

Mr. Chairman, Elected Members of the Council, Officers, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a privilege and honour that I stand before you this evening as the new Leader of Maldon District Council - a Council that exists to represent the interests of this special District – a special district to live, work and enjoy.

As highlighted in the February Budget Statement, core funding for the Council is being reduced by a further £392,000 for 2017/18. The Rate Support Grant is due to be phased out in 2020 and local government were expecting a scheme based on 100% retention of business rates to fill the gap. However, it is now clear that this is in doubt due to the governments slim majority. Whatever funding mechanism does come out of government will need to be robust, fair and sufficient to allow local government to fund its services.

Maldon remains an ambitious and resilient Council. There is much to do to continue to enhance the quality of life and the life chances for local people. We are looking at ways to boost income generation with increased focus on exploring how the Council can become more commercial. We have already made the first steps to identify new and innovative ways to generate income, but it is fair to say that we have, until now been slow to embrace commerciality in the same way as many other authorities. As members, we will need to be open minded to opportunities that may have a positive contribution to our long term financial position.

Economic growth and prosperity across the Maldon District is rightly high on our agenda. Over the coming year our Economic Development Team, headed by a new manager will be increasing its level of business engagement, particularly in relation to our many small and medium sized businesses. In the past, SME's and rural businesses have been largely overlooked in favour of bigger companies, which in many cases neither wanted nor needed such high-level intervention. 75% of all businesses in the district are SME's or rural and we must direct our efforts squarely to this sector. For Maldon, we are facilitating a Causeway Business Forum which will be run by the businesses themselves so they can play a bigger part in assisting their own growth and prosperity in that location.

Our team will continue delivering business engagement events, plus representing the Council as an executive member of the Burnham-on-Crouch Chamber of Commerce.

Following an in-depth analysis of local and sub-regional skills needs, the Team will be working with the County Council's Employability & Skills Unit, the Essex Employment and Skills Board and the Haven Gateway Partnership to develop and implement a strategy to meet the skills need within the District.

Another key focus over the year will be creating a package to promote the Maldon District as a place of choice to start and grow a business. The Council plans to increase small business unit space, increase employment and improve business survival rates by co-ordinating the delivery of an Enterprise Centre. The Team is currently in the process of finalising a bid to the Magnox Socio Economic Grant Fund to provide a detailed business case to assess viability of such a Centre. The Deputy Leader and I have already had several meetings to explore other business led

initiatives to progress this project.

The Sense of Place is now firmly embedded in our district strategy and its' striking branding is heavily featured in our revamped foyer area. After a slow start for this project, we are meeting with the board to provide them with reaffirmed support for Sense of Place and we will continue promoting the District branding which is now being used by several organisations and companies.

The Council has successfully levered grant monies from national funding sources, including the Coastal Communities Fund to seek out opportunities for economic growth and prosperity. The Dengie Gateway Project will conclude in September, when a chain of coastal hubs will be installed at five key points along our coastline, promoted as "The Saltmarsh Coast". The hubs will provide visitor information, encouraging exploration of the area and will be complemented with new signage and way-marking. Our new Tourism Website, integrated social media, and an Eshop all contribute to promoting the District as a first class tourism destination. I am delighted to report that visitor numbers are 'up' with the latest Volume & Value Survey revealing 140,000 extra day visitors to the Maldon District, compared with the previous year, a growth of 3.9%. A new tourism marketing strategy for the District has also been developed with the aim to support and provide a boost for local business and communities that rely on visitors and the tourism economy.

It is vital that we recognise the tourism opportunities that exist in our district. With our coastal walks, prom park, flourishing vineyards, sailing centres, Hythe Quay, golf courses, sporting facilities, historic buildings, churches and caravan parks, we are truly blessed. We also have the internationally significant Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome that has been recognised by the likes of Simon Calder and Dan Snow as potentially one of the most important heritage sites in Great Britain.

This summer Members will be looking to finalise the Maldon & Heybridge Central Area Master Plan and implement plans for the next 15 years which will shape the local area. Detailed work will look at new facilities on and around the Promenade Park and Hythe Quay. In addition, the Council continues to allocate capital spend to maintain or upgrade existing facilities, including an investment of £275,000 in the Promenade Park.

The Council continues to be a driving force within the community helping it deliver its goal of 'strengthening communities to be safe active and healthy'. Through collaborative work with the Community Safety Partnership and Essex Police, the Council will strive to support and protect victims of rural crime, looking for innovative ways where communities can be better equipped to tackle crime. Maldon District Council will this month be one of the very first to operate 'True Cam' to detect and convict motorists who drive anti-socially or speed through our towns & rural areas.

Working with strategic and local delivery partners the Council is targeting help and support to improve the health and well-being of District residents. Priorities include tackling obesity, supporting older residents, particularly those that are frail or isolated, as well as identifying ways we can help our youngest citizens improve their educational attainment, giving them the best outlook for the future. We are actively supporting "Connect Well", a project that ensures that we can connect residents to

health and well-being services that may offer support to them.

The Council recognises that volunteering is a vital part of community life and many people benefit from not only receiving assistance, but also volunteering themselves. To support local communities the Council is developing a strategy to strengthen local communities and support volunteers. The Council will also establish formal management plans, working with local communities regarding the management and maintenance of open spaces where some of the volunteering opportunities will be offered.

Protecting and shaping the District is another key objective for our council which falls largely to our planning department.

Following completion of the second LDP Examination hearings in January and the subsequent publication of the Post-Examination Modifications, the responses were sent away to the Inspector. On June 29th, we received confirmation from Inspector Berkeley that he finds our modified plan sound. All that stands between this and an adopted plan is sign off from Sajid Javid, The Secretary of State. With concerted pressure from ourselves and our MP's, we are fairly confident that this could come in a matter of days rather than weeks. This, coupled with maintaining a 5 Year Housing Land Supply, will place the Council in a strong position to defend the District against further speculative applications for housing development. There is little doubt that this will mark one of the most significant achievements for our council and it will make us one of the comparatively few authorities to have an adopted plan. This has been delivered through the culmination of literally thousands of hours worked by our own officers, external consultants, legal advisors and of course members. This is the perfect opportunity to thank everyone who has played a part in this milestone for Maldon District. However, work cannot stop as the government are insisting on regular plan reviews to take account of changing circumstances.

Following extensive public consultation, it is expected that the Maldon Design Guide and the Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Master Plan, will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents, once the Local Plan itself has been adopted. Neighbourhood plans are still progressing in some parishes with Burnham and Langford in the latter stages of completion.

The Garden Suburbs and the Strategic Sites will be further progressed this year. During the last municipal year, planning permission was granted or resolved to grant on all but one of the Garden Suburbs and Strategic Sites allocated in the LDP. For both Garden Suburbs, Design Codes have been prepared which will control the quality of the development as they progress through the next planning stages.

This year we will work in partnership to deliver and ensure management and maintenance of strategic infrastructure, including that needed as a result of the Garden Suburbs and Strategic Sites. Securing the required infrastructure for all developments is crucial to their success as new communities. Through these strategic sites, we will deliver new roads, faster broadband, new health facilities, better education and of course flood alleviation schemes that will protect both new homes, as well as existing businesses and dwellings.

Staffing in the planning department has long been an issue. We have now filled all planning vacancies and this will enable us to maintain performance levels into 2018.

Unfortunately, we have been a little less successful filling the permanent post of Director, but our Human Resources team are working hard to source a new permanent candidate. We are also taking steps to reduce the backlog of enforcement cases across the district.

During this year we will agree a vision for, and develop a Planning Performance Agreement to maximise the benefits arising from the development of a new nuclear power station at Bradwell. The opportunity for a new power station remains a long-term goal for our council. I have seen at first hand the construction site at Hinkley Point and the very significant local community benefit projects that have been derived from this development. We are in the process of meeting our Chinese partners, who will be the majority shareholders of Bradwell B to discuss opportunities. We must be proactive in engaging with the Chinese to ensure that we can secure as many benefits as possible, as soon as possible. Plans are progressing to host a new LGA Special Interest Group meeting to be hosted in Maldon next March. This would further reinforce our national visibility as all authorities with nuclear facilities would be represented. There is even talk about a twinning opportunity with a coastal town in China that has a similar power station.

Turning to the Council's Housing Service, a number of key issues and opportunities arise this year. We are piloting over the summer, with Essex County Council and other partners, the new legislation to prevent homelessness in preparation for changes next year. Our Home Improvements Team is working with Health and Social Care to provide more assistance to people such as the elderly and disabled who need help to live independently in their own home. We are also developing a programme of Community Led Housing to give local people more involvement in meeting the need for affordable housing.

We have been working with the CCG's dedicated Project Manager in the interest of delivering a quality, modern community health facility for our District. The Council is coordinating the Maldon Health Hub Project Board which oversees the project plan to deliver the facilities. An assessment has been made, at high-level, of the space that would be required in the Maldon Health Hub to accommodate the proposed scope of services and projected future activity. This has been undertaken on the basis of two options, with and without beds and a decision will be taken later in the year. Site options are now narrowed to either Wycke Hill or the existing St Peters Hospital site. Securing a health hub facility for Maldon remains a key objective for this authority.

Our new waste service has been in place for over a year. It has achieved a staggering 58% of waste diverted from the black sack into recycling and we are hoping to improve upon this. Household food waste recycling has increased by 98% and the green waste service continues to expand, with nearly 12,000 subscribers now.

Ensuring that the Council is 'fit for purpose' is crucial, so our Workforce Development Strategy has delivered on a number of key projects over the past year. Our Core Values have been updated reflecting responses received from staff and Members. This includes a new Performance Review process, new Attendance Management and supporting advice to improve employee health. These will continue to be

promoted and embedded this year alongside undertaking a skills audit of the workforce, preparing a recruitment and retention strategy, and reviewing the roles and skills that the Council needs to develop for the future.

The authority also had a follow up to the 2014 LGA Peer review. Several members and staff took part in this review and the summary of their findings has been received. I have however expressed grave concerns to the LGA that the final report did not address some key areas of concern, or indeed some that were previously identified. We have been discussing this with senior LGA officials and it is hoped that a further, more comprehensive report will follow. We are however already working on some of their main points and progress is being made in respect of member/officer relations and our external relationships.

The Public Relations and Engagement Team continue to work positively with the local media to raise the profile of the Council and promote the District. Recognising the decline in printed news, they are embracing the importance social media to deliver our message to the community.

The Council's Legal & Democratic Services Team will continue to work hard to support good governance and the effective decision making of the Council, its Committees and officers alike. This will include the continued roll out of 'Mod. Gov.' functionality, as part of the move towards having paperless meetings to deliver significant cost savings. Work on the committee structure review is also ongoing.

The Council's strong customer focus continues. Our Customer Strategy will ensure that we build upon the number of services that can be accessed on-line [24/7](#), whilst continuing to assist our most vulnerable residents who need additional support. Not only will this help to make it easier for customers to do business with us, it will ensure that we can continue to meet our financial challenges by ensuring that we offer the most efficient and cost effective services.

The final phase of turning the Council Offices into a community hub is nearing completion, with many partner organisations now under one roof. The past year has seen the demolition of St Cedds House creating vital additional parking spaces. Fitting-out work is well under way for the Police accommodation and it is anticipated they will re-locate their operational base from the high street to these offices during the summer.

This Council, along with the rest of the UK public sector, faces challenges that cannot be addressed by doing things the way they always have been in the past. This Council is embarking on a Transformation Programme, with officers and members working up a series of workstreams focussed on ensuring that it provides good quality, cost effective services to our customers and securing a sustainable financial position in the longer term.

So in drawing to a close Chairman, Members, ladies and gentlemen, you will have heard this evening that there is much to do in this municipal year – much that will make a real difference to the lives of our local communities, much that will enhance this special place. As Leader I can assure you that I mean business and that I will do

everything within my power to ensure that the Council delivers this programme of work during the year for the good of the Maldon District. In short, we need to deliver, not talk about delivering.

Mr Chairman I commend my statement to Council.

Councillor M F L Durham, CC  
Leader of the Maldon District Council  
13 July 2017