



**To/
Councillor David Hopkins
Cabinet Member for Corporate
Services & Performance (Deputy
Leader)**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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Scrutiny

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SPC/2023-24/13

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 13 February 2024. It is about delivery against the Council's Workforce Strategy. A formal written response is not required.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

Scrutiny of Workforce Strategy

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session, which focussed on one aspect of your Cabinet portfolio responsibilities, namely Human Resources, but specifically on the Council's Workforce Strategy in order for the Committee to provide challenge to progress, performance, and improvement.

Unfortunately, you were unable to attend the meeting due to illness, but we hope this letter finds you now well. We thank the lead officer, Rachael Davies, Head of Human Resources & Service Centre, for assisting the Committee, taking us through the comprehensive written report you had submitted and details, helping us to understand how the Workforce Strategy is being delivered. We know that the Strategy was approved by Cabinet in October 2022 and covers 2022-2027. Your report set out the Strategy, key themes and objectives, and associated transformation projects to implement change and improvement. It provided progress to date, with a current RAG status, and information on future actions.

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It was highlighted to the Committee that:

- The Strategy sets out our aspirations under four key themes to drive the improvement of organisational culture over the lifespan of the five-year period, contributing to the Council's Corporate Plan, '*Successful and Sustainable Swansea*,' and the associated Corporate Transformation Plan for 2023-2028.
- Shortly after approval of the Workforce Strategy, work commenced on the Transformation Programme. A Workforce and Organisational Development Transformation Programme Board was established in December 2022. The Board has been responsible for identifying appropriate transformation projects that would enable delivery of the strategy's objectives, agreeing the priority projects for implementation at any given point in the lifetime of the strategy and monitoring progress on a quarterly basis. Four specific transformation Business Cases were described, linked to the Strategy.
- The Council's Workforce Strategy contains 43 key strategic objectives across four workforce themes, all of which are anticipated to be achieved within the lifetime of the strategy. Of the 23 objectives agreed for 2023/24, 4 were Complete, 12 were Green, 6 were Amber, and 1 was Withdrawn, overall indicating that good progress has been made with addressing the objectives set out in the Workforce Strategy (with 70% due to be complete by the end of the financial year).
- One objective was withdrawn (relating to the Healthy Working Wales Corporate Health Standard) as due to circumstances beyond the control of the Council it is not achievable, and a further amber around 'developing optimal structures for specific services' is to be reframed to make it more specific and meaningful so it can be achieved across directorates. This and the remaining 5 amber objectives would be carried forward into the 2024/25 year along with newly selected goals remaining in the Strategy, including a thorough and meaningful review and update of our Recruitment & Selection Policy and review of the application and selection process. The Transformation Board will agree the priorities for 2024/25.

It was a very helpful and useful session, and this letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - key issues are summarised below.

A Workforce Fit for The Future - Recognising Performance

This Objective was noted as creating a culture of 'high performance' with regular evaluation and feedback. One of the actions being: 'Delivery of a revised, "fit for purpose" Performance Management approach, via Oracle, to reflect the future needs of the Council'. We know that the new Oracle Fusion system went live in April 2023. We asked for some detail on what the new approach looks like and how far across the organisation this extended.

We were told there is a specific module called 'Goals and Performance', which can be used across all officer grades, where individual Performance Objectives can be entered and the system can facilitate the Annual Appraisal process, with automated prompts sent out to managers regarding performance monitoring. We heard that the system has reporting functionality so the organisation can measure compliance and engagement with performance management requirements across all directorates. We noted that Corporate Services have been key test users of the new system since it was launched, before wider roll out, and this is being closely monitored. Once all departments are on board the Council as a whole will be able to generate performance information regarding the completion of appraisals, and other relevant data around compliance. You clarified that all officers will be offered an Annual Appraisal, however in some cases where appropriate there may be a team appraisal approach taken.

As well as establishing appropriate targets around Appraisals (engagement and compliance, achievement of objectives, etc), the Committee felt that an evaluation of this new approach to Performance Management will need to be undertaken at some point to assess its effectiveness, i.e. focusing on the value and quality of what we are doing through the new system, to support continuous improvement.

Workforce and Organisational Development Transformation

We agree that our workforce is our most essential asset, and we have many excellent teams, delivering front line services for the citizens of Swansea, who do not always get the recognition they deserve. We asked whether the Council seeks 'Investors in People' (IIP) accreditation, as it aims to be an employer of choice, or other ways that will help achieve this.

The Head of Service detailed the process involved in attaining IIP accreditation, but highlighted that it can be a very costly exercise. It was felt that engagement with such a process might be more appropriate as we come towards the end of the current Workforce Strategy as we reflect on things and can look for external assessments. At this point in time it was argued that the Council has a good handle on workforce strengths and areas for improvement and is currently working through these. It was felt the Council was not at any disadvantage from not having any current IIP accreditation.

We were told that the Council Employee Engagement Strategy, about to be launched, will be the best route forward to understanding how our staff feel about working for the organisation, and would be more effective than an external verification. It was added that the Council, through various means, takes the opportunity to praise Teams and/or individuals on their work and performance and share positive news stories across the Council, e.g. the Chief Executive's Blog, and Staff Newsletters, etc.

Being An Employer Of Choice – Recruitment & Retention

One of the actions is noted as 'Review and Update of Recruitment and Selection Policy so that it meets with employment legislation, best practice and Council need (particularly with regard to Equalities)', and another action states there will be a 'Review of the Application Process so that it is compliant with legislation and is seen to be supportive to applicants'. We asked for some more detail on what that will look like, for example in other organisations there is a greater consideration given to skill levels not academic qualifications, ensuring opportunity for all.

We heard that all options would be on the table for these reviews, and supported the view taken by the Head of Service not to rush this work, which was planned for this year, but to roll it on to the next so that proper time can be given to it and improve upon current rigid practice and be more progressive in our applications process. This will include research looking at good practice and experience elsewhere. However, **we were keen that the Review of the Applications Process is prioritised for 2024/5 and would urge the Transformation Board to ensure this is progressed asap.**

Outcomes

The Committee requested that a further update on progress with the delivery of the Workforce Strategy be provided in a year's time, focusing on the impact and difference being made having taken the actions within, to better enable an assessment of the Strategy's success.

We noted within the Strategy reference to a number of outcomes, along with specific strategic metrics and measures, which we could structure the discussion around next time, as far as they relate to the first year of the Strategy:

- Council Plan outcomes are successfully delivered
- Customer feedback and satisfaction is improved
- Employee morale is increased
- Attendance levels are improved
- Employees are more informed via effective two way communication
- Higher number of career paths and apprenticeships are in place and planned through closer collaboration with schools, colleges and higher education providers
- Employee performance is measured in a structured way
- A clear understanding of workforce skills and training requirements is in place
- Workforce training and e-learning completions are increased
- The Gender Pay Gap is reduced
- Workforce diversity is more representative of the communities being served and our understanding of cultural values is enhanced

- The number of employees in our “hard to fill” roles is reduced through improved recruitment and retention programmes
- The workforce age profile is more balanced
- There is less use of an Externally Provided Workforce (EPWs), or spend on consultants, agency staff and interims
- Links with peers and partners are strengthened with an increased number of collaborative services and joint workforce initiatives

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within; however, we do not expect you to provide a formal response.

We will correspond with you in due course about a meeting date and arrangements for the further update, but would anticipate it taking place around February 2025, at which time we can also follow up on matters raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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