

Leader's Statement

27 January 2026



Enabling our communities and supporting our vulnerable residents

Homelessness support

Welcome to 2026 and our first Full Council meeting of the New Year. The first thing I'd like to talk about is the increasing challenges we face around homelessness.

Our area is not alone in seeing a rise in the number of local people needing temporary accommodation due to a lack of affordable homes becoming available or being built each year. There are other significant contributing factors such as an increase in those fleeing domestic abuse, the increase in the cost of living and people being asked to leave the homes of family and friends. People are also being priced out of an expensive private rental market here in the District compared with other areas, with rates which often sit well above Local Housing Allowance levels.

The purchase and introduction of our own temporary accommodation meets the key principles in the government's National Plan to End Homelessness, which aims to eliminate the use of B&B's for families, apply the Decent Homes Standard to temporary housing and greater protection for residents, particularly children who are being impacted by homelessness.

An additional £500,000 has been provisionally allocated for 2026-27 to meet this increasing demand and support work to achieve these objectives.

We made some fantastic inroads into addressing some of these issues last year by officially opening Frost Court, a dedicated supported living scheme in Blaby village



for people with mental health needs as well as giving planning permission to a 100% affordable housing scheme in Leicester Forest East.

This year we hope to go further with planned spending on more homes which can provide a better standard of self-contained accommodation for those families desperate for a safe and comfortable place to live.

Christmas hampers

Again, this year our staff and Councillors have shown how generous they are by donating hundreds of items to make up hampers for some of our most vulnerable residents.

Collections were organised by the team in Lightbulb with hampers sorted in the Council Chamber, looking very festive under our Christmas tree. A total of 45 hampers were made up and distributed to the vulnerable.

I'm sure the households who received them, who are all supported by our teams, enjoyed the seasonal gifts and felt some extra Christmas cheer.



White Ribbon Campaign

During November and December we ran activities and events focused on the White Ribbon Campaign and its message to end gender-based violence against women and girls.

I was proud to see so many people take part, sign pledges and attend our Lunch and Learn workshops. It can be a difficult message to get across as obviously most boys and men would never think about being violent to women and girls.

But we have to remember there can be more subtle types of abuse, cat-calling, misogynistic language and leering, it all perpetuates sexism in society which reinforces dangerous gender stereotypes.

Our work in 2025 is just the start of our actions to not let sexism slide and help create a safer, more respectful environment for everyone.

Looking forward to Community Awards

In just a couple of day's time I'll proudly be the compere for our annual Blaby District Council Community Awards. These awards recognise and celebrate the contribution and achievements of individual volunteers and voluntary sector organisations who serve Blaby District, making a huge contribution to residents' lives.

We have four categories this year, Volunteer of the Year, Young Volunteer of the Year, a new category - Sport and Physical Activity Volunteer of the Year and Community Group of the Year.

I'd like to thank everyone who took the time to make a nomination this year and also to those who voted for your Community Group of the Year. The winners and runners-up in each category will be announced at a special awards ceremony on Thursday 29 January.



Armed Forces Covenant Re-signing

Here at Blaby District Council, we are working hard to support our armed forces. This is demonstrated through our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a UK National promise ensuring the armed forces community receives fair treatment, they are not disadvantaged due to their service and their sacrifices are recognised. It is supported both nationally and locally through government, local authorities, businesses and charities signing pledges.

As part of our commitment Blaby District Council resigned the Armed Forces Covenant this month. We pledged our continuing commitment to ensuring the armed forces community receives support across various aspects of life, including healthcare, housing, education and employment.

The pledge was signed by myself, our chief executive Julia Smith, local MPs Alberto Costa, representative for South Leicestershire and Peter Bedford representing Mid Leicestershire.



Joint taxi inspections

Just before Christmas our licensing team partnered with colleagues from the City of Wolverhampton Council for the first time to carry out surprise taxi checks.

Under licensing laws we can only stop and inspect taxis operating in our District if they are licensed through us. As part of our conditions, all vehicles have to undergo a six-monthly check.

However, we don't have the power to inspect taxis if they are not licensed with us. With the growth of ride-booking apps, many taxis working in our area are licensed elsewhere, for many different reasons.

The City of Wolverhampton Council is a significant licensing authority for around 2,700 ride app drivers who live in Leicestershire alone.

Working with them meant we had the option of checking more vehicles to ensure they were safe and fit for purpose. All of the 15 vehicles which were inspected were licensed through the City of Wolverhampton Council and their team were able to take immediate action on the taxis which were not meeting standards.

The initiative was a great success and while it was our first joint operation we hope it won't be our last, working together to improve taxi services for our residents.



Enhancing and maintaining our natural and built environment

Food waste service launching

As part of the government's Simpler Recycling reforms we're introducing weekly food waste recycling collections at the end of March.

Our teams have been working hard for months to make sure all measures are in place ready for the service launch on 30 March.

This has included taking delivery of specialist vehicles, recruiting new staff and finding storage to house the 90,000 plus caddies which will start to be delivered in the coming days.

Putting the caddy packs together, which comprise a small (7-litre) kitchen caddy, starter roll of bags, larger (23-litre) lockable outside caddy and instruction leaflet, has been a monumental task in itself.



It has been a real example of Team Blaby and different departments working together to ensure the service gets off to the best possible start.

I'd urge all my fellow Councillors to spread the word about the new service and encourage their communities to take part.

Recycling food waste helps reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions and creates useful by-products such as biogas and natural agricultural fertiliser. Let's all support the new service as part of our net zero ambitions.



Ambitious and well managed Council, valuing our people

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

As we continue to modernise the way we work and strengthen our ability to deliver high-quality services, we are taking steps to implement Artificial Intelligence (AI).

We have established an AI Policy that sets out our commitment to the safe, ethical and transparent use of AI. We are now finalising an AI Procedure, which will guide colleagues in using AI. This will include a list of approved AI tools and a clear process for evaluating and approving additional tools in the future.

To support this work, we have created an AI Working Group that meets regularly and brings together expertise from Communications, ICT, Information Governance, Transformation, HR and the Monitoring Officer.

Once the Procedure is complete, we will begin a phased rollout. This will include a comprehensive communications plan, AI prompt training for end users, and ongoing support and resources as we expand our AI capabilities.

The introduction of AI presents significant opportunities to streamline processes, improve customer experiences, and unlock more capacity for staff to focus on meaningful, high-value work.



Budget consultation 2026/27

We have launched our Budget Consultation for 2026-27, and we are inviting our communities to share their views with us. Feedback plays an important role in shaping the decisions we make, and we want to ensure that every voice is heard.

Just like household expenses, the cost of providing services increases over time due to inflation. At the same time, demand for many of our services continues to grow as our district expands. This means we are having to deliver more services, without any additional government funding to support this increased demand.

These challenges make it even more important that we understand the priorities of the people we serve. By taking part in the consultation, residents and businesses can help us identify where resources should be focused, how we can continue to protect essential services, and where we may need to do things differently.

Please encourage residents to have their say before the consultation closes at midnight on 16 February. They can visit www.blaby.gov.uk/consultation to have their say.

Number one for accessibility – www.blaby.gov.uk

I'm absolutely delighted to say at the start of 2026 we are at number one on a special index which measures UK Councils for their website accessibility.

To make this achievement even more amazing, this is a position we have held either solely or jointly since January 2024. What a fabulous achievement from everyone and particularly our Communications Team who are the guardians of our website.

The index is published by a company called Silktide which uses an automated tool to check and score organisations on globally accepted standards for web accessibility, producing the [Silktide Index](#).

An accessible website is important as it ensures that people with disabilities (visual, auditory, motor, cognitive) can access and interact with digital content.

As well as being the right thing to do from a responsible authority's point of view, ensuring our website is accessible is also a legal requirement and regular checks are made by government to review how we are faring.

Having Silktide check our website regularly helps us maintain accessibility standards for compliance and more importantly for the benefit of our residents, ensuring information we share is easy to read and understand.



Local government reorganisation

At the end of November we officially submitted the North, City, South proposal for local government reorganisation.

Backed by ourselves, the other borough and district councils in Leicestershire and Rutland County Council we believe this is the most credible option for future council structures. It is supported by compelling evidence and data, has community support and meets all criteria set by government.

The North, City, South plan focuses on prevention with the proposed creation of neighbourhood partnerships. These will help council services work more closely with other public services like the NHS, police and the voluntary and charity sector. The aim is to get to people sooner, improve lives and reduce demand to help councils be more sustainable.

We have recently been told by government that it is launching a seven-week consultation on the three proposals for the county and Rutland in early February. We will be sharing this consultation and encouraging our residents to give their views.

A decision on which proposal is favoured by the government is expected later this year.

