

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 10 July 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Productivity Plan

Report summary:

When the Local Government Finance Settlement was published in late 2023 it included a requirement for Councils to publish a Productivity Plan. In April 2024, further guidance was received from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) setting out the requirements for the plan.

This report sets out the Productivity Plan for East Devon District Council which must be submitted to Government by 19th July 2024 and published on the Council's website.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. The Cabinet consider the Productivity Plan at Appendix A and subject to member comment approve the content and publication of the Productivity Plan.
2. It is recommended that Cabinet delegate to the Director of Finance to make any minor amendments to the Productivity Plan arising through the meeting.

Reason for recommendation:

There is a requirement for all Councils to submit a Productivity Plan to the Government (DLUHC) by 19th July 2024.

Officer: Director of Finance sdavey@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets

- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

Report in full

- 1.1 As part the 2024/25 Government Finance Settlement all Councils were asked to produce productivity plans. The plans are intended to help Government 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.
- 1.2 The expectation is that the Plan should be short (3 to 4 pages maximum) and there is no set format or template, there are four main themes/question areas that are asked to be addressed:
 - 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.
- 1.3 In February 2024, 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. The CPC concluded that **'we are an ambitious Council that is keen to make a positive difference to residents' lives and the environment in East Devon.'**
- 1.4 The CPC stated that **'EDDC has an excellent financial track record and has successfully managed the General Fund budget, without recourse to use of reserves. The council has developed a Financial Sustainability Model (FSM) which is a process that undertakes reviews to ensure value for money, drives efficiencies to see what savings can be achieved and forms an evidence base that the council has done what it can.'**
- 1.5 The Council has a good record in the areas required to be demonstrated in the Productivity Plan and a focus on continuous improvement supported by external

reviews by industry experts as outlined in our Plan. We have a recently adopted Council Plan setting our agreed priorities.

1.6 Within the plan, as requested, areas have been identified where it is felt Government support is required to further productivity, these include:

- The Council spends in key areas that bring proven health and wellbeing benefits to our residents through sports, leisure, parks and gardens and countryside provision, including linking with General Practitioner referrals. The Council receives no direct contribution or funding which puts services at risk with the current resources available – Government needs to think of this as a whole system cost and provide councils with funding which reduces overall public expenditure.
- The Council is affected by the challenges in accessing affordable housing locally. The Council's temporary accommodation costs have grown exponentially and are projected to be over £500,000 for this financial year. Extra funding from Government is needed to meet these ever-increasing costs and to alleviate the issue long term by providing direct grants to fully fund house building. An issue this Council has lobbied for many years is the ability to retain and use all Right to Buy Receipts from Council Houses sales at the discretion of the Council, but more importantly to end the Right to Buy scheme leaving more properties available for social housing.
- A stable financial environment for local government is needed – in the immediate future we need details of the finance settlement for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
- Councils should be able to set their own levels of planning fees with the ability for the service to break-even and not as a cost to the council tax payer.
- There should be no council tax referendum limits and local democracy and elected members should be able to determine the local levels of taxation.
- End competitive bids for funding.
- Take away outdated practices; need for council committees to meet in person replaced by virtual meetings and public notices to published in the local press replaced by online. Also the excessive details required in annual accounts and transparency code.

The Productivity Plans it is intended 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.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications

Legal implications:

There are no significant legal implications to be added to this report.