

Improvement beyond the 4DW

Improvement beyond the 4DW is continual. This is delivered through service improvements identified within services, and by dedicated improvement programmes and projects led by our Transformation Service which supports the whole business.

The breadth of work and projects is considerable, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these, and the improvements they represent, with the independent expert we understand you intend to appoint as part of the Best Value process.

Examples of improvements delivered within the last year include:

Transformation project delivery

- As part of an ongoing programme of service reviews aiming to improve efficiency, effectiveness and measurable savings, the Revenues and Benefits Service Review phase 1 was delivered between December 2022 and November 2023. This delivered savings and embedded a continual improvement ethos within the restructured team. The Service has identified four areas of continual focus moving forward (tech innovation, customer focus, cost of living and performance) in order to continue to progress towards the 60:30:10 model for customer transactions (60% self service, 30% contact centre, 10% back office).
- Based on learning from service reviews, the transformation team has now (October 2023) initiated a project to quantify the extent of customer email traffic and to propose a roadmap for a reduction in email usage across SCDC and shared services through 2024.
- Shared Waste Service review – this has commenced as part of the ongoing programme of reviews; key aims are to transition closer to the target operating model (20:30:20), achieve savings targets and increase commercial income.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning – service improvements

- Continuous improvement in development management and compliance processes was evidenced in July 2023 when the service secured ISO 9001 certification – it is understood to be the first Planning service in the UK to do so. This means greater consistency, effectiveness and continuous improvement are embedded in the service operating model and translate into continuous improvement in the services offered to our customers.
- The re-designing of the decision making process for Committee and delegated decisions has been implemented to increase efficiency and improve performance and speed of outcome for customers.

- Comprehensive staff training and engagement programme (including with the development industry) across the planning service has been delivered to increase unity of purpose, capacity and capability across teams – allowing rapid re-deployment of staff to priorities.
- A senior management restructure has been implemented, de-layering management and increasing front line operational capacity and freedoms, to empower staff to make decisions on process and improvement quickly and efficiently in response to user feedback.
- Over the last 12 months the re-design of the planning advice service and process, including implementation of a new, unified Design Review Process and new Planning Performance Agreement protocol have gone live. Building upon government Office for Place objectives, the Service is now able to offer design review and support services to smaller neighbouring Councils through its services and panel and reduce the subsidy cost of delivering quality design outcomes to SCDC/residents through more efficient charging and billing regimes.
- Introducing a new online compliance process (and supporting policy) and redesigning back office systems to increase automation, reduce response times and enable more effective deployment of specialist compliance officers to investigation as opposed to administration tasks.
- Recruited 5 professional planning apprentices to increase training of scarce planners alongside a comprehensive programme of officer onboarding, mentoring and development to complement other offers such as 4DW but also help build professional capability in the public sector.
- The service has developed its own unique in house “Wiki” pages using the intranet as a single portal for advice on processes for staff on how to use our IT systems. This reduces error rates and because it incorporates live (real time) performance management data allows effective and rapid information sharing, supports the ISO assurance regime and underpins continued improvements in performance (and performance management) across the service.
- The service is leading on DLUHC PropTech Innovation Fund Round 3 Project: Creating data standards (already the best in the Country and so used by the Planning Inspectorate as pilot for their AI development project) and process improvements for dealing with Local Plan representations with a target to reduce officer input to this process by 40%+ (equivalent to some 200 officer days for each stage of the Local Plan consultation) and increase utility to users and local communities.

- Introduced new project management process in 2023, to facilitate more effective resource planning and deployment/efficiency across the service and a range of projects – and ensure effective cost recovery from the development community from bespoke developer projects wherever possible reducing cost burdens on local citizens.

South Cambs Connected – a programme of digital change to improve customer experience and improve efficiency.

The Business Plan 20-25 set out an action to be “a modern caring Council”. One of the measures agreed to achieve this is to make it easier for customers to access and carry out transactions online. South Cambs Connected is setting out a framework for automating self-service transactions; ensuring this becomes a best practice for all future digital transformation projects and delivering financial benefits of removing current process workloads. In the first phase of this project we are making an additional 12 services available for customers to self-serve online.

Over the last year we have improved the customer process for elected tenant group liaison, Personal Alcohol License applicants, Housing tenants (mutual exchange), planning service (booking facility), and continue to improve other frequently used e-forms.