

Springing Forward – Workforce – City and County of Swansea Council

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 We reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its workforce. We looked at how the Council strategically plans for its workforce, how it monitors the use of its workforce and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements.
- 2 We delivered this review as the world moves forward, using the experiences from the global COVID-19 pandemic, to look at how councils are strengthening their ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
- 3 We have undertaken this project at all councils as part of our 2021 audit plans to help discharge the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 4 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 approaching nine years since the Act was passed and we are now into the second reporting period for the Act. Therefore, we would expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate that the Act is integral to their thinking and genuinely shaping what they do.
- 5 Under the Act, councils must carry out sustainable development in accordance with the sustainable development principle. To do something in accordance with the sustainable development principle means that the Council must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To act in that manner, the Council must take account of the five ways of working: long-term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention. Statutory guidance on the Act sets out seven core organisational activities that it is essential that the sustainable development principle is applied to. Workforce is one of those core organisational activities.
- 6 This review had three main aims:
 - to gain assurance that councils are putting in place arrangements to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services;
 - to explain the actions that councils are taking both individually and collectively to strengthen their arrangements; and
 - to inspire councils and other organisations to further strengthen their arrangements through capturing and sharing notable practice examples and learning and making appropriate recommendations.

What we found

- 7 Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's strategic approach to its workforce effectively helping the Council to strengthen its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of its services in the short and longer-term?
- 8 Overall, we found that the Council has a clear vision for its workforce, strengthened by its work with partners, but has not identified the resources required to deliver its strategy.
- 9 We reached this conclusion because:
- The Council has clear vision for its workforce, with actions to gain more comprehensive information to strengthen its ability to transform;
 - The Council is taking action to strengthen its approach to managing its workforce including by collaborating with partners to address current issues, but has not resourced the delivery its strategy; and
 - The Council has appropriate arrangements for monitoring workforce arrangements, but there is an opportunity to make more use benchmarking to measure the current and longer-term success of its workforce initiatives.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

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

Recommendations	
Resourcing	
R1	The Council should identify the medium-term resource implications of delivering its Workforce Strategy to support appropriate delivery arrangements
Benchmarking information	
R2	The Council should expand its use of benchmarking information to help it to effectively measure success and value for money of its workforce arrangements

Detailed report

The Council has a clear vision for its workforce, strengthened by its work with partners, but has not identified the resources required to deliver its strategy

The Council has clear vision for its workforce, with actions to gain more comprehensive information to strengthen its ability to transform how it works

- 10 **During the COVID-19 pandemic the Council has been through a period of rapid change and has had to work differently.** Large numbers of staff had to quickly work from home, and some were redeployed to other roles to support the Council's response to the pandemic.
- 11 **Pre-pandemic, the Council had already begun implementing an agile working strategy which put it in good stead when moving to remote working.** It also accelerated the opportunity for the Council to shape what hybrid means for its workforce and how and where its services are delivered in the longer term. For example, the Council has since developed its 'post-pandemic working model' which is underpinned by a set of principles to determine the design of service working models that considers operational requirements, customer expectations and workforce needs. It will be important for the Council to continuously evaluate and adapt its arrangements to ensure its new models work across the organisation.
- 12 **The Council has developed a strategic approach to developing its workforce.** The Council's workforce is a strategic priority and is part of the Council's transformation programme, under 'Workforce and Organisational Development'. In October 2022, the Council approved its Workforce Strategy 2022-24 (the strategy). It has a clear vision 'to have a motivated and committed workforce that is innovative, supported, skilled and customer focused'. Five workforce goals and four strategic themes underpin the strategy.
- 13 **Plans are in place to support the Council's strategic approach.** The strategy is supported by an annual delivery plan that sets out key deliverables and milestones for the coming year. The first year of the plan focuses on establishing key strategies in relation to skills, performance, resourcing, and engagement.
- 14 **The Council has considered the key drivers for change as well as risks and opportunities over the short, and longer-term.** These include recruitment and retention, financial challenges, competitive labour market, demand on services and digital advancements. As a consequence, the Council is well placed to manage risks and take advantage of opportunities to further improve its workforce.
- 15 **There is a clear alignment between workforce and accommodation.** The location in which its workforce will deliver some services will change in line with the Council's accommodation strategy. The current expectation is that the Civic Centre

will be vacated by 2025. The Council has acquired other sites across the city for a development such as Community Hubs and a central Public Sector Hub for back-office services within the same timescale.

- 16 **The Council is clearly thinking about the connection between its workforce, and other agendas such as its digital objectives for both the short and longer term.** For example, it recognises that its workforce will need to adapt to be more digitally skilled to deliver services in different ways, such as demand for online services, whilst also considering the longer term impacts that artificial intelligence (AI) and automation will have on service delivery.
- 17 **Overall, the Council has a good understanding of its workforce.** The Council has drawn on a range of information to understand the current workforce, for example, the strategy provides information on workforce composition, workforce performance indicators, demographic information. It has also completed a PESTLE analysis to identify the external context impacting its workforce. To broaden its insight, the Council also seeks to understand regional workforce issues and working practices.
- 18 **However, the Council recognises that there are specific areas it does not yet have a comprehensive view of the workforce's needs and related issues for it to address.** For example, it has identified that it requires a needs analysis of its current leadership and management capability, and more broadly skills and capabilities. It has also identified the need to have a better understanding of the workforce's protected characteristics data. The Council is keen to be able to identify if its workforce is representative of its local communities. It is important that the Council analyses its future workforce needs to identify any gaps between available skills and capabilities/ skill shortages (or excess in areas) and requirements of roles to meet its objectives, and in turn the Council's contribution to the national well-being goals.
- 19 **The Council has identified who it needs to involve in designing and delivering on workforce management.** For example, it has undertaken a staff survey to gain insight into staff wellbeing before and after the pandemic. The response rate was lower in comparison to its previous survey, prompting the Council to engage with its workforce in different ways for workforce related matters such as holding focus groups with Trade Union representatives and a cross-section of employees on each of the key themes of the strategy, as well as with its Employee Engagement group. The Council will be undertaking another staff survey on broader issues during 2023-24 which should help to collate useful data to monitor progress of the workforce strategy's four themes.
- 20 **The Council is working to strengthen the corporate centre of the organisation's strategic approach to overseeing effective delivery of Human Resource (HR) functions as well as to develop its Workforce Plan.** For example, the Council's HR Service wants to work more closely with departments in a fuller business partner role as this current way of working is not embedded. The Council has acted in this regard and has invested in additional temporary business

partner roles to ensure that the right level of strategic support can be provided to departments to plan for its workforce over the longer term.

- 21 **It will be important for the Council continue to work towards the development of a Workforce Plan to deliver and achieve its Workforce Strategy, which aims to be ‘fit for purpose for the future and has the right purpose, vision, goals and projected outcomes across all service areas’¹.** The absence of a Workforce Plan can lead to a lack of alignment between the Council’s Workforce Strategy, objectives and ambitions, and the Council’s actual workforce – present and future. This could result in insufficient succession planning and learning and development offer, hinder diversity in its workforce, and the appropriate allocation of its resources. This could ultimately hamper the Council from strengthening its ability to transform the delivery of its services in the short and longer-term. The Council will need to ensure that when developing its workforce plan, consideration of the sustainable development principle is consistently applied.

The Council is taking action to strengthen its approach to managing its workforce including by collaborating with partners to address current issues, but has not resourced the delivery its strategy

- 22 **The Council is collaborating with partners to address current workforce issues.** The Council has longstanding partnerships with educational providers such as Gower College to support the delivery of its plans, for example, by providing digital skills training for the Council’s employees.
- 23 **The Council has a good awareness of internal workforce pressures.** As part of ongoing engagement between departments, the Council identified areas experiencing workforce pressures difficulties recruiting and is taking action to try and address this. The pandemic has exacerbated the pressures on workforce capacity that the Council had already been experiencing. The Council uses its apprenticeship scheme to ‘grow its own’ across several service areas such as in social care and property services. It is also developing a new reward and recognition strategy as an additional benefit to retain employees. However, recruitment and retention remains a key risk across the Council.
- 24 **There are some positive examples of working with its partners on workforce matters in relation to Social Care.** The Council is working with Neath Port Talbot Council and Swansea Bay Health Board on developing a regional workforce plan, as well as integrating services such as occupational health service, and are seeking opportunities to further improve capacity. These actions are key to ensure service resilience in social care.

¹ Workforce Strategy 2022-2027

- 25 **The Council has identified risks in terms of resourcing for its workforce.** For example, workforce capacity across several service areas including its HR and Service Centre and Learning and Development services, increased demand on services and financial challenges such as savings requirement for the next three years as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- 26 **The Council has not resourced the delivery of the strategy for its workforce over the longer term.** To tackle these risks, the Council has identified financial resources for its short-term actions in the workforce strategy and has shifted its thinking to a more preventative approach. For example, as described earlier in this report, the Council has invested in additional temporary business partner roles to ensure that the right level of strategic support can be provided to directorates to plan for its workforce over the longer term. However, there remains a risk to successfully embedding this approach if the support is withdrawn too early. It will be important that the Council identifies future resource implications to deliver the strategy.
- 27 **It has also introduced a system, 'Oracle Fusion', that should support managers in gaining more access to relevant workforce information including composition and learning and development needs.** Despite initial challenges in implementing the new system, it is now in place. The Council continues to explore more of the systems capabilities to transform the way it works, such as pursuing iRecruitment and self-service modules to reduce manual process and inefficiency.
- 28 **Through the support from the HR business partners and additional digital support, managers should be upskilled at managing their own staff.** This would therefore reducing demand on the HR and Business Service Team and building service resilience.

The Council has appropriate arrangements for monitoring workforce, but there is an opportunity to make more use benchmarking to measure the current and longer-term success of its workforce initiatives

- 29 **The Council has appropriate arrangements for monitoring its workforce activity.** For example, as part of the Council's Transformation Programme, the Council has established a Transformation Delivery Board which has an oversight role of the combined transformation programmes, that includes a Workforce & Organisational Development Transformation programme.
- 30 **There are good arrangements for monitoring the workforce strategy.** The Council's Workforce Strategy Project Board monitors the delivery its Workforce Strategy 2022-24 regularly on a quarterly basis. Officers also report progress to other stakeholders such as the Council's Corporate Management Team.
- 31 **The Council has defined a new suite of outcomes that it wants to achieve through its workforce strategy but these measures do not yet have baseline information nor targets against them.** The Council's intention is to establish

baselines during 2023-24 in readiness for monitoring them the following year onwards. It will be important that this information is in place as the absence of baseline information and targets could impact on the Councils ability to fully measure the progress of its transformation ambitions.

- 32 **The Council does consider approaches adopted by other organisations to managing its workforce and looks for opportunities to learn from them.** For example, the Council is involved in regional groups looking at workforce matters and finds these groups useful as a reference point and for discussing emerging issues.
- 33 **There is opportunity for the Council to use the information it has in future reporting to measure the current and longer-term success of its workforce initiatives and demonstrate if it's delivering effectively and achieving value for money.** The Council was able to talk through how it compared with other Councils or industry standards on aspects such as turnover rates, resourcing data for HR services, and that it uses its networks for benchmarking for example. However, the documentation provided as part of this review did not contain comprehensive benchmarking information.
- 34 **The Council does take action to improve its approach to managing its workforce based on learning.** For example, it has developed its future working model as a result of learning from the pandemic and has also taken action to improve its arrangements for agency staff and absence management as a result of internal audit reviews.



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