For reasons I’ll explain in a minute, this could be my last article in Focus. This will appear in March and the next article would appear in April. However Council elections take place in May and in the run up to elections there are restrictions on what elected officials can say or do. It’s called ‘purdah’ and is basically designed to stop unfair electioneering such as me offering everyone that votes for me free beer and sandwiches at the White Harte. However, I am not standing for election in May so I’m not sure it applies. I’ve been a councillor for eight years, two of them as Mayor and I’m looking forward to handing on to new Councillors and newly elected officials. But these last few months are quite hectic. After a long, long time without a fully staffed office we have a new team of Chief Officer and Office Assistant and they are now fully up to speed and we are taking the opportunity to overhaul all our systems and processes. Some of our policies have not been updated since 2018 so it’s time for a complete refresh.

I must admit, most of the work will fall to my Deputy Mayor Duncan Rawlinson and Cllr Jennie Donnelly who will be working with the Chief Officer. Already we have asked our Internal Auditors to check our financial systems and processes and I’m pleased to say they are happy with the way we handle your money.

We are overhauling the website which is quite a task. We have to check we have everything the regulations demand we have on the site and then we need to make sure we comply with disability requirements.

So, when I had over to a new Mayor in May, the plan is to have everything updated, tried and tested to give the new Council a flying start.

However, there is one concern I can’t put right without your help. Many local parish and town councils are finding it hard to get people to stand for election. We need people who care about Burnham to replace those of us who are retiring. If we don’t get enough councillors, then Maldon District Council takes us over and our District Councillors step in. I know our District Councillors do a good job but I think Burnham needs an independent voice of its own. If you’ve ever been to a planning meeting you’ll know that we have a notice that says “District Councillors reserve their right of view at this meeting as Town Councillors and they reserve their right to a different view as District Councillors, and at other meetings.” We need people to stand to give Burnham its own voice. The office can advise you or my email address is on the website and you can contact me directly for help.

How many times have you heard ‘something must be done’? Well you can do it. It’s rewarding and you can really make a difference to the town and the people of Burnham. So when I hand over the Mayor’s chain in May I hope to see experienced councillors re-elected and some new members with exciting ideas to make Burnham an even better place to live.