

Report title: Essex County Council Productivity Plan	
Report to: Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
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Date: 27 June 2024	For: Discussion
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

Purpose of Item

Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee are to discuss the draft Productivity Plan so that it can be agreed ahead of sign-off by Leader of the Council CMA in early July. The plan must be submitted to DLUHC by 19 July.

Recommendations

Scrutiny are recommended to discuss the draft productivity plan, using the considerations set out below.

Summary of Issue

Background

As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement in February, and as a condition for receiving additional Social Care Grant, councils have been asked for the first time to produce and submit productivity plans to Government. The Minister for Local Government, Simon Hoare MP, wrote to Chief Executives in April to formally set out and start the process for producing and submitting plans.

The definition of productivity used by Government has deliberately been kept broad, recognising that efficiency and productivity are influenced by many different factors and at multiple levels. Government provided a set of questions for councils to consider when producing their plans (but which are not prescriptive) to demonstrate how they are ensuring value for money services and avoiding unnecessary spend. Government are looking to understand what is working well across the sector, common themes or gaps and ideas for how they can help to unlock future opportunities.

Productivity plans are required to be submitted to DLUHC by 19 July 2024. Member oversight and endorsement of plans is required before they are submitted, the process for which is to be determined by individual councils. Councils should consider how they will update and report on their plans on a regular basis and plans are to be published on council websites. Government have proposed to set up a

panel to consider themes and evidence emerging from the plans, chaired by the Minister for Local Government and including Oflog and the LGA.

The subsequent timing and outcome of the General Election, since plans were first announced, is likely to have bearing on the future consideration and use of productivity plans by Government. While public service productivity will be an important issue for any new government of whatever party, new Ministers may decide that they want a different approach and don't want productivity plans in this form.

We have been keeping in touch with other councils through our county networks and with Greater Essex councils to create awareness of and a degree of consistency in approaches (although recognising that individual plans will be tailored to local circumstances and preferences).

The general approach seems to be that councils are continuing with their plans, but (a) are keeping them light touch so as not to do nugatory work, and (b) are not sticking rigidly to the DLUHC template but rather telling the story in a way that is useful to them. This is the approach we have adopted too.

Content

The content for the plan has been generated by discussions with officers across the Council.

We have framed the plan around three dimensions: (a) service productivity, (b) Council productivity, and (c) system productivity. This allows us to take a broader view, to focus on wider outcomes, and to bring in issues like devolution and system working, which are critical drivers of productivity, especially in a system that is as complex as Greater Essex.

The plan highlights the Council's overall strong record on productivity and sets out the different levers of productivity with examples of how we are using them in practice to achieve better and more cost-effective outcomes.

The DLUHC template includes a section on "asks from government". This is important because many of the levers for making further advances in productivity lie with central government, rather than with local authorities. We have covered the asks from Government in brief summary form, as the Productivity Plan will be a public document. Will be able to set our asks (and offers) out in more detail when we write to new Ministers after the election.