

Suffolk County Council

Productivity Plan July 2024

Introduction

This is Suffolk County Council's Productivity Plan 2024. It has been produced at Government request and highlights how the Council is working to productively, accountably and effectively deliver its ambitions for local residents.

It draws on and signposts to existing published documents and we are confident that it provides an accurate snapshot of Suffolk County Council in July 2024.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Hicks'.

Councillor Matthew Hicks
Leader, Suffolk County Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Beach'.

Nicola Beach
Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council

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1. Context

Suffolk is a large eastern county, with rurality, coastal communities, market towns and larger urban centres. Celebrating its 50th year, Suffolk County Council serves a population of 768,555¹ and is focussed on providing the best possible outcomes for local people and places. The Council's priorities are guided by its [Corporate Strategy 2022-26](#) and four guiding ambitions:



Looking after our health and wellbeing.



Strengthening our local economy.



Protecting and enhancing our environment.



Providing value for money for our residents.

Our plans for delivering these and progress against them is reported in our [Annual Plan](#). This forms part of the annual medium term financial planning process that culminates in Council discussion and agreement in February each year ([Revenue Budget 2024-25 and Capital Programme 2024-29](#)). In February 2024, Council agreed a net revenue budget of £752,784 million and a capital programme of £524.995 million (2024-2029).

The Medium Term Financial Plan highlights £50.394 million of demand pressures on the council's 2024-25 budget and assumes demand pressures of £17.350 million in 2025-26, £20 million in 2026-27 and £20 million in 2027-28. These demand pressures are mitigated by the £30.632 million of savings planned from transformation programmes, which are primarily focused on reducing demand. Therefore, the demand cost pressure is an estimate if no transformation programmes were in place but does not represent an increase in the net budget for ACS.

The [Annual Governance Statement](#), reported annually to the Audit Committee, provides an overview of how the council's governance works and is managed. It is published alongside the council's annual [Statement of Accounts](#) and forms an important part of the council's checks and balances.

Beyond its internal governance and organisational priorities, the county council works closely with partners including businesses, voluntary and community organisations, the education sector and, particularly, Suffolk's public sector including Suffolk's five district and borough councils, its two Integrated Care Boards and the Suffolk Constabulary. Suffolk's public sector leaders meet on a bi-monthly basis to progress issues of shared priority ([Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group](#)). A new [Suffolk Business Board](#) has been established to represent the local business community, help steer Suffolk's economic strategy and create a stronger, higher-skilled local economy.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics, mid-year population estimates 2022

2. Transforming services to improve use of resources

What we have done so far

Value for money and innovation are central to everything we do as a council. Consequently, innovation and transformation have consistently been part of Suffolk County Council’s strategic and business planning. The council’s 2018-2022 transformation programmes, developed following the 2017 County Council elections, sought to tackle different aspects of service delivery. The programmes were grouped into four categories: savings; service transformation; public sector reform; and enabling cultural change. Some of the highlights include the launch of the Our Digital Business programme, which resulted in continuous improvement and development of the council’s public-facing websites, growth of the online self-service channel, and the launch of our county-wide digital care service, “Cassius”. And the Commercialism programme has strengthened our focus on the social and environmental value we derive from commercial activity, and has supported the continued development of our wholly owned companies to ensure sustained dividend growth.

In 2022, Suffolk County Council set out its major programmes for the next four years. These aim to improve services and help mitigate some of the demand and cost pressures faced by the council. They are:

<p>Looking after our health and wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People First ○ Independent Lives ○ SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) 	<p>Protecting and enhancing our environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Net Zero By 2030 Implementation Plan ○ Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan ○ Growing Biodiversity in Suffolk
<p>Strengthening our local economy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lowestoft Gull Wing Bridge ○ Strategic Rail and Route Campaigns and Business Cases ○ Housing Joint Venture 	<p>Providing value for money for our residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School Travel ○ Highways New Operating Model ○ Ways We Work ○ Investment in footpaths and drainage

Significant progress has been made in the first two years of delivery. The major programmes produce regular progress updates to provide assurance that they remain on track to deliver the intended outcomes and benefits for Suffolk and are incorporated into the council’s quarterly performance management reporting. The impact of the major programmes is already evident.

Progress includes:

- Opening of the new Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft is scheduled for this year.
- The new highways contract with Milestone Infrastructure has commenced, and important rail and road infrastructure improvements secured for future development.
- Carbon emissions have reduced, and energy efficiency increased across the council’s largest buildings; for example, by investing in solar panels and destratification fans. These have helped deliver savings of 37% against baseline, while enhancing comfort levels and keeping bills low.
- In adult social care, use of the innovative care technology service ‘Cassius’ continues, providing greater independence and better outcomes for residents, which are key to the council’s ‘People at the Heart of Care’ strategy.

Beyond the major programmes, all council directorates continually search for ways to more efficiently and effectively deliver services to Suffolk's communities. This is particularly a priority for the 'people-focussed' directorates where there is greatest financial and demand pressure, due to demographics, increasing complexity of demand and lack of supply of residential care places.

For example, the council's MTFP for 2024-25 highlights two transformation programmes in Adult Care Services focussed on locality budgets for older people services, and people with Learning Disabilities and Autism and mental health services. Running across multiple years and aligned with the council's 'People at the Heart of Care' strategy, they focus on reducing the need for long-term, local authority funded care by ensuring people have access to the right advice and guidance and keeping people independent for longer. Both are key to driving down demand for the council's funded services. Since their launch six years ago, these transformation programmes have saved £37.2 million up to the end of 2022.

Further examples of how the council is transforming services to improve use of resources are outlined in the council's [Annual Plan-2024-25](#) These include:

- Improving the way that we deliver SEND provision with partner organisations, which is a priority for Suffolk County Council. Following a recent Ofsted and CQC inspection of SEND services, we continue to invest and implement wide-ranging reform of provision.
- Implementing the national agenda for modernising adoption to help children who are adopted better understand where they have come from. By working with adopters, this will help birth families play a continuing role and have positive relationships with their birth children.
- Working with the NHS to embed key programmes of work to address health inequalities. This includes the investment of £3.9 million to tackle inequalities in health access, experience and outcomes.
- With local partners, implementing new local economic structures and strategies to ensure that Suffolk fulfils its internationally significant economic potential. For example, working with developers and Government departments to ensure that the impacts of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) are minimised, and opportunities maximised, through better coordination, improved mitigation, and community benefit schemes.
- Transitioning the council's pool car fleet of 42 vehicles to fully electric by the end of the 2023/24 financial year.
- Starting construction on our first Housing Joint Venture homes in 2024.

[Future plans/next steps](#)

Going forward, the council's focus will include:

- Working with residents, care providers and communities to develop new adult social care service offers that make best use of resources - using technology and innovation to create new ways to meet people's needs.
- Delivering a range of new, easy-to-use, self-service tools to allow our residents to access adult social care services and their own information at a time of their choosing, including supported self-assessment for adults and their carers.
- Working jointly with schools and settings on improving attendance, both to support children's progress and attainment and as a key protective factor.
- Continuing the development of the £64 million A12 Major Road Network project to support economic growth on the corridor, including Brightwell Lakes and the Energy Coast.

- Encouraging the shift to low carbon transport by using the £5.9 million Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure funding to install new public charging infrastructure, targeting areas without off-street parking.

The following provides an at-a-glance overview of the council’s major programmes in 2023-24:

Looking after our health and wellbeing			
On course to deliver £11m of targeted savings from adult social care transformation, including from the use of Digital Care technology.	New learning disability, autism, and mental health reablement offer.	New school travel pilot: ‘One School One Operator’ to develop more efficient school transport provision.	
Strengthening our local economy			
Gull Wing bridge Seven of the eight sections installed and highways construction work completed.	Government has confirmed improvements to Ely and Haughley rail junctions.	Outline business case approved for A12 major road network improvements.	Edmundham Developments established between the council and Lovell Partnerships to provide new housing across Suffolk.
Protecting and enhancing our environment			
Almost £1m committed for additional flood investigation specialists following Storm Babet.	Fully electrified pool car fleet by end of 2023/24.	Solar panels on our buildings generate over 400,000 kWh of green electricity.	County farm tenants supported to improve natural habitats across 4,428 hectares of Suffolk farmland.
			53,000 trees and hedge saplings planted, in partnership with Woodland Trust and Suffolk Tree Warden Network.
Providing value for money for our residents			
New highways and street lighting contracts successfully commenced on 1 October 2023	New highways contract to deliver 116 footway improvement schemes .	More than £2.5m saved through switching to LED streetlights across Suffolk.	88.8% of customer transactions now undertaken online

3. The Role of technology and data in service design and use of resources

What we have done so far

Technology and data are fundamental to delivering the council's ambitions. While embracing the exciting opportunities technology offers, it must be utilised in a secure, inclusive and appropriate way. Effective and accountable use of data is fundamental to the way that Suffolk County Council operates. This is underpinned by the council's commitment to information governance compliance. For more information see [Suffolk County Council's Privacy and data protection](#).

The Council's Technology Strategy describes how Suffolk County Council will deploy and utilise technology to support its information processing needs. The strategy applies to all information and communications technology use within the council. It demonstrates the link between technology, transformation, digital service delivery and data.

We have also used digital to transform our service delivery. For example, the council launched the Cassius digital care partnership in 2021 to support eligible people in Suffolk to meet their care needs using digital technologies. By July 2023, 3,200 people were actively using Cassius technology every day. For 327 of those people, this meant they could remain living at home rather than moving into residential care. In total, 18.5% of those accessing social care in Suffolk were being supported with a Cassius device. This results in more personalised care planning and delivery, which supports people to live as independently as possible, whether at home, in supported living, or on discharge from hospital.

Further examples of how the council is using technology and data to improve service delivery and be more efficient are outlined in the council's [Annual Plan-2024-25](#). These include:

- Investing to improve the timely production of Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews and communication with families, and enabling direct access to information for families.
- New dashboards and systems to improve monitoring of cases and caseloads and streamline the Annual Review process.
- Development of the council's website and online services so that over 85% of transactions are completed online, with offline channels such as telephone always available to support those unable to engage with services digitally.
- Collaboration between Suffolk's councils to deliver better health outcomes and locally-based services for people who want to lose weight, stop smoking, or become more physically active by enabling people to access high-quality, evidence-based resources, designed to support their health changes.
- With partners, last year Suffolk's Digital Inclusion Fund was launched for initiatives that will support people of all ages, but particularly those who are at risk of being disadvantaged by being excluded from accessing digital support and information.

Future plans/next steps

Going forward, the council's focus will include:

- Leveraging the investment made in our digital content platform to provide modern council websites. This includes developing and launching a new ceremonies marketing website for the Suffolk Registration Service and a new careers website to support staff recruitment and retention.
- Exploring the transformative potential of generative artificial intelligence (AI).

- Using our new linked Population Health Management datasets to carry out more effective evaluations of interventions in adult social care (ASC) and to support better service planning and design.
- Using data and evidence to better focus our Fire and Rescue Service prevention work and partnership working to target more vulnerable residents.
- Following work with the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System to build a linked health and care dataset for adults to identify population need, and better plan and deliver interventions, the council will work with the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board to develop a similar approach. This will improve consistency of evidence and data-led intelligence across Suffolk, enabling better outcomes for Suffolk residents.

Suffolk County Council is a founding member of the Suffolk Office of Data Analytics ([SODA](#)), established to share high-quality evidence to enable better decision making to improve the lives of Suffolk residents through:

- Joining up and analysing data from multiple sources, including internal data from Suffolk's public service organisations, its partners and nationally available data.
- Ensuring that data-sharing is lawful and appropriate.
- Applying robust analytical techniques and synthesising data to generate insight.

As a result, SODA enhances shared analytical and intelligence capacity and enables data-led innovation and service delivery design. It also maintains valuable data resources that are publicly available, such as the [Suffolk Observatory](#) and various evaluation and analyses.

The county council's public health analysts provide additional data and evidence to the system, including leading on the [Annual Public Health Reports for Suffolk](#), [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) and the [State of Suffolk](#) report that provides trend analysis against various key issues (e.g., demographics, housing, welfare, attainment).

4. Avoiding wasteful spend

What we have done so far

One of Suffolk County Council's ambitions, that underpins our delivery, is providing value for money for our residents. Among other initiatives:

- We have rolled out system-based forecasting tools across all directorates, and we will be implementing a new cash receipting system before the end of the financial year. Income and payment processes continue to evolve, along with our use of reports.
- We are ensuring we make the best use of, and get the best value from, our corporate headquarter campus. Corporate Services staff have moved from Constantine House into Endeavour House. We have taken on public sector tenants into spare space on the top floor of Constantine House and are currently looking to bring in tenants for the remaining two floors.
- We are making use of the council's assets, both land and money, to address gaps in care such as extra care housing and new models of supported housing, where investment makes good business sense. The council has worked with social housing companies to deliver supported living accommodation for our customers on land that we sell for housing schemes.
- As part of the council's work to modernise its main customer websites, new refreshed sites have been delivered for Suffolk Fostering and Adoption, Healthy Suffolk, and Suffolk Local Offer. The new websites provide improved user experience, security and accessibility, enabling more people to engage with services online.

- A peer-led network of over 100 staff, from across the council, provide support with digital adoption, skills development and learning, and explore how technology can improve services and generate savings

[Future plans/next steps](#)

Going forward the council's focus will include:

- Continuing to explore the use of combined emergency services hubs and assessing how our fire stations could be used by our partner agencies.
- Modernising our contact centre platform to improve customer experience and support more efficient ways of working.
- Reviewing, and making changes as necessary, to the service level agreements with our wholly owned companies.
- Continuing to explore opportunities to make the best use of the council's land and assets.

As well as the council's ambition to provide value for money for Suffolk residents, it prioritises good governance and accountability. Accompanying the MTFP, is the annual report from the Chief Financial Officer that must address:

- a. The robustness of the estimates made for the purpose of the budget calculations.
- b. The adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

Reported in the MTFP, and [Annual Plan 2024-5](#), is the 2024-25 financial position. Beyond setting a balanced budget for 2024-25, a budget gap is forecast to emerge from 2025-26 as pressures are expected to continue rising at a faster rate than funding. This gap is expected to reach £66.9 million by 2027-28 if there is no intervention. Although our immediate focus will be on delivering the savings plans identified for 2024-25, further plans will need to be developed, or additional funding be provided by Government, to manage the emerging gap from 2025-26 and ensure the council remains sustainable financially. The council is forecasting that it will run out of unallocated reserves by the end of 2026-27.

Beyond sound financial management of the council, ensuring good governance is intrinsic to the way Suffolk County Council works. Democratic and accountable decision making is governed by the county council's [Constitution](#). More information on the workings of Suffolk County Council is available on its website: [The council and its committees](#)

A variety of governance functions provide, checks and balances to ensure the county council acts appropriately, prudently and transparently. The [Annual Governance Statement](#), reported annually to the county council's Audit Committee, provides an overview of the governance functions, how they contribute to the good governance of the council, and intelligence used to focus their support and challenge to the organisation. These include Suffolk County Council's [compliments and complaints](#) and [privacy and data protection](#) processes.

5. Barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.

The need for longer-term, simplified, fair funding

- Replace single-year settlements with **multi-year settlements** that are better matched to need, enabling longer-term certainty of funding and facilitating better resource planning.
- **End competitive and often short-notice bidding processes** for funding that create demand on stretched capacity, and replace them with more coherent, outcomes-focussed funding across departments.
- Ensure fair allocation of **funding to enable delivery of new statutory duties**.
- **Improve the funding formulae for schools and SEND** so they are better linked to need, fairer and the lowest-funded areas lifted up to ensure all pupils receive equal opportunities and funding, and engage with the [F40 Group](#)'s demands.

The need for greater join up with, and between, Government departments

- A significant and systemic barrier to better delivery for Suffolk County Council's adult and children's social care services is **a lack of parity with the NHS**. This applies both to funding and policy design and implementation. It prevents the health and care system from working in the most integrated and efficient way, and impedes the ability to re-focus on preventative interventions required to create a sustainable health and care system and meet demand from increasingly complex needs.
- As a county with six **Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects**, Suffolk is uniquely placed to contribute to the UK's future clean and secure energy. To support this, departmental join up across Government and with local councils is essential, so that infrastructure is delivered in the right sequence and that impacts for local communities are mitigated/minimised.

Meeting increasing demand and delivery of services

- Providing **support to children and families with special educational needs and disabilities** (SEND) is a major area of challenge for the county council. Working with families, health partners and schools, Suffolk County Council is committed to improving these services. However, like most councils with children's services, there is an enormous gap between resource and demand that is growing year on year. Therefore, **ensuring that local authorities are funded properly to fulfil their statutory duties** is required, plus a rebalancing of the SEND system to make it more sustainable and improve outcomes for children.
- **Home to school transport** is also an area of significant pressure and there is a significant increase in the number of children with SEND needing transport. More resource is urgently required to deliver a more sustainable and fair approach to SEND travel services. For context, the county council's budget on home to school transport is greater than the money spent on maintaining Suffolk's highways network.

The need for a reset between local councils and Government

- Ensure **greater local influence** over funding and delivery across the area through devolution.
- Ensure better join up between Government departments and particularly councils as well as other local partners. This would provide capacity to design policy solutions that enable sustainable public services to address demand, capacity and **focus more on prevention and early help** - such as use of technology.
- Influence delivery of residential care for young people to end reliance on an increasingly **unaffordable market of private providers** and innovate to provide sufficient provision to accommodate young people with increasingly complex needs.

- Adopt ways to ***speed up and improve data sharing*** between Government departments and councils. This would improve targeting of resource and enable preventative delivery.
- ***Review data methodologies for defining deprivation*** to capture more local areas of need.