

Tendring
District Council



Productivity Plan

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Introduction

Tendring District Council is a Local Authority within Essex, named after the peninsula of Tendring that the Council's administrative area covers. Within the district there is a population of 148,100, with 67,500 households and 4,740 businesses.

Tendring is represented by 48 Councillors and its administration is comprised of two groups of Independent Councillors as well as Labour and Liberal Democrat Councillors. 755 staff members are employed to ensure residents, businesses and visitors can depend upon the indispensable services delivered by the Council.

The Council's [Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028 \(Our Vision\)](#) sets out the key areas of focus for the authority and works as a guide to continue improving and developing the Council and the District alongside its partners. Community Leadership is core to our ethos. As a community leader, our Council is a deliverer, facilitator and influencer in delivering outcomes for our residents.

Within this Productivity Plan, Tendring District Council answers the four questions outlined in the letter dated 16 April from the Minister for Local Government. For the first and second questions, this Plan highlights where developments have already been made within the Council and its intentions to make further improvements. In section 3 we set out the achievements and insights accomplished on effective spending, and for question 4 we raise the barriers the Council must address and where the government may be able to support.

Across the years, the approach taken by the Council has contributed to the following totals in savings realised/additional income obtained:

- 2020/21: £301,000
- 2021/22: £239,000
- 2022/23: £223,000
- 2023/24: £742,000

The Council consistently seeks to deliver the functions and services it is responsible for in the most effective way possible within its overall financial capacity. Its medium term financial planning arrangements have been robust and, through 10-year budget forecasts, the Council has weathered the short term impacts where income has declined or expenditure grown. The strong working relationship between officers and Councillors has been a feature of the Council for many years irrespective of the groups forming the administration. The cultivation of an inclusive approach across the Council Chamber with Group Leaders and those involved in Overview and Scrutiny and in Audit has meant that constructive challenge and review have been integral to the governance of the Council for the benefit of residents.



Ian Davidson
Chief Executive

Section 1: How we have transformed the way we design and deliver services to make better use of resources

Through its long term financial plan and 'cash backed' approach to investment and delivering value for money, the Council has undertaken a number of key investment / transformational activities such as in its estate, its digital systems, channel shift, economic development and regeneration and across a range of other service areas. This has delivered not only financial savings to support the Council's financial sustainability but also improvements in the effectiveness in the way the Council works internally and with its customers.

This approach has also enabled and informed subsequent phases of investment via a corporate investment plan approach that reflects on current service provision alongside further value for money opportunities across the following key strands:

- Investing in its existing services and business as usual operations
- Spend to save initiatives
- Investing in the Council's key priorities.

In addition to the above, the Council continues to actively manage its assets to identify associated opportunities such as disposing of assets to invest in an identified alternative need and/or to generate income / growth internally or economically across the district.

The approach highlighted above continues to support the Council in balancing the delivery of its long term financial plans, which include the delivery of savings and value for money responsibilities, with informing its investment decisions either directly or via its many local partners.

The above has also been made possible by the establishment of a Forecast Risk Fund that has provided the Council with the additional financial flexibility to respond to its many challenges.

The Council also maximises opportunities through its partnership work to improve the lives of residents. This includes partners such as the NHS, Police, Fire, Essex County Council and other statutory and community groups.

Our track record

Working with partners

- Through a range of work with partners, relating to health, the health indices have improved in Tendring by 4.7% whereas the All England average is only 0.8%. This is key for Tendring as we have such high levels of health inequalities
- The Council has supported an investment of £25million from NHS England into Clacton Hospital, developing a Diagnostics Hub. Community Renewal funding was included to support the creation and development of new jobs in

the hospital (96 new jobs). There are now 140,000 visits a year to the facility, supporting improved health in our district

- Working with Education colleagues both at Essex County Council and local Headteachers, introduced 33 Wellbeing Hubs in Primary Schools to support children with mild to moderate mental health and wellbeing issues. To date, over 1,000 pupils have been supported via a Wellbeing Hub
- Supported a number of physical health initiatives with partners e.g. Pedal Power (giving away 1,000 free bikes in the Clacton/Jaywick Sands area), Beat the Street, Street Tag and Park Runs
- One Public Estate initiative with local and government participants has facilitated shared working on major capital bids and offers potential to consider shared values and priorities on future project work.

Service Transformation

- Undertook Fundamental Service Reviews of all of its functional areas seeking to match staffing and service structures to functionality and to eliminate surplus activity and reduce staffing levels. To some extent the organisation has needed to rebuild from the levels established in order to meet community demands, but the increased capacity requirements for Levelling Up projects with short delivery deadlines places demand on services; and procurement and recruitment requirements can slow progress whilst ensuring legal compliance
- Our Office Transformation Project has halved the number of corporate sites from eleven to five with a 42% reduction in floor area and the inclusion of sustainability measures such as air source heating/cooling and automatic LED lighting
- Following the liquidation of the former term contractor for housing repairs the organisation recruited a number of staff to form an in-house housing repairs team. The team is achieving high levels of satisfaction and timeliness of work induction and has demonstrated a cost saving on a comparable basis
- Reduced our fees for leisure facilities, which has nearly doubled the number of members, and so we are making better use of our leisure assets, and substantially increasing overall revenue
- Channel shift in our theatre to online ticket sales
- The Council has joined with Essex County Council and other Essex Authorities in a shared Procurement Service. The baseline cost of the service has increased through this approach however, the access to additional resources and increased capacity has made improvements to the procurement function, processes and collaboration to deliver an enhanced service to that which existed previously. Further work is planned looking at strategy, rules of procedure and responding to new legislation.

In the transformation of the design of services - and more generally - we use a range of performance and productivity measures. These are relevant to the particular service, project or programme. A number of these are also already gathered by central Government through the single Government data list of requests for data from local government. Going forward these are being supplemented with:

- Measuring productivity for procurement is being considered as a part of the Essex Procurement Partnership and Collaboration Agreements

- Wellbeing Hubs – academic evaluation through the University of Essex, which has included a variety of feedback methods including surveys and interviews.

Keeping the momentum going

Moving forward, the Council has been instrumental in the establishment of the Essex Procurement Partnership and this has the objectives below:

- Productivity for procurement being considered as a part of the related Members Advisory Group and Collaboration Agreements.
- To understand contract liquidity
- Undertake sourcing activity
- Introducing capacity management
- Create Frameworks
- Develop the professionalism of procurement in each partner
- Grow procurement and market knowledge
- Support robust contract management
- Develop social value

The Council is investing in a Project Delivery Unit for the next two years to increase its capacity to progress the significant number of project work-streams it has underway. The new Unit will support projects to come in on time and budget and protect continued successful implementation of business as usual. The Unit will also bring in project management expertise that will support the wider Council with systems and approaches in this vital area.

The Council also is well along a path to establishing a new waste and recycling collection and street cleansing contract to start in early 2026. At present the Council has separate contracts for these services and bringing them together is intended to deliver efficiencies to the benefit of residents around a core specification for those services.

Section 2: How do we plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making service design and use of resources?

Tendring District Council recognised many years ago the need to support agile working and this paid dividends at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the qualitative shift to hybrid working patterns ushered in as a result. Through the development of the “My Tendring” online portal a 24/7 service is available for a growing range of transactional services for residents and businesses. The budgetary pressures on the Council mean that technological/data driven transformation is an imperative that will continue to ensure services can continue to be delivered effectively.

Our track record

- The Council has acquired new software for data holding in relation to its housing stock condition and commissioned a four year rolling programme of surveys with the intention of being able to control work programmes and bid for funding.
- The Council is trialling the use of condition sensors in its housing stock. These are able to provide real time data on the functioning of heating and ventilation systems, smoke and fire detection and internal temperature and humidity levels. Indications of performance are strongly positive but a complete roll out is difficult to prioritise against expenditure on necessary repairs and maintenance.
- Invested in a “cloud” based legal case management system to work anywhere there is an internet connection. Permitted users can then check the up to date situation on a matter should the particular lawyer be absent for whatever reason – allowing both internal and external parties to be updated when required. For the wider legal team, this case management system is improving management of matters.
- Invested in a new Audio Visual system (Auditel) for Committee Meetings that has enabled the Council to provide hybrid style meetings integrating those physically in the same place and those needing to participate from a remote location. This has been particularly helpful for evidence gathering exercises using experts away from the Council and for operating training events for Councillors. The live streaming of Council meetings using the system’s capabilities means we can engage with those unable to travel to the meeting room where decision makers are considering issues.
- We included QR codes on our heritage trails so that narrators spring to life on visitors’ phones to tell the story.

- Utilised data sources provided and available through statutory partner organisations and community groups such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for the District. This is used to inform decisions and movement of that data over time is used to assess the impact of measures/approaches.

Keeping the momentum going

- Following a successful trial of a works control package to better manage work orders on the Council's housing stock, we plan to roll use of this out to all Council properties and add interaction pack functionality to enhance customer involvement before and after work is done.
- We are testing the use of AI Co-pilot to increase our productivity in developing documents and managing administration.
- Our sports and activity strategy includes proposals for increasing the use of digital in our leisure estate to make them easier for users and run at a reduced cost.
- We are looking at single IT systems through the shared procurement service.

Section 3: Our plans to reduce wasteful spend within our organisations and system

The journey the Council has been on to eliminate waste has meant that the Council is far leaner now than it ever was. The collaboration with other Authorities in Essex around procurement is intended to drive through efficiencies and savings across all significant purchasing decisions. The nature of the Council now means that extra capacity must be factored in for all major programmes and projects beyond business as usual to ensure delivery of those major programmes and projects.

Our track record

- Undertake an Annual Budget setting scrutiny. In addition to engaging with those outside of the Council on resource allocation, the governance structure at Tendring provides for a robust challenge process examining efficiency, economy and effectiveness of key elements of the budget. This extends to business as usual as well as one-off and project expenditure.
- Alongside taking savings where they are identified, there is an ongoing mechanism for identifying cost pressures to ensure these are integrated into the overall budget setting and revision process. Through such mechanisms the challenges around spend on homelessness services for those in need have been identified and the Council has been able to respond to those cost pressures.
- The Council has partnered with others to harness the benefits of working collaboratively to deliver efficiencies and ensure waste is driven out of service provision. These include:
 - Procurement service which also supports other Essex local authorities (Essex Procurement Partnership)
 - Port Authority inspections at Harwich International Port – the agreement is with East Suffolk Council to provide the inspections as that Council also undertakes the service on the Felixstowe side of the River Stour.
 - Emergency Planning – here there is a shared resource with nearby Maldon District Council.
 - Highways Grass Cutting – this service is delivered on behalf of Essex County Council
- Utilised the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver services to our residents that we would not be able to provide without such a funding stream.
- Installed pool covers in our three swimming pools to reduce our energy bills, and the Council is making use of the Swimming Pool Support Fund to install a new air handling unit and building management system to reduce energy use.
- Instigating a review of our leisure facilities within our sports strategy to review ways to reduce the requirement for subsidy to our leisure facilities.

- The organisation is conducting a detailed and specific review of areas for which it maintains open spaces with the objective of ensuring that areas not owned by the organisation are maintained by their actual owners or at least that those owners appropriately fund work and liabilities.
- The Council has adopted a new Beach Hut Strategy that aims to generate additional income that can be invested in seafront areas and facilities that form the environment for those huts and users.
- The Housing team has updated and re-engaged with a recharging policy to ensure that tenants who wilfully or carelessly damage Council property are required to meet the cost of repair and reinstatement works wherever that is practical.

Keeping the momentum going

- The Council has driven out wasteful expenditure. However, it still has the difficult task of identifying £3million of savings over the next four financial years. It is confronting that challenge by identifying areas where those savings could be delivered. Later this year, the Council will have developed its savings plan to achieve the target, and it is recognised this commitment will require tough decisions.

Section 4: The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove

Due to its size and the demands on it, the Council is constantly looking at how to achieve the best outcomes for the District, its residents and businesses. Understanding the challenges and needs of coastal communities by Government is imperative to tackle those barriers towards addressing those challenges and meeting the needs of those communities.

The below sets out a range of areas where barriers could be removed by Government:

Local Government Finance

- Review of fair funding and a long-term multi-year funding agreement (of at least 4 years)
- Limitation of competitive bidding and the resource requirement to submit such extensive bidding requirements. In addition, there needs to be realistic timescales on capital spend projects funded by government so we can progress at a realistic pace
- Review the funding of new burdens and requirements to ensure costs are met, and that these support both national and local net zero strategies and requirements
- Financial devolution so that Councils can:
 - Locally set planning fees and charges
 - Set council tax without the arbitrary upper limit requiring an expensive referendum based on wording that does not reflect the real impact of the precepting proposal.
 - Funding and capacity to develop innovative solutions to identified issues, or funding to try and identify the issues in the first place.

Housing

- Funding and strategy change to ensure delivery of more affordable homes
- There is far too little social housing stock for the number of people on the waiting lists. To consider abolishing / suspending the Right to Buy or if Right to Buy continues then amend the rules on Council Housing so that the Council retains more of the Right to Buy money to then be reinvested into the Council Housing Estate
- In terms of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business case that was agreed as part of the self-financing reforms of the HRA back in 2012, this has been negatively impacted by various additional demands in the intervening years, not least the emerging financial considerations from the new era of social housing regulation. The level of debt taken on by the Council back in 2012 as part of those reforms is increasingly at odds with the assumptions then and the reality now. A timely Governmental review would therefore be helpful against this context.

Regulatory Burdens

- Enable localised decision making around things that matter to our residents, and support efficiencies such as bin collection frequencies, and evidence base requirements for Local Plans
- Review the Freedom of Information obligations and the resource required to meet this
- Modernisation/Review of legislation, such as those requiring publication of notices in local newspapers, fees and charges being cost neutral and restrictions on trading through a company
- Review of the standards framework and sanctions available to Councils with regards to poor conduct of Members in breach of the Code of Conduct and consideration of powers to enable recharging Town and Parish Councils for the Monitoring Officer's duties in this regard
- Subsidy Control legislation requires government to introduce more streamlined routes, especially in relation to voluntary and community based schemes
- The current restriction in respect of holding meetings under the Local Government Act 1972 such that they may only be held in person is antiquated and a regulatory burden. Consideration is requested of the potential benefits of giving local authorities the flexibility to choose to hold online council and committee meetings where councillors decide that this is appropriate and the most efficient way of making decisions.

Wider policy areas

- The sheer volume of Government requests has been significant – such as Ukraine, Afghanistan, homelessness, funeral homes visits, new waste requirements, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and elections, to name just a few. An understanding of the position of local government and the needs to facilitate undertaking future requests is needed prior to the requests being announced
- The market place for Local Government IT is not functioning effectively. Too often we have large companies providing systems with very little room for new players to emerge and provide the drive for competition around those systems. Finding ways of breaking neo-monopolies in the provision of the services would assist with innovation and enhancement of products. It would also challenge costings for systems with a view to driving down those costings
- Greater and more targeted funding for prevention work to reduce health inequalities. Continued funding for Swap to Stop would allow the Essex Region to continue to deliver the core public health goal of smoking cessation. In general, for any funding to have impact, it needs to be multi-year and allow local authorities the flexibility to deliver public health outcomes in transformative and innovative ways.