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# Elmbridge Borough Council Productivity Plan

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July 2024



**Elmbridge**  
Borough Council

## Introduction

As part of The Local Government Finance settlement on the 7 February 2024 the government announced it was reviewing productivity across public services and that all Councils have been asked to produce productivity plans to be submitted to them by 19 July 2024.

## Transforming design and delivery of services

Our [Vision 2030 document](#) sets out our 3 year focus, a programme of continuous improvement which drives changes to our services while continuing to make best use of resources. This is reported quarterly and can be accessed publicly on our website through the [Cabinet meeting agenda](#).

We measure productivity through a set of performance indicators which monitor the performance of our services. They are reviewed by councillors and Council Management Board, to ensure that if performance falls below the expected level, it can be addressed effectively.

Improvement projects that have been completed in recent years include:

- The procurement of the new Leisure Contract, which will save £10m over 10 years.
- The launch of our Green Fleet Strategy to decarbonise our vehicles with 8 new electric vehicles in use so far generating operational cost savings and working in partnership with Surrey County Council in providing the funding for the vehicles.
- A review of parking provision so that it meets local communities needs by introducing parking discounts and increasing the number of [electric vehicle charging points](#).

The current and planned improvement projects include:

- Investigating options for a new Civic Centre Complex.
- Exploring options for a joint waste depot with a neighbouring Council.
- Improving processes and customer access to our online services.
- Continuing with our plans to [improve Esher town centre](#), working with partners and engaging with the local community.
- Progressing the Lower Green regeneration project, to improve connections with surrounding communities.
- A £700k refurbishment programme for [Hurst Pool](#) to extend the life of the pool while improving the customer experience and the pool's impact on the environment.

In recent years our organisation has become more productive by:

- The digitalisation of customer contact, which has delivered approximately £200,000 in salary savings.
- Actively pursuing opportunities to work with community interest groups and other organisations to provide services within the borough including Walton Playhouse, Riverhouse Barn and Elmbridge Sport Hub.
- Streamlining services by reducing the number of service areas from 13 to 10. This included, removing the role of Head of Environmental Services, and splitting these services between three existing teams.
- Delivering services with other public sector organisations where possible, for example:

- Our Community Alarms service is provided by a neighbouring Council, saving £40,000.
- A joint waste collection and street cleaning contract for 4 districts and boroughs managed by a single partnership team, saving an estimated £1 million per year for this Council.
- Our out of hours service is provided by a neighbouring borough.
- Our emergency planning arrangements are provided by a public service mutual serving many local councils in the area.
- We are part of Orbis, a partnership to provide an internal audit service.

Our capital programme includes capital spending to transform existing services or unlock new opportunities:

- Hurst Pool and Xcel Leisure Centres Energy Investment programme, proposed savings of around £100,000 while also improving offer to customers.

Capital spending that has boosted growth or improved services:

- We are continuing to explore opportunities in the housing market for properties to provide more temporary accommodation to satisfy the growing demand, reducing out of borough placements and reducing costs.
- We have purchased properties to assist with demands for Afghan, Ukraine, and temporary accommodation.
- In 2023-24 we purchased 16 properties at a cost of £7.2million. Two properties were also acquired for temporary accommodation costing £500,000.
- In 2024-25 three properties have been purchased totalling £1.2million and one temporary accommodation at £500,000.
- We invested in our CCTV provision to enhance the quality of the service and support closer partnership working with Surrey Police.

Preventive approaches we have undertaken to transform services include:

- Working with the Vital Village Community Interest Company, who now run one of our community buildings, we are expecting savings next year of approximately £100,000.
- Working with the third sector by providing a grant for Burview/MenCap to deliver our Cobham Link service, we achieved savings of approximately £100,000.
- We are actively working toward a Sustainable Elmbridge with our Sustainability plans and our carbon reduction plan.
- To have completed and implemented our property asset strategy review to balance operational, strategic, and financial outcomes.
- We have protected over £500,000 for voluntary sector grants.
- £1million has been put aside for climate change.
- £1million has been put aside in cost-of-living assistance in the form of grants and support to local partners.
- We spend over £600,000 per annum on temporary accommodation with the aim of reducing reliance on out-of-borough facilities, which we are aiming to reduce by the purchase of properties for temporary accommodation.
- We allocate over £4m in support to the residents in need.

## Maximising technology and data use

Elmbridge has an [ICT Digital Strategy 2023-2030](#) which ‘empowers our community, councillors and colleagues through technology’. Actions include reviewing legacy systems to reduce barriers. Progress is reported to the Cabinet annually, accessed through the [Cabinet meeting agenda](#) pages.

Our Geospatial Strategy 2030, sets out a roadmap to promote, adopt and develop new technology for managing data on locations and local demographics.

Data and reports are available to the public on our website, such as our [Publication Scheme](#) and [Knowing our communities](#). These hold Elmbridge demographic data, which is used to inform our cost-of-living funding.

There are some barriers from our legacy systems as old technology can hamper change at times making integrations more difficult.

We are part of a Surrey group sharing thoughts and ideas regarding data, although we do not share much actual data with this group. Service areas share data with partner organisations where appropriate, such as the Community Safety Partnership.

Opportunities to use new technology to improve workflows and systems that are being put in place include:

- The delivery of a new website in 2023, with phase two being investigated including chat and chatbots.
- Increasing the Councils engagement with customers using an online account.
- The use of SharePoint and Microsoft 365.
  - The next steps in our Geospatial Strategy are Cloud migration and the setting up of a data catalogue.

## Reducing unnecessary spend

Our annual budgeting process and review of our Medium-Term Financial Strategy is key in identifying where we have unnecessary spend and how it can be reduced. Our quarterly Revenue and Capital budget updates and Annual Budget reports are agreed by councillors and can be accessed through the [Cabinet meeting agenda](#) pages on our website. We have a strong financial governance structure to ensure accountability of spend.

Given the uncertainties of the economic environment and the national political landscape, the scale of reductions required presents significant risks in delivering balanced budgets over the medium term. Key strategic risks are regularly reported to councillors.

The Council has generated over £10 million in savings over a 10-year period as a result of retendering its Leisure Facilities. There has also been significant capital investment of around £7million by the provider, at no cost to the council, to improve the facilities.

The Council has built its reserves back to pre-pandemic levels, and for 2024/25 did not rely on reserves to balance its budget. Efficiency and productivity savings of £0.75 million have been identified in the 2024/25 budget as well as additional income of nearly £1.5 million. The Council identifies savings as part of the process in setting its budget based on its Medium Term Financial Strategy, the savings identified for both 2022/23 and 2023/24 have exceeded £1m each year and had no impact on the quality of our services.

We are one of the few local authorities to have had our 2022/23 accounts fully audited, receiving a [positive value for money conclusion](#) as part of this process.

An example of where we have undertaken invest to save can be seen in the part demolition of garages in Cobham to regulated parking bays. The spend will be a one-off cost of around £65,000 to generate additional income of £15,000 per annum from car parking spaces.

We have recently refreshed our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy following the LGA framework. The strategy sets how we will engage our communities using available data. Progress against the plan intends to be reviewed annually. We ensured all identified training was included in our existing learning and development offer. We currently have EDI Champions who meet quarterly to discuss internal and external EDI matters, at no additional cost.

Elmbridge uses a managed service provider (MSP) for agency workers. This enables us to monitor spend on agency workers as fees are set at the start of the contract and are typically lower than they would be if no MSP were in place.

- Approximate spend on agency workers for 2023/24 was 6.8% of the total of staff budget including NI and pensions. The approximate number of agency staff that were in place for over a year was 13.
- Approximate spend on consultants for 2023/24 was 4% the total of the total of staff budget including NI and pensions.

We use consultancy services for their specialist knowledge only or where significant unexpected work arises. They are essential for short term projects. The use of consultants for large procurement exercises has produced significant savings that would not have otherwise been possible. We are always investigating how we can share services with other councils and boroughs.

We are part of a Surrey-wide training partnership which includes the county council. This prevents duplication of training across multiple councils and means that training can be procured at attractive rates.

We do not presently share office functions with another council. We do share with the Police, voluntary sector and private sector. We currently have the option to buy in internal audit capacity from a public sector partnership between local County and City councils.

We do not have an elected mayor.

We publish our total pay bill and [trade union facility time](#) figures on our website in July of each year. The proportion of our total pay bill which is for trade union facility time is typically under 0.01%.

## Future plans

As part of our Vision 2030, in 2024/25 we will be strengthening our financial management through the second phase of our constitutional review which includes our financial procedure rules.

Spend on agency workers and consultants is reviewed by our Council Management Board. We will continue to look for savings on agency workers and consultants.

## Monitoring progress

Our quarterly financial monitoring reports, can be accessed through the [Cabinet meeting agenda](#) pages on our website.

## Barriers to progress in productivity and service improvement

The following are barriers preventing us from improving productivity further within our organisation:

- Insufficient funding, rising costs and complex rules on local government spending causing delays in delivering plans. For example, rising construction costs made planned projects for temporary housing financially less feasible.
- Scarcity of resources. For example, difficulties recruiting in some services.
- Current legislation for Local Government is complex and bureaucratic, creating challenges and barriers for officers and lay people alike to follow and therefore comply with as required, for example, business rates relief on empty properties.

The following are barriers preventing us from improving services further:

- Unpredictability of funding.
- Legislative barriers. For example, restrictions on planning fees.

These barriers are consistent across multiple services.

The following is needed from government, the market or elsewhere to remove these barriers:

- Long-term, consistent decision-making from central government would help provide stability and security for local government in forward planning, particularly for long-term infrastructure commitments. This would include engaging local authorities early in the decision-making process to develop policies that help meet the needs of both central government and local authorities. For example, Housing policies.
- A consistent and joined-up approach across government departments in dealing with local authorities. For example, one platform for all data returns
- We welcome the increase in local government funding for 2024/25. To continue to offer a financially sustainable council that provides necessary services for our residents, this funding needs to continue. Government funding needs to be fixed for a longer period, rather than the current single-year finance settlement to enable planning and certainty for decision making, ideally for at least 4 years.
- Review of an overly complicated finance system including the bidding for funds.
- Review the current reporting system for local authority finances and accounts. These reports have become increasingly challenging for the public, councillors, and officers to understand and make informed decisions.
- Revisit and implement the findings of the [Redmond Report 2020 and the government response](#) to the independent review on local authority financial reporting and external audit.
- Simplify the planning process and allow local authorities to set planning fees to re-cover costs.
- Support from government for training schemes to increase the resource pool. For example, a scheme to encourage the intake of general recruits to assist in long term succession planning.
- Incentives to promote a reduction in construction costs to facilitate building of temporary and affordable accommodation.