

Review of the Human Resources and Organisational Development Service – **Wrexham County Borough Council**

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 We reviewed the Council's Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR&OD) service. We focussed on:
 - the vision and strategic direction of the HR&OD Service in supporting the Council to achieve its objectives;
 - the Council's approach to HR&OD management through its:
 - business partner model;
 - workforce planning;
 - communication and support for managers to engage with harder to reach staff groups; and
 - the measurement, monitoring and reporting of HR&OD performance.
- 2 We were seeking assurance that the Council's HR&OD service is meeting the needs of the Council effectively and had made progress since our previous reviews¹.
- 3 We undertook the review during the period January 2020 to April 2020.

What we found

- 4 Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's HR&OD service meeting the needs of the Council effectively?
- 5 Overall we found that: The Council has a transformative HR&OD model, but there is more to do before it fully supports delivery of the Council's aspirations. We reached this conclusion because:
 - there is a clear strategic direction for the HR&OD service;
 - the Council supports managers well through its HR&OD business partner model, but it has more work to do on workforce planning and information management; and
 - the HR&OD service could do more to provide a fuller picture of its performance and use this information to drive improvement.

¹ Wales Audit Office Corporate Assessment 2015, Wales Audit Office Sickness Absence Arrangements Follow-up Review 2018.

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	
HR Information System (HRIS) Implementation	
P1	Drive the expansion of the functionality of the HRIS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• produce and communicate a clear roadmap (with dates, milestones, and potential benefits for managers) for the implementation of the outstanding HRIS modules;• implement the outstanding HRIS modules at pace to reduce the reliance on paper-based people management processes; and• explore the reasons for why some managers maintain their own spreadsheets of employee information.
Workforce Planning	
P2	Review the existing process for workforce planning to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure managers throughout the organisation are involved in workforce planning; and• ensure all submitted toolkits are completed in full and achieve a set benchmark for quality.
Employee Engagement	
P3	Produce a Council-wide action plan for improving the employee engagement score on the annual employee survey.

Detailed report

The Council has a transformative HR&OD model, but there is more to do before it fully supports delivery of the Council's aspirations

There is a clear strategic direction for the HR&OD service

6 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the HR&OD service has a clear strategy in place (the Organisation Development and Workforce Strategy 2017-22) (the ODWS).
- the work of the HR&OD service is clearly aligned to the Council's objectives. The ODWS states it contributes to the delivery of the Council Plan by focussing on two of the Council's wellbeing objectives – 'continuing to modernise services' and 'supporting a resilient Council'.
- the ODWS has four themes – Council direction; Council culture; structuring the workforce; and workforce development. Each theme is underpinned by several clearly defined objectives and performance indicators. However, not everyone we spoke to was aware of the ODWS or the detail it contains.
- the Council has a well-defined focus on an HR Business Partner model of operation with the Head of HR reporting directly to the Chief Executive. The Head of Service – HR&OD is a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and provides regular updates to the team on HR activities.
- the HR&OD service organises its work using a detailed action plan that sits behind the ODWS. We have not seen this detailed action plan to comment on.
- the Council has developed a Modern Ways of Working Programme which the HR&OD service leads on. This programme focuses on transforming the Council under the banner of 'doing more with less'. The Council's Modern Ways of Working Programme aims to transform working practices through providing improved working environments, adopting new digital solutions, and challenging the culture about how the Council currently works.

The Council supports managers well through its HR&OD business partner model, but it has more work to do on workforce planning and information management

7 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the 'Business Partner' model is working well to support managers to carry out the HR aspects of their role:
 - managers speak positively about the support they receive from HR Business Partners (HRBPs) and HR Officers (HROs);

- HRBPs and HROs have a good understanding of the business areas they are responsible for;
- managers take responsibility for the HR elements within their teams and know who to contact for guidance from the HR&OD service; and
- managers can easily access HR policies and the accompanying tools and templates.
- the Council has reviewed and improved its approach to workforce planning, but the approach is not embedded throughout the organisation:
 - the HR&OD service uses its detailed workforce planning toolkit to collect information from service areas. However, the quality of the submitted returns is variable.
 - the HR&OD service evaluated in 2019 its approach to workforce planning using the WLGA/HR Directors' Network audit tool. This work has led to improvements; such as an increased emphasis on succession planning for 2020-21 and enhanced financial information relating to workforce planning issues. The work has also highlighted areas for improvement; such as demonstrating how workforce planning is supporting departments to deliver change and improving the framework for reviewing the workforce plan at a Chief Officer level.
 - the HR&OD service's evaluation recognised that it could improve the data it uses for workforce planning. The data currently exists in different systems that do not talk to each other, and the service has set up manual processes to combine the data for end-users.
 - the HR&OD service has produced guidance for managers on workforce planning topics, for example, identifying critical posts and spotting talent during performance reviews.
 - the Council's approach to workforce planning states HR&OD will hold facilitated workshops with departments but some managers were unaware of the workforce planning process, suggesting that the exercise is completed at a senior management level only.
 - prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the Council was working to create a Council-wide workforce plan. At the time of our fieldwork (March 2020) the plan had not been completed.
- the HR&OD service uses a wide range of methods to engage effectively with 'harder to reach' staff groups across the Council:
 - the Council issues a weekly 'Friday Bulletin' e-mail to update officers on key issues. The HR&OD service is aware not every employee has access to a computer, so it widens the reach of this approach by communicating directly with key contacts in dispersed teams, producing bilingual posters, visiting remote sites, communicating regularly with Trades Union representatives, and making shared computers available.

- the HR&OD service has focussed on improving participation in the annual employee survey by issuing paper copies with ‘ballot box’ style drop off points; identifying key contacts to reach out to dispersed teams; and offering face to face interviews with tablet devices.
- in order to make critical processes easier for ‘harder to reach’ teams, the HR&OD service has adapted methods and tools for specific groups such as tailored performance reviews for Street Scene employees.
- the HR&OD service delivered a series of engaging and effective ‘marketplace’ events to communicate the Modern Ways of Working plans and seek employees’ input and ideas.
- the HR&OD service has introduced a wide range of engaging initiatives promoting mental health and wellbeing within the workforce.
- the pace of increasing the functionality of the HR Information System (HRIS) has improved recently but the HR&OD service relies heavily on paper-based processes for managing people:
 - to provide a focus on expanding the capability of the HRIS, the HR&OD service now has redeployed team members to provide a dedicated project manager and a system administrator.
 - the HR&OD service has a high-level plan for rolling out the various modules of its HRIS, but some dates had slipped significantly, for example, implementation of the web recruitment module moved from Autumn 2018 to October 2019; and the online payslips module moved from October 2018 to September 2019. The Council is aware of technical issues and the requirements to comply with the Welsh Language Standards, which have been resolved.
 - the majority of managers we spoke to were unaware of the Council’s plans for future expansion of the HRIS, both in terms of timescales and system capabilities. By implementing all of the potential capability contained in the HRIS modules, managers would have the potential to work more efficiently. For example:
 - managers told us they were frustrated with the amount of paperwork they have to complete for basic people management processes such as annual leave, managing sickness absence, and recruitment.
 - the reliance on paper-based systems leads to a large amount of administrative tasks needing to be performed by the HR&OD Service Centre. Manual data input can lead to errors and managers speak of frustrations with the Service Centre in terms of errors in HR paperwork and slow response rates.
 - managers told us they had experienced difficulties in obtaining information from the HR&OD Service Centre. As a result, a

number of managers maintain their own spreadsheets containing essential information about their team members, such as telephone numbers and next of kin details. There are risks that this information is out of date and that General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements are not being adhered to.

The HR&OD service could do more to provide a fuller picture of its performance and use this information to drive improvement

8 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the HR&OD service has a range of reporting mechanisms in place to monitor and report its performance. The service contributes to the Council's performance reporting framework, 'Focused on Our Performance', on the areas of the Council Plan that relate to HR activity (i.e. Well-being Objectives O1 'Continuing to modernise services' and O2 'Supporting a resilient Council').
- the HR&OD service also reports to several programme boards, focussing on specific projects such as the implementation of the HR and Payroll system, creating the modern and resilient Council, and the promotion of good health and well-being. The HR&OD service provides RAG-rated 'Highlight Reports' for these boards which summarise the status of the projects, identify key issues, list next steps, and discuss resource considerations.
- the strategy of the HR&OD service (the ODWS) contains 16 performance measures. However, the strategy document only contains the results for 2016-17. There are spaces for displaying the 2017-18 results, but these have not been completed. We are unclear as to where or how the detailed action plan which sits behind the ODWS is reported.
- the Council runs an annual employee survey and the HR&OD service produces a clear and informative summary of the results. One of the key measures within the survey that HR&OD uses to monitor its performance is the 'Engagement Score' which is an average of 14 questions measuring engagement across job role, line manager, team, and organisation:
 - this measure has remained within the narrow range of 59% to 64% and the target within the ODWS is listed as 'Sustain at 62%'.
 - the target is unambitious and the results are consistently low. The detailed analysis for the 2019 survey illustrates that the average score is driven downwards by very low scores of less than 50% in three areas (senior management are interested in listening to employee opinions; the Council keeps employees informed about key issues; and the Council has a clear sense of direction), and three scores of less than 60% (recommending the Council as a good place to work;

recognition for the work people do; opportunities to develop and improve to full potential) also pull the overall figure downward.

- the survey summary contains a section on action planning and instructs individual departments to share the findings at management meetings. This is to enable discussion and ownership of local actions intended to sustain engagement and address areas of decline. However, it is unclear if the HR&OD service collects and reviews the departmental action plans or creates a Council-wide plan to resolve these issues.
- HR business partners and HR officers informally ask for feedback from line managers and the HR&OD service surveys all schools that are part of the Service Level Agreement (SLA). However, the HR&OD service does not have a formal mechanism for collecting service-user feedback on how it is performing on a Council-wide scale.
- the HR&OD service engages in benchmarking activities. The service attends the national HR Directors' Network and is part of the sub-group of the six North Wales Councils. The six North Wales Councils have also joined together to provide a coaching and mentoring framework.



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