

Report from District Cllr - July 2025



CEO of WLDC

Bill Cullen CEO of Hinkley & Bosworth Borough Council has been appointed interim CEO until the arrival of the new CEO

The new CEO, Mr Paul Burkinshaw succeeds Ian Knowles who retired in June, and will join the organisation from his current role as Deputy Chief Executive across both Brentwood Borough and Rochford District Councils bringing a wealth of experience in local government leadership.

Full Council on Monday 7th of July

The Leader and his Deputy were removed as a result of a motion that they had lost the confidence of a substantial group of Liberal colleagues. They had done nothing wrong whilst in office, and I pay compliment to their hard work over the past two years representing the Council. The debate that ensued was acrimonious and in my opinion, as I was present, brought the Council into disrepute.

WLDC is not rudderless, or paralysed, it continues to provide the necessary services and the committees are still functioning. However, the Leader sits on some important committees such as concerning devolution etc. and therefore it is important that this post is filled as expediently as possible.

The 'rebel cllrs' who voted with the Conservatives probably face expulsion from the Liberal party along with those who abstained, such as the Chairman and Vice Chair of WLDC. If this is the position, it will reduce the liberals to a 'rump' and take away its election mandate obtained in the election of 2023 to administer the Council. It was most unfortunate that the disgruntled liberals, all of whom were suspended that evening, had not the 'guts' to move the motion, leaving it to two independents.

The Liberals need to get their act together and sort out the rebels who if expelled, may either join the Conservatives or become an independent group. The Conservatives may wish to take power, but they will have no election mandate to do so.

On the other hand, the next 3 years may result in a 'coalition' of all political shades and this may indeed be the way forward.

I chair Overview and Scrutiny, and I do not expect to be continuing going to the 'back benches' in September. The havoc that had been created cannot be sorted out immediately and I suggested that Council take time to reflect but have things in place on 8th of Sept at the next Full Council. That recommendation was carried approvingly.

I spoke in the debate saying, *"What would the man on the omnibus make of these proceedings?"* I have never witnessed such a spectacle in all my 15 years on the Council and was embarrassed and ashamed of what transpired on the floor of the council chamber. I understand that social media and the press naturally went into overdrive. The Council did not come out of this 'smelling of roses'.

Devolution:

The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon OBE MP, introduced the [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) on 10 July 2025 - a major milestone for our sector.

This Bill builds on the Government's [English Devolution White Paper](#) (Dec 2024) and signals a significant shift of powers from Whitehall to local leaders – making it one of the biggest changes to local government in 50 years. It will have a profound impact on all tiers of local government; both those at the very beginning of their devolution journey and those further along.

The timetable appears to be April 2028 and it is possible that elections in 2027 will not be held and that cllrs will continue in post until 2028. My concern has always been the loss of democratic deficit and what is proposed does not fill me with hope.

Gainsborough Market Place:

Gainsborough's brand new, state-of-the-art cinema



This continues to be a focus for regeneration, the cinema run by Savoy opens on 18 of July. I along with colleagues and officers received a guided tour of the complex last Friday. This exciting new addition to the Gainsborough town centre features fully electric recliner seating throughout its four screens, ensuring maximum comfort. Additionally, experience Savoy's Vertex 4K in screen one with next-generation 4K laser projection. It also has car parking for 50 cars. All it requires are customers to sustain the complex.

Whitton's Gardens now has a café with toilet provision. WLDC has appointed someone to manage it and it will be a great addition for families etc

Baltic Mill site – is now complete and offers additional green space on the west side of the town which was of late the industrial belt of the town. A zebra crossing is in sights to help the public cross or access these green areas from Bridge St.

The town's market place has received planters and many shop fronts have undergone refurbishment; the owners taking up the opportunity of grants. Gradually the rooms above the shops are being made over as living space to re introduce a town centre community which once existed many decades ago. The former Lloyds's Bank in Silver St is a good example.

Community Grants:

A series of grants are now open to the community. Limescales Football Club has made an application which is encouraging. The first meeting of the grant awarding panel being on 24th of July and the follow up meeting may be in late August.

There are applications coming from parishes with generous reserves [and I do not include Willoughton] and I would encourage all groups to approach their parish councils for some contribution on application to WLDC.

As a member of the funding panel, I shall be asking for officers to double check what their parish councils are sitting on unless they have projects itemized in the pipeline.

I have circulated the list of grants that may be applied for to Hazel, but the WLDC website will sign post you to the relevant page.

Emergency Plans:

WLDC is encouraging parish councils/ meetings to produce an emergency plan in preparation for an emergency which could be triggered by flooding, fire, road pile up, shooting incident etc Hemswell Cliff has experienced two significant fires of late and the latest fire incident was a learning curve for all the authorities involved. And if the evacuation of homes are involved, the village hall may well become a refuge centre.

Gainsborough Leisure Centre:



545 solar panels have been installed on the roof of this centre which is due for refurbishment. The solar panels estimated to cut around 42 tonnes of CO2 per year, which is the equivalent of planting 1,966 trees, and generate a saving of around 221 MWh of annual energy production, which is equivalent to the energy used by dozens of homes per year. The upgrade will reduce energy bills and make running the swimming pool more financially sustainable, and utilising the roof space ensures leisure space is not impacted.

The installation was supported by an allocation of £401,500 from the government’s Swimming Pool Support Fund. It supports the council’s commitment to make its activities net-zero carbon by 2050.

Other news affecting us in 2029.....

16 and 17 to have extended franchise:



Lowering the voting age to 16 means there could be over one-and-a-half million more potential voters at the next general election. This also means that we could see 16 + on our parish councils, the youngest district council Cllr Jacob Fear, a distant cousin, was 18 when elected 2 years ago on WLDC.

Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North is the constituency with the biggest proportion of young people eligible to vote in a 2029 general election. Over 4,200 of its residents, 3.4% of the population, would be 16 or 17 years old by the middle of 2029.

That’s based on official population estimates from 2022 and 2023.

There are over 120 out of 650 seats where the population likely to be 16 or 17 by mid-2029 is greater than the current MP’s majority.

No-one knows how young people will vote and no-one expects them to vote the same way, but many MPs will need to think about how to win their support.

It is not the younger generation that actually votes; it is the retired generation who come out to vote. And we need to step up our education of our political system and engage with the younger generation who in my opinion are generally turned off by politicians. Those engaged are enthusiastic and informed. *What can parish councils do in preparation for this extension to the franchise which could impact on parish councils and parish meetings?*

In Hendon, which Labour won by 15 votes, there were over 3,500 children who may be able to vote by the next election.

In Basildon and Billericay, won by the Conservatives by 20 votes, there are over 150 times more children who'll be aged 16 or 17 by mid-2029, while South Basildon and East Thurrock, won by Reform UK by 98 votes, has about 2,600 potential new voters.

The Lib Dems' most slender majority is Ely and East Cambridgeshire, won by 495 votes, where there are over 2,600 potential new voters from today's announcement.

PDJ Howitt-Cowan

17/07/2025