Appendix 1 – T&M Productivity Plan

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Productivity Plan

June 2024

Contents

1. Transformation and Use of Resources

How TMBC has changed to become more productive	In recent years, the council has moved to a more flexible business model, adopting new device and remote working policies which have enabled staff to be more productive, reduced both the number of journeys undertaken (commuting and to meetings) and sickness levels across the organisation. Our short-term sickness absence is currently 2.91 days. There are also a number of examples of new software being used to improve productivity, including the use of the Huume System to manage housing and homelessness information, the use of Bot technology by our Customer Services team and the development of the Citizen Access portal to allow taxpayers easier access to their Council Tax information. In addition to technological advancements and developing a more flexible business model, the council has also worked in partnership with a number of organisations and adjoining local authorities to deliver value for money for its residents and businesses.
How we measure productivity	Following a Peer Challenge Review in 2022, the council now has a comprehensive approach to measuring performance and productivity through its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). In total, we measure 72 KPIs covering activity from across the organisation which are reported on a quarterly basis and benchmarked using LGInform Plus. The council has also invested in Power BI in a number of services to help drive improvement – for example in Planning Enforcement and in monitoring complaints. In addition, at an officer level, the council has an appraisal system in place to measure individual targets.
Changes to improve services	The council has reduced demand on frontline services through the introduction of a new online portal for customer engagement and self-service via the website and mobile app. At the same time, the council is working in partnership with Kent Digital (Kent County Council) to support digitally excluded residents to have the means and knowledge to get on line. In addition, the council has also adopted a '**One Council**' approach which has seen organisational changes that have led to joined up working and improved productivity, including: • Centralised management of the Council website and social media channels. • Consolidation of Customer Services into one team. • The management of Tonbridge Castle and events under one team. The council works in partnership across a number of departments to drive forward efficiencies, including in our Waste Services where partnership contract arrangements with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council are resulting in best value for our residents.
Current plans for transformation	• The Council has recently recruited a new Chief Executive, Damian Roberts, who has an impressive track record in local authority transformation. Damian starts at the Council on 01 July 2024. • The Council has transferred £676,000 to a Transformation Reserve to facilitate new projects, with discussions underway with the LGA regarding an assessment of resource need.

4	• The Council is in the process of joining the Mid Kent Procurement Partnership to ensure Best Value and to drive efficiencies. • The Council has recently adopted a new Digital & IT Strategy to make the council's services more responsive and cognitive via the automation of processes and workflows. • Rationalisation of our office estate – reduced need for a large footprint now flexible-working is established resulting in plans to repurpose/dispose of assets. • Transformation of our Waste Services – including the ongoing automation for reporting missed collections, abandoned vehicles, littering, fly-tipping and graffiti as well as booking bulky waste collections; and the engagement of a third-party contractor to undertake the investigation and enforcement of littering and fly-tipping offences at no cost to the council, which has resulted in a 1700% increase in Fixed Penalty Notices issued between 2021/22 and 2023/24.
Services with greatest potential for productivity gains	Tend to be those that are process-driven and can benefit from digitisation. Although progress has been made with process-mapping service areas and introducing new software, there are potential productivity gains across services such as Customer Services, Planning and Parking. In addition, the council is currently investigating the potential for Environmental Health Officers to work remotely.
Role of capital spending	Capital investment in specialist resources over a 2-3 year period to aid end-to-end transformation across the authority via the adoption of state-of-the-art technologies to unlock further efficiencies and an improved customer experience. Capital investment into our property portfolio to enable it to be used in a more efficient cost-effective way, including Carbon Descent Plans for our Leisure Centres and re-purposing our Head Offices at Kings Hill.
Preventative approaches	• Our Remote Working Policy has helped to reduce sickness absence. • The Citizen Access Portal has helped to contribute towards reducing calls to Customer Services.

2. Taking Advantage of Technology

Existing plans to improve data	Adopt formal data and information governance, as well as applying data standards to ensure data is reusable and interoperable in compliance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). The introduction of the customer portal has enabled residents to access and transact council services via a personalised page.
Barriers from legacy systems	The council does have some barriers from legacy systems, although such monolithic systems have either been replaced or are in the process of being replaced.
Sharing of data	Data sharing in accordance with the legislation takes place across Kent District and county councils on regular basis (i.e. monthly, weekly and daily), as well as other partnering organisations. This is essential in order to deliver effective and efficient services and drive forward improvement. One example of this is the Community Safety Partnership, which meets regularly and shares data/information across partner organisations in order to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

Opportunities to use new technology	There are opportunities to use new technologies to improve workflows and systems. This is something that has formed an intrinsic part of both our past and current Digital Strategies, and as such the council has made considerable progress in this area, including: • Move from Uniform to Agile system • Setting up of a new room and hot-desk booking system.

3. Reducing Wasteful Spend

Identifying and reducing waste.	The council has a thorough approach to identifying and reducing waste. At both Management Team and Cabinet, the budget is challenged on a line-by-line basis to ensure there is a detailed scrutiny of every cost centre.
Invest to Save	There are a considerable number of examples where the council has followed an Invest to Save approach. This includes: • Moving over to Agile from Uniform – there have been upfront costs in terms of implementation, including the employment of a Change Manager, but the annual software costs have been reduced by approximately £50,000 per annum. • Carbon Descent Plans – the council has so far invested £220,000 in 190 solar panels at Larkfield Leisure Centre and 180 panels at Tonbridge Swimming Pool, which not only helps the council along its path to Net Zero but also save approximately £30,000 per annum in operating costs at Larkfield Leisure Centre and £20,000 per annum at Tonbridge Swimming Pool. The council has also recently secured around £1.5m of external funding for heat pumps, LED lighting and additional solar panels at Larkfield Leisure Centre.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	The council has not spent any money specifically on EDI training. Whilst we have not commissioned any EDI training, there are some e-learning courses available to staff within our overall e-learning package. The Council has 2 Member Champions for EDI, with the role being undertaken on a voluntary basis. There are currently no paid staff specifically employed to work solely on EDI matters. The council does have an Equalities Officer Study Group (8 members of staff) that meets for an hour on a quarterly basis to discuss any EDI issues that have been raised within all services across the council. This group is chaired by our Policy, Scrutiny and Communities Manager and there is no budget assigned to this group.
Agency Staff and Consultants	During 2023/24, 7.61% of the total staff budget was spent on agency staff. This is down from 8.87% in 2022/23. The council currently has 3 agency staff who have been in place for over a year. The council does not fund consultants from staff budgets, and the use of consultants is currently in the process of going to our Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to ensure the is challenge and ensure Value for Money. The council also ensures value for money by going out to several different agencies for each assignment to ensure we can compare the rate on offer and ensure we are paying a 'going market rate'. In terms of value for money, the council is very aware that agency staff are more costly than employing staff permanently, and as such has

	tended to only seek to use agency staff when unable to fill a permanent vacancy directly or if the assignment is short term and a specialist skillset is required for a specific short-term project or to add additional capacity. The council is trying to limit its reliance on costly agency staff to cover vacant posts. In 2023, a new policy was adopted on the payment of market supplements to enable paying staff in some hard to recruit to areas an additional supplement to their salary. The council ensures that the market supplement offers better value for money than employing an equivalent member of staff via an agency.
Governance structures to ensure accountability of spend	The council has very strong governance structures in place to ensure accountability of spend with regular reporting into Management Team and Cabinet enabling oversight of spend. There are also three thematic scrutiny select committees and an Overview and Scrutiny Committee which provide additional oversight.
Sharing of Office Functions	The council does share office functions with other local authorities, most notably with Kent County Council Audit and Fraud Prevention team. This helps to improve communication between the two authorities. The West Kent Economic Development Officers work collaboratively through the West Kent Partnership, and have occasionally shared hot desking space on an informal basis.
Training costs	The council shares some training costs with other authorities, for example we have accessed safeguarding, emergency planning and audit/fraud training in partnership with Kent County Council as it offers the organisation efficiencies.
Elected Mayor, Combined Authority and Devolution Deals	The Council does not have an elected mayor, and is not part of a combined authority or a devolution deal.
Trade Unions	Only 0.02% of the council pay bill is spent on trade union facility time.

4. Barriers Preventing Progress

Barriers preventing productivity improvements	There are numerous barriers which make it challenging to improve productivity, these include: • One year finance settlements, along with uncertainty over future grant funding streams. This makes medium-term planning with any confidence incredibly challenging, and also has knock-on effects across the organisation. • The requirement for all council meetings to be held in-person/hybrid rather than allow the council to have the option of holding a meeting virtually where it is deemed appropriate.
Barriers preventing service improvements	• Finance – whilst the council is an extremely well-run authority that holds no debt, it still finds the current public funding landscape extremely challenging. • Despite efforts from Central Government to simplify and speed up the plan making process, producing a Local Plan has become considerably more complicated and expensive in recent years. • Recruitment and retention of staff is more challenging now than it has been for many years. The council has made progress on this in recent months, with vacant posts now down to 10 in Q4 of 2023/24 from 17 in Q4 of 2024/25, but this has taken a concerted effort.

7	• There has been a lack of national progress in areas such as Producer Pays and harmonising recycling collection.
Are these barriers across all services.	Whilst a number of the barriers impact all services, the council has noticed in recent years that the recruitment of planning professionals has proved to be particularly challenging, leading to the council being heavily reliant on agency staff until relatively recently. There have also been challenges in recruiting legal, licencing and property staff.
Removal of barriers.	Clearer and timelier direction from Central Government, and when it comes to financial settlements, to look longer term to give local authorities the opportunity to plan with greater certainty. At the same time, Central Government could grant greater freedom to councils to allow them to make local decisions on matters such as charging and use of government grants.
	Genuinely making the plan making process less cumbersome and expensive, possibly through the re-introduction of regional planning for setting housing targets and the removal of the Duty to Co-operate.
	Making it easier to take on apprentices – the current process is cumbersome and restrictive.