



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 10 JUNE 2026

**ANNUAL UPDATE ON THE TRADED SERVICES STRATEGY,
SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE AND BEAUMANOR HALL ENGAGEMENT**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Scrutiny Commission on the performance of Leicestershire Traded Services (LTS) during 2025/26 and the progress towards exiting the School Food service in 2026.
2. This report also updates the Scrutiny Commission on the public engagement activity around the future of Beaumanor Hall.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

3. With the continued financial pressure on the County Council the requirement to raise additional revenue has become a key element of the Council's Transformation Programme and has been specifically included in the County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) since 2016.
4. Traded Services performance was initially reported to the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Commission under the Commercial Strategy and Workplan 2018-2022 and then under the Traded Services Strategy 2023-2028 (approved by the Cabinet in June 2023) which superseded the Commercial Strategy.
5. The Scrutiny Commission continues to receive regular reports on Traded Services performance. In September 2024 it sought to look more closely at the operation of Beaumanor Hall and the School Food Service. It held a private workshop on these service areas and received a further update in November 2025. Whilst recognising the importance of food quality for school children the Commission recognised the long-term financial reasons for closure of the school food service and the need to review the future direction of Beaumanor Hall.
6. The Cabinet (a new Administration, following local elections in May 2025) on 15 July 2025 authorised the Director of Corporate Resources to take the necessary action to cease the Traded Services' school catering offer with effect from the end of the 2025/2026 academic year.

7. In May 2026, a large number of the Traded Services previously held within the Corporate Resources directorate were moved to the Adults and Culture Services directorate. These included Beaumanor Hall, Century Theatre, Cafes and Country Parks. The Adults and Cultural Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider these items henceforth. As a result of this, this report focusses on those services which remain in Corporate Resources.

Overall performance of LTS

8. Overall, the performance of LTS as shown below, was a budget overspend of £638,000 with a contribution of £119,000. Although there is a notable improvement in the performance of School Food from recent years, 2025/26 proved a challenging year for LTS overall. Financial pressures on schools, the largest client group for LTS, meant that trading conditions were difficult. Increased costs related to national living wage increases, the national insurance changes and inflation have had an impact on performance as they could not easily be passed on. In addition, the closure of Beaumanor due to emergency engineering work on the chimneys has had an impact on the Hall's performance.

<u>Service</u>	<u>Budget Target</u>	<u>Outturn</u>	<u>Over/ (Under) Spend</u>
	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>
<u>LTS Education Catering</u>	<u>(298)</u>	<u>(101)</u>	<u>197</u>
<u>LTS Beaumanor</u>	<u>398</u>	<u>627</u>	<u>229</u>
<u>LTS Professional Services (LEAMIS (School IT and Financial Support), HR, Health and Safety)</u>	<u>(196)</u>	<u>(137)</u>	<u>59</u>
<u>Cafés</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>(24)</u>	<u>(24)</u>
<u>Century Theatre</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>40</u>
<u>Hard Facilities Management</u>	<u>(324)</u>	<u>(179)</u>	<u>145</u>
<u>Soft Facilities Management</u>	<u>(347)</u>	<u>(368)</u>	<u>(21)</u>
<u>Print</u>	<u>(71)</u>	<u>(58)</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>(758)</u>	<u>(120)</u>	<u>638</u>

School Food Performance and MTFs Position 2026/27

9. Overall, the performance of LTS School Food was a profit of £101,000. Whilst this was an underperformance on the budgeted profit of £298,000, it is still a substantial improvement on previous performances and an overperformance on the budgeted figure reported to Scrutiny Commission at their meeting in November 2025.
10. This year was the first year since the pandemic that the service has made a profit and shows the culmination of the turnaround plan that had been put in place.

11. This improved position was achieved mainly through the full-year impact of the new financial deals with all customers to deliver the required margin being realised.
12. The variance to budget in 2025/26 can be explained by falling school numbers after the decision to close the service, leading to a loss of contribution compared to budget. In part, this reduced income was offset by reduced provisions and running costs, although staff costs remained high with increased sickness levels in schools.
13. Regular operational audits are undertaken by the Council's Food Standards auditor and 86 out of 102 sites achieved the highest - five star - rating. Local environmental health teams also inspect the sites and of 14 inspections, 12 were rated four or five star.
14. LTS ran a highly successful Junior Chef competition which saw a record amount of over 200 children submit an entry form. Following 10 heats, with over 60 pupils, a winner from each went forward to the final at Loughborough College. The winning dish was cooked at the winning school for all staff and pupils, and the winner served the dish to all of her school.
15. The service continued the marketing calendar of special themed meals to run alongside the new menu with one special menu each month, designed to increase uptake and add variety to the regular menu.
16. Following feedback from the Scrutiny Commission arising from its meeting in March 2025, a report on the School Food Service was considered by the Cabinet on 15 July 2025. At this meeting the Cabinet resolved to exit the School Food Service at the end of the academic year 2025/26.
17. Since the Cabinet decision, staff and customers have been informed and have been supported throughout the transition process.
18. Schools have been supported to find new catering providers and a number have moved to new caterers throughout the academic year. Of the 117 schools that remain with LTS School Food, all of them have now been supported to find a new caterer for the start of the academic year.
19. The Council and ESPO directly supported 26 customers (primarily maintained primary schools) with the tender process to find a new supplier and this concluded last month.
20. The vast majority of frontline staff will transfer to their new catering provider under TUPE protections with three mobile staff being at risk of redundancy.
21. The management and administration team have been instrumental in ensuring that this process has proceeded as well as possible and that customers and staff are supported throughout. This is despite a number of team members having their redundancies confirmed.

22. In all instances of redundancy or risk of redundancy, the Council has aimed to redeploy as many staff as possible.
23. The financial risk is being controlled through the school food closure project. The costs associated with the closure are continually scrutinised to ensure the spend risk is minimised. The financial control risks were successfully managed during the 2025/26 financial year resulting in the school food service achieving a contribution of £101,000.
24. The 2026/27 Budget is set with an expectation that closing the school food service would come with a one-off transition cost of £344,000. This would be met from a contribution of £42,000 through the last term of trading and £302,000 of ear marked reserves. The latest forecast is that the call on reserves has fallen by £15,000 to £287,000.
25. In addition, there are staff exit costs related to redundancy for staff who could not TUPE to new providers. The July 2025 Cabinet paper, recommending closure, estimated these costs at £650,000. The latest forecast is that these costs have fallen to £360,000 through staff being redeployed or finding opportunities in other organisations ahead of closure.

Engagement on the future of Beaumanor Hall

26. The Cabinet agreed at its meeting in July 2025 an engagement process to allow the Council to work with the market, local community and schools to determine the right approach to remove the cost to the County Council and improve its financial performance to better support the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. There was engagement with the wider public, businesses, schools and staff.

Responses from the Public

Questionnaire background

27. An online questionnaire was run through the 'Have Your Say' pages of the Council's website. It was promoted via press release and on social media, as well as in local parish publications in the Charnwood area.
28. In total, 889 responses were received. Results have been reported based on those who provided a valid response, i.e. excluding the 'don't know' responses and no replies from the calculation of the percentages, where applicable.

Demographics of the respondents

29. 75% were female and 25% were male, with 1% indicating that they use another term. The highest proportion were aged 25 to 44 years (42%) and 45 to 64 years (43%). 11% indicated that they had a disability. The majority identified as white (95%) and 5% identified with a Black and Minority Ethnic group. 54% said they lived in Charnwood, 34% said they lived in other parts of Leicestershire

and 9% outside of Leicestershire. 12% indicated that they were an employee of Leicestershire County Council.

Frequency and nature of previous visits to Beaumanor

30. Overall, 39% of respondents indicated that they had visited Beaumanor in the last 12 months, 21% indicated that they visited between one and two years ago and 33% indicated they visited more than two years ago.
31. Those who said they visited Beaumanor in the past were asked why they had done so. The most frequent reason selected was for a public event or gift fair (57%), followed by school trip (44%), conference or meeting (31%) and wedding/civil partnership or private event (30%). 'Other' reasons for visiting Beaumanor were selected by 17% of respondents and when asked to specify the reasons, comments contained references to specific events, including leisure activities and food related events, children's activities, historical events and activities, being a former or current employee and registration services.

Which events were important to respondents

32. Respondents were asked how important different types of events would be in terms of visiting Beaumanor Hall in the future.
33. Most people said 'other' events were important (71% very important, 24% fairly important) followed by public event or gift fair (54% very important, 36% fairly important). Over a quarter (30%) of respondents indicated a conference or meeting as not important (11% not at all important, 19% not very important).
34. Those who indicated the importance of 'other' events were asked to specify these events. The comments closely resembled the suggestions detailed in the section asking how Beaumanor could generate further income. The suggestions fell into the following broad themes:
 - Accommodation and Hospitality
 - Heritage and History
 - Community and Inclusion
 - Events and Entertainment
 - Outdoor Activities and Adventure
 - Education and Learning
 - Weddings and Private Hire

Ideas for generating further income or visitors

35. Respondents who indicated that they were responding as a resident or 'other' were asked if they had any suggestions for how Beaumanor Hall could generate more income or attract more visitors.
36. There were 704 responses to this question. 144 unique ideas were identified although with such a high volume of responses, there was some overlap between the ideas. Common themes included:

- Concerns regarding marketing and promotion of events. People often said they didn't know Beaumanor Hall was there, didn't know if it was open to the public, and unaware that events were taking place. This included the website and social media.
- Pie Nights were frequently mentioned as a really popular event that people wanted to bring back.
- Outdoor pursuits and sports were frequently suggested. This included as a base for parkruns, 'tough mudder' style events, as well as zip wire and family oriented outdoor activities and camping/glamping (with various other sports also mentioned).
- Murder Mystery events were often mentioned, including options for staying overnight and premium dining.
- Afternoon tea was mentioned several times.
- Corporate events including conferences, meals, bar and accommodation to cater for larger budgets.
- Education was another theme with several suggestions, including:
 - SEND provision, including becoming a dedicated SEND school
 - Forest school
 - Pre-school / nursery
 - College and university collaborations. This included becoming a satellite campus or a base for skills training (e.g. horticulture).
- Several suggestions of outdoor entertainment including outdoor cinema, concerts, music festivals, comedy, theatre.
- Many references to World War Two history, especially potential links with Bletchley Park.
- There were suggestions of a Friends of Beaumanor or similar membership or subscription scheme where people could make regular donations. A 'buy a brick' scheme was also mentioned a couple of times.
- Several people suggested using the site as a location for TV and film production.
- Selling or gifting the property to National Trust or English Heritage.
- A greater use of volunteers to run and support events and ongoing activities.
- Lots of references to weddings including:
 - Overnight accommodation, including a bridal suite for before and after
 - Increase prices (seen as relatively inexpensive by some)
 - Add premium options
 - Create budget options including 'fast track' registry
 - Cater more for large Indian weddings
 - Cater for receptions
- Various suggestions about accommodation, including hotel and spa facilities, Airbnb and rooms to cater for conferences, weddings etc.
- Several people suggested looking at similar facilities for inspiration and provided many examples.
- Various themed events included including Downton Abbey and Bridgerton, Victorian balls, Medieval banquets.
- Lots of suggestions regarding a restaurant, including one that is permanently open, themed nights, fine dining and Sunday carvery.

Public engagement event

37. A public engagement event was held at Beaumanor on 25 September 2025 at the Hall. 23 people were booked to attend the event. 22 people attended – mostly residents of Woodhouse, plus a very small number of current and former staff.
38. Many of the themes from the main public engagement questionnaire were echoed in this session, but there were some significant additions, including:
- Management and leadership challenges
 - Funding and investment strategies
 - Physical infrastructure issues (lift, signage, décor)
 - Marketing and visibility gaps (social media, tours)
 - Opportunities for business collaboration, heritage funding, and commercial partnerships
 - Innovative ideas beyond events (e.g., serviced offices, workshops, charitable trust)
 - There was an enthusiasm for forming a friends group for the site, as an informal advisory body of interested local people.

Reponses from Businesses

Demographics of the respondents

39. 4% of the 889 responses to the engagement survey were representative of a business or organisation. Respondents who indicated that they were a representative of a business or organisation were asked what type of business or organisation they represent. The largest proportion (28%) represented an education/training organisation, while over 16% represented an event/entertainment business. 22% of respondents said that they represented other types of business/organisations (this included manufacturing, social media and the public sector).

Frequency and nature of previous visits to or collaboration with Beaumanor

40. Representatives of a businesses or organisation were asked whether they had ever visited Beaumanor in a professional or business capacity. Around two thirds (63%) indicated they had visited within the last 12 months, while 9% said they have never visited. The remaining respondents visited between one and two years ago (13%) or more than 2 years ago (16%).
41. Representatives of businesses/organisations were also asked whether they had ever worked with Beaumanor for events, services or promotions. A similar proportion of representatives indicated they had not worked with Beaumanor (44%) and had worked with it (41%), while 16% expressed interest in working with Beaumanor.

Perceived strengths of Beaumanor

42. Businesses/organisations were asked if there were any particular strengths that they thought Beaumanor offered for different types of businesses.
43. There were 27 responses to this question. Key themes from the responses are summarised below:
- Location and Setting:
 - Outdoor space and environment
 - Free and easy parking
 - Ease of access
 - Central location
 - Unique in the area/region
 - The building
 - Variety of spaces (hall, outbuildings)
 - Disabled access and facilities
 - Great facility for education:
 - Teaching facilities
 - Links to education curriculum (WW2, Victorian)
 - School residentials
 - Reputation for excellence (education)
 - Heritage:
 - Historical links
 - Iconic establishment
 - Cultural landmark

Perceived barriers of Beaumanor

44. Businesses and organisations were asked if there were any barriers to making the most of Beaumanor that they thought the site should consider.
45. There were 25 responses to this question. Key themes from the responses are summarised below:
- Building/infrastructure not being fit for purpose
 - Costs of activities onsite
 - Miscellaneous:
 - Lack of public identity, needs branding
 - 'Council run' seen as negative
 - Lack of events and marketing
 - Too many staff
 - Don't take on ideas – including from staff

Ideas for generating further income or visitors

46. Finally, businesses/organisations were asked if they had any suggestions for how Beaumanor could generate more income or attract more visitors.
47. There were 30 responses to this question. Suggestions from businesses were broadly similar in themes and content to suggestions from individuals.

Business engagement event

48. A business engagement event was held at Beaumanor on 16th September 2025. Nineteen people attended from various business backgrounds including wedding venues, campsite, marketers, theatre company, MOD and chamber of commerce.
49. Suggestions made at this event were broadly similar to those made in the engagement questionnaires, but with greater focus on:
 - External collaborations (organisations, universities, railways, National Forest)
 - Funding and strategic alignment (Arts Council, heritage grants)
 - Infrastructure expansion (MOD car park, accommodation for weddings)
 - Continuous event programming and marketing strategy
 - New event types (kid's festival, makers fairs, antiques fair, car show, pop-up pubs, segways)
 - Community engagement through children and neighbourhood dinners
 - Focus on testing ideas with low-cost events

Further meetings with local businesses

50. Further to the questionnaire and the engagement sessions, the council was approached by a number of businesses directly and met with all that wished to meet onsite.
51. Proactive contact was also made with all the businesses who responded to the engagement questionnaire and asked for a follow up meeting. Fifteen businesses were contacted in this way.

School engagement

52. A questionnaire for schools was devised by the staff from the outdoor education centre. The aim was to establish what schools felt about the current offer at Beaumanor and how they felt their usage of Beaumanor might change in the future.
53. The online questionnaire was live between October and December and was publicised through direct contact with schools and through the headteacher bulletin. Disappointingly, only 12 responses were received. It might be worthwhile considering incentivising participation in the questionnaire in future, to gain a better response rate.

54. Of those teachers who did respond, all were from Leicestershire schools with the vast majority representing primary schools. 11 had visited Beaumanor for residential and 9 for day visits.
55. When asked why they chose Beaumanor, most noted the location, range of activities, quality of experience and tradition as being reasons for attending.
56. When asked what challenges they faced when attending Beaumanor, the main response was around cost, transport logistics, and staffing constraints. Respondents also highlighted that the food and accommodation was not as good as other venues and the cost was not comparable. They also noted that the variety of activities was not as good as in other venues and had not adapted over the years. Free text comments bore this out with a number commenting on the poor quality of teacher accommodation, in particular the need to share rooms. A number of comments also highlighted that most comparator venues offer free staff places, whereas Beaumanor charges for these.
57. Respondents who no longer used Beaumanor noted that this was because it was too expensive or that they did not know what was available. Some noted that they no longer had budget for trips and residential.
58. Teachers were asked what would encourage them to attend Beaumanor more regularly and the main responses were around the visits being more budget friendly, better curriculum links, and improved facilities and accommodation.
59. Teachers were asked what they thought would happen to the frequency of their school visits. 75% felt that the number of residential visits would remain the same. 64% felt that day visits would remain about the same. All felt that the duration of visits would remain the same. Cost was cited as the main factor governing how often schools would attend. No school expected to go on more frequent trips.
60. When it came to cost, all respondents felt that £20 was the maximum acceptable cost for a day visit, per child. For residentials, the figure was £50-100 per overnight stay.
61. Schools expressed moderate interest in having a joint learning visit, combined with another local provider, suggestions included another local museum, farm park, or country park. Almost all respondents said they would be interested in a Beaumanor offer that could come to their schools as an outreach event.

Staff engagement

62. An in-person event was held with staff at Beaumanor on 7th October. Staff worked in small groups to consider the strengths, barriers and opportunities of the site. The broad themes are set out below.

63. Strengths

- Spacious site with development opportunities (dining hall renovation, basement use, sports hall hire).
- Unique blend of historic venue and activity centre featuring facilities like a high ropes course.
- Good vehicle access and parking; additional parking needed for major events.
- Five-star food rating; capacity to host larger events.
- Skilled, adaptable staff dedicated to customer service.
- Experience with public offerings and partnerships (e.g. Bletchley Park).
- Strong relationship with MOD and supported workers scheme.
- Key assets: beautiful gardens, central location, Grade II* listed status.
- Multi-purpose venue with growth potential and international links.
- Accessible, safe, secure, and well-connected to the motorway.
- History of successful public events and positive feedback.
- Access to art collections and craft fair possibilities.

64. Barriers

- Recognition that lack of a clear strategy has hampered activity onsite.
- Venue usage is split between schools and weddings, with insufficient facilities for corporate events and parking.
- Lack of budget for continued investment in maintenance, cleaning, and accessibility
- Safeguarding limits public access during children's activities.
- Marketing, staff training, and website quality require upgrades.

65. Opportunities & Ideas

- Initiatives include 'Friends of Beaumanor', volunteering, upgraded staff uniforms, and increased staff recognition.
- Investments in CRM, supplier management, grant-seeking roles, and improved engagement across management levels.
- Greater community collaboration (e.g., care homes), enhanced public access (walking, cycling, parking), expanded site facilities (play areas, catering, toilets, showers), and ongoing maintenance.
- New amenities: paid parking, overnight stays, stair lifts, refurbished cabins, swimming pool/lido, and conference equipment.
- Creative additions such as an underground maze, fireworks, rifle/axe activities, a new website, and themed events.
- Expanded marketing, external funding, pay-and-play activities, and partnerships with local businesses.
- Events like outdoor cinema, light trails, archery, car boot sales, public camping, heritage education focus, and regular management meetings.

Research into the state of the market

66. Officers identified and analysed comparator venues within a 30-minute radius, including wedding venues with accommodation, outdoor education centres, and

sites combining heritage, weddings, education, and events. This work also also sought examples of courtyards used for commercial activities, potential revenue opportunities, relevant businesses for partnerships, and gaps in the local or regional market that Beaumanor Hall could fill to inform strategic decision-making and income generation strategies.

The state of the local wedding market

67. The research considered nineteen local wedding venues within a reasonable drive time of Beaumanor. It focused on exclusive hire venues, rather than venues that were primarily hotels.

68. It found that, of those venues:

- Just over half had accommodation available for wedding guests. This ranged from six to 185 bedrooms.
- Eight allowed use of a variety of caterers. Some were on an approved list, others allowed complete flexibility over caterer, this suggests that catering flexibility is desired within the market.
- All of them also offered conferencing.
- Pricing for dry hire weddings was normally more expensive than Beaumanor, suggesting there might be scope to raise our prices.

The state of the local outdoor education market

69. The research also looked at outdoor education centres in the region to see how their offer compared with Beaumanor. It is clear that there are a substantial number of alternative venues within the east and west midlands, with a mixture of sites that could offer residential visits and those that only catered to a day visit audience.

70. As well as the offer to schools, there were venues catering to Corporate, Stag and Hen, Birthday Parties, Holiday Club, Thrillseeker Days. A number of venues are beginning to focus more on wellbeing, resilience building and mental health.

71. Activities being offered that are different to those currently offered at Beaumanor include:

- Robin Hood and Medieval Life
- Comparing Habitats
- Woodland Wonders
- Soft Archery
- Aero Ball
- Axe Throwing
- Air Rifle Shooting
- Grass Sledging
- Fencing
- Volleyball

72. A number of venues are offering discounted rates in off-peak periods.
73. Whilst a number of venues could offer space for meetings, there was only one venue that offered outdoor education, as well as weddings and conferencing. This was Lea Green, run by Derbyshire County Council.

Beaumanor Hall and Park - Next steps

74. Following from the engagement activity, officers have been working on a future plan for Beaumanor that will reduce the financial cost of the site to the Council. Further due diligence work and costings are being established around the following areas, some of which may feature in the final plans:

- Refreshment of the interior of the main hall
- Improvements in outdoor education accommodation to improve facilities for teachers and small groups
- Accommodation within the wider site
- Redevelopment of the courtyard area
- Redevelopment of the sports hall to create an improved space and facilities for education catering and dining
- Greater provision of events onsite
- Improved marketing

Recommendation

75. The Commission is asked to note the performance of LTS during 2025/26 and progress regarding closure of the School Food service.
76. The Commission is asked to note the feedback from the public, businesses, schools and staff on the future of Beaumanor Hall.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

77. None.

Equality Implications

78. There are no equality implications arising directly from this report.

Human Rights Implications

79. There are no human rights implications arising directly from this report.

Officers to Contact

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Background Papers

Scrutiny Commission – 12 June 2023 – Annual Commercial Strategy Report
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=7101&Ver=4>

Cabinet – 23 June 2023 – Annual Report of the Commercial Strategy
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7077&Ver=4>

Scrutiny Commission – 29 January 2024 – Interim Report on the Traded Services Strategy
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=7441&Ver=4>

Scrutiny Commission – 4 September 2024 – Annual Report on the Traded Services Strategy
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=7445&Ver=4>

Scrutiny Commission – 10 November 2025 – Annual Report on the Traded Services Strategy
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=7836&Ver=4>