

# Cumberland Council – Productivity Plan

## Submitted on 19 July 2024

In February 2024 the government asked that all councils submit a productivity plan to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in July 2024. These documents were to set out the plans each council has in place to improve their productivity.

Cumberland Council produced our plan based on the work already underway to transform the way we work and the services we deliver in Cumberland.

### Introduction

The requirement placed on councils to develop Productivity Plans has come in the context of increasing demand for services within a challenging funding environment; however, it also comes at a time of great opportunity in Cumberland. Following local government reorganisation and as a newly-formed Cumberland Council we are beginning an ambitious transformation journey.

This document has been produced in the context of local government reorganisation and focuses on the future and the work to create a new financially sustainable council, transform services and do things differently.

### Transforming Services

Our Transformation Opportunity

Cumberland Council was established as a new unitary council on 1 April 2023 replacing 3 district councils (Allerdale Borough Council, Carlisle City Council and Copeland Borough Council) and a part of Cumbria County Council.

The local government reorganisation process has seen a significant change programme over the last 3 years. We have brought together 4 legacy councils into one organisation whilst maintaining the quality of service delivery to our residents. The complexity of bringing 4 councils together and disaggregating the former county council has been challenging but provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the way we deliver services and support our communities across Cumberland.

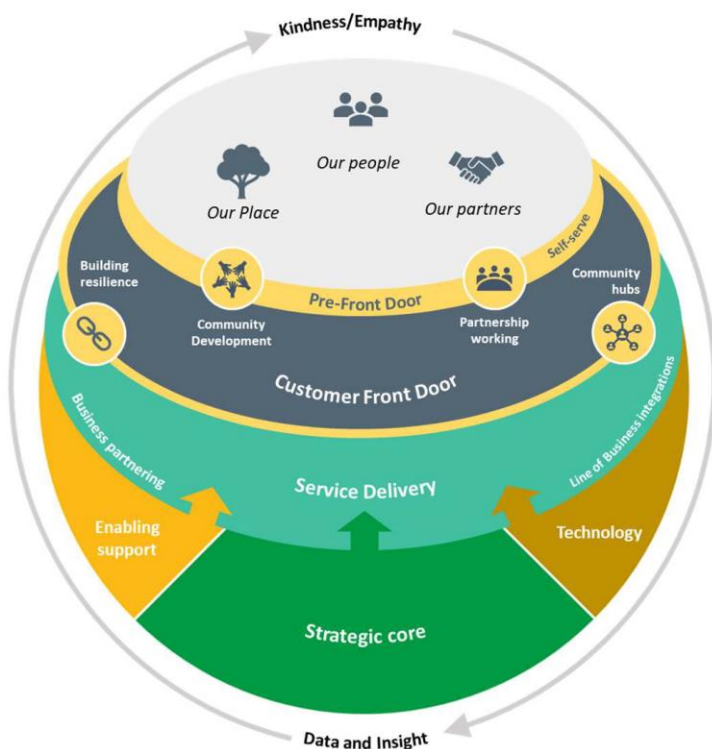
We set out an ambitious vision in our Council Plan that: 'Cumberland Council takes a fresh approach to the delivery of inclusive services that are shaped by our residents and communities. By enabling positive outcomes for health and wellbeing, prosperity and the environment we will fulfil the potential of our people and our area.'

Delivery of our vision is being underpinned by our values that are in everything we do. We aim to be compassionate, innovative, empowering, ambitious, and collaborative.

Our broad approach to creating our new council is focused on:

- Achieving long-term financial sustainability - realising £80 million financial benefit by 2027 by reducing overspend, avoiding cost and increasing income;
- Delivering high-performing, quality services that deliver better outcomes for our residents – using data and insight, technology, innovation and efficient processes; and,
- Implementing a new operating model for Cumberland – by managing demand, setting a new culture, shifting to a prevention model, early engagement with residents, and focusing on pre-front door and self-service.

## Our Target Operating Model



Our Target Operating Model has been informed by our understanding that we need to invest in transforming services and the way we work to address areas of lower productivity and see the long-term benefits of becoming a single council for Cumberland. This will take some time and significant investment – but is absolutely critical to improving productivity.

Our Operating Model is designed to enable a common understanding of how Cumberland Council will operate in the future as one combined organisation.

Each layer represents a different area of delivery which ultimately helps to build a stronger and more prosperous community across Cumberland Council.

At its core, the Operating Model will:

### Empower communities

Through partnership working and targeted community development, Cumberland Council will seek to strengthen support networks and respond to signs of need early to reduce pressure on public sector services.

### Increase self-service

An improved digital offering will allow customers to access services and resolve simple enquiries through self-service. Self-serve can also be used to capture more up-front information for customers that require more complex assessments. Channels such as the website, a customer portal or a customer chatbot can help customers access council services at a time and a place suited to them.

### Improve Service Delivery

A better digital service offer will enable staff to save time on administrative tasks and focus their time to support customers with complex needs or focus on delivering the service. Similarly, improving the internal support offered to Service Delivery employees will free up time to focus more on delivery of services and less on back office activities.

### Harness technology, data and insight

Providing employees with improved digital solutions will be key to transformation. Technologies such as a Customer Relationship Management system, which would be powered by customer data, can provide a single view of all customer interactions with the council. Insights and performance data can also be used to improve performance and prioritise service delivery and resources across the organisation.

## Our Transformation Plans

During the work to transition from 4 legacy councils to a new single council over our first year, we have also been developing and beginning to implement an ambitious set of Transformation Programmes and improvement activity. We are clear about the future planned state of the organisation we aim to achieve, which is:

- Operate with a balanced budget and financially sustainable Medium Term Financial Plan;
- A strong positive culture with harmonised workforce that is proud to work for Cumberland Council, where colleagues feel valued, individuals' strengths are aligned to appropriate worker roles, absence levels are reduced, and Cumberland Council is an employer of choice;
- All services have strong performance against Key Performance Indicators and positive customer feedback, and are excellent in external regulatory assessment, compliance and awards;
- A rationalised estate – operating from fewer offices and maximising commercial opportunity from remaining assets;
- Proactive early engagement with residents which supports managing demand and the implementation of a preventative model;
- Work effectively with partner organisations;
- Cloud-based enterprise architecture and forward-looking digital infrastructure that drives performance;
- Longer-term improvements to health and wellbeing;
- Improved processes and removal of duplication in service delivery; and,
- An embedded 'commissioning cycle' approach in all service areas, including effective contract management and pipeline planning for future alternative delivery models.

Our Transformation Plan is organised within the following themes and projects:

Three key themes have been identified –

- **people and culture, including the following projects:**
  - pay and reward review and implementation, agency staff, academy, overseas recruitment, recruitment and vacancy management.
- **technology and innovation, including the following projects:**
  - Enterprise architecture, pre-front door (self-serve), remove duplication, enterprise resource planning and customer relationship management, digitisation and use of AI.
- **implementing the operating model, including the following projects:**
  - Delivery of operating model, waste service review, review of Cumberland care, robust project gatekeeping, governance, policy, training and contract review.

The investment and savings we aim to achieve over the next 3 years through delivery of our portfolio of Transformation Programmes are outlined below:

Transformation Portfolios – investment / savings over the next 3 years

Portfolio	Investment (£000s)				Savings (£000s)		
	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	24/25	25/26	26/27
Adults Services transformation	0,250	2,500	2,350	-	6,125	2,000	0,400
Children's Services transformation	0,800	3,500	1,200	-	9,900	8,050	2,750
People, Resources and reducing agency/EPW	1,100	4,000	4,000	-	1,000	4,000	5,000
Assets and Fleet Management	-	500	-	-	0,475	3,750	3,500
Customer and pre-front door	0,250	2,750	-	-	1,000	2,000	2,000
Commissioning and commercialisation	0,450	200	-	-	1,242	1,150	-
ICT – foundation systems	-	5,850	3,000	-	-	0,500	2,500
Improvement and efficiency	-	-	-	-	0,510	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,850</b>	<b>19,300</b>	<b>10,550</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>20,252</b>	<b>21,450</b>	<b>16,150</b>

Year 1 priorities

Within this financial year, 2024/25, we aim to achieve savings of £37,610 million which is equivalent to approximately 11% of the Council's 2024/25 Net Service Expenditure budget. These will be achieved through:

- Delivery of the Transformation Plan £20.252 million
- Service reviews and budget pressure mitigation £15.598 million
- Contract and service reviews £1.759 million  
(Non-recurring savings)

In developing our Transformation Plan we have identified and prioritised projects with the highest level of opportunity – resulting in the following breakdown of transformation activity in Year 1:

- £9.912 million of savings to be achieved in Children's Services;
- £11.532 million of savings to be achieved in services for Adults; and,
- £7.773 million of savings to be achieved by better use of resources across the council.

## Technology and Data

The potential of technology as an enabler to improve productivity and the quality of services for residents is a massive opportunity for the new council. We are beginning work to move from 4 different sets of systems used by the 4 legacy councils to creating integrated systems that work for Cumberland. Accordingly, technology is one of the 3 themes of our Transformation Plan.

### Data

The Council holds a wealth of data on residents that interact with our services. We are moving towards an insight-driven approach which is critical to the development of the Pre-Front Door and Front Door and understand what our residents need at an early stage. As part of our Pre-Front Door and Front Door work, we will have:

- An integrated view of the resident to bring together data sources and support a better understanding of an individual or household's situation;
- Facilitate improved decision-making by using data and predictive analytics to understand risk factors which lead to an individual reaching 'crisis point';
- Frontline officers to have access to the insight they need to make intelligence-led decisions by improving how data is used in local commissioning.

Within the next few months, the Council will be obtaining a complete understanding of the current data landscape, the optimal future state and the roadmap to achieve this.

### Pre-Front Door, Front Door and Technology

Core to our Operating Model is implementing the Pre-Front Door and Front Door model, enabled by strong technology infrastructure as set out in our emerging IT Vision, Strategy, and Enterprise Architecture approach. This will be achieved through a prevention pathway, supporting as many residents as possible through self-serve, but also providing a proportionate telephony and face-to-face offer.

We are working with our strategic partner, EY, to progress automation opportunities within key service areas such as Revenue and Benefits and Customer Services to realise financial opportunities and deliver more effective and efficient opportunities. We know intelligent automation can deliver financial benefits, and we will be validating benefits and a prioritisation mechanism to identify top opportunities to be delivered. By December, the Council will scale-up up to 10 key service opportunities in relation to intelligent automation.

To realise this, we are implementing a new prevention-focussed service to drive better demand reduction and ensure that customers have queries resolved at the earliest point possible. The Council is committed to implementing this through cultural change, embedding our values and new ways of working. This is a sustainable change for the future; the Council will roll-out its Community Hubs model soon, which will re-frame our relationship with communities to ensure that more services are visible and available in the community. This will empower communities, improve outcomes, harness our community and partner infrastructure where appropriate, and also ensure that it reduces demand on council services in the longer-term. It will also ensure we better utilise our assets, and rationalise assets linked to our wider Asset Management Strategy.

Our Pre-Front Door approach is anticipated to save £5 million in the next three financial years. In the short-term, benefits will be realised through staffing, property-related spend and third-party contract spend. Where achieved previously, we can see that it delivers significant financial benefits.

We will ensure alignment of projects through the establishment of a Design Authority within the Council, which will bolster and support existing robust governance through our Assurance and Efficiency Delivery Board and our Strategic Programme Panel which acts as the gatekeeper across the organisation to ensure strategic alignment and a robust approach towards delivering financial savings as agreed by Full Council.

## Improving Outcomes and Increasing Efficiency

### Service Reviews

The Council has begun a series of service reviews which incorporate a deep-dive into how each service is currently delivered and how that service could be redesigned to increase efficiency and improve outcomes. Some of these reviews are part of the Council's Transformation Plan and some are being carried out as part of the Council's strategic planning processes. The outputs of these reviews will then drive further improvement activities over the coming months.

Additional review activity is also underway. For example, fees and charges income had broadly been less in the legacy councils than their statistical neighbouring authorities, Recognising that those benchmarking comparisons are now unhelpful following local government reorganisation, the council has now harmonised policies in respect of fees and charges and moved to a full cost recovery of care model relating to in-house adult social care service delivery. Further work to assess the council's position in relation to comparable authorities is to be carried out.

### Governance

The Council has established a robust governance structure to enable effective decision-making, assurance, and risk and performance management. This includes quarterly budget and performance reporting in public to the Council's Executive, the Council's Scrutiny function which includes the Business and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a specific responsibility for scrutiny of budget and performance, and the Council's Audit Committee (including an independent person within its membership) with responsibility for providing independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment and independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance.

Member accountability and review in relation to the Council's Transformation Plan sits with the Council's Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and full Council ensuring strategic decision-making, monitoring and review of this vital work is carried out with transparency and public accountability. The Council's Senior Leadership Team is the Strategic Programme Panel providing officer-level strategic oversight and decision-making for the delivery of the Council's ambitious Transformation Plan. The work to deliver Transformation is carried out by staff from across the organisation (and in some cases from partner organisations) through a range of Programme Boards and Project Delivery Groups, supported by a well-resourced Programme Management Office and underpinned by robust programme and project management methodologies.

Our Transformation Plan incorporates Invest to Save approaches with the investment required for each Programme to realise the intended benefits outlined in the table above. A new capital investment strategy is now in place to support delivery of these approaches and programmes.

### Workforce Planning

Our workforce is our greatest asset. Through our strategic planning processes and delivery of our Transformation Plan we are working to ensure our workforce, our assets and our finances are focused fully on delivering the Council's priorities.

Our workforce and recruitment challenges include difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff in some service areas which results in use of externally provided workforce (e.g. agency staff), often at high cost to the Council. Reducing the number of externally provided workforce used by the Council and ensuring we have the permanent workforce in place to deliver our services is a priority project within our Transformation Plan. Significant progress has already been made to lower in increasing levels of the permanent workforce in Children's Services.

Our workforce challenges include high levels of long-term sickness in some parts of the council. We are using a range of interventions to reduce these levels, investing substantially where we need to address these issues and support people back into work, to achieve productivity gains in the future.

We are developing a robust understanding of the capacity we will need to deliver transformation plans over the coming years and are using externally-commissioned specialist services where we need to in order to achieve savings and deliver on our objectives.

Engaging with our workforce is a vital part of creating our new council for Cumberland and to delivering our transformation plans. An empowered, skilled and motivated workforce is critical to future productivity. We are using a range of ways to engage with our staff and support them through change. Effective engagement with Trade Unions is an important element of our work in this area. The proportion of the Council's pay bill spent on Trade Union Facility Time in 2023/24 was 0.1559%. The expectation in our medium term financial planning is that this proportion will reduce by 2026/27.

#### Performance Management

We have a Performance Management Framework in place which sets out how the Council manages performance. This includes quarterly performance and finance reports made to the Executive on the current position – including progress against the Medium Term Financial Plan, Key Performance Indicators and activity milestones aligned to the programmes of work set out in the Council Plan and Council Plan Delivery Plan. The latest performance reports are publicly available at [Browse meetings - Executive | Cumberland Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#).

#### Addressing Inequalities

Improving the health and wellbeing of our residents is the central aim of our Vision for Cumberland as set out in our Council Plan. This is supported by 4 strategic priorities which are key to making an impact on the factors that affect health and wellbeing - addressing inequalities, local economies that work for local people, environmental resilience and the climate emergency and delivering excellent public services.

Addressing inequalities is integral to the delivery of our Vision for Cumberland and is mainstreamed throughout the whole Council – through policy, processes, transformation programmes and delivery activity. We have agreed our Equality Objectives for the next 4 years and are currently developing an implementation plan which will be delivered through existing or planned programmes of activity across the Council.

Meaningful engagement with all our communities is central to our vision and we have put a community engagement framework in place to embed the importance of engagement across all services. The Council currently provides two small grants of £1,250 a year to two local infrastructure groups to support engagement with people with specific protected characteristics.

Equalities training is one of a number of mandatory online training packages for all staff to be completed at a time of their choosing through our online learning portal. We also have a number of staff networks across the organisation as part of our staff engagement approach.

#### Barriers to Increasing Productivity

The Council has ambitious plans for transforming services and creating a single, integrated Cumberland Council fit for the future. This is a long-term plan requiring long-term investment and long-term decision-making.

To do this the Council needs the government to provide certainty – certainty of funding and certainty of reform – including:

- the certainty of multi-year funding settlements which enables the Council to make long-term investment decisions in order to realise significant improvements in productivity and enables us to plan service improvement resulting in better outcomes for our residents;
- the certainty of long-term investment in local place with a shift away from multiple bidding rounds for multiple funding streams towards strategic investment in a place, and increased flexibility of use of ring-fenced grants;
- the certainty of a devolution approach which enables flexibility of local governance arrangements to meet local need rather than the current prescriptive mayoral model to secure the most significant devolution deals;

- clarity of SEND reform recognising increasing demand – fully funding councils so that they can ensure the needs of those eligible can be fully met;
- clarity of home-to-school transport entitlement and funding arrangements recognising increased costs – to ensure affordability for councils;
- clarity of adult social care reforms and funding arrangements recognising ageing populations and increasing complexity of demand – to ensure sustainability of support for some of the most vulnerable in our communities; and,
- action across government departments, including DWP in particular, to ensure better data-sharing with councils to enable more automated and better support for residents, including those on benefits.

**July 2024**