



## **North Devon Council**

Report Date: Wednesday, 17 July 2024

Topic: Productivity Plan 2024-2025

Report by: Jon Triggs, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. When the Local Government Finance Settlement was published in late 2023, it included a Government requirement for Councils to publish a Productivity Plan. In April 2024, further guidance was received from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities setting out the requirements for the plan.
- 1.2. This report sets out the Productivity Plan for North Devon Council, which must be submitted to Government by 19 July 2024 and published on the Council's website.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. That Members approve the content and publication of the North Devon Council Productivity Plan as set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2. Subject to 2.1 delegate authority for any minor amendments to the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, ahead of submission to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities by the deadline of 19 July 2024.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. Government have requested all councils to publish a Productivity Plan and that there is member oversight and endorsement of the plan before it is submitted.

### **4. REPORT**

- 4.1. The Government is reviewing productivity across all public services. As part of the recent Local Government Finance Settlement, all Councils are being asked to produce productivity plans. The plans will help the Government to understand what is already working well across the whole country, what the common themes are and whether there are any gaps and what more the Government needs to do to unlock future opportunities.
- 4.2. The expectation is that the Plans should be short (around a few pages) although there is no set format or template that the productivity plan has to adhere to. The Government has suggested that the Productivity Plan includes some of the four main areas below:-

- Transformation of services to make better use of resources;
- Opportunities to take advantage of advances in technology and make better use of data to inform decision making and service design;
- Ways to reduce wasteful spending within all Councils; and
- Identify any barriers that currently impact efficiency that the Government could help to reduce or remove.

4.3 In 2020 and 2021, the Council had a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) which forms a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. It is underpinned by the principles of sector-led improvement put in place by Councils and the Local Government Association (LGA), to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector.

4.4 At the Full Council meeting in January 2022, Members received both the draft report from February 2020 and the refreshed report from 2021. Both reports were very positive and accurately reflected the work and approach of the council. The reports praised the council's financial planning and also the approach of staff, highlighting the strong public service ethos and the pride in working for the council that exists.

4.5 The 2021 report also highlighted how staff value the collaborative approach being adopted by the council and the opportunity to be involved in developing the council's Behaviour Framework. It also noted that many of the key recommendations from the first report had been addressed even though there was an obviously challenging environment.

4.6 The Council has a strong track record in all of the areas set out in the Productivity Plan, which has been endorsed by consistently good value for money assessments by our External Auditors with the latest report in January 2024 concluding that **'We are satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.'**

4.7 We feel that these assessments by sector experts demonstrate that North Devon Council is already delivering against the requirements set by the Secretary of State, which we have evidenced within our Productivity Plan shown in Appendix A.

4.8 Within the plan, we have set out a number of areas where we feel Government can support us to further increase productivity; these are set out in the final section of the plan.

4.9 The Productivity Plans will be considered by a new productivity review panel, made up of sector experts including the Office for Local Government and the Local Government Association.

## 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The Council since 2010 has seen a reduction in its net budget from £15.5million (2010/11) to £14.7million (2023/24) – however the real cut is larger due to the impact of inflation and the effect of this would have seen the latter 2023/24 budget figure around £22.6million today – thus an £8m real cost reduction in resources. Aligned to this the Council has seen a reduction in its workforce in the same period from 530 FTEs (Full-time equivalent staff) to 440 FTEs in 2023/24 (a reduction of 17% in the workforce). These



changes have all been implemented in a managed way and resulted in no compulsory redundancies, which demonstrates how the Council had adapted and changed the way it has been structured.

5.2. This Productivity Plan sets out the value for money measures that have already been implemented by North Devon Council and areas moving forwards where we continually strive to be efficient and effective in the way we deliver services to our communities.

## 6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1. There are not any equalities implications anticipated as a result of this report

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1. There are not any environmental implications anticipated as a result of this report.

## 8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

8.1.1. The commercialisation agenda: the report references areas of work and interventions the Council has delivered.

8.1.2. Improving customer focus: the report references areas of work and interventions the Council has delivered.

8.1.3. Regeneration or economic development: the report references areas of work and interventions the Council has delivered.

## 9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1. The decision in respect of the recommendations in this report can be made pursuant to Article 4.3.3 and 4.5 of the Constitution.

## 10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report.

## 12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Jon Triggs, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive