

Nottinghamshire County Council Productivity Plan

July 2024

About Nottinghamshire

Nottinghamshire County Council is an upper tier local authority situated centrally, within the East Midlands. We operate in a two-tier area, working with district, borough, town and parish councils to serve a local population of over 834,800 residents. Alongside our key partners, we're committed to delivering the healthy, prosperous and greener future that all our communities deserve, as set out in [The Nottinghamshire Plan](#).

We employ over 7,600 staff and in 2024/25 will be spending £1.4 billion on over 400 services to benefit every resident, business and community in Nottinghamshire. 36 per cent of this budget will be spent on our adult social care and public health provision to help support adults to live well and independently for longer, whilst a further 30 per cent is dedicated to local schools, to ensure every young person has access and opportunity to education.

The council has also recently become a constituent member of the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA), in partnership with Nottingham City, Derby City and Derbyshire County Council. This will grant additional powers to local government from Whitehall, which enable us to make the decisions that matter most to local people.

The Nottinghamshire Plan

The Nottinghamshire Plan 2021-31 sets out the strategic vision for the future of Nottinghamshire and the Council, built around achieving a bold 10-year vision for a 'healthy, prosperous and greener future for everyone', with a particular focus on:

- Improving health and well-being in all our communities
- Growing our economy and improving living standards
- Reducing the County's impact on the environment
- Helping everyone access the best of Nottinghamshire.

These broad themes will build resilience in our communities into the future and are supported by nine ambitions which provide a framework for all County Council activity:

- Helping our people live healthier, more independent lives
- Supporting communities and families
- Keeping children, vulnerable adults and communities safe
- Building skills that help people to get good local jobs
- Strengthening businesses and creating more good-quality jobs
- Making Nottinghamshire somewhere people love to live, work and visit
- Attracting investment in infrastructure, the economy and green growth
- Improving transport and digital connections
- Protecting the environment and reducing our carbon footprint.

A tenth ambition – 'A forward-looking resilient Council' – outlines the Council's plans to strengthen processes, systems and ways of working that enable the whole organisation to deliver efficient and effective services for Nottinghamshire's people and communities. Looking to the future, work to reform the organisation into a forward looking, sustainable and resilient council will become an increasing corporate priority, particularly so that the Council can remain ambitious for the County and fit for the future.

The Plan sets out what the County Council will do over the next ten years to achieve these ambitions as well as how it will measure progress and success. The Plan also details the Council's on-going journey of improvement as we continue to deliver services in a responsive, efficient, financially sustainable and forward-looking way. It is supported by an Annual Delivery Plan, which is monitored regularly, and reported through Cabinet. The latest Annual Delivery Plan and assurance reports can be [found here](#).

Key achievements in the delivery of the Nottinghamshire Plan include:

- The establishment of the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA), which brings up to £4 billion investment to secure improved growth, jobs, housing and transport connectivity, and creates a platform for wider public service reform to improve the lives of residents.
- Working with partners to bring STEP Fusion technology to the county. West Burton in Bassetlaw was selected as the home of the government's ambitious STEP fusion energy programme, offering clean, green energy to the UK in a world first, along with high skilled jobs for local people, and large-scale infrastructure investment.
- We have continued to maintain and strengthen our strong record of first choice school allocation for primary and secondary school children. In 2024, 95.6 per cent of primary school children got their first choice, whilst 91.4 per cent of secondary school children got their first choice. We have achieved this by investing over £38.3m during 2023/24 in new schools and expanding existing school's capacity.
- Launching Foster for East Midlands, the fostering recruitment support hub across Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, aimed at increasing recruitment and retention of foster carers. The first of its kind in the country, since its launch, FfEM has already seen an increase in the number of regional fostering applications compared to the last financial year.
- Introducing technology enabled care (TEC) to support people with care needs to remain independent. Following Cabinet approval in March 2024, the TEC strategy is now being implemented, with 27 Lilli TEC devices now being piloted in the south of the county. As of January 2024, the Council provided TEC services to 43% of people who receive our support to maintain their independence at home, the aim is to increase this to 70% by April 2027.
- Delivery of the Nottinghamshire Bus Service Improvement Plan, resulting in more effective and expanded bus services, including the introduction of evening services. A student travel scheme has also successfully been launched in partnership with local bus operators and colleges in Mansfield and Ashfield, with 2,100 students now using local buses to access education, work and leisure, with the scheme having been awarded the prestigious Bus Centre of Excellence, Bus Initiative of the Year 2024.

Finances

Nottinghamshire County Council is in a better financial position than many due to both a sound fiscal management approach and the significant ongoing transformation of our services. This has enabled us to maintain high quality delivery of our services whilst limiting the increase in council tax upon our residents. We have also used reserves wisely to protect services as much as possible in the short to medium term, thus giving the Council time to transform. We remain focussed on getting the maximum value for the people and communities of Nottinghamshire and in our most recent audit, we received a positive value for money judgement from our external auditors.

Budget pressures and inflationary increases, totalling £56.6m, were required to meet the rising costs and increasing demand for the Council's services, for 2024/25. Despite this, the Council has been able to maintain its investment in a wide range of universal and targeted preventative and community services, notably children's centre services, youth services and libraries. For 2024/25 we are investing ~ £13.1m into our libraries, ~ £9.5m (including £3.2m public health grant) for Childrens Centres and Family Hubs, alongside ~ £3.4m for youth services. Being in a position to maintain investment in community-based early support is key to achieving the long-term vision of helping people to live healthier, more independent lives, whilst relying less on high-cost statutory services.

Effectively meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in a timely way is both a national and local challenge, and a key area of focus for us. We have a long history of inclusive practice in Nottinghamshire, with schools able to access additional finance to enhance provision to meet children's needs in mainstream educational settings where possible, without the need for an education, health and care plan. This means we have a lower rate of education, health and care plans as compared with our statistical neighbours. As part of our improvement activity, we are also further strengthening the graduated response whilst improving the timeliness and quality of education, health and care assessments and plans.

Transforming services to make better use of resources – impact to date

Our approach to financial sustainability in our high spend people services, involves both continuous improvement and targeted transformation activity in areas where there is most potential to both improve vulnerable people's experiences and outcomes and in doing so, reduce costs.

Our continuous improvement approach also involves taking person-centred, strengths-based approaches to working with people that need our support. In adult social care, this means supporting people to develop their independence through building skills and confidence, and connecting people to a wider network of support to help them live the best life they can whilst reducing reliance on long-term care. Examples of impact include:

- Between September 2022 and March 2023, the number of people connected to a community group or the voluntary sector as part of their support offer, increased by 32%.
- In 2023/24 there were reductions in the inappropriate use of short-term care, resulting in a reduction in spend of £752,511 for the year.

In children and family services, it means working creatively and flexibly to respond to the individual needs of children, whilst working with partners to support children at the lowest level of intervention. This has resulted in the numbers of children supported through statutory child protection plans reducing, with those children being subject to a child protection plan for a second time within two years, being 23 per cent, as of January 2024. This frees up social work capacity to provide more intensive support to families at higher levels of need, reducing escalations to care.

Through our organisational change portfolio, we have successfully improved resident outcomes and through this, avoided cost in areas where demand and cost pressures are causing financial challenges:

- The introduction of a multi-agency model for child protection, integrating domestic abuse, substance misuse, adult mental health, and social workers within a multi-disciplinary team to provide more holistic support to families.
- The introduction of a new model bringing together social workers, family support workers and youth workers to support young people on the edge of care, is supporting more families to stay together and avoid care. Between September 2022 and February 2024, the team has worked with 158 young people of whom 48% have remained out of care and 18% have had their admission to care delayed, both improving their outcomes and avoiding cost.
- Increasing the reach and impact of the Maximising Independence Service, which supports adults with care needs to maximise their independence, has enabled 2,421 people to complete reablement after coming out of hospital in 2023/24, compared with 1,611 in 2022/23, equating a 50% year-on-year increase in delivery. The average saving per person per week (based on figures from quarter 1 to quarter 3) was £167.49 in 2023/24, compared with £89.74 in 2022/23. This equates to an 87% year-on-year improvement in delivery and represents total savings of £1.5m over the year.

The organisational change portfolio is tracked and monitored through an Organisational Change Board, ensuring oversight and accountability to the changes we make. We have recently taken a paper to the Council's Overview Scrutiny Committee outlining the approach to organisational change. Papers can be found [here](#).

Transforming services into the future

Whilst maintaining a focus on our transformation of people services, we're refocussing our wider transformation approach from one of primarily internal transformation to one of public service reform, looking at opportunities to work more collaboratively with our public sector partners to deliver long-term improvements to residents' experiences and outcomes, and make more efficient use of our collective financial resource. Prevention is at the heart of this agenda, with priorities including:

- Making information, advice and support more accessible so that people can find the right help, at the right time and in the right place, through improved online information that can enable people to self-help as well as connect with support available across the Nottinghamshire partnership.
- Delivering family hub networks to provide more joined up support to families in their local communities addressing parental as well as children and young people's needs.

- Extending community-based roles such as local area coordinators and health and wellbeing champions to connect people to support that prevents their needs from escalating.
- Furthering the building blocks of good health to support residents to enjoy more years in good health and to prolong life through the organised efforts and informed choices of ourselves and our partners, alongside society, communities and individuals.

We are also embarking on an ambitious programme to maximise the use of data, digital and artificial intelligence to both improve residents' experiences and improve workforce productivity and efficiency:

- Our [Data Strategy](#) sets out how we will transform our use of data both within the organisation and across the partnership to strengthen strategic planning, decision-making and effective use of resources. Matching data across organisations will enable a better understanding of community needs and enable more tailored interventions and solutions to be developed.
- Our emerging Digital programme will involve redesigning priority processes to incorporate digital solutions, testing the use of Chatbots and piloting sensors in homes to support preventative care, and in our highways fleet, to enable better mapping and coordination of road maintenance.
- We are taking the opportunity to make necessary changes to our business management system and social care records management system, to ensure they are modern and fit for purpose, so they can help us maximise operational efficiency and productivity.

Productivity, Efficiency and Oversight

As a Council, we have a proven track record in maintaining financial stability and doing all we can to mitigate and reduce pressures on our budget. Part of this includes being vigilant on spending within the organisation and systems, and continually looking for opportunities to improve efficiency.

Monthly budget monitoring information is provided into the public domain via reports to Cabinet or the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources. Budget update reports are also provided to Overview Committee throughout the year.

In addition, the Council's refreshed Quality & Performance Management Framework 2024-2027 has been designed to outline how the organisation will understand how well it is performing and how we will nurture continuous improvement across departments. There is a particular emphasis on the role all Council staff have to play in ensuring the effective implementation of performance and quality management tools and mechanisms, which allow us to target our resources efficiently, for the benefit of residents.

Following implementation of our new governance system from a committee system to a Leader and Cabinet model in May 2022, we also continue work with members and officers to review our new arrangements, develop the Council's approach to Scrutiny and to embed understanding and good practice across the organisation, to allow for increased transparency and oversight.

Opportunities to make further progress – how government can help

- Tackle major policies which result in poorer value and worse outcomes, including funding and eligibility criteria regarding SEND, as well as home-to-school transport entitlement.
- Continue to progress the Devolution agenda, granting more powers and decision making to local authorities, whilst stopping the competitive nature of funding bids.
- Increased freedoms and flexibilities that encourage a greater focus on outcomes, allowing authorities to spend ringfenced grants and to reduce the number of/ increase the delivery period of grant funded programmes.
- Provide multi-year settlements that allow for better workforce planning and improved value commissioning, to enable local authorities to plan for the longer term.
- Better data sharing with national departments such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to enable more automated processing in areas such as blue badges, benefit claimants etc.
- Improved clarity regarding relevant reforms, in particular – charging reform in Adult Social Care, reforms to the current system of placements for children needing care, as well as the potential impact from Extended Producer Responsibility (Packaging) reforms.
- Labour and national market intervention, regarding the private equity dominance of children's placements, as well as agencies being able to charge a premium for in-demand or specialist roles.