

We continue to win awards, fight for positive transformational change, reduce backlog times, improve services, and continue to make decisions that help us punch above our weight as a District, while being prudent with our Council's finances.

Planning Delivery (Development Services, Planning Enforcement, Strategic Growth & Local Policy)

Development Services

We have reduced our backlog by around 80%. Our yearly timescales for decisions both majors and non-majors continues to be way above national targets. Project work continues towards the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain, and the transformation programme including the validation process and introduction of pre-application charging.

Planning Enforcement

A number of high-profile cases have progressed to successful outcomes and some other sensitive enforcement cases are ongoing. Our new Enforcement Policy is being progressed to ensure we do the best we can for residents. We continue to be successful in defending enforcement appeals.

Strategic Growth

Our dedicated team for large scale projects has been hard at work ensuring these developments are right for Blaby District. Including HNRFI, New Lubbethorpe and potential strategic sites. We have a Blaby Growth Plan that pushes for Infrastructure Led proposals and the team always push for this ethos.

Local Policy

Our new Local Plan is progressing well, we continue to be mindful of future impacts including Leicester City's unmet need, and potential planning reforms arising from the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. We have run several workshops around our New Local Plan, and these will continue.

Corporate Transformation (Transformation & Projects, ICT, Customer Services & EDI)

Transformation & Projects

We introduced our Transforming Blaby Together strategy, this sets out how BDC aims to meet the needs, expectations, and aspirations of Blaby District residents, communities, businesses, and our people. Our quick win projects have been going well, for example the planning development services team have seen an 80% reduction in operational backlog following a robust review of their process and procedures. Similarly, in Licensing, time to issue a new license has been reduced to 4 weeks (50% reduction), this has enabled the service to become more competitive, increase licences issued and develop new initiatives such as a "School Transport Only" license to bring in additional income to the Council.

Customer Services

Customer Services and its importance in terms of customer experience continues to be of high priority. Our Service Manager started at BDC in January 2023 and over the last 12 months has utilised prior knowledge, experience, and skills in the utilisation of the Storm telephony system to create detailed reporting for all service areas which also includes avoidable contact which in some services, is drilled down to specific enquiries. This baseline data provides valuable insights, signposting to where we can work together to continuously improve the customer journey.

Equalities Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

The Council's commitment to equality and diversity goes beyond the equality objectives which are set in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Blaby District Council are determined to do more than just meet our statutory obligations. With an EDI Champion in place, we want to continue our desire to make BDC a leading authority in our commitment to EDI. Recent changes include an improved prayer room, a new wellbeing room, and a separate quiet room.

ICT

It is no secret that we have had our challenges with ICT over the past year, however, this is a high priority for the administration. We must improve this service for our staff, members, and customers. Thank you to the opposition groups representatives for joining us in a recent ICT workshop. Members will see further reports soon on a potential new direction for our Council. It is so important we get this right and see the trust restored in our ICT, the benefits of evolving technologies and financial stability.

Digital

Some of our digital achievements over the last year:

- Garden waste campaign – 82% of subscriptions submitted online, up from 80% previous year and 87% customer satisfaction with digital process.
- Trained over 70 staff members to become editors of the corporate website and make documents accessible to people with disabilities.
- Developed 11 digital forms, including Noise Complaint, Change Council Tax Payment Frequency and Sharps Collection. Six of these forms seamlessly integrate with the back office system, eliminating the need for manual data entry by staff.
- Newsletter subscribers – 28,979 (increased by over 1k in the last 12 months)

Future

Our focus continues to be on delivering for the customer and for our place. We will continue the transformation work underway and embark on further projects to ensure our culture of continuous improvement goes from strength to strength.

We will ensure that we continue to provide and improve digital access to services for residents and businesses.

We will continue our proactive approach to place-shaping and growth, to ensure the district is a great place to live and work.

Finally, can I thank officers across my portfolio who continue to work tirelessly to ensure our residents remain at the heart of everything we do in what continue to be challenging times.

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ben Taylor

**Senior Officer: Executive Director, Planning & Strategic Growth Group
Manager, IT & Transformation Group Manager, Corporate
Services Group Manager**

Portfolio Total

Planning Delivery & Enforcement and Corporate Transformation - Total	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£2,872,276	£2,878,663	£3,039,818	£167,542 5.83%	£161,155 5.60%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£1,536,013	£2,452,182	£2,752,528	£1,216,515 79.20%	-£300,346 12.25%
3. Direct Income	-£842,912	-£1,134,590	-£2,142,781	-£1,299,869 154.21%	-£1,008,191 88.86%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£3,565,377	£4,196,255	£3,649,565	-£84,188 -2.36%	-£546,690 -13.03%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	59.61	60.16	57.69	-1.62 -2.73%	-2.47 -4.11%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This portfolio includes the establishment and operational costs relating to Planning, Transformation (including Projects, Customer Insights, Experience & Engagement and ICT) and Communications.

The establishment budget for 2024/25 allows for a 3% estimated pay award, contractual increments where appropriate, and employer's national insurance and pension contributions within service budgets. The budgets reflect a reduction in headcount for Customer Services of just over 1 FTE because of the deletion of 1.95 FTE vacant posts, changing advisor posts to an apprenticeship position, and changes in working patterns for some staff. Two vacant posts in Planning have also been removed from the establishment. This is offset by the addition of an IT Business Partner, approved as part of the final budget considerations in February 2023.

Other gross direct expenditure includes one-off unspent budget brought forward from 2022/23, reflected in the revised estimate for 2023/24. In addition to this, the revised estimate and 2024/25 budget include provision for expenditure on projects funded from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The cost of the ICT options appraisal also forms part of the revised estimate.

Direct income includes sums in both financial years in recognition of allocations from the UKSPF. The sums receivable will be allocated to individual services once funding bids have been reviewed. The income budgets also reflect the nationally agreed increase in planning fees and charges, effective from December 2023.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Development Strategy	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£330,661	£330,661	£375,875	£45,527 13.77%	£45,527 13.77%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£94,471	£105,071	£132,254	£37,783 39.99%	£27,183 25.87%
3. Direct Income	-£4,000	-£4,000	-£4,000	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£421,132	£431,732	£504,129	£82,997 19.71%	£72,397 16.77%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	6.51	6.51	6.41	-0.10 -1.54%	-0.10 -1.54%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2024/25 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions.
2. The revised budget includes expenditure relating to the Local Development Framework, for which funding is from the Local Plan Reserve. The increase in 2024/25 is for consultancy work, also associated with the local plan, which is not covered by the earmarked reserve.
3. No change.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. Minor change in working hours.

PLANNING DELIVERY

Planning Delivery	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£670,655	£670,655	£726,485	£55,830 8.32%	£55,830 8.32%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£136,247	£163,054	£155,497	£19,250 14.13%	-£7,557 -4.63%
3. Direct Income	-£560,000	-£500,000	-£743,698	-£183,698 32.80%	-£243,698 48.74%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£246,902	£333,709	£138,284	-£108,618 -43.99%	-£195,425 -58.56%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	14.61	14.61	13.98	-0.63 -4.31%	-0.63 -4.31%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2024/25 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions.
2. The revised budget includes non-recurring budget carried forward from 2023/24. Increases in 2024/25 include contractual and inflationary increases, and specialist consultancy advice.
3. The income budget has been reduced in 2023/24 to reflect the forecast outturn position, but for next year is expected to increase significantly based on the national increase in fees and charges.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. Change in FTEs in 2024/25 is due to the removal of a vacant Development Services Support Assistant post, and a return to substantive post following end of fixed term secondment.

ENFORCEMENT

Planning Enforcement	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£240,596	£240,596	£196,234	-£44,362 -18.44%	-£44,362 -18.44%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£19,628	£26,828	£26,108	£6,480 33.01%	-£720 -2.68%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£260,224	£267,424	£222,342	-£37,882 -14.56%	-£45,082 -16.86%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	5.00	5.00	4.00	-1.00 -20.00%	-1.00 -20.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2024/25 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions. 1 vacant post has been removed from the Establishment.
2. Increases are for consultants' fees relating to enforcement action and associated legal fees.
3. Not applicable.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. As per Note 1.

STRATEGIC GROWTH

Strategic Growth	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£281,841	£281,841	£213,269	-£68,572 -24.33%	-£68,572 -24.33%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£154,766	£291,880	£30,480	-£124,286 -80.31%	-£261,400 -89.56%
3. Direct Income	-£266,712	-£115,000	-£50,000	£216,712 -81.25%	£65,000 -56.52%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£169,895	£458,721	£193,749	£23,854 14.04%	-£264,972 -57.76%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	4.86	4.86	3.12	-1.74 -35.80%	-1.74 -35.80%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2024/25 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions. A vacant Major Schemes Officer post has been removed from the Establishment.
2. 2023/24 revised estimate includes non-recurring expenditure brought forward from 2022/23, for HNRFI, Whetstone Garden Village, and Lubbesthorpe.
3. Revised budget and proposed budget include confirmed external funding.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. Slight decrease in hours and 1 vacant post removed.

TRANSFORMATION, CUSTOMER INSIGHT & ICT

Transformation, Customer Insight & ICT	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£797,353	£771,527	£847,490	£50,137 6.29%	£75,963 9.85%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£862,058	£939,834	£889,331	£27,273 3.16%	-£50,503 -5.39%
3. Direct Income	-£9,400	£0	£0	£9,400 -100.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£1,650,011	£1,711,361	£1,736,821	£86,810 5.26%	£25,460 1.49%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	18.88	18.73	18.73	-0.15 -0.79%	-1.15 -5.78%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2024/25 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions. Reflects changes in headcount within Customer Services, and the new post of IT Business Partner, as described in the Executive Summary,
2. The revised estimate includes one-off budget provision brought forward from 2022/23, the cost of the IT options appraisal, and the mobile working pilot. The 2024/25 budget allows for inflationary increases including the ICT contract, until the outcome of the options appraisal is known and understood.
3. Income in relation to rent of floorspace to the Citizens Advice Bureau has been transferred to Property Services.
4. Net impact of the variances listed above.
5. See note 1 above.

MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

Management & Admin	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£265,394	£265,394	£310,273	£44,879 16.91%	£44,879 16.91%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£102,129	£87,229	£78,192	-£23,937 -23.44%	-£9,037 -10.36%
3. Direct Income	-£2,800	-£2,200	£0	£2,800 -100.00%	£2,200 -100.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£364,723	£350,423	£388,465	£23,742 6.51%	£38,042 10.86%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	3.91	3.91	3.91	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2024/25 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions.
2. Budget for one-off administration fees associated with the Levelling Up bid moved to UKSPF.
3. Contribution towards the cost of provision of open data, not applicable in 2024/25.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. No change.

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

UK Shared Prosperity Fund	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£0	£32,213	£80,781	£80,871 0.00%	£48,568 150.77%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£0	£661,572	£1,264,302	-£1,264,302 0.00%	£602,730 91.11%
3. Direct Income	£0	-£513,390	-£1,345,083	-£1,345,083 0.00%	-£831,693 162.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£0	-£180,395	£0	-£0 0.00%	-£180,395 305.19%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	0.00	1.00	2.00	2.00 0.00%	1.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. Administrative posts paid for out of the UKSPF allocation.
2. Represents the cost of projects covered by the UKSPF allocation.
3. The UKSPF allocation for years 2 and 3 of the 3 year programme.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. See note 1 above.

COMMUNICATIONS

Management & Admin	2023/24 Approved Budget [A]	2023/24 Revised Estimate [B]	2024/25 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£285,776	£285,776	£289,411	£3,635 1.27%	£3,635 1.27%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£166,714	£176,714	£176,364	£9,650 5.79%	-£350 -0.20%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£452,490	£462,490	£465,775	£13,285 2.94%	£3,285 0.71%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	5.54	5.54	5.54	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2024/25 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions.
2. Contractual increases in relation to the Customer Relationship software maintenance, and web development.
3. Not applicable.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. No change.

Portfolio Priorities

Priorities for 2024/25 for the portfolio include:

- 1. Large scale strategic projects.** The strategic growth team is managing a full range of large-scale projects. These include a rail freight terminal, garden village, further potential large-scale site near to Stoney Stanton, and Fosse Park West. Significant milestones for 2024 include the completion of the rail freight terminal project and subsequent Government decision.
- 2. New Local Plan.** The next 12 months will see a number of important milestones for the new Local Plan, as we move closer to a submission version. Further detailed work will result in a draft final version of the Plan during 2024.
- 3. Neighbourhood Plans.** Work will continue to progress and finalise a number of Neighbourhood Plans, to support our parishes to shape their places.
- 4. Respond to Planning Reforms.** During 2023, consultations continued to be undertaken by the Government on proposed reforms to the planning system. These reforms, should they be taken forward, will have a significant impact on the way we work in most planning related areas. We are hopeful of further consultation and guidance from Government as quickly as possible, which enables us to start considering the changes.
- 5. Delivering a high performing Development Management Service.** Planning application levels continue to be high, and the team have delivered a quality and customer focussed service despite these demands. The focus for 2024 will be on continuing with this approach, progressing a number of specific projects such as the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain and pre-application charging project.
- 6. High profile enforcement action.** Ongoing action will continue for a number of current high-profile cases; with Enforcement Notice appeal outcomes expected during 2024. In addition, the team will continue their pro-active approach across the district, in dealing with a varied case load of investigations.
- 7. Joint Strategic Planning –** work continues across Leicester and Leicestershire to support the delivery of the Strategic Growth Plan, key infrastructure to enable future growth, and other 'cross boundary' projects. We are exploring all opportunities to work collaboratively with other local authorities; to ensure that we can maximise opportunities and efficiencies.
- 8. Delivery of the Lubbesthorpe Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE).** The new community is going from strength to strength. Around 1000 houses are now occupied, the first primary school is thriving, and works continue to deliver the road infrastructure. To date the development has now won five awards. Key milestones for 2024/25 will include the opening of the first Local Centre (including health centre), and development of the leisure offer and secondary school.
- 9. Customer Insights, Experience and Engagement and Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion.** Implement and embed priority projects and key objectives as outlined

in Service Delivery Plans and the Transforming Blaby Together Strategy and appended documents.

- 10.Transforming Blaby Together.** Implement and embed priority projects and key objectives as outlined in Service Delivery Plans and the Transforming Blaby Together Strategy and appended documents.
- 11. ICT.** To ensure that the ICT provision for Blaby DC is robust, reliable and the infrastructure is fit for purpose. In addition, the Blaby ICT provision should support Blaby to realise future digital ambitions.
- 12.Digital service delivery and integration for Council Tax and Benefits.** Review and improve the digital transformation activities for Council Tax and Benefits. Implementing solutions to further improve operational efficiency with the service, whilst retaining or improving the customer experience.
- 13.Raise the profile of the Leicestershire Building Control Partnership.** Following the launch of the partnership, including the new website and online forms communication and marketing activities will continue throughout the year to help raise the profile and reputation of LBCP.
- 14.Acting on the Recommendations from the LGA Communications Review.** Continuing to support new initiatives and service delivery whilst making improvements to internal and external communication.
- 15.Continue to maintain and develop the Council's corporate website** www.blaby.gov.uk, www.visitblaby.org.uk, and www.lbcp.co.uk Work also continues to support services with corporate branding and accessibility compliance of web solutions.

Services

The portfolio comprises the following services:

Planning & Strategic Growth:

Development Strategy

The purpose of the Development Strategy Service is to ensure that the district has a robust and up-to-date strategic framework for planning decisions. The Local Plan, and other key planning policies, are the key mechanisms for place shaping and the delivery of many other corporate priorities.

This budget includes the costs of Planning Policy Officers and a Planning Obligations Officer; all involved in developing robust policies and guidance, gathering, and interpreting the data necessary to do this, advising on the interpretation of policies and designing and implementing initiatives to deliver strategic objectives.

Planning Delivery

The purpose of the Planning Delivery Service is to ensure that development is acceptable whilst determining planning applications as fast as possible.

This budget includes the costs of Planning Officers and Technical staff involved in providing advice to potential applicants and determining applications.

Planning Enforcement

This budget includes the costs of Enforcement Officers, who monitor development across the district, carry out investigations, enforce planning controls, and take forward prosecutions where necessary.

Strategic Growth Team

This team manages a range of high profile, large-scale, strategic projects. These are considered to be projects which fall outside of the usual planning process, due to their profile and need for a more complex range of skills – a typical example would be housing developments of more than 1,000 houses.

This budget includes the cost of a manager and Major Schemes Officers, along with some external funding which covers the cost of two of these posts.

Transformation & Customer Insight:

Customer Services

The team provide the main front of house services for the authority – at present this includes answering general queries, payments, incoming / outgoing post and telephony services. The team also assist with linking residents and businesses to our other Partners, Services and promote the use of online / web services. The Customer

Insights, Experience and Engagement Manager is also our organisational lead for Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion.

This budget includes Customer Insights, Experience and Engagement Manager, Customer Service Team Leaders, and Customer Service Advisors associated costs.

Transformation [Transforming Blaby Together]

The Transformation and Projects service consists of a small team, working with colleagues throughout the authority to support and facilitate Transformation. The team has significant experience in project management, process development and continuous improvement methodologies.

Core activities of the team include:

- Project Management Office – Project governance and reporting
- Project Support – Project related guidance and training
- Continuous Improvement – Guidance and training relating to process improvements
- Process Controls – Facilitating the measurement and control of processes
- Business Analysis – Data driven analysis to support decision making
- Digital Support – Facilitating the transition to digital and increasing self-service

This budget includes Transformation Group Manager, Service Manager, and Project Support Officers associated costs.

ICT Services

The Council currently receives ICT support and services from the Leicestershire ICT Partnership (LICTP), this includes provision of an insourced ICT service from Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) for Blaby District Council and Melton Borough Council.

Management & Administration

This budget includes the costs of the Transformation Group Manager, the Planning & Strategic Growth Group Manager and the support staff who manage the portfolio budgets and systems.

Communications

Delivery of external and internal communications, management of the website and intranet and digital improvements for customer access.

Key Points

Doing things differently – plans for the coming year

The portfolio continues to perform well, despite a further unprecedented and challenging year due to the economic crisis. Staff are working hard but remain motivated. Over the last year the remit of the portfolio has continued to grow – particularly in the areas of strategic growth and infrastructure planning.

As set out in the priorities for the forthcoming year; we expect the next 12 months to be equally challenging – but also rewarding and exciting.

Strategic Growth

The team will continue to project manage some of the district's most high profile and complex strategic projects. This includes a wide range of sites; from retail and commercial developments to a garden village, a strategic rail freight interchange and of course Lubbethorpe.

Development Strategy

The team will continue to focus on strategic planning, Neighbourhood Plans, planning obligations and the Local Plan

Work will continue during 2024/25 on the final stages of the new Local Plan.

Planning Delivery

The workload of the team has reached a steady level over the last year, as application levels have become more manageable, and this will enable focus to turn to the delivery of a number of specific projects.

During 2024/25 the team will focus on ensuring the continued delivery of an excellent service to customers.

Enforcement

The enforcement team will continue its proactive monitoring approach next year. In addition, work on the high profile and sensitive sites will also progress.

Transformation

A major focus for 2023 was to define a Transformation Strategy (Transforming Blaby Together) for Blaby District Council, the strategy was approved by Cabinet in November 2023.

Transforming Blaby Together brings together our aspirations and plans for Customer Insights, Experience, and Engagement; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; and Transformation and Projects into one place. The strategy will support the delivery of the new Corporate Plan, providing a foundation of skills, culture, and policies for the authority.

The Groups Individual Objectives and Delivery Plans support the strategy, setting out action-based approaches. These documents form the basis of the

Transformation Groups Service Plans for 2024. This in turn will support delivery of the new Corporate Plan (2024-2028).

Transformation and Projects

- Deliver Quick Win training to promote continuous improvement, enabling services to focus on improving the customer journey, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and avoidable contact.
- Continue to introduce triage systems to ensure customer enquiries are acted upon quickly and workflow managed effectively.
- Continue to improve our self-service offer, implementing new digital systems to enable customers to make service requests and amend account information through our website.
- Continue supporting the transition to SharePoint which will enable us to start our journey into automation and free up our time to support customers.
- Explore working with community groups and parish councils to promote digital literacy across our District.

The approach for 2024 will be to adopt a more typical Project Management Office (PMO) function, providing guidance, tools, and training for project managers. As a result, project managers and Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) will carry responsibility for compliance with the project framework and maintaining reporting standards on iPlan.

Project Management Training will continue, on a quarterly basis, with additional sessions being scheduled specifically for SROs.

2024 will see an increased emphasis on strategic prioritisation to facilitate delivery of the Corporate Plan. Business cases will provide the basis for evidence-based decisions, and the Programme Board will be better positioned to challenge spend against benefits and consider resource conflicts.

Transformation is everyone's journey and one of the challenges for 2024 is to ignite the transformation spark within the authority.

The Transformation Team is an enabler for change and will work with the Communications Team to define a communication strategy for Transforming Blaby Together.

2023 was a year of creating a foundation for transformation and demonstrating that improvements can be made, 2024 will be more focused on data and delivery of tangible savings.

Customer Insights, Experience Engagement and Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

- We will revisit our approach to managing customer demand to ensure our customer contact operating model is the most efficient and effective way of meeting our customers' needs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a customer experience survey to seek views on contacting and engaging with council services for day-to-day business. • Work will councillors through our member development group to support meaningful engagement and communication with our customers and communities. • Develop customer satisfaction measures across all customer touchpoints to ensure we are achieving the aims. • Review and implement a corporate Customer Record Management system to improve customer processes and provide increased personalisation for customers. • Continue to adopt a digital first approach; increasing online availability which will reduce service delivery costs through efficiency savings. Thereby we will strive to develop a self-serve digital pathway to meet our customer needs. • Provide consistent online forms, that are concise, easy to understand, and collect all the relevant information at the first point of contact. • Research and explore artificial intelligence (AI) solutions for customers looking for simple advice and/or factual information. • Develop and implement an in-depth customer insight and experience review programme of council services. • Explore the re-design of services to improve the customer experience journey and value for money, prioritising services which have a high volume of customer interaction, and/or where we want to improve customer satisfaction. <p><u>ICT</u></p> <p>A dependency exists on the outcome of the (exempt) report going to full council on 27th February 2024 on the future of the ICT service provision.</p> <p><u>Management & Administration</u></p> <p>The focus for 2024/25 will be on the delivery of high-quality services, whilst supporting and enabling staff development.</p> <p><u>Communications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the recommendations from the LGA Communications Review
Income generation	<p>The fees and charges for all aspects of the services will be kept under review to ensure that these maximise income without impacting on the quality of communications and applications submitted and increasing costs elsewhere in the delivery of the services.</p> <p>Income generation across the group is restricted to fees for documents; and nationally set planning application fees. A project to look at charging for pre-application advice will continue to delivery in 2024/25.</p> <p>The group will seek to maximise opportunities for cost saving through collaborative working, particularly on Local Plan technical work.</p> <p>The Transformation and Projects team will continue to work in close collaboration with services to review current ways of working and in doing so will</p>

	look to identify potential income opportunities as well as efficiency savings. It is important to note that these would then be reflected in service budgets.
Capital plans for the portfolio	The capital programme for 2024/25 allows for £500,000 to be spent on various ICT schemes and the spend will be dependent on the outcome of the (exempt) report going to full Council on 27 th February 2024 concerning the future of the ICT service provision. Additionally, there will likely be some carryover from 2023/24 for upgrades and infrastructure improvement/resilience works.

Key Performance Indicators

Planning & Strategic Growth	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 Apr - Dec
Number of planning applications received	1104	1305	943	961	684
Planning application fee income	£647,370	£513,563	£572,724	£464,613	£221,768
Number of planning applications determined	1043	1004	1280	842	518
% of major applications determined in 13 weeks	96.3	100	100	88.89	100
E2E (householders)	46.2	74.12	91.65	80.59	67.29
E2E (majors)	219.61	218.88	256.22	197.89	551.11
E2E (non-majors)	71.83	60.7	74.6	82.42	95.95
E2E (DOC)	69.2	104.9	90.59	84.3	94.2

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – CORPORATE SERVICES	2023/24 Apr - Nov	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Number of followers on Facebook	7,880	6,089	5,558	5,118	3,893
Number of followers on Twitter	5,475	5,377	5,294	5,010	4,502
Number of followers on LinkedIn	2,174	1,938	1,636	1,422	1,159
Number of online forms submitted by customers	43,406	63,907	64,637	66,832	54,385
Number of email subscribers	28,830	27,644	27,409	25,843	22,002
My Account Subscribers	55,293	51,649	46,914	40,771	32,434
% of positive (4-5*) online form feedback ratings	87.1%	86.9%	87.9%	86.4%	84.7%

Customers

- The Planning Delivery and Enforcement services in particular have heavy interaction with residents, and we will continue to monitor customer feedback to ensure that all interactions with customers and stakeholders to these services are conducted appropriately and professionally.
- There are a number of significant public consultations planned for 2022/25 including the next stage of the new Local Plan, and a number of large strategic sites.
- Customer Insights, Experience and Engagement will continue to be pivotal as the 'face' (virtual or in person) of Blaby District Council when customers make contact. As such we will prioritise monitoring interactions, measuring performance, and seeking feedback as critical enablers for continuous improvement.
- Maintaining awareness of Equalities and Human Rights across the Council by staff and members to ensure equitable access to services remains a focus. Training, information communications and advice are provided by the Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) team supported by Human Resources (HR).

Risks

- Planning application levels have stabilised, but should they increase suddenly this will place significant demands on the service. Ongoing resource and service delivery reviews are essential to help to mitigate against this.
- Failure to progress the new Local Plan could leave the district vulnerable to unacceptable types of future development.
- High number of appeals would place further pressures on the Development Services Team.
- Inability to progress with the delivery of a clear and robust policy framework would put delivery of sustainable development at risk.
- Delivery of Lubbesthorpe against the current proposed timetable is essential – failure to do so could further affect the 5-year housing land supply, and in turn the council's ability to defend against undesirable development.
- Ongoing lack of clarity, or a long period without further guidance, on planning reform proposals would lead to long periods of uncertainty; and could in turn delay the new Local Plan.
- Failure to deliver an effective enforcement service could result in reputational damage.
- Failure to ensure a robust and risk assessed approach to enforcement investigations, on sensitive and high-risk sites, could leave staff at risk of harassment or violence.
- The Council has experienced downtime in key ICT systems during 2023 and there remains an on-going risk to infrastructure.
- Failure of the STORM telephone system. This is a separate system from the back office (Jabba) system and provides the platform for the Customer Services Team.
- Disengagement with the Transforming Blaby Together Strategy, Programme Management, and ethos of continuous improvement will likely hinder/halt progress to make sustainable corporate efficiency savings.
- With regard to the communications and digital team there is a risk in ensuring that there is capacity and skills to deliver the improvements identified by the LGA Communications Review.