

Productivity Plan 2024/2025



Barnsley – the place
of possibilities.



BARNSLEY
Metropolitan Borough Council

One: transformation of services to make better use of resources

General overview

Barnsley's relatively weaker economy, low tax base and greater reliance on Government funding means Barnsley Council has been amongst those hardest hit by austerity, with a 21.2% reduction in core spending power (£116M per annum., £1bn cumulative impact since 2010).

We're a well-run council with strong political and officer leadership. We have strong financial management arrangements through the adoption of a three-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which includes, where necessary, an established, multi-year, priority-led approach to delivering transformational savings. This has enabled the delivery of £140M annual efficiency savings through to 2024, with an agreed strategy in place to deliver a further £32M over the next three years.

Our place-based plan, Barnsley 2030, sets the long-term vision for the future of the borough. This is supported by strategic outcomes that are aligned to the Council Plan across four outward-facing priorities and our inward-looking, Enabling Barnsley priority, which focuses on delivering continuous improvement and the best value. Performance is reported to Elected Members on a quarterly basis, along with financial performance updates and key strategic risks. Effective scrutiny arrangements exist to ensure robust checks and challenges of council activity, along with independent oversight from the Audit and Governance Committee to assure the appropriateness of priorities, the fair and equitable use of public funds, and tracking of transformational projects, efficiency and performance.

Through our ambitions to be even better, forward-thinking, innovation, and culture of continuous improvement, we have successfully received positive inspections and won several awards, for example, Ofsted Children's Services inspection, External Audits, LGC Awards, culminating in becoming the first double award-winning Council of the Year in 2023 for both the LGC and MJ awards.

Key background documents

[MTFS 2024-2027](#) [2019 LGA Peer Review](#) [Our annual statements of accounts](#)

What we've achieved since 2010

The delivery of £140M per annum efficiency savings over the past 13 years has fundamentally transformed our approach to service delivery, leading to a 40% reduction in our workforce. We've innovated the way we provide services, meaning we haven't had to stop delivering the services that our residents and communities rely on the most. Some examples include:

- Reconfiguration of early years provision, rationalisation of buildings and services, creating more accessible and integrated family-focused support services (£2.5M).
- Remodelled customer contact through digital transformation and channel shift to online methods (£0.8M).
- Adoption of targeted reviews of social care packages to support step-down of care where it is safe to do so (£0.6M).
- Partnership with three South Yorkshire authorities to deliver waste and recycling through a Waste PFI contract (£0.6M).
- Fundamentally re-designed waste and neighbourhood services, streamlining processes and enhancing route optimisation of bin collections (£1.7M).
- Undertook a major Building Schools for the Future programme to help improve educational outcomes and operational efficiency.
- Re-design corporate functions through the implementation of automation, streamlining processes, and the introduction of online offers and customer self-service (£1.9M).
- In-source of repairs and maintenance services resulting in significantly improved value for money (£0.4M).

Through our ambitious but successful approach to delivering savings, we've self-financed a major award-winning town centre regeneration programme, [The Glass Works Barnsley](#), improving the local economy, creating jobs, increasing footfall and working in partnership to deliver the first health on the high street NHS community diagnostic centre in England.

Current plans

In response to significant and ongoing financial challenges, in 2022, we launched a refreshed council-wide transformation programme aimed at seeking further improvements to service delivery and driving efficiency to ensure we deliver our ambitious plans for Barnsley 2030's place-based plan – Barnsley the Place of Possibilities.

The approach comprises of three key strands, including a fundamental review of service delivery, scaling up digital transformation and a refreshed [Asset Management Strategy](#), governed by our Transformation Board and which is capable of delivering £17M per annum efficiencies through to 2026.

All services have been tasked with undertaking a zero-based review to understand the survival minimum operating models with the objective of delivering a minimum 10% annual efficiency

saving. The first phase of service reviews took place over 2023/24, releasing £7.4M annual savings to support the 2024/25 budget, including £1.3M from remodelling Adults Social Care, enhancing initial interaction at the first point of contact through signposting, improving the customer experience and reducing the demand for people needing care packages. A further £1M was delivered via the Asset Management Strategy through a combination of invest-to-save initiatives, including the installation of solar panels on office buildings and the rationalisation of office space and community buildings.

The second phase of service reviews will take place over 2024/25, and the plan is to deliver a further £9.6M per annum. across 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Furthermore, in response to the exponential increase in the cost of Children's Social Care, we've implemented a revised Children's Sufficiency Strategy focused on adopting a comprehensive approach to managing the needs of looked-after children in a way that delivers improved value for money by enhancing in-borough residential care, recruitment of more in-borough foster carers, sourcing additional post 16 and semi-independent accommodation, practice improvement and edge of care services.

Looking ahead

As a result of increasing demand and inflationary pressures, our transformation plan is not sufficient to balance the books over the longer term. As part of our future planning, we have begun to formulate an alternative plan to address the shortfall of circa £15M, which includes exploring difficult decisions that may need to be taken which will have an adverse impact on the services that our residents and communities rely on the most.

Two: opportunities to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to inform decision-making and service design

What we have achieved

We've made significant strides in embracing technological advancements, leading to more informed decision-making and enhanced service design. In 2018, we launched our Digital First programme, a comprehensive initiative aimed at modernising the IT estate and transforming our approach to digital technology. At its core, Digital First was about fostering a cultural shift throughout the organisation. It encouraged both personal and collective adoption of a more digital approach to work. It has been instrumental in enabling digital mobility, improving data and records management, and adopting initiatives including paperless office, Microsoft SharePoint, digital signatures, modernisation of core infrastructure, and robotic process automation, culminating in annual savings of £1.2M.

Our current plans

We're rolling out Microsoft Dynamics, a comprehensive platform designed to enhance customer service capabilities, enabling improved management of customer contact methods. Initially adopted in Facilities Management, Waste Services and the Customer Contact Centre, delivering £0.8M savings per annum through streamlining processes, reducing manual intervention and improving the customer experience, this technology will now be rolled out across other services as appropriate.

The use of the Internet of Things (IoT) is being integrated into various aspects of our operations, including in the management of our assets, providing data to support decisions in the way we use our buildings, improving operational efficiency and minimising carbon emissions.

The shift to cloud computing is a strategic move to adopt new ways of working, increasing agility, preventing capital expenditure, reducing administrative overheads, and contributing to the sustainability agenda using Microsoft's carbon-negative data centres.

Our device strategy is being revamped, ensuring the right devices are matched with job profiles and deployed as a service, creating efficiency in IT provision and reducing the number of devices in circulation.

Looking ahead

As we look to the future, we're embracing the latest technology that will further streamline operations and enhance service delivery. We're one of the first local authorities in the UK to adopt generative AI in the form of Microsoft Copilot. We've already achieved immediate productivity benefits such as document drafting, summarisation, meeting transcription, and code debugging. Plans are underway to integrate connectors to other back-office systems, aiming to alleviate the administrative burden on frontline workers, particularly in social care.

A key move is the transition to TEAMS Telephony, which aims to simplify the communication experience, reducing expenses and administrative burdens. In parallel, the introduction of chatbots and other automated tools will enable a more efficient resolution to customer queries, allowing for the repurposing of traditional roles to more added value tasks and better supporting the digital journey of the workforce.

Furthermore, we're actively exploiting relationships with industry leaders like Microsoft to secure funding for pivotal projects. Initiatives such as telephony upgrades, implementing sustainability manager, and Power BI projects have all benefited from external funding, showcasing our ability to forge strategic partnerships that yield tangible benefits.

Data continues to play a crucial role in shaping our services. The onus on data to provide evidence-based insights is more pronounced than ever, enabling us to reshape services to meet the evolving needs of the community. We've made significant investments into business intelligence to support our drive for data-driven decisions with a focus on children's social care.

Three: plans to reduce wasteful spending within the organisation and systems

As outlined in section one, having delivered £140M per annum efficiency savings over the last 13 years takes us way beyond removing waste in service delivery.

Current activity

Through the adoption of zero-based reviews, we'll identify and understand our statutory minimum requirements, explore alternative ways of doing things and opportunities that really add value in supporting the needs of residents and communities, ensuring they're delivered most efficiently and effectively, enhancing the use of digital tools and technology to release efficiency in service delivery.

In 2023, we launched our red tape initiative aimed at reducing residual bureaucratic processes identified by staff, simplifying documentation, and improving efficiency across internal processes. Several improvements have been made, including updating contract procedure rules to provide greater clarity and more straightforward market access, removing duplicate documentation, standardising documents, and simplifying approval processes.

Furthermore, because of the rising pressures in children's social care, in the [2024/25 Section 25 Statement](#), our Director of Finance Section 151 Officer advised Cabinet and Senior Management to increase scrutiny and challenge of all material demand-led services to provide additional assurance that all relevant risks are being managed appropriately.

Use of temporary resources and spend on equality, diversity and inclusivity.

Temporary resources are only ever used to deliver specific priorities. Attributable factors include skills shortages in certain professions, resourcing temporary projects, specific skills and flexibility to increase resources without long-term commitments. We ensure value for money by collaborating with three other local authorities for the provision of temporary assignments, enabling shared best practices, streamlining processes, and the ability to negotiate better rates.

We employ two Policy and Equality Diversity Inclusivity Officers, whose roles are not specific to equality, diversity, and inclusivity-related matters. Staff training is achieved through online learning. We do not utilise consultancy in this area. There is no budget set aside specifically for quality, diversity and inclusivity initiatives.

Four: barriers preventing activity that the Government can help to reduce or remove

Financial

- **Increased funding in the system:** Local government funding is insufficient to fund the obligations placed on it. The inequity and disproportionate nature of funding cuts, coupled with the rise in demand for services, far outweigh any increases in funding, meaning more councils will reach crisis point and, ultimately, S114 notices. While the Government have provided some help, this is inadequate and fails to address the underlying pressures in the sector.
- **Local Government Finance Reform:** An urgent reform to the local government finance system is required. This reform needs to include a full review and reset of the business rates retention system to consider the growth that has occurred during the last ten years and the removal of S31 grants.
- **A funding system that follows need:** The current system has drifted away from funding allocations based on need to one based mainly on local revenue (taxation and other income) raising ability. This approach disproportionately favours those wealthier areas that have larger value tax bases; often, this is coupled with relatively less deprivation, fewer health inequalities and thus less need for government funding.
- **Multi-year funding settlements:** For the sixth year in a row, the 2024 Local Government Finance Settlement provided a single-year settlement. Multi-year settlements must be provided to enable effective longer-term planning. Moreover, while additional funding is always welcome, the timing of funding announcements makes it hard for us to use this effectively, mainly to cover immediate cost pressures rather than developing permanent, long-term, cost-effective solutions.
- **Removal of multiple funding pots:** Multiple funding pots make financial planning difficult. A review and consolidation of the myriad of social care grants is required. The requirement for councils to bid also creates unhelpful competition, added cost, reduced productivity and overly bureaucratic reporting requirements. As Council of the Year and ranked top metropolitan performer in the recent OFLOG rankings, the Government should trust us to spend money more flexibly on local priorities.

Children's services

- **National interventions in the residential children's home sector:** The government needs to intervene in the children's residential care market to ensure that public money is being spent on improving the care of children and not enhancing shareholder dividends or paying down commercial debt.
- **Revisit agency social care workforce reforms:** Remove managed teams from case-holding social work and deliver this at pace.
- **Review the impact of ever-growing inspection and regulation:** The system needs accountability, which is proportionate and ultimately improves outcomes for children.
- **Improve coherence within Government:** Remove the impact of competing national policy positions, particularly in education, criminal justice, and health, as set out in the ADCS paper, [Childhood Matters](#).
- **Reform of the SEND System:** The 2014 SEND reforms have not delivered the intended system change. Current drivers of demand cannot be addressed by the SEND and AP Improvement Plan.
- **Reform of Home to School Transport:** Address escalating home to school transport costs, which in part are driven by the current statutory guidance. The core legislation dates to the 1944 Education Act and is no longer fit for purpose.
- **Develop an inclusive education system** that meets the needs of all children, as set out in the ADCS policy paper, [A future vision for the education system](#). Proposals in the Schools White Paper Opportunity for All and the Timpson Review of School.

Other key barriers for the Government to consider

- Clarification of the implementation of Adult Social Care Reforms to include a full impact assessment and commitment to fully fund the reforms.
- A review of the NHS capital departmental expenditure limit rules to enable increased capital investment to support independence and prevention.
- New funding models to accelerate housing growth.
- A review of the housing revenue account model, specifically to consider the impact of the new regulatory framework.
- Regulation of private landlord rent levels.
- Standardisation and greater coherence of asylum and migration schemes and funding
- Clarification of the implementation of the Environment Act and extended producer responsibility.
- Adopt a system-wide Pathways to Work programme.
- Further regulation of the agency market.
- Relaxation of rules surrounding the use of the apprenticeship levy.