

Improving Project Management – Conwy County Borough Council

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 As part of the Auditor General's 2019-20 programme of audit work we undertook a review to gain assurance that Conwy County Borough Council (the Council) has improved project management arrangements and acted to address the recommendations made in the independent report on the Mochdre Commerce Park which was presented to the Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 March 2019.
- 2 We also reviewed whether the Council took action to address recommendations made in a 2012 review of Contracting and Procurement which identified similar improvement themes.
- 3 We undertook the review during the period December 2019 to March 2020.

Our approach

- 4 In December 2019 we held meetings with the Chief Executive Officer, several other key officers from the Council and some Councillors to discuss the scope of the work and to gain an overview of the Council's current programme and project management arrangements. The review also involved consideration of key documents, such as the Programme and Project Management Framework and Council Committee papers.
- 5 Our review was set up before the outbreak of COVID-19. We had intended to review one or more past projects and a live project as tracers to consider the extent to which there is evidence that the project management arrangements are being applied and contributing to improved outcomes and delivering value for money. This report therefore focuses on the design of project management arrangements in the Council.

What we found

- 6 Our review sought to answer the question: 'Has the Council improved project management arrangements and acted to address the recommendations made in the independent report on the Mochdre Commerce Park which was presented to the Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 March 2019?'.
 - 7 We also specifically considered whether the Council has made progress to address:
 - the five recommendations from the March 2019 report; and
 - the 21 recommendations from the July 2012 review of Contracting and Procurement.

- 8 Overall, we found that: The Council has clearly defined and improving project management arrangements, but the absence of project management for the property at the Mochdre Commerce Park was the root cause of the problems which occurred. We reached this conclusion because:
- clearly defined project management arrangements are set out in the Council's Programme and Project Management Framework, which is supported by a dedicated corporate team and tailored software;
 - the Council's Programme and Project Management Framework encourages self-reflection, learning and improvement throughout the project lifecycle;
 - the Council updates and develops its project management arrangements to reflect good practice, changes to Council policies, procedures and structures, and to respond to recommendations;
 - the root cause of the issues facing the Council with the lease of a property at Mochdre Commerce Park was the absence of project management; and
 - the Council has taken steps it believes will prevent a repeat of the issues it has faced with the property at Mochdre Commerce Park.

Proposals for improvement

Exhibit 1: Proposals for improvement

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

Proposals for improvement	
P1	The Council must ensure that it uses the CAMMS system to record and manage all projects that fall within the remit of the Council's Programme and Project Management Framework.

Detailed report

The Council has clearly defined and improving project management arrangements, but the absence of project management for the property at the Mochdre Commerce Park was the root cause of the problems which occurred

Clearly defined project management arrangements are set out in the Council's Programme and Project Management Framework, which is supported by a dedicated corporate team and tailored software

9 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- in 2007, the Council's Cabinet approved a Corporate Project Management Framework, which became the current Programme and Project Management Framework (the Framework) in 2011.
- the Framework provides a generic, scalable, structured approach to delivering programmes and projects, with roles, responsibilities and governance arrangements clearly set out.
- based on the Projects in a Controlled Environment (PRINCE 2) and the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) methodologies, the Framework reflects best practice in project and programme management.
- dedicated corporate resources facilitate and support the aspiration for consistent implementation of project management across the Council. For example:
 - the Council has a Programme and Project Management Team whose members hold professional qualifications in programme and project management. A team member led the Conwy Modernisation Programme, which won the Association for Project Management's Programme of the Year in 2019.
 - the Programme and Project Management Team delivers targeted and tailored training on project management across the Council, catering for staff experienced in delivering projects to those that are new to projects, and also supports Senior Officers and elected Members in their roles as Project Board members.
 - the Programme and Project Management Team hosts the 'Management of Projects and Programmes Forum' which:
 - provides staff with information and expert advice on managing projects, such as updates to the Framework; and

- brings project managers and officers together, giving them opportunities to debate issues and share knowledge by organising sessions on specific project management topics and hosting user groups such as the Cammsproject User Group.
- workflows in **cammsproject**, the project and programme management functionality of the procured CAMMS software system, are configured to support the Framework and enable a consistent approach to planning, monitoring and controlling projects.

The Council's Programme and Project Management Framework encourages self-reflection, learning and improvement throughout the project lifecycle

10 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council adopts the PRINCE2 and Managing Successful Programmes principles of 'learning from experience' by integrating 'lessons learnt' phases, 'risk logs' and 'pause and review' stages into the Framework and CAMMS' project and programme functionality, **cammsproject**;
- the 'Benefits Realisation Plan' steps in the Framework, along with the completion of an 'End of Project' report, allow projects to look back and assess hoped-for benefits against a project's outcomes and to identify learning points from a project; and
- being a live database of all projects and programmes across the Council with good reporting capabilities, CAMMS' **cammsproject** captures and examines issues, risks, key learning points and good practice in real time and shares them with other users.

The Council updates and develops its project management arrangements to reflect good practice, changes to Council policies, procedures and structures, and to respond to recommendations

11 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council refreshes, revises and updates the Framework as and when necessary to reflect good practice in project management and changes to the Council's ways of working.
- the Council has responded to the recommendations made in the 2012 review of Contracting and Procurement.
 - the 2012 review concluded that the Council was performing inconsistently in the procurement and contracting of external suppliers. Many aspects of the contracting process needed improving, including the way procedures were applied in many of the Council's services.

- our review confirms the Council has taken action to address the recommendations that were made.
- the Council has the appetite to embrace change, adopt emerging good practice and respond to internal and external observations, which is demonstrated by the establishment of the Conwy Opportunities Board in early 2019. Key drivers cited for the Conwy Opportunities Board's creation were the need for the Council to have a means through which it can:
 - have oversight of all projects and programmes and their contribution to the realisation of the Corporate Plan.
 - ensure current and proposed projects and programmes across the authority are the right ones to help achieve the Council's strategic objectives.
 - develop its approach to project and programme management to be in line with the professional practice of 'Portfolio Management'.
 - respond to:
 - the Wales Audit Office Annual Audit Letter (December 2018); and
 - the Staff Survey 2018, which showed a reduction in staff opinion that ideas for improving customer service are encouraged and contributions are listened to and make a difference.
 - provide challenge and support to projects and programmes before significant issues start to develop.

The root cause of the issues facing the Council with the lease of a property at Mochdre Commerce Park was the absence of project management

- 12 In reaching this conclusion we found that:
- the Framework is well written and clearly differentiates between matters which require a project and those which form part of everyday work.
 - the lease acquisition should have been, but was not, treated as a properly regulated project under the Framework. Although there was scope for confusion on this issue, there was evidence of a lack of understanding of the Framework guidance and what constitutes a 'project'.
 - the project management framework was not followed, and sufficient project governance was not established. A properly functioning project management structure, such as the one in place within the Council, would have been capable of dealing with the issues that have arisen and would have uncovered the drawbacks of the property before the lease was entered into.

The Council has taken steps it believes will prevent a repeat of the issues it has faced with the property lease at Mochdre Commerce Park

- 13 In reaching this conclusion we found that the Council has responded to the recommendations set out in the report into the acquisition of the lease at Mochdre Commerce Park by:
- delivering a tailored training programme for Members and Council staff on the Framework. The Council is committed to providing refresher training on a regular basis and requiring new staff to undertake the training before becoming involved in any projects.
 - considering the issues raised by the independent report on the Mochdre Commerce Park, updating the Framework with additional guidance covering reporting arrangements, board membership and decision-making issues.
 - introducing Failsafe Checklists on significant property related transactions (those with a value over £250,000 or where there are unusual or complex issues with the property) that the Council's Senior Leadership Team must collectively review, scrutinise and 'sign off' before commitment.



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