

# Springing Forward – Isle of Anglesey County Council

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# Summary report

## Summary

### What we reviewed and why

- 1 As the world moves forward, learning from the global pandemic, this review has looked at how the Council is strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
- 2 We reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its assets and workforce:
  - a. for assets, our primary focus was on office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivers services to its residents; and
  - b. for workforce, our focus has been on the challenges highlighted during the pandemic that have exacerbated some longstanding workforce issues.

We looked at how the Council strategically plans to use its assets and workforce, how it monitors their use and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements.
- 3 When we began our audit work under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, 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 we would expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate how the Act is shaping what they do. It is now approaching seven years since the Well-being of Future Generations Act was passed and we are now into the second reporting period for the Act. Therefore, we would now expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate that the Act is integral to their thinking and genuinely shaping what they do.
- 4 This project had three main aims:
  - to gain assurance that the Council is putting in place arrangements to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services;
  - to explain the actions that the Council is taking both individually and in partnership to strengthen its arrangements as well as further embed the sustainable development principle; and
  - to inspire the Council and other organisations to further strengthen their arrangements through capturing and sharing notable practice examples and learning and making appropriate recommendations.
- 5 This is important because the Isle of Anglesey County Council invests considerable sums in its building assets and workforce. Some key information from 2020-21 is show in **Exhibit 1**.

**Exhibit 1: key data relating to building assets and workforce.**

Number of Council buildings owned in 2020-21	616 land and buildings, and 3,855 dwellings within the housing stock
Value of property, as of 31 March 2021	Approximately £196 million
Number of staff	2,532
Spending on workforce	£95 million which equates to 43% of Gross Expenditure chargeable to the General Fund
Percentage of the workforce, of staff who were male	24.0%
Percentage of the workforce, of staff who were female	76.0%
Percentage of staff who work full time	55.6%
Percentage of staff who work part time	44.4%
Percentage of staff aged over 55 years	22.8%
Number of staff who left the Council by their own choice in 2020-21	165

- 6 The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on demand for buildings and the way that staff work. This report examines some of these impacts and the way that the Council benefits from the positives and mitigates risks from the negatives when planning future service delivery.
- 7 We undertook the review during the period December 2021 to February 2022.

## What we found

- 8 Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's strategic approach strengthening its ability to transform? In doing this work, we have identified some of the direct impacts of the pandemic as well as some operational and governance issues exacerbated by the pandemic.
- 9 Overall, we found that more prominent consideration and application of the sustainable development principle would lead to a more complete understanding of the challenges presented by both the Council's building assets and workforce, and lead to improved visions, strategies, and plans.
- 10 We reached this conclusion because:
- the Council understands the challenges presented by its land and building portfolio but has not yet developed a corporate vision for its assets or the associated delivery plans;
  - the Council has rationalised and modernised part of its asset base and service delivery model, but this is not yet driven by a clear corporate vision;
  - defining and reviewing progress towards short, medium, and longer-term objectives for its asset base will strengthen the Council's ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of its services;
  - the Council has a vision and key delivery themes for its workforce which can be strengthened by more prominent consideration of applying the sustainable development principle and further embedding the lessons learnt from the pandemic.
  - the Council has engaged with staff and managers and is responsive to workforce challenges, **it recognises the need to, and has started, the work of developing longer-term integrated strategies;** and
  - the Council maintains an overview of current workforce issues but there is an opportunity to make more use of data and use benchmarking to measure the current and longer-term success of its workforce initiatives.

## Recommendations

### Exhibit 2: recommendations

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

Recommendations	
<b>Vision, strategies, delivery plans and the sustainable development principle</b>	
R1	<p>The Council needs to demonstrate that the sustainable development principle at the heart of its considerations, embedding on the lessons learnt from the pandemic, as it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• develops the Council's vision for the shape and size of its land and building assets and workforce in the short, medium, and long term;</li><li>• develops an asset strategy that demonstrates consideration of the sustainable development principle and is fully integrated with key priorities such as the Modernisation and Net Zero Carbon programmes;</li><li>• updates the workforce strategy to demonstrate application of the sustainable development principle and is fully integrated with key priorities such as the Modernisation and Net Zero Carbon programmes; and</li><li>• develops costed delivery plans.</li></ul>
<b>Data and benchmarking</b>	
R2	<p>Develop the use of data and benchmarking to inform planning, budget setting, and monitor and assess the longer-term success of its asset and workforce initiatives.</p>

# Detailed report

## Assets

### **The Council understands the challenges presented by its land and building portfolio but has not yet developed a corporate vision for its assets or the associated delivery plans**

11 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the pandemic required office-based posts to be undertaken in individuals' homes. The Council's modernisation agenda had already equipped the workforce with laptops, which assisted in the transition to working from home. The Council has since identified the need to make additional investment in areas such as software licensing, and it is implementing a new telephone system.
- the Anglesey Transitional Plan 2022-23 introduces a new way of hybrid working for staff and elected members which is currently being piloted, and will enable monitoring, learning and further adaptation.
- the Council recognises that changes are required, and future workspace and wider asset requirements need to be defined, and until this is completed there is some uncertainty about what the future asset needs will be.
- the Council has consulted with residents to shape its priorities, which has been undertaken in partnership with Medrwn Môn, Age Cymru and Flying Start. This activity is helping shape Council asset priorities.
- the Council adopted 'Establishing the Isle of Anglesey County Council Towards Net Zero Plan 2022-2025' in March 2022, and is to refresh other key strategies early in the new administration. There is an opportunity to ensure that these plans are aligned and are integrated, so the Council can make sure its approach to assets delivers maximum value and helps deliver wider corporate objectives. The plans include:
  - the Council Plan;
  - the new Capital Strategy and Corporate Asset Management Plan; and
  - key strategies, such as the Towards Net Zero Plan 2022-2025, and School Modernisation Strategy (2018 Update), need to be developed, refreshed, and costed to inform the corporate asset vision and plan.
- services have not identified their current and longer-term asset needs. Some of the assets are aged, the needs of service users and providers are changing over time, and the financial cost of transforming the asset base is not known.
- the Corporate Asset Management Plan for Land and Buildings 2015-2020 has not been updated and is out of date. Officers have been appointed to new posts to lead on Capital and Climate Change, and there is the intention

to move assets from Finance and Property to enable an organisation-wide view of the Council's needs.

- the Council continues to invest in capital projects, including buildings; however, plans need updating and should be longer term in nature. Councils need to be mindful that incremental change, without an overarching vision and delivery plans could take them in the wrong direction.
- the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies to balance current and future needs. The Council needs to put the sustainable development principle at the heart of its new asset strategy and supporting plans to help it deliver its service delivery aspirations, both now and in the future. This should help ensure its assets deliver maximum impact, across a range of its objectives.

## **The Council has rationalised and modernised part of its asset base and service delivery model, but this is not yet driven by a clear corporate vision**

12 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council, before the pandemic, has reduced the number of offices from which it operated and has transferred some assets and the delivery of some services to the wider community.
- the Council had already moved to work more agilely as a result of its smarter working project, and the pandemic has helped move some agendas forward at a greater pace than originally planned. These include home working, virtual meetings, and a reduction in travel.
- there has been a shift in access to services: many users have accessed services digitally, accompanied by a reduction in traditional face-to-face access. We heard as part of our fieldwork that family, neighbours, and friends often assist individuals who find digital access difficult.
- the pandemic has provided some opportunities for the Council to offer its assets to other public bodies, such as providing leisure centres for midwifery services.
- the Council recognises that it is 'unable to change the world on its own' and actively seeks to partner with organisations that can help it to deliver real benefits, but it recognises that some partnerships provide more added value than others.

## **Defining and reviewing progress towards short, medium, and longer-term objectives for its asset base will strengthen the Council's ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of its services**

13 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has developed its understanding of how use of assets will change in the future, but does not plan to undertake a complete review until the Council considers itself to be at the end of the pandemic.
- the Council has not stated what it wants to achieve over the short, medium, and longer term for its asset base; as such, it is difficult to review progress, particularly as it has no asset measures as part of its Corporate Scorecard report. There is also no review of the impact of the incremental changes that are taking place. Being clear about what it wants to achieve will enable the Council to develop and set measures, which in turn will allow the Council to monitor progress and impact.
- the Council is not actively using benchmarking in its approach to better understand its own performance and identify areas for improvement.

## **Workforce**

### **The Council has a vision and key delivery themes for its workforce which can be strengthened by more prominent consideration of applying the sustainable development principle and further embedding the lessons learnt from the pandemic**

14 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council is of the view that effective workforce management is more important than ever, especially during and after the pandemic and ensuring business continuity is an essential part of designing resilient services.
- the Council Plan 2017-2022 identifies: 'Promote apprenticeships arising from new developments and ensure that young people and adults have the right skills and expertise for work. We will also create opportunities within the Council to develop staff' as one of the key steps to delivering its objective 'Ensure that the people of Anglesey can thrive and realise their long-term potential'.
- the Anglesey Transitional Plan (post pandemic) 2022-23 identifies the importance of staff, ensuring their safety and wellbeing, and delivering new hybrid ways of working and delivery mechanisms.

- the People Strategy 2020-24 Supporting People, Supporting the Future has identified a vision whereby ‘we have to ensure that the people we employ are skilled, trained and motivated to meet the challenging needs ahead. We also need to optimise the use of our people capacity and ensure that we plan for our current and future workforce requirements and design agile structures and roles to meet changing demands in cost-effective ways.’ Five key themes have been identified:
  - recruiting and retaining the best (innovative, ambitious and outward looking);
  - inspiring service excellence (customer/citizen and community focused);
  - building organisational effectiveness (professional and well run);
  - engaging, developing, and managing our talent (valuing and developing our people); and
  - developing the skills and capacity of the workforce (valuing and developing our people).
- the Council has not updated its People Strategy 2020-24 to incorporate the learning from the pandemic. The strategic work programme is updated annually to support the People Strategy 2020-24 and identifies the main workforce priorities. There is an opportunity to integrate workforce issues with other Council strategies including Modernisation, Assets and Net Zero Carbon.
- the People Strategy 2020-24 does not demonstrate how the Council has applied the sustainable development principle and considered the five ways of working, as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

**The Council has engaged with staff and managers and is responsive to workforce challenges, and recognises the need to develop longer-term integrated strategies and has embarked on doing so**

15 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has a good understanding of the current workforce challenges which include recruitment and retention of staff in specific areas;
- the Council has undertaken numerous actions to respond to workforce challenges, including:
  - making the Council an attractive employer to prospective employees;
  - working with the local college to include two-week work experience to introduce students to the care sector;
  - simplify job application and introduce generic roles to enable flexibility in the workforce;

- making terms and conditions less rigid and allowing staff to shape their working hours where the business needs allow; and
- recognising that pay and status need to be improved in some vital posts.
- the Council obtained the views of staff about Living and Working with COVID-19 in June 2021, which considered areas such as working arrangements, advantages experienced, and methods of communications. The high response rate of 565 out of 800 office-based staff has provided a good understanding of the current position and preferences for future working arrangements.
- the questionnaire identified benefits that are attributable to hybrid working, including but not limited to:
  - reduction in travelling and associated costs for employer and employee;
  - finding it easier to concentrate;
  - more flexibility of when and how is work undertaken; and
  - improved work-life balance.
- the Council's key plans in areas such as workforce and assets tend to be standalone, whereas they are operationally interrelated. Advancing integrated thinking would help the Council make the connections between relevant strategies, and ensure they are all geared towards delivering the overall vision and strategies that drive the whole of the Council in the same direction.

## **The Council maintains an overview of current workforce issues but there is an opportunity to make more use of data and use benchmarking to measure the current and longer-term success of its workforce initiatives**

16 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council monitors the people management measures within its corporate scorecard including staff numbers, short and long-term sickness absence and turnover.
- a Task and Finish Group is reviewing recruiting arrangements to see if current arrangements are working and if there are any lessons to be learnt.
- a Recruitment Panel is held every two weeks to consider the number of empty posts, and where they sit within the organisation. The panel also keeps track of any developing trends.
- the Council is undertaking exit interviews to gain an understanding of what influences leavers and to understand how to do things differently.
- the Council participates in national and regional workforce related groups and reports that they are valuable.

- The Council has five people management measures reporting staff numbers, sickness, and turnover. The measures are not benchmarked with other councils. Using a wider range of measures and utilising benchmarking data can provide useful insight into council's individual performance and can identify opportunities for learning from other organisations.
- the Council has an opportunity to review current internal and regional arrangements, to identify those that provide additional value, and areas where improvement or changes are required. However, effective workforce planning needs a full range of current data, not only about factors affecting the supply of the workforce but also the demands placed upon it. It is only when equipped with this information that an effective workforce approach can be developed.



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