

# **Recruitment and retention challenges – the right people at the right time?**

Isle of Anglesey County Council

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# Audit snapshot

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## What we looked at

- 1 We looked at the recruitment and retention challenges the Isle of Anglesey County Council (the Council) is facing. Including how well the Council understands its challenges, what it is doing in response, and how it reviews the value for money of its approaches.
- 2 Our main audit question was, “Does the Council have proper arrangements to address its recruitment and retention challenges?”

## Why this is important

- 3 Having the right workforce in place is essential for a Council to deliver the services its communities need and to meet its legal duties. To do this the Council needs to employ the right number of employees, with the right skills, at the right time.
- 4 The majority of the Council's day-to-day spending is used to pay for its workforce.

## What we have found

- 5 We found that the Council is taking a wide range of actions to tackle its recruitment and retention challenges many of which have been successful. But it does not generally assess the value for money of those approaches.

## What we recommend

- 6 We made two recommendations for the Council about improving the use of data to inform its understanding of its current and future workforce trends and about its arrangements to assess value-for-money.

# Our findings

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## Understanding the challenges

### **The Council understands which posts are difficult to fill but does not systematically review the reasons behind this**

- 7 The Council understands which of its roles are hard to fill within individual service areas but does not have corporate oversight of this. It struggles to recruit and retain staff in specialist areas such as legal, leisure, social services and occupational therapy. The Council recognises challenges include pay competitiveness, shortages of qualified staff in some professions and changing expectations around work-life balance. It has also identified local challenges such as the Council's geographical location and difficulty recruiting Welsh speaking staff for some posts. The Council does not have a council-wide list of hard to fill posts across the Council or the reasons why which limits its understanding at a corporate level.
- 8 Identifying its hard to fill roles across the Council, and the reasons why, can help the Council have a better understanding of its challenges and to target its resources.
- 9 The Council uses a range of ways to help it understand its recruitment and retention challenges. It gains information on its recruitment and retention challenges through its Annual Workforce Review, which is a questionnaire to managers. There is also effective communication between Human Resources (HR) officers and heads of service. This forms part of a workforce planning update to the Council's Management Team three times a year, helping senior leaders to have a broad overview of workforce matters.

- 10 However, the Council does not consistently collate data in a way that provides a corporate understanding of pressures. Much of the information that the Council relies on is informal or has the potential to be inconsistently collected, for example through questionnaires. Access to consistent data would help the Council identify gaps or risks to its workforce needs. It would also help it to avoid emerging problems being overlooked and make timely interventions to address its challenges.
- 11 The Council has awareness of its use of workforce management approaches such as fixed term contracts and agency staff. It uses fixed term contracts to meet temporary needs or for grant funded roles. The Council only employs agency workers when it is unable to recruit permanent staff.
- 12 The Council recognises and monitors the cost implications of using agency workers, particularly within its legal service where the Council has made significant use of them. It is clear that employing agency workers should only be a short-term solution. By being clear on its use of workforce management approaches and why, the Council reduces the risk of using short-term solutions which could make problems worse over the longer-term.

## Addressing the challenges

### **The Council is taking a range of approaches to address its recruitment and retention challenges**

- 13 The Council is proactive in using a wide range of approaches to attract and retain staff. For example, the Council has a strong learning and development offer providing development opportunities for staff at a range of grades. These include targeted programmes for management and leadership development, a graduate scheme and paid work experience in social care. The Council also offers its staff financial and lifestyle benefits, health and wellbeing support and options for work-life balance such as hybrid and flexible working.

- 14 The Council has strengthened its recruitment processes through an online recruitment system. The Council believes this has made processes easier for both applicants and recruiting managers and helped it to onboard new starters more quickly. But the Council does not collect the data it would need to demonstrate this. The also Council provides a corporate induction process which includes e-learning modules, a staff well-being booklet, and a face-to-face session with senior leaders. An efficient onboarding process can help new employees to feel engaged and motivated as well as helping them to quickly become productive in their roles.
- 15 Having a range of approaches to recruit and retain people helps the Council secure the talent it needs to deliver its services and objectives. This increases the likelihood of the Council being able to recruit and retain people and help it to grow its future workforce.
- 16 The Council provides opportunities for staff to help inform how it responds to recruitment and retention challenges. Staff have annual development conversations with their managers and can also input into a bi-annual staff survey. New starters can also provide feedback through a new starter questionnaire. The Council offers exit interviews to staff that are leaving the organisation, but the Council does not record how many staff take this opportunity. By engaging effectively with its employees, the Council can capture timely insight into its recruitment and retention challenges, including potential problems, trends, and solutions. This can help the Council understand where best to target its resources and interventions.
- 17 The Council proactively seeks to work with others to tackle recruitment and retention challenges. This includes working with local colleges to support people with additional learning needs into employment and attending schools' recruitment roadshows. It also works with the third sector in the county to widen access to Council employment and support applicants to fill in application forms. By working with partners, the Council increases opportunities to share resources, expertise, and good practice and widen its potential pool of applicants for hard to fill posts.

## Reviewing value for money

### **The Council does not assess the value for money of its approaches to recruitment and retention**

- 18 The Council does not collate data to evaluate its recruitment and retention activities. The Council has examples of cost monitoring on the use of agency staff. However, these do not form part of a corporate framework for assessing value for money. The Council does not routinely monitor and evaluate the cost effectiveness of its major initiatives such as its online recruitment system and various recruitment initiatives. By not having clear arrangements in place, the Council is unable to assess the value for money of its recruitment and retention activity, including its impact.
- 19 The Council does not systematically capture learning or share good practice on its recruitment and retention activity. Within the Council there are informal opportunities for learning through the HR officers engagement with services. By not always sharing learning, the Council may miss opportunities to improve its approaches to recruitment and retention and improve value for money.

# Recommendation

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**R1** The Council should ensure it has the information and data it needs to enable it to understand current and future recruitment and retention trends (**paragraphs 10 and 18**).

**R2** The Council should develop an approach to assessing the value for money of its approaches to recruitment and retention (**paragraphs 18 and 19**).

# Appendices

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# 1 About our work

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## Scope of the audit

We looked at the challenges the Council faces in recruiting and retaining staff. This included how well the Council understands the challenges, the steps it is taking to respond to these challenges, and the how it reviews the value for money of its approaches.

We did not look at the wider topic of workforce planning.

## Audit questions and criteria

### Questions

We set out to answer the following questions:

- Does the Council understand its recruitment and retention challenges?
- Is the Council taking action to its address recruitment and retention challenges?
- Does the Council review the value for money of its approaches to address recruitment and retention challenges?

### Criteria

We have assessed the Council's arrangements by answering the above audit questions. To help us do that, we have created a set of audit criteria which explains 'what good looks like'. We have used the audit criteria to help us analyse the evidence we collected from our review of documentary evidence and the interviews we conducted.

Our audit criteria were informed by a combination of our knowledge and experience and research into this topic. It was also informed by our conversations with national stakeholders.

## Methods

We interviewed senior officers and the cabinet member responsible for developing and delivering the Council's strategic approach to meeting its recruitment and retention challenges.

We also interviewed senior officers from three Council services that have faced acute recruitment and retention challenges.

We also reviewed a range of documents relevant to the audit questions we were seeking to answer.

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