

Springing Forward – Workforce Management – Powys County Council

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This document is also available in Welsh.

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 We reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its workforce. We looked at how the Council strategically plans for its workforce, how it monitors the use of its workforce and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements.
- 2 We delivered this review as the world moves forward, using the experiences from the global COVID-19 pandemic, to look at how councils are strengthening their ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
- 3 We have undertaken this project at all councils as part of our 2021 audit plans to help discharge the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 4 When we began our audit work under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) we recognised that it would take time for public bodies to embed the sustainable development principle, but we also set out our expectation that over the medium-term public bodies would be able to demonstrate how the Act is shaping what they do. It is approaching seven years since the Act was passed and we are now into the second reporting period for the Act. Therefore, we would expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate that the Act is integral to their thinking and genuinely shaping what they do.
- 5 Under the Act, councils must carry out sustainable development in accordance with the sustainable development principle. To do something in accordance with the sustainable development principle means that the Council must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To act in that manner, the Council must take account of the five ways of working: long-term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention. Statutory guidance on the Act sets out seven core organisational activities that it is essential that the sustainable development principle is applied to. Workforce is one of those core organisational activities.
- 6 This review had three main aims:
 - to gain assurance that councils are putting in place arrangements to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services;
 - to explain the actions that councils are taking both individually and collectively to strengthen their arrangements; and
 - to inspire councils and other organisations to further strengthen their arrangements through capturing and sharing notable practice examples and learning and making appropriate recommendations.
- 7 We undertook the review during the period January 2022 to May 2022.

8 There are approximately 5500¹ full time equivalent members of staff in the Council's workforce.

What we found

9 Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's strategic approach to its workforce effectively helping the Council to strengthen its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of its services in the short and longer-term?

10 Overall, we found that: **the Council has clear plans and effective service planning arrangements to deliver its workforce planning agenda in the short and longer term and is working with partners and staff to do this.**

11 We reached this conclusion because:

- the Council has clear plans for its workforce with actions to address recruitment challenges and current and future training needs;
- the Council is collaborating with partners and supporting managers and staff to deliver services through its new ways of working; and
- the Council has clear arrangements for monitoring workforce activity and recognises workforce benchmarking needs improvement, however, scrutiny could be more frequent to ensure challenge and monitor the impact of workforce management.

Recommendation

Exhibit 1: recommendation

The table below sets out the recommendations that we have identified following this review.

Recommendation	
Performance management	
R1	The Council needs to strengthen the performance management of its workforce by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• highlighting workforce items to Scrutiny Chairs for their consideration in developing agendas; and• continuing to develop benchmarking activity on workforce with other organisations.

¹ [Table | Staff in post | All staff | Local authority workforce | Local government | Data | Home - InfoBaseCymru](#)

Detailed report

The Council has clear plans and effective service planning arrangements to deliver its workforce planning agenda in the short and longer term and is working with partners and staff to do this

The Council has clear plans for its workforce with actions to address recruitment challenges and current and future training needs

- 12 During the COVID-19 pandemic many councils have worked differently. Large numbers of staff have worked from home and some have been redeployed to other roles to support the Council's response to the pandemic. To capture learning and capitalise on delivering services differently, the Council approved their New Ways of Working Strategy in September 2021. This strategy has a focus on how work is undertaken rather than where it is undertaken. The Council hopes this approach will reduce staff travel, increase flexibility for workers and aid in recruitment challenges.
- 13 The Council has a Strategic Workforce Plan which is a high-level document and is regularly updated. The Strategic Workforce Plan sets out the Council's ambitions, values and areas of focus for its workforce. The Council also has a Corporate Workforce Development Plan and to accompany this, there is a detailed Workforce and Organisational Development Aspirations project plan spanning 2021-2023. At a service level the Workforce and Organisational Development Integrated Business Plan largely links to the 'Vision 2025: Corporate Improvement Plan' with a broad set of actions and performance measures. These plans identify the key workforce challenges the Council is facing both internally and externally and set out how the challenges identified will be addressed. Through these plans, the Council has a well-developed understanding of the long-term risks and opportunities relating to its workforce.
- 14 The Council has effective arrangements to identify the future training needs of its workforce and adapts training provision in line with service requirements. Each service reviews its Workforce Plans annually as part of the integrated business planning cycle. To help inform the Workforce Plans, each service area also undertakes an annual Training Needs Analysis to identify any gaps in the skills mix of the service which need addressing to meet its objectives. These service level Workforce Plans inform the Council's Corporate Workforce Development Plan helping to inform a 'ground up' approach to future training needs. This ground up approach includes developing a Corporate Leadership and Development programme for future leaders, retraining staff with lapsed qualifications for hard to fill jobs such as Social Workers and introducing graduate programmes to attract a younger workforce. Powys has an aging population so focusing resources and

training to fill future skill gaps is likely to help mitigate against some of the future risks the Council has identified.

- 15 The Council has identified challenges around recruitment of staff and noted this within its service level risk registers and the corporate risk register. The Council has put mitigating actions in place to try and limit this risk and has embedded them within the Workforce and Organisational Development Aspirations project plan. This project plan is split into 'pillars' which identify and represent a specific workforce workstream. In Pillar One 'Developing organisational agility', the Council aims to address some of the issues it faces around recruitment. An example of solutions in Pillar One includes an end-to-end review of recruitment processes and targeted support for service areas who have difficulty recruiting. For example, the Council undertook a targeted Social Services recruitment campaign in January 2022 due to the high demand on the service. The Council undertook an evaluation of the recruitment campaign which identified how well the campaign had worked and mapped the Council's current retention situation identifying any problem areas on which it could focus. In addition to this, the Council gave staff working on the Test, Trace Protect project the opportunity to move to Social Services as Well-being Officers in the first instance before being redeployed more widely in the Council. The Council are using opportunities to improve processes and address vacancies within Social Services by creating support roles such as the Well-being Officers who assist with Social Worker workload and redeploying staff from other service areas.
- 16 The Council has undertaken an initial assessment of the resource implications of its New Ways of Working Strategy but recognises the costs may vary over time. The Council's Cabinet received a report in September 2021 outlining these resource implications and the potential savings of the implementation of New Ways of Working Strategy. The Council anticipates there will be some savings from reduced staff travel which could be used to offset service cost pressures however this has been done as an initial costing exercise and could be subject to change.

The Council is collaborating with partners and supporting managers and staff to deliver services through its new ways of working

- 17 The Council's Strategic Workforce Plan recognises the need for collaboration in line with the sustainable development principle and there are a number of examples that demonstrate how it collaborated in delivering its workforce plan. The Council works with a range of partners to deliver training such as its apprenticeship programmes. Various apprenticeship programmes are offered by the Council for employees. In order to deliver the apprenticeships, the Council collaborates with a range of partners including external training providers, the Department of Work and Pensions and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. In addition to this work, a joint Health and Social Care Academy based in Bronllys has been developed with Powys Teaching Health Board and the University of Wales offering specialised

training. As a result of this partnership working, staff are being trained to fill future service gaps.

- 18 The Council has continued to engage with staff in relation to its New Ways of Working Strategy and is committed to this going forward. 'Pillar Three' of the Council's Workforce and Organisational Development Aspirations project plan relates to 'Culture and Engagement'. The Council has issued a number of detailed surveys out to staff since June 2020 asking about wellbeing and working from home. One of these surveys ran for seven weeks between March 2022 and April 2022. The Council analyses survey responses and the most recent survey recorded that staff have less desire to be back in the office. This was one of the considerations in the Council not compelling flexible workers to return to office working and giving staff members a choice of their work location where possible.
- 19 The Council has arrangements in place to assist managers to support their teams as they adjust to the New Ways of Working strategy and support its implementation. Resilience and Wellbeing Training for the Senior Leadership Team and the development of practical guidance for managers to enable them to support themselves and their teams in the new working environments is in place. Managers guidance includes resources for teams including links to working policies, grievance procedures and key questions to support staff. This guidance also includes discussions around display screen equipment working assessments and reference to risk assessments.
- 20 An Integrated Impact Assessment on the New Ways of Working Strategy has been completed by the Council and was updated in August 2021. The Integrated Impact Assessment encourages wider thinking around the well-being objectives and well-being goals. This assessment identifies areas the Council wants to further develop within its New Ways of Working Strategy. These include expanding partnership working and the challenges the Council faces integrating new starters in a virtual environment. In response the partnerships, the Council intends to seek further collaboration with Powys Teaching Health Board and Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations. Regarding the induction of new starters, the Council is exploring the introduction of a digital 'buddy system' for new staff.

The Council has clear arrangements for monitoring workforce activity and recognises workforce benchmarking needs improvement, however, scrutiny could be more frequent to ensure challenge and monitor the impact of workforce management

- 21 The Council had arrangements in place before the pandemic to monitor workforce activity through its Workforce Board. The Workforce Board was responsible for assessing and challenging workforce programmes and comprised a mix of senior staff from across services. The Workforce Board was stood down during the pandemic and progress was reported instead to the Council's Transformation Board. The Workforce Board is due to be reinstated to monitor progress going

forward. At an operational level, the delivery of service level plans is the responsibility of each service lead. The Corporate Workforce Development Plan is implemented and monitored by the Senior Leadership Team with progress being reported to the Executive Management Team.

22 The actions within the Workforce and Organisational Development Integrated Business Plan are specific and most actions have a performance measure. The Integrated Business Plan contains a comprehensive list of performance measures for workforce topics relating to:

- Appraisals
- Mandatory Training
- Apprentices
- Sickness
- Staff well-being
- Reducing the gender pay gap
- Flexible working

The combination of actions and performance measures provides arrangements for the Council to monitor and evaluate progress in workforce development and inform future decision making.

23 The Council's Head of Workforce and Organisational Development meets with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder monthly to provide updates on workforce matters.

24 However, scrutiny committees have limited information on the progress and impact of the work which is being undertaken in relation to the New Ways of Working Strategy. A report on Leadership and Apprenticeships went to the Economy, Residents and Community Scrutiny Committee in September 2021 and more recently to discuss aspects of integrated business plans at Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee in February 2022. To ensure effective scrutiny and challenge and to highlight the impact of work being undertaken, Scrutiny could request for progress relating to workforce development to be scrutinised more regularly.

25 The Council undertakes very little benchmarking in relation to workforce but is in the early stages of addressing this. The Head of Workforce and Organisational Development works in collaboration with other Councils as part of a recently established subgroup looking at the development of benchmarking of workforce across Wales.



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