

**Mr Chairman**

**We stand today at a crossroads. This is a very different budget to those that this Council has seen before. It is a budget for change, it is a budget for economic prosperity and social well-being, it is a budget that draws on the positive experience of others and it is a budget that reflects the wishes of the many different communities in our area. Above all, it is a budget that deals with the present and a budget that deals with the future.**

**The decisions we make tonight will have effects that will be felt in the next 10 -15 years (and hopefully beyond), not only in economic and social terms, but in political and democratic terms as well. Above all else, we must make sure that those decisions are made solely in the long-term interests of all our residents, in all parts of our district, and not for any other reasons.**

**First, a little background –**

**As has been highlighted recently, we have pockets of deprivation (in various forms) within our District and it is also a fact that Tendring, because of its historic structural conditions, economically underperforms the rest of Essex and East Anglia.**

**Over and above that we face a very worrying economic outlook, both globally and nationally. Events outside of our control bring the very real threat of recession to our country and, given the seasonal nature of our local economy, to our district.**

**It paints a gloomy picture, but one that we all have to face up to. We can sit and watch it happen or, as I believe, we can take what's been described as a “once in a generation opportunity” to help soften its immediate effects, taking advantage of renewed and greater prosperity when the national economy turns the corner.**

**I am positive that, with the right vision and with the right leadership, we can change this. The budget before you tonight is a major step towards that change.**

**However, none of what I am going to propose tonight would have been possible without a solid financial foundation and, for this, I pay tribute to previous administrations who have**

**worked closely with the management board and officers to bring us to this position - envied throughout Essex and recognised throughout the country. That work continues to this day.**

**Whilst this Council, in overall terms, has been rated a good council, with positive recognition of its direction of travel, there is much more to the story than that. Over and above those measures of performance, the National Audit Commission recently awarded us (on a grading of 1 to 4) an overall 4 use of resources rating, which incorporated our financial stability, the robustness of our financial forecasting, our financial management and value for money.**

**If you think that over half the other Districts and Boroughs in Essex are struggling with a 2 rating or less, it clearly illustrates how strongly positioned this Council is and also how it did not happen by accident. Then remember that, combined with town and parish precepts, Tendring households pay the lowest taxes for their services within this District than any other District or Borough in the County and you will realise what an opportunity we possess. It is an opportunity we must not let slip through our fingers.**

**Nevertheless, nowhere in this budget will you read about cuts in, and cancellation of services. The same is not true elsewhere in the County, as some of our fellow councils struggle to balance their books, yet face severe criticism for poor services. There is even one area in Essex with a black hole of £1 million in its accounts; it is about to lose its CEO and risks being pushed into a forced marriage with the County Council. If you want to look for waste, for cutbacks and for financial mishap, then look elsewhere. If you want stability, continued improvements in services, value for money and opportunity for the future, then stay close to home.**

**Mr Chairman, I realise that it is all very well to use fine words, but let's look at three specific examples of how we manage our financial affairs well, how we operate our services efficiently, how we are able to create opportunities for economic and social wellbeing and how we still give outstanding value for money.**

**At the beginning of last year, TDC signed a new contract for waste disposal. Moving totally against the national trend and, more importantly, listening to what our residents told us they wanted, we introduced a weekly collection of recycling alongside the weekly collection of waste. A year later, our residents have responded magnificently and we are experiencing a substantial increase in the tonnage recycled. This obviously pays us a major and very**

pleasing environmental dividend, but there has been a significant financial one as well, since much less waste is now going to land-fill and we are being rewarded accordingly.

The second illustration arose when we were asked to explore joint working in the distribution of benefits, a major function of this and other councils and one that logically could benefit from economies of scale. However, it became quickly clear that our processing costs were much lower than being targeted as a result of joint working, underlining once again how real value for money is being delivered in this District.

The third example is the Clacton Town Centre. Just like any major change, it has been disruptive, controversial and has drawn its critics. But, like any major change, it needs to be judged over time. The signs are that some critics have already changed their minds and see the positive benefits, especially when they note that local and outside businesses are already investing new money into Clacton as a result of the much improved Town Square. However, it is still early to judge properly, especially in face of the difficult national economic scene, but this Council will not only continue to provide leadership and vision in transforming Clacton into a vibrant and prosperous community, but also will do the same in our other communities.

Mr Chairman, I am pleased to present a triple A (AAA) budget that is:

**Affordable - with a 4% (or an average 11p) increase in Council Tax**

**Appropriate - after taking a tough but balanced look at both our priorities and the money that is available to manage them**

**Ambitious – giving us the resources to take a huge step towards the transformation of this District and its various communities, large and small.**

As I said earlier, we did not get here by accident. We got here (starting this process in the early summer of last year) by not just looking at all our cost pressures, but weighing up all our ambitions as well. What is being proposed tonight is based on solid and sustainable financial foundations.

At this stage, I'd like to express my thanks to the Corporate Management Committee, under their Chairman Graham Steady, for their contribution to the budget scrutiny process. In two separate 2-day sessions, this cross-party committee put forward many financial recommendations, almost all of which you see in the budget today. In addition, the Committee provided many thoughtful suggestions for future discussion and these will all be looked at over the coming months.

Returning to the budget, at the public meeting of the Cabinet in December, we made specific recommendations to this Council in terms of our spending. I don't propose to repeat them once more as they have been published already and are listed in the document in front of you. Nevertheless, you will see that some of the larger items are conditional on bringing in substantial funding from other sources. It was the Cabinet's wish to extend this principle much further and much wider, leading to the introduction of Project Tendring.

**Project Tendring is all about regeneration.**

Over the last few months, a tremendous momentum of belief has been building up between senior members and officers that the very exceptional needs of Tendring demand a step change in the delivery of real regeneration. This includes not only economic development but also the physical, social and environmental transformation of our district. We are now at the stage where the question is now not whether it can be done, but how it can be done.

**Project Tendring is all about local communities and partnership**

It recognises the disparate needs of different parts of the district and the necessity of engaging with individuals, partners and groups in the diverse communities of Tendring. It is also a powerful way for the Council to make its contribution to the delivery of the aspirations set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy, co-authored and co-owned by Tendring's Local Strategic Partnership. Through regeneration we, together with our partners at Essex County Council, the Police, the Voluntary Sector and the PCT (to name but a few), can address the themes of health, economic development, children and young people, crime and disorder, deprivation and environment that we have put down as our collective challenges between now and 2016.

To help achieve this, there are five main components to Project Tendring, three of them reflecting the wider geography of the District.

- Harwich and the Stour Valley
- Clacton and the Coastal Towns
- Brightlingsea and the Villages of Mid Tendring.

Over and above that, we need to help improve the quality of life for all our residents, through culture, sport and other social activities. This goes under the name of Dynamic Tendring, it affects all areas of the District and, accordingly, it will be coordinated centrally.

Finally, we need to address the very specific and complex issue of Jaywick and I am pleased to say we have had near cross-party support in our proposal to provide £1 million of expected future capital receipts in the next few years as our contribution to this major task. There has generally been a positive reaction to that first step and I am heartened to hear, albeit through unofficial sources, that Essex County Council are minded to make a £3 million contribution which, if true, is a very welcome vindication of this Council's initiative and leadership. Hopefully, this money comes with no significant strings attached and is as clear and unequivocal a contribution as our own.

More specifically, what is the approach to Project Tendring ?

- As I announced in December, there are four guiding principles
- Locality based.....

Tendring is not a homogeneous unit with the same needs throughout the whole district. Project Tendring reflects this. It recognises that the needs of Harwich and the Stour Coast – the north of Tendring – are different from those of Clacton and the coastal towns to the south of the district. In turn, the requirements of both are very different from those of the rural areas inland. And people across the whole district will benefit from a strong collective focus on the improved quality of life and participation agenda enshrined in the Dynamic Tendring project.

The scale and requirement for a closer, more individual focus on the different communities of Tendring has become more apparent during the visits I have made to nearly all of Tendring's 27 town and parish Councils over the past few months or so, drawing my attention to projects like the Brightlingsea Youth Club, the Lawford Football Pavillion, the Hamford Water Nature Reserve, Dovercourt Town Centre and the

**Wrabness Village Hall to name but a few. Project Tendring is designed to help bring these community aspirations closer to reality.**

- **Whole Council.....**

**The successful regeneration of the district will be achieved more effectively and more quickly if the whole Council unites and works to drive these projects forward for the benefit of the people who live and work in Tendring. Such an over-arching project, the first stage of which will take 10-15 years, also takes us through several electoral cycles and it is important that the work, once started, continues to completion.**

**With that in mind, the project delivery boards for each project will be set up with members of opposition groups on the Council, as well as other partners of the Council, invited to join them. More than that, we want all Members, as a first step, to be engaged themselves, both by contributing ideas and directly through the provision of a budget for each member of the Council to spend for the benefit of the people of their ward.**

**It is also vital that the thinking and commitment to the regeneration and reshaping of our district contained in these five project segments become the driving culture throughout the work of the Council itself so that staff and members are able to contribute wholeheartedly to the overall aim of regenerating the district through their various day to day roles and activities.**

- **With partners.....**

**It is quite evident that the regeneration and/or transformation of Tendring is not something the Council can begin to achieve on its own. Joined up service delivery with our partner public service providers is something we have been working on for some years and we are getting better at it. But we also need to work more closely with the groups who are closer to the communities than we are – voluntary and community based organisations and groups, such as the Older Persons Forum, which I now meet regularly with.**

**A core part of the approach is to work with individuals, partners and community groups to achieve impacts on the ground in their areas, to support them with the capacity –**

time, knowledge and skills – to help themselves. In essence, we are looking to engage and involve people and communities to work with us in partnership.

- Leveraging in finance (and expertise)....

Each of the five projects has, at its heart, the aim of bringing additional resources into Tendring, to meet the needs of and provide benefits for the people of Tendring. Experience elsewhere shows this can run into 10's of millions of pounds and perhaps much, much more. We shall work hard to win extra resources for the district, whether through new investment delivering better housing, living environments, town centres and jobs or through targeted grants which require work to develop bids and to support the implementation of projects when successful. As a very relevant example, the Cabinet and Senior Officers have already had a very constructive discussion with English Partnerships, a major national source of regeneration funding and expertise, and looks to develop that relationship more intensively in the coming months and years as English Partnerships becomes part of the new Homes and Communities Agency.

*The approach to Project Tendring – how is this likely to take shape?*

I have asked officers to bring forward proposals to the Cabinet in March which will include the following:

- The structural options for delivering Project Tendring.
- A widened and more inclusive membership – with the possibility of inviting opposition leaders to join
- The provision of nearly £1.3m of financing over three years to ensure sustainability in getting Project Tendring off to the best of starts. This, in the main, will be used to employ expert staff and give us the capacity for regeneration. It is well recognised that this approach leads to extra external funding being made available, potentially adding anything up to £5 million to the overall budget.

True and lasting success will only be achieved by creating vital capacity which we do not currently have – people with the specialist skills and, equally importantly, the time to dedicate and focus on delivering the various projects, all supported by the

**Leadership and Membership of the Council and the whole staff of the Council. This means allocating and moving resources – money, people and time – to support this top priority issue for our Council and for our District**

- **The creation of three area boards – also proposing the inclusion of opposition members as well as other representatives and partners, although numbers will be limited to ensure focus and efficiency.**
- **Examination of the various options that can be effectively used to manage the key staff and successfully deliver on all the individual and collective projects**
- **Focus on driving regeneration and community transformation projects, large and small, across the district.**
- **Development of community forums to feed into the Area Boards. This could entail creating new small area forums under the leadership of our Town Mayors or may, more simply, be based on our current network of town and parish councils with, of course, an alternative solution for our un-parished areas.**

**Mr. Chairman, for good house-keeping's sake, this exciting and ambitious approach to the transformation of the District will obviously entail a rebasing of our Corporate Strategy and I am similarly asking officers to produce the necessary reports and recommendations to support this. Whilst this will take a little more time, proposals for the delivery of Project Tendring should be put before you at our meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup>.**

**In the meantime, it is my intention (in consultation with my colleague the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) to allocate £50,000 of the voluntary sector funding identified in the recommendations before you to Tendring Community Voluntary Services and £50,000 to Tendring Citizens Advice Bureau in the coming year. This is in continued recognition of the valuable work that both these organisations do within our community.**

**Also, I have recognised the call for even greater clarity and simplicity in the operation of the Members' Small Schemes Grant Fund. In the short term, it is my intention to increase that fund to £120,000 this year, allocating £2,000 to each ward member to utilise at his or her discretion, in consultation with their local community. This will give every member the ability**

to make a tangible contribution to their own areas and, as such, I hope this is welcomed by everyone in this Council.

The rules will be simple (probably using a basic pro-forma system) and flexible. The money does not have to be spent this year and can be rolled up with future grant allocations, it can be combined with other members' allocations to create the opportunity for larger projects and/or it can be used as seed corn capital to draw in new funding. I shall invite one of our O&S Committees to suggest the best way forward.

Finally, when I look at the major task ahead of us, the various projects and schemes that Project Tendring (with the guidance of our different communities) will spearhead, it is quite obvious that much more than time and capacity is required. In my recent visits to our towns and parishes, very many individual projects, large and small, came to light. With Project Tendring, we shall be aim to provide the expertise and the support to help these communities help themselves, but what would also be of tremendous help is to find financial support as well.

As such, I am proposing that a further £1.5 million of potential future capital receipts is allocated to Project Tendring, spread over the coming years, but with a mechanism to ensure there is an even-handed approach in place that is eventually fair to everyone. The more mathematically astute of you will recognise that this equates to a benchmark of £25,000 per member, meaning that all communities, great and small, could benefit.

Once again, there would and should be no pressure to spend all this money as soon as possible. In fact, the reality of the situation is that the resources put behind the projects will need to be prioritised

However, by earmarking funds, this allows communities that do not have ready or urgent projects to hand to take their time in deciding and planning them, using their money well and using it wisely.

All of a sudden, the building of a new football pavilion in Lawford to support the activities of more than 300 children could tonight take a closer step to reality, the purchase of the 4youth centre building in Brightlingsea could tonight become less of a dream or the long-awaited redevelopment of Dovercourt Town Centre could tonight move significantly closer to inception.

However, it is not for me to say what projects our communities should put forward, in what priority and how such capital should be spent within the framework of Project Tendring – this is a matter for members and our other community representatives to decide on and to contribute their ideas and proposals over the coming years.

Nor should we fool ourselves that it will be easy, as the sale of assets can often be an emotive issue, not just an economic one. Likewise, the timing of sales to release funding is a hard matter to call, leading to delay and frustration. It's quite obvious that there will have to be some hard and fast rules about how this is all managed, but with the right input and a good consensus, I believe it is eminently achievable.

Mr Chairman, I have spent some time this evening outlining this Administration's vision for this District, a vision fed not least by the aspirations and ideas of the various communities and local organisations that I have made contact with in the last six months. I have also introduced the democratic methods and professional resources through which we shall achieve our individual and collective goals.

Finally, I have ensured that we put the necessary financial backing in place (potentially amounting to some £5 million), not only to provide the launch pad for a new, ambitious and enterprising way of working for this Council, but also to give all our communities a meaningful financial capability to make a significant improvement to their individual ways of life.

As such, Mr. Chairman, I present this budget for 2008/9 and beyond. In doing so, I look for all members' support and help, not only tonight in terms of their vote, but for many years to come in taking an active part in the major transformation and regeneration of our District. In endorsing this budget, I can do no better than quote the Council's motto "Pro bono omnium" – For the Good of All.

Mr. Chairman, I call on this Council to support this budget and, in doing so, support the people of Tendring.