


Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 July 2024	
Report Title:	Productivity Plan	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement, all Councils are required to produce a productivity plan.
- 1.2 The plan should be endorsed by members and be returned and publicised on the Fenland District Council website by 19 July 2024.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Our productivity plan is based on a number of key themes outlined by Government on the following questions:
 - How we have transformed the way we design and deliver services to make better use of resources.
 - How we plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.
 - Our plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.
 - The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 For Cabinet to approve the FDC Productivity Plan.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	N/A
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Chris Boden, Leader of the Council Cabinet Members
Report Originator(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications

Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications
Background Papers	N/A

Report:

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement, all Councils are required to produce a productivity plan.
- 1.2 Our productivity plan is based on a number of key themes outlined by Government on the following questions:
- How we have transformed the way we design and deliver services to make better use of resources.
 - How we plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.
 - Our plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.
 - The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is being asked to approve the FDC Productivity Plan. This can then be returned to Government and published on our website.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 N/A

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 There are no specific legal considerations connected with the content of this report.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Legal Implications

N/A

5.2 Financial Implications

N/A

5.3 Equality Implications

N/A

5.4 [Any Other Relevant Implications]

N/A

7 SCHEDULES

Appendix 1 – Productivity Plan

Fenland District Council Productivity Plan

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1. Transforming how we design and deliver services to make better use of resources

How we've changed in recent years to become more productive

Organisational change has been ongoing for several decades, but the most recent strand started in 2019 with the creation of the new My Fenland team. This brought together officers within the Customer Services team and admin officers from a number of services to work as one service, removing potential silos. Where specific service expertise is needed, technical champion roles answer detailed enquiries to free up the capacity of specialist officers. This environment is supportive and has given staff the scope to develop and learn new skills, whilst providing excellent customer service.

We have also implemented a new corporate operating model which enables the development of a more inclusive culture, offering greater flexibility that increases productivity whilst helping to facilitate wider transformational change. The new operating model has enabled our workforce to offer flexible and responsive services that supports better contact and improved service delivery for the benefit of Fenland residents and customers. The key principles of the operating model were to deliver an efficient and effective way of providing services.

How we measure productivity

Our Business Plan sets out the priorities we aim to deliver over the next 12 months. These priorities have been developed to address the most important needs of our communities and sets a framework for how we will work towards our ambitions for the area and achieve our goal of creating a thriving place to live, work and visit.

Each priority is underpinned by a series of performance indicators, which are used to track progress, measure success, and identify areas for improvement. All performance indicators are reported to all elected Members at our Council meetings. These public reports are summarised to provide end of year performance updates against our priorities in our [Annual Report](#).

Where a priority does not have a linked performance indicator, usually where we work towards objectives with partners, updates will be reported [via Portfolio Holder Briefings at Council meetings](#).

All staff have 121 meetings with their line manager and an annual appraisal (Springboard) where targets are agreed which are measured and monitored throughout the year. Each service area has relevant productivity and efficiency targets. For example, in our contract centre, we have a target for a call answered in set time, we have a 'right first time' target and we expect our contact centre team to respond to a certain number of calls a day. We monitor their activity and down time through our telephony system. We also capture qualitative data from our customers about how satisfied they are with the service we provide. We have a robust performance management process in place which addresses any issues of poor performance or productivity in a timely and consistent way.

Our transformation plan for the next two years

In 2019, we began our Transformation Agenda programme (TA1) which focussed on transforming the way the Council delivers all aspects of our services to our customers. TA1 is on track to deliver over £1m savings over the medium term.

This year we have committed to Transformation Agenda 2 (TA2). Spanning across all services within the council, this 2-year programme ties together all major 'change' initiatives that are seeking to improve how the council manages and delivers services. Whether this is reviewing a service, how systems support delivery or how staff are able to conduct their jobs in a more effective and flexible manner, the programme will aim to ensure we are an effective and efficient Council for the future.

We have taken a prioritisation approach and developed a programme of service reviews based on potential risk factors and potential opportunities. Efficiency and financial benefits realisation are a key part of each service review process, in addition to benefits generated for our staff and customers.

Preventative approaches being undertaken

In addition to our TA2 programme and our proactive approach to the service reviews, we have a number of preventative approaches we are actively undertaking. Two key ones are our proactive approach to alleviate the housing issues in Fenland and the current review of our corporate office accommodation.

We have been successful in securing a capital grant from the Local Authority Housing Fund to purchase houses that can be used as quality temporary accommodation to house vulnerable families and support our homelessness duties. This is cost effective, delivers financial savings and reduces the risk of using inappropriate Bed & Breakfast accommodation. This ensures that the Council also meets the Government requirement of not having more than 5 homeless families in B&B for more than 6 weeks.

We are currently carrying out a corporate office accommodation review to ensure our accommodation is fit for current and future customer and business needs. With increasing liabilities for repairs and maintenance and new agile working arrangements, reducing our accommodation requirements will realise cost savings. An efficient estate will reduce impact on budgetary pressures and enable funds to be reallocated to help the Council achieve key strategic targets.

Proactive partnership working

We are part of ARP (Anglia Revenues Partnership), 5 Local Authorities in partnership to deliver Revs and Bens. So far, the partnership has achieved greater resilience and significant cost savings. Having a larger workforce provides staffing resilience for our main functions of billing and assessment, as well as cover in specialist areas such as Government Returns, Benefit Subsidy claims and database maintenance. Savings have been realised in the Management Structure where 1 senior team can direct resources, implement change and manage projects across 5 LAs rather than 5 independent LA teams.

As part of a national pilot program of Early Help Hubs, we are working with the NHS to deliver a new systems-based approach to improving the health and wellbeing of the working age population, reducing inequalities, and supporting economic prosperity in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The key objective is to decrease the proportion of the workforce who are not working because of a health condition or disability. A healthy workforce that supports a healthy local economy, that there is good work for everyone, and that disability or poor health is not a barrier to being in work. Successful outcomes will also help prevent the need for higher cost interventions in statutory services like housing, health and social care.

2. Taking advantage of technology and making better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources

Technology use

Key principles have been developed to enhance our corporate transformation. Digital innovation and better data analysis are two of these key principles and are embedded in our transformation journey.

Digital innovation

- Develop the Council's digital offer to provide residents and businesses with even better online services, ensuring our digital offer is the access channel of choice for customers.
- Develop software learning and knowledge to ensure we are maximising corporate applications.
- Taking advantage of emerging technologies and forward planning.

Better Data Analysis

- Develop a better understanding of what our residents and businesses want, anticipating demand and ensuring we plan and deliver services accordingly.
- Use data analysis to improve the customer experience.
- Make better use of data and business intelligence to improve service decision making particularly in relation to design, delivery and the use of technology to facilitate greater customer choice.

The development of technology and the use of data were fundamental factors in why we introduced the My Fenland team and how we are driving forward our transformational service reviews. A key corporate commitment has been to centralise all software and have a suite of data sets to gather customer needs to help us inform service delivery. Further efficiencies are being driven through developing end-to-end processes and integration between front and back-office systems.

Barriers to legacy systems

As part of our transformation programme, we are reviewing all business applications currently in use to decide whether they are still fit-for-purpose or should be replaced.

We are taking a digital-first approach when reviewing / procuring new systems and have found that some of our legacy systems do not allow as much automation as we

would like. Features such as self-service by the customer, or being cloud-enabled, may not be included leading to an evaluation as to whether it is more efficient, or cost-effective, to replace the current application.

The most significant barrier to moving towards the most efficient / up-to-date system tends to be the cost of procurement and annual maintenance charges in comparison to those paid for the legacy systems.

Data sharing and opportunities to use technology

We have a selection of data sharing agreements with partner organisations. Services include, revenues and benefits, housing service, elections, provision of private hire vehicle licensing data and local businesses applying for grants.

Proactively we use information from partner organisations to help support residents and businesses, like our assisted bin service. However, we also think there are opportunities to improve data workflow, like information on free school meals, linked to other benefit uptakes.

Using technology to assist our customers to self-serve is one of our key transformation drivers. This includes developing end to end processes that improve system workflows to enable a more efficient way of working for both customers and staff. We continue to use analytics to assist and improve customer service. We have investigated the use of AI, but currently the cost implications and concerns regarding some of our vulnerable customer groups have paused progress.

3. Plans to reduce wasteful spend

Governance structures for accountability of spend

Regular budget monitoring takes place across various Officer levels and Member bodies. We deliver bi-monthly Portfolio Holder Briefings and reports are also taken to Cabinet. Ad-hoc monitoring (of 'hot topics') also takes place during fortnightly Management Team meetings.

Reducing spend

For the current financial year, we are estimating to spend £0.427 million out of a £16.434 million staffing budget (2.6%) on agency and consultants. These are predominantly linked to specialised skilled officers or professional contractors. Due to the national shortage of Planning staff and to reduce our agency bill, we offer retention payments to attract high quality candidates and retain staff.

We have recently undertaken a full review of all temporary labour spend and have a plan in place to review the spend on agency and consultancy costs moving forward. This is reviewed monthly, and also frequently by CMT (Corporate Management Team). We have also developed a new Temporary Staff Authorisation process for new agency staff and the renewal of agency staff; this must be authorised by CMT.

We track any additional spend on temporary labour costs (i.e. overtime and sickness) to ensure swift action can be taken to alter processes or approaches if

required. Our annual staff sickness levels are at their lowest ever at 5.8 days per employee per year. Moving forward, our Transformation team is undertaking a review of all services to identify opportunities for streamlined, more efficient and better ways of working.

We have an Equality & Diversity Senior Officer who is responsible for delivering all the internal training. He is supported by ten equality, diversity, and inclusive champions across all services. In addition to the internal training programme, we also utilise e-learning programmes to help maintain skills and knowledge amongst our workforce. This work ties into our Annual Equality Report and has synergy with the work we do to ensure CSE (Customer Service Excellence) accreditation.

We have a very good relationship with our Union group and meet with them (and other staff elected reps) on a monthly basis. The proportion of time spent on Trade Union facility time is therefore very low at under 0.04%.

An accommodation review is also underway with the aim of reducing surplus office space. Two partners (NHS wellbeing and Everyone Health) rent some of our office space generating £66,000 per annum. Additionally, our Grounds Maintenance provider rents our land for their base of operations.

In addition, the expansion of the LAHF (Local Authority Housing Fund) programme has enabled the Council to source temporary accommodation for single people and couples in the homelessness system. This has reduced the need for costly hotel accommodation and has improved both the efficiency and quality of outcomes.

We are also reviewing our Debtors policy to ensure we are efficient with sending bills, collecting debts and acting when payments are not made.

To improve data management and GDPR compliance, we continue to reduce our paper and digital storage. Planning files are being scanned to allow these records to be accessed digitally and all storage is being reviewed to free up space, ensure documents are secured securely, become environmentally friendly and improve customer service. The same work is being undertaken with historic burial records.

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

Areas for Government support

A significant financial pressure for the Council is Internal Drainage Board levies. The Partnership has helped formed a Local Government Association Special Interest Group that is lobbying Government on this issue. The Group now has 30 Councils and fully recognises the important work of Internal Drainage Boards in protecting our communities. The significant and ongoing increases in levies charged to the Council by Drainage Boards – a sum the Council can't control – is a major concern and is having an impact on our ability to invest in front line services. Since 2021, the levies charged to the Council, have increased. In 2022/23 it was £1,707,909, in

2023/24 it increased to £1,903,750 and in 2024/25 it increased to £2,098,570 – this is also significantly above inflation.

Some other areas to consider include:

- Reviewing the Council Tax funding model – the majority of our properties are in low Council Tax bands which limits the amount of income that the Council will receive. Furthermore, a review of the cap of the maximum Council Tax rise could take place – for example, a cap of 3% does not enable the authority to equally fund a 5-6% pay award uplift.
- A longer-term financial settlement. A spending review commitment for a number of years would enable effective and efficient financial planning rather than waiting for annual settlements and the short-term approach that this then engenders.
- Alternative funding to CIL which is not currently viable for Fenland due to local demographics and rurality.
- Increase the value and scope of the Homelessness Budget which is a very significant pressure for the Council. Fenland spent £1million on Homelessness support last year due to sheer demand, despite maximising usage of existing funding and partnership support.
- Being able to share more data between different tiers of Government to deliver better outcomes for residents. For example, as a district council we have access to DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) data so know all households that should be on Free School Meals but are not. However, we cannot share that data with the County Council. Sharing data to support the enforcement of damp and mould conditions would also be advantageous.
- Being given the flexibility to use the BCF (Better Care Fund) for non-capital initiatives (i.e. revenue) that help keep vulnerable residents safe in their home and prevent non-elective admissions to hospital.
- Agreed implementation and funding dates for new initiatives with clarity on how and when they should be delivered. For example, the new DEFRA food waste strategy along with Extended Producer Responsibility, Deposit Return Scheme and Recycling Credits is being constantly delayed which holds up the delivery of waste strategy and infrastructure planning.