



# Productivity Plan

July 2024

## Bradford Productivity Plan 2024

The Government wrote to Local Authorities in April 2024 to confirm they were carrying out a review of productivity. All Local Authorities were asked to produce a Productivity plan and were given a list of issues to cover within the plan. This document forms the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council's response to that request and the structure.

### Background

Bradford is the ninth largest council in England with a population of 560,200 and it is the fifth largest Metropolitan Authority. However, given its size, diversity, levels of need and the scale of the financial pressures it presents a greater level of complexity. Bradford is a major economic centre with 16,600 businesses and a £12bn economy, its growth potential has seen it named as one of the UK's leading growth opportunities. Bradford will be UK City of Culture 2025 and local leaders are progressing an ambitious pipeline of projects that are designed to unleash the district's potential. Central to those plans is a new rail station which would unlock significant regional growth.

Our productivity plan must be set against the fact that since 2011 our population has increased by 7.1% (37,100 people) whilst we have had to find £298 million of cuts and savings due to national austerity measures, inflation and increased demand.

Bradford's assets include enterprising, globally connected businesses and a strong manufacturing base; innovative public services; a vibrant voluntary and community sector and a university at the forefront of thinking on the circular economy and boasting the highest numbers of AI students in the country. Powerful data and analytics offer includes Born in Bradford's unique evidence base of the factors affecting the wellbeing of children and families.

The district does though, face significant challenges to achieving its full potential. Bradford has persistent high levels of deprivation and is England's 5th most income deprived local authority district with 36% of children living in low-income households. Weekly wages are £70 below the national average, unemployment is above average. An educational attainment gap between Bradford and the rest of the country persists and the number of people with good qualifications is relatively low.

### Improvement Plan and Spending Control

In the face of these major challenges and the need to secure the financial sustainability of the Council given its current reliance on Exceptional Financial Support, the Council will be focussing on three key objectives: securing its financial sustainability, improving Children's Services and outcomes and developing and delivering plans for inclusive growth.

The need for the financial actions arises because a structural gap of £120m at 31 March 2024 has been identified. This is an unprecedented level of financial pressure caused by several internal and external factors. These factors include the impact of austerity, increasing demand pressures on social care and other services much of which is driven by high levels of deprivation, and a system of funding local authority services that fails to take Bradford's needs and local resource base properly into account. This has been compounded by delays in addressing key pressures and budget gaps appropriately. In some years budget savings were not delivered in full and mitigating action was not identified.

Given the scale of this challenge Bradford Council engaged with Government to secure solutions that would help to secure financial sustainability. The then Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (Now Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government) commissioned an independent review of the council's finances which was conducted in August/September 2023, and reported at the end of February 2024, by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy). This review and resulting action plan can be found here: [CIPFA External Assurance Review](#)

The six key CIPFA recommendations have been resolved. Of the forty-four other CIPFA recommendations thirty are in progress and fourteen are complete.

Bradford then applied for Exceptional Financial Support for £80 million in 2023-24, and £140 million for 2024-25. Government have supported the 2023-24 request and has indicated that it is minded to support the 2024-25 requirement. A Best Value Notice was, consequently, issued to Bradford Council by the Government on the 29 February 2024. This a formal but non-statutory request for the Council to engage with MHCLG to provide assurance of improvement. This assurance is being delivered through our Improvement Plan which is currently under development. This document will also replace our Corporate Plan for 2024 to 2025 and form the plan we will measure improved productivity against.

Grip and control in this area is driven by our Bradford Budget Emergency Response Team and Financial Stability process. This evidenced through our budget process for 2024/25 and 2025/26 that includes:

- The elimination of non-essential expenditure secured through a spending panel structure.
- Major reductions in revenue budgets in 2024/25 through to 2029/30.
- A significant asset disposal programme.
- Ceasing all but essential recruitment.
- Review of fees and charges with resulting projected increased income.
- Continuing our review of the Council's Capital Investment Programme.
- A planned review of traded services not operating under a full cost recovery model.

- A planned contracts and procurement review.

## Inclusive Growth

**The Built Environment and Regeneration of the district** - Bradford is one of the UK's major opportunity areas with c.£5bn of transformational transport schemes announced (Rail: Network North and Mass Transit). The city centre has also been designated as a major part of the West Yorkshire Investment Zone and the towns of Keighley and Shipley are benefiting from investment through the Towns Fund. These developments have vastly increased Bradford District's overall development capacity and are the pre-cursors to boosting the overall productivity of the district and the wider North. To capture and sustain this productivity and GVA enhancement, the Council is applying a much stronger focus on delivery alongside our public sector and private sector partners. Development Frameworks for the city centre and principal towns and Concept Plans have recently been developed and a robust governance model has been established including the new Southern Gateway Board which incorporates key delivery partners such as DfT, DLUHC, Network Rail, Homes England and the Combined Authority.

**Housing Growth:** Bradford has re-committed to completing its Local Plan in 2025 and as part of large asset disposal programme is actively reviewing its approach to developing strategic housing sites. Pro-active work has also been undertaken to identify potential opportunities for new communities along the proposed West Yorkshire Mass Transit route(s) and other local transport hubs including the planned new Bradford city centre rail station. The Southern Gateway is shortlisted as West Yorkshire's single largest spatial priority areas (SPA) and will deliver housing growth for neighbouring inner-city areas, alongside large housing site designations within the city centre. The market-making City Village scheme plans to deliver 1,000 new residential units in the core-city centre, is a partnership with English Cities Fund and is soon to receive a determination on a substantial application to Homes England for Brownfield, Infrastructure and Land funding.

**UK City of Culture 2025** - The vision for Bradford District's year of Culture, approved by Government through the selection process, is that by 2026:

- Bradford will have come of age and mobilised a new young generation of leaders and changemakers.
- Creativity will be celebrated in every home and every street.
- Our agile cultural and creative sector will be bigger, will have scaled up and will play a leading role in the growing economic success and sustainability of the district and the UK.
- Bradford's reputation will be transformed, and a new and coherent identity will drive a destination of choice for national and international visitors to

experience exceptional cultural activity and for artists to create outstanding work.

- The trajectory of the UK's youngest and most exciting population is shifted, and all district residents enjoy happier lives, better wellbeing, skills, and opportunities.

Achieving the objectives of 2025, is key to unlocking the potential of our place and our people. Therefore, effective, and collaborative working between the Culture Company and the council and a range of key stakeholders has now been established.

## Corporate Planning Underpinning Productivity

Bradford has a robust and systemic approach to planning and monitoring our productivity. Our strategic intent is established in our Council Plan [Bradford Council Plan](#) and how we will work with our strategic partners in our District Plan [District Plan](#). Both of those documents are currently being reviewed for 2025 with a focus on rationalising priorities to ensure deliverability within current fiscal boundaries and to underpin priorities with resource.

Our financial processes align to our strategic priorities as seen through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Budget for 2024-2025 [Budget](#)

One of our key commitments is to be an Enabling Council meaning:

- We will work to deploy our resources – people, money, buildings, land, ICT and digital infrastructure – in a sustainable and responsible way.
- We will deliver efficient, value for money services, minimise risk and support improved outcomes across the district's key priorities.

## Transformation

We have a dedicated service that leads on transformation, and we have achieved improved performance and productivity already. This work is overseen by a Transformation Board consisting of senior and strategic leaders to ensure that work is assured and co-ordinated across the Council.

Some Key Areas examples to date are:

**Adult Social Care** - Recognising the scale of the challenge required a joint approach with our partners in the Health and Social Care System, we worked with them to develop and agreed shared vision and related operating model which is adopted and embedded both strategically and operationally. The operating model is structured around the following levels of support:

- Help to help yourself (Self Care – advice and information)
- Help when you need it (prevention and early help – Advice, information, and Community based support)
- Help to live your life (assessment and support)

The quality of life of people in adult social care and the quality of life of carers in Bradford District is higher than the national average [OFLOG](#) . Bradford are high investors in short-term services, leading to lower investment in long-term adult social care and higher performance and outcomes for people. Our plan is therefore to maintain investment in those short-term services to manage demand and the council's budget.

**The Clean Air Zone (CAZ)** was put into operation in 2022. Since 2022, we have supported:

- Upgrade of the taxi fleet to 98% compliant with electric hybrid standard – arguably the cleanest taxi fleet in the UK.
- Upgrade of over three hundred buses, ensuring all scheduled and tendered services are CAZ standard, with forty new electric buses in the district in 202.
- The revenue from the CAZ will go towards several projects including a Clean Schools Programme which will reduce pollution at Schools across the Bradford District and a grants programme to support business and residents upgrade to cleaner vehicle choices.

**SEND** - Bradford is part of the SEND Change Partnership Programme which is looking at managing and reducing demand for EHC Plans, improved outcomes for families of C&YP with SEND and increasing inclusivity in schools. One element has been the implementation of the SEND Portal so that all EHC assessment requests can be done on-line. School place applications are also on-line now and 96% of applications are done via this portal. This has enabled demand to be managed. Based on the work we have done to date; Bradford has remained below the national average for EHC Plans (4% when national is at 4.3%) and our High Needs Block is still in surplus.

Our key transformation themes are:

**Workforce & Structure:** Our Council will be re-shaped to become affordable and deliver lean and innovative services within the resources that are available. A 'one council' approach will guide this programme to reduce fragmentation and duplication; create efficiencies and consistency; and ensure professional functions and resources sit together. One strand is a governance framework programme (including support for the Boundary Commission review) to ensure enhanced compliance to governance standards and reduce risk to the organisation (e.g. service planning project).

**Digital:** We will enable our future services to be as high performing as possible by focussing on the needs of our customers. We will create efficiencies and improve

customer experience by embodying a 'digital first' culture. One strand being Approval of the Contact Management Business Case delivering the first deployments of Voice Automation in the Clear Air Zone (CAZ) with the benefits of £1.6m p.a. from 25-26.

**Locality:** We will seek to prevent avoidable demand through early help, signposting residents to community-based assets, and supporting residents to live well. We ensure we have the right people in the right place at the right time and with the right skills to meet the needs of individuals.

Other foci to maximise our productivity include:

- Our Children & Families Trust implementing a business case for change – including a capital investment in local provision for residential placements to replace costly reliance on private providers.
- Our System finance approach that looks to create efficiency at the interface of intermediary care and how we use our collective estate across the district.
- A planned extensive asset disposal programme to include several Community Asset Transfers so we operate fewer buildings and lower direct costs while sustaining outcomes in local communities.
- Bradford is City of Culture 2025; this creates a unique opportunity to drive economic growth in the district and to provide opportunity to our young population to raise aspiration and develop skills.

## Making Better Use of Technology & Data

Our district wide ambition is set out in our Digital strategy - [Digital Strategy](#) Bradford has made a commitment to data led decision making and investing in skills and innovation.

Born in Bradford is one of the largest research studies in the World, tracking the lives of over 30,000 Bradfordians to find out what influences the health and wellbeing of families. We plan to use the findings from this study to develop new and practical ways to work with communities to shape the regenerate plans for our district and develop the built environment in a way that maximises improvements to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Within the Local Authority this manifests itself through a few cross-council work streams:

**Data & Intelligence Board** – The Council has an action plan to support our part of the delivery of the strategy focus on data. This action plan includes a training programme for staff, a partnership focusses to create Data as One on key themes for example e.g. predictive data models and generating cultural data maturity and legacy from our City of Culture status.

Bradford has one of the first ten **Health Determinants Research Collaboratives** building research structure within Local Authorities. This work is delivering the following:

- Rapid reviews of existing evidence and accessible briefings.
- Data and modelling to support whole system linked data across local government, NHS and other local agencies.
- Training staff in research methods to support choosing, using and generating research.

Bradford is piloting Robotic Process Development. This is being carried out under our new AI policy. This approach will allow staff time to be refocus on complex decision making and tasks.

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We have a small number of staff dedicated to work on this agenda however it is critical to successful delivery in a district as diverse as Bradford. Among other things, the key staff support us to fulfil statutory legal requirements round equalities e.g. quality assuring Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). Most training is delivered through online modules.

There is widespread evidence that demonstrates that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the workforce promotes better productivity. In Bradford, it helps us understand and therefore serve our communities better. Given the level of deprivation in our district and our role as corporate parents it also allows us to assess for policy and/or service delivery impact on those with low income and/or care experience. By assisting the Council to ensure that service delivery is attuned to needs this work helps to deliver better, more productive outcomes and reduce pressures on other public services such as the NHS.

## West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Bradford is an active and influential partner in West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and played a key role in securing the biggest devolution deal to date. Our partnership is now working to The West Yorkshire Plan [The West Yorkshire Plan](#)

West Yorkshire is to be among the next wave of trailblazer deals and our asks from Government are set out in this letter [Letter to DLUHC](#), however, pivotal requirements are for:

- A single flexible financial settlement
- Full devolution of adult employment skills and careers funding.
- Assurance of continued commitment to mass transit in West Yorkshire.

- Money, powers and market reform for buses.
- Increase commitment to work on net zero.

## Government Support - Policy Change and Market Regulation

**We welcome the Government's commitment to multi-year financial settlements which are needed to provide certainty and support better financial management and securing of financial sustainability for Bradford and for the wider sector.**

**We also welcome the Government's aim to end competitive funding streams.** Government funding for regeneration should be awarded according to evidence of need and impact rather than through simple per capita formulae and competitive bidding, which is expensive, time consuming and diverts Council resources from other activities with no certainty around the outcomes.

**Agility and flexibility on Levelling Up Fund projects.** There needs to be a clear recognition that many of the original projects have evolved into meaningful schemes which can be delivered however, a faster, more agile change approval request process is required to allow these projects to commence.

**Fair and sustainable funding for vital Council services** and to support the delivery of growth. Urgent acceleration of financial reforms to reflect needs and local resources. Bradford's low local tax base presents challenges because, Band D Council tax is 8.5% below the average for Metropolitan authorities and 80% of households are below Band D. This means that increases in Council tax raise far less money in Bradford than in many other often more affluent, places potentially leading to postcode lotteries in the range and quality of local services. In Bradford, raising Council tax and social care to the maximum allowed without a referendum would only raise around £13m a year which is dwarfed by inflationary pressures of over £60m. Furthermore, excluding exceptional financial support, the proportion of the Council's budget funded by council taxpayers is now 57% compared to 37% in 2011 and the burden of council tax falls disproportionately on households on lower incomes. The use of council tax to bridge local authority funding gaps therefore represents an increasingly regressive measure and the system requires reform with funding based on need and local resources. Independent analysis by sector experts Pixel demonstrates that overtime Bradford would benefit by £32m a year from implementation of the Fair Funding Review and reforms to business rates. These reforms have been persistently delayed and we now need to see rapid implementation.

**Sufficient funding to meet demand and complexity in Children's and Adult Social Care.** Pressures on children's social services reflect national issues around increasing demand and complexity and challenges in recruitment and retention as

well as the need to deliver improvements in Bradford. The Association of Directors of Children's Services has estimated that authorities will need £778m just to standstill. Bradford must also improve its services and we have moved to a Children's Trust model that will require sustainable funding. Gross expenditure on Children's Social Care (inclusive of services provided by BCFT and others provided by the Council) has increased by over £150m, from c£100m in 2019-20 to over £250m in 2023-24, and benchmark spend has gone from low to extremely high over that period. In relation to adult social care, Bradford is a relatively low cost, high performance but has considerable and rising demand and need driven by population growth, complexity of cases and significant deprivation. Increasing demand sits alongside challenges in recruitment and retention as competitive wages for care workers are increasingly unaffordable for cash strapped Councils.

**Public Sector Reform.** We must seize this opportunity to do things differently especially in demand driven areas such as social care recognising the key role of local councils and their partners in service delivery, leadership and collaboration and in understanding their communities. We want to play our part; for example, Bradford has worked with Government to trial place-based approaches to public service delivery, and we are keen to build on that work to secure flexibility in the deployment of public resources across agencies.

**Invest in prevention and early help.** Key to improving outcomes in public services is recognition of the demand and inflationary pressures on local authorities that restrict the scope for investment in early help and prevention. But, while new investment is necessary, Bradford's data and analytics offer focussed on prevention and early help can test new approaches that will reduce pressure on statutory services. We want Bradford to act as a testbed for new, flexible approaches to place based public services that maximise the impact of the totality of public spending in the district and provide flexibility around the use of existing resources across organisations and systems.

**Market Regulation of Children's Residential Placements.** The Market and Competitions Authority has determined that a dysfunctional market for children's residential care is fuelling private sector profiteering from competition for scarce places. Residential fees are up from £3,600 per week in 2020-21 to c£6,500 now. If enacted, the recently proposed Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill will permit only not-for-profit organisations and councils to provide fostering, children's home, and secure accommodation placements. If carefully implemented and properly resourced, this could remove market-driven inflation and keep costs down. The government could consider similar legislation for England. The private sector has profited from public funds and the public sector offers good quality at a lower price, but we lose staff to the private sector who can afford to pay far higher wages and charge accordingly, for often provision that is no better or even less good than that in the public sector.

## Working Together

The legislative agenda set out in the King's Speech on 17 July 2024 provides a number of critical opportunities for Government and Local Authorities to work together to deliver growth and solutions to some of the challenges that have impacted our district. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with Government and the Mayoral Authority on how these things are implemented to support improved productivity and public reform.