

To better serve Dudley borough
Dudley Council Improvement Plan
A summary



Welcome

Welcome to our Dudley Council Improvement Plan. This plan outlines how we are working to improve the council itself as an organisation, as well as the services we deliver to local people. The plan focuses on:

Delivering high quality, value for money services to our communities, continually striving to improve our partnership and community working.

Background

The past few years have presented unprecedented challenges for local councils. Reduced funding from central government, increasing demands and costs has meant councils have to do more, with less.

Alongside these budgetary and demand challenges, the council had faced scrutiny reports from external bodies (the Local Government Association, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and external auditors) which all stated there was an urgent need for improvements across the organisation. Weak areas included a poor culture, strained relationships and poor financial management.

The council has responded with a determination to make radical changes to the organisation, how it operates and the way in which services are provided.





What have we done?

We have been responding to these challenges and have, over the past year made some swift, significant and much needed savings across the council.

We have also been laying the groundwork for the longer-term transformation of the council into a leaner, more cost effective, financially sustainable and efficient establishment able to face future challenges. This work has included the design of a new operating model which has community focus at the centre.

Where are we now?

We are now working towards a new Dudley Borough and the Dudley Council Improvement Plan is our way forward on the improvement journey. The needs of local people are at the heart of the plan, as is support to the local economy.

We acknowledge that there is a lot to get done, but we will be working closely with our committed staff, as well as local residents and organisations to make sure we become a council that is working well and that everyone can rely on. The heart of the plan recognises that there has been leadership, cultural and governance (the ways in which council staff are accountable to the elected councillors and the local community) issues and the plan is putting in place solid actions to address these weaknesses, which can be tracked and monitored.

Things central to the plan:

Communications and engagement

Effective communication to residents, partners and staff is vital and the plan recognises this. Two-way communication and engagement will be the way the council operates going forward and will further inform and co-design the wider plan. There will be more consultation, discussions and opportunities to have a say and feed into the shaping of services around the needs of local people, improving customer service and reducing duplication and waste. There will also be more joint partnership working with other organisations across the borough to make sure local people have solid, joined up services – working to a shared aim.

Governance

The plan will have much stronger governance and scrutiny (the process for reviewing and questioning decisions made by the councils leadership). Scrutiny committees, revised reporting mechanisms and clearly defined responsibilities and accountability will be laid out and monitored.

Risk and issue management

There are risks associated with such large scale change across the council. Risk mitigations have been put in place and will be closely monitored on an ongoing basis.

Resourcing the plan

We will make sure the right resources are in place to deliver this plan. There is a solid commitment to make the changes needed, to invest where required – for example where there may be skills gaps, and embed the new ways of working involved in the plan.





The Dudley Council Improvement Plan

The plan follows a co-design principle meaning leaders will be working together with staff from all levels, and across all functions of the council to redesign the organisation and its services.

Cross council working (services all working together jointly – rather than in isolation), collaborative working as well as joint working with other organisations (such as health, police, voluntary and community groups) and communities is at the heart of the plan.

The plan is based around the government's 'Best value standards for local authorities'. This guidance sets out seven themes of good practice. These themes provide the structure for our plan and the guidance makes it clear 'what good looks like' for a well-functioning council, as well as showing poor performance.

The seven key themes of the plan: The best value framework

Theme 1 - **leadership**

Development of people, processes and the Council Plan

Theme 2 - **culture**

Development of people, processes and relationships

Theme 3 - **governance**

Development of people, processes and provision of information to inform transparent decision making

Theme 4 - **use of resources**

Financial planning and control supported by performance and project management

Theme 5 - **service delivery**

Planning, management, listening to users and external advice

Theme 6 - **partnerships and community engagement**

Developing a vision and following through with planning and delivery

Theme 7 - **continuous improvement**

Implementing processes, benchmarking, staff performance and external review findings

In the plan each of the seven key themes is focused upon individually, with:

- core outcomes set out - goals, targets, and indicators to help to evaluate our performance.
- deliverables set out – actions and improvements we plan to achieve.

Each of the seven themes is also then broken down into fundamental areas for improvement that have been identified.





The seven themes of the plan

Leadership

Here we want to achieve a capable, stable leadership team, leaders with better financial planning and risk skills, working to a clear plan. There will be a clear, achievable, prioritised vision, which senior leaders will be capable of delivering and providing strategic direction. This will involve a new leadership structure, with development and succession plans. New processes will be put in place for finance, risk and council planning.

To achieve these aspirations, activities have been grouped into three areas of work and there are detailed plans for each area:

- leadership and people development
- build leadership processes
- leadership agreed council plan

Culture

The right culture is vital moving forward and is a key area of focus. There needs to be an agreed set of shared ethics, values and beliefs about how decisions are made, how people behave, interact and carry out their roles.

We need to embed the right values and behaviour in our people, and staff need to feel valued and listened to. Councillors also need to feel supported to effectively lead the council. We will be implementing a culture development programme, using staff survey feedback and engagement and putting in place new people policies.

There will be work around three central cultural areas:

- develop the right culture with people
- build supportive processes to enable the culture we want
- develop positive relationships across the council

Governance

Governance is the way a council acts – in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, open, honest, and accountable manner. It involves the systems, processes, cultures, and values that direct and control the council. Going forward we will be ensuring clear and robust governance and scrutiny arrangements are in place that are fit for purpose. We will be aiming for accountability, transparency, evidence-based decision making and effective relationships across all levels and roles.

Central going forward are improved staff and councillor relationships and behaviours, transparency of decision making, effective reports for decision makers and improved risk management and auditing.

Work which underpins the plan highlights the need for improvements across three areas of governance and each of these will have an action plan:

- governance people development
- refresh governance processes
- providing information to inform governance

Use of resources

A good council must have solid financial management, reporting and regulation in place to govern the management of its investments, funding, and assets. This includes ensuring it has the right skills and capacity in place. Excessive risks must not be taken. Going forward we will ensure that robust financial system are put in place, with specialist and independent expertise bought in when needed. There will also be clear and transparent budget setting and reviewing.

There are four core areas of focus here with their own plans:

- financial planning of resources
- financial control of resources
- performance management of resources
- project management of resources





Service delivery

All well run services are focused on the needs of customers. Our services should effectively meet the needs of people who use them, improving lives for the better, while ensuring a balance of quality of service and cost. Going forward we will aim to be more customer focused in our services. Local people, communities and partners we work with will help shape services, to ensure the council meets local people's wants and needs. There will be better joined up working to ensure effective connections between services, reducing missed opportunities and improving efficiency.

We will make sure service plans all link back to our overall council aims, use accurate data to inform service decisions, use customer feedback to develop services – always listening, and make sure we are constantly reviewing and assessing the performance of our services.

There are four core areas of focus here for us, each area with its own plan:

- Service delivery planning
- Service delivery management
- Service delivery user feedback
- Service delivery external reviews (regulators)

Partnerships and community engagement

Good councils should be putting effective partnerships at the heart of everything they do. They should work collaboratively together with local communities and residents, as well as local organisations who are vital to local regeneration and economic growth.

We fully recognise the importance of and benefits to be gained from this joint working, the council's new operating model puts community focus at its centre. We will be working to be engaged, led by feedback, more resilient and supported by local communities.

We know that meaningful engagement means a true understanding of local needs. It needs committed, often difficult conversations. It means being open to different views and genuine co-design and co-production. We will be looking to develop and achieve a truly shared vision for the borough

There are three core areas that we will be focusing upon here:

- Developing a new Dudley Borough vision with local people, communities and partner organisations
- Partnership planning
- Partnership delivery

Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement across all areas of business and operation must be central to the improvement plan.

There will be processes put in place for external reviews, challenges, as well as internal reviews, benchmarking, and assessments. The improvement journey will be evolving and require continuous development.

The improvement plan will focus upon four crucial areas here:

- Embed continuous improvement processes
- Continuous improvement benchmarking with other councils
- Performance management of staff to achieve continuous improvement
- Continuous improvement through implementation of external review findings





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