

# Springing Forward – Workforce Management – Carmarthenshire 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 did also set out our expectation that over the medium term we would expect public bodies to 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 April 2022.
- 8 There are approximately 8,000 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 is improving the strategic planning for its workforce and is taking action to address staff capacity issues in key service areas but recognises that performance monitoring of workforce management needs strengthening.
- 11 We reached this conclusion because:
- the Council is taking action to improve strategic workforce planning but needs a greater focus on its workforce requirements over the longer-term.
  - the Council is working to address strategic risks it has identified in relation to workforce capacity, and to strengthen its staff engagement arrangements.
  - the Council recognises that its corporate arrangements for monitoring performance in relation to its workforce need improving.

## Recommendations

### Exhibit 1: recommendations

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

Recommendations
<b>Workforce management</b>
R1 The Council should strengthen the application of the sustainable development principle <sup>1</sup> to improve the way it plans, delivers, and monitors the management of its workforce.

<sup>1</sup> The sustainable development principle is set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

## Recommendations

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### Performance management

R2 The Council needs to strengthen the performance management of its workforce by:

- developing a set of performance and outcome measures that reflect the Council's ambitions for its workforce, and monitor these measures at a corporate level, including reporting to overview and scrutiny committee(s); and
- benchmarking performance on workforce management with other organisations.

# Detailed report

**The Council is improving the strategic planning for its workforce and is taking action to address staff capacity issues in key service areas but recognises that performance monitoring of workforce management needs strengthening**

**The Council is taking action to improve strategic workforce planning but needs a greater focus on its workforce requirements over the longer-term**

- 12 During the earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council's staff worked differently, with large numbers working from home or being redeployed to other roles. The Council's recent Investors in People<sup>2</sup> assessment found that almost a thousand employees were prepared to retrain, doing very different jobs in a positive and highly supportive manner to help with the response to the pandemic.
- 13 The Council has provided additional temporary funding to strengthen its employee wellbeing support in response to the pandemic. The Employee Wellbeing team introduced an Employee Wellbeing Advice and Support Service to help employees through the initial phase of the pandemic. Employee Wellbeing Co-ordinators developed new intranet pages directing employees to a wide range of self-help and other support services in response to the issues being faced, such as homeworking, mental health, and health fitness interventions. Corporate funding was made available to establish Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator (Mental Health). The Employee Wellbeing Service is building on these positive aspects to help ensure that wellbeing continues to be a key priority for the future. The Council has expanded its network of Health and Wellbeing Champions. These Champions are members of staff that help promote and support health and wellbeing matters in their directorates. There are now more than 60 Champions throughout the Council and over 60 in schools. The Council anticipates that the number of Champions will increase over the coming months.
- 14 The Transformation Innovation and Change Team (TIC) is looking at how the organisation builds forward from the initial phases of the pandemic. A Council review of the COVID-19 experience in 2021 suggests that it has changed the organisation, made it more agile, with quicker decision making and better cross departmental working. The Council is very keen to build on these positive aspects related to its workforce including: greater staff flexibility, the can-do attitude, more trust being shown in staff, enhanced team working and better cross departmental

<sup>2</sup> Investors in People is a standard for people management, offering accreditation to organisations that adhere to the Investors in People Standard

working. The TIC team has been asked to work with services to identify 'alternative ways of working' that have been adopted over the last two years, and to review whether there are opportunities for these to be implemented on a permanent basis, especially if these resulted in smarter, more efficient ways of delivering the service that met the needs of the customer.

- 15 The Council has established a Better Ways of Working Group. This group has developed the 'Better Ways of Working - Our People Framework'. This was agreed by Corporate Management Team in April 2021. All employees will work in one of three ways: multi-located, fixed-located, or community located. The Council has agreed a 'Key Principles of our Better Ways of Working (BWoW) Framework.' This framework has been developed to underpin the foundation for the change the Council sees as required to modernise its services. The 'Case for Change' document, sets out the key principles that it will apply, including: agile working will become the norm for office staff, the Council operating with fewer buildings, sharing workspace with other public sector organisations, wherever possible staff being located in areas that support the Council's Economic Development Strategy, and managers involving staff in shaping new service delivery models, applying a customer first approach.
- 16 Through the Better Ways of Working Group, the Council has begun to set out its future vision for its workforce but it does not currently have a clear, up to date plan for its workforce. The Council recognises this and identifies it as an area for development.
- 17 The Council is strengthening its approach to the use of data to understand its workforce and service demand but recognises that it does not yet have a thorough understanding of the long-term factors that will impact its workforce and the challenges and opportunities that may result. The Council told us that the pandemic has catalysed the need for it to focus more on workforce analysis and the need for a workforce plan. During 2021 the Council engaged with the Local Government Association to run sessions with senior staff looking at workforce planning issues. These sessions started to look at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Council's workforce planning arrangements. The Council sees the key workforce challenges in the next 5 years as: recruitment (developing a modern recruitment strategy to get the right people and growing their own talent), improving the Council brand (being the employer of choice), addressing the issue of an aging workforce (developing a more refined workforce plan), management of a remote workforce, and dealing with a potential reduction in funding and the impact this would have on staffing levels. The Council has started to develop a succession planning dashboard to give more data to managers to help with workforce planning.
- 18 The Council's People Management Business Plan (January 2022) identifies a number of improvement areas including the need to: review the current People Strategy (in light of the pandemic to support the organisation to recover), develop a new workforce strategy and strategic workforce plan, and to develop a workforce engagement strategy. It also identifies the need to review the Learning and

Development function to ensure alignment of learning and development to the new people strategy and the Council's corporate priorities.

- 19 The Council makes efforts to integrate workforce matters with other things it is trying to achieve and this can be seen in terms of its approach to better ways of working, and its links to economic regeneration and carbon reduction. Its new business planning arrangements also support stronger corporate oversight and better integration across services, with managers of key corporate areas being part of the business planning engagement and review sessions with its Heads of Service.

### **The Council is working to address strategic risks it has identified in relation to workforce capacity, and to strengthen its staff engagement arrangements**

- 20 The Council is committed to strengthening its arrangements for engaging with its staff and has been actively consulting with managers and staff in relation to its Better Ways of Working Strategy. The Council intends to develop a specific workforce engagement strategy, which will include a mechanism to hear directly from staff about their views.
- 21 The Council has identified a number of corporate risks in relation to workforce capacity both within its People Management Service and in other areas of its service delivery. One of the areas where there are capacity issues in the HR Service is in recruitment. The Council has identified that recruitment volume has increased (the stated reasons for this are higher turnover of staff in key service areas including: social care, waste service and lorry drivers, as well as schools making more use of the HR Service to undertake recruitment on their behalf). Challenges dealing with this increase in demand are exacerbated by difficulties with the recruitment process. The Council identifies that the current recruitment process is not fit for purpose and the Council's TIC team are involved in reviewing the process to help identify improvements. The Council is looking to purchase a new HR IT system to help drive efficiencies through greater automation. Alongside rolling out the new IT system there will be training for recruiting managers about their responsibilities in the recruitment process. The HR Service has identified the need to develop a service level agreement with departments, to define what the role of the HR Service is and what is the responsibility of managers and to set out the service standards for the HR Service.
- 22 The Council is working with its partners in key areas on workforce related matters, including in social care. A 10-year strategy for social care has been developed to help ensure that there is throughput of quality people into the care profession. The Council is looking at launching a care academy to recruit more career minded 18–24-year-olds and take them through a career pathway in social care. The Council is looking to partner with further education providers to deliver this academy. The Council has also collaborated successfully with partners on developing public

sector hubs in the County eg the former Debenhams building in Carmarthenshire and the planned hub in Llandeilo. The Council has also identified a medium level risk around School Leadership and the Council's ability to recruit and retain high quality and resilient school leaders who can respond to and deal with the transformation of education in Wales. The Council is working in partnership with other councils through Partneriaeth<sup>3</sup> to help to support school improvement.

- 23 The Council holds a lot of HR data but further analysis and presentation of what the data means for departments needs to take place to make the data useful. The HR Service is looking to use its business partner model to provide added value by interpreting the data prior to reporting it to Departmental Management Teams.
- 24 The Council has introduced a new integrated impact assessment process to help to ensure that it gives due regard to the statutory duties that need to be considered when taking decisions. The new corporate process should help strengthen its arrangements in this area.

## **The Council recognises that its corporate arrangements for monitoring performance in relation to its workforce need improving**

- 25 The performance measures that the Council is using at a corporate level for monitoring performance in relation to its workforce are limited. The corporate measures only cover information related to sickness and apprenticeships. The Council recognises that it needs to develop a wider suite of performance measures for HR/workforce. As part of this process the Council should ensure that it is able to measure progress towards the longer term outcomes it is seeking to achieve. The Council has begun developing a dashboard for some HR metrics but this is not yet being reported systematically through Departmental Management Teams.
- 26 The Council participates in the Investors in People Standard and currently holds the silver award and is aiming for gold accreditation.
- 27 The Council is involved in national and regional groups looking at workforce matters and reports finding these useful, particularly at a local level. The only measure that it is benchmarking itself on relates to performance on sickness absence. Using wider benchmarking data can provide useful insight into councils' individual performance and can identify opportunities for learning from other organisations.

<sup>3</sup> Partneriaeth is the South West Wales Education Partnership which is working to deliver school improvement in the region. Three councils are in the partnership: Swansea, Carmarthenshire, and Pembrokeshire.





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