

COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting held at the Council Offices, Narborough

TUESDAY, 27 JANUARY 2026

Present:-

Cllr. Roy Denney (Chairman)
Cllr. Janet Forey (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr. Shabbir Aslam	Cllr. Susan Findlay	Cllr. Ande Savage
Cllr. Royston Bayliss	Cllr. Helen Gambardella	Cllr. Tracey Shepherd
Cllr. Dr John Bloxham	Cllr. Hannah Gill	Cllr. Dillan Shikotra
Cllr. Lee Breckon JP	Cllr. Nigel Grundy	Cllr. Mike Shirley
Cllr. Nick Brown	Cllr. Paul Hartshorn	Cllr. Roger Stead
Cllr. Nick Chapman	Cllr. Richard Holdridge	Cllr. Ben Taylor
Cllr. Adrian Clifford	Cllr. Mark Jackson	Cllr. Matt Tomeo
Cllr. Cheryl Cashmore	Cllr. Becca Lunn	Cllr. Bob Waterton
Cllr. Luke Cousin	Cllr. Antony Moseley	Cllr. Jane Wolfe
Cllr. Tony Deakin	Cllr. Les Phillimore	Cllr. Maggie Wright
Cllr. Alex DeWinter	Cllr. Terry Richardson	Cllr. Neil Wright

Officers present:-

Julia Smith	- Chief Executive
Sarah Pennelli	- Executive Director - S.151 Officer
Marc Greenwood	- Executive Director - Place
Louisa Horton	- Executive Director - Communities
Gemma Dennis	- Corporate Services Group Manager
Jonathan Hodge	- Planning & Strategic Growth Group Manager
Katie Hollis	- Finance Group Manager
Sandeep Tiensa	- Senior Democratic Services & Scrutiny Officer
Avisa Birchenough	- Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer
Nicole Evans	- Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer

Honorary Alderman in attendance:-

Guy Jackson

Apologies:-

Cllr. Stuart Coar

1. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS**

Cllr. Ben Taylor	- Item 10 – Council Tax – Second Home Premium and Empty Property Premium amendments
Nature of Interest	- Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.
Extent of Interest	- Owns a buy to let property within the District.
Cllr. Terry Richardson	- Item 10 – Council Tax – Second Home Premium and Empty Property Premium amendments
Nature of Interest	- Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.
Extent of Interest	- Owns a buy to let property within the District.
Cllr. Nick Chapman	- Item 10 – Council Tax – Second Home Premium and Empty Property Premium amendments
Nature of Interest	- Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.
Extent of Interest	- Owns a buy to let property within the District.
Cllr. Antony Mosely	- Item 10 – Council Tax – Second Home Premium and Empty Property Premium amendments
Nature of Interest	- Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.
Extent of Interest	- Owns a buy to let property within the District.
Cllr. Richard Holdridge	- Item 10 – Council Tax – Second Home Premium and Empty Property Premium amendments
Nature of Interest	- Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.
Extent of Interest	- Joint ownership of buy to let properties in the District.
Cllr. Bob Waterton	- Item 10 – Council Tax – Second Home Premium and Empty Property Premium amendments
Nature of Interest	- Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.
Extent of Interest	- Partner owns buy to let properties within the District.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 18 November 2025, as circulated, were approved and signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman, Cllr. Roy Denney made announcements in respect of the following:

- Attended a meeting with the Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire to discuss the accomplishments made in 2025.
- Attended Melton Borough Councils Christmas Carol Service on 4 December 2025.
- Attended a concert with the Musical Village on 6 December 2025.
- Hosted the Blaby District Council Chairmans Christmas Carol Concert on 11 December 2025.
- Attended a Charity Quiz at Melton Mowbray.

The Chairman, Cllr. Roy Denney also made announcements in respect of the following upcoming events:

- Charity Quiz Night to raise funds for LOROS on 6 February 2026.

The Vice-Chairman, Cllr. Janet Forey made her announcements in respect of the following:

- Attended the Cosby Old People's Welfare Association Christmas lunch with the Chairman of the Council, Cllr. Roy Denney on 29 November 2025.
- Attended the Oadby & Wigston Borough Council's Christmas Carol Service held at St Peter's Church on 10 December 2025.

4. LEADER'S STATEMENT

Cllr. Alex DeWinter arrived at the meeting during this item.

The Leader, Cllr. Ben Taylor presented his statement in respect of the following:

- Homelessness Support
- Christmas Charity Hampers
- White Ribbon Campaign
- Looking forward to Community Awards
- Armed Forces Covenant Re-signing
- Joint Taxi Inspections
- Launch of the Food Waste Service
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy
- Budget Consultation 2026/27
- Number one for website accessibility
- Local Government Reorganisation update

5. PUBLIC SPEAKING PROTOCOL

No requests were received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

7. QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL RULES OF PROCEDURE

Cllr. Maggie Wright raised the following question to Cllr. Mike Shirley, Planning and Strategic Growth Portfolio Holder.

“Within my ward of Fosse Normanton, the village of Huncote is classed as a “medium sized” village within our Local Plan. This classification of villages exceeded their minimum numbers by 319 in March 2024. The combined housing figure was set between 2006 to 2029, so the figures, acknowledging minimum and not capped, have been exceeded in advance. There are now 1,575 properties within the village of Huncote. Last year the planning committee passed three significant planning application relating to this parish. This has resulted in an extra 345 dwellings. With another application for 47 residential dwellings in the pipeline plus those listed in the 2020 Call for Sites. With such a low land supply figure for the district it is highly likely these additional Call for Sites will also be included. The New Local Plan cannot therefore be termed as “the cavalry coming over the hill to save us”, with a solution. Already the village has taken 25% additional properties (if 47 passed), but the sustainability and facilities in the village have not changed. Indeed, in some villages we are losing community facilities due to the closure of community buildings. Already these opportunistic developments have

resulted in “bolted” on and not shaped developments. This is against the principal criteria of the NPPF which is sustainability. If action is not taken soon our rural villages will merge into each other and lose their individual identity. This loss cannot be justified by the veiled threat that the district will be put in special planning measures if development is refused. Once our countryside is gone it is gone for ever leaving no legacy for future generations.”

In light of the above could the portfolio holder clarify the following:

“When does the applied “Tilted Balance” factor for determining current planning permissions, swing back in favour of communities?”

“What is the Council doing to support communities across the district who are experiencing large percentage increases to their settlement numbers, (several developments coming online at the same time making small villages construction sites for several years)?”

Cllr. Mike Shirley, Planning and Strategic Growth Portfolio Holder responded:

A) “The Tilted balanced can be engaged by a number of factors,

- a lack of 5 year housing supply,
- a lack of delivery over the recent past approved sites
- Plan policies in an adopted plan being demonstrably out of date.

The granting of planning permission for a notable number of speculative sites may give the Council a 5 year housing land supply in the relatively near term but the tilted balance could still be engaged by developers as a result of a lack of recent housing delivery. The Adoption by Council of a new local plan is the remedy which will give communities the power to resist inappropriate or excessive development.

B) When considering sites for the emerging Local Plan our Development Strategy team take into account the scale or size of the village within the settlement hierarchy, together with the range of services and facilities it has including its connectivity and public transport links. However, with the significant housing requirement we have, most settlements are needing to contribute to housing growth. Where villages are subject to speculative applications which will come forward in the near term the appropriateness of further growth will be carefully considered by the Council to ensure excessive growth does not take place which undermines the sustainability or integrity of those villages.”

Cllr. Maggie Wright asked the following supplementary question:

“What is this Council doing specifically from a practical initiatives point of view to help small village communities cope with the cumulative impact of

three to four major developments taking place at the same time, increasing their settlements, in my case by over 25%.”

The Planning and Strategic Growth Group Manager responded:

“We are providing a Statement of Common Ground and intend to publish a Local Plan Regulation 19 in April 2026, this is the best protection for our residents. We are also looking at community groups however we can only engage with developers as much as developers allow, we cannot force developers to engage with local communities. We do however ensure that all developers have environmental management plans and construction management plans in place as required by legislation.”

8. QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL RULES OF PROCEDURE

Cllr. Luke Cousin raised the following question to Cllr. Ben Taylor, Leader of the Council:

"I was surprised to read recently that levels of reading for pleasure are at an all time low. National Year of Reading 2026 has been set up, a collaboration between the Department of Education and the National Literacy Trust, to help promote reading in children and adults alike.

Some statistics from the national literacy trust in 2025 have found just 1 in 3 children enjoy reading. Fewer than 1 in 5 read daily. It should come as no surprise that young people who enjoy reading have statistically significant improved literacy scores, which directly links to school grades and comprehension in our increasingly feed focused online world.

As part of the initiative, individuals, businesses, and communities are being asked to get involved. I have signed up to become a National Year of Reading Champion. I, currently, coordinate with one of my local schools, Manorfield C of E Primary School, as a member of the Parent, Teacher and Friends Association (PTFA), to run a Literary Festival which is in its 4th year. We have had Masked Reader games, writing competitions, Library integration events, a Roving bookshop, and a Book Swap. which sees families donate unwanted books which are subsequently made freely available for other students to take, ensuring every child has book of their choice to read. The spine (pardon the pun) of the event is a read-a-thon, an optional participatory fundraising event to promote the students to raise money in exchange for reading books, or however parents and guardians want to encourage them to read, with suggestions and new themes each year.

I have been promoting reading of any type as beneficial, as long as the child enjoys it. This includes, but is not limited to; graphic novels, manuals, walk-through guides for games, fiction and non-fiction books, poetry and, even,

community information boards.

I know we are not the education authority, however, we have a remit in the community and I would like to ask our community and youth focused cabinet members and champions what we will do for our communities to promote this worthy initiative for 2026?

I also ask whether Blaby District Council, as an employer, and our councillors will sign up to be champions, like I have, and actively encouraged our residents to find the joy in reading, once again?"

Cllr. Ben Taylor, Leader of the Council responded:

"This is a great initiative and I fully support us encouraging children across Blaby District to read and enjoy reading. If you are happy to co-ordinate I think we should all be encouraged to get involved in the book swap by giving you suitable books we might have. In addition, I would encourage all Councillors to look at the champions roles and if they are interested encourage them to sign up. I'd also advocate us to spread the word about this work through our community networks. I would like to add that as part of the volunteering scheme we run for staff that many have in the past been and read with children in local schools and we will continue to operate and facilitate opportunities such as this going forward. As this is a question there is no time to debate this matter, as such perhaps this is something we can explore further at our group leaders meeting, with the option to consider as a motion at our next Council meeting."

9. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025 - 2026

Considered - Report of the HR Service Manager, presented by Cllr. Cheryl Cashmore – Finance, People and Transformaton Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader.

DECISION

That the Blaby District Council Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26 be approved.

Reason:

Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to prepare pay policy statements setting out the authority's own policies regarding the remuneration of its staff particularly its senior staff (or 'chief officers') and its lowest paid employees.

10. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2025

Considered - Report of the HR Service Manager, presented by Cllr. Cheryl Cashmore – Finance, People and Transformation Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader.

DECISION

That the Gender Pay Gap Results for the year to the 31 March 2025 be accepted.

Reason:

The Council is required by law to carry out Gender Pay Reporting under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties & public Authorities) Regulations 2017 and this enables the Council to monitor pay differentials by gender throughout the Council.

11. COUNCIL TAX – SECOND HOME PREMIUM AND EMPTY PROPERTY PREMIUM AMENDMENTS

Considered - Report of the Finance Group Manager, presented by Cllr. Cheryl Cashmore – Finance, People and Transformation Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader.

Councillors Ben Taylor, Terry Richardson, Nick Chapman, Richard Holdridge, Antony Mosely and Bob Waterton withdrew from the meeting for this item only, having earlier declared a disclosable pecuniary interest.

DECISIONS

1. That Council Tax be increased for all properties which are occupied periodically by 100% from 1 April 2026 subject to any exemptions set out the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
2. That the Council Tax empty homes premium be increased to 100% for properties empty for between one and five years (currently over 2 years) from 1 April 2026 subject to any exemptions set out in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and guidance.
3. That the Council Tax empty homes premium be increased to 200% for properties empty for between five years and ten years from 1 April 2026 subject to any exemptions set out in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and guidance.
4. That the Council Tax empty homes premium be increased to 300% for

properties empty over ten years from 1 April 2026 subject to any exemptions set out in Local Government Finance Act 1992 and guidance.

Reasons:

1. The purpose of changing the Empty Homes Premium for long-term empty properties is to provide owners with a further incentive to bring empty homes back into use, thus supporting the aims of the Council's Empty Homes Enforcement Strategy as well as generating additional Council Tax income. The current Empty Homes Premium that is applied by the Council is 100% for properties that have been empty for 2 years and over.
2. The purpose of the Second Home Premium is to close the loophole where furnishing an empty property negates the Empty Home Premium charge as well as generating additional Council Tax income. The purpose of changing the Empty Homes Premium for long-term empty properties is to provide owners with a further incentive to bring empty homes back into use, thus supporting the aims of the Council's Empty Homes Enforcement Strategy as well as generating additional Council Tax income. The current Empty Homes Premium that is applied by the Council is 100% for properties that have been empty for 2 years and over.

12. LEICESTER & LEICESTERSHIRE AUTHORITIES - STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND RELATING TO HOUSING DISTRIBUTION FOLLOWING NPPF AND NEW STANDARD METHOD PUBLISHED DECEMBER 2024 (DECEMBER 2025)

Considered - Report of the Development Strategy Manager, presented by Cllr. Mike Shirley – Planning and Strategic Growth Portfolio Holder.

DECISION

That the signing of the Leicester & Leicestershire Authorities - Statement of Common Ground relating to Housing Distribution following National Planning Policy Framework and new Standard Method published December 2024 (December 2025) be approved.

Reason:

To continue to maintain effective cooperation that Blaby District Council must fulfil to progress the emerging Local Plan

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 6.32 P.M.