



Productivity Plan

Published: July 2024



**Population
of 103,217**

**Households
44,108**

**Represented
by 36
Councillors**

**Businesses
4,070**

Introduction

Blaby is a local government district in Leicestershire. The district is named after the village of Blaby, although our council offices are based just a few miles away in Narborough. The district covers an area lying south-west of the city of Leicester.

We are a Conservative led District Council, employing 365 staff to deliver the essential services relied upon by our residents, businesses, and visitors. We share a vision to ensure that **Blaby District is a great place to live, work and visit.**

Our vision is central to the [Blaby District Plan 2024 - 2028](#) which serves as our roadmap for continually improving Blaby District over the next four years and beyond.

This Productivity Plan answers the four key questions posed by the Minister for Local Government in his [letter](#) which was shared on 16 April 2024.

It does this by focusing not only on the future, but also recognising much of the transformative work that has already taken place over recent years to improve our service delivery, keep pace with technological advancements and find efficiencies.

For questions 1 and 2, we have separated our retrospective improvements from our continuing and forthcoming plans for further development. Question 3 provides our views on wasteful spending, and Question 4 addresses the barriers we face, and how government may be able to assist in reducing these.

Julia Smith
Chief Executive





1. Transforming the design and delivery of services to make better use of resources

Blaby District Council is continuously improving. Despite the challenges faced over recent years, such as the complexities of covid, the cost-of-living crisis and some significant emergencies, we have continued to evolve and adapt, finding new ways of working whilst safeguarding our residents and businesses. We are also facing significant financial challenges but are committed to building on our successes and adapting accordingly. Despite increased costs, proposed changes to business rates and uncertainty regarding funding, we continue to deliver the aims of our Transforming Blaby Together Strategy.

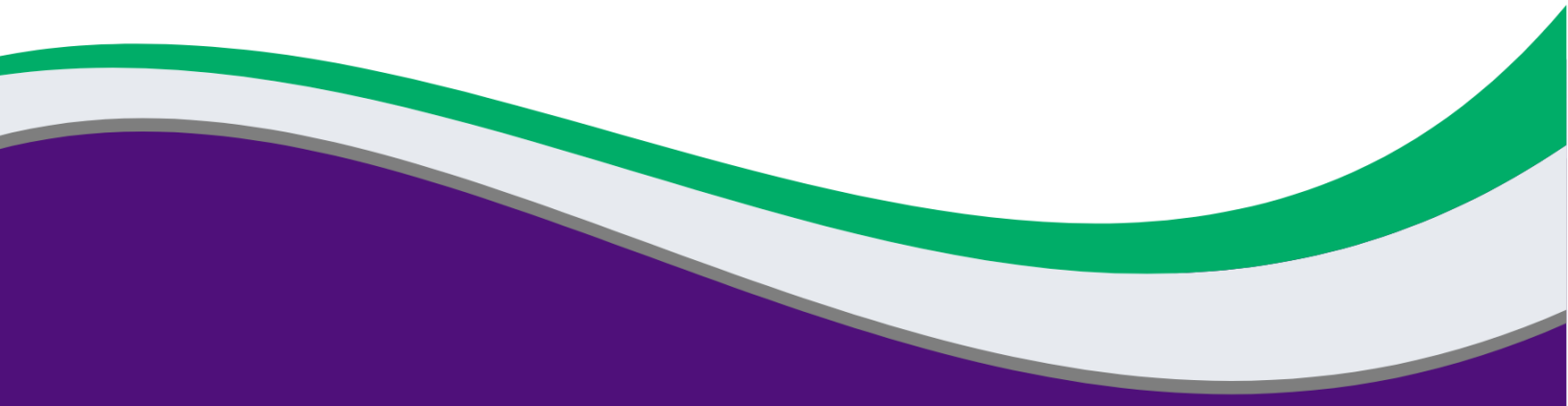
Improvements already achieved

How we have become more productive

Our transition to agile working has enabled staff and members to be more flexible in their working environments and patterns, choosing when it is appropriate to collaborate with colleagues and when to work individually to progress and develop the ideas and decisions made when collaborating. This cultural change has undoubtedly improved our productivity and the pace at which change, and improvement, is delivered.

How we measure productivity

In early 2023 we implemented a centralised online service/business planning system, providing a singular place for all departmental managers to account for specific improvement projects and track their progress via appropriate metrics. This service level business planning combines with the Council's strategic objectives, which influence and steer the operational level work. Productivity and overall progress towards our objectives are managed and assessed via this system.





Service improvements

We have made strides to building a single source of customer data. Our digital platform, which includes CRM, My Account, and online forms is supported by a single customer database. This ensures that no matter which channel is used, it is backed by the same database and customer records are kept up-to-date.

We have developed over 120 online customer forms, across a range of services, enabling our public to engage with the Council digitally. Last year 71% of over 80k online submissions were fully integrated into our back-office systems, eliminating the need for human intervention and manual processing of information, improving operational efficiency and accuracy.

We have an online My Account solution on the website, giving customers the opportunity to view all the information relevant to them in one place. Our online accounts for Council Tax and Benefits saw 22,685 customers log in 98,399 times in 2023/24.

Last year, 80% of over 80k digital transactions were completed online, together with the 98,399 views of Council Tax and Benefits online accounts, these online services have prevented over 160k phone calls and enhanced access further by allowing the customer to interact with the Council at a time and place that suits them.

Future development

Further plans for transformation?

In November 2023, Members approved our forward-thinking Transformation Strategy, alongside its delivery plans, which set out our transformational aims to,

- ‘Prioritise Digital,’
- ‘Hold Customers at our Heart’
- ‘Challenge the Way We Work’
- ‘Ensure Financial Resilience’

The delivery and impact of these plans will be reviewed on an annual basis as we progress through our commitment to Transforming Blaby Together. [Transformation – Blaby District Council](#)





Where is the greatest potential for further productivity gains?

The delivery of our ICT service is currently shared across several Leicestershire based councils. In February 2024 Members approved plans to move away from this partnership and take sole control of our future provision.

This is the area that holds the most potential for increased productivity for Blaby, giving us the opportunity to apply recent technologies such as Robotic Process Automation (RPA), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and to construct better analytics to drive our process improvements.

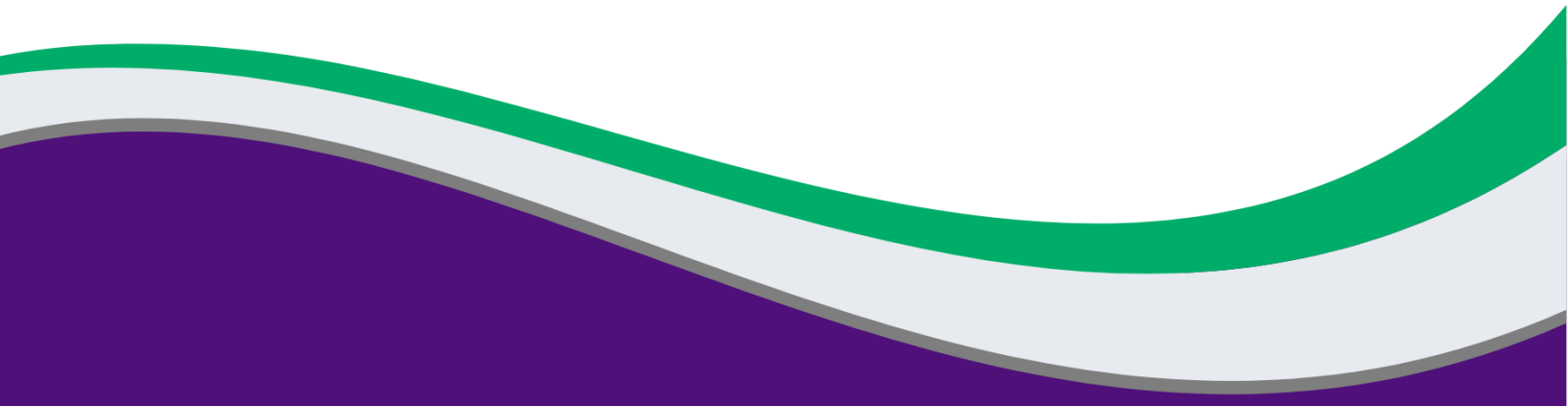
Which service area will subsequently gain the most benefit from this will be determined by the workstreams and reviews to come.


2. Taking advantage of technology and data to improve decision making, service design and resourcing.

As alluded to in the previous section, we are on a journey to bring our ICT provision in house. This will give us a greater level of control and the ability to develop our ICT provision significantly. This includes the development of a strategy which will ensure we are getting the most from our ICT provision and will help us to deliver the services our customers need as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Improvements already achieved

We collect and analyse performance data for all digital processes to continually enhance service quality. Customer satisfaction across our assisted and digital forms reached 87% in 2023/24.





Blaby District Council is leading the Leicestershire Building Control Partnership which combines six local authorities, streamlining operations by pooling resources and consolidating onto a single back-office management system. The partnership's dedicated website was designed and built in-house and offers a range of digital transactions, including integrated booking and payment options, understood to be relatively unique amongst building control services.

Digital customer-focused improvements in waste services have seen us move garden waste subscriptions, missed bins, and bulky waste collections to self-service online forms whilst the installation of in-cab technology to our waste collection vehicles has provided live information on the progress of waste collection rounds to our customer service team, vastly improving the efficiency and quality of this service.

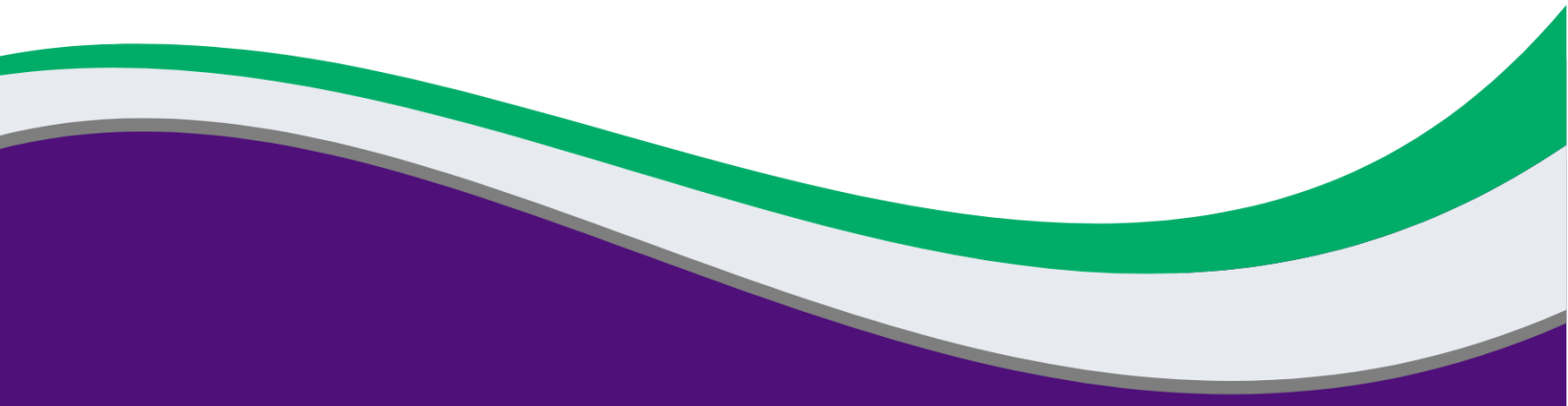
Future development

Improving the quality of data collected and its use

We have a renewed focus on performance data and will further develop and use management information to ensure our processes are managed efficiently, and wherever possible, decisions are based on the intelligence provided by the data we collect. Our Performance and Transformation teams will work together to assist other services transition to a data-led approach and 'measure what matters'.

We are developing our knowledge and use of Microsoft-based apps such as Power BI, which will provide automated connection and retrieval of information from a variety of databases and online forms in use across the Council.

This has the potential to bring significant efficiencies by eliminating the need for manual re-entry of data into performance systems and management reports. Greater still, this will enable our performance, digital and transformation teams to assist services much more effectively in creating meaningful and intuitive data dashboards that are used primarily to drive decision making, service improvement and efficiency.





Other opportunities for new technology to improve workflows

We are investigating and exploring options to improve our customer relationship management with modern holistic products, as well as methods to improve the automated routing of incoming emails.

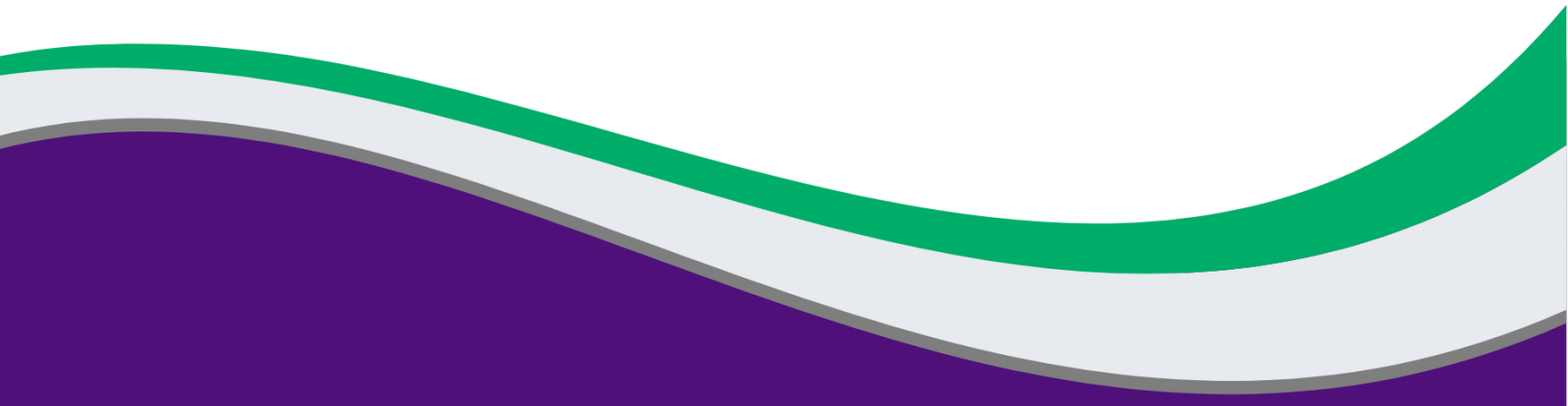
Microsoft products such as Power Automate are also within our plans to improve process flows and efficiency.


3. Reducing wasteful spend wherever possible

Through our expert and considered financial management, business planning and medium-term financial strategy, we believe that we have reduced all significant wasteful spend found across our departments.

When you consider the breadth of service for which we are responsible, the needs of our communities, and the demands from central government, we manage our limited and reducing finances well. We have been the subject of significant cuts and have had to ensure we can continue to deliver our valued services as effectively as possible.

We find the majority of our wasteful spend comes from the requirements and conditions placed upon us by central government, we have included some examples of this below.

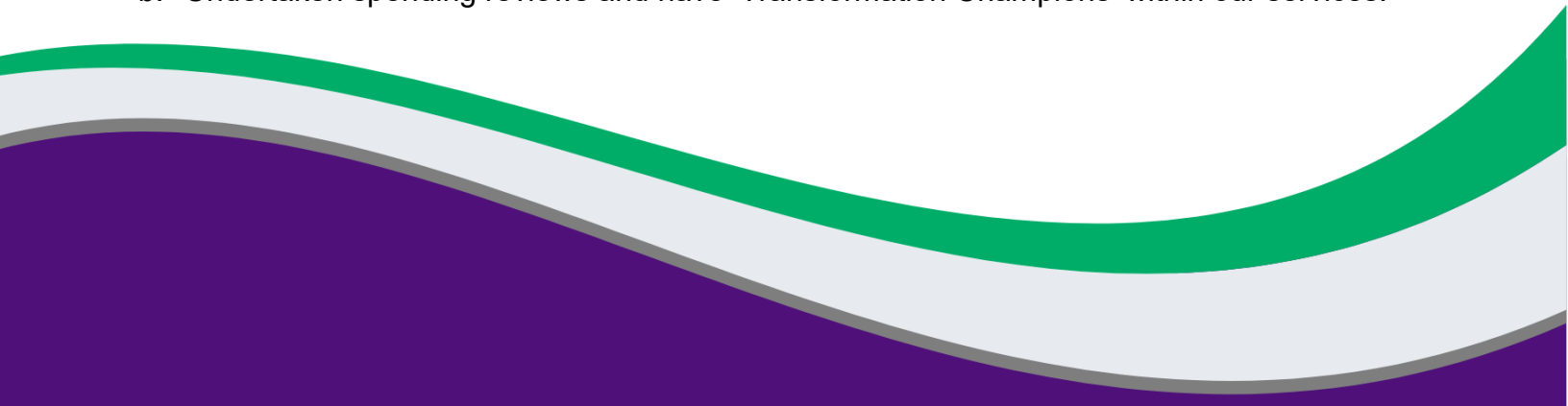
- a. **Uncertainty of funding and one-year settlements.** This makes it very difficult to plan for the longer term and takes resource away from where it is needed most to focus on the immediacy of the current financial situation. The delays around fair funding and the uncertainty this creates encourages short-term thinking and focus. This is recognised by the Government every year and promises are made to resolve it, but this has not happened to date. Our core spending power has reduced year on year. Funding levels need to be re-established to enable us to provide the services our communities demand relating to housing, waste collection and other valued services.
- 

- 
- b. **Competitive bidding and funding.** The requirement to bid for funding accounts for a significant amount of officer time and resource, quite often with limited success. We applied for LUF funding, costing us £40,000 plus our officer time, but were unsuccessful. This is just one example of many. We need a fair funding process instead of costly bidding processes.
 - c. **The requirements for the new food waste services** that limit our ability for innovation through the requirement for specified collection times for residual waste, insufficient funding for implementation of the new system, and no consideration of our journey to net zero and funding electric vehicles.
 - d. **Requirements such as the completion of productivity plans** when we already submit data to Government, produce corporate plans, transformation plans, and Medium-Term Financial Plan's (MTFS) place additional strain and burden on our resources.
 - e. **Requests to undertake additional work with no regulation or funding**, such as the recent request to visit all funeral directors – which we have completed, however, this has cost significant officer time and resource, with no recognition of this from Government.

The ministers letter implied that **spend on staff equalities, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) training** and development had been wasteful and excessive across local government. At Blaby, all employees participated in a 2-hour awareness session on EDI in 2023/4, and we do provide a self-serve online awareness module for new starters. We have also convened an 'equalities' working group which meets every 2 months to discuss issues and topics for development and further awareness amongst staff.

We think EDI is important, and as such have a member champion who ensures we maintain focus that our services meet the needs of our whole community. We do not consider this an expensive element of our service or that it is wasteful.

Despite the issues listed above **we have undertaken the following positive steps.**


- a. Invested in shared services to reduce costs.
 - b. Undertaken spending reviews and have 'Transformation Champions' within our services.
- 

- c. Reviewed our strategic assets and have plans to maximise their value.
- d. Invested in solar panels on some of our buildings.
- e. Invested in temporary accommodation to limit the cost of homelessness, but more importantly ensure some of our most vulnerable residents and families do not have to stay in bed and breakfast accommodation as far as possible.
- f. Utilised the UKSPF to deliver services to our resident's that we would not be able to provide without such a funding stream. Examples of this include mental health support, active travel strategies and enhanced business support.

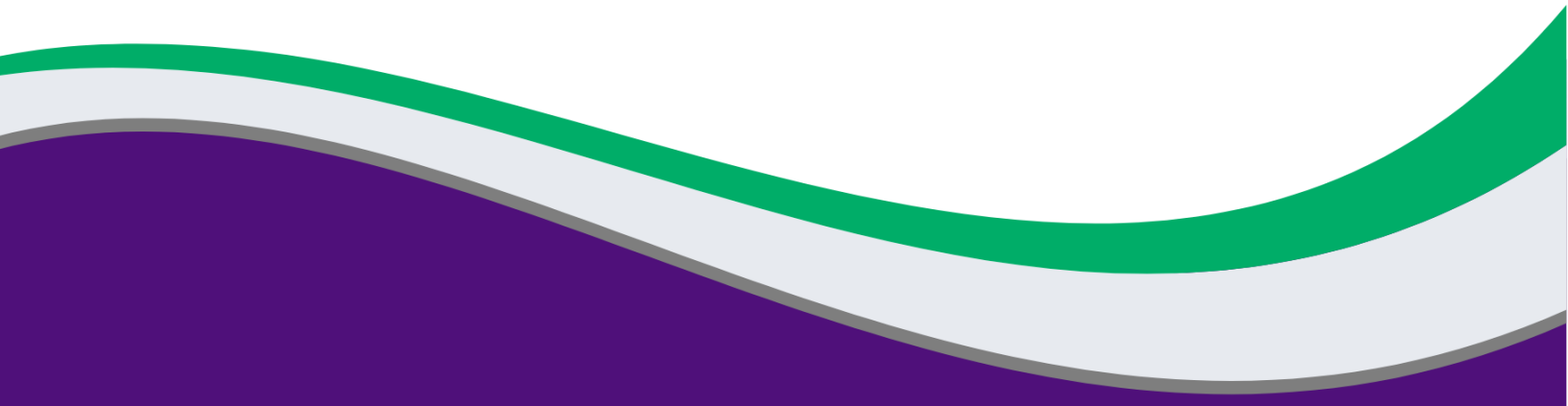
4. Barriers preventing progress that Government can help to reduce or remove


Section 3 above highlights some of the wasteful spend we experience due to factors outside of our control. On this basis, our key requests are outlined below.

- a. Review of fair funding and a long-term funding agreement (of at least 4 years).
- b. Limitation of competitive bidding and the resource requirement to submit such extensive bidding requirements.
- c. Review the funding of new burdens and requirements to ensure costs are met, and that these support both national and local net zero strategies and requirements.
- d. Alongside this, the volume of these requests is significant – such as Ukraine, Afghanistan, homelessness, funeral homes visits, new waste requirements, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and elections, to name just a few.

- 
- e. Enable localised decision making around things that matter to our residents, and support efficiencies such as bin collection frequencies, and evidence base requirements for local plans.

Additionally, there are further elements that we believe the Government may want to consider.

- a. Allow local setting of planning fees and charges.
 - b. To allow localised setting of Council tax.
 - c. Review the Freedom of Information obligations and the resource required to meet this.
 - d. Recognition of new duties, and the subsequent requirements on LAs, such as Building Control requirements, Serious Violence Duty.
 - e. Funding and capacity to develop innovative solutions to identified issues, or funding to try and identify the issues in the first place.
 - f. Modernisation/Review of legislation, such as those requiring publication in local newspapers.
 - g. Support Leicestershire to engage with devolution through the East Midlands Combined Authority to ensure we are able to access funding opportunities for Leicestershire communities, particularly for infrastructure improvements.
 - h. Funding and strategy change to ensure delivery of more affordable homes.
 - i. Being tied into the large systems such as Capita or Civica, where control really sits with the supplier, and therefore we are at the behest of them, as well as financially tied to them.
 - j. If there were open, flexible, and supported systems provided by the government universally, which LAs could access and which replicated the standard service offerings, then development would accelerate quickly as partner councils could share their development and learning with each other.
- 

- 
- k. The absence of a singular ‘Digital Experience Platform’ that is fully supported and controlled centrally in the same way that LocalGov Drupal is heading for CMS.
 - l. There are some big steps being taken with value services like Gov Pay, Notify and Forms, but these are small bolt-on’s. It is the core software’s that are the real issue.

End of Report

