

Springing Forward – Workforce Planning – Vale of Glamorgan Council

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 One of the findings in our Reshaping Services Programme Review report published in 2020¹, was that ‘there is an opportunity to strengthen workforce planning to support the delivery of the Reshaping Services programme, although the support from Human Resources for individual projects was valued’.
- 2 Our January 2021 Assurance and Risk Assessment presentation to the Vale of Glamorgan Council (the Council) identified workforce planning to be a risk because:
 - the COVID-19 pandemic had delayed the HR Strategy and the latest iteration of the Strategic Workforce Development Plan;
 - workforce planning was only considered at a high level as part of last year’s Reshaping Services Review; and
 - the implications of new ways of working during the pandemic.
- 3 Between August and September 2021, we reviewed workforce planning at the Council to gain assurance that the Council is effectively developing its workforce planning, that it has supporting arrangements to implement its strategy, and that it is evaluating and learning from the pandemic in terms of its workforce.
- 4 In late 2021, we began a national thematic review entitled Springing Forward in all councils in Wales. This national review focussed on two tracer areas:
 - strategic management of assets; and
 - strategic management of workforce.
- 5 The intention of the Springing Forward review was to look at how councils, using the experiences from the global Covid 19 pandemic, are strengthening their ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities. As a result, we used our fieldwork from the workforce planning review in 2021 to inform our subsequent Springing Forward review. This report is a culmination of both reviews.
- 6 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 now approaching seven years since the 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

¹ [Vale of Glamorgan Council – Reshaping Services Programme Review | Audit Wales](#)

demonstrate that the Act is integral to their thinking and genuinely shaping what they do.

What we found

- 7 We found that the Council is taking steps to improve its workforce planning arrangements, but it needs to strengthen the application of the sustainable development principle² to further shape its approach to workforce planning.
- 8 We reached this conclusion because:
- the Council is using its experience of delivering services during a pandemic to inform the development of its new Strategic Workforce Development Plan but needs to ensure that its planning is fully shaped by the sustainable development principle; and
 - the Council has improving arrangements to support and monitor the implementation of its new Strategic Workforce Development Plan but these could be further strengthened

Recommendations

Exhibit heading: recommendations

Recommendations

Strengthen the application of the sustainable development principle in relation to workforce planning

Planning

R1

- develop a clear picture of the Council's future workforce needs;
- further improve external collaboration in relation to workforce planning;
- ensure that when developing service level workforce plans, consideration of the sustainable development principle is consistently applied;
- ensure strategic alignment between Council strategies such as decarbonisation, assets and digital; and
- determine future resource implications to deliver the final Strategic Workforce Development Plan.

² [150623-guide-to-the-fg-act-en.pdf \(futuregenerations.wales\)](#)

Recommendations

Monitoring

R2

- formalise the purpose, role and responsibility of the workforce planning working group in the development, management, monitoring and review of the Strategic Development Workforce Plan;
- formalise the future monitoring arrangements and success criteria of the Strategic Workforce Development Plan;
- consider the role of members in the future monitoring of progress against the Strategic Workforce Development Plan; and
- further embed succession planning and clarify timescales for review; and
- ensure a more consistent exit interview process and that any lessons are learnt in relation to workforce planning.

Detailed report

The Council is taking steps to improve its workforce planning arrangements, but it needs to strengthen the application of the sustainable development principle to further shape its approach to workforce planning

The Council is using its experience of delivering services during the pandemic to inform its new Strategic Workforce Development Plan but needs to ensure that its planning is fully shaped by the sustainable development principle

- 9 The Council had a Workforce Plan 2016-2020 and was due to develop a new iteration of the Plan, but the Council paused this work as it responded to the pandemic. At the time of our fieldwork, the Council was drafting a new Strategic Workforce Development Plan.
- 10 In developing its new strategic workforce plan, the Council is keen to learn from how its staff worked flexibly to maintain delivery of key services during the pandemic. It carried out two surveys to understand the impact on staff's mental health, their work and ICT needs. It has identified a number of positives in how it and its workforce responded during the pandemic:
 - increased use of technology
 - enhanced focus on staff well-being and engagement
 - improved work life balance
 - more flexible working
 - staff redeployment to maintain delivery of critical services.
 - strengthened partnership working between services
- 11 The Council has produced a draft Workforce Development Implementation Plan which takes account of the learning from the pandemic and includes actions to design a new flexible working framework and produce a well-being strategy.
- 12 Staff we spoke to during our review felt they had been well-supported by the Council during the pandemic. However, the Council believes that while home working has largely been successful with service delivery continuing, there are some front-line roles that cannot be delivered as successfully remotely. The Council is drafting a hybrid working policy, building on its experience of the pandemic and recent staff engagement.
- 13 Workforce planning is one of the seven core organisational activities listed in the statutory guidance to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Given the length of time that the Act has now been in force, we now expect to see it driving

and shaping what public bodies do. We found some positive examples of how the Council is applying some of the five ways of working in its workforce planning:

- the Council involved Trade Unions, its digital and transformation teams, its GLAM LGBT+ group in the development of the Strategic Workforce Development Plan;
- the Council has engaged with other councils to understand how they are developing their strategic workforce planning;
- the Council has been working with others, such as Social Care Wales, to help consider how they can address some of the recruitment and retention challenges common with other local authorities in Wales;
- the Council has a good understanding of its current workforce and its current workforce needs, as evidenced by the comprehensive workforce needs section in the corporate risk register. It is also developing a recruitment dashboard that will provide better data on trends, such as the age profile of job applicants; and
- the Council is developing its arrangements to help it better understand the risks and opportunities relating to its workforce needs. It is preparing a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities) analysis for inclusion in its Strategic Workforce Development Plan and the succession planning toolkit includes a SWOT section for Heads of Service to complete.

14 However, despite these examples, it was clear from our 2021 fieldwork that the extent to which the sustainable development principle was driving workforce planning across the Council was stronger in some parts of the organisation than others. Ensuring consistency in the application of the sustainable development principle across the organisation is important. The Council recognises this and acknowledges that potential opportunities may be missed if its approach is not strengthened. Other opportunities to strengthen the application of the sustainable development principle are:

- having a clear picture of its future workforce needs although there is an aim in the draft Workforce Development Implementation Plan to forecast future demands. Identifying the types of skills, competencies and roles needed for the future will strengthen the Council's approach to strategic workforce planning. Considering how services may be delivered in the future will also be key.
- further improving the Council's external collaboration in relation to workforce planning. One example that emerged during our fieldwork in 2021 was that there was merit in taking the draft Strategic Workforce Development Plan to the Public Services Board to initiate a broader discussion across the public sector on future workforce planning.
- considering the resource implications for delivering its Strategic Workforce Development Plan both in the short and long term.

- further integrating the Council's current Digital Strategy, Carbon Management Plan and the Corporate Asset Management Plan as all are being refreshed in 2022. This presents the Council with a good opportunity to further align these strategies with the Strategic Workforce Development Plan and use the sustainable development principle more broadly, to shape and drive the new iterations of these strategies.
- 15 We met with the Head of HR in February 2022 to share our initial findings from our workforce planning review and to inform our Springing Forward tracer on strategic management of the workforce.

The Council has improving arrangements to support and monitor the implementation of its new Strategic Workforce Development Plan but these could be further strengthened

- 16 We took the following assurances from the arrangements to support the implementation and monitoring of the Council's workforce planning:
- there is a draft Workforce Development Implementation Plan that contains a number of short-term actions that can potentially lead to medium or long-term changes such as developing systems and practices to support the recruitment and career development opportunities for a more diverse workforce.
 - a strength of the draft Workforce Development Implementation Plan is that actions are not just focused on the recruitment and retention of staff, but also seeks to enhance the Council's workforce data and understand and address skills gaps.
 - the Council created a Workforce Planning working group which has the potential to be a useful mechanism for future management, monitoring and review of the final Strategic Workforce Development Plan, when this is produced.
 - the Council is positively addressing and formalising succession planning arrangements by introducing a toolkit for Heads of Service to complete and return to HR. The toolkit should bring more rigour to the process and help to formally identify critical roles and learning and development of the workforce.
 - it is important that those responsible for workforce planning are comfortable and confident in how to do it. The Council identified a need to provide workforce planning training and was rolling this out at the time of our fieldwork.
 - there are also plans to introduce service level workforce plans and strengthen workforce planning in service areas.
- 17 The Council could strengthen its arrangements to support the implementation and monitoring of the Council's workforce planning in the following ways:

- clarifying the role of the Workforce Planning working group in the development, monitoring and review of the new Strategic Workforce Development Plan. At the time of our fieldwork that group did not have a Terms of Reference. The Council needs to be assured that representation on that group allows the group to be sufficiently strategic.
- considering the role of members in the future monitoring of progress against the Strategic Workforce Development Plan.
- developing success criteria for its Strategic Workforce Development Plan. Certain actions in the 2016-2020 Workforce Plan were never completed, due in part, but not entirely, to the pandemic. The future monitoring of the Strategic Workforce Development Plan needs to be formalised and the success criteria clear to enable progress to be measured. For example, whilst the Workforce Development Implementation Plan has 'what does success look like' it would benefit from more robust measures to support those statements - one success point is 'Improved take up of training opportunities via our iDev system'. There is no baseline set out of what success would look like.
- further embed succession planning in the organisation and clarify timescales for review. The succession planning toolkit has been used by senior managers, and we gather the intention is to ensure the succession planning toolkit is used at different levels in the organisation in due course.
- ensure there is a consistent process for exit interviews and any relevant lessons from these are factored into its workforce planning arrangements.



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