

## Productivity Plan

### Wiltshire Council has transformed the way we design and deliver services to make better use of resources

Over the past decade Wiltshire Council has delivered significant savings, many driven through activity related to unitarisation (circa £17m per year) as well as collaboration with other public services. A sustained process of service review and job redesign has taken place, using an agreed set of organisation design principles, to remove structural inefficiencies and reduce management costs. Analysis of workforce numbers shows an overall headcount reduction of 16% (764 staff) since 2010, with more than half of this reduction (432 staff) since 2013.

Wiltshire Council's [Business Plan](#) ensures that its budget is spent strategically with a clear long-term focus. The plan outlines the council's guiding themes for the next decade, which are prevention and early intervention; improving social mobility; understanding communities; and working together. The plan sets out the priorities, outcomes and aspirations we aim to deliver and outlines how progress towards achieving these is measured. Achieving many of these outcomes requires transformation of existing business models and service delivery methods.

To deliver this, a dedicated transformation directorate has been introduced to support all large-scale corporate and service change programmes ensuring that all aspects – budget, workforce, resources, quality and timescale - are monitored and the appropriate links are made across services within the council to ensure delivery of identified benefits.

The directorate brings together delivery capabilities such as systems thinking, programme management, business intelligence and direct oversight of specific strategic programmes into one function. Robust governance provides consistent organisational-level prioritisation and oversight.

The 2021 [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge](#) noted that *'The Council has developed a visible corporate approach to transformation, with a strong narrative that the purpose of this activity is to drive service improvement over delivering financial savings.'*

The same report notes *'There are many improvement success stories within the council, not least within Children's Services – a service which has embraced a wide-ranging improvement journey resulting in the team being the first to be rated as 'Good' in the South West. The learning from this improvement journey is now informing transformation in Adults Services and the wider performance management approach across the council'*

Transformational activity through the **Families and Children's Transformation** (FACT) programme has now seen Wiltshire's children's services rated '[Outstanding](#)' by Ofsted. The programme continues to focus on family help and transitional safeguarding projects, working with various partners with a focus on prevention and early intervention to improve long term outcomes and suppress the growth in future demand for follow-on services. The council is also working closely with the Department for Education to deliver two new **residential children's homes** (reducing reliance on costly third-party placements) and '**staying close**' – a pilot to improve the transition to adulthood for young people who have been in residential care (through direct support on housing, education, employment, health and social care).

Other transformational programmes over the next two years include:

**Transformation of Adult Social Care** (TASC), with several projects on technology-enabled care opportunities, independent living, provider payments, quality assurance, home care, self-directed support and outcome focused services projects.

The **Tackling Obesity** programme seeks to achieve systemic changes to the environment, food advertising and access to green spaces in Wiltshire. This is a preventative approach that aims to increase healthy life expectancy

and quality of life while reducing long term conditions that are a burden on social care.

**Community conversations** is an innovative programme openly engaging communities in the five most statistically deprived neighbourhoods in Wiltshire. The aim is to build community resilience and improve opportunities in the short-to medium term, then build trust and engagement between those residents and the council in the longer term, so that we can better work together to address local issues.

**Evolve (Oracle implementation)** is an internal business change and technology programme that aims to modernise and streamline our business operations in the areas of Finance, Budget Management, Procurement, HR, Recruitment, Learning and Payroll. The programme is currently being delivered within budget (in contrast to significant overspends seen elsewhere) and has a savings and efficiency focus, with a business case benefits target of £20m over 5 years.

The **Customer Experience** programme is improving the accessibility of customer services to reduce operating costs and exploit technological developments in line with our digital strategy and evolving resident expectations (such as AI, chatbots, “omni-channel” customer contact systems and better website technologies). The objectives are to make digital access channels appealing, with services designed by customer needs and customers able to access services locally and when convenient to them.

The **Depots Transformation Programme** is developing three strategic depots across Wiltshire to address future service demands, meet carbon-neutral objectives and optimize network efficiency. These depots will enable better delivery of Highways, Streetscene and Waste services. Aligned to this, the **Waste Transformation Programme** is a complex multi-year programme to bring together Waste service re-procurement activities (approx. £45m contract values) and identify opportunities for significant transformational changes to contract delivery methods, waste collection and recycling processes and efficiency of the related assets estate (built facilities, vehicle fleet, HRCs). The programme will ensure the compliance with the recent Simpler Recycling requirements.

The council has allocated one-off funding via a £5m Transformation reserve. This is intended to be replenished in part through savings delivered by transformation projects. Funding for one-off transformation projects will also be provisioned through the flexible use of Capital Receipts where permitted. The council's capital programme, which is spent on projects to improve and maintain the county's infrastructure, was set at £255m for 2024/25. It will be spent on many different projects throughout the financial year, including leisure services, council house building, preventative housing projects, schools maintenance, footpath and highway improvements and projects to improve the high streets of Salisbury and Trowbridge.

County Council Network [research](#) recently highlighted Wiltshire Council’s deliberate investment in the resilience of its organisation and how this had seen it successfully through the disruption associated with the novichok incidents, Brexit, Covid and its recovery. Preventative activity has also been [recognised](#) as key to delivering a balanced budget.

#### **How we plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.**

The LGA corporate peer challenge report notes that *Wiltshire Council has adopted Performance and Outcome Boards as an effective mechanism for driving continuous improvement and ensuring organisational oversight of performance. The approach was initially piloted as part of the Children’s Services Improvement Programme and is now part of the organisation’s performance framework. In some areas they are relatively new and need to continue to embed, but they offer a valuable opportunity to review, and importantly, challenge performance and improvement across the council, and are structured to drive the finance conversations not vice versa, which works well for the Council.*

Quarterly [corporate performance and risk reports](#) are presented to Cabinet meetings where councillors and the public alike have the opportunity to interrogate the data and ask questions of senior leaders.

Alongside the Evolve programme, Wiltshire Council is creating and developing a new Corporate Data and Insight function to extract business insights and value from the council's data assets. The main aim is to extract cashable or service value from our data by identifying areas of inefficiency, opportunities and potential risks that are currently hidden in our siloed data sets. By introducing an organisation-wide data strategy (with associated strategies for digital, AI, cyber security and transformation), the council aims to harness strategic insights more effectively, upskill relevant staff, and improve data integrity, business processes and people structures surrounding data. This function will seek to explore and exploit new data science technologies, AI and Natural Language Processing. This is a major aspect of the Council's broader transformation and business change objectives as it provides the foundation for innovation and efficiency across the board, particularly for capturing resident sentiments at a scale the council has not previously been able to do.

The council shares data as and when appropriate with other organisations in line with existing legislation. Public health and social care records use the NHS number as a single identifier to enable this and the revenue and benefits team also have a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with DWP, HMRC and the National Fraud Initiative in place (which has in the past seen thematic work to reduce fraud and error – for example, £90k savings on single person discounts).

### **Our plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems**

Wiltshire has a strong track record of financial planning and control, setting and delivering balanced budgets. Investment in [prevention](#) saves money, improves lives and prevents 'wasteful work'. By adopting a long term approach to our strategic and financial planning and by focusing really clearly on preventative work (and investing now to solve problems in three or four years time) we have not only controlled our budget and kept services open but are able to invest in more preventative work (such as action on fly tipping, investment in highways and gully clearing). Since 2010 the council has delivered over £200m of savings and additional income to meet a fall in grant and rising costs and demands on our services. Overall, our net budget is now £490m. Budget monitoring is based on a tiered reporting system with all budget holders and senior managers reviewing budgets on a monthly basis. All actions to address spend in year are discussed and appropriate decision making carried out. Directors are allocated responsibility to deliver savings and financial management training is made available to all heads of service. Progress on delivering the [savings identified](#) in budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan is included in reports to Cabinet and scrutinised [quarterly](#) by elected members. The annual budget setting process includes rigorous challenge sessions led by cabinet members that ensure a focus on delivering business plan priorities whilst addressing rising demand and inflationary pressures. The service planning process ensures appropriate links are made between council services and invest to save opportunities highlighted.

Recent examples of invest to save successes include £12m spent on introducing LED streetlights across Wiltshire to reduce energy consumption and expenditure. When the work began in 2019, this initially had a payback period of 12 years but increased energy costs in the years since mean this will be substantially sooner. This is only one example of energy reduction activity undertaken since the council declared a [climate emergency](#) (with regular reports provided to cabinet) and Wiltshire has been recognised as the highest performing rural unitary in this area. We have also driven down costs on office space by sharing with partners including Wiltshire Police (co-locating neighbourhood policing and response teams in the council's Chippenham and Salisbury office hubs , developing community campuses and hubs incorporating Neighbourhood Police Teams; co-locating police in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)); Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (with its new HQ based co-located in the Health and Wellbeing Centre in Salisbury); Citizens Advice Wiltshire (co-locating in Salisbury and other hubs across the county); the NHS (co-locating health services in Corsham's Community Campus and with the MASH); and Probation (with services operating from County Hall). Office space has also been leased to provide a solution to expanding businesses.

The council has obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and in-house briefing material is available online to all staff with further advice available from the Legal and Democratic Services directorate, as necessary, when developing proposals. The headline success measure for this activity is reducing the risk of legal challenge to council decisions and service delivery. To augment this we would be happy to pilot some of the

recommendations made to local authorities in the [Khan review](#), such as cohesion assessment frameworks, regular polling, deliberative democracy models and publishing additional information on how we are delivering PSED. Support for the workforce aspects of our equality duties are embedded within our Human Resources and Organisational Development directorate, who consult staff as appropriate in developing policies and are required to report [annually](#) on key measures. Trade Union facility time (employee representation activity) amounts to one FTE post – 0.03% of the total paybill. Wiltshire Council does not engage external training providers for council staff on equality, diversity and inclusion as it delivers this inhouse, which takes account of best practice highlighted in the Cabinet Office [Inclusion at work](#) research. PSED activity is mainstreamed within directorates as an alternative to employing multiple specific posts, reflecting the obligation on all decision makers. This is a highly cost-effective approach. Alongside this, spend on agency staff was only 2.7% of the total staff budget (with only 17% in post for longer than 12 months) and regular [workforce reports](#) monitor agency spend and other indicators such as sickness levels, overseen by a [Staffing Policy Committee and by Directorate Performance and Outcome Boards](#).

### **The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.**

We would be grateful for government support in: removing legislative requirements to advertise planning applications/ traffic orders in newspapers (£250k a year); aligning procurement frameworks between health and care; increasing the share of right to buy receipts available for affordable housing; greater flexibility in Housing Revenue Account rent setting (particularly when there is investment in reducing tenant energy costs); enabling joint procurement with National Highways; enabling digitisation of records (rather than legal requirements for hard copies); retaining all business rates on council car parks to allow for flexibility on parking and investment in active travel; allowing technology for council parking management (such as ANPR); simplifying consultation requirements on car parking charges; allowing online registration of births, deaths and marriages; enabling greater comparability between council budgets by specifying minimum requirements on what to include; allowing greater flexibility on business rates by removing mandatory discounts; enabling presumptive data sharing between local public service providers with the emphasis on the recipient meeting the public interest test and facing sanction if abused (rather than compliance to 'data processing' rules which are rightly designed to restrict private companies' processing of data); allowing online or hybrid council meetings when deemed appropriate locally; and ensure a close match between SEND funding and eligibility requirements. We are happy to expand on this as helpful.

Whilst the recent memorandum of understanding with DWP has brought more discipline and better understanding between parties it has not eased the ability to share information - in fact it has reduced our ability to share information within the organisation. We continue to report a variety of welfare benefit related concerns to DWP, to counter fraudulent claims or errors in DWP data, but with feedback on how intelligence is being used to prevent fraud this could go further. Likewise, it would be hugely beneficial for all concerned if HMRC were to develop data sharing protocols with local authorities rather than maintain their current stance of demanding information with little to offer in return (e.g. to improve take up of free school meals).

For Wiltshire Council's enforcement activity to be successful there is the need for greater flexibility in setting local fines for non-compliance in all areas and for magistrates and courts to have clearer sentencing guidelines. A great deal of effort and resource is necessary to undertake prosecutions as a preventative activity, which acts as a deterrent to others, but this can be undermined by the eventual punishments not reflecting the nature of the offence. Similarly, family courts need an inspection and improvement programme to improve decision making.

A major source of instability for councils is the succession of one year funding settlements, which increases the level of expenditure at risk and consequently the requirement for reserves whilst inhibiting long term planning and disincentivising capital spend. Similarly, bidding and reporting requirements for short-term grant funding from central government are frequently over the top. When multi-year funding is provided for schemes such as the Future High Streets Fund or UK Shared Prosperity Fund there can also be requirements to use consultants (£150k in the case of FHSF) or to spend (as opposed to legally commit) all funding by the end of March 2025, which forces councils to spend at risk. This needs to change.