Annual review of fees and charges should also consider the introduction of new charges or the rescinding of old charges.
J	Consistent with other policies	Consistency between fees and charges and other wider policies and strategies of the council, including the corporate plan objectives.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 8.27 pm.

A FITTOCK
CHAIRPERSON