



DATE:
MY REF: RW/CCouncil
PLEASE ASK FOR: Mrs. R. Whitelaw
DIRECT DIALLING: (0116) 305 6098
E-MAIL: rosemary.whitelaw@leics.gov.uk

ORDEER PAPER AND POSITION STATEMENT **SUPPLEMENTARY PACK**

Order Paper (Pages 3 – 18)

7. To receive position statements under Standing Order 8. (Pages 19 - 24)



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MEETING OF THE LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY 2025 AT 2.00 P.M.

ORDER PAPER

EVACUATION PROCEDURE

In the event of having to evacuate officers will be able to advise and be on hand to assist any disabled persons.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1
CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The CHAIRMAN will make his announcements.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2
MINUTES
 (Pages 3 - 42)

The CHAIRMAN will move and the VICE CHAIRMAN will second:

“That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 3rd December 2025, copies of which have been circulated to members, be taken as read, confirmed and signed.”

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The CHAIRMAN will invite members who wish to do so to make declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4
BUDGET REPORT OF THE CABINET
 (Pages 43 - 310)
 Supplementary Agenda Pack Pages 3 – 20)

Principal Speakers:
 Mover of the motion (as appropriate)
 Leader of the Opposition (Mrs Taylor)

(A) MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/27 – 2029/30

MR FOWLER will move and MR D HARRISON will second:

“(a) That subject to the items below, and following changes arising from the Local Government Finance Settlement, approval be given to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which incorporates the recommended net revenue budget for 2026/27 totalling £616.1m as set out in the revised Appendices A, B and E of this report and includes the growth and savings

for that year as set out in the revised Appendix C;

- (b) That the revised Appendices A, B, C and E be approved to reflect the changes in Revenue Support Grant, which reduces the use of reserves in 2026/27 and reduces the funding gap in 2027/28, and the allocation of £2.5m in the Service Investment Fund, as set out earlier in this supplementary report;
- (c) That approval be given to the projected provisional revenue budgets for 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30, set out in revised Appendix B to the report, including the growth and savings for those years as set out in revised Appendix C, allowing the undertaking of preliminary work, including business case development, engagement and equality and human rights impact assessments, as may be necessary to achieve the savings specified for those years including savings under development, set out in Appendix D;
- (d) That each Chief Officer, in consultation with the Director of Corporate Resources and following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Lead Member(s), undertake preparatory work as considered appropriate to develop proposals and associated investment required to reduce the financial gap in all four years of the MTFS, to enable the Cabinet, subject to scrutiny processes, to consider a new multi-year transformation programme;
- (e) That approval be given to the early achievement of savings that are included in the MTFS, as may be necessary, along with associated investment costs, subject to the Director of Corporate Resources agreeing to funding being available;
- (f) That the level of the General Fund and earmarked reserves as set out in the revised Appendix K, to reflect the updates for the High Needs Deficit cover as set out earlier in this report, be noted and the planned use of those earmarked reserves as indicated in that appendix be approved;
- (g) That the risk assessment at paragraph 140 and the Director of Corporate Resources assurance statement at paragraph 155 be noted;
- (h) That the recommended Council Tax increase of 2.99% for 2026/27 and the resulting precept be approved;
- (i) That the Chief Executive be authorised to issue the necessary precepts to billing authorities in accordance with (g) above and the tax base notified by the District Councils, and to take any other action which may be necessary to give effect to the precepts;
- (j) That approval be given to the 2026/27 to 2029/30 capital programme, totalling £501m, as set out in Appendix F;
- (k) That the Director of Corporate Resources following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member for Resources be authorised to approve new capital schemes and revenue spend to save schemes, including revenue costs

associated with their delivery, shown as future developments in the capital programme, to be funded from funding available;

(l) That the financial indicators required under the Prudential Code included in Appendix N, Annex 2 be noted and that the following limits be approved:

	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Operational boundary for external debt				
i) Borrowing	194	200	225	255
ii) Other long term liabilities	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	195	201	226	256
Authorised limit for external debt				
i) Borrowing	204	210	235	265
ii) Other long term liabilities	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	205	211	236	266

(m) That the Director of Corporate Resources be authorised to effect movement within the authorised limit for external debt between borrowing and other long-term liabilities;

(n) That the following borrowing limits be approved for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30:

(i) Maturity of borrowing:

	Upper Limit	Lower Limit
	%	%
Under 12 months	30	0
12 months and within 24 months	30	0
24 months and within 5 years	50	0
5 years and within 10 years	70	0
10 years and above	100	25

(ii) An upper limit for principal sums invested for periods longer than 364 days is 25% of the portfolio.

(o) That the Director of Corporate Resources be authorised to enter into such loans or undertake such arrangements as necessary to finance the capital programme, subject to the prudential limits in Appendix N;

(p) That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix N, be approved

including:

- (i) The Treasury Management Policy Statement, Appendix N; Annex 4;
- (ii) The Annual Statement of the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision as set out in Appendix N, Annex 1;
- (q) That the Capital Strategy (Appendix G), Investing in Leicestershire Programme Strategy (Appendix H), Risk Management Policy and Strategy (Appendix I), Earmarked Reserves Policy (Appendix J) and Insurance Policy (Appendix L) be approved;
- (r) That it be noted that the Leicester and Leicestershire Business Rate Pool has been revoked for 2026/27;
- (s) That the Leicestershire School Funding Formula is subject to capping and scaling and continues to reflect the National Funding Formula for 2026/27;
- (t) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Children and Family Services, following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Family Services, to agree the funding rates for early years providers for 2026/27.”

An amendment will be moved by MRS TAYLOR and seconded by MR KING

[Note: although there will be a single debate, there will be six recorded votes at the end of the debate, one on each of the six proposals that form the amendment. The Chairman will take Table A first, then Table B and so on. There will be no opportunity for further debate between the votes.]

- “1. That paragraph (a), (b), (e), (f) and (i) of the motion be amended to read as follows:
- ‘(a) That subject to the items below, approval be given to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which incorporates the recommended net revenue budget for 2026/27 totalling £616.1m as set out in the amended Appendices A, B and E of this report and includes the growth and savings for that year as set out in Appendix C, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;’
- ‘(b) That approval be given to the projected provisional revenue budgets for 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30, set out in the amended Appendix B to the report, including the growth and savings for those years as set out in Appendix C, allowing the undertaking of preliminary work, including business case development, engagement and equality and human rights impact assessments, as may be necessary to achieve the savings specified for those years including savings under development, set out in Appendix D, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;’
- ‘(e) That the level of the General Fund and earmarked reserves as set out in

the amended Appendix K be noted and the planned use of those earmarked reserves as indicated in that appendix be approved, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;'

- ‘(f) That the risk assessment at paragraph 140 and the Director of Corporate Resources assurance statement at paragraph 155 be noted, as amended by paragraph (a) (iii) below;’
- ‘(i) That approval be given to the 2026/27 to 2029/30 capital programme, totalling £501m, as set out in Appendix F, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;’

2. That the following be added after paragraph (a) of the motion:

- (a) (i) That the list of growth and savings proposals as set out in Appendix C; the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix F and the Earmarked Reserves as set out in Appendix K of the report be amended as follows:

	2026/27 £000s	2027/28 £000s	2028/29 £000s	2030/31 £000s
TABLE A				
<u>Additional Service Growth</u>				
NEW Parking Enforcement – Feasibility and Model Development	20	0	0	0
Full investigation into establishing a centralised Parking Enforcement Model coordinated by Leicestershire County Council.				
This funding will support:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A feasibility study assessing operational, financial, and legal implications of moving to a centralised enforcement model. • An options appraisal comparing the current approach to an alternative centrally led approach • Engagement with districts and key partners on governance, accountability, and implementation requirements. 				
Identification of potential efficiencies, income generation, and improvements in consistency and compliance.				
A centralised enforcement approach may provide improved consistency, more effective use of technology, streamlined administration, more coverage, extended operation, and potential cost efficiencies. This initial investment enables the Council to fully assess the				

model before making any long-term budgetary commitments.

TABLE B

NEW Development of a Residents' App for Highways Reporting	10	0	0	0
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Investigation into a Residents' Mobile App that enables the public to easily report potholes and other highway issues whilst on the go.

This funding will support investigation of:

- Scoping and estimated uptake of a user-friendly mobile App (iOS and Android).
- Integration with existing highways reporting systems to streamline workflows and reduce duplication.
- Improved GPS-based reporting to enhance accuracy and speed of defect identification.
- Accessibility and compliance requirements.

A dedicated App will improve public reporting, enhance real-time visibility of highways defects, and reduce delays in identifying and triaging potholes and other issues. The investment will support digital transformation and improve customer experience.

TABLE C

NEW Investment in Innovative Technology for Road Maintenance (Automated Road Inspection)	50	0	0	0
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Explore and pilot innovative automated highway technology to drive efficiencies across highway services such as improving the accuracy, efficiency, and speed of identifying defects on the highway and the wider network.

This funding will support:

- A feasibility study into a wide range of potential new technology that could improve efficiency such as automated road-inspection tools (e.g., AI-enabled cameras, sensor-based systems, dashboard-mounted scanning equipment).
- Trials of suitable technologies to assess accuracy in detecting potholes, cracking, surface wear, and other defects on the wider network.
- Evaluation of integration with existing asset-management systems.
- Cost-benefit analysis comparing automated inspection with current manual survey methods.
- Engagement with technology providers and neighbouring authorities to identify best practice.

Automated road-inspection technology offers the potential to:

- Improve the consistency and reliability of condition assessments;
- Identify defects earlier, preventing deterioration;
- Reduce manual workload;
- Provide real-time data to support proactive maintenance planning.

This investment will allow the Council to explore innovative, data-driven approaches to maintaining the highway network and ensure the most efficient use of future maintenance budgets

Potential long-term savings include more efficient highway services such as reduced manual inspection costs and earlier identification of defects, preventing more expensive repairs.

TABLE D

NEW Councillor Grit Bin Funding Pot	30	0	0	0
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Each County Councillor may apply for funding from this pot to install grit bins within their division, subject to meeting the Council's existing location and eligibility criteria for grit bin placement.

This fund will support:

- The purchase and installation of new grit bins.
- Initial stocking of new grit bins
- Improved winter resilience at local, community-identified priority locations.

Providing a dedicated funding pot gives councillors flexibility to address local winter safety needs, supports community resilience, and ensures that grit bins are installed only where they meet the Council's established criteria, ensuring fairness and consistency across the county.

Currently Parish/town or district councils can apply for a grit bin and pay for the installation

TABLE E

NEW Additional Resources for Gully Cleaning to Prevent Flooding	400	0	0	0
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To strengthen the Highways Gully Cleaning Programme and drainage works, in order to reduce surface-water flooding, improve drainage performance, and enhance winter and storm resilience.

This additional funding will support:

- Targeted interventions in areas with repeated resident reports or known historic flooding issues.
- Improved mapping and data capture to support proactive drainage maintenance.

- Repairing culverts
- Addressing other defects arising from surveys

Flooding is one of the most frequent causes of highway disruption and resident complaints. Increasing investment in proactive gully maintenance and drainage repairs reduces emergency callouts, protects road surfaces, improves road safety, and provides visible, community-focused benefits. This funding will allow the Council to act ahead of severe weather events and manage drainage assets more effectively.

Additional Capital Expenditure

TABLE F

Increased Funding for Footpath Maintenance to Prevent Trips and Falls	3,000	0	0	0
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To significantly enhance the Footpath Maintenance Programme, with a focus on preventing trips, falls, injuries, and mobility barriers for residents.

This investment will support:

- Accelerated repairs to damaged, uneven, or deteriorating footways across the county.
- Targeted upgrades in areas with high pedestrian use, including routes near schools, care homes, community centres, and health facilities.
- Reduced backlog of reported defects, improving safety and accessibility for all users, including older residents and those with mobility impairments.
- Proactive maintenance to prevent more costly structural failures caused by weathering, tree-root intrusion, and drainage issues.

Improved monitoring and prioritisation processes to ensure timely intervention in high-risk locations.

Whilst this is a capital enhancement, it is expected to reduce future revenue pressures by lowering reactive maintenance costs and claims relating to slips, trips, and falls.

Footpath condition is one of the most frequent and visible concerns raised by residents. Poorly maintained footways present a direct safety risk, particularly for older people, wheelchair users, visually impaired residents, and families with pushchairs.

Strengthening footpath maintenance:

- Reduces avoidable injuries;
- Improves community confidence;
- Supports active travel ambitions;
- Enhances the overall appearance and usability of local streets.

A £3 million investment provides a substantial uplift that will deliver noticeable improvements countywide.

<u>Other Changes (Finance to Complete)</u>				
Bank & Other interest				
TABLE A	0.4	0.7	1.2	1.2
TABLE B	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.6
TABLE C	0.9	1.8	3.0	3.0
TABLE D	0.5	1.1	1.8	1.8
TABLE E	7.0	14.0	24.0	24.0
TABLE F	52.5	105.0	180.0	180.0
iiLP reduction below removes the requirement to repay borrowing through MRP, but the interest implications from a reduction in cash balances needs to be reflected, as the balances would only be spent if the expected return justified it.				
Assumes mid-year expenditure for 2026/27, reduction in cash balances for first 2-years (3.5%) and borrowing for years 3&4 (6%).				
Total Cost Increase	3,571.5	123.0	210.6	210.6

(a) (ii) that the Total Cost Increase above be met from:

	2026/27 £000s	2027/28 £000s	2028/29 £000s	2030/31 £000s
<u>Reduced Capital Expenditure</u>				
Investing in Leicestershire Programme	(3,510)	0	0	0
TABLE A	(20)	0	0	0
TABLE B	(10)	0	0	0
TABLE C	(50)	0	0	0
TABLE D	(30)	0	0	0
TABLE E	(400)	0	0	0
TABLE F	(3,000)	0	0	0
A one-off allocation to be drawn from the unallocated reserves in the 'Investing in Leicestershire Programme' (iiLP) fund for invest to save projects.				
<u>Increased Savings/Income</u>				

TABLE E				
NEW Removal of Chairman's Council Lunch Allowance	(1.5)	(1.5)	(1.5)	(1.5)
The removal of this allowance provides a modest but appropriate saving, reflecting a commitment to directing funds towards frontline priorities and ensuring public money is spent where it delivers the greatest value for residents				
NEW Removal of Printed Copies of Leicestershire Matters and Transition to Digital-Only Publication	(60.0)	(120.0)	(120.0)	(120.0)
TABLE A	(0.4)	0	0	0
TABLE B	(0.2)	0	0	0
TABLE C	(0.9)	(1.4)	0	0
TABLE D	(0.5)	(1.1)	0	0
TABLE E	(5.5)	(12.5)	(12.5)	(12.5)
TABLE F	(52.5)	(105.0)	(107.5)	(107.5)
This change reflects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the increasing shift towards digital communication across the sector, the need to prioritise essential services during a period of severe financial pressure, and the Council's environmental and carbon reduction commitments. A digital-only model will allow continued communication with residents at significantly lower cost, using the Council's website, email bulletins, and social media channels.				
Total Cost Reduction	(3,571.5)	(121.5)	(121.5)	(121.5)

SUMMARY TABLE				
	2026/27 £000s	2027/28 £000s	2028/29 £000s	2030/31 £000s
Total Cost Increase	3,571.5	123.0	210.6	210.6
Total Cost Reduction	(3,571.5)	(121.5)	(121.5)	(121.5)
Net Change Total	0.0	1.5	89.1	89.1
TABLE A	0.0	0.7	1.2	1.2
TABLE B	0.0	0.4	0.6	0.6

TABLE C	0.0	0.4	3.0	3.0
TABLE D	0.0	0.0	1.8	1.8
TABLE E	0.0	0.0	10.0	10.0
TABLE F	0.0	0.0	72.5	72.5
Revised Budget Gap	15,372	34,152	57,243	84,628

(a) (iii) that the following changes are made to the “Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves” section of the budget report

<u>Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves</u>
<p>The proposed expenditure increases are small investigations or “cash-capped” investments, so do not alter my view of the robustness of estimates contained in the Council report.</p> <p>However, with significant activity already being planned for next year it will be important to prioritise to ensure value for money. The service would benefit from flexibility in the timing of spending the £3million for footpaths maintenance, for example to ensure that it can be co-ordinated with other jobs and accommodate weather conditions.</p> <p>The shortfall in funding of the proposals has a small detrimental impact on the long-term financial position of the County Council, increasing the savings requirement. My recommendation will always be that whilst a financial gap is present discretionary expenditure should be minimised. However, the position is still better than before the settlement, so my view on the robustness of estimates is unchanged.</p>

(a) (iv) that the Revenue Budget Summaries in Appendix A, B and E also be amended to reflect the above changes.”

With the consent of the Council, MR MULLANEY will move a revised amendment.

An amendment will be moved by MR MULLANEY and seconded by MR GALTON

“1. That paragraph (a), (b), (e), (f) and (i) of the motion be amended to read as follows:

‘(a) That subject to the items below, approval be given to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which incorporates the recommended net revenue budget for 2026/27 totalling £616.1m as set out in the amended

Appendices A, B and E of this report and includes the growth and savings for that year as set out in Appendix C, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;'

- '(b) That approval be given to the projected provisional revenue budgets for 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30, set out in the amended Appendix B to the report, including the growth and savings for those years as set out in Appendix C, allowing the undertaking of preliminary work, including business case development, engagement and equality and human rights impact assessments, as may be necessary to achieve the savings specified for those years including savings under development, set out in Appendix D, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;'
- '(e) That the level of the General Fund and earmarked reserves as set out in the amended Appendix K be noted and the planned use of those earmarked reserves as indicated in that appendix be approved, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;'
- '(i) That the risk assessment at paragraph 140 and the Director of Corporate Resources assurance statement at paragraph 155 be noted, as amended by paragraph (a) (iii) below;'

2. That the following be added after paragraph (a) of the motion:

- (a) (i) That the list of growth and savings proposals as set out in Appendix C of the report be amended as follows:

	2026/27 £000s	2027/28 £000s	2028/29 £000s	2030/31 £000s
<u>Additional Service Growth</u>				
NEW Additional investment in public bus subsidies	120	120	120	120
NEW Additional environmental maintenance	200	0	0	0
£200k for additional environmental maintenance including additional weed spraying, rural grass cuts, sign cleaning, footpath maintenance and other relevant treatments as required to respond to conditions over the season				
Total Cost Increase	320	120	120	120

(a) (ii) that the Total Cost Increase above be met from:

	2026/27 £000s	2027/28 £000s	2028/29 £000s	2030/31 £000s
<u>Increased Savings/Income</u>				
<u>Other Changes (Finance to Complete)</u>				
Budget – Service Investment Fund				
Additional grass cutting and weed spraying to be funded from the Service Investment Fund (£2.5m revenue budget).				
Total Cost Reduction	(320)	(120)	(120)	(120)

SUMMARY TABLE				
	2026/27 £000s	2027/28 £000s	2028/29 £000s	2030/31 £000s
Total Cost Increase	320	120	120	120
Total Cost Reduction	(320)	(120)	(120)	(120)
Net Change	0	0	0	0
Revised Budget Gap	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change

(a) (iii) that the following changes are made to the “Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves” section of the budget report:

Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves

The proposed expenditure increases are funded by redirection of existing budgets and there is no change to the budget gap or reserve balances over the 4-year period. On this basis the amendments do not alter my view of the robustness of estimates contained in the Council report.

My recommendation will always be that whilst a financial gap is present discretionary expenditure should be minimised, and any savings should be directed to reduce the use of reserves needed to balance the budget. However, the position is still better than before the settlement, so my view on the robustness of estimates and level of reserves is unchanged.

- (a) (iv) that the Revenue Budget Summaries in Appendix A, B and E also be amended to reflect the above changes.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5
QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 7(1) (2) & (5)

There are no questions asked under Standing Order 7 (1) (2) and (5).

TO DISPOSE OF BUSINESS FROM THE LAST MEETING

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6
REPORT OF THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE
 (Pages 311 - 344)

Principal Speakers:
 Chairman (Mr D Harrison)
 Conservative Spokesperson (Mrs D Taylor)
 Liberal Democrat Spokesman (Mr M Mullaney)

(A) REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS (MEETING PROCEDURE RULES)

MR D HARRISON will move and MRS TAYLOR will second:

“That the changes to Standing Orders (The Meeting Procedure Rules), as set out in the Appendix to the report, be approved.”

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6
TO RECEIVE POSITION STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Note: Standing Order 8 provides as follows: -

- (a) A position statement may give rise to an informal discussion by the Council.
- (b) At the conclusion of the discussion a formal motion may be moved to the effect that a particular issue relevant to the statement be referred to the Cabinet, the Commission, a Board or a Committee for consideration. This shall be moved and seconded formally and put without discussion. No other motion or amendment may be moved.

(c) The discussion of any position statement shall not exceed 20 minutes but the Chairman may permit an extension to this period.)

LEADER

The Leader will make his statement.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8
REPORT OF THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
 (Pages 345 - 362)

Principal Speakers:
 Chairman (Miss H Butler)
 Conservative Spokesperson (Mr O O'Shea)
 Liberal Democrat Spokesman (Mrs L Broadley)
 Labour Spokesman (Mr J Miah)

(A) PAY POLICY STATEMENT

MISS BUTLER will move and MR FOWLER will second:

“That the County Council’s Pay Policy Statement 2026/27, as set out in the Appendix to the report of the Employment Committee, be approved.”

AGENDA ITEM NO. 9
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
 (Pages 363 – 424)

Principal Speakers:
 Chairman (Mr S L Bray)
 Reform UK Spokesman (Mr G Cooke)
 Conservative Spokesperson (Mr J Orson)
 Labour Spokesman (Mr J Miah)

(A) CHANGES TO THE CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

MR BRAY will move and MR MIAH will second:

“That the revised Contract Procedure Rules, as set out in the Appendix to the report, be approved.”

AGENDA ITEM NO.10
NOTICE OF MOTION

(A) SEND NURSERIES

MR BOOLS will move and MRS BROADLEY will second:

- “(a) That this County Council believes that the four pre-school nurseries currently supported by this County Council that serve children with Special Educational Needs in the County should continue to be supported;
- (b) That the Menphys Nurseries in Wigston and Sketchley Hill in Burbage and the Oasis nursery in Melton Mowbray and the Lift Beacon in Loughborough provide essential educational support to some of the most vulnerable young children in Leicestershire;
- (c) That many parents have expressed their anguish at the news that the nurseries could close. They offer specialist focused teaching and expert care. To close them would mean the loss of an essential service in the County;
- (d) That this County Council believes that the four nurseries should continue to remain open and urges the County Council Cabinet to listen to the residents of Leicestershire and this Council and keep the nurseries open.”

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 18TH FEBRUARY 2026**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****One Million Trees**

Today, I am proud to announce that the Council is increasing its tree-planting ambition. Building on the existing pledge to plant 700,000 trees, we are now setting a new goal: to plant one million trees across Leicestershire by 2032.

Leicestershire is one of the least wooded areas in the country, with only around 6% woodland cover—significantly below the national average of 10% for England. This is something we are determined to change.

As one of the county's major landowners, Leicestershire County Council has been working hard to identify areas across our own landholdings where new trees, woodlands and hedgerows can be planted. This forms a key part of our commitment to protect and enhance our natural environment for generations to come.

We will continue to work closely with our valued partners, including the National Forest, the Woodland Trust, district councils and local community groups, to help us reach this milestone. Thanks to these partnerships, and the dedication of volunteers and residents, we have already made significant progress. By December 2025, 494,240 trees had been planted through joint efforts across the county.

This new target will be delivered through our Tree Management Strategy, ensuring that we create and maintain a healthy, diverse and resilient tree population. This strategy also equips us to respond to the increasing challenges posed by diseases such as ash dieback.

Together, we can grow a greener future for Leicestershire. I encourage residents, landowners and community groups to join us in this vital effort. Every tree planted brings us closer to a more sustainable, biodiverse and resilient county.

Flooding Prevention Initiatives

In response to the increasing number of flood events that have devastated communities across Leicestershire over the last couple of years, we allocated an additional £2 million towards flood mitigation initiatives and to adapting services to mitigate the impacts of severe weather events.

Part of that funding has gone towards purchasing stock of an alternative to traditional sandbags and on 5 February, we hosted a demonstration session at County Hall which was attended by over 45 parish councils all of whom were given a volume of stock to hand out to their communities. This was very positively received and will go some way to help reduce flood water entry to properties in Leicestershire. More will be handed out to communities in due course. We are also planning further spring public drop-in sessions to hand more out and offer more opportunities for the public to meet the responsible agencies and learn how they can Be Flood Ready.

In January, applications for our Community Flood Recovery Grant were opened. This funding aims to build on local resilience and reduce flood risk through practical support to communities. We are aware that at least 10 communities impacted by Storm Henk and 6 January 2025 flood event are seeking to submit bids for this funding. We would encourage other communities to apply for grant funding where they have a specific initiative that could help minimise their flood risk.

In addition, we will spend just over £3m this and next financial year on a programme of local flood risk management schemes across the County which also draws in national flood funding. The largest scheme in 2026/27 is Stoney Stanton, which includes highway drainage improvements, watercourse improvements, and Sustainable urban Drainage Assets (SuDS) at Manorfield Primary School.

We are also in the progress of delivering SuDS for school initiatives in two schools who have been flooded previously. Both schemes are funded by the Department of Education with great engagement from the schools involved.

£1.3m of the additional £2m we allocated to flooding is being spent on our highway drainage assets over the next three years including:

- a) Proactive culvert maintenance – we are introducing a proactive programme, where the current approach is reactive, and undertake high priority repairs and or replacements.
- b) We will start a project to develop a system of management for SuDS on the Highway as they become more commonly adopted.
- c) An increased gully emptying trial will commence, introducing a 40-month cycle for priority 3 gullies rather than solely inspections.
- d) Further mapping of underground drainage assets will be carried out to improve the Council's ability to investigate issues and plan maintenance activities.

Some key facts and figures to note on our flood related work:

- We have assisted 157 homeowners from across Leicestershire in obtaining national property flood resilience repair grants totalling over £759,000 following Storms Henk and Babet.
- We used Local Transport Grant funding to deliver a flood scheme for Oakthorpe this year and have allocated over £400,000 to develop and deliver seven projects in the coming financial year.
- Our Highways Drainage team are on target to clean the 89,560 gullies programmed for routine gully cleansing as well as cleaning over 2,000 more gullies in respond to customer enquiries.
- We have recut 51,428 rural drainage grips across the County.

- We are on target to re-map the underground drainage assets at eight village locations and complete six pipe re-lining schemes which provides a cost-effective solution to repair damaged pipes that can extend pipe life by 50+ years.

In addition to the extensive work being carried out by our Flood and Highways teams, I am pleased to announce I have asked the Lead Member for Environment and Transport and the Director of Environment and Transport to undertake a review of how the Council and key partners approach flood prevention and mitigation work. The objective will be to identify improvements that could be made to the approach in Leicestershire for responses to flooding and how we support our communities in dealing with the significant challenges they face.

Melton Mowbray Distributor Road

Work on the £134m North East Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (NE MMDR) began on site with advanced works in February 2023. Three years later, we are now nearing completion of the 7.1km new road. The NE MMDR will be key to improving access as well as reducing congestion and pollution in the town by diverting significant levels of through traffic and HGVs from the town centre. It is a key element of the Local Plan which incorporates significant levels of growth, including over 6,000 dwellings and 3,400 jobs.

The NE MMDR is now in the final phase of construction. All six roundabouts have been completed, and all four major bridges are in place, including the 47-metre new railway bridge, a major engineering achievement in itself. We are currently working towards completion with final earthworks, landscaping, surfacing, safety barriers and signage underway.

The aim is to have completed the road and hold an opening event in late spring 2026; the weather is currently the main determining factor on exact dates. Details of the opening event will be announced in the coming weeks. Recently, we held a press “open day” to give an advance look at the scheme. We will also be carrying out a public vote to choose the name for the new road.

We look forward to the opening of the new road shortly and seeing it benefit the people of Melton and travelling public in Leicestershire.

Rural Strategy

As part of our commitment to farming and Leicestershire's rural economy a review of our Rural Estate Strategy is reaching its final stages. The strategy seeks to create a Rural Estate that provides valuable opportunities for people to start farming on their own account, supports the rural economy and communities and makes an increasing contribution to the Council's wider objectives.

In developing the strategy, we have engaged in a comprehensive consultation process involving our own farm tenants and industry stakeholders including the National Farmers Union, together with the people of Leicestershire. I would personally like to thank them all for the valuable contribution they have made to the shaping of the final strategy which will be considered by Cabinet in April with the aim of adoption later this spring.

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government has now formally launched its consultation on proposals for Local Government Reorganisation across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This marks an important moment for our area, giving residents, partners and stakeholders the opportunity to have their say on the future structure of local government.

Our proposal, submitted to the Government following extensive planning and engagement, sets out a clear, evidence-based case for creating a more efficient, resilient and community-focused model. It prioritises putting residents first, empowering local communities, reinvesting in frontline services and ensuring long-term financial sustainability. It also reflects strong cross-party support and the valuable scrutiny input received to date.

Over the coming weeks, we will continue to engage proactively with partners, MPs, parish councils, businesses, staff and residents to ensure the consultation is widely understood and accessible. Work is already underway to coordinate communications activity across the county and support stakeholders to share their views. At the same time, we will prepare the Council's formal response ahead of Cabinet consideration in March, supported by further member briefings and scrutiny oversight.

I encourage everyone to take part in the consultation and help shape the future of local government in our area. This is a significant opportunity to secure a modern, effective structure that strengthens local services and delivers better outcomes for all our communities.

Rejoining the LGA and CCN

I'm pleased to announce that we are now engaging fully with the Local Government Association (LGA) and County Councils Network (CCN). This represents an important step in strengthening Leicestershire's voice nationally and ensuring we are fully represented in the debates shaping local government.

It will enable stronger collaboration, better access to intelligence and support, and a more influential platform from which to represent our residents and our workforce. With major national policy changes underway, this is the right time to rebuild these connections and ensure we are at the table where the future of local government is being shaped.

Partnership Working

As Leader of the Council, I am committed to strengthening the partnerships that sit at the heart of successful local government. Our ability to deliver high-quality services, support economic growth, and respond to the needs of our residents depends on effective, respectful and collaborative relationships both with the business community, universities, health colleagues, district and parish councils.

We will work closely with businesses to ensure that Leicestershire remains a place where investment, innovation and economic growth can flourish. I am planning a

breakfast meeting with key local businesses where I can hear directly from local employers about the challenges and opportunities ahead and demonstrate our commitment to supporting the wider prosperity of Leicestershire.

With numerous partnership bodies operating across the county, effective collaboration requires openness, aligned priorities and a shared willingness to work together in the interests of residents. The current complexity in local structures only reinforces the need for a clearer, more coordinated approach that helps partners engage confidently and consistently with local government.

Parish councils also play a vital role in representing local identity and shaping neighbourhood priorities. Strengthening our dialogue with them will be key to improving community-level decision making and ensuring local voices remain central in our shared work.

By approaching these relationships with transparency, mutual respect and a shared sense of purpose, we can build a more unified, resilient and prosperous Leicestershire

Efficiency Review

Our Efficiency Review is now well underway. Working in partnership with Newton, we are carrying out a thorough, evidence-based assessment of how we operate and the outcomes we focus on delivering for the people of Leicestershire. This work will help us identify opportunities to enhance services, improve lives, increase efficiency, and address the financial pressures we face. The review is focussed broadly on four themes:

1. **Managing demand and improving lives** for the people we support through service excellence
2. **Increasing value for money and financial sustainability**
3. Innovating to further improve lives and value for money – focussed on **prevention and commissioning**
4. Operating more **efficiently** and setting up LCC to be **fit for the future**

The review will conclude in spring, and once we have a view of all opportunities in these areas and what it will take to deliver them, the next step will be to develop a single, integrated programme of change and improvement.

I will be able to share specifics about the opportunities being identified and the expected impact of the solutions that we are working to develop in the spring. The evidence is still being developed and tested and we want to make sure it is robust before finalising anything.

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