

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT – 2024/2025

Scope of Responsibility

Blaby District Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and to proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Blaby District Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, Blaby District Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.

Blaby District Council has approved a Local Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. A copy of the authority's code is on our website or can be obtained from the Finance Service at the Council Offices in Narborough. This statement explains how Blaby District Council has complied with the Code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the preparation and approval of an Annual Governance Statement.

Significant Events

Normalisation of hybrid working

During the pandemic it was necessary for the Council to ensure governance arrangements were appropriate given the changed manner of working and to continue to respond to the demands of our community. Whilst the impact of the Pandemic has diminished the Council continues to develop and benefit from the changes in working practice that had arisen.

Our methods of working have developed into a hybrid combination of remote and face to face working and governance arrangements continued to be in place with officers and members communicating through virtual means in addition to face to face contact where required.

Future Use of Huncote Leisure Centre Site

In November 2021 during routine work to install landfill gas mitigation equipment contractors found elevated levels of landfill gas onsite. As a result, a decision was taken to close the site as a precautionary measure.

An emergency situation was declared by Blaby District Council and the situation has been ongoing since that date and continued into 2024/25. Gas emission levels have remained at safe levels and some remedial work is in progress to re-open the site to the public as open space.

External Audit Sign off of Statement of Accounts

Over recent years nationally there have been issues around the audit profession not being able to offer prompt auditing of accounts for local authorities. For Blaby, although the Finance Team had published the draft accounts within Government timescales, the external auditor had not completed the audit of those accounts for the historic financial years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23.

2024-25 saw the introduction of various backstop dates set by Government for the statement of accounts to be signed off by auditors.

For years before 2022-23 the backstop date was 13 December 2024 and for the 2023-24 statement of accounts a date of 28 February 2025 was set.

Members of the Finance Team worked to provide information to the external auditors for the statement of accounts to be signed off within these timescales. In December audits were completed for the historic years and in February the audit for 2023-24 was completed and signed off by the external auditors.

Given the limited timescales given to the external auditors to sign off the accounts, all were disclaimed opinions. Azets, the Council's current external auditors, have informed the Council that they will be unable to provide a 'clean' opinion on the Statement of Accounts going forward without additional work to build back the assurance in the audit opinion. Officers of the Council's finance team continue to work with Azets to ensure the Council is in a position to gain a 'clean' audit opinion in the future.

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

Following the publication of the White Paper on Devolution and Local Government Reform in December, the Council has engaged with Local Authorities across Leicestershire and Rutland to meet the government's request to put forward proposals to reorganise into larger unitary councils. Along with the seven District Councils and Rutland County Council, Blaby has put forward 'The North, City, South proposal' which proposed that three unitary councils were formed and this interim proposal was submitted within the March deadline to MHCLG (Ministry Housing, Communities and Local Government). Alternative interim proposals were also submitted in the 'Leicestershire County Council Proposal' and the 'Leicester City Council Proposal'.

'The North, City, South proposal' includes three well-balanced unitary councils which:

- Keeps councils connected and accountable to local communities
- Simplifies services for residents, businesses and partners
- Focusses on protecting and supporting vulnerable people in our communities with a focus on prevention
- Meets the Government's requirements for devolution and supports economic growth
- Will boost efficiency, saving £43 million per year

Feedback, on the proposals submitted for Leicestershire was received from Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 3rd June 2025. The feedback highlighted areas that needed to be addressed within the final proposal which is currently being developed for submission by the November deadline.

The purpose of the governance framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievements of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The systems of internal control are a significant part of that framework and are designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. They cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The systems of internal control are based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Blaby District Council's policies, aims and objectives; to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at Blaby District Council for the year ended 31 March 2025 and will continue to be in place up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

The Governance Framework

The Authority's vision is set out in the Blaby District Plan which was developed with officers, Members and stakeholders in the district. The control environment encompasses the strategies, policies, plans, procedures, processes, structures, attitudes, and behaviours required to deliver good governance to all.

Communicating the Authority's Vision

The Blaby District Plan applicable to the 2024/25 year was adopted by Council on the 28th November 2023 and has set our Vision, Values and Priorities for the District spanning 2024-2028. Our vision is for the District to be "a great place to live, work and visit". Sitting below this vision are five strategic themes under which our plans are listed:

- Enabling our communities and supporting our vulnerable residents
- Enhancing and maintaining our natural and built environments
- Growing and supporting our economy
- Keeping you safe and healthy
- Ambitious and well-managed Council, valuing our people

This document serves as our roadmap for continually improving Blaby District and to ensure it is a great place to live, work and visit. Alongside the Plan our Transforming Blaby Together Strategy has been developed encompassing how the authority aligns our objectives for delivering Equality and Diversity; People and Organisational Development; Customer Insight, Experience and Engagement as well as Transformation, Project and Digital agendas. The MTFS continues to be updated alongside the annual budget process to ensure the Plan is affordable and the Council is in a position to respond to funding gaps that may be forthcoming.

Each year an action plan is produced detailing how the Blaby District Plan will be delivered this was approved by Council in March 2025 for the year 2025/26.

To continue to strengthen our governance arrangements the Council has commenced plans to carry out a self-assessment against the Best Value Guidance issued in May 2024. An initial

assessment indicates that we have a number of the assurance activities already in place illustrated in the examples below:

- An annual review of the effectiveness of the council's controls and governance. The Council produce an Annual Governance Statement which performs this function
- Regularly reviewing performance, finance and risk information, and taking actions where needed
- Ensuring that both members and officers have the skills they need for their roles
- Focused and constructive challenge by scrutiny of decisions and policy development (in councils with the mayor or leader/ cabinet model of governance)
- Oversight and challenge of arrangements for risk and audit by the audit committee
- The external auditors issue a Value for Money Opinion as part of their Audit which is one of the ways we might measure and report on Best Value generally and not just in reaction to the 2024 Framework. During this year the outgoing external auditors provided their opinion on the three outstanding audit years (2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/2023) and this report has been shared with Members of the Audit Committee and Finance Portfolio holder when it was received in October and included in the report to Audit Committee of the 25th November meeting when Ernst & Young gave their opinion on the outstanding years. Azets, our auditors for 2023/24 provided an opinion of VFM when they reported to the Audit Committee in April 2025. All auditors reported that they had not identified any significant concerns or risks regarding the financial sustainability, governance, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Council.

Translating the vision into objectives for the authority and its partnerships

The Council's objectives reflect the overall vision and are detailed in a series of critical activities which are regularly planned. Through the enhancement of the staff PDA process with linkages into the vision and the Blaby District Plan we have developed the Performance Framework to record and track both the corporate plan and service plans. This relatively new Performance Framework is now becoming embedded within the organisation.

The following section lists the key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance framework with a commentary setting out how the Council's arrangements comply with each of the principles in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government as follows:

Principle A – Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

The Council has adopted the national Code of Conduct for Members supported by the Grievance and Standards Committee which monitors issues in relation to standards of behaviour. The Code of Conduct for Members was approved by Council in December 2021 and was adopted as of 1 April 2022.

There is a separate officer code of conduct.

The roles and responsibilities of the Cabinet Executive, the Non-executive members, the Scrutiny Commission and the Senior Leadership Team are set out in the Council's Constitution which

provides a comprehensive framework for the management of the authority's business. This is supported by a formal Scheme of Delegation, based on a delegation by exception principle. A Member/Officer protocol ensures effective and appropriate communication between the paid establishment and elected Members. The Cabinet Executive has previously approved a recommendation from the Member Development Steering Group to adopt a comprehensive "Members Roles and Responsibilities" paper which sets out role profiles and the required skills and knowledge for the various roles Members fulfil in discharging their responsibilities.

Council policies are produced in accordance with the principles set out in the Constitution and recommended for approval following review by the Senior Leadership Team. Decision making which falls within the policy and budgetary framework rests with the Cabinet Executive whilst those decisions falling outside the framework are reserved to full Council. The call-in procedure enables the Scrutiny Commission to review decisions made by the Cabinet Executive. Day to day decision making is carried out by appropriate officers in accordance with the Scheme of Delegated Powers (which is based on a delegation by exception principle) and in accordance with the Financial Regulations. These arrangements all contribute to the economic, efficient and effective operation of the Council. The whole suite of standing orders, financial regulations and scheme of delegation are reviewed and updated as required through regular reports to Council.

In January 2025 Council endorsed and supported the Local Government Association (LGA) Debate not Hate campaign by signing the LGA Debate not Hate public statement and each councillor was invited to demonstrate the pledge by signing the statement following the Council Meeting. The Council also launched a the 'Debate Not Hate: Councillor Handbook for personal safety and healthy debate'.

Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the monitoring officer function

The "Monitoring Officer" function was carried out by two individuals throughout the year. Initially the Executive Director of Communities held the position reporting directly to the Chief Executive. The Monitoring Officer responsibilities then passed to the Group Manager of Corporate Services on her appointment in August 24. This position reports directly to the Executive Director of Communities. Regardless of reporting lines, the Monitoring Officer meets directly with the Chief Executive on a monthly basis and has ability to report directly to him/her any concerns he/she may have as Monitoring Officer.

All three statutory officers meet on a regular basis to discuss any governance issues and to ensure any concerns are addressed.

Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the discharge of the Head of Paid Service function

The "Head of Paid Service" role is undertaken by the Council's Chief Executive. The Executive Director (Section 151 Officer) has responsibility for all HR matters and this position reports to the Chief Executive position. The HR Manager and respective Group Manager also attends the regular statutory officers meeting to highlight any areas of concern.

Undertaking the core functions of an Audit Committee, as identified in CIPFA's Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities

The Council has an established Audit Committee (the Audit and Governance Committee) whose remit and functions are based on the guidance set out in a CIPFA publication which identifies best practice in relation to roles and responsibilities. The Committee meets quarterly and receives regular reports from both the Section 151 Officer, Finance Group Manager and the Audit Manager. Arrangements are in place for the Audit Manager to report independently to the Audit Committee

should he/she feel it appropriate to do so. During this year the Council has continued to enhance the function of Audit Committee in line with the CIPFA guidance. The appointing of an independent member to the Committee in October 2023 has encouraged the challenge and questions raised by Committee members and training has continued to be provided to members. Going forward the Chief Executive will attend Audit Committee meetings on a regular basis.

Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful

The Council ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations through various channels. Two statutory officers (the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer) have responsibility for ensuring that the Council does not act in an ultra vires manner, supported by the Finance Group Manager and the Council Tax, Income and Debt Manager who facilitate the management and mitigation of risk and the Audit Manager who provides assurance on matters of internal financial control. The Human Resources function along with managers, through the use of Performance Development Appraisals, assesses (and provides a means of improving) competencies to ensure that officers are equipped to discharge their duties in accordance with the requirements of the Council.

Whistle-blowing and receiving and investigating complaints from the public

The Council has in place and promotes appropriate whistle blowing policies and procedures which are regularly reviewed and updated where required. A revised Whistle Blowing (Raising Concerns) policy was updated in February 2025. Staff are aware of the Whistle Blowing policy and it has been highlighted in Blaby Matters. There is also a well-established and responsive complaints procedure to deal with both informal and formal complaints from its customers and the residents of the District. Regular information relating to performance in respect of complaints (and compliments) is presented to the Senior Leadership Team.

Principle B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

The Blaby District Plan sets out the Authority's vision, values and priorities, the resources that the Council has to deliver these (within the MTFs) and how we support our officers to deliver the plan within our Transforming Blaby Together Strategy. Objectives are set that link with the priorities and these are monitored through the year by the Senior Leadership Team within the Project Management reporting structure. The authority works closely with other local public bodies, community and voluntary groups via a partnership approach to ensure effective delivery of its services.

The development of the new Blaby District Plan 2024-28 saw extensive engagement with both staff, residents and stakeholder groups to gain valuable input into the themes and objectives identified within the Plan.

We have an active voluntary forum through which the Authority provides support to those in our community whilst engaging with them to understand how we can improve our services. Engagement with our voluntary community and new/temporary volunteers increased during the pandemic and we have taken measures to ensure we retain connection with these groups.

Customer satisfaction with services is monitored through local and service specific surveys, and electronic means to provide feedback on a range of activities and issues.

The Council produces regular e-newsletters for residents and businesses within the District which, in addition to providing information and advice, seeks to receive the views of the residents on a wide range of issues. Targeted service priority consultation exercises are undertaken to inform the future allocation of resources. The Council carries out a bi-annual Residents Survey which

includes consultation on potential Council Tax increases and satisfaction levels for a range of Council services. This was carried out in January 2024 with 1680 responses received which statistically suggests that there is 99% confidence that the results reflect the views of the whole district. Results reported that 71% of respondents felt well informed about the services and benefits delivered by Blaby District Council with general satisfaction rates being 55%.

The Council works closely with its 24 Parish Councils. Officers attend a Parish Liaison Group, which has representatives from all other districts and Leicestershire County Council. We regularly send information through to our parishes in relation to funding opportunities.

The Council has established effective Business Breakfast meetings, engaging particularly with small and medium sized enterprises. Regular meetings are also held with the head teachers of the Academies in the district and engagement with academies and primary schools in the district continued, working with them to explore career opportunities, with a number of events spanning a range of sectors including, construction, tourism, logistics and hospitality.

The Council has a thriving Youth Council which has been active this year, in raising awareness about the feeling safe, hate and vaping; a particular concern that they continue to champion.

The Council held a Youth Conference in February 2025 which was an opportunity for young people to have their say with elected members regarding issues most important to them. The event also provides an insight into what the Youth Council does and the opportunity to take part in a debate as well as attracting new members to join our Youth Council. This year the young attendees took part in activities on subjects of knife crime, first aid and internet safety and they also met the Councillors.

In order to demonstrate its openness the Authority also publishes:

- A Forward Plan 28 days before the Cabinet Executive meets and provides:
 - a) The public with details of all key, non-key and budget and policy framework decisions to be taken by Members over a minimum period of four months ahead
 - b) An aide-memoire for the Council's informal board of senior Members and officers to identify future issues for further discussion
 - c) The Scrutiny Commission with information to consider areas where it may wish to seek involvement in policy development
 - Its pay policy
 - Gender Pay Gap Report
 - Council, Cabinet and Committee Reports
 - Payments over £250

To keep the public informed the Authority proactively prepares appropriate press releases. The Council has an award-winning website which is user friendly and well-designed and the frequent use of social media channels of communication have enabled the Council to reach more of our residents effectively. Work has been carried out to update the Council's Communication Strategy which was completed in April 2025 and in an era of rapid technological change and evolving customer expectations, our approach focuses on digital-first innovation while ensuring inclusiveness for all residents. In addition, a Crisis Communications Plan has also been developed with the aim to warn, inform and reassure staff, councillors, the public and other audiences before, during and after a crisis.

Scrutiny of the Council's budget for 2024/25 took place over two meetings in January 2024. These meetings were open to all Members and attendance levels were high. A further meeting was held with Scrutiny and non-Cabinet members to consolidate their understanding and comments regarding the budget process to feed back recommendations to Council. These recommendations were fed into Cabinet formally and recommendations responded to and actions taken where appropriate.

Engagement with Stakeholders in preparation for the Interim Proposal for Local Government Reform was extensive. Whilst it was carried out jointly with the local authorities within the proposal, the Council took an active role in this speaking directly with stakeholders to understand their views on the proposal being put forward.

Contact was made with over 600 stakeholders and local partners from

- Health care organisations
- Sports and leisure providers
- Emergency services
- Education providers
- Business sector - Businesses and organisations representing a range of sectors including: chambers of trade, housing and commercial developers, manufacturing, logistics, tourism, aerospace, research and development, retail, and transport.
- Community, voluntary and charitable organisations A diverse range of individual community and voluntary groups
- Housing associations and tenant groups Representing the wide range of social housing providers operating in the area.
- Regional government bodies
- Politicians and Local Government organisations across Leicestershire and the East Midlands
- Leicester City Council
- Leicestershire County Council
- MPs across Leicestershire and Rutland
- Town and Parish Councils

To develop a robust full proposal for submission in November 2025, further comprehensive engagement will be essential. This process will allow more detailed feedback to be gathered on specific proposals. This stage of engagement will be broader, targeting a wider range of audiences. Channels will be established to reach seldom heard groups and individuals to ensure their views are included in the decision-making process.

Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

Incorporating good governance arrangements in respect of partnerships and other group working as identified by the Audit Commission's report on the governance of partnerships, and reflecting these in the authority's overall governance arrangements.

The Council participates in a range of joint working arrangements with other bodies, some of which are more significant than others. For those that deliver services to our customers there are service level agreements or contractual arrangements in place to ensure delivery and protect reputational risk. Should there be corporate risks based on partnership arrangements these will be detailed within the corporate risk register. The Council is particularly mindful of the financial and reputational risks that can arise through entering into joint working and collaborative arrangements, including the potential for a detrimental reputation impact on the Council should the partnership fail. It therefore actively supports and encourages an "open book" approach wherever possible.

Enhancing the accountability for service delivery and effectiveness of other public service providers

From April 24 to March 25 the Blaby Health and Wellbeing Partnership continued to deliver the Community Health and Wellbeing Plan (CHWP). The plan for Blaby District brings together a wide range of partners with the common purpose of improving the health and wellbeing of the local population. Forming partnerships between organisations on a local footprint is key to planning and delivering joined up services to improve the lives of people who live and work in the area.

The final set of priorities and areas of focus are:

- Reducing Obesity Levels in Adults and Children
- Reducing the level and impact of Alcohol Consumption
- Reduce the number of Falls and Hip Fractures
- Improve Cancer Diagnosis Rates
- Improved Mental Health
- Reduce Levels of Smoking and Vaping in Young People & Non Smokers

The Council is a member of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Chief Housing Officers Group are cognisant of the wider housing impacts and as a partnership are concentrating on:

- Understanding the housing impact of increased levels of household unemployment and financial instability
- Identifying and then meeting (wherever possible) the wider support and complex needs of housing customers
- Effectively supporting staff to maintain positive mental wellbeing and health as well as identifying appropriate training and career opportunities
- Working in partnership with key agencies to improve the housing offer to customers for example health, probation, adult social care

- Working collectively to address increased levels of homelessness and maximising opportunities for funding to deliver appropriate accommodation.
- Supporting initiatives such as the Staying Healthy partnership by enabling safe and healthy homes and preventing homelessness wherever possible
- Developing and managing protocols for various groups such as Care Leavers / Young People and Prison Releases
- Reviewing and responding to new legislation such as the Private Renters Bill and the Supported Housing Act
- To lead Local Government Reorganisation work linked to housing services, linking in with Programme Board arrangements.

One of the positive outcomes from this group has been the success of the bids for the Rough Sleepers Initiative Programme and the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme which continue to help improve options for Rough Sleepers and homeless households across the County at a time of increased homelessness presentations.

The Chief Housing Officers Group has continued to work well with partners and in particular in relation to the increase in homelessness presentations which have remained high across the County but also in relation to other key housing areas including, Children and Young People, Care Leavers, Prison Releases, Community Safety, Strategic Housing as well as being reactive to emergency occurrences e.g. accommodating families from the Afghanistan resettlement schemes and the Ukrainian Refugees. Blaby has also led on initiatives such as the bids for the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme which have been successful in providing self-contained accommodation for Rough Sleepers or those threatened with Rough Sleeping.

In 2023/24 Blaby took advantage of the LAHF2 to purchase housing to be utilised for temporary accommodation and reduce the need for the authority to house people in bed and breakfast accommodation. In 2024/25 the Council brought into use 15 properties purchased to provide temporary accommodation. These properties have enabled the Council to reduce reliance upon bed and breakfast accommodation which is considered unsuitable for households with children. The social benefits of being in a position to provide self-contained accommodation, particularly to families with children, are considerable for those facing homelessness.

The Council leads on the Lightbulb programme; a nationally recognised transformational project designed to improve and integrate housing related support services across the County. Lightbulb has won 3 major accolades since its inception: -

- Winning the Local Government Chronicle award for best Public/Public Partnership
- Named the best collaborative working initiative by the Association for Public Service Excellence
- Highly commended at the Home Improvement Agency Awards

The service now offers a more streamlined and person-centred service model that brings together multiple partners to address the housing and health needs of residents effectively. This includes the core Lightbulb Service focused on delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants and a range of pilots developed by district councils to provide critical insight and innovation to support communities such as:

- Safe Spaces Project – Supporting residents who are facing issues around hoarding.
- The Home Gadgets project - which sees technology supplied to help individuals with Dementia or long-term health conditions remain as independent as possible.
- Housing and Respiratory Illness Project – Identifying and supporting residents suffering with mould and damp in the home to get timely solutions
- Case worker Pilot - A pilot to support the most vulnerable service users through the DFG process to allow adaptation in the quickest possible timescale.

Looking ahead a full-service review is scheduled for 2025/26 to further enhance the Lightbulb service impact and ensure continued delivery of effective joined up housing solutions to improve residents' health and wellbeing support them to remain in their homes for as long as possible.

The Housing Enablement Team plays a key role within this integrated approach running as a standalone project working closely with services users across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland to support discharge from hospital. The service plays part of a strategic partnership model and is designed as an embedded NHS service supporting patients who have housing issues that are prevent and delaying discharge from hospital.

The Council formally merged the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) of both Blaby and Hinckley and Bosworth in April 2016. Together the CSP's across Leicestershire work with the Police, Fire, Probation Services, County Council and Clinical Commissioning Groups to develop and implement strategies to protect local communities from crime and to help people feel safe. Local approaches to deal with issues including antisocial behaviour, drug or alcohol misuse and re-offending are also developed through the joint working.

The Council has over recent years invested considerably to promote the economic development of the district. This has continued with a new Economic Development Framework being adopted by Cabinet in September 2023 with a vision "for Blaby District to be a great place to live, work and visit, with a strong, successful economy where everyone can build great businesses, careers and lives, supported in a green and environmentally friendly way, with superb connectivity." The Economic Development Framework sets out the aspirations of the Council and provides a framework that brings together all economic development activities that are occurring within the district and considers how they complement each other to maximise the benefits for our residents, businesses and visitors.

The Council leads a Building Control Partnership on behalf of five other local authorities including Harborough, Oadby and Wigston, Hinckley and Bosworth, Melton and Rutland County Council. A governance structure has been set up which includes a Management Board that meets quarterly to review performance of the service, income generation and make decisions on future priorities. Initially the partnership was delivered through a shared service agreement however, in November 2021 a decision was made by Council to operate the Building Control Partnership under delegated authority and this structure has been in place since April 22.

Through a delegation of statutory responsibility, Blaby provides a Local Land Charge service for both Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council. Through this arrangement Blaby maintains local land charges registers, processes official searches and provides access to the local land charges register for Hinckley & Bosworth Borough and Oadby & Wigston Borough (until July 2025) under the Environmental Information Regulations for personal searches.

This arrangement has provided resilience in service across all authorities with the service being highly commended at the Local Land Charges awards 2019 and shortlisted by Land Data in 2021 and 2022 for Team of the Year.

In April 2023 Blaby District successfully collaborated with neighbouring authority Oadby and Wigston Borough Council to manage and run their sport, physical activity, health and well-being programme and this was extended for a further 12 months in April 2024. Blaby District undertakes work on their behalf to run regular programmes and initiatives. In January 25 OWBC finalised their Community Health and Wellbeing Plan, providing opportunities to now work collaboratively to tackle gaps in provision or work in partnership on the same identified health inequalities.

The Council continues to work closely with the academies in our District and meetings cover a wide breadth of matters including: creating workplace opportunities in Blaby District and gaining benefit from developments under construction in our district; workplace health initiatives and creating linkages in our community to promote community safety. This meeting has also facilitated closer relationships being developed with the academies and both the police, local community groups and officers from children's support services at Leicestershire County Council.

The Council via the Chief Executive Chairs the Counties Early Help Partnership to ensure a systems based approach to children and families across the relevant partners who touch the lives of children and their families.

In addition, via the Chief Executive we engage in the Public Sectors Leaders forum which includes leaders from across the public sector such as Police, Fire, Health and Local Government including representatives from MHCLG and DWP, to ensure strategic matters across the public sector and discussed and addressed as appropriate.

Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcome

The Blaby District Plan sets out the Authority's vision, values and priorities, the resources that the Council has to deliver these (within the MTFS) and how we support our officers to deliver the plan within our Transforming Blaby Together Strategy.

The Council's service and financial planning process ensures that resource redirection and allocation is aligned to the priorities emanating from the Blaby District Plan. The Council has in place Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations designed to ensure that the Council achieves value for money in discharging its procurement requirements.

The system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information sharing, financial regulations, administrative procedures, management supervision and a system of delegation and accountability.

Development and maintenance of the system is undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team within the Council and its effectiveness is reviewed by either external or internal audit. In particular, the arrangements include:

- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy is now part of the Blaby District Plan. It includes a Financial Summary spanning future years which is revised annually.
- A 5 Year Capital Programme including asset investment.
- An effective system of budgetary control.
- The preparation and review of regular and timely financial reports which indicate financial performance against the forecasts.
- Clearly defined capital appraisal, funding and expenditure controls.
- Formal project management disciplines where appropriate

- Performance management reports

The Councils “project board” approach is now established implementing change and transformation. A focus has been placed on project management and the regular monitoring of project delivery with the SLT meeting monthly to review progress. The Council making permanent the Transformation Group Manager position recognised the importance of investing in additional resource to enhance this focus. Ultimately this is led by the Chief Executive and will continue to ensure focus is placed on continuing improvement and learning. Members are fully engaged in this process with a Cabinet Executive portfolio holder having specific responsibility for driving and monitoring the change process. The Scrutiny Commission, through its working groups, are actively involved in examining the detail of processes and change reviews.

In 2023/24 Blaby District Council considered its position within the Shared ICT Service provided by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council with Melton Borough Council also being within the Partnership. Recognising the importance of utilising digital capability the Council made the decision in February 2024 to give notice to the Partnership and transition to an in-house solution by 31st March 2025. This transition away from the Partnership has progressed during this year and we expect the transition to have been delivered by the 30th June 2025.

An in-house service will provide BDC a complete level of assurance, influence and decision making to meet its digital aspirations for ongoing transformation of services, and accelerate BDC towards achieving the ambitions of the both the Blaby District Plan adopted in 2023 and the Transforming Blaby Together Strategy

Principle E – Developing the entity’s capacity including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

Identifying the development needs of members and senior officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by appropriate training

The district election held in May 2023 saw significant numbers of new members elected. Since then a comprehensive induction programme which included 25 training sessions being delivered to new members. This programme included sessions on a variety of subjects including ICT, Democratic Process, Code of Conduct, Planning Essentials, Local Plan, Enforcement, Scrutiny introduction and questioning skills. This programme has continued to be built upon with various training sessions delivered to both new and more experienced members to ensure they are fully equipped to fulfil their roles. Where By Elections have taken place, training and development has been replicated on a one to one basis with the new Councillors. We have continued to hold 6 and 12 monthly evaluations with new Councillors in order to identify additional needs or gaps.

The Council fully supports the requirements to ensure that both Members and senior officers have the necessary skill sets to fulfil their strategic role in the organisation. The Council continues to invest in development for officers and managers. All people managers continue to be supported to understand staff wellbeing and manager participation in HR workshops delivered both virtually and face to face. During the year training on project management and procurement have been delivered along with the introduction of a new online training system; Skillgate. Mandatory modules have been released using this online system including topics such as sexual harassment awareness, work health and safety, introduction to data protection and safeguarding. We’ve also supported staff with talks on the Pensions scheme and Planning for retirement.

The Council has accessed LGA, Solace, CIPFA and DCN development programmes that a small number of staff have benefitted from. During the year 10 members of staff were involved in apprenticeships; 2 commenced, 1 completed their apprenticeship, 5 are ongoing and unfortunately 2 resigned partway through their apprenticeships.

We have continued to collaborate with local Councils on an ILM Manager Development programme, with 9 managers in the process of completing a management qualification at different levels, resulting in positive feedback and cross Council networking opportunities.

In past years the Council has supported a group of officers to attend the East Midlands Challenge Event giving them an insight into issues faced when in strategic roles. This year no event was held but it is an opportunity the Council will continue to support in future years.

The Council continues to adhere to the principles of the East Midlands Councils Elected Member Development Charter. The Charter provides a set of national standards for authorities to achieve, ensuring elected Members are equipped to have the knowledge and skills to be effective community leaders.

Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public management

The Council invested in putting in place a new clear and coherent framework for managing and monitoring performance. Extensive work was undertaken in 2022/23 to develop a much improved performance system utilising a system known internally as I-Plan. I-Plan is now being used by the authority to report both performance, risk and projects. This has become embedded across the authority since implementation and has seen access for both officers and members to access performance data.

A Six Monthly Performance Report is presented to Council which provides a summary of progress and performance against the priorities within the Blaby District Plan. This report encompasses a whole Council approach focused on the three priorities; A Place to Live, A Place to Work, A Place to Visit, and it is recognised that all services contribute to the successful delivery of the Council's Plan.

This report is also presented at Scrutiny Commission meetings. The responsibility for Performance Management sits with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Assets and Performance. All Cabinet members provide challenge through our reporting channels.

The Council has in place a Risk Management Policy and Strategy to ensure that the management of risk, is embedded within the organisation at both the strategic and operational level with both Members and senior officers having specific roles and responsibilities identified. A Corporate Risk Management Group, headed by the Chief Executive who is supported by the Finance Group Manager who has specific responsibility to co-ordinate the management of risk across the Council. Both Members and officers are trained so that they are equipped to manage risk in a way appropriate to their duties. Risk assessments are a pre-requisite for all capital project appraisals and form an integral element of Project Plans. The Council utilises a software package Iplan to assist with the management and monitoring of both corporate and service risks. Members of the Audit and Governance Committee received regular corporate risk monitoring reports.

Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

Ensuring the Authority's Financial Management Arrangements Conform with the Governance Requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government

The CIPFA Statement was originally published in March 2009 in respect of the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in public services as a whole and was considered by the Council's Cabinet Executive in July of that year. The following year a further version was produced which was specifically directed towards Chief Financial Officers serving in local government. The five

underlying principles however remained the same. The Council's financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements as set out in the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016).

During this year, the Executive Director (S151 Officer) held the position of S151 Officer.

Ensuring the authority's assurance arrangements addresses the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019)

The Council's internal reporting arrangements are designed to ensure the independence of the internal audit function. Appropriate resources are made available to provide an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the Council's operations. It brings a systemic disciplined approach to evaluating and improving the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. The Audit Manager reports directly to the Council's Audit and Governance Committee on all matters appertaining to audit outcomes.

Review of Effectiveness

Blaby District Council undertakes, on an annual basis, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by a) the work of the senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, b) the Audit Manager's annual report and c) by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

Part of this process is to carry out an assurance review which identifies examples of assurances in respect of those governance arrangements which are key to mitigate against significant risks to the achievement of the corporate objectives of the Council.

Whilst a number of actions were identified through this process they don't relate specifically to governance matters, but illustrate the Council's commitment to continuous improvement. The actions are listed in the table below for completeness. The comprehensive detail of the assurance review completed will be presented as an appendix to the Annual Governance Report which will be considered by Cabinet Executive in June 2025.

Core Principal 1: A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Supporting Principle 1 : Behaving with Integrity

Action – To continue to reinforce the values detailed within the new Blaby District Plan: honesty, openness and treating people fairly.

Action – Training of staff when responding to complaints with a balanced view.

Supporting Principle 2 : Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values

Action – Culture audit to be carried out by internal audit.

Core Principal B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Supporting Principle 2 : Engaging comprehensively with institutional Stakeholders

Action – Longer-term review of both the Lightbulb Service and Housing Enablement Team (HET). Both services with partners require new arrangements from April 2026.

Supporting Principle 3 : Engaging stakeholders effectively, including individual citizens and service users

Action – Build on the development of the Communications Strategy and ensure engagement with all stakeholders regarding the proposals for LGR.

Action – ensure that the LGR engagement reaches young people and seldom heard groups and individuals to ensure their views are included in the decision-making process.

Core Principal C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

Supporting Principle 1 : Defining outcomes

Action – Continue to deliver actions to deliver the Blaby Plan taking into consideration the LGR Proposal.

Action – Continue to embed the new business planning, data intelligence and risk management process utilising the I-Plan system.

Supporting Principle 2 : Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

Action – Continue to brief all members, regarding Council finance incorporating Fair Funding, Business Rates and financial implications of government driven waste initiatives.

Core Principal D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Supporting Principle 2 : Planning interventions

Action – Develop and provide extra value from the new business planning, data intelligence and risk management process utilising the I-Plan system and external data to inform KPI's and improvements to services.

Supporting Principle 3 : Optimising achievement of intended outcomes

Action – Continue to increase the financial awareness of budget managers to monitor and ensure that budget is tailored and trimmed with services delivered efficiently and effectively.

Core Principal E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Supporting Principle 1 : Developing the entity's capacity

Action - Use benchmarking information to enhance the performance framework and support decision making.

Action – Build on work already carried out on policy updates and development and retention/recruitment initiatives, including East Mids pilot scheme being carried out by EMC.

Supporting Principle 2 : Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals

Action - Continue to progress the programme of training for people managers across the authority with the employment of Learning & Organisational Development resource to develop a programme of development across the organisation.

Action – Undertake staff survey and monitor sickness levels

Core Principal F : Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Supporting Principle 1 : Managing risk

Action – Build on progress made to utilise the new I-Plan system to record risks and ensure lower level risks are managed across the organisation.

Supporting Principle 2 : Managing Performance

Action – Develop and provide extra value from the new business planning, data intelligence and risk management process utilising the I-Plan system and external data to inform KPI's and improvements to services.

Action – Need to ensure track outcomes on project delivery.

Supporting Principle 3 : Robust internal control

Action – Carry out a self- assessment against the Best Value Framework.

Action – Build on the progress made to work towards compliance of the Council's Audit & Governance Committee with the CIPFA Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (CIPFA, 2022).

Supporting Principle 4 : Managing Data

Action - Improve the use and reference to data during the decision making process.

Supporting Principle 5 : Strong public financial management

Action – Build upon the training that has been provided for budget managers to ensure they understand their responsibilities to manage their budget and can re-forecast accurately during the year.

All actions from the previous year were completed or progressed and a number of them will continue to be built on and developed in 2025/26.

There was however, one action relating to the Bi-Annual satisfaction survey that will no longer be undertaken in 2026. Given the timelines for the Local Government Reform the residents survey will not go ahead. An action has however been added to ensure that the LGR engagement reaches young people and seldom heard groups and individuals to ensure their views are included in the decision-making process.

Actions identified during the annual governance review are monitored through a combination of actions appearing on the Corporate Action Plan (the annual action plan formed from the Blaby Plan) or monitored by the Statutory Officers as part of their regular meetings.

Review of Compliance with Financial Management Code 2022/23

The Council carried out a review of compliance with the FM Code in advance of 2022/23. It was considered by the Audit and Standards Committee in July 2021 and the action plan arising from the review approved by Cabinet Executive in September. The document was made available to the public. Whilst the Authority was found to be compliant with many aspects of the FM Code, there were a number of areas that were partially compliant. An action plan was developed and all areas addressed to ensure compliance.

Role of the Council

The extent of the role of full Council in reviewing and monitoring effectiveness of internal control is set out in Article 4 of the Council's constitution. Article 4 provides that the Council is responsible for setting the policy and budgetary framework.

It is the responsibility of the statutory officers to report to Council on any issues concerning the review of the effectiveness of internal control arrangements where such cases fall outside the delegated power of other decision making bodies of the Council. There have been no issues arising during 2024/25 which have required the full Council to exercise its role.

The Constitution of the Council is subject to a continuous review process and a delegation by exception scheme forms an integral part of the arrangements. The Constitution underwent a revision in 2016/17 and the new version, which was actively reviewed by Members, was approved by Council on 24 May 2016. Since that time, amendments to the Constitution are brought before Council throughout the year as part of the continuous review process and annually to ensure it is fit for purpose.

The Council formally reviews its Financial Regulations on a regular basis albeit ongoing updates are implemented as part of the regular reviews of the Constitution.

Role of Cabinet Executive

The role of the Cabinet Executive is to receive, consider and approve the Annual Governance Statement and to monitor the implementation of any Action Plans arising out of the review of its governance arrangements.

Role of Audit Committee

A formal Audit Committee, constituted on the basis of the guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance, including the adoption of a "Statement of Purpose", was established in 2008.

The Audit Committee (The Audit and Corporate Governance Committee) meets on a quarterly basis. It has responsibility for considering the findings of the annual review of the effectiveness of the internal audit function in addition to receiving regular monitoring reports from the Audit Manager. The annual external audit plan is also approved by the Audit Committee.

Role of Scrutiny Committee

The Council has a well-established Scrutiny Commission supported by working panels who are assigned specific projects to be undertaken. The Commission can "call in" a decision which has been made by the Cabinet Executive but not yet implemented, to enable them to consider whether the decision is appropriate.

Risk Management

The Corporate Risk Group regularly reviews the Risk Management Strategy to ensure its continued relevance to the Council. The reviews also assess performance against the aims and objectives of the Risk Management Strategy.

The Financial Services Group Manager provides regular progress reports to the Corporate Risk Group and the Senior Leadership Team bringing to their attention any significant risks which have been identified. The Corporate Risk Group/Senior Leadership Team also:

- Reviews the Council's strategic/operational risk registers and associated action plans
- Ensures that the appropriate management action is taken to minimise/eliminate risk

The Audit and Corporate Governance Committee review the Strategic Risk Register and mitigating actions regularly. They also have responsibility for reviewing and recommending the Risk Management Strategy at regular intervals.

Role of Internal Audit

Internal Audit is provided in accordance with the statutory responsibility under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Accounts and Audit Regulations and the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. It is managed on a day-to-day basis by the Shared Audit Manager who reported to the Executive Director of Communities during the year. There is however also an indirect reporting line to the Executive Director (Section 151 Officer) in relation to matters of a technical or professional nature.

Internal Audit objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of internal controls and governance as a contribution to the proper, economic and effective use of resources. During 2024/25 this responsibility was carried out following an approved risk based annual audit plan. The Audit Manager produces quarterly progress monitoring reports against the plan to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

The internal reporting process for audit work requires a report of each audit to be submitted to the relevant Group/Corporate Manager and/or Service Manager. The report includes an action plan that details areas where control weaknesses have been identified. The action plan requires a response from the relevant manager detailing the way in which the control issue will be addressed, or alternatively, the way in which the risk associated with the control issue will be managed. The process also includes regular reviews of agreed actions to ensure that they are acted upon. A summary of all audits carried out, including a grading rating which reflects the effectiveness of the controls in place and an analysis of the recommendations is submitted to each quarterly Audit and Corporate Governance Committee meeting. The Senior Leadership Team regularly review the progress made towards the recommendations from internal audits being actioned.

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), introduced on 1 April 2013, and revised in April 2016 and again in 2017, require an external assessment of compliance with the Standards to be carried out at least once every five years.

The assessment was carried out in November 2020 and found that the internal audit function at Blaby District Council conforms with the PSIAS and there were no areas of non-compliance identified. The final report was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee on 1 February 2021 along with an action plan containing minor action points which the Shared Audit Manager has implemented to improve overall compliance with the Standards.

The Shared Service Audit Manager provides an independent opinion on the internal control environment to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee which then feeds into the Annual

Governance Statement process. For the 12 months ended 31 March 2025, based upon the work undertaken by Internal Audit during the year and additional information provided by relevant managers on their responses to audit recommendations, the Shared Audit Manager has formed the opinion that she is able to give **reasonable assurance** on the Council's overall internal control arrangements. To be consistent with our Internal Audit opinion definitions, this means that there is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the areas audited. This is a positive assurance opinion overall which will be detailed in the report of the Shared Manager's 'Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/2025' which will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 28th July 2025.

All but three internal audit reports issued during 2024/25 were issued with either substantial or reasonable assurance opinions. The reports that were issued with limited assurance opinions and recommendations made within the audits have already been actioned or plans have been put in place to ensure they are addressed.

It should be noted that no assurance has been obtained in relation to the management of risks and controls within the ICT service area other than evidence of a Public Sector Network Certificate. The ICT Service is currently provided through a shared partnership.

Recognising the importance of utilising digital capability, the Council made the decision in February 2024 to give notice to the Partnership and transition to an in-house solution by 31st March 2025. Whilst this transition has been delayed until 1st July 2025, it is still the intention of the Council to bring the service in-house.

An in-house service will provide BDC a complete level of assurance, influence and decision making to meet its digital aspirations for ongoing transformation of services and accelerate BDC towards achieving the ambitions of the Blaby District Plan adopted in 2023.

Other Explicit Review/Assurance Mechanisms

The Corporate Services Group Manager, and the Executive Director of Communities (who both carried out the role of the "Monitoring Officer" during this year) has a duty to monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure its aims and principles are given full effect. The Constitution underwent a revision in 2016/17 and the new version, which was actively reviewed by Members, was approved by Council on 24 May 2016.

Statements of Assurance are received from senior officers regarding internal control issues in line with the guidance set out in "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government".

In November 2021 the Council invited the LGA to carry out a Finance Health Check which gave a view of the robustness of the Council's financial arrangements. The report, received in December 2021, concluded that the Council is well managed financially and has consistently spent within its budget. The report went on to provide a number of recommendations all of which were either completed or have been incorporated into our financial considerations on an ongoing basis.

The Council has continued the engagement with the LGA Peer Review process; the first review being in 2015 and followed by a further review in 2018.

A more recent Peer Review (now referred to as a Corporate Peer Challenge) was performed in March 2022 and was again very positive with the report summarising that "Blaby District Council (BDC) is a well-run local authority; it has a sound financial position, strong leadership, particularly through its Leader and Chief Executive, and committed staff. There is real ownership by members

and officers, and everyone wants to do their best for Blaby as a council, place and for its communities.”

The final report was reported to Council in July 2022 alongside an action plan that has been put in place to address recommendations made for improvement. The LGA Peer Challenge team returned to the Council in December 2022 to review the Council’s progress reporting that “Blaby DC is clearly committed to addressing all the CPC’s recommendations and has made excellent progress in doing so. This is all the more impressive, given that the council, like others, is responding to the ongoing challenging, economic environment.”

In October 2024 the LGA carried out an Annual Assurance Conversation, with no concerns raised but some opportunities were identified to gain support from the Planning Advisory Service in relation to the Local Plan and review/training for the Planning Committee, along with support and training from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and further training/mentoring for Members.

Recently the Council was notified by the Planning Inspectorate that the Council’s Planning Service nearly entered Special Measures, narrowly avoiding failing to meet the ‘quality of decisions for the ‘major developments’ indicator. The most recent measures are reported for the time period April 2022 through to March 2024. The Council has continued to engage with the Planning Advisory Service to aid the Planning Committee with an improved understanding of their responsibilities in relation to future decision making.

Statement of Leader and Chief Executive

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework carried out by members of the Senior Leadership Team and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Significant governance issues

Whilst there are no significant governance issues to report, nevertheless the Council continues to seek to enhance and strengthen our governance arrangements where improvements can be identified. We will monitor progress made as part of our next annual review.

Signed _____
Leader of the Council
June 2025

Signed _____
Chief Executive
June 2025