

Springing Forward – Strategic Workforce Management – Ceredigion 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 strategic arrangements for managing its workforce. For the workforce, our focus has been on the challenges and opportunities that have been exacerbated and accelerated by the pandemic.
- 3 We looked at how the Council strategically plans to use its workforce, how it monitors their use and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements.
- 4 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.
- 5 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.
- 6 This is important because Ceredigion County Council has the following workforce profile:
 - 66% of the workforce are female and 34% male.
 - 57% of the workforce are over the age of 44. The largest single group within this percentage is in the 45-54 years-old category, which represents 28% of the workforce.
 - nearly 18% of its leavers are in the 16-24 years-old category.
 - 2.2% declare that they have a disability whilst 31.1% preferred not to say.

- 76.9% chose 'White' as their ethnicity, followed by 'Other ethnic group' (0.4%), 'Black/African/Caribbean' (0.2%), 'Mixed ethnicity' (0.2%), and 'Asian' (0.2%). 22% of the workforce chose 'prefer not to say'.

7 We undertook the review during the period January 2022 to March 2022.

What we found

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

9 We have concluded that the Council has a clear understanding of how the workforce will need to evolve to deliver its priorities, accelerated in part by the pandemic, and it is aware of where it needs to strengthen its arrangements and is taking steps to manage the associated risks.

10 We reached this conclusion because:

- the pandemic has accelerated the move to new ways of working and promoted positive operational and cultural changes within the Council. Continuing to embed these will help it to manage its known workforce risks and support the delivery of its priorities.
- the Council has well developed plans, monitoring, review and improvement arrangements for its workforce.
- whilst the Council is financially stable, it is aware that projected future efficiency savings represent an ongoing challenge to investing in and continuing to deliver its transformation ambitions at pace.
- the workforce arrangements put in place by the Council to deal with the pandemic have helped to strengthen existing partnerships and promoted further improvements in joint working across key service areas.
- the Council has made use of available workforce benchmarking and learning to support specific workforce decisions and recognises it needs to further strengthen these areas.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

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

Recommendations	
R1	Workforce vision and planning The Council's workforce vision, planning and monitoring could be strengthened by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• refreshing its corporate workforce vision;• having a clearer integration with its tier one annual Business Planning process;• an annual review of its strategic workforce plans;• developing a more comprehensive picture of workforce skills and competencies;• more clearly demonstrating how it consistently uses the sustainable development principle to support the delivery of its workforce planning; and• developing specific targets and timescales for its Hybrid Working Strategy success measures.
R2	Benchmarking The Council should undertake more routine workforce benchmarking to strengthen its business planning and self-assessment arrangements.

Detailed report

The Council has a clear understanding of how the workforce will need to evolve to deliver its priorities, accelerated in part by the pandemic, and it is aware of where it needs to strengthen its arrangements and is taking steps to manage the associated risks

The pandemic has accelerated the move to new ways of working and promoted positive operational and cultural changes within the Council. Continuing to embed these will help it to manage its known workforce risks and support the delivery of its priorities

- 11 During 2020-21, the Council established a critical incident command structure, this structure facilitated how the Council made the best use of its workforce and assets to respond to the pandemic and to keep people safe.
- 12 Also, in response to the pandemic's legal requirements to work from home, significant numbers of the Council workforce moved to agile working, with many key services being available within 48 hours of this decision. Whilst agile working was an existing objective within the Council's Workforce Plan, the pandemic accelerated this change.
- 13 As a result, and to manage the significant changes to how the Council makes use of its assets and workforce – both now and in the future – it established a Way we Work Project – now called the New Ways of Working Project. Through extensive consultation with staff, the New Ways of Working project has developed a Hybrid Working Strategy. The Council is developing the way it will deliver the ambitions for hybrid working including projects to consider:
 - the future footprint of the workspace with the immediate focus of this being on the modifications planned for the main Council building in Aberaeron;
 - designing Hub working environments for staff and Council Members;
 - the right digital platforms to support these changes;
 - work to support a better customer experience and how customers/citizens can continue to access the services they need, such as the proposals for digitally enabled virtual meeting spaces in the Council's main libraries;
 - changes to Human Resources policies and procedures to reflect the new hybrid landscape; and
 - virtual learning and improved electronic Human Resources software to support staff and managers in the new agile environment.

- 14 The way in which the Council has and is planning to use its workforce has become more integrated between and within services. This has been helped by the changes to job descriptions to allow greater flexibility for staff to move between roles. This flexibility is an important principle for the transformation being undertaken across adult and children services in the new Through Age Wellbeing Model.
- 15 The Council has told us that the pandemic has also seen a change in the culture of volunteering and flexible working, with very positive responses to recent volunteering campaigns and staff supportive of being redeployed to support other services if needed.
- 16 Other workforce changes brought about by the pandemic have included:
- the acceleration of IT skills across all levels of staff;
 - a legacy of skilled staff from the Ceredigion Track, Trace and Protect team;
 - the appointment of a health professional as a Health and Wellbeing Manager; and
 - mapping community services and continuing to support community groups that were established during the pandemic.
- 17 The Council's single biggest impact on its current and future workforce will be the embedding of its Through Age Wellbeing Model. This transformation programme around social care (adults and children) has and will continue to look at new ways of working, rebalancing its services to shift need from the high-cost intensive services to lower-cost early intervention preventative investment. In doing so, it is expected that this will have a significant positive impact on service users' personal resilience and wellbeing, as well as ensuring that these services are financially sustainable for the future. The pandemic has been a catalyst for an increased speed of change to this new model.
- 18 The Council is aware of several key workforce risks and is managing these to ensure that it can deliver on its priorities, these include:
- the changed needs of citizens as a result of the pandemic and how this changed landscape might impact the workforce planning for the Through Age Wellbeing Model;
 - capacity to concurrently support major corporate changes;
 - sickness absence increases because of COVID-19 and longer-term conditions due to 'long COVID';
 - the ability to recruit and retain staff within the social care sector. The Council told us that some Through Age Wellbeing teams have a vacancy rate of 30%, and that it is already taking steps to try and mitigate this risk. For example: through working with Aberystwyth University to develop training for social care, developing their own staff by increasing the number of social care apprenticeships and by staff working co-operatively and flexibly across the Through Age Wellbeing Model.

The Council has well developed plans, monitoring, review and improvement arrangements for its workforce

- 19 The Council has well developed planning, monitoring and governance arrangements for its workforce which have been supported by:
- undertaking a detailed workforce assessment in 2017, based on current and future requirements, using a Strategic Workforce Development Toolkit;
 - having a Strategic Workforce Plan 2017-2020 which is aligned to the corporate priorities and includes a detailed action plan;
 - ensuring that workforce planning is a primary business planning objective within the key transformative services;
 - workforce planning progress updates presented to the Corporate Resources Committee in October 2019;
 - key workforce objectives and metrics regularly monitored and challenged at the Council's Quarterly Performance Boards;
 - the Council's 2017-2022 Corporate Strategy identifying Workforce Planning as one of the key strategies for delivering the Council's priorities;
 - specific work undertaken as part of the Through Age Wellbeing Model to align citizen need and future workforce models;
 - using data to help shape workforce changes such as in the development of a centralised customer contact service; and
 - developing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2027 as a direct response to its staff Health and Wellbeing Survey undertaken in November 2020.
- 20 To support the Council's decision making it has developed an Integrated Impact Assessment. This assessment requires all key decisions and policies to be considered in the light of their impact on the Council's key statutory obligations such as: the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Socio-Economic Duty and Equality Duty.
- 21 The Council is working to further improve its workforce planning by ensuring that the next iteration of its Strategic Workforce Development tool and the resultant Strategic Workforce Plan:
- reflects the changed environment since it was last completed in 2017;
 - has a clearer integration with the tier one annual Business Planning process;
 - is reviewed at least on an annual basis;
 - builds a more comprehensive picture of skills and competencies;
 - more clearly demonstrates how it consistently uses the sustainable development principle to support the delivery of these future strategies; and
 - reflects any changes to the vision for its workforce since 2017.

- 22 The Council's Draft Hybrid Working strategy has identified several high-level metrics that will be used to measure its success. It will be important for these to have specific targets and be monitored as part of the Council's current performance planning process.
- 23 The timeframes for the Council's strategic review of its workforce planning align with local election cycles. However, many of the transformative changes within the workforce related plans are focused on addressing systemic issues over a much longer time horizon. For example: the Through Age Wellbeing Model which is transforming the Council's workforce in this area, to deal with longer-term need.

Whilst the Council is financially stable, it is aware that projected future efficiency savings represent an ongoing challenge to investing in and continuing to deliver its transformation ambitions at pace

- 24 Our Financial Sustainability report (June 2021)¹ highlights that overall – ‘The Council remains financially stable and is focussed on future challenges and [that] the Council has a good track record of meeting its overall annual budget although there continues to be significant overspends in Social Care. The Council has a good track record of meeting savings targets, however, delivering the required savings will be more challenging going forward specifically in relation the savings in social care.’
- 25 The Council's latest Medium Term Financial Plan 2021-22 to 2024-25 highlights that:
- the Council is required to save at least £15 million by March 2025; and
 - there are some financial risks related to the cost of the Council's workforce, such as pension cost pressures, that are likely to continue due to people living longer, mitigated in some part by new regulations requiring higher pension contributions from employees.
- 26 Whilst there is clear member support for delivering the Through Age Wellbeing Model ambitions, the Council recognises the scale and pace of the significant cost savings required to fund this new approach and other challenges such as:
- the changing needs of the population due to the pandemic – the impact of this is still being evaluated;
 - the requirement to continue to fund care for existing citizens under the old approach whilst still having to reallocate monies to early intervention and prevention during the transition period of the model;
 - factors outside of the Council's control such as the trend for an aging population relocating to Ceredigion; and

¹ Audit Wales, [Ceredigion County Council – Financial Sustainability Assessment](#), June 2021

- recruiting skilled social care staff to service the new approach.

The workforce arrangements put in place by the Council to deal with the pandemic have helped to strengthen existing partnerships and promoted further improvements in joint working across key service areas

- 27 The Council told us that the collaborative public sector response to the pandemic has strengthened some existing relationships, such as those with the Health Board, Registered Social Landlords and Private Care homes.
- 28 At the heart of the Council's Through Age Wellbeing Model is the use of collaborative and co-productive principles, whilst working collaboratively across the internal teams, Health Sector, Third Sector and with other external partners. These include the planned collaboration with other bodies and groups around the development of the Lampeter well-being centre. It is also working with local micro businesses to support the delivery of specific support and thereby promoting a wider positive economic impact.
- 29 There are also several other examples of where the Council is engaged in partnerships and collaborations which impact its workforce planning including:
- its leadership of the Joint Learning and Training Working Group under the West Wales Care Partnership;
 - engagement with Aberystwyth University to develop modules for social care and the relationship with the Business School to offer third-year business-degree students work placements;
 - establishing the Mid-Wales Education Partnership with Powys Council to replace the Education in Regional Working (ERW) consortia, focusing on shared resource around school improvement;
 - working with Powys Council and other partners on the Mid Wales Growth Deal and establishing the Mid Wales Growth Board; and
 - the recently established Mid Wales Corporate Joint Committee with Powys Council and the Brecon Beacons National Park. This Committee will need to make use of a collaborative workforce to deliver its regional transport, development, economic and energy plans.

The Council has made use of available workforce benchmarking and learning to support specific workforce decisions and recognises it needs to further strengthen these areas

- 30 The Council's Annual Report 2020-2021 – Annual Review of Performance and Well-being Objectives – referenced, in its 'Benchmarking Our Performance' section, that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the reporting of the Performance

Accountability Measures (PAMs) was suspended, for all councils, for the 2020-21 year. Therefore, only a small number of PAMs were collected by the Council during the year. One of these included a Human Resources metric around sickness absence:

- 31 Where the Council had examples of recent benchmarking these tended to be for specific exercises such as salary benchmarking for Social Workers and the Chief Executive.
- 32 The Council's report to the Corporate Resources Oversight and Scrutiny Committee in January 2022 included benchmarking of specific Human Resources metrics between services and several other Human Resources metrics.
- 33 There is currently limited routine workforce benchmarking undertaken by the Council's People and Organisation Service. One of the reasons cited for this was that previous attempts to benchmark had proven difficult due to differences in workforce structures between organisations. Whilst there are always challenges with comparability, having a more routine approach to benchmarking would strengthen its business planning and self-assessment arrangements.
- 34 The evaluation of the Council's workforce Health & Well-Being surveys for 2020 resulted in the development of the new Health & Well-Being Strategy 2021-2026. The Council also plans to evaluate the progress being made against this Strategy and its respective performance measures at the end of 2022-2023.
- 35 There has been significant engagement activity with staff around the Hybrid Working Strategy, with over 74% of staff working from home having engaged in one of the engagement activities. This engagement and learning have helped the Council to shape its Hybrid working approach.
- 36 The Council's Quarterly Performance Boards are also an opportunity for it to learn lessons. Corporate Lead Officers and Members have the opportunity to challenge and suggest changes to address any issues with progress against key objectives and measures.
- 37 The Council has also told us that it uses its appraisal process as a key tool for learning. This process is used to provide evidence of what is and is not working across its services, with this information then being used to support improvement.



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