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Reference: 2240A2021-22

Date issued: January 2021

Dear Dilwyn,

Ffordd Gwynedd – High Level Review

After our Well-being of Future Generations review of the Area Teams in Adult social care in 2019, we planned, with your support, a follow-on review of Ffordd Gwynedd. This follow-on work was to look council-wide but with a more ‘helicopter view’ than the detailed approach we had previously taken. Our conclusions in this letter are based on recent interviews with all Heads of Service, our Area Teams review, and our accumulated knowledge of Ffordd Gwynedd built up over the last five years.

Ffordd Gwynedd is embedding well and is driving cultural change, however there are some common misconceptions and barriers that slow Ffordd Gwynedd’s progress

Ffordd Gwynedd has clearly had a big impact on the way Gwynedd Council works and thinks. The Council has transformed elements of the way it works through both corporately supported and more service driven change projects, as well as a significant training programme for senior officers.

However, there are some common misconceptions and some barriers that hinder further progress. These issues limit the way in which Ffordd Gwynedd embeds and becomes part of the subconscious way of working.

Concepts

Focus of activity – the notion of putting the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything that the council does is clear. However, this is more often relayed as putting the citizen at the centre. On the face of it this is a small change to the wording that is not significant. However, having the word ‘citizen’ in the mind can limit the thinking about who or what is the focus of the activity undertaken.

In some cases, the individual is the right focus, but in others it might be a small group or a community or at the other extreme it might be the whole county. The Council needs to challenge itself about who or what needs to be the focus of the activity and the overall outcomes it plans to achieve.

Prevention – prevention is an activity that we assume to be one that takes place before intervention. Pre is a prefix that means before, prior to, in front of. However, prevention needs to take place before, during and after interventions to prevent reoccurrence, to prevent escalation or to prevent cyclical models often seen in areas like looked after children, whose children in turn are often looked after.

The Council needs to challenge itself around prevention and to make sure it is clear about how prevention activity is embedded in service design, delivery and review.

Money – Financial constraints have been a clear and present feature of local government over the last ten years and are likely to be for some time to come. As such there is a clear correlation between Ffordd Gwynedd and the need to make savings, that has built up over time. Whilst some of this linkage is warranted, it should not be the sole driver. There is a need to demonstrate that doing the right thing may not lead to savings and in other cases may in fact cost more.

This is amplified by the difficulties often seen in calculating savings from systems thinking process change, rather than weighting decisions on improvement in outcomes for service users. At times there is a need to take a leap of faith and believing that removing waste process steps and investing to improve outcomes will deliver savings in the medium term, even if they cannot be proved at the outset.

The Council needs to assure itself that it is not limiting innovation and improved outcomes by placing the need to demonstrate savings as a precursor to initiating change projects. It needs to convince officers that Ffordd Gwynedd is truly about doing the right thing even if upon occasion it costs more. Without taking this step officers will not propose ideas unless they can clearly prove the financial savings, and this will continue to stifle innovation, preventing further progress and potentially worsening outcomes.

Data – Data is a key information source, it is needed to predict demand, to justify change, to quantify spend or to explain deviation from expected delivery outcomes or

costs. It is not about targets; it is about knowledge. Without data, organisations lack the information and knowledge needed for both strategic and operational planning and budgeting. Consequently, both can be weakened.

It is positive to note that the Council has recognised the need for more detailed information during the COVID pandemic and is now putting in place a revised performance management model. The Council needs to continue this initiative and ensure it establishes quality, relevant and valuable measures for all services and then uses these to manage services effectively.

Culture

Empowerment, Trust and Leadership – Ffordd Gwynedd expects individual officers to take ownership and be empowered to drive change and propose new ways of working. However, to feel empowered there is a need to trust those around you. They need to be supportive and to be positive even if that is in challenge. A safe environment is key, a safe space to experiment and to explore ideas. A space where it is safe to fail and learn, seeking support and input from colleagues.

At present this trust relationship does not exist, and challenge is often described in the words of some and observed as destructive.

Whilst Ffordd Gwynedd hopes to empower all, no matter what level in the organisation, to enable a more trusting environment, the Council may need to revert to a more structured, supportive approach to developing ideas for the short term. This will allow leadership styles (coaching/mentoring) to develop and to establish the structures needed to deliver as a 'One Gwynedd' team. The true test of success will be a flow of ideas that are put forward collectively, supported by all, with no last-minute destructive challenges. This will be a real test of leadership but fixing this throughout the organisation is fundamental to the future of Ffordd Gwynedd.

Brand – There are examples where challenge is made along the lines of 'that is not Ffordd Gwynedd'. Where this is correct the challenge is justified, but where it is driven from a misunderstanding about some of the concepts referred to above it is unfortunate and destructive. These instances need to be carefully challenged even if the person making the statement is considered senior or in a position of authority.

These conclusions are intended to be useful and constructive. Whilst they represent some challenge to the Council, we feel that overcoming these barriers will further embed Ffordd Gwynedd as the cornerstone of the way the Council thinks, plans and acts.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Evans, Audit Manager