

Rushcliffe Borough Council Productivity Plan 2024

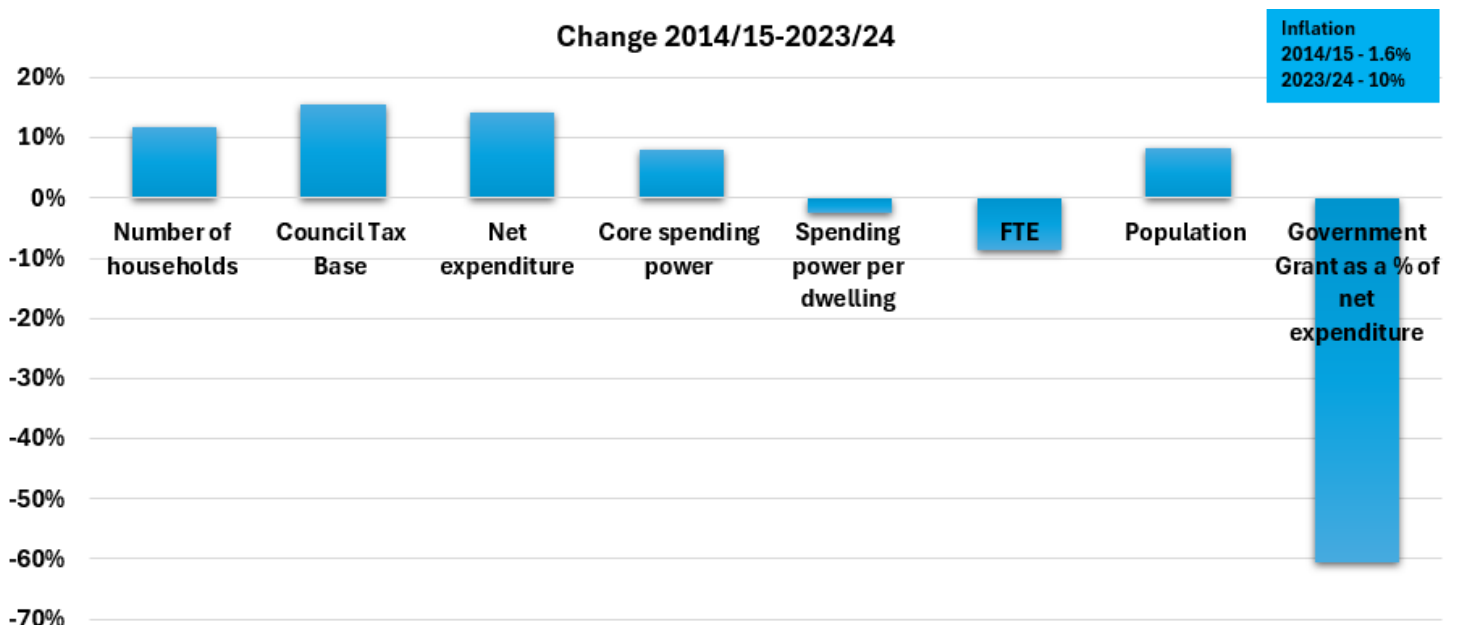
1. Introduction and Background

1.1 This document sets out a condensed version of the Council’s [Transformation and Efficiency Plan \(TEP\) 2024/25 – 2028/29](#) which was adopted by Full Council in March 2024. This document serves as the Council’s Productivity Plan, which is a new requirement from Government for 2024/25.

1.2 The full TEP outlines the Council’s approach to identifying and working with partners, recognising and maximising opportunities, and leading the way in delivering high quality services that match the needs of residents. It is clear that as the organisation becomes leaner and the Borough grows, it will become increasingly challenging to find further savings. Delivering consistently good services for our residents, while achieving necessary savings will require a more strategically focussed way of thinking.

1.3 The Council’s approach to Transformation and Productivity must be considered in the context of a number of important factors, including but not limited to: pressures to the budget as a result of cost of living crisis, rising housing benefit costs, high inflation rates, reduced funding, lack of long term financial settlement creating uncertainty, a growing Borough (20% household growth in the next 20 years), our commitment to achieving carbon net-zero by 2030 and protecting our more vulnerable residents.

1.4 The following reflects, at a high level, the changing position over the past 10 years, considering a number of key factors. While Government grants and Core Spending Power (relative to inflation) have decreased, the Council has had to serve an increasing population, with more properties, and a relatively smaller staff establishment.



- 1.5 The Transformation and Efficiency Programme sets out the Council's threefold approach to meeting continuing financial challenges while maintaining performance, through:
- Identifying cost efficiencies
 - Increasing income opportunities
 - Developing transformational alternatives for the future delivery of services
- 1.6 Since its inception in 2010, the TEP has set out to support the delivery of over £7m in efficiencies. In making savings to date, services to residents in some cases have been changed from universally free services towards chargeable choice-based services e.g.
- Garden waste collection
 - Car parking charges
- 1.7 Other services have been streamlined or transformed, to be even more productive e.g.
- Introduction of Hybrid Mail, reducing the amount of mail that is printed/posted in-house
 - Bringing street cleansing and grounds maintenance service back in-house, making savings and improving performance.
 - Outsourcing of ICT help-desk and support service
 - Reducing number of printed publications, moving to digital
- 1.8 Costs have been reduced through rationalisation of assets and staff, with the sharing of both posts and key services e.g.
- Joint waste depot with Nottinghamshire City Council
 - Building Control partnership with South Kesteven and Newark & Sherwood District Councils
 - Payroll with Gedling Borough Council
- 1.9 At the same time the Council has made it easier for customers to transact their business with online through 'My Account', at a time and in a way that suits them. This has been done without significantly impacting on service quality or resident satisfaction. Latest resident polling data (2021) shows that 84% of residents are satisfied with Rushcliffe as a place to live, compared to 83% in 2018.
- 1.10 Use of technology has been vital to delivering efficiencies in recent years. The Council introduced its Digital by Design Strategy in 2019 with the objective of understanding the Council's digital needs and delivering a programme to improve productivity. This strategy promoted four areas has successfully delivered a total of 18 projects to date, with cumulative savings of approx. £74k per annum thanks to initiatives such as:
- 'My Account' portal for our residents
 - Councillors portal for our elected Members

- Improved website
- New online venue booking system
- New workflow and automation

1.11 There is clearly still significant scope for transformation and improvements in productivity through the use of technology and AI. This will be captured in the next iteration of the Digital by Design Strategy which is currently being drafted. We are interested in exploring opportunities around the use of AI and are engaging in the Local Government Association’s cyber, digital and technology support offer.

1.12 The Council has also made good use of external funding wherever possible, including Home Upgrade Grants (HUG) and Local Area Delivery Grants (LAD), SALIX, UKSPF totalling £5m. These have been particularly valuable in supporting the Council’s goal to be carbon neutral in its own operations by 2030.

2. Addressing the funding gap:

2.1 Savings will continue be a key component of productivity moving forward:

	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000
Cumulative Savings in TEP	(5,100)	(5,833)	(6,223)	(6,457)	(6,598)
Additional TEP Savings	(733)	(390)	(234)	(141)	(240)
Cumulative TEP Target	(733)	(1,123)	(1,357)	(1,498)	(1,738)

2.2 The TEP also focuses on the generation of additional income mainly from car parking, garden waste and the digitalisation of home alarms to cover increasing costs of the service. Officers continue to seek efficiencies wherever possible and look for wider projects to improve value for money and several projects are being assessed for feasibility to deliver potential future savings.

2.3 Each year, officers undertake an internal programme of investigations looking specifically at improving efficiency through different ways of working. Budgets are challenged every year to drive out further savings whilst minimising the impact on front-line services.

2.4 The culture at Rushcliffe has been to ensure different services are reviewed regularly to make sure they are as focused upon the customer and as streamlined as possible, any identified inefficiency removed from the system and where appropriate services are moved online. The way the service is delivered is also investigated and consideration is given to potential partnership opportunities or alternative methods of delivery to protect the services that residents value without a pre-determined view.

3. Transformational Projects 2024-2029

3.1 The TEP is a continuation of the Council's original Transformation Programme and consequently, several key projects which influence service delivery and finances over the next few years are already in progress. Good progress has been made with new Transformational Projects as mentioned above. Going forward, the three major transformational projects are:

- Increase in fees for garden waste and car parking to cover increasing costs of providing the service.
- Full year effects of the Bingham Arena and Enterprise Centre and Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium. These project are both examples of where the Council has invested capital to meet the needs of our communities (both residents and businesses) to respond to growth in the Borough and to generate additional income. In the case of leisure the Council is constantly striving to improve its offer to residents and gain the benefit of contract efficiencies with Lex Leisure (it's leisure partner).
- Review of Assets, with a focus on investment and operational assets.

3.2 The current transformation and efficiency projects are detailed below and aligned with the themes of the Productivity Plan: transformation, technology and reducing discretionary expenditure (which we believe is a more appropriate term than 'waste').

	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000	26/27 £'000	27/28 £'000	28/29 £'000	Total £'000
Transformation of Services						
Leisure Strategy	(207)	(35)	(28)	23	0	(247)
Crematorium	170	(47)	(70)	(64)	(40)	(51)
West Park (Special Expense)		(39)	1	1	1	(37)
Customer Contact Centre Relocation		(50)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(53)
Country Park Car Park Charges	(50)					(50)
Charging for New Bins	(50)					(50)
Car Parking	(164)	(15)			(100)	(279)
Green bin Scheme	(238)	(98)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(636)
Bingham Enterprise	(35)		(8)			(43)
Cotgrave Phase 2	(1)	(1)	(6)			(8)
Charge for Street Naming and Numbering	(1)					(1)
Edwalton Golf Course	(21)					(21)
Streetwise insourcing	(100)					(100)
Technology						
Marketing Services	(2)	(8)				(10)

Home Alarms Digitalisation	57	(81)	(21)			(45)
Reducing Discretionary Expenditure						
Young	(26)					(26)
Remove obsolete internet content software	(8)					(8)
Grantham Canal	(26)					(26)
Reach Rushcliffe	(5)					(5)
Public Conveniences	(15)	(15)	(1)			(31)
Rushcliffe Community Voluntary Services	(8)					(8)
Mayor's Christmas Party	(4)					(4)
Total	(733)	(390)	(234)	(141)	(240)	(1,738)
Cumulative Savings To Date	(5,100)	(5,833)	(6,223)	(6,457)	(6,598)	
Cumulative Savings Carried Forward	(5,833)	(6,223)	(6,457)	(6,598)	(6,838)	

3.3 The Council gathers performance data from 250 performance indicators monitored across the authority on a monthly basis. Monthly reports highlight areas of particularly good performance for the period and areas where performance is falling below the expected standard. These exceptions are challenged at each stage of the monitoring process. A condensed version of these performance indicators is presented to the Council Corporate Overview Group (Councillors) on a quarterly basis, alongside a quarterly budget position. This information is then in the public domain and available to all Councillors and residents.

3.4 Budget monitoring is a critical part of the financial resilience process. Performance Clinics are produced every eight weeks (reviewed by Executive Management Team) and include capital and revenue financial projections, review of performance indicators, task progress and updates to risk assessments. Quarterly, finance and performance is reported to Corporate Overview Group and Cabinet. Expenditure and income variations are reported to Cabinet.

4. **Barriers**

4.1 There are a number of clear barriers which are inhibiting transformation or productivity, these include:

- Government wide/legislation changes - not yet fully aware of implications, we await further information from the Government. Examples include potential changes to waste collection, planning and the overall future financing of local government.

- Unreasonable timescales associated with bidding for and spending grant funding and a perception that Rushcliffe does not need funding when as with all authorities it is aiming to improve 'place'.
- Increased burden of requirements of current audit regime both time and financial.
- Volume of new burdens on local government without proportionate funding.
- Referendum limits on Council Tax.
- Special Expenses are part of Council Tax referendum limits. Removing these would ensure local tax setting is consistent with parish councils and enable Rushcliffe to maximise Council Tax income.
- Lack of freedom and flexibilities with regards to raising income (ie a desire for less statutory charges).
- Internal Drainage Board levies not having a separate precept and Councils having to absorb significant cost increases.
- Significant national minimum living wage increases with a 'domino' effect on pay scales. Because it hasn't been affordable to pay comparable percentage increases to more senior officers, the differentials between salary scales have been eroded making the appeal of taking on additional responsibilities more limited to staff.
- Resource shortages in the labour market resulting in requirement to pay market supplements to attract candidates.
- Challenges in recruiting to a number of key professions and disciplines including Finance, ICT, Planning and Environmental Health. Finding people with the right skill set, matched with the salaries offered in the public sector (in comparison to private sector) can be difficult. The Council appoints agency staff or consultants due to short term vacancies and lack of specialist knowledge. The cost of this is exacerbated by the aforementioned labour market recruitment challenges.
- Lack of consistent data with which to benchmark the costs of services and performance.
- Appropriate recompense for Councillors – this limits the pool of Councillors willing to stand.
- Procurement regulations – with greater reporting requirements which are barriers to productivity and pace.