

Dorset Council Productivity Plan 2024/25



Dorset
Council

Dorset Council Productivity Plan

This plan is being published in line with the requirements set out by the Secretary of State of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in Local Government Finance Update on 5 February 2024 and in response to questions set out by the Minister for Local Government in a letter dated 16 April. In line with this statement, this plan sets out Dorset Council’s continuing service performance journey and ongoing efforts to continuously reduce wasteful expenditure. This plan is based on the existing work, plans and strategies of Dorset Council.

Theme 1. “How you have transformed the way you design and deliver services to make better use of resources.”
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Following local government reorganization and the creation of a unitary authority 5 years ago, Dorset Council has initiated large scale change, saving £96m by converging systems and processes. Changes include: (1) Staff integration, culture and values; (2) Business as usual service improvement through change and performance management; (3) Improvements driven by capital investments; (4) Enhanced partnership working and governance; and (5) Transformation. 2. The council measure productivity through a range of measures. These include the outputs and savings from transformation activity, and wider work around performance improvement, which are monitored via the council’s Strategic Performance Framework. 3. Examples of changes and improvements which have contributed to the improved use of resources and savings realised have included: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establishing a new care company, Care Dorset, to improve the care offer to residents and deliver increased value for money. b. Converging 6 legacy planning systems into a single system, migrating 47 years of data to improve efficiency for users. c. Improving the way customers can contact the council, included the transfer of further services to the council’s contact centre. d. Rolling out new digital tooling to improve the way we consult and engage with residents, making it more accessible, alongside an improved digital newsroom for publishing information to residents. 4. Plans for transformation are set out in the November 2023 ‘Our Future Council’ Transformation Paper. Details of savings projected from the Our Future Council programme are set out the November 2023 paper and February 2024 Medium Term Financial Plan Strategy Paper. 5. Dorset Council is committed to investing in preventative approaches and this forms part of the work across the Council, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dorset Council’s Early Help Strategy b. Our 10-year Children, Young People and Families Plan. We have been invited to be a pathfinder for the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme. We are using the opportunity to further embed our integrated locality approach which has been independently evaluated by Oxford Brookes University. c. The Mockingbird programme which delivers an evidence-based model for the provision of sustainable foster care to provide support for children, young people and foster families. d. The PAUSE programme to reduce the number of women who have multiple children removed from their care through increased support and early intervention. e. The Pineapple Project offering safe places and spaces for women and girls in Weymouth by developing a community guardian model. f. In partnership with Public Health, Swop to Stop was an innovative, digital campaign run across Dorset using central funding. Launched on 13 March 2024 it has already generated an estimated £4.4 million of savings via smoking cessation. • SEND provision: An Ofsted inspection in March 2024 resulted in the best possible outcome from an inspection that ‘the local area partnership’s special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND...Children and young people with SEND and their families are placed at the heart of all that leaders do.’ Dorset Council is the first unitary authority to receive this outcome under the new SEND inspection framework. This has been supported by improved and embedded information, advice and guidance to parents and carers in our SEND Local Offer and Family Information Services. Developed a specialist support and advice line, Dorset Education Advice Line (DEAL) to provide information, advice



and guidance to parents and carers wanting to understand how they can get the right support in education for their children and young people.

6. Wider locally-led reform which forms part of the delivery of high quality public services and improves wider resilience include:
 - a. **A potential devolution deal for Dorset**, working with other local authorities. This would support our shared ambition and resources to deliver better outcomes for our residents, prosperity for our region and deliver in key sectors for the UK. The council has the capability, vision and passion necessary to lead the strategic role in delivering services, investment spending and supporting local businesses as offered by the level 2 devolution framework.
 - b. Delivery of an **Integrated Care Partnership** with the NHS, councils, and other partners within our integrated care partnership (ICP) to work together to make the best possible improvements in the health and wellbeing of local people.
 - c. Delivery of **new Home First partnership approach** to provide more community-based care in Dorset and reduce unnecessary hospital stays by supporting recovery of a person in the comfort of their own homes wherever possible.

Theme 2. “How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.”

1. Data is a valuable council asset and informs how we deliver our services to best meet the needs of our communities. The council has a 5-year [Data and Business Intelligence Strategy](#) which puts down the foundations for a data-first approach across the council. This includes a dedicated strand of work aimed at continuing to enhance the quality of our data. The strategy also makes provision for greater democratisation of our data, increasing availability to our residents.
2. We are taking an architectural approach to how we deliver digital solutions, implementing our customer and automation platforms to enable us to address legacy technology constraints such as the inability to integrate systems or access data and provide better customer experience. Along with work to better manage our application portfolio we will be able to make better decisions to reuse existing capabilities and national ones such as GovPay & GovNotify, getting better value for money from what we have. We will design-in the collection of key performance / customer insight to enable service managers to make good decisions to continually improve services. To further support this we are doing work to understand how we make better decisions and manage our application portfolio to enable the council to become modern and resilient. Dorset Council has engaged SOCITM (Society for Innovation Technology and Modernisation) to help understand application spend and how to identify improvements and reductions to spend regarding this.
3. We share data as part of the wider Dorset system and Integrated Care System (ICS) to help improve outcomes for residents. Examples include our Dorset Care Record which includes combined patient and care data. The council is also part of the Dorset Intelligence and Insight Service (DiiS), a collaborative project to deliver a live, linked health and social care dataset across the ICS, aiming to make health and social care data open, easy to access, and available to create actionable insights. It is being used to support data-led service improvement, planning and decision making at a system and organisational level. It is also used by health and care professionals to make evidence-based decisions to improve the health and wellbeing of our population.
4. The [Data and Business Intelligence Strategy](#) outlines a desire to make greater use of predictive analytics and we are currently producing a statement of intent and toolkit to support the use of AI. This also forms part of our [Digital Vision](#). We are experimenting and learning with Microsoft AI tools and the potential to increase workforce productivity, using predictive modelling in our customer insights work to improve decision making, as well as understanding new capabilities in our automation platform that would enable our customer and ways of working transformation plans.

Theme 3. “Your plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.”

1. Since becoming a unitary council in 2019, Dorset Council has made savings of £96.4m as at the end of 2023/24 by restructuring staff and re-designing how services are provided. This money has been reinvested into frontline services, including funding the growing need for adult social care due to our ageing population. Savings delivery is reported publicly as part of the quarterly financial management reporting cycle. These savings are key to delivery of a balanced budget in conjunction with the Council's medium term finance plan.



2. Dorset Council monitors progress against the reduction of wasteful spend through the Our Future Council programme and through manager improvement plans.
3. The council's transformation strategy has established an invest to save model, utilising reserves or capital receipts to invest in changes. The benefits from delivery can be reinvested to maintain frontline services or returned to reserves as appropriate. Since 2019 £11m has been invested and £45m profiled for return by March 2026 (£19m of this delivered as at March 2024). Some of the investments have been in service delivery, for example, year on year growth to support Children's and Adults services which has delivered financial stability.
4. All staff complete brief annual EDI 'essentials' module as part of the core mandatory training related to the council's statutory duties. Additional training is available for those staff who complete Equality Impact Assessments. EDI activity is assigned and recorded against Dorset Council's Public Sector Equality Duty requirements which form part of the council's statutory duties.
5. A very small percentage of staff budget is spent on agency workers and consultants. This currently equates to 0.35% of total staff budget (including schools) spent on agency workers and 0.96% of total staff budget (including schools) spent on consultants. On 31 March 2024, we had 65 agency workers that have been engaged in work for more than 12 months. Each assignment for agency or consultancy spend is required to be formally signed-off at Corporate Director level.
6. We have recently set up a new company, Connect2Dorset, to service all the Council's agency worker needs moving forward. The company has two clear business objectives; reduce the costs of agency workers to the Council and increase the number of agency workers converting to permanent roles. Both objectives are incorporated into performance monitoring arrangements.
7. As required under the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017, Dorset Council publishes information on trade union facility time each year. The figures for 2023/24 have not yet been published, but during 2022/23 we spent 0.12% of the total pay bill on facilities time.
8. Dorset Council utilises a number of reporting structures to ensure accountability of spend. The [Financial Management Report](#) goes to Cabinet and to the Audit and Governance Committee on a quarterly basis. In addition, financial reporting is provided to monthly Senior Leadership Team and Directorate Management Team meetings to monitor the financial performance of the organisation.

Theme 4. "The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove"

1. Dorset Council faces a number of challenges specific to its demographics and geography, including deeply entrenched issues of social mobility, lack of transport and deprivation. Core areas where Dorset Council would welcome central government support in 'shifting the dial' on these issues include:
 - a. Support and funding for **housing that local people can afford to live in**. The Dorset area continues to experience a significant disparity between house prices and earnings. Housing affordability is a significant issue in Dorset with average house prices 11 times higher than average earnings. Adding to housing pressures, Dorset has the third highest number of Second Homes in England and Wales behind only Cornwall and Gwynedd. Dorset Council requires robust access to capital to enable building of good quality, energy efficient, lifetime housing. This would help Dorset Council achieve twin aims of both enabling low wage young families access good quality, affordable accommodation but also would support a preventative approach for Dorset's older population, creating housing stock that would allow older residents to remain at home for longer rather than having to move to expensive residential care.
 - b. Funding and support for **more effective and frequent public transport services** to improve social mobility and employment outcomes for remote and deprived rural areas. Six Dorset towns feature amongst those most at risk of becoming transport deserts.
 - c. A **much larger than average ageing population with a concomitant impact on health and social care services**. Dorset Council would welcome great funding and support regarding the delivery of adult social care to ensure Dorset residents receive appropriate care and support.
 - d. Greater and more targeted funding for **prevention work to reduce health inequalities**. Continued funding for Swap to Stop would allow the Dorset region to continue to deliver the core public health goal of smoking cessation. In general, for any funding to have impact, it needs to be multi-year and allow local authorities the flexibility to deliver public health outcomes in transformative and innovative ways.
2. In addition to the above, there are a number of more general reforms Dorset Council would welcome central government support for in order to enable to plan and manage its work and finances more strategically in the long term. These include:



- a. **Removing the requirement for directly elected mayors** for large unitary councils to access the same devolved powers and funding as city regions, allowing greater parity of opportunity for unitary councils in rural locations.
- b. The **introduction of multi-year settlements** which would give Dorset Council and other councils the ability to plan for the longer term whilst **ending the 'begging bowl' culture** requiring councils to bid against each other for funding, often against short and unrealistic timeframes.
- c. **Enhanced data sharing between central government and local authorities** to enable local councils to realise savings in automated processes e.g. DWP sharing data to enable to automation of blue badge processing or certain benefit claims.
- d. **Greater clarity and reforms with respect to the most acute issues councils are facing in social care and education.** We would welcome clarification from the government regarding the Social Care Reforms including, particularly with respect to charging and assurances that adequate funding will be provided. In addition, we request that central government increases funding to meet eligibility criteria or reduce eligibility criteria to match available funding and reforms home to school transport entitlement to make it more proportionate and affordable.
- e. **Consideration of the potential benefits** of giving local authorities the flexibility to choose to hold online council and committee meetings where councillors decide that this is appropriate and the most efficient and effective way of making decisions.



Annex A



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Simon Hoare MP
Minister for Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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16 April 2024

Dear Chief Executive

Productivity in Local Government

As you know, the Government is reviewing productivity across all public services and local government is, of course, part of that exercise. The recent [Local Government Finance Settlement](#) announced that councils would be asked to produce productivity plans. This letter formally begins that process.

May I first thank you for your very helpful engagement with my officials. Your views and thoughts have been valuable in shaping this approach to make it as useful as possible for all of us.

Local government has already done a huge amount in recent years to improve productivity and efficiency. However, lockdown and post-lockdown has proved challenging, and you are looking for new ways to go further. These new plans will help us understand what is already working well across the whole country, what the common themes are, whether there are any gaps and what more we need to do to unlock future opportunities. We will share these important lessons across the sector.

Productivity is not one-dimensional, and I would encourage you to consider the various facets that encompass the drive for greater productivity. When developing your plans, please think broadly and include reference to not only how you run your organisation, but also how you run the public services you provide and how you provide place leadership. It is with this wide view that we can ensure we are providing value for money for residents.

I am not looking to impose excessive burdens. I am not issuing you with a formal template or a detailed list of criteria to meet. I expect your plans to be three to four pages in length, and to set out what you have done in recent years, alongside your current plans, to transform your organisation and services. I do not want to specify a list of metrics you must report, but I do want to understand how you will monitor and assess your plans to assure yourselves and your residents that they will be delivered.

The plans should consider the below themes and where appropriate, should reference the work your council undertakes alongside other public services, such as the NHS and police.

1. How you have transformed the way you design and deliver services to make better use of resources.

Questions to consider:

- how has the organisation changed in recent years to become more productive? You may wish to consider what you have done around staffing, structures, operating models etc;
- how do you measure productivity in your organisation?
- what changes have you made to improve services, and what effects have those had?
- what are your current plans for transformation over the next two years and how will you measure the effects of those changes?



- looking ahead, which service has greatest potential for savings if further productivity gains can be found? What do you estimate these savings to be?
- what role could capital spending play in transforming existing services or unlocking new opportunities? If you have already used capital spending to boost growth or improve services, we would be interested in learning more;
- what preventative approaches you have undertaken and can the value of these be quantified?
- are there wider locally-led reforms that could help deliver high quality public services and improve the sustainability and resilience of your authority?

2. How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.

Questions to consider:

- what are your existing plans to improve the quality of the data you collect; how do you use it and how do you make it available to residents?
- are there particular barriers from legacy systems?
- how often do you share data with other organisations, and do you find this useful?
- Are there opportunities to use new technology to improve workflows and systems, such as predictive analytics and AI?

3. Your plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.

I know we will share the aim to reduce waste wherever we can and, while you have all made huge strides in recent years, no organisation is ever 100% efficient. You should set out your plans to reduce wasteful or “gold-plated” spend.

Questions to consider:

- how do you approach identifying and reducing waste in the organisation? How do you monitor progress?
- where have you followed invest to save and what was the result?
- how much time and money do you spend on staff EDI training (internal and external), networks, and other programmes? How many EDI Champions do you have as an organisation? How do you log and report the time and money spent on EDI related activity? How do you assess the effectiveness of that training?
- what percentage of total staff budget is spent on a) agency and b) consultants? How do you assess value for money on agency & consultancy spend and what are your plans to reduce use / costs? How many of those consultants or agency staff have been in place for over a year?
- what governance structures do you use to ensure accountability of spend?
- do you share office functions with other councils and if so, how useful do you find this?
- if you share external training costs with neighbouring councils, how do you factor out duplications of service between your council and your upper-tier council (if you have one)?



- if you have one, what is your assessment and experience of working with an elected mayor, combined authority, or devolution deal?
- what proportion of your paybill is spent on trade union facility time?

4. The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.

There will be barriers preventing you from going as far or as fast as you would like to. I would like your plans to set those out, so that we can understand how government, or the market, can help you overcome these barriers to go even further.

Questions to consider:

- what are the barriers preventing you from improving productivity further within your organisation?
- what are the barriers preventing you from improving services further?
- are these barriers consistent across multiple services?
- what would you need to remove those barriers? What do you need from government, the market or elsewhere?

Your plans must be returned by 19 July 2024, by email to productivityplans@levellingup.gov.uk.

You must ensure that there is member oversight and endorsement of the plan before it is submitted, and the plan must also be uploaded to your website so that residents can see it. You should consider how you will update the plans and report on progress on a regular basis. The plans should also contain relevant metrics and key performance indicators to allow you and your residents to monitor progress.

Once received, we will review the plans to identify common themes and issues across the sector. We are keen to highlight best practice that others can learn from.

Individual plans will not be rated or scored, and we will not produce any kind of league tables. We are interested in understanding what is happening across the sector.

We are setting up a panel to consider the themes and evidence that comes from the plans. I will chair the panel and bring together experts from the sector and beyond, including Oflog and the LGA. They will consider the issues emerging from the plans, the implications for future national policy design, the role of government in supporting further change and the role of the sector in going further. The panel will advise national government and local government, and I believe this collaborative approach will ensure the most effective outcomes.

I look forward to updates on your publication and progress.



SIMON HOARE MP
Minister for Local Government

