

The budget settlement we have received for the next financial year is very much as expected which means we have seen a real terms reduction in our Core Spending Power funding.

It is now apparent that the new Government has plans to bring change swiftly with both the Consultation on Funding Reform and the White Paper on Devolution and Local Government Reform being recently released.

Both will undoubtedly have significant impact on the future of this Council, especially the potential impact on Local Government reform. I am working at pace with the Leaders of all the other Councils in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, fully supported by our senior officers, to understand the possible implications. I am committed to keeping all members informed on progress and to make sure our staff is fully kept in the loop as well.

At this stage in the process it is extremely difficult to forecast the financial implications of the Funding Reforms however, the financial prudence we have shown over the last few years does mean that we have the financial reserves available to make the necessary adjustments to how we operate going forward without facing the 'knee jerk' reaction that other councils have made. This process will be supported by the roadmap we have put in place with the newly adopted Blaby District Plan supported by a transformation strategy.

Clearly the process we are about to undertake as we work through the budget process gives an opportunity to fully understand our situation and look for further opportunities to ensure we remain financially viable but still able to deliver the quality services our residents expect.

We have never been a Council that just reacts to events but one that looks for solutions and does the right thing by our residents. As we understand the implications of the Devolution and Local Government Reform White Paper a pro-active approach to find the best outcome for our residents will be key.

Our residents and businesses must always be at the heart of what we do, and we will focus not just on those statutory services we must deliver, but also those other services, which truly add the greatest value. Coupled with this we owe a duty of care to our employees to provide a stable platform on which they can carry out their duties and develop their careers during what may be a turbulent time.

The strength in depth we see in our staff gives me full confidence that we have the talent to meet the undeniable challenges ahead.

I remain both optimistic and confident about the future, changes to services will be inevitable and difficult decisions, as I said earlier, will need to be taken but our staff should be in no doubt that they remain our greatest asset and we will continue to invest in them as we have fully demonstrated over the last 12 months.

We are a forward-thinking Council that will find the solutions we require and in all of this we will retain the 'Blaby Way' of doing things. I said last year that I believe few Councils are as open, effective, and harmonious as Blaby and I am committed to making sure this does not change.

Within my own portfolio responsibilities, the notes attached to the budget below are self-explanatory.

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Terry Richardson

**Senior Officers: Chief Executive, Executive Directors, Corporate Services
Group Manager, Neighbourhood Services Group Manager,
Assets and Major Projects Group Manager**

Portfolio Total

	2024/25 Approved Budget	2024/25 Revised Estimate	2025/26 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
Leader - Total	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£1,854,621	£1,857,241	£1,967,820	£113,199 6.10%	£110,579 5.95%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£841,119	£1,379,912	£1,092,594	£251,475 29.90%	-£287,317 -20.82%
3. Direct Income	-£285,263	-£642,263	-£425,263	-£140,000 49.08%	£217,000 -33.79%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£2,410,477	£2,594,890	£2,635,151	£224,674 9.32%	-£10,826 -0.41%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	29.55	29.55	29.49	-0.06 -0.20%	-0.06 -0.20%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Leader's portfolio includes establishment and running costs in respect of the Chief Executive, Directors, Health and Safety, Elections, Democratic Services, Land Charges, Legal, Web Development and Emergency Planning/Business Continuity.

The establishment budget for 2024/25 allowed for a 3% pay award within services, with an additional 1% provision held centrally. Following protracted negotiations, a flat rate increase of £1,290 for employees on grades 1 to 9 was agreed with the trade unions. The nationally agreed pay award for Chief Executives and Chief Officers was 2.5%. There is no increase in headcount built into the 2024/25 establishment budget. The establishment budget for 2025/26 allows for a 3% estimated pay award, contractual increments where appropriate, and employer's national insurance and pension contributions within service budgets.

The increase in other gross direct expenditure between approved and revised stage for 2024/25 is due to the following reasons:

- The carry forward of unspent budget provision and external funding from 2023/24.
- An increase in external legal fees in connection with various planning issues, as well as increases in relation to the management of our Assets.
- Budget for the PCC Election held in May 2024, and General Election held in July 2024. This is offset with a reimbursement income budget.

In 2024/25, budget was added for the General Election, and PCC Election. The annual provision for local elections is included at £40,000 as there are no planned district elections. This will be added to the Elections Reserve if unused. The reserve is maintained to smooth the impact of district elections so that the cost does not fall in one financial year. A County Council Election is planned for 2025/26, expenditure budget has been added, with reimbursement income expected.

Land Charges income has been reduced in both 2024/25 and 2025/26, the reduced income is due to the migration of part of the Local land charges function to HM Land Registry in October 2023.

Chief Executive, Directors and Health & Safety

Chief Executive, Directors, and Health & Safety	2024/25 Approved Budget	2024/25 Revised Estimate	2025/26 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment	£762,537	£762,537	£782,400	£19,863 2.60%	£19,863 2.60%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£34,022	£40,668	£37,624	£3,602 10.59%	-£3,044 -7.49%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£796,559	£803,205	£820,024	£23,465 2.95%	£16,819 2.09%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	7.43	7.43	7.43	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2025/26 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. Revised estimate allows for the extension of commercial support from Charnwood Borough Council until 30th April 2024
3. Not applicable.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. No change.

Electoral Registration

Electoral Registration	2024/25 Approved Budget	2024/25 Revised Estimate	2025/26 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£122,460	£122,460	£129,730	£7,270 5.94%	£7,270 5.94%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£104,650	£497,100	£290,848	£186,198 177.92%	-£188,252 -39.29%
3. Direct Income	-£3,800	-£373,800	-£183,800	-£180,000 4736.84%	£190,000 -50.83%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£223,310	£227,760	£236,778	£13,468 6.03%	-£9,018 3.96%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	2.67	2.67	2.61	-0.06 -2.25%	-0.06 -2.25%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2025/26 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 estimate includes unspent budget carried forward from 2023/24 and budget added for the PCC Election held in May 2024, and the General Election held in July 2024. The 2025/26 proposed budget includes expenditure in relation to the County Council Election.
3. Reimbursements for the PCC and General Elections. The 2025/26 proposed budget includes reimbursement for the County Council Election.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. 1 team member minor reduction in hours.

Democratic Services, Governance, Information Management and Legal Services

Democratic Services, Governance, Information Management & Legal Services	2024/25 Approved Budget	2024/25 Revised Estimate	2025/26 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£680,213	£682,833	£742,150	£61,937 9.11%	£59,317 8.69%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£475,916	£616,984	£526,779	£50,863 10.69%	-£90,205 -14.62%
3. Direct Income	-£281,463	-£268,463	-£241,463	£40,000 -14.21%	£27,000 -10.06%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£874,666	£1,031,354	£1,027,466	£152,800 17.47%	-£3,888 -0.38%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	13.91	13.91	13.91	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2025/26 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 increase in the revised estimate mainly relates to additional legal costs in relation to Planning, HR and Asset Management matters. It also includes non-recurring budget carried forward from 2023/24. The 2025/26 budget includes an inflationary provision for members allowances.
3. Land charges income has been reduced in both 2024/25 and 2025/26 due to the migration of part of the Land charges function to HM Land Registry.
4. Net impact of the variances listed above.
5. No change in headcount.

Emergency Planning & Business Continuity

Emergency Planning & Business Continuity	2024/25 Approved Budget	2024/25 Revised Estimate	2025/26 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£50,167	£51,567	£53,265	£3,098 6.18%	£1,698 3.29%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£50,167	£51,567	£53,265	£3,098 6.18%	£1,698 3.29%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. No establishment costs associated with this service.
2. Proposed budget includes increase in contribution for Business Continuity Resilience Partnership.
3. Not applicable.
4. Net impact.
5. Not applicable.

Communications, Consultation and Digital Services

	2024/25 Approved Budget	2024/25 Revised Estimate	2025/26 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
Web Development	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£289,411	£289,411	£313,540	£24,129 8.34%	£24,129 8.34%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£176,364	£191,593	£184,079	£7,715 4.37%	-£7,514 -3.92%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£465,775	£481,004	£497,619	£31,844 6.84%	£16,615 3.45%
5. 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 2025/26 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. Revised estimate allows for increases in software costs with Granicus-Firmstep Ltd due to a new contract and the addition of single sign on for the Citizen Access online revenues and benefits service.
3. Not applicable.
4. Net impact.
5. Not applicable.

Portfolio Priorities

- To lead the Council through the implementation of the Blaby District Plan and the implications of the Devolution White Paper.
- To oversee the measures taken to meet the financial challenge for the Council to remain sustainable
- To ensure the Council has robust arrangements in place for responding to emergencies and can fulfil its statutory obligations
- To ensure the Council has robust Health and Safety advisory capacity and arrangements in place for fulfilling its statutory obligations.
- To continue to oversee major projects and continue to build on Peer Review recommendations
- Continue to maintain and develop the Council's corporate website www.blaby.gov.uk, www.visitblaby.org.uk, and www.lbc.co.uk Work also continues to support services with corporate branding and accessibility compliance of web solutions.

Services

Chief Executive & Directors

Includes costs for the Chief Executive and Directors' budgets and in addition the costs for the PA team and Health and Safety Officer budgets.

Electoral Services

Includes costs for electoral registration and elections, note that District Elections are paid for by the district council (national election/referendums, County and Parish election expenses are recoverable).

Democratic Services, Land Charges, Information Management & Legal

Includes costs for the Legal, Land Charges, Democratic Services and Information Management budgets.

Emergency Planning

Includes the costs associated with the provision for Emergency Planning within the Authority, which is delivered across the Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland area.

Communications, Consultation and Web Development

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

Key Points

<p>Doing things differently – plans for the coming year</p>	<p><u>Leader, Directors & SLT</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the Devolution White Paper and take action to find the best outcome for our residents• The Senior Leadership Team to continue to deliver the Blaby District Plan• To implement the Place Narrative• All members of the Senior Leadership Team will be supporting the Transformation agenda and to work towards to the Council becoming financially sustainable <p><u>Electoral Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elections 2025- Leicestershire County Council elections• Review of election processes following completion of the Election Act 2022 implementation• Neighbourhood plan referendums as required• Delivery of the annual canvass <p><u>Democratic Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of the Constitution <p><u>Land Charges and Legal Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electronic signature/sealing• Migration to HM Land Registry <p><u>Emergency Planning/Business Continuity arrangements</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Test service specific business continuity plans for robustness and resilience.• Continue to develop the incident specific action cards to assist with emergency response and recovery.• Focus on development and delivery of operational roles such as flood warden training and humanitarian assistance.• Develop tactical awareness across the Service Manager to continue to develop expertise in our collective emergency response to immediate and enduring events <p><u>Corporate Health & Safety</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The safety of our staff will continue to be a key focus and our organisational Blueprint, and all Health & Safety policies will continue to be reviewed with particular reference to staff working in a more agile manner and consideration of mental health and the support available to staff. <p><u>Communications, Consultation and Digital Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To align communication activity to support the Council's delivery of strategic themes.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver meaningful consultation processes to improve service delivery and transparency • Continue to improve our self-service offer, implementing new digital systems to enable customers to easily obtain information and make service requests.
Income generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Information Governance team continues to offer services for other authorities. Land Charges income will be impacted in future by the transfer to HM Land Charges, however it is felt that the budget included is realistic and achievable. Land Charges undertake work for OWBC and HBBC.
Capital plans for the portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision has been made to replace the audio-visual technology in the Council Chamber to better meet the needs of members and residents.

Key Performance Indicators

Land Charges - Turnaround time (smaller is better)

	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
2023/24	4.33	4.67	4.67	5	4	4.33	4.33	3.67	4	3.67	4.33	4.28
2024/25	4.33	5	5	5.33	4.67	5	4	3.33	-	-	-	-

Land Charges Income

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
2023/24	£15,778	£15,584	£16,045	£15,021	£14,651	£19,410	£17,496	£9,546	£5,757	£19,808	£18,630	£18,524
2024/25	£14,592	£21,014	£14,095	£24,176	£15,418	£23,758	£17,236	£15,718	-	-	-	-

Information Governance

Complaints Escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman

	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
2023/24	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2024/25	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	-	-	-	-

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – CORPORATE SERVICES	2024/25 April - Nov	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Number of online forms submitted by customers	45,589	64,606	63,907	64,637
Number of email subscribers	29,864	29,300	27,644	27,409
Number of customers logged into My Account	24,416	20,166	24,859	25,454
% of positive (4-5*) online form feedback ratings	88.1%	87.1%	86.9%	87.9%

Customers

The Council will continue with its focus on delivering services that our customers need. This is going to be a particular focus as we transform and ensure that our customers remain at the heart of what we do.

Risks

A full risk register is maintained in relation to the teams within this portfolio and is regularly reviewed to ensure its accuracy. However, significant potential risks include the following issues:

- **Impact of Cost of Living on Residents** – It is vital that our Council is prepared to support our residents and local economy as they continue to cope with the Cost-of-Living Crisis. There is reputational risk to the Council if we are not in a position to assist our locality and along with partners, we will continue to develop strategies to support both residents and business.
- **Emergency Planning** – reputational risk with partners and customers if appropriate response not available or given. Lessons learnt from both flooding incidents, landfill gas site management and the pandemic situation has helped us to review our plans and add to them to support our residents specifically in relation to recovery following an incident.
- **Health and Safety** - financial, legal, moral, reputational risk - negligence. Control measures managed through advisory service and internal policies, procedures and departmental audits.
- **Carbon Zero Target** – the Council is committed to meeting its net zero ambition by 2030 but the potential future financial gap represents a risk to that aim.
- **Reduction in Land Charges Income** as a result of the HM Land Registry migration and the downturn in the Housing market.