

Productivity Plan

2024



Chorley Council

Productivity Plan 2024

1. How you have transformed the way you design and deliver services to make better use of resources

Over the last five years, one of the most significant transformations at Chorley Council has been the development of shared services. Chorley Council have shared a number of services with neighbouring South Ribble Borough Council. Both councils still retain their Council, Cabinet and Committees, and make decisions and set policy for their sovereign Council. Almost half of the services are now shared, including a joint Chief Executive and Senior Management Team. The shared services enable improved resilience across both councils and provides numerous benefits to operations and efficiency. It also provides significant cost savings, estimated at in excess of £1 million to date. A Shared Services Joint Committee is in operation which reviews the outcomes from the current shared model and considers further opportunities to streamline services where appropriate.

At Chorley Council both productivity (the “quantity” of results) and performance (the “quality” of results) are measured and monitored as part of regular performance reporting. Arrangements include a quarterly dedicated senior management team to reviewing the corporate health dashboard, progress against delivery of corporate strategy projects and a review of key strategic risks.

There have been many programmes of work to improve services and drive the economy over the years since austerity. These programmes demonstrate how capital spending can boost growth and improve services. These include purchase of the shopping centre and a large scale regeneration scheme, Market Walk, giving the council the ability to shape and drive the town centre. This continues to be developed through the award of the Levelling Up funds. Another example is the development of Strawberry Fields Digital hub which opened in October 2019, providing spaces for start ups and SMEs in the digital and creative sectors to work alongside each other in an innovative, supporting and vibrant environment. These diverse investments have supported a growing and thriving local economy, as well as supporting the council to generate additional income to support other council services.

Chorley Council has not only undertaken programmes to drive economic growth but has also supported the development of local heritage and culture, and people focused services and support. The Council has led the restoration of the Astley Hall, a 16th century Grade I listed building. This work began in 2020 and will preserve the hall for future generations and the physical works have also been supported by enhancements to the visitor experience, a gift shop and community and café facilities. The Hall is frequently the base for events, such as the annual Chorley Flower Show, Astley Illuminated, Picnic in the Park and, in 2021, it played host to worldwide politicians as the venue for the G7 Speakers’ conference.

Chorley Council has also improved local services with the delivery of two extra care housing facilities, Primrose Gardens and Tatton Gardens. These facilities enable residents aged 55 and over to stay independent for longer, in their own living space, but with the option of flexible care and support packages, alongside social opportunities with other residents and being near to shops and healthcare provision. While not a core district council function, the facilities support wider public services in reducing demand and costs in the long term.

A further successful programme has been the design, development and completion of Chorley Youth Zone as an independent charity funded through private sector donations, funding from the council and membership fees. The Youth Zone provides a safe and inspirational environment for more than 5,000 local young people between the ages of 8-19, offering a wide variety of activities.

An example of a preventative approach that the Council has successfully designed and delivered is the social prescribing service. The services, which has been developed in partnership with local partners including Primary Care, demonstrates the importance of expanding core district council services to improve residents' health and wellbeing and to reduce demands on public services.

Our current plans for transformation are centred around maintaining successful service models, generating further income and maximizing opportunities to transform internally and externally. A transformation programme is under development called the "Fit for the Future programme" to ensure that Chorley Council continues to drive forward its positive as a forward looking and ambitious organisation. Proposals are being coproduced by officers and members and are influenced by resident feedback and engagement. A master tracker is under development to give oversight of both financial and non financial benefits of each proposal. This has been influenced by sharing of similar transformation programmes across the LGA Transformation leads network. The programme will be governed by a Change and Delivery Board, with strategic oversight by the Senior Management Team and the Executive Cabinet.

Wider, locally-led reforms that could help the delivery of high quality services and support sustainability include development and progression of devolution in Lancashire, further improvements to integrated health, social care and wellbeing partnerships and other partnership arrangements with local blue light services and housing. However, these areas of public sector reform need to be developed collaboratively, using the skills and assets of all partners to achieve the most effective outcomes for local people.

2. How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources

The creation of a single operating model through Shared Services across Chorley Council and South Ribble Borough Council ensures there is alignment of technology and working practices to enable delivery of the digital and ICT strategies. The Council uses Microsoft 365, enabling officers and members to work anytime from anywhere. There is access to a range of devices and technology across hybrid working areas throughout the council's estate.

A shared open data platform has been commissioned through the Chorley and South Ribble partnership. This allows open access to a range of data and intelligence around local indicators. The platform contains not only the council's data, but also data from partners. The platform continues to be expanded and developed as a central, local data source. Data sharing across partner organisations allows a clearer view of residents, businesses and visitors and enables more accurate service design based on evidence and intelligence.

The Council uses artificial intelligence and machine learning in areas of high volume, straightforward activities, such as revenues and benefits. This offers the benefits of the ability to process high volumes of non-complex information to deliver a quick and responsive service to residents and freeing up officer time to focus on more complex cases.

A residents' survey is conducted every two years and this provides intelligence on customers skills and needs in relation to digital services and technological advancements. Chorley Council continues to provide services in a way that meets the needs of all customers, including those that are digitally excluded.

A recent example of how technology has improved workflows and systems is HR transformation programme, which went live in January 2024. This delivers service efficiencies through a new online HR hub and HFX time management system, which aligns processes across both Chorley and South Ribble councils and introduces greater levels of automation and self-serve functionality.

The current digital strategy focuses on harnessing the potential of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, whilst maximising the use of existing resources to provide a customer focused approach to service delivery. The strategy focuses on four key themes:

- Work (Digital Councils) – utilising technology and business intelligence to develop smarter and more efficient workspaces
- Place (Digital Boroughs) – together with our partners, we will proactively work to ensure that everyone in the borough has the right infrastructure, skills and support to be able to make the best use of new technology
- People (Digital Services) – Transforming relationships with our communities and businesses by providing an online experience so good that people will prefer to use digital channels and can do so unaided
- Data and intelligence – a cross cutting theme of the strategy is a specific focus on data and intelligence to further support an open and transparent culture and intelligence led decision making

The council uses many different ICT systems and providers to form its digital and technological offer. In 2024 the council went live with a new website, changing the provider to Jadu. This supports the progression of accessible, online customer services.

Like many councils, Chorley Council has systems with some large providers, such as Civica and IDOX, which have a monopoly on this area of work. The influence of these large providers, together with the changing of procurement rules can mean that updating and development of systems is costly and complex, and often the potential costs and timescales of system change can outweigh the anticipated benefits.

3. Your plans to reduce wasteful spend with your organisations and systems

Chorley Council has worked on improvement and reducing waste over many years since austerity and therefore there is little that is considered “wasteful spend”, the focus is on stretching limited resources to achieve best value for residents.

Examples have been cited earlier in this report of invest to save initiatives, particularly in relation to capital programmes. These programmes have not only supported economic development but also influenced community cohesion and supported health and wellbeing.

Equality, diversity and inclusion form an important part of our organisational values, however this is embedded in all roles and work across the organisation and there is no specific, dedicated role for equality, diversity and inclusion.

Core EDI training is mandatory and is delivered as part of the online training suite on the Learning Hub portal. Training to members is delivered annually in one face to face training session, this is delivered by internal officers so does not incur additional spend. Chorley Council has approximately 20 EDI champions who support the council in meeting its statutory duties around EDI alongside their core jobs.

Our equality objectives are currently being refreshed. The objectives for 2020-2024, and accompanying measures are as follows:

- Objective 1 – To support digital inclusion to ensure our services are accessible to all, measured by
 - Number of residents engaged in Digital Strategy projects
 - Number of people who have successfully completed basic, digital skills training
- Objective 2 – To increase resident participation to enable more informed decision making, measured by
 - Number of engagement activities undertaken on equality issues

- Percentage of those aged 16-30 participating in our surveys
- Objective 3 – To empower our workforce through training and engagement to respond to the needs of a diverse community, measured by
 - Percentage of staff who have completed mandatory training module on equality and diversity
 - Percentage of decisions that include an Integrated Impact Assessment
- Objective 4 – To advance social progress across the borough through helping residents overcome barriers to work and improving their skills, measured by
 - Number of apprenticeships created through Chorley Council support or intervention
 - Number of residents from disadvantaged groups into training and employment

Agency and consultancy staff are only employed by the council where there is a particular specialist need for a time limited period, or in areas where the organisation is struggling to recruit. This area forms part of the Fit for the Future programme and is monitored by the Senior Management Team. A piece of work is being undertaken to review current agency staff, the time they have been in post, the associated spend and the strategy to exit arrangements if appropriate.

Spend accountability is monitored at several levels in the organisation. Service areas have a named business partner within finance, who they regularly meet with to monitor spend against budget and discuss any variance and the reasons behind this. Regular financial reporting takes place to the senior leadership team and are considered publicly by the Executive Cabinet.

Trade union facility time has recently monitored and is in line with central government recommended levels. There was a slight increase in spend in this area over 2022/23, this was due to progression of shared service arrangements across two councils and the work to align staff terms and conditions.

4. The barriers preventing progress that Government can help to reduce or remove

The main barrier that prevents progress that Government can help to reduce or remove is sustainability of resources. Local authorities need more stable and longer-term funding settlements that would enable more effective and efficient spend. A one-year funding allocation impacts both the quality and extent of the service but also on the resource to deliver the service as it is difficult to recruit and workforce plan over the short term. There are also significant government funding sources that are time limited which result in communities becoming accustomed to a service and then it has to be reduced or removed, frequently meaning the local government has further pressure in trying to maintain the funded service. Examples of this include the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Holiday Activities with Food programme.

A key barrier preventing progress that Government could help reduce or remove is the lack of early and proactive collaboration and engagement. Local authorities have regular close engagement with the communities that they serve and are familiar with local services and organisations, therefore they have the knowledge of how implementation works best. When policy decisions are made by central government and then local authorities are asked to implement this can often be a more complex and costly way of delivering the service. This barrier also includes a lack of collaboration across government departments which can impact on outcomes achieved.

Lack of central government awareness of local authority services and operating context and understanding can lead to policy decisions that are challenging to implement. This could be overcome by having greater communications between central government and local areas and spending more time on resource and developing two-way collaborative relationships between central and local government and moving away from a more paternalistic approach.

A further barrier is how data is not used efficiently both across central government departments and between central and local government. Central government data and intelligence is not always shared with local government and often, when data is available, it is duplicated and inconsistent. For example, the establishment of OFLOG has utilised pre-existing open data sources and taken information that was already used and reported by LG Inform. There are often complicated, inconsistent and misaligned processes for submitting data returns to central government which could be much improved.

Finally, while Chorley Council welcomes the promise of devolution to local areas, that devolution needs to be meaningful and work for local areas. Lancashire has not yet benefited from a devolution deal and the offer that was developed during 2023 and 2024 will not bring the change required to unlock growth in the county. The planned devolution is unambitious, and the governance arrangements will just add a further layer of complex bureaucracy without providing a foundation for Lancashire to grow and reach its full potential. Devolution in principle is welcomed but this needs to be inclusive, proper and aspirational devolution. The development of a devolution deal that is ambitious and engages the whole of local government in Lancashire in driving growth and the government's ambitions for the country is needed, and Chorley Council would support discussions on that basis.