

Productivity Plan

2024/24

How we plan for productivity and transform services

How we take advantage of advances in technology and make use of data to inform decision making and service design

Reporting our efficiencies in key areas

Barriers preventing activity that Government can help to reduce or remove



Introduction

The Council is committed to maintaining financial sustainability through fundamental transformation, digital transformation, development, continuous improvement to service delivery and increased partnership working, including projects which deliver efficiency measures and invest-to-save projects. The **Council Delivery Plan**, and the **Medium Term Financial Strategy** set out the major projects in these areas, and the Council Delivery Plan includes milestones, metrics and key performance indicators that allow progress to be monitored and reported.

How we plan for productivity and transform services

Value for money and effectiveness considerations are throughout our decision making processes. The Council Plan sets out our priorities and the **annual Council Delivery Plan** sets out our actions and activities for the next 1-2 years, including the milestones that we aim to reach over the next year.

The council takes the following approach to transformation:

- Taking a preventative and strengths based aspirational approach to everything we do to manage demand and improve outcomes. Developing a prevention model to map the best use of resourcing and funding to ensure value for money
- Investment is made in digitalisation and automation of manual processes, transforming the way staff work to free up resource time to focus on value added work. Also ensuring processes are efficient and user friendly
- The Corporate Transformation Programme is focused with clear priorities and a robust focus on benefit delivery. Transformation Team resources are centralised and used flexibly, mainly aligned to the biggest demand areas.
- Internal governance structures are in place to provide scrutiny on resource requests, ensuring a return on investment is clearly articulated within business cases

Recent productivity activities and successes (including the role of capital spending and opportunities in this area with capital spending)

Despite 14 years of austerity, residents continue to benefit from good quality services, with c£5 million of savings delivered through transformation and efficiency, between 2021-22 and 2023-24. Between 2012-13 and 2023-24 the Council has delivered circa £126m of savings in total.

The local authority has utilised the Technology Investment Fund to support digital transformation opportunities within corporate programmes, particularly in Adult Social Care recently. Digitalising processes and manual forms, enables key staff such as social workers to focus on case work as well as improve the customer experience when accessing services.

Capital spending has enabled more development in Kingston to help future proof accommodation provision within the borough at the same time of repurposing existing stock to make better use of council assets. The Acre Road development will provide delivery of new 33 older people & 13 Learning Disabilities accommodation units in the borough by 2026.

The Council continues to share some services with the London Borough of Sutton and is part of 5 borough shared services for legal and counter-fraud services. These arrangements work well for a number of functions but the council has no current plans to develop further shared services, acknowledging that the efficiency benefits reduce the more a service needs to be able to respond to local circumstances.

The council also delivers efficiencies through collaboration on a regional and sub-regional basis, such as:

- Freedom Pass – the annual administration of and negotiations regarding the Freedom Pass is undertaken by London Councils on behalf of the boroughs. At a cost of £1.7 million, it is 20% of the cost of boroughs undertaking this activity individually (c. £8.5 million).
- Parking and moving traffic appeals tribunal – London Councils provides a statutory tribunal for the boroughs. This includes an outsourced managed service. Since 2015, London Councils has saved boroughs 40% on the cost of this service (c. £18 million).
- London Councils Grants Programme – funded by London’s 33 local authorities. Between 2022 and 2026, this is investing over £6 million each year to tackle two of the most serious issues facing the capital - homelessness and domestic sexual violence. The programme commissions services where it is economical and efficient to deliver services on a London-wide basis.

Case study - The Cambridge Road Estate

On 30 September 2020 the Council entered into a joint venture Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) with Countryside Partnerships to deliver the regeneration of the Cambridge Road Estate (CRE). The CRE will be transformed with the existing 832 homes being replaced by 2,170 homes

currently expected to comprise 767 Council rented homes, 174 intermediate homes and 1,229 private homes. The scheme will address residents' chief concerns around safety and the fear of crime, the provision of quality open space and landscaped areas.

Since 2020 the LLP has made excellent progress. Following the rehousing of 93 households and the acquisition of nearly 30 private properties, construction work has progressed well since with Phases 1A (total 44 homes) and 1B (total 206 homes) both now out of the ground and pressing on with construction of their concrete frames. In total, the first phase of the scheme is expected to deliver 453 homes with the current mix being 150 Council social rented homes, 15 intermediate homes and 288 private homes.

How we take advantage of advances in technology and make use of data to inform decision making and service design

The Council is committed to enhancing our approach to using data to target services and identify need. During the development of the annual council delivery plan each service area considers and sets out activity in the 24 priority areas. Use of technology, transformation and service delivery feature across these priorities, with specific focus given within the plan through the following 'Future Council' priorities:

- **Data and insight** We develop data and insight to guide how we improve services. We share this insight across the council and our partnerships to enable us to make the best decisions for the borough.
- **Service delivery, digital and communications** We provide access to information and services efficiently. We invest in fast, digital solutions, while supporting those who are digitally excluded. We communicate clearly and in an accessible way with our communities.

Developing our benchmarking multi-disciplinary team model

The Council is developing its approach to benchmarking through a new multi-disciplinary team model. This will enhance the data that we collect and we continue to look externally at other local authorities to measure performance, highlighting opportunities and areas for improvement. Our emerging data strategy, which considers our use of analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to further develop our use of data, alongside benchmarking commitments, are included for further action in the Council Delivery Plan 2024/25.

Reporting our efficiencies in key areas

As part of this year's financial settlement with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Council is required to specifically consider making reductions in the following areas:

- **Staff equality, diversity and inclusion programmes** In 2023/24 the Council commissioned an external organisation to deliver Equality Diversity and Inclusion “Unconscious Bias” training for front line staff. While there are no plans to repeat a whole organisation programme in 2024/25 the Council remains committed to enhancing inclusive practice, ensuring a workplace free from discrimination and continuing to develop the skill of our workforce so that services are designed to meet the needs of our residents.
- **Expenditure on consultants:** The Council values the contribution made by its Agency Workers, Contractors & Consultants and recognises that they provide us with added flexibility to provide specific skills and capabilities, temporary cover, react to resource demands, support specific projects and on occasion, may also provide a mechanism for recruiting staff on a permanent basis. The Council actively works with managers to reduce this spend wherever possible and reports on spend on agency workers.

Barriers preventing activity that Government can help to reduce or remove

The latest final Government Settlement (December 2023) went some way to support the Council to meet rising cost and demand-led pressures in the budget for 2024/25, however it did not go far enough to meet the full growing cost pressures and demand felt by Kingston.

The settlement for 2024/25 was the sixth consecutive one-year settlement, making longer term planning even more challenging. The uncertainty driven by one-year settlements is a huge barrier to becoming more productive and enabling boroughs to plan services strategically and take invest-to-save decisions. Three or four-year settlements would go a long way to solving this.

Additional actions that the government could take to unlock productivity are:

Funding

- Reduce ringfences and reporting requirements associated with grant funding to empower and trust councils to get on with delivering services.
- Reduce the number of specific funding pots and arduous bidding processes, particularly in economic development and skills.
- Ensure funding reflects need – many councils are unable to put resources into driving further productivity gains because they are being overwhelmed by demand pressures due to structural underfunding and a system that no longer reflects local needs. The Government should review and update the funding formulae for all the major grants that councils receive from government.

Housing

- Remove barriers preventing councils from combining Right to Buy receipts with grant funding to deliver affordable housing.
- Remove the cap on the proportion of individual sites that can be funded through Right to Buy receipts.
- Make the increase in LHA rates from Autumn Statement 2023 a permanent measure.
- Remove the cap on LHA payable for Temporary Accommodation in Housing Benefit subsidy (set at 90% of January 2011 LHA rates).
- Provide funding to help councils buy accommodation sold by private landlords.
- Deliver a new HRA debt settlement based on updated assumptions, as government policy changes have altered the existing 2012 agreement beyond recognition.

Adult social care

- Deliver the adult social care funding reforms which are crucial to providing long-term financial certainty for the sector.
- Baseline all existing ASC grants and consolidate them into one fund.
- Implement the Hewitt Review recommendation of 1% of ICB budgets towards prevention.
- Regulate agency social workers to control cost
- Link the health and social care system more closely, seeing the system as a whole and focusing on prevention in health rather than discharges

Children's services

- Ensure the Social Care Grant reflects children's social care needs (rather than only adult social care relative needs).
- Urgently reform the children's social care market to reduce profiteering.

- Allow local authorities to open and run special schools – this would reduce placement costs, help meet rising demand more quickly and ensure greater local oversight of places.
- Introduce a mandatory register for all home educated children – this would improve identification of children at risk of harm.
- Extend the DSG statutory override to provide financial certainty for councils – otherwise at least a quarter of councils risk running out of general fund reserves.
- Consider writing-off accumulated DSG deficits.

Regulation

- Simplify the regulatory framework, including developing a coordinating role for Oflog. While hugely important, servicing multiple inspections limits capacity and hinders productivity.
- Reduce, and better coordinate, the volume of returns and reporting required of local government by national government
- Ensure regulators have the appropriate capacity and understanding of councils and local places, including their financial context.