

Kirklees Council ‘Productivity Plan’ – 2024/25

Introduction

Kirklees Council has well-established processes for setting and monitoring our annual priorities and budgets; this ‘Productivity Plan’ therefore summarises and expands on productivity-focused areas of our [Council Plan 2024/25](#) and [Budget 2024/25](#).

Improving productivity and efficiency has long been at the heart of Kirklees Council’s approach to delivering services for our residents. Alongside our long-standing shared outcomes, we have had a council-focused outcome: ‘Efficient and Effective’. This outcome, as set out in the Council Plan, indicates our commitment to work smart and deliver efficiently and effectively.

Our Council Plan 2024/25 includes four priorities for the next three years, with two of them focused explicitly on organisational productivity: 1. Address our financial position in a fair and balanced way; 2. Strive to transform council services to become more modern, efficient, and effective.

We will continue to report on our progress through our regular performance and impact monitoring. This includes updates on the commitments set out in the Council Plan and Budget, all of which is published and discussed by elected members.

Transforming the design and delivery of services

What we have done so far

Kirklees Council has a dedicated corporate transformation service as well as a number of change hubs across the organisation. Senior officer oversight of our corporate transformation programme comes via the Executive Leadership Team and four directorate-specific Change Boards. In this way, transformation efforts focus on both cross-council and individual service areas. We have seen some key transformation successes over recent years, including:

- being seen as a leader on special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), for example additionally resourced provision, and working with the Department for Education to bring down costs and improve some of our most important services.
- continuing to deliver our [Access to Services Strategy](#), increasing the accessibility of services and improving how we work with people when they contact us. For example, we have achieved a 17% reduction in calls on Council Tax from 2022/23 to 2023/24.
- reforming our local planning application process, with the aim of making it more modern and efficient.

- embedding a succession planning process, with the aim of mitigating the risk of our most critical posts being left vacant through employees leaving the organisation.

Next steps

Transformation is one of the four priorities in our [Council Plan 2024/25](#), as it has been in previous years. In the coming years, we will focus on a number of areas, including those set out in the Council Plan:

- continuing to implement 'The Big Plan' - our offer to children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families, with a focus on improving and providing the right support at the right time in the right place.
- developing and delivering a more efficient and effective operating model for adult social care services.
- delivering transformation of services and homes for our housing tenants.
- progressing the implementation of our Access Strategy, for example by rolling out public access facilities across our libraries.

Making better use of technology and data

What we have done so far

Making better use of technology and data underpins all our efforts to improve productivity and runs as a thread through all the work described in this 'Productivity Plan'.

We have invested in user productivity and reduced failure rates; implemented resilience across our data services; improved our cyber posture, defence, and response; invested in new IT systems; skills for staff and devices for residents; more end to end online services to reduce calls to our contact centre.

More recent investments include beginning to explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in our day-to-day work through commencing a trial of Microsoft Copilot. We have also put in place guidance for staff on the safe and effective use of other AI tools.

We have put in place clear corporate level governance and oversight to prioritise technology investments. This ensures we provide efficient services and good quality outcomes for residents while also creating efficiencies and cashable savings in the council. For example, we have invested in modern and specialised technology to support the efficient management, transformation, analysis, and provision of data across the Council.

Our investment in data capability (technology and people) has enabled a Council-wide roll-out of interactive self-service dashboards. Those dashboards provide the Council's workforce with near real-time access to high quality data and intelligence on Council performance and demand, enabling more timely identification and response to challenges, opportunities, and issues as they arise.

The dashboards are being used to inform operational, tactical, and strategic decision making in a range of areas including children's social care, adults social care, and community safety, resulting in timelier and better-quality services for residents. This improved availability and access to data and intelligence is supporting and informing service design and development and enabling services to monitor the impact of interventions.

Our investment also provides the technology and tools to process data more efficiently. Exploration of the potential opportunities to improve data processing efficiency and productivity through these tools is in the preliminary stages but is likely to deliver significant benefits over the coming months and years.

To support new ways of working, we have undertaken a review of hybrid capability across all office accommodation buildings and installed hybrid equipment where possible. Additionally, as part of a wider refurbishment, we have installed hybrid enabled technology throughout our main Civic Campus building.

Next steps

We will continue to invest in our IT and data infrastructure. We also want to increase our focus on shifting the culture of the organisation to ensure officers across the authority are partners in driving technology-inspired efficiencies. We have invested over £500k in cyber security controls; £900k per annum on technology refresh; £2m on new IT systems and just awarded a £5.5m contract for new network infrastructure and services. Also, an extra £400k supporting digital exclusion initiative for children, families, and school.

We will continue to leverage innovative technology and recognise that AI is a major opportunity. We are investigating ways in which AI can boost efficiency across everything that we do, supported by discussions with other councils via national networks. We are also considering what we can achieve by sharing resources.

Through the apprenticeship levy, we have been building our specialist data skills. During Summer 2024, we will be developing a data and insight skills improvement programme to develop the data and insight skills of staff at all levels across the Council. Improving the data skills of our workforce should result in more efficient and productive working practices.

Balancing the budget

What we have done so far

Like many local authorities, Kirklees Council faces twin issues of growing demand and insufficient resources, with these becoming particularly pressing in recent years. For a number of years, we have been identifying activities aimed at reducing our spending. This work continues, and we monitor activity closely through our budget delivery programme management arrangements, led by the Executive Leadership Team. Recent actions have included:

- The ceasing of non-essential expenditure.
- Additional requirements on recruitment, to focus recruitment on essential roles.
- Increasing discretionary fees and charges in line with inflation and market factors.
- Accelerating the sale of assets.
- Increasing our exploration of external funding opportunities to bring in additional resources behind council and partner priorities.
- Continuing our review of the Council's Capital Investment Programme.

Data has shown that we made good progress in the 2023/24 financial year in reducing non-essential spending. For example, there was a reduction of £2.6m in agency staff spend in 2023 compared to 2022, with 105 fewer agency workers.

Internally, we have ensured that senior managers and wider staff have been fully briefed and engaged on the development and delivery of budget savings. We have done this in a wide range of ways, for example sharing information through newsletters and the intranet, and regular budget briefings, workshops, and discussions.

Next steps

The Council is now focused on delivery of the [agreed annual budget for 2024/25](#). We will continue to monitor demand and costs, so we are able to manage risks and respond early and appropriately to any issues. We will need to ensure the delivery of £34.5m of savings this financial year, which we will continue to govern through our budget delivery programme management arrangements. We have published [our savings proposals online](#), alongside [Integrated Impact Assessments](#) that consider the impact of change, as well as [consultations](#), where appropriate.

Barriers to progress that the government can help to reduce or remove

Funding

Levels of funding are inadequate, especially for councils with higher local needs. According to analysis by SIGOMA, Kirklees Council has suffered an 18% drop in real terms core spending power between 2010/11 and 2024/25. In parallel, there is growing demand for our services and cost increases. SIGOMA analysis shows local authorities with higher local need levels like Kirklees are more underfunded. Previous SIGOMA analysis of [figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) showed Kirklees to be underfunded (relative to need) by £13m per year in 2022/23. With increasing demands for local services and without commensurate increases in funding, we expect this situation to have worsened. With proper resourcing, councils across the country, including Kirklees, will be able to deliver better outcomes for local people and support government objectives.

We also need fairer, more stable, and more flexible funding. The recent practice of providing annual local government financial settlements makes it significantly more difficult to plan for the longer-term. This, alongside the increasing use of distinct funding pots and competitive bidding, with tight deadlines and sometimes shifting criteria, leads to inefficient use of officer time. The [LGA's 2023 report into local levelling up](#) highlighted the costs and inefficiencies created by reliance on smaller, short-term, competitive funding pots. The government could shift to multi-year fiscal settlements and permit more funding flexibility, allowing places to decide how resources are allocated in line with local priorities and legal obligations.

We welcome the government's commitment to funding simplification and the prospect of single-settlement pots at a West Yorkshire level (as set out in the next section). For local authorities to play a full role in delivering outcomes and supporting government ambitions, we need similar considerations around local authority funding to those relating to combined authority funding. We also need the 'fair funding review' to go ahead as soon as possible.

In the longer term, the government could consider more wholesale reform, for example fiscal devolution.

Devolution

The government's commitment to expanding the scale and scope of English devolution has been welcome. Kirklees Council's participation in the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) has brought significant benefits to our district. To make even more progress in support of productivity, we need a single-settlement for West Yorkshire at the next spending review, with departmental-style flexibilities. As part of this, it would help government to review its approach to assurance for funding delivered through the Combined Authority. The combination of government and regional assurance processes can leave little time for efficient and effective project design, development, and

implementation; this ultimately weakens the final project. Within enhanced devolution agreements, annual funding programmes could be delegated to local authorities without the need for additional assurance, for example highways maintenance.

Finally, an area where improvements can be made is better alignment of funding programmes, to realise greater strategic benefit. For example, central government programmes (e.g. recently Levelling Up Funding) could be better coordinated with complimentary WYCA investment to improve places across West Yorkshire.

Growth

We are continuing to invest in and regenerate our towns and villages to support our diverse places and communities to flourish. Local government has the potential to do much more on inclusive growth with the right support from government, and we stand ready to do our part, working with and through the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and other local, regional, and national partners such as health services, educational institutions, and businesses. More place-led economic strategy making should be underpinned by investment in local economic development capabilities.

A key aim of our 2024/25 Council Plan is to continue to make progress with the strategic housing sites in our district. This will help to deliver high quality housing and increase the amount of sustainable green homes to meet a range of people's needs. We acknowledge the new government's commitment to this area and would welcome extra resources to enable us to continue to deliver a strong local planning system that delivers outcomes for local communities with the support of regional and national partners as required.

Adult Social Care

Partnership working around social care has improved with the development of the West Yorkshire Integrated Care System and Integrated Care Board. There are, however, elements of national policy emphasis that reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of adult social care. Timely discharge from hospital is obviously important, but the current focus on this as the main motivation for adult social care tends to overlook its wider purpose to support people to live well and independently. This can incentivise the wrong response to situations. Ultimately, hospitals and the health system more broadly will be under less demand if people are better able to live well and independently.

Continuing Health Care and the Better Care Fund are areas where there may be inefficiencies as both the NHS and local government risk trying to use this funding to address immediate financial pressures rather than longer-term change and transformation.

The expenditure on working age adults who need social care services has increased significantly (reflecting SEND pressures) but is under-emphasised in national policy and funding work.

Other issues concerning adult social care include:

- The sector would benefit from greater join up between DHSC and DHLUC policy making. The short-term funding solutions to adult social care, often associated with addressing particular pressures or with tight criteria, means that the money cannot be used as effectively as a longer-term approach to sustainable investment with greater ability to focus on local challenges.
- Pay and conditions for social care providers is a recurrent challenge and would benefit from further consideration. One aspect that needs attention is how to increase domestic recruitment. This is particularly important because international recruitment is driving significant local inefficiencies. Though we recognise that recruitment licenses must sometimes be revoked, this can lead to inefficiencies arising.
- Given the relatively small numbers of suppliers of health and social care record systems, some national work on data extraction may be valuable. This could generate local predictive insight about “at risk” populations, who may be more likely to use health and social care services and allow us to better focus resources and intervention.

Children’s Services

Local Authorities (LA) spent £11.1bn on children’s social care in 2021/22, a real terms increase of 41% since 2009, while the number of children grew by less than 10% in the same time frame. Children’s social care lacks sufficient and suitable placements in the appropriate locations, which means that children are not always getting the care and accommodation that suit their needs. The biggest private providers of placements are able to earn excess profits because demand exceeds supply, meaning they can charge disproportionate rates. Statistics analysed by ADCS show that between 2015 and 2022, private residential placement costs increased by 163%, while LA placements increased by only 69%. If enacted, the recently proposed [Health and Social Care \(Wales\) Bill](#) will permit only not-for-profit organisations and councils to provide fostering, children’s home, and secure accommodation placements. If carefully implemented and properly resourced, this could remove market-driven inflation and keep costs down. The government could consider similar legislation for England.

On SEND, Kirklees Council is pleased to be working constructively with government on our ‘safety valve’ agreement, which is helping the council and partners to deliver high-quality SEND support to children and families whilst also meeting a sharp increase in need and complexity. The Kirklees SEND transformation programme includes multi-million pound investments in special school facilities so that pupils with additional needs can be educated locally and see their outcomes and life chances improve. Our [SEND Big Plan](#) explains what we are doing. That said, the government will wish to consider the wider context of rising Education, Health, and Care Plan applications and the increasing complexity of need across the country to consider whether wider reforms or action is necessary.

Local government requires more flexibility in securing and allocating developer contributions for educational infrastructure under Section 106 planning obligations. The current system, which ties funding to local school place availability and new housing developments, can lead to delays which in turn lead to mismatches between identified needs and actual requirements. This is due to the time elapsed – sometimes many years – between the initial calculation and funding availability. Conditions often make it difficult to spend contributions as initially intended. Allowing more flexible use of these contributions could address challenges like replacing aging modular school buildings, especially given the limited capital funding opportunities outside the central government's school rebuilding programme.

The current early years funding system, which calculates free entitlement allocation based on the January census and adjusts it in the summer, is overly complex and risky for local authorities. Local Authorities are required to pay providers for actual numbers of children per term, requiring us to set aside reserves which could otherwise be used to maximise what can be passed on to the early years providers. Simplifying this process and aligning the DfE's methodology with that of local authorities could improve efficiency and allow for better use of reserves.

Childcare providers face uncertainty due to late government funding announcements and the subsequent need for local authorities to consult on a local early year funding formula. This often results in providers receiving confirmed funding rates just two months before implementation. Furthermore, the low increases in funding rates compared to the rise in minimum wage and inflation over recent years pose challenges for workforce planning in this lower-paid sector. Addressing these issues is crucial to maintain the quality of provision and enable local authorities to fulfil our childcare sufficiency duties.