

Maldon District Council Report 2017/18

Local Government finance remains constrained with spending as a percentage of GDP by central government on local government at its lowest since 1945.

Currently all districts, borough and county councils receive grants from central government, the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). For the Maldon District Council this supplements the monies it receives from council tax and a proportion of business rates.

Maldon District Council has seen its RSG gradually cut since the austerity measures came in to being and it has been reduced from £5.6M to £2.2M in 2019/20.

The Government had announced approximately two years ago that the RSG would be abolished from 2020 with the aim being that councils would be allowed to retain the business rates that currently go to the central government.

At first it was considered that meant councils would be able to retain 100% of the business rates that they collected but it is now likely that it will be in the region of 75%.

However, the act that was required to bring this in has not been passed and therefore at this time local government is uncertain exactly where funding will come from in 2020.

The Council to close the funding gap, due primarily to the reduction in RSG, has delivered cost and efficiency savings as well as other measures.

Due to the Council's history of prudent, effective and efficient financial controls all key services for residents have been protected.

However, any further funding reductions may have a more severe impact.

The Council in the current financial year has delivered a balanced budget but the next two years reflect a deficit of over £1.4M which will need to be addressed appropriately.

The Council's reserves could cover the gap, but the decision has been made that it would not be sound management just to use the reserves to plug the gap. Therefore, a full study into how the Council operates and how its structures its processes has been commissioned to ascertain if the organisation is structured in the best way to achieve its objectives.

Other Councils have gone down this route and the exercise has transformed many and enabled the funding gap to be closed and maintain frontline services.

The project has just started at Maldon and it is hoped that the Council should be in receipt of a report at the end of April.

At the current time Parish Councils have not been subjected to matters that affect them fiscally as other tiers of local government have. In the future it is anticipated that some tasks carried out in the higher tiers of local government may be devolved down to parish Councils.

Some efficiency measures taken by the Maldon District Council have had an impact on the parish councils, particularly with regard to some areas with respect to the planning services.

The Maldon District Council is the Local Planning Authority and therefore determines planning applications received. Parish Councils are generally included as consultees in the planning process. However, parish councils are not statutory consultees and the law at this present time states that the LPA is only obliged to advise parish councils if they make a specific request to be notified.

The Maldon District Council will though continue to advise all parish councils each week about all the applications that are validated in the Maldon District.

In the past planning applications had to be submitted in paper form with several copies so that various consultees could be circulated with a copy. It is no longer the case that paper form is a requirement of the submission of a planning application and in fact most applications are now submitted directly to the authority electronically. Consequently, it has been very expensive and time consuming taking up officer resource to make paper copies and print them and send them to Parish Councils and therefore as a result paper copies will no longer be provided and sent to the Parish Councils of the district.

All the planning applications and documents related to them are on the Council's website and can be viewed on line with some Parish Councils having elected to print off relevant planning applications to assist the parish in considerations/discussions.

Parishioners can look on line and view any planning application they so wish, and this would help Parish Clerks so that they do not have to print off hard copies.

Planning Notices are generally posted outside of the site with respect to any planning applications that the authority has received with respect to planning proposals of the site. This enables residents to obtain the planning reference number so that, should they wish to do so, planning applications can be viewed on line. Alternatively, at certain defined times a planning duty officer is available at the Maldon District Offices and planning applications may be viewed on file subject to a request having been made. Plus, normally neighbour notification of any proposed development as a result of a planning application(s)

received is sent to immediate neighbouring properties so that neighbours that may be directly affected are aware of proposals.

Another efficiency measure that has recently been introduced to streamline the planning process is the removal of the 'parish trigger'. It is unfortunate that this has resulted in some misunderstandings.

The 'parish trigger' is something that appears to have been unique to the Maldon District Council. It was simply a method that automatically directed a planning application for determination by a planning committee, instead of by a professional planning officer operating under delegated powers, when the Parish Council's consultation view of objection(s) and hence refuse was not the same as the planning officers consideration to approve.

There were some issues with the 'parish trigger' which as a result it was common place that many applications ended up being sent to a planning committee unnecessarily.

Obviously, this resulted in officer resources needing to be applied and hence a cost which was somewhat expensive and also, on occasions, incurred a delay in an application being determined.

Parish Councils are still a key part of the planning process and they can still request a particular planning application is sent to committee for determination but now it is done by asking the Ward Members to call in each case individually. Also, other members as per the defined list, in addition to Ward Members, can be approached and asked to 'call in' a planning application.

It appears that the result is, from early indications, that there has been a reduction in the number of routine cases being sent to committee but still ensuring that any contentious planning applications may be referred upwards to the planning committee.

National Government has given a target to all Local Planning Authorities that 80% of planning applications are to be determined under delegated powers and therefore this process ensures that objective is likely to be met.

The Council's relatively new waste collection scheme is working well and has been widely accepted by residents. The rate of recycling in the district has improved considerably and now the Council's position is second across the County. Previously, under the old regime, we were near to the bottom of the rankings.

The Council's Parks and Leisure Services are as active as ever putting on and planning new events. The service is admired both county and nationwide.

The Park Rangers was a valued service and being innovative the Council recognised that the team could actually offer/do more for the benefit of all in the district. So the service has grown and developed in to a Community Protection Team with the rangers being known as Community Protection Officers. It is a model that others across the county and nationwide have shown an interest in and perhaps may go on to be adopted by others.

The team are uniformed and carry body cams at all times whilst on duty. They carry out parking enforcement in car parks and the roadside, tackle anti-social behaviour, dog fouling, fly posting, littering, speeding on the estuary, and more recently have been trained and have the powers to carry out speed enforcement. Maldon District Council is the first authority in the country to have civil officers that can issue speeding penalties.

The Community Protection Officers have been trained to operate a device called Trucam which takes a high definition photograph of the vehicle with details of speed and location. The equipment can even be used with regard to drivers not wearing a seat belt or using a mobile phone while driving. Since the team have been operating Trucam hundreds of reports have been sent to the Police who process the data and issue the penalty notices.

This is not a money-making enterprise for the council as the money from fines is not retained by the council. However, it does make the district a safer place by making the roads safer for all.

The Council was successful in obtaining approval of its Local Development Plan (LDP) by the Secretary of state following its second examination in public by a different inspector from the first examination.

The Council therefore can control the use of land and where it wants development rather than being subjected to a host of hostile developments which seek to dictate where development should occur.

Strategic allocations are clearly detailed within the plan. The number of hostile planning applications received by the authority has decreased significantly since the approval/adoption of the LDP.

The Government is intent on increasing the numbers of homes and the delivery of the same across the country. Therefore, it has recently stated that all Local Plans will need to be reviewed every five years.

With a Local Development Plan in place, with its suite of local planning policies, for the Maldon District means that planning applications will be determined in accordance with the LDP policies unless material planning considerations may indicate otherwise.

Also, the council due to having an up to date approved LDP currently has a five-year land supply.

National policy requires councils to have enough sites ready for development to meet their housing need for the next five years. That is what is meant be a five-year housing land supply.

If a council has an up-to-date local plan, that usually isn't a problem. That plan, as the Maldon District LDP does, should identify enough sites for housing development to meet housing need. National Policy says that when a council doesn't have a five-year supply of housing land all of its policies for delivering housing are out-of-date. Instead of planning applications being decided based on what local policies say, national policies will instead take precedence. In essence, that means that if a site can be considered sustainable development then planning permission should be granted. A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) titled Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Technologies was consulted on for a six-week period at the beginning of 2018. It will go to Council for adoption in May 2018.

Two further SPDs have been drawn up, one to do with Affordable Housing and the other Specialist Housing and these have recently been presented to the Planning and Licensing Committee to seek approval to go out to consultation, which was agreed.

Maldon District Council and Essex County Council recently hosted the Annual Conference of authorities that have existing or new nuclear power stations in their area. The group of authorities is named NNLAG (National Nuclear Local Authorities Group). The purpose of the annual event is to hear about developments in the nuclear industry and to discuss the new facilities that are being built. By sharing information, we can ensure that we gain the benefit of valuable knowledge from those councils that are ahead of us.

The proposed new nuclear power station in Bradwell may have moved slightly nearer to reality with work having commenced on ground studies/investigations late last year.

The design of the new type of reactor is being assessed by the government and it is considered that work could possibly start on site in about five years if all the necessary permissions are successful and approved. Numerous community benefits would be achieved, as has been seen at Hinckley Point, however it is appreciated that not everyone is happy about the possible development of new nuclear facilities at Bradwell.

Business and enterprise is important to the district as it is business that provides jobs and enable prosperity. The Economic Development Team have been engaged with businesses throughout the year including attending and supporting the Burnham on Crouch Chamber of Commerce and helping facilitate the set up of the Causeway Business Forum.

The Chairman of the Council has been going around the district visiting various businesses. As with the previous Chairman of the Council the Chairman held Business Awards which included several categories to which Councillors and others could nominate worthy businesses. The Awards ceremony was held at the Stow Maries Aerodrome.

Consultants are currently looking in to sites and other matters for an Enterprise Centre for the district. Magnox have been supportive of the project including allocation of some funding towards it.

The two Coastal Community Teams, River Blackwater and Crouch CCTs, have had a relatively successful year recognising the importance of the Rivers and how they have a major role to play in tourism. The Crouch CCT having produced a tourism leaflet that informs people what is in the area and places that they can visit.

The Vineyards in Althorne and elsewhere south of the district have grown from strength to strength and several articles, including one in The Telegraph, have highlighted them and their success in the production of grapes and wine production.

Clayhill Vineyard due to a successful Essex Leader Funding Bid has built a café so that people can enjoy coffee and cake while visiting and overlooking the vineyard and the River Crouch.

The Sense of Place Board, headed by the Chairman Charlie Fillingham, has met several times during the year and the branding for the district is now being more widely used. It can be used alongside businesses own individual branding. The Sense of Place tells the story of the Maldon District and illustrates what a good place it is , a good place to live, work and visit .

Development is progressing well on the Blackwater retail site in Maldon with a Topping Out ceremony having been held recently. Several well-known stores have already confirmed that they intend to take up units, including Next, Home Bargains, Aldi, Costa Coffee and a well known sports outlet. Others are currently in discussion and hopefully confirmation of who they are may be known shortly.

Early 2018 saw Paul Dodson arrive at Maldon District Council to take up the position of the Director of Planning and Regulatory Services. Paul has significant experience from working in Cumbria and also at Essex County Council, to name but two areas. His arrival has seen the Corporate Leadership Team positions of the Chief Executive and three Directors filled.

It has been a privilege, honour and a pleasure to represent and serve the residents of the Mayland Ward (which includes the Parishes of Mayland , Steeple and St Lawrence) this past year and remain happy in the future to hear from residents regarding any problems/issues that they may have or if they have any

views/ comments that they may wish to raise/share. Contact details (address, telephone numbers etc.) can be found on the Maldon District Council's website.