

EASTSUFFOLK
COUNCIL

PRODUCTIVITY PLAN

JULY 2024

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Context to the Productivity Plan

In April 2024, the Local Government Finance Settlement announced that councils will be asked to produce productivity plans. It is recognised that local government has already done a huge amount in recent years to improve productivity and efficiency and that there is an ethos of continuous improvement which runs through the sector. Capturing this information will allow good practice to be identified and for common themes and challenges to be shared nationally. It will also identify gaps and where Government can help unlock future opportunities.

Local government in East Suffolk has gone through significant change in the last 10 year, including the merger of the former Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils to create East Suffolk Council. There are very few council mergers in England and it has proved to be a significant success in increasing productivity and efficiency, whilst being able to maintain our local focus through initiatives such as community partnerships. The Council is constantly looking to improve its processes and use of technology – but also recognises that not everyone can access the technology that is often required to do business nowadays and so maintains a customer service presence across the district. This balance is an essential component of a modern service organisation.

This document seeks to capture some of the things the Council has done and is doing to remain productive and efficient. It is by no means exhaustive, but gives a flavour of our constant focus on value for money for residents and customers. It also identifies those areas where Government can support us to go further with some of the specific challenges we face in East Suffolk.



**Cllr Caroline Topping,
Leader**



**Chris Bally,
Chief Executive**

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

Introduction

East Suffolk Council has always been and is committed to transforming the way we design and deliver services to increase our efficiency and deliver the best possible outcomes we can for our residents. Our journey began by sharing services between two Councils which cumulated with the formation of one Council, East Suffolk Council in 2019. This merger was driven by a strategic business case focused on enhancing productivity and achieving significant cost savings through various initiatives.

Transformation Journey

Through the initial sharing of services and subsequent merger, much has happened in terms of transformation, examples include:

Office Accommodation Changes

When the two Councils were working together, they relocated from their respective aged office accommodation to two new operational sites, Riverside in the North of the District, which is an office building shared with Suffolk County Council, and East Suffolk House in the South of the District. At the same time the two Councils were one of the first to introduce an electronic mailroom for all incoming and outgoing post, moving to a paperless office environment.

Community Empowerment

The creation of Lowestoft Town Council and Oulton Broad Parish Council devolved certain services, empowering local communities and enhancing localised service delivery, as the two Councils came together to become East Suffolk Council.

East Suffolk Council launched a Community Partnership Model in 2019, this model facilitates place-based project work to address specific local issues, promoting collaborative problem-solving tailored to the specific needs of the area the partnership represents (8 in total).

Digital Transformation and Automation

Since 2016, there has been a focus on enhancing the Council's online presence and shifting towards digital services. This approach has freed up officer time to handle more complex cases by automating routine processes, and includes:

- ↳ **The adoption of cloud technologies** and Microsoft 365 has modernized our IT infrastructure, enhancing productivity and collaboration.
- ↳ We are trialling the **Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT)** for early intervention work and also analysing income data to address rent debtors effectively.
- ↳ **PowerBI Development:** we have utilised the development capability of PowerBI to gain greater insights into our operations and service delivery. By harnessing data analytics, we can make informed decisions that drive efficiency and improve outcomes for our residents. We have proven API links from data sources to PowerBI to provide real-time reporting and insight, as well as bringing in demographic data about our district to really understand how our services impact our communities.
- ↳ **Digital Towns Initiative:** we have implemented free public wifi and footfall trackers in 11 market towns across the district – this is a significant investment in our locality to enhance town centres, leveraging technology to revitalise town centres and boost economic activity.
- ↳ **Moving away from legacy systems** to create a more agile platform for service delivery.
- ↳ **Mobile technology and hybrid working** – utilising technology to enable us to work in the most agile way possible to deliver services where we need them, including on site and out in the district, reducing the need for travel.

Shared Services and Partnership Working

Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP), through ARP, a partnership with five other local authorities, we have achieved greater resilience and significant cost savings. This collaboration has enabled staffing resilience, streamlined management, and shared system updates, driving efficiencies across the board.

ARP has greater influence with software providers and government departments. Our participation in initiatives such as the Energy Rebate Schemes and Digital Enterprise Act showcases our role as a leader in innovative solutions.

We also host Active Suffolk, share internal audit services with Ipswich, and participate in various other partnerships, including Coastal Partnership East and Suffolk's Office of Data Analytics. These collaborations have led to cost savings and enhanced service delivery.

Establishment of East Suffolk Services Ltd (ESSL)

ESSL is the councils wholly owned Local Authority Trading Company. It became fully operational from the 1st July 2023 and is responsible for delivering a number of Council services such as waste collections and grounds maintenance.

This company replaces two Joint Venture Companies and was established to drive service improvements and value for money.



Future Plans

Strategic Vision

Our Direction 2028 is guided by a commitment to innovation, efficiency, and continuous improvement. It has a specific section titled Our Foundations which focusses on ensuring the Council always listens to its residents, uses data to inform decisions, seeks best value and capitalises on the benefits digital technology can bring the organisation.

Rolling Programme of Service Reviews

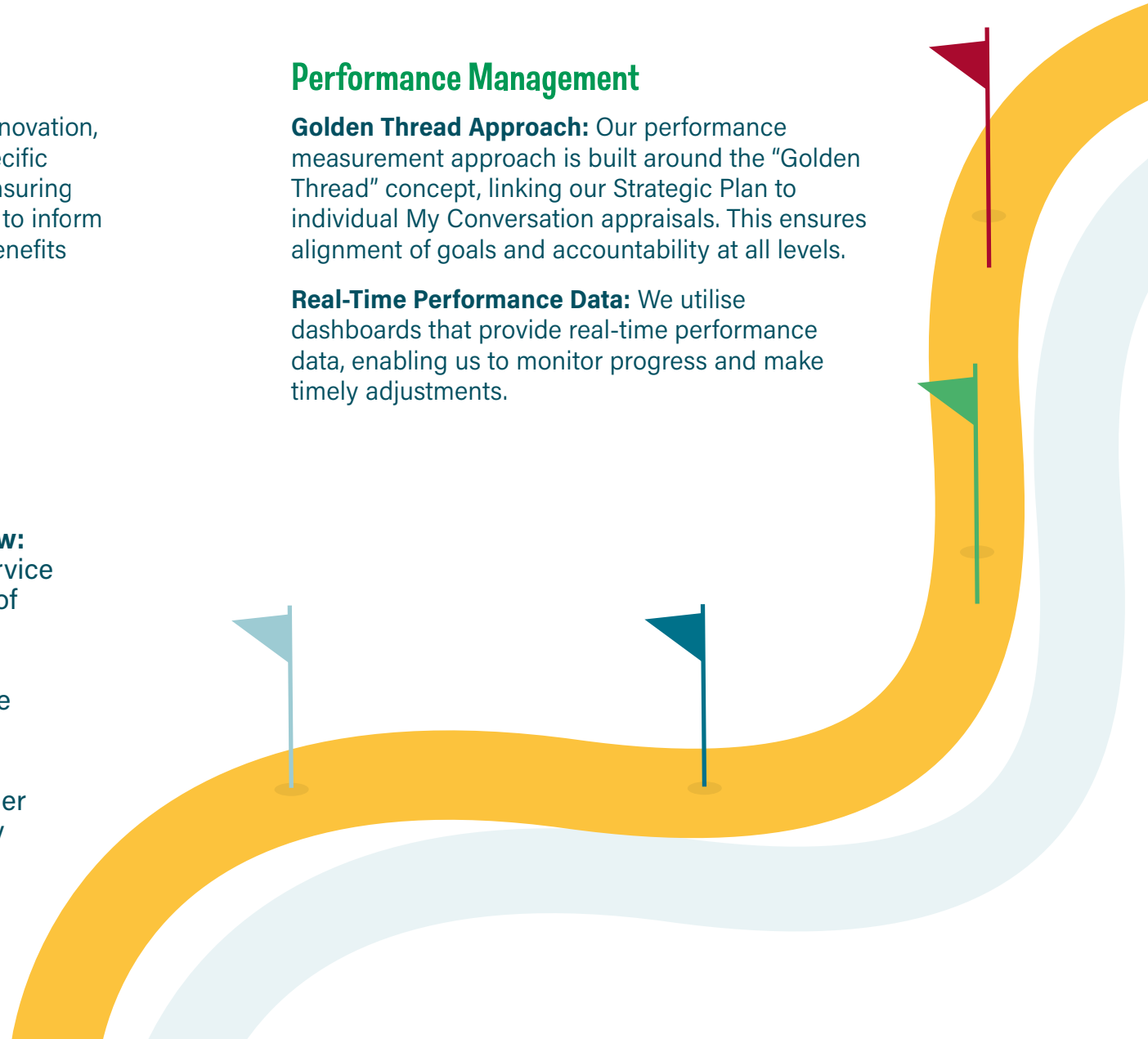
We have instituted a rolling programme of service reviews focused on transformation and enhanced customer service. This includes:

- ↳ **Customer Service Operating Model Review:** Evaluating and improving the customer service operating model to better meet the needs of our residents.
- ↳ **Digital review:** Understand what is currently working from a digital perspective within service areas and consider future improvements.
- ↳ **Use of the Transformation Toolkit:** To further support any service changes as part of any facilitated review.

Performance Management

Golden Thread Approach: Our performance measurement approach is built around the “Golden Thread” concept, linking our Strategic Plan to individual My Conversation appraisals. This ensures alignment of goals and accountability at all levels.

Real-Time Performance Data: We utilise dashboards that provide real-time performance data, enabling us to monitor progress and make timely adjustments.



Reporting Framework:

- ↳ **CLT (Corporate Leadership Team) Performance Reporting:** Regular reporting to the Corporate Leadership Team.
- ↳ **Informal Cabinet Performance Reporting:** Ongoing performance updates to the Cabinet.
- ↳ **Strategic Plan Action Plans:** Annual reporting to the Cabinet on progress against the Strategic Plan.
- ↳ **Financial Reporting:** Quarterly financial reporting to CLT and Cabinet, with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reviewing the budget for the General Fund, Capital, and Housing Revenue Account before Full Council approval in February.

Early Engagement on Budget:

We aim to engage with Members and the Corporate Leadership Team earlier in the budget-setting process, starting with an away day in June. This will foster greater collaboration and input from key stakeholders.

Enhanced Role for Overview & Scrutiny:

Scrutiny Committee in the budget-setting process to ensure thorough review and input, leading to more robust and effective financial planning.



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

Continuing PowerBI Development:

We are continuing the development of PowerBI to gain greater insights into our operations and service delivery. This includes new KPI (Key Performance Indicators) dashboards at a strategic level to measure performance against our new Strategic Plan, operational level dashboards and insight to ensure services are understood and management effectively using the data that is available to us.

Power Platform Enhancements:

- **PowerAutomate:** We are expanding the use of PowerAutomate to further automate processes, reducing manual work and increasing efficiency.
- **Dataverse:** We are exploring the benefits of using a Dataverse to service our needs and harness the power of the data we already hold.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** We are exploring AI applications beyond traditional chatbot technology to identify areas where AI can add significant value.

Digital Towns Initiative:

We are exploring additional solutions with this digital infrastructure to address various issues in towns across the district. This includes initiatives such as:

- ↳ **Smart Waste Collection:** Implementing digital solutions for efficient waste management.
- ↳ **Smart Parking Systems:** Utilising digital tools to improve parking management.
- ↳ **Town Centre Regeneration:** Leveraging technology to revitalise town centres and enhance economic activity.

Digital Learning & Development Programme:

To ensure that all staff are equipped with the necessary digital skills, we are implementing a comprehensive Digital Learning & Development Programme. This initiative will help maintain high and consistent standards across the authority, ensuring everyone can effectively use technology in their roles.

Service Automation:

As part of our contract with ESSL, we are automating all services to achieve efficiencies, modernisation, and enhanced customer experiences. Key initiatives include:

- ↳ **Route Optimisation:** Improving service delivery through optimised routing of waste collection rounds in our large geographical district.
- ↳ **Waste Improvement Plan:** To drive through service improvements, provide data to enhance performance and digitise manual processes.
- ↳ **Facilities and Grounds maintenance enhancements:** To include better mobile working and job allocation.

Next Generation website and online services

Our current website has served us well since launching in 2016, however we recognise that the next generation website development and other enhancements to our online offerings will enable smoother and more efficient service delivery for customers and officers alike, reducing unnecessary interactions for those who prefer to transact online.

Development of a Transformation Toolkit

We are developing a Transformation Toolkit to assist all teams in identifying areas for improvement, streamlining processes, and achieving efficiencies. This toolkit will be a valuable resource for driving continuous improvement across the council.

District Profile data pack

Providing an enhanced, interactive and real time data pack for all officers and members to use will ensure everyone is using the latest demographic and service defining data to help feed decision making and provide insight to manage services.

Shared data set at Suffolk level

Working with SODA to test some use cases to define the logistic of building a Suffolk level data set to help join up services within the Suffolk system, with a specific set of agreed data across county, districts, police and health to really benefit the delivery of services.



Your plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems

East Suffolk Council is committed to reducing wasteful spending and optimising our resources to ensure best value for our residents. This plan outlines our strategies to achieve these goals, leveraging the Golden Thread approach, and detailing specific initiatives aimed at financial prudence and operational efficiency.

Golden Thread Approach

Our Golden Thread approach ensures that organisational priorities are clearly defined and aligned from the Strategic Plan down to individual appraisals through the My Conversation framework. This alignment helps to ensure that all activities contribute towards our strategic goals and that resources are used effectively.

Best Value Commitment

We are committed to always seeking the best value in all our activities. This means making prudent financial decisions, continuously reviewing processes, and implementing best practices across the organisation.



Financial and Resource Management

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS):

Our MTFS underpins our financial planning and budget setting processes. Key components include:

- **Reserves Management:** Ensuring adequate reserves to safeguard against financial uncertainties.
- **Budget Setting:** Rigorous processes and governance to ensure budgets are realistic, aligned with strategic priorities, and closely monitored.

Resource Management

- **People Strategy 2028:** Provides a clear strategic framework to ensure the needs of our people are met today and, in the future, providing a clear blueprint of organisational development.
- **Staffing and Resource Allocation:** We aim to manage our staffing needs within the existing establishment wherever possible, avoiding unnecessary expansions and ensuring optimal use of current resources.
- **Hybrid Working and Technology:** By promoting hybrid working and leveraging technology, we aim to reduce travel costs and improve efficiency.

Contract and Finance Procedure Rules:

We have updated the Council's procurement strategy and alongside this have been reviewing our Contract and Finance Procedure Rules to ensure better clarity in terms of governance and controls over spending.

Asset Management Strategy:

Our new Asset Management Strategy will provide a comprehensive framework for the acquisition, development, and disposal of assets. This strategy aims to maximise value from our asset portfolio and ensure strategic investments, alongside ensuring our assets better support the needs of our communities.

Project Governance:

Robust project governance is essential to ensure that all projects are delivered on time, within budget, and achieve their intended outcomes. This includes strict oversight and regular performance reviews.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I)

The Council has a clear ED & I action plan endorsed by Cabinet and based on the LGA self-assessment tool and wider organisational needs. This was developed in-house and aims to foster an inclusive workplace, ensuring that all staff can contribute to their fullest potential.



Partnership with Unison

We work closely with Unison, our recognised trade union, supporting one officer with part-time trade union facility time. This partnership helps us to address staff concerns and maintain positive industrial relations.

Monitoring and Consultancy Spend

Consultancy Spend Oversight:

Consultancy spend is closely monitored and discussed at our Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) meetings. By scrutinising these expenditures, we ensure that consultancy services are used judiciously and only when necessary.

Strategic Recruitment Partner:

To reduce reliance on temporary staff and ensure long-term stability, HR is procuring a strategic recruitment partner. This partnership will focus on permanent recruitment aligned with organisational needs.

Engagement with Suffolk County Council

We are actively engaging with Suffolk County Council regarding the proposed County Deal, which is currently out for consultation. This engagement aims to ensure that any agreements align with our strategic priorities and deliver value for our residents.

The barriers preventing progress that the government can help to reduce or remove

That Suffolk Council believes that if the following areas are addressed, they would significantly improve productivity within East Suffolk Council:

Planning & Housing Reform

The Council welcomes the commitment to Planning and Housing reform.

- Levelling Up and Regeneration Act – secondary legislation / guidance. To speed up planning, statutory consultees will need to be appropriately resourced to respond in a timely and adequate fashion.
- Funding for house building / reform Right to Buy so that the Council can build / retain more stock thus contributing more effectively to housing demands placed upon it.
- Bring together different funding streams to tackle homelessness, rather than duplicated/overlapping funding.
- Discretion to build housing and new developments to higher energy standards and need to be given the flexibility to deliver these standards locally through the planning and building control systems.



Devolution

The Council is supportive of proper devolution to local councils and the Government's most recent commitment to give power to local communities. We want to see devolution that.

- Genuinely empowers local leaders who know their places best and is flexible enough to recognise local circumstances
- Understands and recognises how the local government system works and where the 'levers' are for delivery, e.g. the role that District Councils play in creating jobs, building homes, improving economic opportunity, tackling inequalities and planning communities
- Gives councils a clear role in the design of policy that affects local communities and residents and that Government takes a co-design approach that engages fully and as early as it can where decision making is centralised
- Keeps initiatives and funding simple to reduce local costs in implementation
- Commits to much greater flexibility for our council (and all councils) to decide how to raise and spend money locally. Central prescription and ringfencing constrain our ability to allocate our resources effectively.

Local Government partnership working with Central Government

There are a number of smaller areas where central government could support local delivery for communities, families and individual.

- Improving the join-up between central government departments on issues including housing, homelessness prevention and asylum dispersal.
- Reviewing the numerous statutory requirements to place notices in newspapers or issue written copies of routine notices.
- Reconsidering the excessive amount of information that is required in annual accounts or has to be published under the transparency code or statutory overrides such as the requirement to value assets for accounts every year.
- Addressing the challenge of regulatory bodies seeking "to the letter" compliance with their statutory codes and not reflecting local circumstances.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

- Join up in Government Departments to support delivery in communities, and speed up these major projects.
- Proper consideration of cumulative community impact of schemes which fall in one geographical area, so that better coordination and appropriate mitigation/compensation can be achieved.
- Clear policy of Energy Generation and Transmission in England so that these major projects can be better planned, and communities better understand what is required nationally and what to expect locally.

Local Government Funding

- Sustainable, multi-year core settlement for local authorities (3-year rolling), to allow councils to better plan ahead, design service delivery and develop programmes that will achieve more for our residents.
- Fund policy commitments and aspirations properly – for example Retrofit & decarbonisation/ Simpler Recycling Reform. Trying to do this through multiple, sporadic bidding rounds (see below) will not achieve delivery, is piecemeal and leads to lower productivity.
- Less competitive funding streams, greater and fairer allocation. The current bidding rounds create unnecessary additional bureaucracy, increase costs, and are somewhat of a lottery in terms of successfully winning funds. It would be far more efficient to allocate funding to councils to deliver agreed shared objectives and allow a council, as a democratically accountable body to use its discretion and local expertise to deliver what is right in its area.
- Reinstate / Replace Household Support Fund with some form of equivalent support to address cost of living issues. Without schemes like this, additional demand is placed on services such as housing and homelessness, which is more expensive and time consuming in the long run.





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