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# Review of the arrangements to support the Capital Ambition Delivery Programme – **Cardiff Council**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Ian Phillips, Samantha Clements and Sara-Jane Byrne under the direction of Huw Rees.

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# Detailed report

## Summary

### What we reviewed and why

- 1 In 2017 the Cabinet approved 'Capital Ambition', the administration's 5 year policy programme for the Council. These priorities have been translated into the Council's Corporate Plan for 2018-21, called Delivering Capital Ambition. The Council has also aligned partnership planning and delivery arrangements behind the delivery of key areas of Capital Ambition that require strategic partnership working.
- 2 Cabinet approved the establishment and implementation of the four-year Capital Ambition Delivery Programme on 14 December 2017. The Capital Ambition Delivery Programme comprises two components: Modernisation and Resilient Services. Modernisation is defined as: transformation of corporate systems and processes that support service delivery and Resilient Services is defined as: transformation of front-line services, typically working in partnership with other organisations, with local communities and with those who receive the service.
- 3 The focus and purpose of our review was shaped by the fact the Council is continuing to experience severe financial pressures that require all services to be challenged to:
  - deliver high levels of savings;
  - manage demand pressures, particularly in the area of social services; and
  - satisfy the Council's priorities as stated in 'Delivering Capital Ambition'.
- 4 We monitored the development and implementation of Cardiff Council's (the Council) Capital Ambition Delivery Programme. We chose to carry out this review over a number of months, so as to observe the governance arrangements in practice.
- 5 We undertook the review during the period September 2018 to March 2019.

### What we found

- 6 Our review sought to answer the question: Are the Council's arrangements to support the delivery of its four-year 'Capital Ambition' Delivery Programme enabling it to address its key financial and organisational challenges?
- 7 Overall we found that: the Council has sound programme management arrangements in place for its Capital Ambition Delivery Programme, but it needs to strengthen engagement with scrutiny and links to its medium term financial plan. We concluded this because:
  - Governance arrangements in place to support the Programme provide the necessary information to understand and challenge progress, but the Council need to ensure that the level of resource and in particular senior officer time commitments to the Programme are delivering improved outcomes

- the role of scrutiny in monitoring and challenging the Programme is underdeveloped.
- the Council is working constructively with other public services to help implement the Programme.
- the Council is focusing on how it can address its significant service demand, drive service improvement and address medium term financial challenges through the Programme, but links to its medium term financial plan could be strengthened.

## Proposals for Improvement

### Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

The table below sets out the proposals for improvement that we have identified following this review.

Proposals for improvement	
P1	The Council needs to strengthen the role of scrutiny in engaging with, and challenging the delivery and impact of, the Programme to increase accountability and help provide momentum.
P2	The Council would benefit from a review of the Capital Ambition Delivery Programme management arrangements alongside others that support delivery of the Corporate Plan such as the Directorate Delivery Plans.
P3	The Council could do more to assess the extent to which the Capital Ambition Delivery Programme is contributing to the achievement of the Council's £91m savings target and make links to the medium term financial plan.

# Detailed report

## The Council has sound programme management arrangements in place for its Capital Ambition Delivery Programme, but it needs to strengthen engagement with scrutiny and links to its medium term financial plan

### Governance arrangements in place to support the Programme provide the necessary information to understand and challenge progress, but the Council need to ensure that the level of resource and in particular senior officer time commitments to the Programme are delivering improved outcomes

- 8 The Council's administration has articulated its priorities in its policy programme called 'Capital Ambition.' The Council has translated these priorities into its Corporate Plan, called 'Delivering Capital Ambition'. The Council has established the Capital Ambition Delivery Programme (the Programme) to deliver service change in defined areas requiring significant reform.
- 9 The Programme has a high profile within the Council with strong commitment from both senior management and the Executive. The Programme is split into two portfolios of boards:
  - modernisation portfolio of boards focuses on the transformation of corporate systems/processes that support service delivery programmes such as Corporate Landlord and Digital First.
  - resilience portfolio of boards focuses on the transformation of frontline services Programmes such as Improving Outcomes for Children, Improving Outcomes for Adults, Inclusive Growth and Street Scene.
- 10 Officers provide a quarterly assessment of the Council's position in delivering 'Capital Ambition' to Cabinet at Progress and Performance Group meetings. This is in addition to the formal Cabinet meetings for which reports and minutes are publically available. However, members more generally are not as well sighted of the Programme. An increased awareness of the Programme amongst members will enable a better understanding of progress and outcomes arising from it.
- 11 The Council's Senior Management Team performs the function of an overarching Programme Management Board covering both portfolios. This meets fortnightly and dedicates a proportion of its agenda time to monitoring and oversight of the Programme. The Programme Management Board receives dashboard reports for the Programme on an exception basis based on risk.
- 12 We observed a Digital Board meeting which forms part of the Modernisation Programme portfolio. This meeting was chaired by the Chief Executive, and it was clear that progress was being clearly presented and robustly monitored.

- 13 The Council has also invested in a central corporate resource, a team established to oversee and manage the Programme. It is this team of staff who are responsible for maintaining a central project database and regular liaison with officers responsible for the delivery of project work. The team manager assimilates this information and uses it to prepare monitoring reports for circulation to the various groups involved in programme governance. In addition to this, there is regular involvement from finance, Human Resources, procurement, and ICT to actively support, enable and challenge Programme delivery.
- 14 Documentation for projects within the Programme refers to the need for improved monitoring of project cost versus benefits (for example, a key responsibility in the Streetscene Programme Board Terms of Reference), but we found no evidence to suggest that this was being done. This information will assist the Council to better evaluate whether the Programme is delivering value for money.
- 15 The Council has committed a high level of resource and senior management time to the management and delivery of the Programme and this commitment is helping to enable project delivery. The Council should regularly review the programme to ensure that this high level commitment and senior officer time is being translated effectively and efficiently into service change and improved outcomes.
- 16 In addition to the Programme governance arrangements, the Council has further governance arrangements as illustrated in a flowchart in the Directorate Delivery Plans (DDPs). This flowchart depicts clear lines of accountability to deliver the Local Well-being Plan and Corporate Plan and includes the DDPs themselves, Service Plans (although these are not mandated) and individual performance information for personal reviews. This flowchart states that the DDPs demonstrate how the Corporate Plan will be delivered. The DDP's make reference to the Corporate Plan, but do not align with the Programme. There are therefore two sets of governance arrangements for delivering the Corporate Plan but the linkages between those different sets of governance arrangements are unclear.

## The role of scrutiny in monitoring and challenging the Programme is underdeveloped

- 17 The governance arrangements for the Programme sets out that the Policy Review and Performance Committee will receive an annual report of progress against the Programme. The chair of the Policy Review and Performance Committee had limited awareness of the Programme and to date, scrutiny has not received an annual report. The Programme has been in existence since December 2017 so the timescale for the preparation and issue of the report is overdue.
- 18 We note that aspects of the Programme have been considered by the scrutiny committees. For example, the Family Support work has been reported to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee. However, it could be made clearer to the members where projects form part of the Programme.

- 19 While progress in implementing the Programme is effectively monitored by SMT and Cabinet, consideration needs to be given as to how best scrutiny committees can meaningfully engage with and challenge the delivery and impact of the Programme to increase accountability and help provide momentum.

### **The Council is working constructively with other public services to help implement the Programme**

- 20 The Council recognises the importance of working in partnership with other organisations and with local communities to deliver lasting solutions to complex problems. This is illustrated in the Corporate Plan which emphasises the importance of working in partnership to help manage the continuing impact of austerity. It is also illustrated through the alignment of the city's Wellbeing Plan with Capital Ambition priorities and through the alignment of the city's partnership delivery arrangements with the Capital Ambition Delivery Programme.
- 21 Where there are opportunities for joint project delivery, such as Improving Outcomes for Children and Adults, then the Boards will fall within a separate set of governance arrangements reporting to the Public Services and Regional Partnership Boards. This reporting structure was designed to facilitate clear lines of accountability and joint ownership of intended outcomes. These arrangements are becoming increasingly embedded.
- 22 As part of the fieldwork we observed a meeting of the Improving Outcomes for Children Board and found it to be attended by a range of public sector bodies and stakeholders including National Health Service, Public Health Wales, Police, Social Services, Education and Housing. The group was very collegiate and clearly understood the benefits of working together, sharing intelligence and resource to achieve common goals. Multi-agency, preventative projects are being taken forward by the Board, including the development and implementation of the new Early Help and Family Support Service.

### **The Council is focusing on how it can address its significant service demand, drive service improvement and address medium term financial challenges through the Programme, but links to its medium term financial plan could be strengthened**

- 23 The Council's financial situation is extremely challenging. The Council has made nearly £250 million in cumulative savings over the past 10 years, including over £105 million from 2014-15 to 2016-17. It has reduced its non-school staff by over 20% since 2012-13.



- 24 Looking ahead, the Council anticipates that it will have to make savings of £91 million in the period up to 2021. The Council, along with its public service partners, is facing a continued period of severe budget constraints at a time when demand for services is projected to rise significantly and citizen expectations of services remains high. The Council's Corporate Plan recognises that it needs to modernise and develop resilient services to help address this. As such, there is a huge expectation that the Programme will make a difference.
- 25 The Programme is designed to enable change within the Council. The Council recognises that some of the projects within the Programme may not result in improvement or change for a number of years due to the longer term and preventative solutions being sought, such as those arising from the Improving Outcomes for Children workstream. However, the Council considers that some aspects of the Programme are already delivering change. For example, the Council has told us that it is making good progress in introducing the first bilingual virtual assistant/chatbot.
- 26 Although the Programme is not the sole solution to the Council's budget gap, there will be financial savings arising from it. For example Cabinet received a report in July 2018 stating new effective technologies arising from the Council's Digital Agenda will maximise efficiencies whilst assisting the Council to meet the requirement for £14.3 million savings in 2018-19. Our observation of a Digital Board meeting in October 2018 showed that the Digital Board made explicit reference to the need for budget savings to be achieved from 'The Cardiff App' and 'Education – Information Management' project and 'ongoing budget reductions and increased demand mean that services must find ways of doing 'more with less'.
- 27 We feel the Council could do more to assess the extent to which the Programme is contributing to the achievement of the Council's £91 million savings target. The Programme is resource intensive and increased transparency will also improve opportunities for scrutiny to more effectively challenge outcomes from the Programme, for example making reference to savings in the Programme monitoring reports and in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

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