THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 6TH JUNE, 2024

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 24TH APRIL, 2024

"1049 REQUIRED LEARNING REVIEW (DCR) –

The report, presented by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, was intended to provide Committee Members with an overview of the current required / mandatory learning provided as workplace compliance across the Council and for them to consider the proposed approach to reviewing the same.

As a Local Authority and employer, the Council currently provided a number of modules of required or mandated learning, which an employee needed to complete as part of their probation process and at regular intervals, which the Council entitled 'workplace compliance'.

The report sought to highlight the current provision in relation to required / mandatory learning and the completion rates for modules currently on offer.

The report also highlighted how the Council sought to comply with regulatory requirements, mitigate risks, and address emerging challenges through mandatory learning mandates whilst balancing these requirements alongside the potential implications for employee engagement, morale, and the effectiveness of mandating learning. Also referred to was reaching the required staff audience in an engaging way, enriching the learning experience and empowering the Council's staff to be the best they could be to its citizens and the communities the Council served.

In addition, the report sought to address the recommendation brought from the Governance and Audit Committee in relation to Whistleblowing, i.e. the need to strengthen employee understanding, awareness, along with a willingness to report issues, around Whistleblowing.

Finally, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development emphasised that workplace compliance was part of a more rounded review of the induction process, which would offer new staff greater understanding of key areas of the Council, including the Corporate Plan, Annual Delivery Plan, the mechanics of staff communication and the democratic process. The online iDev training and learning system for new and existing staff helped to monitor compliance and helped to ensure that staff achieved a 100% completion of such e-learning and modules in order to complete their probation period.

Following the report, a number of questions and comments were raised by the Committee, including:

- The Chair raised the status of Display Screen Equipment (DSE), Equality and Welsh Language training and whether they were mandatory training modules for new staff. It was explained that they were not specific modules but were part of the wider induction process i.e. these areas were discussed in the section in the induction process concerning working for the Vale of Glamorgan Council, as well as new staff being signposted to further learning and topics such as the Welsh Language.
- Councillor Caroll referred to the need to ensure that at the start of the induction process and subsequent required learning for Council staff, a more 'staggered' approach was taken in order to avoid any unnecessary, 'box ticking' exercises. In response, it was stated that the Council was actively seeking to avoid a 'tick box' approach to learning and training for staff and to move away from a 'one size fits all' approach by taking a more multi-faceted approach to learning and training. On the Councillor's follow up question on the mandatory nature of asbestos training for all Council staff and whether this reflected an issue with asbestos at the Council, it was explained that this training was being reviewed with the Health and Safety Team, but currently remained mandatory in order for staff to identify asbestos should they encounter it in the course of their work. This did not imply that there was asbestos at Council premises but was merely a precaution as seen in other organisations.
- The Vice-Chair referred to the 'heavy lifting' that ICT undertook in the Council as a relatively small team and as part of the induction training it would be useful to provide more ICT 'how to' modules and guides as part of the induction process in order to raise awareness of ICT and the use of digital technology more effectively. It was explained that this was being reviewed already by the Head of Digital and some relevant training / learning had already been added to the Council online learning and training system (iDev) concerning ICT, such as Cybersecurity. The Council was also working on including learning around ICT tips, as well as more efficient use of software and digital technology.
- Councillor Dr. Johnson referred to the review of required / mandatory learning to be undertaken as part of the Council's People Strategy, and asked when this would be coming to an end, how this would be rolled out, and what could be done to ensure that staff only undertook mandatory training that was absolutely necessary for their role, in order to avoid unnecessary work pressures on them. Furthermore, would the review put into context what mandatory learning and training all staff needed to do and those areas that only needed to be done by staff in the relevant team or workstream. It was explained that the review would hopefully be completed in the Autumn and would encompass a more job centred approach to mandatory learning, etc. as well as stipulating what learning would be required of all staff to do irrespective of their work role. Further details would be provided to Committee in Autumn.
- The Chair asked whether all Welsh Local Authorities undertook the same or similar mandatory training, had the same learning requirements and if so, whether these could be 'pooled' together or a joint approach be undertaken with other Local Authorities in terms of training and learning in order to achieve economies of scale for similar training objectives. It was explained

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that some interim work had been done on this with both Welsh and other UK Local Authorities, with training and learning streams not being that dissimilar so far, but further data was needed to be gathered on this before a full set of conclusions and results could be drawn.

There being no further questions, Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

RECOMMENDED –

(1)   T H A T the Required Learning Review report be noted.

(2)   T H A T Cabinet consider the comments made by the Committee in relation to the proposed approach and scope of mandatory/required learning for Council staff:

- The importance of providing more ICT 'how to' modules and guides as part of the induction process in order to raise awareness of ICT and the use of digital technology more effectively.
- To ensure that at the start of the induction process and subsequent required learning for Council staff, a more 'staggered' approach was taken in order to avoid any unnecessary, 'box ticking' exercises and lessen the impact on staff work pressures.
- To look at a joint approach with other Local Authorities in terms of training and learning in order to achieve economies of scale for similar training objectives.

(3)   T H A T the response to the recommendations of the Governance and Audit Committee with regards to Whistleblowing be noted.

(4)   T H A T a further report be provided to the Committee once the review has been completed.

Reasons for recommendations

(1)   Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

(2)   In order for the Committee's views to be considered by Cabinet.

(3&4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting."

Attached as Appendix: Report to Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee: 24th April, 2024

Meeting of:	**Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee**
Date of Meeting:	**Wednesday 24 April 2024**
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Required Learning Review
Purpose of Report:	To provide an overview of current required/mandatory learning provided as workplace compliance across the Council and consider the proposed approach to reviewing the same.
Report Owner:	Director of Corporate Resources
Responsible Officer:	Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	OD and Learning Team
Policy Framework:	The report is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

Executive Summary:
- As a Local Authority and employer, we currently provide a number of modules of required or mandated learning, which an employee needs to complete as part of their probation process and regular intervals subsequently which we entitle 'workplace compliance'.

- This report seeks to highlight the current provision in relation to required/mandatory learning and the completion rates for modules currently on offer.

- Highlighting how we seek to comply with regulatory requirements, mitigate risks, and address emerging challenges through mandatory learning mandates whilst balancing these requirements alongside the potential implications for employee engagement, morale, and the effectiveness of mandating learning. Reaching the required staff audience in an engaging way, enriching the learning experience and empowering our staff to be the best they can be to our citizens and the communities we serve.

- In addition, the reports seeks to address the recommendation brought from the Governance and Audit Committee in relation to Whistleblowing.

Recommendations

1. That Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee consider this report.

2. That Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee consider the proposed approach and scope of mandatory/required learning for Council staff and refer this report and any views to Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement.

3. That Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee note the response to the recommendations of the Governance and Audit Committee with regards to Whistleblowing.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To make Committee aware of the Council's approach to mandatory/required learning.

2. To enable the Committee to consider the proposed approach to mandatory/required learning and for the Committee's views to be considered by Cabinet.

3. To address the recommendations from the Governance and Audit Committee regarding Whistleblowing.

1. Background

1.1   As a Local Authority and employer, we currently provide a number of modules of required or mandated learning, which an employee needs to complete as part of their probation process which we entitle 'workplace compliance'.

1.2   1.2 Once completed, certain modules will be repeated at ongoing at intervals as deemed necessary to maintain competence and understanding. This is shown in the table provided as part of key issues for consideration.

1.3   1.3 These modules are held within our iDev learning platform. iDev is a comprehensive Learning Management System, which allows us to provide a personalised blended learning experience to staff across the Council, Schools and associated external parties (e.g. external Care Providers, Town Councils, The Big Fresh Catering Company).

1.4   1.4 The Council utilise iDev to provide enriching learning experiences in a cost effective and efficient way. We have tailored our system to host our blended corporate induction programme, which provides new starters with a 'introduction journey' to the Council, providing information in a number of key themes:

- About the Vale of Glamorgan Council

- Working for the vale of Glamorgan Council

- Workplace Compliance

- Next Steps

1.5 We also utilise the system as a platform to host our performance management process, for both Chief Officers and the wider 'itsaboutme' process for other Council colleagues.

1.6 1.5 This report has been prepared following consideration by Governance and Audit Committee of the Annual Whistleblowing Report in February 2024. The Governance and Audit Committee in continuing to receive annual reports in relation to staff survey results as part of the annual report recommended (minute 766 refers):

(4) T H A T the recommendation of the Standards Committee for all staff to be made aware of the Whistleblowing Policy and for the policy to be a part of the Staff Induction and Refresh Programme be agreed.

(5) T H A T the Whistleblowing Policy be considered as part of the review of mandatory training for staff, and for the matter to be referred to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

2.1 Currently at the Council we have the following online Required Learning modules in iDev which form part of our workplace compliance:

Topic Area	Content	Recertification Frequency
Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy	Policy and policy acceptance statement that is acknowledged	At recruitment only
ICT Code of Conduct	Policy and policy acceptance statement that is acknowledged	At recruitment only
Whistleblowing Policy	Policy, link to staffnet speak out pages and policy acceptance statement that is acknowledged	At recruitment only
Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Level A	Welsh Government produced eLearning module	At recruitment only
Data Protection	eLearning Module	At recruitment and then every 1 years on anniversary of completion
Safeguarding Children's and Adults Level A	Social Care Wales produced eLearning Module	At recruitment and then every 2 years on anniversary of completion
Armed Forces Covenant	eLearning module	At recruitment and then every 3 years on anniversary of completion

Fire Safety for Vale Employees	eLearning module	At recruitment and then every 3 years on anniversary of completion
Asbestos Awareness for Vale Employees	eLearning module	At recruitment and then every 3 years on anniversary of completion

2.2   We have also recently rolled out a Cyber security module, which is not hosted on the iDev site as a trial.

2.3   Completion Rates for the training are as follows:

Topic Area	Content	Completion Rates September 2023
Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Level A	Welsh Government produced eLearning module	93.48%
Data Protection	eLearning Module	80.85%
Safeguarding Childrens and Adults Level A	Social Care Wales produced eLearning Module	78.75%
Armed Forces Covenant	eLearning module	83.27%
Fire Safety for Vale Employees	eLearning module	93.27%
Asbestos Awareness for Vale Employees	eLearning module	80.59%

2.4   A review of required/mandatory learning is to be undertaken as part of the Council's People Strategy and associated workstreams and in response to the recommendation of the Governance and Audit Committee.

This review will consider the following.

- Completion rates of the current mandated/required learning (as described above).

- Requests for new mandated learning modules.

- The balance of learning and knowledge.

- The limitations of the current approach.

Requests for New Mandated Learning Modules

2.5   Through the work of the Council's departments and requirements from other bodies, such as Welsh Government and Audit Wales, the Organisational Development Team receive regular requests for new mandated/required

learning modules. This includes modules such as counter terrorism and artificial intelligence (AI).

2.6   Whilst we seek to comply with regulatory requirements, mitigate risks, and address emerging challenges through mandatory learning mandates, consideration is required of the implications for employee engagement, morale, and effectiveness of mandating learning and reaching the required staff audience. These considerations include:

- **Compliance Fatigue:** The requirement for mandatory learning can contribute to compliance fatigue among employees, leading to diminished engagement and motivation. When employees perceive mandatory training as a repetitive chore rather than a meaningful developmental opportunity, they are less likely to actively participate and absorb the intended learning outcomes.

- **Demands on the Workforce:** we must balance the delivery of mandatory/required learning with the demands of daily operational responsibilities and service delivery. As employees manage competing priorities, this may result in rushed or superficial engagement with mandatory learning, as employees view mandatory learning as a box-ticking exercise rather than a catalyst for behavioural change.

- **Resource Strain:** Developing and delivering mandatory/required learning programs, requires significant resource commitment. As a general guide, 5 minutes of interactive eLearning content, can take around 15 hours to create. There is also an administrative impact associated with tracking employee compliance, reporting, managing logistics, and addressing learner enquiries.

The Balance of Learning and Knowledge

2.7   When considering our mandatory/required learning, the Council considers the most appropriate mechanisms for disseminating information (knowledge) and developing learning for staff. This recognises that there are different (and complementary routes) available to deliver both elements. It is important also to consider:

- **Continuous Development:** Learning should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event.

- **Personalised Learning Pathways:** Rather than delivering generic learning modules, customising learning content to align with specific job roles, functions, and priorities leads to stronger outcomes and better learning.

- **Integration with Council Strategy:** Effective learning initiatives should align with the strategic objectives and priorities of the local authority, moving away from a tick box activity, and measuring the impact of a change in behaviour.

Limitations of the Current Approach

2.8   Whilst the quality of the learning provided is high, there are limitations with the current approach to required learning:

- **Resistance to Compliance:** Mandated/Required learning programs may encounter resistance from employees if they perceive them as burdensome

or irrelevant to their roles. This resistance can undermine the effectiveness of the learning initiative and impede desired behavioural change. We see high levels of engagement with the initial completion, but this may not be sustained.
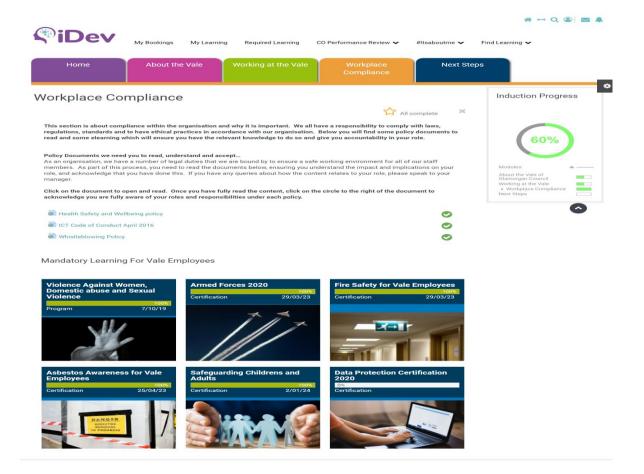
- **Short-term Impact:** Mandatory learning programs often focus on achieving short-term compliance rather than fostering lasting behavioural change. Whilst we are able to demonstrate that an individual has completed the learning, it is less clear of the evidence of any significant behavioural change as a result of the learning.

- **Limited Transfer of Learning:** The gap between learning and application poses a significant challenge to the effectiveness of mandatory learning initiatives and may not have the desired impact we are expecting as an organisation if colleagues cannot transfer the competencies acquired from the module to their direct role.

- **One Size Fits all:** Due to the nature of the Council, one-size-fits-all learning programs may fail to address the diverse learning needs and requirements of employees. The current learning modules are extensive and time consuming due to the breadth of coverage desired. These limitations may be reflected in the current completion rates highlighted above.

2.9 All of the above are taken into consideration when each request is made, alongside the need to ensure legal compliance, audit requirements and the development of competence.

Whistleblowing

2.91 As part of our review of whistleblowing processes the need to strengthen employee understanding, awareness, along with a willingness to report issues, around Whistleblowing (what it is, how an employee can submit/make a whistleblowing notification and the support that they will receive) was identified.

As part of this review, we undertook the following activities:

o Revised whistleblowing policy and process. Simplifying language used and communicating the process to staff under the auspices of the 'Speak Out' line.

o Undertook two annual surveys, collated feedback and acted on any key themes, for example making necessary changes to the process.

o Engaged with our Trade Union colleagues to support us communicate the process, removing any barriers which exist, to ensure staff members feel supported should they wish to 'speak out',

o Enhanced our induction process to specifically include Whistleblowing, so all new starters with iDev access will have read the policy and confirmed that they have done so (see images below).

o Requested that all managers highlighted and discuss the importance and approach to whistleblowing with their existing staff as part of all DMT meetings.

Home   About the Vale   Working at the Vale   Workplace Compliance   Next Steps

Workplace Compliance

☆ All complete ✕

Induction Progress

60%

This section is about compliance within the organisation and why it is important. We all have a responsibility to comply with laws, regulations, standards and to have ethical practices in accordance with our organisation. Below you will find some policy documents to read and some elearning which will ensure you have the relevant knowledge to do so and give you accountability in your role.

Policy Documents we need you to read, understand and accept...
As an organisation, we have a number of legal duties that we are bound by to ensure a safe working environment for all of our staff members. As part of this process, you need to read the documents below, ensuring you understand the impact and implications on your role, and acknowledge that you have done this. If you have any queries about how the content relates to your role, please speak to your manager.

Click on the document to open and read. Once you have fully read the content, click on the circle to the right of the document to acknowledge you are fully aware of your roles and responsibilities under each policy.

Health Safety and Wellbeing policy ✔
ICT Code of Conduct April 2016 ✔
Whistleblowing Policy ✔

Modules:
About the Vale of Glamorgan Council
Working at the Vale
▸ Workplace Compliance
Next Steps

Mandatory Learning For Vale Employees

Violence Against Women, Domestic abuse and Sexual Violence
100%
Program   7/10/19

Armed Forces 2020
100%
Certification   29/03/23

Fire Safety for Vale Employees
100%
Certification   29/03/23

Asbestos Awareness for Vale Employees
100%
Certification   25/04/23

Safeguarding Childrens and Adults
100%
Certification   2/01/24

Data Protection Certification 2020
0%
Certification

2.92   As part of the review of the mandatory training requirements as described above, the Organisational Development Team are working to include a requirement for required learning regarding whistleblowing in a way which recognises the importance of awareness of such policies, practices and processes and ensures staff feel supported to raise any aspects they feel uncomfortable or uncertain about, this may not be a iDev learning module.

2.93   Given feedback presented as a result of the audit and survey, consideration is required as to how we address any aspects of perceived fear of reprisals a staff member may have through a required learning module. It may be better addressed through a different mechanic.

2.94   Alongside the inclusion of whistleblowing in the induction process to ensure all new starters are aware of the processes, for existing staff we are encouraging all line managers to undertake regular 1:1s with their team, conduct regular performance reviews and have informal touch point discussions to support staff in terms of wellbeing and develop trust and openness. In addition, we are working closely with our trade union colleagues so staff feel properly supported should they wish to raise a concern.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

3.1 Required/Mandated learning provides a key foundation for all new starters and current staff at the Council, getting the basics right at an early stage to build a strong learning culture and investment in our people. It identifies the key needs of the organisation to ensure the Council maintains compliance, knowledge, understanding and competence to provide the best service to our citizens.

3.2 This is a key pillar of our People Strategy and strategic themes (redesigning for responsiveness, striving for high performance and driving employee experiences) all aligned strongly to the Corporate Plan and our Wellbeing Objectives.

3.3 Our People Strategy seeks to provide the foundation and direction of travel of all people related activity to provide a nurturing and supportive working environment for our staff to provide the best possible service to our citizens and the communities we serve.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

4.1 No climate change and nature considerations as a direct result of this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. However, there are potential efficiencies to be gained from a wider review of required learning, streamlining our processes to best effect.

Employment

5.2 Improving the required learning position would ensure our offering best reflects the business needs and supports the development, competence, knowledge and understanding of our staff to provide the best possible service to our citizens

5.3 Proving a robust learning platform which aligns strongly to our People Strategy and key themes:

- o Redesigning for Responsiveness
- o Driving Employee Experience
- o Striving for High Performance

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.4 No are no direct legal considerations arising as a result of this report.

6. Background Papers

None.