



# Productivity Plan

**Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils**

# 1. Introduction

As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2023, the Government required councils to publish productivity plans by 19<sup>th</sup> July 2024. The purpose of productivity plans is to understand what is working well and how the Government can remove barriers to local government productivity.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils (B&MS) have a culture of continuous improvement and innovation - driving productivity gains and best use of resources across a shared services model. This Productivity Plan describes what Babergh and Mid-Suffolk Councils have done, or are doing, to:

- Transform the way that we design and deliver services to make better use of resources;
- Take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources;
- Reduce poorly targeted spend within our organisation and systems.

It also identifies the barriers preventing our progress which the Government can help to reduce or remove.

As set out in our [Annual Governance Statement](#), Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are responsible for:

- Ensuring that we conduct our business in accordance with the law and proper standards, to secure continuous improvement in the way in which our functions are exercised;
- Ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively;
- Putting proportionate and appropriate governance of our affairs in place, including for the management of risk.

## The Place

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are local authority districts located in South and Central Suffolk, collectively covering an area of 1,465 square km. The districts are predominantly rural in nature and include areas forming part of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths, and Dedham Vale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Our main settlements are the historic market towns of Stowmarket, Sudbury and Hadleigh.

Both districts are within the least deprived third of local authority areas of England; with residents having higher-than-average levels of most metrics including: home and car ownership, life-expectancy and disability-free ageing, educational attainment, reported levels of well-being and satisfaction and pride in the area as a place to live.

At the same time, a range of challenges are evident, many of which are shared at the country, regional and national level. These include challenges around decarbonisation of the transport, agricultural, domestic and industry sectors; the rural nature of the districts creating barriers related to the physical proximity of local services and employment centres; housing affordability and inflationary pressures on the rental market; poverty and inequality, particularly relating to certain groups of residents, such as those in social rented accommodation, single and younger adult households and those with a limiting long-term illness or health condition.

## 1. Transforming Service Design and Delivery

### Organisational Transformation for Productivity

The Councils have made significant strides in modernising our operations and service delivery mechanisms. Highlights include:

- Adopted the 'Working Together' model in 2011, merging services and creating a single

workforce across both councils, saving £2 million annually.

- Streamlined leadership through a unified senior management structure.
- Increased resilience and knowledge sharing - breaking down operational silos.
- Entered shared services partnerships for revenues, benefits and legal services.

## Measuring Productivity

Measuring productivity is at the heart of what we do. Our quarterly performance reports for [Babergh](#) and [Mid-Suffolk](#) track key information about our performance against our strategic priorities.

We are implementing a new performance framework to monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) across all service areas. This will provide a single location for performance and risk management, with regular updates to enable the use of up-to-date evidence for decision making.

In addition, we conduct regular resident and tenant satisfaction surveys, to gauge service quality, build strong engagement within our communities and inform decision making.

## Service Improvements and Effects

We have delivered noticeable improvements in services, with highlights including:

- Central Suffolk Lettings scheme increased access to quality rental housing for residents.
- Over 1,300 new affordable homes have been built between 2019 and 2023.
- Our waste and recycling collection fleet has been switched to hydrotreated vegetable oil, reducing carbon emissions by 89%.
- We have enabled flexible/remote working models and invested in collaborative workspaces.

- Resident satisfaction rates have been maintained above 60% despite significant challenges, created by pandemic lockdowns and the cost-of-living crisis.

## Transformation Plans 2024-2026

We have a number of planned initiatives over the medium term which will continue our transformation journey, including:

- Implementing Phase 2 of the Joint Local Plan to guide future sustainable development.
- Opening a £18 million Skills and Innovation Centre at Gateway 14 business park in Stowmarket.
- Expanding digital self-service options and automation of internal processes.
- Piloting Generative AI solutions to determine what efficiencies can be made.

We will measure the impact of these initiatives via a suite of suitable metrics, as we continue to implement our performance framework.

## 2. Utilising Technology and Data-Driven Decision Making

Both Councils have made significant strides to make practical, effective use of new technologies and ensure that our decision making is informed by relevant data. Highlights include:

- Implementing digital workflows and mobile working capabilities for frontline services.
- Adopted data analytics to identify issues like fuel poverty and target interventions, through annual State of the Districts reports.
- Brought in performance and risk management software, Ideagen, to give an overview and identify areas of focus for improvement.
- Adopted standard technology guidelines to make sure that new systems work well together, can grow easily, are dependable and accessible from anywhere.
- Modernised Enterprise Resource Systems by replacing legacy systems with interoperable

cloud architected solutions that are scalable, flexible and reliable.

- Adopted modern workplace technologies that support and enable collaborative working in an increasingly hybrid world.

### 3. Reducing Waste and Driving Efficiency

Our Councils strive to ensure that we are efficient in everything that we do, ensuring that our residents receive as much value as possible for each pound spent. Highlights include:

- Implementing the 'Working Together' model - eliminating duplicate roles, systems and spend.
- Downsized our office footprint, saving £196k annually, but also improving staff collaboration.
- Implementing sustainability initiatives like solar carports, LED lighting and EV charging points.
- Reviewing procurement practices, contracts and spend controls.
- Rationalised our property portfolio, increasing commercial income through investments.
- Instigated programme management structure to implement and deliver co-ordinated change and efficiency.

### 4. Barriers and Government Support Opportunities

Despite our successes, there remain opportunities for further improvement, with Government support and removal of unnecessary barriers.

Funding uncertainties hinder long-term strategic planning for transformation – in particular, the lack of a multi-year funding settlement to local government makes financial planning difficult – the current system of piecemeal, “cliff edge” funding raises

expectations on services, which then need to be pared-back or ceased as funding ends.

A reformed council tax and business rates system could help to address issues of self-sufficiency, unfairness within funding models and support the sustainable growth of our local economy. This needs to reflect the significant challenges faced by rural councils - including the higher costs (both financial and carbon) associated with longer travel times and the difficulties of serving dispersed populations and responding to pockets of deprivation. While urban deprivation is often more visible, rural deprivation is equally pressing and requires tailored funding solutions. Additionally, there are also opportunities for:

- Consistency of approach to measuring productivity across local government in complex service environments and reflective of different types (district, borough, county, unitary) and local geographies that impact delivery (coastal, urban, rural).
- Support sector wide for long term workforce planning, especially for new / emerging skills e.g. data science, digital roles, particularly for smaller authorities .
- Best practice support for the efficient procurement and adoption of emerging technologies.
- Policies/legislative flexibility to facilitate innovative investments and local income generation e.g. tourism tax.
- Reform of financial policy and structures around Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- Single, aligned, non-competitive funding pots.
- Recognising local government's primary role as long term stewards and leaders of place rather than as a delivery arm of central government.
- Do devolution by 'philosophy' rather than through 'negotiation'.
- Align and streamline central government department expectations based upon place i.e. for local government, health & police

- Local control e.g. Council tax rates, rent levels, Right to Buy discount.
- Investment in local government is the most effective mechanism for prevention and avoiding future government expenditure e.g. health costs, benefits bill & underperforming economy.

## Conclusion

As Councils who put sustainability at the heart of everything we do, we have a robust approach to continuous improvement and a track record of transformative initiatives: enhancing productivity, reducing poorly targeted spend and driving efficiency.

However, additional government support, in particular more clarity and stability over funding settlements, would enhance and empower our transformation journey.

The Councils are committed to building on our successes: providing open and honest leadership; working closely and cooperatively with our communities nurturing community resilience; and delivering quality services, whilst ensuring we are financially responsible with public money.