

Budget Statement of the Leader of the Council, Cllr. M.F.L. Durham, CC
8th February 2018

Mr Chairman, Members of the Council, Visitors and Officers, it is my responsibility as Leader of the Council to present the proposed annual budget for the year commencing on the 1 April 2018.

This budget has been compiled by Members and Officers over the past six months using a zero based approach, taking account of future risks, threats & unknowns, whilst looking for opportunities where, as a Council we can develop and become more efficient and resilient in these difficult times for local government.

While there have been some signs of improvement in the economic outlook, the continuing austerity measures have led to unprecedented year on year reductions to local authority funding. Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, the Council will have suffered a cumulative loss of 52% of core grant in addition to the 43% already lost in the previous spending review. Since 2009/10, the Council has lost £3.2m in core grant. We are however a prudent Council and there is no doubt that, without our sound financial practices in recent years, we would be in a far worse position now.

We continue to invest in our services and, whilst our capital programme is more constrained than in previous years, we are still replacing valuable plant and equipment, investing in technology and things like CCTV to provide additional assurance to our residents.

We are actively engaging with EDF and their Chinese partners CGN, to maximise benefits that can be derived from a potential new Nuclear Power Station in Bradwell. In a few weeks' time we will host the first ever Local Government New Nuclear LGA Special Interest Group annual conference. This will bring together 15 local authorities with either new, emerging or operational power stations in their area. The idea is to share knowledge and learn from each other to ensure best practice and experience so that we can get the best outcomes for our district, such as, training, infrastructure improvements, business support and employment opportunities from the power station.

2017-18 has seen the approval of the Local Development Plan, providing us with sustainable planning growth and the ability to protect the Maldon District from unwanted & unsustainable planning growth. We are in the process of bringing forward eleven strategic sites, working with developers to ensure that their contributions are maximised to provide our residents with the infrastructure and affordable homes that are vitally necessary for the district.

On the 1st February it was announced that £7.3m had been secured from the government's Housing Infrastructure Fund for the delivery of key projects to support the housing growth, flood alleviation measures and the wider community in Heybridge. This funding will unlock the development of 1,500 houses identified within the Local Development Plan (LDP) alongside opportunities for local business through stimulating commercial opportunities within the Maldon and Heybridge Central Area.

2017-18 saw the successful delivery of a number of events on The Promenade Park in Maldon and at the Riverside Park in Burnham. The Council actively supports these events as they are crucial to the District's Tourism offer. In 2018-19, we are looking to maximise the financial benefits from events, as well as looking at new opportunities.

This summer sees the completion of the Saltmarsh Trail which provides visitor hubs along the 75 miles of our coastline. The Saltmarsh 75 event has quickly become one of the most significant endurance trials and entrants come from all across the United Kingdom to participate. The Economic Impact of Tourism 2016 report stated that the total financial contribution to the Maldon District was £195m. As a Council, we want visitors to enjoy our District as much as we do.

Our Corporate Plan sets out how we deliver our Visions and Goals for the District. Our Vision is to make Maldon District a better place to live, work and enjoy. We have four goals which underpin everything that we do:

Strengthening Communities to be safe, active and healthy.

Protecting and shaping the district.

Creating Opportunities for economic growth and prosperity.

Delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services.

Our Budget and Strategic Planning process is centered on the delivery of these important goals to support our community.

There are a number of risks to our medium term financial sustainability, as shown in the medium term financial plan. Between 2018-19 and 2021-22, the Council must deliver almost £1.5m of savings to meet the budget gap and this is without factoring in further uncertainties post 2021-22, that Central Government has not yet announced. Local government still does not know what will replace the Rate Support Grant in 2020 and the envisaged 100% retention of the business rates collected by us now seems more likely to be only 75% at best. Representatives from all tiers of local government gave evidence at a select committee this Monday to explain to the government that this uncertainty is preventing authorities from being able to make plans for their future. Hopefully, during this coming year, we will be given more details about the government's intentions for ongoing funding.

The Government has however recognised the immediate financial pressures facing councils and has allowed flexibility to increase our Council Tax by 3%, or £5 whichever is greater. We are proposing to increase Council Tax by 2.99% in 2018-19, an increase which amounts to 10.8 pence per week for a Band D household. We must focus on identifying and delivering our savings target for the medium term as a matter of urgency, so that our authority remains financially sustainable and autonomous for the benefit of our district residents.

Over the next three months, this authority will take a hard look at itself in the mirror and examine its fundamental core structure and systems to ensure that we really are doing things in the most efficient way possible. Investment in IT and telephony will allow residents to make contact with us more swiftly and efficiently and also enable Officers to work from different locations. It is no longer viable to simply 'tinker around

the edges', we need to reshape the authority so that it is fit for purpose to move into the next decade.

It is essential that we not only bridge the significant financial gap, but also look to create new income streams. In due course, like many other councils, we will need to enter a new phase of commerciality to generate a return on investments which will help us to preserve services to for our residents. However, this can only be done once the Council is in a sound fiscal position through securing the necessary cost savings.

Finally, I would like to thank Councillor Sismey and Councillor Dobson for their leadership of the Finance and Corporate Services Committee, not only for their role in compiling this budget, but also for providing scrutiny and authority during 2017/18.

Chairman, I commend this budget to Council.

CLLR. M.F.L. DURHAM, CC
LEADER
MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL