

Meeting of:	<b>Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Wednesday, 15 March 2023</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	<b>Audit Wales: Springing Forward - Vale of Glamorgan Asset Management and Workforce Planning</b>
Purpose of Report:	To advise Members of the findings of Audit Wales's review of the Council's asset management and workforce planning arrangements undertaken as part of the Springing Forward national thematic review in all Welsh councils.
Report Owner:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Responsible Officer:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	No specific ward member consultation has been undertaken. Regulatory reports apply to the whole authority and inform Scrutiny Committees' annual work programme, the Cabinet annual work programme and the Council's improvement programme. Progress in relation to areas for improvement arising from the Annual Regulatory Plan (including local and national reviews) is regularly reported via the Council's Insight Tracker to the Strategic Leadership Team, relevant Scrutiny Committees, Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet for final oversight.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the Council's annual audit work programme for 2021/22, the Auditor General for Wales undertook two reviews which looked at the strategic arrangements for managing our assets and workforce. This work formed part of a national thematic review, 'Springing Forward' which has been undertaken in all councils in Wales and which has focussed on these two areas.</li> <li>The reviews focused on the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements in strategically managing its assets and workforce. This involved looking at how the Council strategically plans the use of its physical assets and workforce, how it monitors their use and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements. This work has been undertaken within the context of our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>Overall, the review findings were positive and concluded that:</li> <li>in relation to assets, 'the Vale of Glamorgan Council has put arrangements in place that help it manage its assets effectively but needs to consider how it can more fully apply the</li> </ul>	

sustainable development principle to strengthen these arrangements and plan for the future’.

- in relation to workforce, ‘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’.
- 3 recommendations have been made to the Council (one on assets and two on workforce planning) to strengthen its application of the sustainable development principle in relation to both our assets and workforce planning.
- In response to the recommendations, the Director of Corporate Resources, Head of Financial Services and the Operational Manager Property and Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development have developed action plans which will be progressed by the Council.
- In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, progress against our regulatory improvement areas will be monitored via the Insight Tracker. All Scrutiny Committees will continue to be informed of progress against our regulatory improvement areas through quarterly performance monitoring arrangements. This will be supplemented with a 6 monthly and annual review of regulatory progress, which will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet for final oversight. Progress will also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.
- Corporate Performance Resources Scrutiny Committee members are being asked to consider the contents of the appended reports including the Council's response (in the form of an action plan - **Appendix C**) with any recommendations /comments being referred to Governance and Audit Committee and thereafter, onto Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement of the proposed actions to address the recommendations.

## Recommendations

1. That the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee considers the findings arising from the review of the Council's asset management (**Appendix A**) and workforce planning arrangements (**Appendix B**) and the response to the review findings and Audit Wales's recommendations (**Appendix C**).
2. That, subject to recommendation one, the report be referred to Governance and Audit Committee and thereafter to Cabinet for their oversight and endorsement of the proposed Council actions (**Appendix C**) to address the recommendations.

## Reasons for Recommendations

1. To provide for scrutiny and review of the findings of Audit Wales's Springing Forward Assets review and the Council's response to its findings.
2. To ensure the Council responds appropriately and implements areas of improvement as identified by Audit Wales.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 As part of the Council's annual audit work programme for 2021/22, the Auditor General for Wales undertook two reviews which looked at the strategic arrangements for managing our assets and workforce. This work formed part a national thematic review, 'Springing Forward' which, has been undertaken in all councils in Wales and which has focussed on these two areas.
- 1.2 The Springing Forward review looked at how effectively the Council, through learning from its experiences from the pandemic, is strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.

## 2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 **Appendix A** and **Appendix B** contain Audit Wales's reports outlining the key findings of the reviews.
- 2.2 In relation to its assets the report concludes that, 'the Vale of Glamorgan Council has put arrangements in place that help it manage its assets effectively but needs to consider how it can more fully apply the sustainable development principle to strengthen these arrangements and plan for the future'.
- 2.3 The key findings from the assessment were as follows:
  - The Council has a good understanding of its current assets to help inform its new corporate asset management plan, but needs to better understand the longer-term demand for its assets and ensure it aligns with other key strategies;

- There are positive examples of collaboration as the Council delivers its corporate asset management plan; and
- The Council has sound arrangements to monitor its current corporate asset management plan;

**2.4** The report makes one recommendation:

**Strengthening the application of the sustainable development principle in relation to assets**

**R1** The Council should more fully apply the sustainable development principle in its strategic asset management, including:

- taking account of longer-term trends and future service demand that may affect service provision and the efficient use of its built assets;
- taking an integrated approach ensuring its strategic approach to asset management helps deliver its wider plans, such as decarbonisation, workforce and digital; and
- involving service users in the design of future service delivery which may impact on its assets.

**2.5** In relation to workforce planning, the report concludes that, ‘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’.

**2.6** The key findings from the assessment were as follows:

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

**2.7** The report makes two recommendations:

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

**R1 Planning**

- 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.

## **R2 Monitoring**

- 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.
- 2.8** In response to the findings of the reviews, the Director of Corporate Resources, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Operational Manager Property have developed action plans which are being progressed by the Council.
- 2.9** The review findings and recommendations have informed the development of the next iteration of Council's People Strategy 2023-25 and the Corporate Asset Management Plan (2023-28) considered by Cabinet on 16<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February respectively ) and referred for consideration by this Committee.
- 2.10** In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, progress against our regulatory improvement areas will be monitored via the Insight Tracker. All Scrutiny Committees will continue to be informed of progress against our regulatory improvement areas through quarterly performance monitoring arrangements. This will be supplemented with a 6 monthly and annual review of regulatory progress, which will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet for final oversight. Progress will also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.
- 2.11** Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee members are being asked to consider the contents of the appended reports including the Council's response (in the form of an action plan - **Appendix C**) with any recommendations /comments being referred to Governance and Audit Committee and thereafter, onto Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement of the proposed actions to address the recommendations.

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

- 3.1** Performance Management is an intrinsic part of corporate governance and integrated business planning which underpins the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and its Well-being Outcomes. Our Corporate Plan has been structured around the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, through the development of four Well-being Outcomes and eight Well-being

Objectives. By aligning our Well-being Outcomes in the Corporate Plan with the Well-being Goals of the Act, this will enable us to better evidence our contribution to the Goals.

- 3.2 External Regulation is an important vehicle for driving continuous improvement across our services. Progressing the improvement areas identified by our regulators not only enables us to demonstrate our commitment to continuous service improvement, but also contributes to further strengthening our impact on the national well-being goals through the achievement of our well-being objectives.
- 3.3 The areas of improvement identified by our external regulators and the associated action plans produced by officers have been developed with the five ways of working in mind. The focus of these is on developing innovative ways of working that better integrate services, whilst enabling us to work more collaboratively with our partners and citizens to involve them in improving service delivery. These improvement actions also focus on preventative actions that will enable us to sustain and future proof our services into the longer term.

#### **4. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 4.1 There are no implications directly arising from this report, although failure to progress the improvement areas outlined in the report could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments and could result in a special inspection by the Auditor General for Wales if deemed that the Council is not meeting the performance requirements.
- 4.2 Both the Corporate Asset Management Plan and the Human Resources Strategy and Workforce Development Plan aim to have a positive impact on climate change and nature overall.
- 4.3 The climate change and nature implications in respect of our property assets and our people resources continue to inform developments aligned with our Human Resources and Workforce Development Plans and the new Corporate Asset Management Plan 2022 and will identify mitigating actions required to minimise adverse consequences in the use of those resources.

#### **5. Resources and Legal Considerations**

##### **Financial**

- 5.1 There are no additional budgetary implications directly arising from this report, although failure to progress the improvement areas outlined in the report could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments of the Council which could in turn put funding opportunities at risk.
- 5.2 The Corporate Asset Management Plan and the Human Resources Strategy and Workforce Plan both have regard to the effects of climate change and nature implications and inform decisions around resource use that help to mitigate climate change and nature implications in the use of those resources.
- 5.3 The financial sustainability of our property assets will be considered as part of the development of the new Corporate Asset Management Plan in 2022. Similar

considerations are being given to ensuring the sustainability of our workforce as part of the Workforce Plan.

### **Employment**

- 5.4** There are no direct workforce related implications associated with this report. However, there are a number of issues contained within the report that if not effectively managed have the potential to impact on our staff establishment and performance overall. This may in turn impact adversely on achievement of our well-being Objectives.
- 5.5** The resources required to support the effective management of our property assets will form a part of the development of the new Corporate Asset Management Plan in 2022. There are similar ongoing considerations as part of workforce planning.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 5.6** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WBFG) and the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E) require the Council to publish annual Well-being Objectives, keep performance under review and consult and report on our performance through an annual self-assessment relating to the previous financial year.
- 5.7** The Auditor General for Wales is statutorily required under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, to examine public bodies to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives and taking steps to meet them.
- 5.8** Under the LG&E Act, a special inspection of the Council may be undertaken if the Auditor General for Wales considers that the council is not, or may not be meeting, the performance requirements. This inspection is to assess the extent to which the Council is meeting the performance requirements, in exercising its functions effectively; using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and in ensuring its governance is effective for securing the above.

## **6. Background Papers**

None

# Springing Forward – Assets – Vale of Glamorgan Council

Audit year: 2021-22

Date issued: July 2022

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# Summary report

## Summary

### What we reviewed and why

- 1 We reviewed the Vale of Glamorgan Council's (the Council) arrangements for managing its assets with a primary focus on office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivers services to its residents. We looked at how the Council strategically plans the use of its assets, how it monitors the use of its assets 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 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 demonstrate that the Act is integral to their thinking and genuinely shaping what they do.
- 4 The Council's asset base had a valuation of £737.3 million in 2021 and comprised of the asset types set out in **Exhibit 1**.

## Exhibit 1: asset base

The table below sets out key aspects of the Council's asset base in 2021.

Asset type	Number in 2021
Core Corporate Offices	4
Schools and learning centres	62
Leisure centres	5
Council house dwellings	3,894
Libraries	4 (there are four full time libraries and five community run libraries)
Community Centres	22
Residential homes	4
Recycling centres	2
Public toilets, parks and gardens	43

Source: Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 5 We undertook the review during November and December 2021.

## What we found

- 6 Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's strategic approach to its assets effectively helping the Council to strengthen its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of its services in the short and longer-term?

- 7 Overall, we concluded: The Council has put arrangements in place that help it manage its assets effectively, but needs to consider how it can more fully apply the sustainable development principle to strengthen these arrangements and plan for the future.
- 8 We reached this conclusion because:
- the Council has a good understanding of its current assets to help inform its new corporate asset management plan, but needs to better understand the longer-term demand for its assets and ensure it aligns with other key strategies;
  - there are positive examples of collaboration as the Council delivers its corporate asset management plan; and
  - the Council has sound arrangements to monitor its current corporate asset management plan.

## Recommendations

### Exhibit 2: recommendations

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

Recommendations
<p><b>R1 Strengthening the application of the sustainable development principle</b></p> <p>The Council should more fully apply the sustainable development principle in its strategic asset management, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• taking account of longer-term trends and future service demand that may affect service provision and the efficient use of its built assets;</li><li>• taking an integrated approach ensuring its strategic approach to asset management helps deliver its wider plans, such as decarbonisation, workforce and digital; and</li><li>• involving service users in the design of future service delivery which may impact on its assets.</li></ul>

# Detailed report

The Council has put arrangements in place that help it manage its assets effectively, but needs to consider how it can more fully apply the sustainable development principle to strengthen those arrangements and plan for the future

**The Council has a good understanding of its current assets to help inform its new corporate asset management plan, but needs to better understand the longer-term demand for its assets and ensure it aligns with other key strategies**

## Why setting a clear vision is important

- 9 A clear asset management plan and well-developed delivery plans are important to identify the intended usage of assets over the short and longer term; the funding available to maintain and develop assets, as well as the anticipated future level of demand for, and cost of, providing services. It is also important to identify how the asset management plan aligns and integrates with other relevant strategies including, agile working, workforce, digital and carbon reduction. Learning from the changes brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic can help councils strengthen their ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services.

## What we found

- The Council has a Corporate Asset Management Plan (CAMP) 2019-22. Contained in the CAMP is a Property Mission Statement outlining the Council's long-term aspiration 'to have a lean, sustainable portfolio that is fit for purpose to support service delivery across the Vale'. The CAMP does not define the Council's view of long-term<sup>1</sup>. It is unclear therefore what time period the mission statement refers to, and to what extent the Council is considering long-term trends that may affect future service delivery and demand.
- Contained in the CAMP is the Council's Smarter Working Policy with a focus to help make best use of the Council's office accommodation and to enable different

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<sup>1</sup> The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act's [statutory guidance](#) does not prescribe the time period meant by long term. However, 'a useful reference point is that a generation is considered to be about 25 years. It is therefore expected that public bodies and public services boards will look at least 10 years ahead, although best practice would be to look 25 years ahead. In some contexts, it will be longer'.

styles of working. The Council also set up a Space project focussing on key corporate buildings as part of the Reshaping Services Asset Programme.

- Prior to the pandemic, the Council conducted an occupancy review of its main office accommodation to determine occupancy rates. As a result, the Council gathered data and was therefore in a good position to understand the usage of its main offices and to progress with making best use of its office accommodation based on solid evidence.
- The Council's ambition to optimise use of its office accommodation remains a priority as staff worked from home where possible during the pandemic as per Welsh Government restrictions. Directorates engaged with staff to understand if those currently home-working would want to continue working from home, have hybrid working or a complete return to the office. The Council anticipates the office space available would be a more flexible, collaborative working environment.
- In addition, in late 2021, the Council surveyed its Heads of Service to establish their future office accommodation requirements and at the time of our fieldwork, were analysing the results. In December 2021, the Council held a focus group with the Heads of Service to assess the challenges and opportunities of hybrid working. The Council intend to use the information gathered from the survey, focus group and Directorates' engagement with staff to produce a hybrid strategy and inform the next version of the CAMP.
- Necessitated by the pandemic services delivered from Council offices closed and re-opened as lockdown restrictions eased, albeit with reduced opening times and a booking system to ensure social distancing. Anecdotally, the public have not adversely reacted to these new arrangements. This however has not substantiated by formal service user involvement. At the time of our fieldwork, the Council were considering fully re-opening the services when Welsh Government lift all restrictions. The Council should consider how it can best involve service users so that it has the necessary evidence to support any decision on the arrangements for future service delivery.
- The Council has robust arrangements to ensure it gathers service level information on its assets. Every department who runs services from a built asset completes a Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) annually.
- The SAMP template includes sections on the 'suitability of the property' such as location and layout to enable efficient service delivery and the 'sufficiency' of each property asset to support service needs covering periods of 0-1 years, 1-3 years and 3-5 years respectively. The 2022-23 SAMP template will also reflect the Council's new Corporate Plan 2020-2025 wellbeing objectives which replace the objectives in the previous Corporate Plan.
- Prior to the pandemic the Council intended to complete a service area asset review to identify underperforming assets; reduce the amount of accommodation used to deliver services; and to identify opportunities to provide multiple service delivery from an asset (co-location). The pandemic delayed this review, but the Council is now progressing this area of work.

- The annual service asset management process commenced in January 2022 and should provide information on what services need to offer efficient and effective services to their users. The outcome of these SAMPs will help shape the next iteration of the CAMP. The current template does not explicitly reference the need to involve service users when considering any changes to service delivery. Involving service users can provide the Council with valuable information on providing both efficient and effective services in the future.
- The Council gathers information to acquire a good understanding of its current built assets. Information is gathered through a five-year programme to assess the condition of its built assets, through the annual completion of the SAMPs and through data collected on each asset such as energy usage, running costs and compliance rates.
- In 2022, the Council is refreshing its current Digital Strategy, Carbon Management Plan, Workforce Strategy, as well as the CAMP. This presents the Council with a good opportunity to further align and integrate these strategies and use the sustainable development principle more broadly, to shape and drive the new iterations of these strategies.

## There are positive examples of collaboration as the Council delivers its corporate asset management plan

### Why effectively managing the delivery of planned changes to assets is important

- 10 It is important that asset management plans deliver the intended outcomes efficiently and effectively so that actual expenditure is as close to the levels planned as possible and councils meet their statutory duties. Effective collaboration with other organisations and involving communities about their needs can improve the services delivered to residents. Where councils do not have the range of skills, knowledge and expertise to effectively manage both ongoing asset management and deliver strategic changes this may reduce the ability to deliver the intended outcomes.

### What we found

- During our fieldwork, we identified several examples of good internal and external collaboration as the Council delivers the actions within the CAMP. The Council has accommodation working groups for each of the different office hubs led by Council Directors, supported by the Estates team. In addition, the IT team were instrumental in designing a pilot office booking system to enable staff to book a workspace to maintain a safe working environment during the pandemic. The Council sought feedback from those officers using the new booking system and at



the time of our fieldwork, were analysing the comments with a view to possibly roll out the booking system to other office accommodation.

- In 2021, the Council took the lead on re-establishing the Public Services Board (PSB) Asset Management Group to include the Climate Change agenda. There is widespread membership on this group across the public sector, such as Natural Resources Wales, NHS Estates, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, South Wales Police, Welsh Government Land Division, Cardiff and Vale College, Town and Community Councils and GVS with good meeting attendance.
- A key role of this group is 'to support the development of an integrated public sector estates strategy based on a shared understanding of current estate issues across the public sector. The strategy will support improved service delivery and the identification of opportunities for collaboration/co-ordination covering both the buildings and the land holdings of the member partners'. The group has the potential to be a constructive mechanism to facilitate a more integrated and collaborative approach to planning and management of assets across the region.
- The Council has collaborated with partners in co-locating staff in a single asset such as the Cardiff and Integrated family service within the Council's Alps office in Wenvoe, and the Joint Adoption Service in the Docks offices in Barry. The Council also works with the voluntary sector in re-purposing assets. For example, the Council identified two buildings in Llantwit Major as surplus. Rather than proceed to disposal and gain a capital receipt, the Council sought interest from the community to take on the assets. The outcome is a voluntary organisation managing these assets which offers services to the local community.
- In 2020, the Council completed the Goodsheds development in the Innovation Quarter in Barry and achieved the inaugural Ystadau Cymru Award for best project in Wales in the "Creating economic growth" category. This award was given as it demonstrated how a public sector organisation used their estate to create economic growth such as the creation of jobs, homes and business opportunities.
- Some synergy and integration between Council priorities can be seen through the emergence of the Council's hybrid working strategy. This strategy focuses on the working environment, tools and technology to offer staff a different way of working. In 2018, the Council updated its Carbon Management Plan and is due for a refresh in 2022. The Energy team responsible for delivering this plan work closely with the Estates team and both are part of the Property team. The teams work together to reduce energy costs and decrease carbon emissions for the Council's corporate buildings. The decarbonisation agenda is a significant driver in the Council's future use of its assets and, we were told would feature more prominently in the new CAMP.
- The Council has a small, stable estates team. A recent recruitment process did highlight lower than usual applications, but this is a trend also seen in other councils. A future concern is that recruiting people into those roles with the necessary professional skills may be more challenging. However, at the time of the fieldwork, the estates team had sufficient staff capacity.

## The Council has sound arrangements to monitor its current corporate asset management plan

### Why effectively reviewing the delivery of planned changes to assets is important

- 11 Councils should use data to monitor whether they are achieving their intended outcomes effectively and efficiently over the short and longer term. Using benchmarking data can provide useful insight into councils' individual performance and can identify opportunities for learning from other organisations.

### What we found

- Every three years, the Council updates its CAMP with a supporting action plan. This is reported to Cabinet however the Council did not produce an annual report in 2020 due to the pandemic.
- The annual CAMP report contains an updated action plan with progress on delivering the actions supporting the five objectives in the CAMP. These are mainly narrative statements with each action given a red/amber/green (RAG) rating, but the RAG criteria is not stated. Therefore, the allocation of a RAG rating is subjective potentially making it difficult for members to fully understand the status given to each action.
- In addition to the annual CAMP report to Cabinet, the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet receive quarterly updates on the Council's Corporate Plan. Key asset management actions, for example, 'review our property and land assets to support changes in service delivery, including agile working' are included within these quarterly reports, providing members with an opportunity to understand and challenge progress.
- The Council established an Insight Board, chaired by the Chief Executive which replaced a number of working groups including the Corporate Asset Management Group. The Insight Board now considers any asset management recommendations or requests. The Operational Manager for Property is a member of the Insight Board and leads on the standing agenda item relating to asset management ensuring the use of assets remains visible at this senior officer level.
- Whilst the Council is very supportive of comparison through benchmarking, with the operational manager for property a member of the Consortium of Local Authorities in Wales (CLAW)<sup>2</sup>, the opportunity for comparison between councils has been temporarily suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As part our examination of councils' performance assessments covering the 2020-21 financial year, we noted a reduced reference to comparative performance information as the pandemic led to the suspension of some national data

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<sup>2</sup> [CLAW | Home](#)

collection. The ability to compare data and performance with other organisations will continue to be an important element of arrangements to secure value for money. This represents a challenge for councils to address particularly in light of the self-assessment duties as set out in the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021.

- The Vale PSB Asset Management and Climate Change group has a role to 'liaise with similar groups in adjoining authority areas in order to share good practice, be aware of each other's proposals and to identify/consider cross border/boundary opportunities'. At the time of our fieldwork, while the group was still in its infancy and gaining an understanding of the asset requirements of the individual public bodies, the group was beginning to look outside of the Vale for learning and good practice, such as the Swansea Bay Solar farm.





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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

# Springing Forward – Workforce Planning – Vale of Glamorgan Council

Audit year: 2021-22

Date issued: August 2022

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This document is also available in Welsh.

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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 7

The Council has improving arrangements to support and monitor the implementation of its new Strategic Workforce Development Plan but these could be further strengthened 9



# Summary report

## Summary

### What we reviewed and why

- 1 One of the findings in our Reshaping Services Programme Review report published in 2020<sup>1</sup>, 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

<sup>1</sup> [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 principle<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

## Recommendations

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### 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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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.  
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

Springing Forward Asset Review: Council Response

Ref	Recommendation (Audit Wales)	Action (Council)	Responsible	Due Date
R1	<p><b>Strengthening the application of the sustainable development principle in relation to asset management</b></p> <p>The Council should more fully apply the sustainable development principle in its strategic asset management, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>taking account of longer-term trends and future service demand that may affect service provision and the efficient use of its built assets;</li> <li>taking an integrated approach ensuring its strategic approach to asset management helps deliver its wider plans, such as decarbonisation, workforce and digital; and</li> <li>involving service users in the design of future service delivery which may impact on its assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and revise Service Plans and the Service Asset Management Plans (SAMP) to enable identification of trends and demand for services over the medium term i.e., 3-8 years and 8 years+ horizon.</li> <li>We plan to identify and use the findings (asset related implications) from the Directorate annual self-assessments and the SAMPs to inform the next iteration of the Corporate Asset Management Plan (CAMP).</li> <li>The Draft CAMP is to be reviewed by the Project Zero Board, SLT and Insight Board.</li> <li>Review terms of reference of the Insight Board to ensure it accurately provides time for integrated and detailed discussions on assets.</li> <li>Remind colleagues completing SAMPs of the importance of involvement of service users in the design of service delivery impacting on use of assets (for example, as part of Eich Lle)</li> <li>Report progress on delivery of the Public Participation Strategy to the Insight Board with consideration given to asset implications.</li> <li>Review self-assessment report (re participation activities and outcomes) to inform strategic consideration of assets</li> </ul>	<p>LC/Corp Performance</p> <p>LC</p> <p>LC</p> <p>TB</p> <p>LC</p> <p>RJ</p> <p>LC</p>	<p>Dec 2022 ready for use in the 2023 SAMP process</p> <p>Summer 2022</p> <p>Summer 2022</p> <p>Summer 2022</p> <p>Summer 2022</p> <p>September 2022 (and quarterly)</p> <p>October 2022</p>

Springing Forward Workforce Planning Review: Council Response

Ref	Recommendation (Audit Wales)	Action (Council)	Responsible	Due Date
R1	<p><b>Strengthening the application of the sustainable development principle in relation to workforce planning</b></p> <p><b>Planning:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a clear picture of the Council’s future workforce needs;</li> <li>further improve external collaboration in relation to workforce planning;</li> <li>ensure that when developing service level workforce plans, consideration of the sustainable development principle is consistently applied;</li> <li>ensure strategic alignment between Council strategies such as decarbonisation, assets and digital; and</li> <li>determine future resource implications to deliver the final Strategic Workforce Development Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publish the People Strategy &amp; Workforce plan for consultation, including making links with other Strategies and Plans such as Project Zero, Asset Management and Digital.</li> <li>Consult on the Strategy &amp; Plan, including with partners.</li> <li>Finalise the Strategy &amp; Plan.</li> <li>Work with Service Areas to develop service workforce plans, giving consideration to the sustainable development plan.</li> <li>Review the resources required to deliver the workforce plan once agreed.</li> </ul>	<p>TD</p> <p>TD</p> <p>TD</p> <p>TD/ OD Team</p> <p>TD/TB</p>	<p>February 2023</p> <p>February – March 2023</p> <p>April 2023</p> <p>April 2023 – Ongoing</p> <p>May 2023</p>
R2	<p><b>Strengthening the application of the sustainable development principle in relation to workforce planning</b></p> <p><b>Monitoring:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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;</li> <li>formalise the future monitoring arrangements and success criteria of the Strategic Workforce Development Plan;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and revise the Terms of Reference for the workforce planning working group, in light of the changes to the Strategic Insight Board (which has overall coordination of integrated planning activity).</li> <li>Include success criteria in the Workforce Plan (including monitoring arrangements).</li> </ul>	<p>TD/TB</p> <p>TD</p>	<p>April 2023</p> <p>April 2023</p>

**Appendix C**

Ref	Recommendation (Audit Wales)	Action (Council)	Responsible	Due Date
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consider the role of members in the future monitoring of progress against the Strategic Workforce Development Plan; and</li> <li>• further embed succession planning and clarify timescales for review; and</li> <li>• ensure a more consistent exit interview process and that any lessons are learnt in relation to workforce planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with LGA and all service areas to further embed succession planning activity.</li> <li>• Review (and revise as necessary) the exit interview process to draw these lessons.</li> </ul>	<p>TD/ OD Team</p> <p>TD</p>	<p>March 2023- Ongoing</p> <p>June 2023</p>