

WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

PRODUCTIVITY PLAN – JULY 2024

About this plan

This plan is produced at the request of the Minister for Local Government. On Tuesday 16 April 2024, he wrote to all Local Authority Chief Executives requesting that a plan be submitted by 19 July 2024.

Guidelines for the plan were provided, including that the plan should be “3-4 pages in length”. Despite a General Election being called on 22 May 2024, there has been no change to this instruction.

This plan should be considered alongside the following strategic documents already produced by the Council, given the level of detail they contain about the council’s achievements, plans and approach as an organisation:

1. **Corporate Plan 2023-24** (new plan to be developed following May 2024 elections) - [Corporate strategy 2020-2024 | warrington.gov.uk](https://warrington.gov.uk/corporate-strategy-2020-2024)
2. **Medium Term Financial Plan (2024-2028)** - [Medium Term Financial Plan approved by Full Council - February 2024](#)
3. **Annual Governance Statement** - [Draft annual governance statement 2023-2024 \(warrington.gov.uk\)](#)

Financial Context

In 2024/25, the council’s revenue net budget totals £194million. 62% will be spent on adult social care and children’s services, 7% on recycling and waste disposal and 7% on leisure, recreation, libraries and culture, with these areas accounting for three quarters of our budget. The budget for 2024/25, which was approved by Full Council in February 2024, includes new savings requirements of £15.9m.

The council has already made savings of £20.0m and £13.6m in 2022/23 and 2023/24. Future years forecasting indicates that £63.7m of additional savings will also need to be made over the four-year period, 2024/25 to 2027/28.

Warrington has the 11th lowest Settlement Funding of all 99 Unitary and Metropolitan Authorities and the lowest in the North West. The Settlement Funding comprises non-ringfenced government funding and the income we receive from the Business Rates Retention Scheme. If Warrington

received the amount of funding per dwelling received by other authorities, based on the average amount of funding per dwelling for the North West authorities, we would receive an additional £42.4m per annum.

Further information on the council's budget can be found at: [Council budget | warrington.gov.uk](https://www.warrington.gov.uk/council-budget)

Despite the financial challenges, the council is proud of our strong track record of delivery. Our most recent OFSTED inspection of Children's Services rated us as good, our schools deliver educational outcomes above both the regional and national averages, and our residential and nursing home CQC ratings (Good and Outstanding) are above both the National and North West averages. These strong external assurance findings covering areas that make up the majority of the council spend are indicators of strong performance, despite overall funding reductions.

Design and Delivery of Services / Productivity

The council continually adapts the design and delivery of our services to optimise how we use resources. These can range from the restructurings of teams in order to meet financial savings targets or adapt to new ways of working, to larger strategic decisions, such as the insourcing of the council's leisure, library and lifestyle services, which took place earlier this year.

These changes have been driven by a need to adapt to the changing needs of the community and the evolving expectations and demands on council services, but also by the requirements to deliver savings each year as part of the council's MTFP.

There is no agreed measure for productivity within services across Local Government, either which are commissioned or delivered directly, and no guidance has been provided by Central Government when requesting these productivity plans.

The council annually sets a number of performance indicators at a corporate level, which are reviewed quarterly by the Senior Leadership Team, and reported formally to Cabinet. The council's Scrutiny Committee also takes the most recent version of the performance report at each of its committee meetings, focusing on a particular area of the organisation. This in itself helps to drive improvement, particularly in under-performing areas. It should also be noted that below this, each service also has a further number of more detailed performance indicators that are considered within Directorate Management Teams on a quarterly basis.

As part of our drive for transparency, residents and all members can access and explore in further detail our performance data using our portal, which hosts our Key Performance Indicators, at: [Cabinet scorecard | warrington.gov.uk](https://www.warrington.gov.uk/cabinet-scorecard)

The council also works effectively with local partners to deliver collectively against its agreed priorities – with close partnership working and joint commissioning across the Warrington 'system', including the Integrated Care Partnership.

We also share the delivery of services with other councils in a number of areas, with an outstanding example being 'Together for Adoption' which is a regional agency that integrates five local authorities, including Warrington. In Public Health, we have joint commissioned services such as sexual health with Halton, Infection Prevention with Halton and St Helens, and within our Corporate Services we share audit specialists across Warrington and Salford. This is not an exhaustive list.

Our operational structure continues to evolve over time, taking into account available resources and the strategic priorities of the council, along with external influences.

As an example of the impact of our continued redesign of services, it should be noted that in April 2010, the Council employed over 4,100 staff – and this had dropped to less than 3,300 as of March 2024.

Details of our senior management and their responsibilities is available at: [Council structure and senior managers | warrington.gov.uk](https://warrington.gov.uk/council-structure-and-senior-managers)

Efficiency

The council operates an outcomes-based approach to budgeting; the purpose being to provide a long term strategic and sustainable financial plan. Outcomes Based Budgeting (OBB) is a process designed to create a public sector that works better, costs less, focuses on delivering outcomes, puts citizens and their priority needs first and emphasises accountability, innovation and collaboration across services.

The OBB process requires the council to work across organisational boundaries and be proactive rather than reactive to encourage longer term planning and sustainability. By use of this approach, budget pressures and saving proposals are identified. Costs, savings and any new pressures are closely monitored to ensure the strategic financial plan remains robust.

Savings proposals have come from the OBB approach and traditional service challenge. At the start of the most recent full financial year, the annual saving required to meet the 2023/24 budget gap was £13.599m. Of this target 82% has been achieved across the council, and the council has continued to have a record of achieving the majority of its savings by the original planned means, with the rest made up through other management actions.

We report our financial position every three months to Cabinet which includes our progress against savings targets, and we believe we have a robust and well embedded Budget Monitoring process (link below to Cabinet papers)

The extremely difficult financial future for local government, is going to mean further transformation of our services, but in reality we are near the end of our OBB process. Whilst we will continue an approach of avoiding cuts wherever possible, it is impossible to achieve the required savings through efficiency alone and this will impact the level of services we are able to provide.

[Link to Warrington Borough Council cabinet papers](#)

Digital and Data

The council undertook a significant multi-million-pound digital transformation programme which culminated in 2021 and which implemented a new customer relationship management system for the council (Granicus) and which served as a catalyst to transform both the council's customer contact centre, and also the majority of our high-volume, repeat transactions with customers across our services. This programme was extremely successful and delivered an ongoing saving significantly above the investment required.

We continue to review our customer processes on a rolling basis as new technologies (such as AI) are introduced, but always balance the resource needed to implement a change with the real efficiencies and other benefits, through the use of business cases.

As a council we use the Microsoft platform and have successfully implemented a number of new products as part of a move to Office 365 (including use of SharePoint sites, TEAMS and PowerBI), all of which have been delivered as part of a wider "communication and collaboration" programme delivered collaboratively across the council.

Three of the council's largest system requirements are those for finance/workforce/procurement, children's services and adult social care. All of these have been in situ for a number of years in Warrington, and we currently have change projects running to ensure that we have fit-for-purpose systems supporting efficient business processes for the decade ahead.

As a council, we are also continuing to embed a data-led approach, and following a review of its structure and ways of working in 2022, our refocused business intelligence service helps to drive this across the organisation.

The council's first data strategy is currently being drafted and will set out our aspirations in this area looking forward for the next few years.

Waste

Through ongoing programme of savings and change projects, we continually look to reduce and remove waste, using technology and data, removing unnecessary steps in processes, ensuring our use of office accommodation is efficient, and working collaboratively as an organisation whilst adhering to our statutory frameworks.

We will continue to monitor this, although the level of inefficiency within the organisation is now clearly a fraction of what it was, whilst still balanced against the need to ensure good governance and services that meet the requirements for all our residents.

We have been prompted in producing this document to also consider specifically the council's spend on Trade Union facility time and our commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion posts/training/champions although in the context of the level of the financial challenges that the council faces, this is a perhaps a surprising area of focus.

We already report our Trade Union facility time information to government on an annual basis via [Public-sector trade union facility time data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/public-sector-trade-union-facility-time-data)

In terms of 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' we believe that our activities in this area are appropriate, with a small amount of training, much of it delivered in-house. We currently employ one post working solely on EDI, which is a Financial Inclusion Manager, working with some of our most disadvantaged individuals and families.

We do not have 'champions' nor do we subscribe to any 'diversity champions' programmes, given our budgetary constraints.

However, we do have an active Strategic Equalities Group, chaired by the Chief Executive, to monitor our approach to EDI issues both across the organisation and within the borough, to ensure they are appropriate and having an impact.

Tackling national barriers to productivity

- Multi-year settlements would provide an opportunity to focus upon more robust multi-year financial planning and would enable local authorities to plan for the longer term.
- Revisit the Fair Funding review to ensure that it provides a current assessment of need and ensure that the funding is sufficient to make local services fair and possible to achieve.
- Business rates retention review
- Consider the fairness of council tax percentage raises for councils with lower council tax rates
- National solutions to adult and children's social care market issues required

This plan was submitted on 19 July 2024, with the agreement of the Chief Executive and endorsement of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. It will also be reported to the council's Cabinet.