

Productivity Plan: Brighton & Hove City Council

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

Council Plan and Priorities

The council has developed a clear and targeted delivery plan for the city of Brighton & Hove ([Brighton & Hove City Council plan 2023 - 2027](#)). Whether people live, work, study or just visit the city, our vision is to create a 'Better Brighton & Hove for all'. A key priority is to provide **responsive and well-run council services** which is particularly pertinent to the Productivity Plan and underpins the direction of travel and future investment in change that the council expects to provide.

However, step increases in the growth in demands alongside reducing government grant funding and limitations on council tax increases have meant the council has had to deliver large annual savings and efficiencies of over £230m since 2010/11 to balance the budget.

Key to improving productivity and delivering substantial savings programmes in latter years has been the use of the council's 'Modernisation Fund' and approach, utilising capital receipt flexibilities since 2016/17. These one-off investment resources have enabled significant restructuring, redesign and modernisation of services, nearly 50% reduction in Admin Officer Buildings and substantial reductions in staffing and cost. The council's Modernisation Fund has been invested in the following key areas to support change:

- Invest-to-Save Business Cases;
- Our Digital Customer programme to generate processing efficiencies and improve the ease of access to services;
- 'Enabling' investments such as project and programme management, specialist support, and training and development of staff and leadership;
- Managing staffing changes i.e. provision for redundancy and pension strain costs to enable severance of staff to reduce overall staffing costs.

Using capital receipt flexibilities, around £49 million has been invested in change and modernisation since 2016/17 which has levered annual savings that have grown to £79 million per annum with a cumulative cash saving of £432 million over the period; a return on investment (ROI) of over 7.5.

Improved Operating Models

Through its Modernisation Programmes and other best practice-led changes and savings initiatives, the council has invested in a wide range of improvements and transformation of its delivery approaches to improve customer service, productivity and economy. Examples include:

- Piloting and then embedding Family Hubs providing a 'front door for families' and access to a wide range of support, guidance and intervention for parents and families in difficult situations. This has been underpinned by a change to the Social Work model now arranged in multi-disciplinary 'Pods' which has improved triage and prevention, maintained the numbers of children in care despite increasing caseload, and reduced reliance on traditional and expensive care models that have poorer long-term outcomes.
- Our Homeless transformation programme focuses on a dual approach of increasing supply through house-building (HRA), home purchase and a Joint Venture affordable housing development programme with Hyde Housing alongside a focused 'move-on' approach developed with DLUHC to ensure people do not become trapped in the homelessness and worklessness cycle.
- The council has also reflected on its 'ways of working' following the pandemic and now has technologies in place that enable staff to work out on location in any of the council's open access

buildings or remotely. This has not only helped to reduce the administrative office footprint substantially (around 50%) but has improved productivity through reduced travelling times, better quality and faster IT equipment, and investment in applications that enhance productivity e.g. Office 365 and MS Teams/Messaging.

Co-Design and Co-Delivery of Services through Partnership

Alongside its critical work with the NHS within the Integrated Care System, the council has also reviewed and re-ignited its Strategic Partnership working with key city partners aimed at engendering a co-design and co-delivery approach to addressing the city's many challenges. This has led to refreshing the membership structure, agreeing a new purpose and terms of reference, and refreshing culture, values and behaviour, for example to enable officers to step back and let partners co-lead. The approach to partnerships aims to increase productivity where services and projects can be delivered collaboratively to improve value for money across stakeholders, not only in the council.

Community and resident involvement is also key and the council has invested in improving its ability to engage and consult with residents, businesses and visitors through a newly developed 'Your Voice' platform and portal.

Measuring Productivity

The council has a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that reflect different service areas for which it has developed efficient data capture and insight. Through quarterly performance reporting, the monitoring of KPIs helps us to keep track of customer satisfaction, service quality and outcomes, and productivity. Alongside this, each service area has a set of performance indicators and establishes clear service plans aligned to the Council Plan.

The Council Plan not only sets out priorities but indicates clearly how progress against these will be monitored and measured. For example, the priority to achieve a 'Responsive and Well-run Council' includes the following measures:

- Customer satisfaction with council services (supported by a customer insight dashboard);
- Quality and timeliness of responses to customer feedback;
- Staff health, safety and wellbeing data;
- Budget monitoring and achievement of savings/efficiency plans;
- Compliance with information rights and access requests;
- Internal audit results and reviews
- External Audit review of arrangements for Value for Money.

Importantly, the council measures productivity against other local authorities and is an active member of the LGA, Housemark, APSE and other informal performance and benchmarking networks including Cipfa.

The External Auditor's latest review (2022/23) highlighted the council's overall positive progress against its basket of 62 KPI's, its 'strong' use of benchmarking and its arrangements for collaborating and learning from other organisations and local authorities, and its actions to improve contract management and partnership arrangements. The auditor concluded that there were 'no significant weaknesses in the council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness from its use of resources'.

Future Modernisation, Investment and Productivity Opportunities

The council has identified a range of opportunities linked to its Council Plan priorities which will determine where investment to improve or enhance service delivery is required but will also help to identify where investment to improve value for money and productivity in other services is required to free up resources and capacity for priority areas. The council's majority Administration is working

to develop a more aligned Modernisation Programme and Capital Investment Programme.

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](#)

[Digital, Data & Technology \(DDaT\) Strategy](#)

The council is initiating a data programme as part of its **Digital, Data and Technology Strategy** and portfolio (see [DDaT Strategy](#) which is currently being revised). Detailed scoping of programme workstreams will be part of the initiation process, but there are expected to be several initiatives which will aim to improve data quality. These include benchmarking data quality, building an enterprise data catalogue and establishing data governance and data standards.

Our ambitions for a revised DDaT Strategy are as follows:

- Development of our Citizen ID form, linked to our MyAccount service (over 172,000 accounts) and our complex 'Customer Index' that matches data and people to capture information and ensure people only have to 'tell us once';
- Using technology to link data and develop a single view of a person or family and using the data to prioritise service provision;
- Further development of Digital Forms (over 300 transactional forms already exist) to standardise contact and transaction, incorporating more on-line payments;
- Using technologies to develop automated workflows to improve productivity and customer service, for example, by converting emails into contact management casework;
- Optimising the use of available app's and tools such as PowerBI to improve data mining and analysis.

3. [Your plans to reduce 'wasteful spend' within your organisation and systems](#)

[Optimising the Use of Resources](#)

The examples given above show how the council is aligning its spend and investment with Council Plan priorities, including aiming to be a responsive and well-run council. The severe resource and funding constraints placed on the authority over the last decade or so in the face of growing costs and demands has led to very significant annual savings requirements to balance the budget which means all areas of service are striving hard for greater economy and efficiency to make the money go further. Our approach to ensuring that our use of resources, including staffing, is optimised places strong reliance on:

- Our business case approach to investment ensuing effective review and appraisal of modernisation and capital investment proposals aligned with priorities;
- Keeping under review our organisational structure and considering our management and administration costs and efficacy. A recent Organisational Redesign has streamlined the number of directorates and is currently working through opportunities for further efficiencies across similar functional areas such as business and admin support;
- Achieving channel shift through digital and technological investment to speed up processing and reduce costs.

Examples of the council's effectiveness in challenging and driving down costs and improving productivity include:

- Eliminating the use of expensive Children's Social Worker agency cover and reducing other staffing agency costs in 2023/24 by 17% year-on-year;
- Restricting the use of 'consultancy' to the support of service or programme delivery only where it is used for a time-limited period and where it would not be financially beneficial or practicable for the council to employ and retain expertise internally;

- Sharing services with other councils including IT & Digital, Internal Audit and Procurement services with Surrey and East Sussex County Councils through our Orbis Partnership of which Brighton & Hove is a founding partner;
- Procuring and commissioning many services with partners or neighbouring councils including our major Waste PFI Contract managed jointly with East Sussex County Council.

EDI Spending

The government has asked about EDI spending. In 2023/24, spending on instructor-led courses for staff EDI training was approx. £11,000. BHCC has 4 employee networks and each network has a annual budget of £1,000 to spend on activities and events. There is an average of 5 members on each network steering group and they are allowed up to 11 hours per month to engage in network-related activity during their normal working hours. There are 4 EDI Champions: each employee network has 1 EDI Champion who is also a member of the Corporate Leadership Team.

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

Local Government Association - Local Government White Paper

This council fully endorses the LGA's White Paper which was recently published ([Local Government White Paper | Local Government Association](#)). In particular, we support the resetting of an equal and respectful partnership between local and national government including clear longer-term plans and agreements, multi-year financial settlements, and avoidance of bureaucratic and arbitrary funding and bidding processes. There are also many areas where councils could be more productive or achieve greater value for money with changes in national policy or practice, including:

- Greater powers to tackle empty properties and second home ownership;
- Greater influence over transport policy and funding to meet local need;
- Fully devolving the Adult Education Budget and the Apprenticeship system to ensure local workforce and skills development needs are met.

Funding Reforms and Flexibilities

The system of local government finance is clearly no longer fit for purpose. Reforms of local taxation and much greater local choice and control over funding sources are minimum requirements for the future survival and sustainability of the sector. In particular, we would advocate for:

- 100% business rates retention and devolution of stamp duty and/or retention of a share of income tax and VAT generated locally;
- Reform of Council Tax and bands to ensure this tax is progressive as intended;
- Removal of 'excessive Council Tax' rules to enable local decisions on Council Tax increases;
- Tax increment financing;
- Resolution of the long-term funding reform of Adult Social Care;
- Complete overhaul of Business Rates to ensure a level playing field between businesses located on high streets and those operating mail order businesses including e-commerce taxation;
- Local discretion over all fees, charges and fines;
- The ability to set new levies, such as a tourism levy to support areas under significant pressure from visitors;
- Continuation and extension of local flexibility to apply capital receipts to lever change and modernisation;
- Funding for new affordable homes, reducing national homelessness and housing benefits costs;
- Aligning NHS and Local Government long-term funding settlements.