

Productivity Plan

July 2024



Current Achievements

In the years following the pandemic, we have made significant changes to the Council and the way we work. We have transformed the way we operate, with a remote working model underpinned by modern IT hardware and systems. Through our New Ways of Working project, we have driven widespread cultural change following behaviour changes experienced in response to the pandemic. This approach has prioritised outcomes and business needs over working at set locations, enabling appropriate roles to work in multiple locations. It has helped reduce our environmental impact, including through reducing our estate, and secured financial savings whilst providing staff a better work/life balance and the council with opportunities to deliver services differently to better meet the needs of our residents.

- **Work Bases** – office-based staff now work from home, using Teams meetings as default and embracing working hours and patterns resulting in significantly reduced travel time across a large rural authority. Commute time can be included within the working day.
- **Spend** – delivery of £42m savings in 2023/24.
- **Adoption of Artificial Intelligence (CoPilot)** – use of this developing aid to reduce admin time, improve productivity and effectiveness, and enhance accountability.
- **Use of Data**
 - *Data Quality Strategy* being embedded across core service areas.
 - *Dashboards and Knowledge Banks* for statutory returns, performance management, information and insight for decision making.
 - *Data Sharing* available to residents such as the Shropshire Plan Performance Dashboard.
- **Customer Front Door Project** – to increase efficiency organisation wide to respond with increasing speed and quality and reduce failure demand effects such as FOI requests and complaints.
- **Digitalisation**
 - *Financial dashboards and improved data sharing* – clear, single version of the truth provided for decision making across multiple audiences.
 - *Risk Environment* – digitalised strategic, operational and project risk environment to enable self-serve and availability of risks 24/7 with PowerBI reports overlaid.
 - *Revenues & Benefits* - online information, over 4,500 records per month negating requirement to manually punch data.
 - *Claim Forms* - extracted from the claims handling system to pre-populate forms.

- *Online Training* - reduces the need for face to face training programmes and travelling for delegates.
- **Managing Demand** – The social care transformation programme aims to improve the quality, efficiency, and sustainability of our social care provision, based on the principles of prevention, personalisation, integration, and innovation. The programme has achieved some positive outcomes and impacts for example:
 - We are transforming our front doors to a self serve model and enhanced website linked to a Digital Delivery programme
 - We are making efficiencies to foster carer processes to increase sufficiency of placements through quicker processes and self serve approach.
 - We are supporting more people at home with the use of technology in people's homes
- **Partnership Working** – The council are working with the Marches Forward Partnership to develop a manifesto for growth and investment that will form the basis for some form of growth and devolution deal, which will set out a series of offers and asks of government including support for alternative structures for local delegations and flexibilities This is due for launch at the end of July this year.

Priorities for 2024/25

Our short-term priority is simple: Financial Survival. We have the greatest financial challenge we have ever faced as a Council in the current financial year, delivering £62.5m recurrent savings leaving a net budget of £262m.

- **Strategic Operating Model for the Council** – adoption of this new model, building on evidence from a Time to Change survey in 2023. Aim to change the manner in which customers are managed and services set up to meet demand. Resizing of the organisation in to remove duplication and reduce costs.
 - Resizing of the Council in the short term (delivery 2024)
 - Development of a new operational model (delivery 2025)
 - Review of Third Party Spending (TPS) and Commissioning models (delivery 2024/2025)
 - Development of a new customer journey model for the Council (delivery 2024 – 2026)
- **Expanded use of AI** – increasing focus on the use of AI to enable colleagues to concentrate on where they can add value to the processes we employ. More time can be spent on improvements rather than transactional work.
- **Expanded use of PowerBI** –
 - *Financial forecasting models* are being developed for activity and financial forecasting including mitigation activities in the form of a dashboard for demand modelling. Correlating and predicting activity and financial forecasts to understand effectiveness of mitigation activity or whether this needs to be increased.

- *Insurance claim form* - Finalise the PowerBI and web-based claim form to speed up setup of claims and claims reporting.
 - *Potholes* - To make pothole information readily available and reduce the number of requests being processed.
- **Installation of Mod.gov Extension** – to enable self-service for Councillors (unitary and town/parish) to log and update declarations of interests. Significant reduction in staff time manually processing declarations - avoiding need for additional resource after local elections. Increased ownership and responsibility by individuals and local councils.

Efficiency and Reduced Waste

- **Financial Management** – increase visibility of a single version of the truth across all senior managers so dependence is less on a data “push” and more on a data “pull”. Monthly financial reporting to Members in place from April 2024 automated from introduction of PowerBI dashboards on savings and budget, as well as other areas (debt, capital receipts, organisational scorecards).
- **Claims Reporting** – regular claim reporting to identify areas of risk resulting in payment of claims. Use of risk control days to support avoidance of potential claims.
- **Digital Communications to Members** – removal of paper as standard communications to save cost and time with the removal of printing and postage. These are sent via Gov Delivery and members are encouraged to use the self-service platform,
- **Invest to Save** – programme in place for several years resulting in repayments to fund future cyclic investment.
- **Benchmarking** – through LGInform website, use of CIPFA benchmarking (eg resilience index), peer benchmarking etc. Links to the LGInform reports provided in the Councils Financial Strategy to help frame the wider position and provide comparison to secure a sense for residents and members of how the authority is performing relative other authorities.
- **Reduction of Agency Staff** – programme to reduce and insource since 2023, current agency spend is 8% of all pay costs. Contracted provider from October 2024 to overhaul recruitment and retention approach, and minimisation of agency usage.
- **Use of Consultants** – contract with PwC from March 2023 to provide capacity, capability and insight to support the delivery of £34m (full year effect) of planned spending reductions (5:1 RoI).
- **Governance** – Directorate Workforce Board, chaired by Executive Directors review all workforce related spend to ensure this represents value for money, is lawful and in line with financial sustainability priorities.

Assurance

Shropshire Council strives to deliver excellent council services for all. In our most recent LGA Peer Reviews – Finance, Communications and Scrutiny Function, undertaken in June 2022, the peer teams found us to be open to challenge with newfound confidence in our future; this despite an acknowledgement that “Shropshire Council’s finances are not immediately catastrophic – but they are in a precarious position’.

Our quarterly performance reports to Cabinet are aligned, through our Performance Management Framework, to our priorities and strategic outcomes as set out in The Shropshire Plan. We have worked hard to develop Service Improvement Plans and Personal Development Plans for all areas and employees of the Council and taken 350 of our most senior officers through an extensive, comprehensive and bespoke ‘Getting Leadership Right’ programme. Productivity is measured by KPIs, which are set against statutory timescales for the delivery and receipt of information. Workflow statistics are monitored to ensure deadlines are being achieved and to see the volume of work being dealt with. Our performance monitor for quarter 4 of 2023-24 can be found on our website here [The Shropshire Plan Performance Dashboard](#). Key areas for consideration include:

- HP35 – Rate of people with learning disabilities that live in their own home or with family. This enables people with learning disabilities to remain within their community and increase their self-confidence and independence whilst reducing reliance on others. Shropshire has high performance in achieving the targets set and exceeding national averages.
- HP24a - % of children accessing free early education at 2 years. High take up of education helps support the child’s education and social development skills for better long-term outcomes. Performance remains high achieving higher than targets set and is above the national average.
- HEc23 – Planning Applications – major. Planning permission is a legal process of determining whether a proposed development should be approved with Shropshire aiming to assess applications efficiently and effectively ensuring local and national policies are adhere to. Shropshire is performing well above target with over 80% approved withing thirteen weeks.
- HO8 – Average number of days to process new housing benefit claims. Efficient processing of claims demonstrates good working practices and supports our most vulnerable households. Shropshire Council’s performance is on target and significantly higher than the national average.
- HO7 - % of Council Tax Collected. Reductions in central government funding places greater importance on the need to collect Council Tax to support the delivery of essential services. Shropshire Council is achieving the targets set and remain in line with the national average.
- HEn6 - % of household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting. Increasing recycling helps preserve natural resources for future generations. Shropshire is performing above targets and again is significantly higher than the national average.

Unlocking Opportunities – Asks of Government

- **Local Freedoms** – Greater short term flexibilities to enable fundamental transformational change without the requirements for Exceptional Financial Support or specific capitalisation directives.
- **New Funding Model** – A revised national funding system for local government taking account of the unsustainable arrangements across health and social care, reducing duplication with greater alignment to local demand.
- **Multi-year settlements** – enabling local government to plan for future years knowing the financial resources at their disposal
- **Efficient Grant Systems** – A change in emphasis away from competitive bidding for grant funding, which reduces productivity and dilutes alignment to local priorities.
- **Council Tax Freedoms** – Ability to raise more income locally through a revised system to set Council Tax. This could include removal of the current referendum threshold or linking it to underlying inflation rates.
- **DSG Resolution** – Setting a policy on the treatment of DSG deficits and dealing with the growing financial implications of the current statutory override.
- **PFI Freedoms** – Power to renegotiate long standing PFI contracts that no longer represent best value, tying the Council into arrangements unfit for future requirements.
- **Shropshire Priorities** – Clear, written confirmation of funding intent for the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road.
- **Virtual Decision-Making** – provide primary legislation to the Local Government Act 1972 to allow decision making member meetings to be held virtually, increasing access and reducing cost and travel time for members, staff and public.
- **Carbon Monitoring** - a standardised national reporting mechanism for emissions in the public sector would allow an efficient approach to local management of carbon reduction and for comparison between Local Authorities.