

Leaders Budget Speech

Good evening. Welcome Councillors, Officers, and members of the public.

I am here to present the annual budget for 2025/26 for Maldon District Council, alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2025/26 – 2028/29. The annual budget and MTFS are the result of months of collaborative work between officers and Members.

Together, we have developed a financial strategy that supports the Council's strategic priorities, as outlined in the revised Corporate Plan.

The financial outlook for the Council is generally positive, largely due to the recently approved leisure contract, which will provide significant commercial income over the long term. This of course, will require good contract management and diligence throughout the contract term.

Additionally, over the past year, we have implemented numerous improvements across the Council, demonstrating our commitment to efficiency, savings, and technological advancements, which have further strengthened our financial position.

The local government landscape however is a completely different situation to last year. Local Government reorganisation and Devolution changes some of our priorities and our focus as members. We need to ensure that we leave the Maldon District in a good place and that we have plans in place to ensure that we are focused upon what we can do for the long-term benefit of the district.

I would also like to thank Mr Cookson for getting to grips with the finances so quickly and I know we all appreciate the excellent Finance team we have at Maldon. That alongside our new Chief Executive Mr Wilkinson and our Deputy Mr Dodson, who, working with their assistant directors and budget managers have ensured we produce a balanced budget. I know we really appreciate officers work and the members of the working groups for their diligence, commitment, and constructive challenges, ensuring the proposed budget is robust, sustainable, and reflects the needs of our community.

With the revised corporate plan, we now have the opportunity to set the service plans to the budget. This will enable us to deliver on a council that works for its residents, businesses and visitors.

I want to thank members of all political groups and the nonaligned, in the way we have worked constructively together to enable a council that is stable and focused. This has improved how we are seen locally, in Essex, regionally and nationally. We have presence on both regional and national working groups and organisations. We can be proud of what we have achieved.

Our commitment to delivering good quality services continues, with officers delivering for our residents. There is more we can do to improve how some of our services are delivered.

We have listened to our residents and as part of the budget, we are reintroducing green bags for food recycling. This will help residents, to work with us in delivering the highest recycling rates in Essex and to continue to be one of the best councils in the country for our waste services.

As part of our corporate plan, we have a focus to support our local businesses and towns. I would therefore ask members to support the recommendation, not to introduce car parking charges in Burnham.

Across the council by introducing new systems, software and processes we have improved our services and become more efficient. This has brought benefits to our residents and increased savings.

The introduction of the new leadership structure has fostered closer collaboration between Officers and Members. This will continue this year and work with both officers and members will take place to identify and establish, the best way for the organisation to be structured. This will enable further efficiency and also support the organisation through the LGR process.

We have initiated several projects to enhance community facilities and accessibility. These include upgrading play areas at Prom Park, improving the BMX track, and adding a new accessible play site at Riverside Park. A new pontoon has been installed in Burnham on Crouch, replacing the one destroyed by a storm. New skateparks are being developed in Maldon and Burnham on Crouch.

With limited resources and a team effort, the Council successfully delivered its £1 million UK Shared Prosperity Funding allocation, investing in projects across the district. We also awarded 19 Rural England Prosperity grants, totalling £396K, to businesses in our rural community.

The council continues to collaborate with Essex Police on community safety and, with PFCC funding, has increased speed enforcement at district hotspots. The Community Engagement Team is expanding services like community patrols and speed enforcement from April 2025.

Our partnership with the NHS has been fruitful, delivering health and well-being activities, prevention campaigns, and the One Maldon District Partnership work. Through this collaboration, we have provided £63K of Thriving Places funding to community groups across the district. We have supported five community-based projects to enhance their delivery and further support residents in areas of mental health, reducing social isolation and access to services.

We have also strengthened our relationship with the NHS and Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board. The challenge of the health services still exists in the district and the Chief Executive and I have been part of the working group to ensure that services remain in the district. We are also working with the community group. We do seem to be working towards a long-term solution, and the provision of health services in the district is in a much better position than this time last year.

It has been a successful year for delivering Public Health, Sports England, Active Essex, and Active Maldon funding. The Beat the Street programme saw over 5,000 residents participate, walking an impressive 38,650 miles. We have invested in various sporting activities, including swimming sessions for children with SEND needs, new football and tennis equipment, and after-school activity clubs.

Our Supporting Local Business programme has also been successful, with fully subscribed business events and support. The Let's Do Business Group has achieved remarkable results, delivering much more for our businesses at a fraction of the previous cost.

As part of our new corporate plan, we will be developing a culture and heritage strategy, this will enable the council to support tourism, culture, and heritage, which plays a vital role in our local economy.

Looking ahead, we will continue to improve processes to enhance the customer experience and organisational efficiency. We will be data-driven, updating corporate reporting and performance indicators to measure the delivery of the new Corporate Plan and maintaining robust corporate governance processes, to deliver value for money. We can really focus on our budget and service delivery plans, so that they are tied together.

We will continue with the IT strategy roadmap, reducing systems and costs, developing more cost-effective contracts, and delivering new technology improvements; including the use of AI. We will develop our Organisational Development and Workforce Strategy to ensure we are well-resourced, and that staff are suitably trained.

We will invest in our assets, updating and installing leisure equipment, and improving open spaces and parks. We will deliver an updated Local Development Plan and work with partners to attract inward investment.

The Chancellor's autumn budget confirmed another one-year allocation of UKSPF funding. We look forward to investing the £327K in more projects across the district. Members will see this evening that there is an opportunity to maximise this funding by using reserves to match fund the investment in our district. The intention is to ensure that we allocate funding to community projects across the district.

I am under no illusion as to the scale of the challenges we face; however I remain optimistic that by continuing with our collaborative working, and I am sure all members welcome the opportunity to continue with this, and that together with officers we will meet those challenges.

With the demands that we face, working with our external partners is crucial to the lives of residents and the success of organisations with the district. I am sure we can deliver the best possible outcomes for the district.

Members, the proposed budget and MTFS before you this evening provide a financial framework and strategic plan for us to deliver the priorities in our Corporate Plan. I believe we have the financial resources, workforce, leadership, and determination to achieve these goals. I look forward to you to supporting the budget, and the medium-term financial strategy presented this evening.