City and County of Swansea Peer Review 2014

Review: September - October 2014
Report: December 2014

WLGA · CLILC

Contents

1. Executive Summary

1.1   The City and County of Swansea is a well-regarded council in Wales, with a good reputation for service delivery. It has been on a significant improvement journey over recent years and the positive nature of recent audit and inspection reports is testament to that. However, local authorities are, without exception, facing unprecedented challenges, the inevitable consequence of which is an increasing pressure on the quality and level of services they all provide. In order to meet these challenges the Council's political and managerial leadership have set out a commitment to transform the Council so that it can continue to deliver positive outcomes for the residents of Swansea.

1.2   To support this aim, the Council invited the WLGA to facilitate a corporate peer review at the end of September 2014. Peer reviews aim to support councils' approach to self-improvement, offering detailed perspectives from 'critical friends' who understand the challenges of running a local authority and can make an honest and impartial contribution to their self-awareness and development. Importantly, requesting a peer review is regarded as a sign of organisational maturity and commitment to improvement.

1.3   While the peer review was arranged for the end of September, in advance of the Council's Wales Audit Office (WAO) corporate assessment, the leadership were clear that it needed to be a separate process with a different focus. While the peer review would inevitably be complementary, supporting the Council in taking stock and evaluating its own performance, the key purpose was to explore specific areas that are critical to organisational development and delivery in challenging times. These areas were:
- Delivery
- Change
- Governance

1.4   The Council was also keen to ensure that the peer review process should involve learning from elsewhere. Peers were therefore selected on the basis of their experiences and achievements and their ability to bring a fresh perspective to the issues in question. Indeed, the Review Team noted and commended the Council's openness to new ideas and willingness to engage and learn.

1.5   In undertaking the review, the team sought to gain insight by:
- Reviewing extensive council documentation
- Conducting interviews with 24 elected members
- Interviewing 27 officers
- Running workshops with a further 38 officers
- Interviewing 6 partners
- Taking a tour of the city

1.6   The Review Team's initial findings were presented jointly to Cabinet and Executive Board at the end of the site visit on 1st October. An interim letter summarising the main observations was sent to the Council on 29th October 2014.

A summary of the Review Team's main findings are set out below.

General

1.7   The Review Team found a clear sense of members' and officers' pride in Swansea, both as a city and a council; they found commitment to making it a better place and to improving the lives of residents. This appeared to be a primary motivation and repeatedly featured in interviews and workshops. This commitment was supported by a good understanding of the area and the needs of local communities.

1.8   The Review Team developed an impression of an organisation where internal arrangements and the management of revenue finances were in order and the quality of service provision was generally good. They commended the leadership for not only recognising the scale of the challenges but for the need for far-reaching transformation, as opposed to incremental change. Importantly, the Review Team noted that there is evident talent among both the Cabinet and senior management, which should provide the capacity required to continue improving and transforming the organisation.

1.9   Moreover, the Council is strong on self-awareness and diagnosis; Cabinet and senior management have a clear idea of what they need to change and there is an emerging agenda setting out how this might be achieved. The Review Team felt the Council's recognition of what it needs to change and where it wants to get to are extremely positive. However, the Review Team was less convinced that the vision and arrangements for achieving that change are sufficiently developed. That said, the Council is open to new-thinking and learning, as demonstrated by the request for the peer review.

1.10   More fundamentally, while there is a good understanding of the need for change, of the challenges facing Swansea and the needs of communities, these elements have not yet been woven into a clear narrative. This was not helped by the range of plans and priorities that the Council produces. The Review Team emphasised the central importance of setting out a 'Swansea Story' and rationalising priorities to support its delivery, but recognised the forthcoming corporate plan (in draft at the time of the review) might achieve this.

Governance

1.11   The Review Team found a constructive relationship between members and officers, based on interviews conducted. This was demonstrated by a shared

4

understanding of how they could collectively contribute to achieving the Council's goals. It also appeared that the member/ officer dynamic was healthy, with an overall perception that the Council is member-led and there is an appropriate balance between political and professional leadership.

1.12   The Leader and Cabinet have recognised that there are some members within all groups who feel disconnected from the Council's decision-making processes. They are responding to this by seeking to extend participation through the introduction of Cabinet Advisory Committees and increasing the involvement of all groups with a new monthly Group Leaders' meeting. These changes appear to have been welcomed and have the potential to build a more open, transparent and inclusive way of working if managed effectively. However, it is important to ensure that new arrangements do not hold back clear and timely decision-making.

1.13   The Council's scrutiny arrangements are still relatively new, having been introduced in October 2012. The scrutiny arrangements are unique in the Welsh context, with one overarching Scrutiny Committee and a number of ad hoc Scrutiny Panels. The Review Team heard a range of views on scrutiny, but there was a sense that it provides challenge. Some non-executive members felt the Scrutiny Panels provided a means for them to explore issues that are important to them and there was a consistent view that members could decide which panels they wished to participate in according to their interest or expertise. However, there was also scepticism from some quarters. There were some concerns that scrutiny needed to develop a stronger improvement role and some non-executive members expressed concern that the creation of a single overarching programme committee could reduce capacity and focus. Importantly, there is a need to clarify the role and responsibilities of the new Cabinet Advisory Committees and the relationship they are to have with the overarching Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels.

1.14   The Review Team recognised that the Cabinet is new and it would take time to establish relationships with senior officers, as well as finding a structured way of working that meets their needs. However, they observed that Cabinet support could be more consistent and formalised, particularly briefing and support on their new portfolios and Cabinet roles.

1.15   The Review Team were positive about new and emerging arrangements to underpin financial planning and transformation, such as the Budget Group and 'Stewardship Sessions'.

1.16   However, certain internal processes, including the speed of decision-making, appear to be a barrier to the fulfilment of the Council's aim of becoming a more dynamic and innovative organisation. In order to address this, the Council should focus on culture, as well as formal decision-making processes. This would include creating a less risk-averse, no-blame culture (see Change

5

below) where staff learn from what has and hasn't worked together, in addition to looking at, for example, the length of time Cabinet have to respond to scrutiny recommendations.

1.17 The Review Team felt there was more opportunity to reduce the process and bureaucracy in programme management and partnership working, streamlining both to increase the focus on action and reduce the number of meetings and the amount of paperwork.

Change

1.18 The Council recognises the need to foster a more positive and empowering organisational culture and there is strong self-awareness and an emerging agenda, setting out what needs to change. There is talent and commitment among the political and managerial leadership which will help drive this forward.

1.19 As already identified by the Council, change needs to be taken forward on a more 'whole council' basis. Even with the evident leadership commitment, this is a challenge. However, there are opportunities to increase the pace and scale of change. For example, some change is currently being taken forward on a department-by-department basis and there is more scope to systematically share learning and practice across the organisation. The Council should explore more cross-cutting savings opportunities, as well as aligning priorities, finance and the change agenda more closely.

1.20 The Review Team were positive about the culture change and the kind of transformation the Council aspires to. However, the Review Team felt that innovation needed to be more effectively enabled and supported and the expected behaviours championed and modelled by the leadership. Perhaps most importantly, it needs to be borne out of wider development of the Swansea story, the way of working and how every individual fits in.

1.21 While there have been significant efforts to communicate the change agenda and the challenges facing the Council to staff, the Review Team found that it had not always been consistent or effective, with the message varying significantly depending on the manager delivering it. They also found the Council's priorities are not consistently understood and there isn't a shared conception of 'Sustainable Swansea'.

1.22 The Review Team felt that the conception of and approach to transformation could become more outward-facing, with more of a focus on creating new relationships with citizens and other partners.

1.23 In order to better align resources, priorities and change, the Council should consider developing a more priority-based, themed approach to budgeting

and avoid departmental targets. The Council should be careful to ensure that its approach to identifying savings options does not reinforce silo working.

1.24   The Review Team felt there was enthusiasm and commitment towards transformation, but there is more work to be done to break down service silos. The realignment of directorates could support this, but working across the organisation needs to become the 'norm', there should be more time and space for staff to come together and managers could be given more responsibility for solving corporate problems. While there is capability and talent, it may still be necessary for the Council to bring in external technical expertise for specific pieces of work to complement the skills that exist internally.

Delivery

1.25   The Review Team identified a large number of strategies, plans and action plans containing a significant number of priorities. However, they felt that the Council needed a unifying narrative, which sets out a clear and coherent vision. They felt that developing the Swansea story was of critical importance, particularly in the context of having to make difficult choices and attempting to foster a different organisational culture. Establishing the Swansea story would help to focus on a more limited number of key priorities and ensure that activity and resources are aligned accordingly.

1.26   The Council should ensure it fulfils its role as a city and community leader and develop a stronger national presence for Swansea- in Wales and the UK. This would involve building links with Cardiff and strengthening relationships with key stakeholders in the city and region. It would also involve actively promoting the good work that Swansea is doing- within central and local government and to partners in the public and private sector.

1.27   City leadership should be balanced with community leadership. The Review Team suggested that local councillors could be further empowered as community leaders by enabling them to respond to local priorities by devolving more central budgets across the county (e.g. on the basis of both deprivation and population).

1.28   The Review Team acknowledged that the Council is beginning to look for ways to become more 'commercial', noting that there are a number of opportunities which would help meet the budget challenge and promote city growth. The Council should aim to build a more commercial skills set and capability among staff and develop a trading arm, which could exploit opportunities relating to building management, vehicle maintenance, landscaping, solar energy and district heating, among others.

1.29   The Council should consider how best to maximise its use of resources - especially its asset base. This could, for example, include creating a trading

account in property services to recycle revenue earning capital receipts in order to improve the rate of return over the longer term.

1.30   Throughout the review, it emerged that the Council were at the early stages of implementing arrangements which would meet several of the recommendations the Review Team were set to make. Therefore, many of the points made in this report reinforce the direction of travel the Council is already committed to.

1.31   This report includes a total of 20 recommendations which seek to address the identified issues and barriers or build on measures which are already being progressed.

2. Background and context

2.1 Peer reviews are a key part of the WLGA's improvement offer for local authorities, being highly regarded by both the organisations who have received them and key partners, such as the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and Welsh Government. They are generally found to be a valuable tool because they are provided by 'critical friends' who understand the challenges of running a local authority and can make an honest and impartial contribution to the Council's approach to self-improvement. Importantly, requesting a peer review is regarded as a sign of organisational maturity and commitment to improvement. This was indeed reinforced by Swansea's keenness to learn and openness to new ideas and ways of working.

Purpose of the review

2.2 The Council had a number of reasons for commissioning the review, which were to:
- Learn from elsewhere and to improve what they do.
- Develop their approach to self-evaluation.
- Assist their preparations for the WAO corporate assessment (scheduled to take place during November 2014).
- Support the overall objective of sector-led self-regulation and improvement in Wales.

2.3 While supporting the Council's own self-assessment and self-awareness in advance of the corporate assessment would be one useful outcome of a review, the Council recognised the value of drawing on the expertise of senior colleagues from within local government and the wider benefits that such an exercise could bring to the organisation. They were therefore clear that the peer review was a separate process with a different focus. In order to maximise the value of the review, the Council asked that it should focus on the specific areas they consider to be critical to their success. These were:
- **Delivery** - their capacity and capability to deliver on extensive and challenging policy commitments.
- **Change** - their ability to manage change across the organisation, to communicate what they are trying to achieve effectively and to engage staff in embracing that change.
- **Governance** – the effectiveness and transparency of internal arrangements and ability to support change and delivery.

The peer review process

2.4 Throughout the preparatory conversations with the WLGA, the Council had placed a particular emphasis on their desire to learn from others. For that reason, peers were selected on the basis of their experiences and achievements and their ability to bring a fresh perspective to the issues in question. The peers were;

DRAFT DECEMBER 2014

- Cllr. Graham Chapman, Deputy Leader of Nottingham City Council
- Nick Hodgson, independent consultant and former Chief Executive of Derbyshire County Council
- Ben Spinks, Assistant Chief Executive, London Borough of Brent
- Rory Borealis, Executive Director (Resources) and Working Smarter Delivery Lead at Walsall Council

2.5   The review consisted of desk-based analysis of key council documents, which preceded a three day site visit that took place from 29th September to 1st October. The aim of the site visit was to develop a more in-depth understanding of the organisation and test some of the assumptions made by reading the documentation. This was achieved through extensive interviews with a broad cross-section of members and officers with different responsibilities and levels of seniority. The review activity can be summed-up as follows;
- Review of council documentation
- Interviews with 24 elected members
- Interviews with 27 officers
- Workshops with 38 officers
- Interviews with 6 partners
- A tour of the city

2.6   After 2½ days of intensive interviews and workshops, the Review Team presented their initial findings to the Cabinet and Executive Board on the final afternoon. This report represents the team's more detailed findings and includes some examples of good practice from elsewhere. The Review Team hope these additions are found to be valuable by providing a practical dimension to the recommendations and some possible options for implementation.

2.7   Following the final report, the WLGA would be happy to engage in further discussions with the Council and explore whether there are opportunities for support or peer learning.

3. Governance

3.1 Sound governance is the foundation of a healthy, well-run organisation. It is crucial in enabling a council to achieve its aims, or could equally be a major barrier to change and improvement. Moreover, in a context of significant and emerging challenges, where transformational change is required, governance arrangements need to be constituted in a way that supports that change. Consequently, the Council asked the Review Team to look at their governance arrangements, with a focus on how they are supporting (or hindering) the other two elements of the review; change and delivery.

Member/ officer working

3.2 In seeking to establish the effectiveness of the Council's governance, the Review Team took a broad perspective, considering culture and relationships as well as structures and processes. One of the most fundamental considerations was the relationship between members and officers, this setting the context for all of the Council's work. The Review Team observed a healthy relationship between members and officers; there was relatively good communication and a shared understanding of how they could collectively contribute to achieving the Council's goals. The member/ officer dynamic was well-balanced, with an overall perception that the Council is member-led.[1]

3.3 While the overall dynamic is good, the Review Team recognised that the Cabinet is new and it will take time to establish relationships between Cabinet members and senior officers, as well as finding a structured way of working that meets their needs. However, Cabinet support appears to be inconsistent at the moment. The Cabinet itself also needs time to form as a 'team' and find a suitable way of working. The Review Team identified a need for more formalised, proactive briefing of and support to Cabinet members. They also suggested Cabinet members should each be clear about and 'own' a set of priorities which deliver the overall vision. These should be a focus within their regular meetings with officers.

3.4 Some Cabinet members felt they would like to build stronger relationships with middle managers and have more interaction with them. They also felt middle managers sometimes approached them with a certain amount of trepidation and thought there was an opportunity to build more trust. The Council could aim to increase interaction between Cabinet members and middle managers by, for example involving middle managers in senior manager/ Cabinet Member briefings, as and when relevant to the agenda.

3.5 The dynamic between members was also considered to be of paramount importance. The Review Team heard that there were some members, from

---

[1] It is important to note that these inferences were drawn from a fairly limited number of conversations with non-executive members, due to low turnout at the members' workshops.

DRAFT DECEMBER 2014

all groups, who had come to feel disconnected from decision-making. There was a feeling that those outside of the Cabinet were 'spectators'. However, the new Leader and Cabinet have recognised this and are keen to address it. Consequently, the political leadership are instituting new arrangements to extend participation by introducing Cabinet Advisory Committees and establishing a monthly Group Leaders' meeting. These changes appear to be welcome and, if managed effectively, have the potential to build a more open, transparent and inclusive way of working.

> **Recommendation 1:** Develop more formalised briefing of Cabinet members, which would include regular meetings with senior managers who have responsibility within their portfolio, with notes of the meeting and action points to ensure members' priorities and decisions are followed through. The emphasis should be on proactively engaging members in decisions, rather than briefing them too late into the process.

Scrutiny

3.6   The Review Team were aware that the Council's scrutiny arrangements are still relatively new, having been introduced in October 2012, and the Wales Audit Office has committed to continuing to review their effectiveness.[2] It is then perhaps unsurprising that the team heard a range of different views on the effectiveness of these arrangements. On the one hand, there was a sense that scrutiny provided challenge and many members could identify occasions where it had made an impact. The Audit Committee was cited as providing particularly robust challenge. Furthermore, some non-executive members felt the Scrutiny Panels provided a means for them to elevate and explore issues that were important to them, thereby increasing their involvement in council business and scope to influence.

3.7   However, there was also scepticism from some quarters. There were some concerns that scrutiny needed to develop a stronger improvement role and that its focus should be more closely aligned to council priorities. Some non-executive members expressed concern that the creation of a single overarching programme committee could weaken the scrutiny function by reducing capacity and focus. In addition, while there was an appreciation from members that the new Cabinet Advisory Committees could help extend involvement in policy development and decision-making, there appeared to be some confusion about how they are to relate to existing arrangements, in particular overview and scrutiny. There was some concern that without clarity of responsibilities and purpose, there could be a risk that the role of scrutiny is undermined and effort is duplicated.

> **Recommendation 2:** If the Cabinet Advisory Committees are to be effective, their responsibilities and relationship to existing arrangements needs to be clarified and

---

[2] Wales Audit Office, *Annual Improvement Report – City and County of Swansea*, May 2014, p. 18

set out clearly in the Constitution so that all members and officers understand their respective roles.

Recommendation 3: The Council should consider how scrutiny could be closely oriented towards the Council's top priorities by, for example, establishing inquiries shaped around them. This would help develop scrutiny's improvement role as well as ensuring activity and resources have maximum impact.

Decision-making

3.8   The Council's aspiration to be a dynamic, inclusive and innovative organisation which is risk aware, creative and capable of coproducing services with citizens and staff is to be commended. However, the team observed certain aspects of governance which appear to be a considerable barrier to the fulfilment of that aim at the current time. One commonly identified problem was the speed of decision-making. The Review Team heard the widespread view that decision-making is too slow, which was largely attributed to an embedded risk-averse culture. This culture appears to manifest itself through a tendency to push decisions 'up' to more senior officers, the obvious effect of which is a protracted process with unnecessary delays in implementation. An additional risk is that staff in less senior positions become disempowered and their creativity and professional development is stifled, while senior managers are overloaded with decisions. The view was also expressed that protracted decision-making sometimes leads to implementation needing to be rushed, potentially impacting on the effective management of change and the delivery of outcomes.

3.9   The leadership appear to be well aware of the tiers of decision-making and the associated consequences and are seeking to address the risk averse culture through the Innovation Programme. As already identified internally, the Council should seek to build a less risk averse, no-blame culture by creating an environment where staff work together to learn- both when things don't go to plan and when they go well. The leadership should model and promote these behaviours in order to advance the change they want to see.

3.10   In addition to the cultural considerations, the Review Team identified some procedural changes which would be complementary and hopefully increase the pace of decision-making. In particular, the Review Team felt that the Council could inject greater pace into their change programme if they stripped back some of the unnecessary 'paraphernalia' of programme management. The current approach relies on a typically structured approach, with leads, boards and workstreams. However, the team developed the impression that this may be over-engineered and could risk time and energy being spent servicing boards and working groups, rather than actually implementing change. One potential unintended consequence of taking a very structured approach is that meetings themselves become the focus and few actions are

progressed or decisions taken in between. *See Barrow Borough Council case study, p. 21.*

3.11   Programme management could be streamlined by, for example:

- Reducing the amount of paperwork, the number of meetings and ensuring conversations focus on action. Officers should be encouraged to take decisions or seek senior endorsement (where necessary) between meetings and unnecessary tiers of approval should be stripped out.
- Establishing a 'Gateway Scheme' to assess viability of major projects, so that time and energy is not wasted preparing to implement projects which are unlikely to succeed (partners could also be invited to participate).
- Focusing on the 'big ticket' items within change and partnership working, that will yield substantial successes, rather than undertaking a wide-ranging programme which will inevitably mean exerting more energy on projects which will have less impact.

3.12   While the speed of decision-making is certainly limited by cultural constraints and could be improved without any change to formal arrangements, the Council may wish to review its delegation arrangements to ensure that decision-making responsibility rests at the most appropriate level and ensure the powers are being used to the full.

3.13   Furthermore, the Council should ensure its internal audit activity is focused on 'higher risk' policies and practices so that resources are being used to best effect.

3.14   The Review Team were impressed by some of the new and emerging arrangements to underpin financial planning, such as the Budget Group & 'Stewardship Sessions' and the budget tracking system. These appeared to be systems and processes which could support sound financial management.

> **Recommendation 4:** The Council could consider reducing the time that Cabinet has to respond to scrutiny recommendations (currently 3 months).

Partnership working

3.15   The Review Team spoke with a selection of statutory and non-statutory partners from the Local Service Board (LSB) and noted the high degree of enthusiasm and commitment to partnership working. This was seen as a major asset, which the Council should harness. However, there was some concern that the LSB's responsibility was too broad and it was vulnerable to being over-managed and impeded by bureaucracy. While it was recognised that the LSB had overall ownership of the Single Integrated Plan, the scale of tasks could become overwhelming. Some suggested the LSB could have more impact if it were to focus on a manageable set of shorter term priorities (in

addition to the overarching shared outcomes) where a partnership approach could really add value.

3.16 There were mixed perceptions of the LSB, particularly among members. Some had significant concerns regarding transparency, describing it as remote or 'invisible', possibly fuelling a sense that the LSB was operating outside of democratic processes. Some of these members also thought the LSB to be ineffective and in need of a major overhaul. Conversely, others could point to specific examples of success.

3.17 One simple means of ensuring the LSB is seen to be transparent might be to develop regular communication, particularly with members. This could include sending summaries of key points, decisions and actions to Cabinet and scrutiny meetings for information, for example.

3.18 There was also a sense that the Council was getting better at engaging with and listening to the public. Although there had been improvements, there was a view from many that they could still go further. The Council were thought to be very good at working with and managing the media and the communications team appear to have an excellent reputation. However, it may be necessary to ensure that communications is equally focused on community information as on press and media.

> **Recommendation 5:** The LSB could develop a small number of priorities, based on defined operational problems, which partners commit resources to and tackle on a task and finish or rolling basis.
> **Recommendation 6:** The Council should communicate the role, purpose and activities of the LSB to members. Moreover, the Council should look for opportunities to involve members in the work of the LSB, including projects which may be taking place in their ward or local engagement and consultation.

4. Change

4.1 Changing the way the Council operates is evidently a primary concern for the leadership. Importantly, the Review Team felt that the scale of the challenge and the need for transformational change was widely understood. Key council documents, such as *Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future* and the council-wide Innovation Programme demonstrate the corporate commitment to a fundamental shift in how the Council does business. The Review Team also felt there was evident talent among both political and managerial leadership and heard how the Leader is seen as someone who will drive change forward.

4.2 The Review Team explored the Council's approach to change with members and officers from across the organisation, at a range of levels of seniority. The intention was to test the coherence, efficacy and reach of the Council's change agenda.

4.3 The leadership saw the Sustainable Swansea programme as providing the framework for change. They were clear that the intention was to reaffirm the Council's core purpose and establish a new operating model, capable of delivering on it. The Review Team commended the Council's aspirations for change and gave the leadership credit for fully endorsing and promoting it. The team supported the kind of change the leadership want to effect, as represented by the examples of 'future council' 'shifts', which are set out in Sustainable Swansea:

What Sustainable Swansea means for
WHAT WE DO and HOW WE WORK

From….. What we **do** now in Swansea	To….. What we want to **do** in the future
Leading the Council	**Leading Swansea**
Residents as receivers of services	**Residents as co-producers of services**
Providing services	**Creating new models**
From….. How we **work** now in Swansea	To….. How we will **work** in the future
Service led	**Whole Council**
Top down leadership	**Everyone is a leader**
Risk averse	**Risk aware**

Source: *Sustainable Swansea - Fit for the Future*

DRAFT DECEMBER 2014

4.4 The Council were seen to have good self-awareness and diagnosis; the leadership are conscious that the existing culture needs to become more positive and empowering, they know the organisation needs to become more dynamic and innovative and more outward facing and coproductive. As part of this, the Council has put innovation at the heart of change; it is intended to define the way of working, as well as the organisational culture.

4.5 The Review Team also felt the Council were able to identify some of the solutions to the identified problems and there was an emerging agenda for implementing change. For example, it is positive that the Council has set out plans to create a more innovative environment by promoting a healthy attitude to risk, the exchange of ideas and building new skills. However, it appears there is more to be done to develop the steps to get from the current position to their ideal operating model and culture. The Review Team therefore identified some suggestions to support the implementation of this agenda, as well as some further opportunities relating to staff engagement, which are set out below.

4.6 The Review Team felt that it was important the Council adopt a clear, unified approach to managing and promoting change. It is vital that this is linked to organisational priorities and finance.

Engaging staff in change

4.7 A fundamental barrier to driving change forward is the buy-in and understanding of staff. The Review Team heard a number of positive comments about why the Council was a good place to work, including the opportunity to work for the city and communities and the flexibility it offered. However, there were also some negative comments and particularly strong feelings about Job Evaluation and having to work longer hours to get the job done without recognition. While Job Evaluation is a sensitive issue and a negative response from those adversely affected could be understood and expected, the Review Team heard concerns about the way in which the process had been managed and the outcomes communicated. These experiences can impact on the view staff have of change management more broadly. Furthermore, a small number of those interviewed suggested that past experiences of transformation work might have caused some cynicism towards change. Therefore, honest conversations with the workforce about the future 'employment deal' and what this means in the context of the change agenda, will be crucial in building levels of employee engagement. For example, how staffing numbers or remuneration are likely to be impacted, how roles might change, as well as what the organisation can offer, including non-economic factors on training, development, support and flexibility. (*See also point 4.22*).

4.8 While the leadership see Sustainable Swansea as the driving force behind change, there does not seem to be a shared conception of what it is and what

17

it is for throughout the organisation. The leadership have sought to ensure staff are aware of the challenges and change agenda through the Chief Executive's blog (which was seen by both frontline staff and middle managers as useful) and their Sustainable Swansea roadshows. However, discussions with frontline staff revealed that messages given at these events varied considerably. Some staff had heard a 'don't worry, things will be fine', whereas others had got the sense that things were overwhelmingly bleak. In general, it appears that communication to staff and members could be improved as some described themselves as feeling on the fringes and being unaware of organisational developments, to the extent that they 'often find out from service users'. While recognising the efforts the leadership have made to get the message out, it seems the current approach has not been as effective as hoped.

4.9   Whilst the Review Team would endorse face-to-face communication as a key element in managing major change, if the Council continues running roadshows, the messages should be more consistent way. This requires an accurate, shared understanding at Heads of Service level (Directors being responsible for ensuring this) and agreed messages and tone of delivery. In order to ensure that all members are up-to-date on important issues, the Council could hold members' seminars on relevant policy developments or organisational reforms.

4.10   The Council should consider how they engage and involve staff at every level and from every department in shaping the organisations' core purpose and change agenda. This could incluce making current communication opportunities such as the Chief Executive's blog and roadshows more participative or using other mechanisms such as online forums or networks, which provide space for user-generated content and continue discussion outside of set meetings and workshops.

4.11   While there is a definite commitment to transformation, some of those interviewed expressed doubts as to whether there was clarity about the kind of radical change being sought, what it might entail or a detailed understanding of the methods that might be required. Despite this uncertainty, many officers were able to identify recently introduced measures, which had some potential to address these concerns, such as the 'new ways of working' training or the inclusion of behaviours (in addition to delivery of objectives) within the appraisal process. This suggests that the Council could be in the early stages of making the change 'real', although the prospects for implementing change at pace and scale is less clear. In addition, officers provided the Review Team with their own possible solutions, which are included below.

In order to effect change, staff suggested:
- Getting senior managers out and about in the organisation, to help achieve culture change and give them a sense of what's working and what isn't.
- Developing a mechanism for sharing ideas and learning across the organisation.
- Involving frontline staff in the Innovation Programme.
- Becoming a learning organisation, rather than a blaming organisation, which is able to focus on why things didn't work.
- Investing more in staff development and training.
- Bringing in specialist expertise when needed and listening to and learning from the third sector.
- Giving more consideration to riskier, innovative approaches to service delivery.
- Increasing the urgency of the change that needs to happen over the next 2-3 years.
- Moving away from the language of 'innovation' and 'transformation', which creates a sense of distance and takes it away from people's 'day job'.

4.12   While there is talent and experience among senior leaders, there should be a focus on systematically involving officers from across the organisation in developing new ideas. The Sustainable Swansea scoping workshops are a step towards that. The leadership should not feel that the responsibility for, or ownership of, change lies solely with them and should actively seek to cultivate an open and inclusive way of working, which provides opportunities for staff to influence from the bottom up. At a time when morale needs to be maintained, this could help ensure staff feel valued.

4.13   Similarly, there may still be a need to increase the Council's capacity by drawing on external expertise. This could mean seeking input from partners in the public, private or third sector or bringing in additional technical knowledge for specific pieces of work, which would complement the in-house skills and experience.

4.14   As previously outlined, there is a risk that the paraphernalia of programme management and the structure of boards and appointed leads slows down change. There is also the risk that change is seen as only being owned by those involved, especially those with the lead responsibility. Creating space and opportunity for other staff to contribute is one means of rebalancing that, but the leadership may also want to extend responsibility and accountability for solving corporate problems in a more formalised way.

4.15   One means of doing this would be to actively involve staff, other than senior managers, in leading and delivering change. This could relate to a corporate issue or their individual area of work, drawing on their knowledge and enthusiasm while reducing some of the burdens of programme management and reporting. For example, Barrow Borough Council invited volunteers who were interested in 'making a difference' to gather, create, promote and implement ideas on improving efficiency and effectiveness through the use of

technology. They were not selected by management. Instead senior management's role was to make sure they were 'completely unencumbered by the things councils usually do - working groups, discussion forums and discussions with trade unions' and to handle those things on their behalf. They replaced the normal structures with six weekly updates with the Chief Executive to identify issues that senior managers could help solve. This allowed them to harness the skills and enthusiasm of staff in different parts of the organisation and speed up the change process. (*See link to full case study in Annex 2*).

> **Recommendation 7:** The Council should aim to create space where staff can come together to solve shared problems (e.g. the session to consider horses being kept on council-owned land) and staff outside senior management should be empowered within the authority to bring officers together, rather than relying on or waiting for senior managers to convene a meeting or workshop. Frontline staff in particular should be more actively involved in the Innovation Programme and in developing savings proposals. Middle managers and their team managers should be encouraged to seek ideas from within their teams so that staff feel they have an opportunity to propose new ideas either informally or at team meetings. *(See also Recommendation 12 and Recommendation 13)*

Whole-council working

4.16 The Council has, rightly, stated its desire to institute a 'whole council' way of working, which will characterise the new model of operating. As a result of the senior management restructure, departments have been realigned to more thematic groups, which has the potential to strengthen the connections and collaboration across complementary agendas. However, the Review Team heard that where good practice develops or new ways of working are introduced, this still tends to be restricted to particular services or departments. There was also a sense that change is happening at different rates in different parts of the organisation. There was a view from the leadership that making cross-service structures work is a challenge which requires continuing efforts. While the thematic structure might help to strengthen joint working between certain areas it will still be necessary to encourage collaboration beyond those boundaries.

4.17 The Council has begun to identify some organisation-wide transformation projects. These are strategic in nature, as well as practical, such as developing the role of refuse workers to be the 'eyes and ears' of the organisation so that they can refer issues on to other departments. Staff referenced this as good practice and it demonstrates how the day-to-day experiences of frontline staff can be drawn on to support the council's wider priorities. The Council should seek to identify and exploit further cross-cutting change and savings opportunities, ensuring learning is shared between different strands and opportunities to scale-up and extend work across the organisation are taken.

4.18   Further to this, there is a risk that the various strands of change are not sufficiently integrated and it could feel initiative-based. There appears to be a lack of clarity about priorities (*see 5. Delivery*) and a feeling that perhaps the Council is trying to do too much all at once. If the Council were successful in drawing together a unifying narrative with limited supporting priorities (i.e. the five identified in the draft Corporate Plan) this could give shape to Sustainable Swansea, the Innovation Programme and financial planning and allow the Council to deliver change on the 'big ticket' items. Indeed, clear, specific organisational goals have been shown to promote innovative working.[3] In essence, change needs to be part of a coherent whole, linked to priorities and finance.

4.19   In particular, the Council could consider how it develops a more priority-based approach to financial planning. The Review Team heard that directors had or were considering this but had not identified a method as yet. Managers in the People directorate had been asked to develop a three year plan on the basis of a 20% reduction to the budget, recognising that extending the horizon enables a closer alignment with current and emerging priorities. One council which has a well-regarded approach to priority-based budgeting is Stevenage Borough Council. While their funding gap is comparatively small, the principles are still relevant.

CASE STUDY

Stevenage Borough Council has adopted a priority based budgeting (PBB) approach based on a methodology developed by Aberdeen City Council, to meet its need for a three year forecasted funding gap of £3 million. Central to the PBB process is a full citizen engagement programme with local people to establish their service priorities and a determination of their preferences between tax increases, service cuts and raising fees and charges. This informed the development of a range of savings proposals over the three year timeframe. After internal officer challenge, these were put to members in the form of a Leaders Services Priority Group whose membership included majority and opposition councillors, front and backbench members. Over a period of eight weeks, members ranked all savings proposals into a priority order that reflected future challenges and the results of the engagement programme. This has succeeded in producing a detailed savings programme which addresses the Council's funding gap, via a permanent shift away from short-term 'salami slicing' to a well-managed longer-term process.

Source: Grant Thornton *2016 tipping point? Challenging the current: Summary findings from our third year of financial health checks of English local authorities*, December 2013

Recommendation 8: The Council should look for more thematic transformation and savings opportunities such as, for example shared administration, which is

---

[3] Patterson et al, 2009, *Everyday innovation: How to enhance innovative working in employees and organisations*, NESTA

DRAFT DECEMBER 2014

currently being taken forward in the People directorate, but could be expanded across the whole organisation.

Recommendation 9: The Council should seek to better align finance with priorities and change, and in so doing move away from departmental savings targets to a more priority-based approach to financial planning.

Culture change

4.20   Many of the suggestions put forward by staff relate to culture and they cohere with the leadership's ambition to foster a more empowering, learning culture with 'everyone as a leader'. On that basis, there appears to be consensus about the improvement needed with the existing culture and an appetite for the kind of changes being proposed. However, translating that will and enthusiasm into sustained change is still a challenge. While the leadership have granted 'permission to innovate' further steps are required to effectively enable and support the process across the organisation. It is inevitable that it will take time for behaviour change and new cultural norms to be established.

4.21   However, while there are many positive actions being developed through the Innovation Programme, the Review Team were clear that this alone would not deliver the culture change that both staff and leadership wish to see. Joint problem-solving and staff development, for example, are likely to have a positive impact, but this will be limited if they are done in isolation. It is understandable that the Council has developed a programme and the associated means of managing it in order to galvanise energy and ensure adequate focus on culture change. However, culture change should not be seen as a separate strand, but rather a by-product of the other changes the Council is making. This means linking change to the development of an overarching narrative which staff understand and can see how their role fits with.

4.22   As previously stated, there was some reference to morale in a few discussions. However, there are inevitably a range of factors that might be affecting individual, team or organisational morale in these challenging times. While it is difficult for the Review Team to gauge the extent of this feeling or its effect based on the interviews and workshops conducted, it could be a barrier to building the kind of culture the Council wants to see. The LGA and Public Sector People Managers' Association (PPMA) supported research into the state of the employment deal in local government. The research found that the economic aspects of the traditional employer-employee deal have broken down with the loss of job security, pay freezes and reductions in pay and the emphasis on doing 'more with less' and this is further compounded by a perceived lack of support from organisations, a lack of voice and the quality of interactions with line managers. This research argues that local authorities need to forge a new deal which takes account of factors beyond the economic, such as providing support and building collaborative and productive

partnerships that enable high involvement and workforce participation in shaping and delivering change. In order to achieve this and reduce blame, they suggest creating openness and trust through solutions-focused conversations with staff, rather than performance-focused conversations. They suggest this is dependent on individual line managers being able to practice listening skills and be willing to implement ideas from their team.[4]

4.23 Furthermore, involvement and empowerment could be increased by; engaging staff in how the new values are translated into practice, providing opportunities for staff to share and promote their successes (ie. at the lunchtime seminars) and encouraging staff outside of upper tiers of management to convene cross-cutting problem-solving sessions (*as suggested in Recommendation 7*).

4.24 Making the shift from blaming to learning was repeatedly referenced by staff in different services and at different levels of seniority. This is clearly pivotal to building an innovative culture and working practices. In order to reduce blame, the Council will need to tolerate failure and promote risk taking and managerial support will be key to this. The Council could also look at ways of incentivising innovation, rewarding innovation through staff recognition or incorporating it within performance reviews.

4.25 Notwithstanding these observations, there are many useful elements of the Innovation Programme which will contribute to driving change forward. In particular, the action which focuses on staff development, building capacity and capability and using different tools and techniques. These should continue to develop.

Recommendation 10: The Council should achieve longstanding culture change by advancing a coherent Swansea story, supported by clear priorities and helping staff see how they fit with and contribute to that story, while providing support for them to adapt within their role and a means for them to influence decisions and change.

Recommendation 11: Members, senior and middle managers should consistently model the behaviours they want to see and commit to avoid blaming staff when things don't go to plan. Senior and middle managers should encourage their staff to use their initiative and try new things and create time within their own teams and wider corporate settings to consider and share the learning.

Recommendation 12: The Council should aim to develop a more systematic approach to sharing learning and practice - both positive and negative. This could be through team meetings, managers groups, lunch time sessions or problem-solving session.

Recommendation 13: Senior managers should be encouraged to get out into the organisation, meet and listen to staff. Regular formal or informal staff visits would create an opportunity for staff to communicate their experiences (particularly

---

[4] Edinburgh Napier 2012, *New Employment Deal For Local Government*, LGA and PPMA
http://ripassetseu.s3.amazonaws.com/www.ppma.org.uk/_files/documents/jul_12/FENT__134368396
7_DEVELOPING_A_NEW_EMPLOYMENT_DE.pdf

relating to what's working and what's not working) and propose ideas. It would also give the leadership a direct understanding of how successfully and quickly change is being implemented.

4.26 Promoting this culture change will yield obvious benefits for the organisation by empowering staff. However, the Council should also seek to develop the 'outward facing' strand of its change agenda alongside changes to the business and culture of the Council, so that it can fulfil the ambition to coproduce services with residents. The Council should increase engagement and involvement with partners and the community, so they can understand the pressures and help shape and deliver the 'Swansea Story' and be part of the Council's change agenda.

5. Delivery

5.1　The Review Team were aware that the Cabinet has set out its intention to focus on delivering outcomes for the residents of Swansea, keeping it at the forefront of everything the organisation does. Indeed, there was a palpable enthusiasm and optimism among the political leadership that they were going to deliver. While there was a realisation that the Council's capacity to deliver is more constrained than ever before, the Review Team acknowledged there are good reasons to be positive. Specifically, the organisation is well-regarded within the sector and the quality of service provision is generally good, there is evident talent among both Cabinet and senior management and there appears to be a healthy relationship between members and officers.

Focus

5.2　The Review Team recognised the Council's ambition to deliver on multiple agendas and its high profile commitments on issues such as poverty. However, based on analysis of key documents and feedback from many members and officers, the team considered there to be too many priorities, making it difficult to focus on the top issues that matter most. The Review Team noted different priorities within the One Swansea Plan, Corporate Improvement Plan, Sustainable Swansea and the 'policy commitments', among others, but it was difficult to see how these documents and associated priorities related to one another. Essentially, the Review Team felt that the Council was at risk of overwhelming itself with priorities and initiatives and needed to create more coherence and focus in on a more manageable agenda.

5.3　However, the leadership were broadly clear that there are five top priorities (to be set out in the forthcoming Corporate Plan, in draft at the time of the review) which should take precedence and provide overall coherence. They are:
  • Safeguarding vulnerable people
  • Improving pupil attainment
  • Creating a vibrant and viable city and economy
  • Tackling poverty
  • Building sustainable communities

However, this top five did not seem to be widely known and the inter-relationships between the various strategies, plans and priorities did not appear to be well understood.

5.4　Fundamentally, it appeared that an overall narrative or Swansea story, setting out a clear vision of the future, was missing. The Review Team emphasised the central importance of establishing this vision and rationalising priorities to support its deliver, but recognised the forthcoming Corporate Plan might achieve this.

5.5   Once the Council has established a clear vision and supporting priorities which are well-understood across the organisation, it will be better able to align resources and priorities. This means concentrating finance and change activity on the most important issues and big pay-off items, rather than spending time on a greater number of initiatives, some of which will inevitably yield fewer benefits. As previously outlined, this could be manifest through a more priority-based approach to budgeting, resulting in a reduced reliance on departmental targets which risk reinforcing silo-thinking.

5.6   In this way, clarity over priorities can help reorient activity and thinking away from service silos and promote the whole-Council working that the leadership wish to promote. Rather than refocus resources away from the day job, staff are encouraged to link their day job to the delivery of those priorities. This is then supported by continual reinforcement from the leadership and commitment of resources.

5.7   Furthermore, a clear narrative and increased focus on a small number of top priorities will create a shared understanding of what success would look like and enable monitoring and scrutiny to give particular attention to progress in these areas.

5.8   There was also a suggestion from a small number of those spoken to that the Council can appear to be preoccupied with external judgements and requirements. However, the Council should feel confident that if members and officers hold on to their commitment to improving things for the residents of Swansea and doing what they think will deliver the best outcomes, audit and inspection requirements will be met as a result.

5.9   Linked to the above points, there is a need to develop a clearer picture of how activity is actually making a difference. Some members, in particular, felt there were too many targets which were impeding delivery and there should be more focus on outcomes. The Council is developing outcomes-based performance management, which should help show the impact activity is having. However, the Council should be mindful of not over-engineering this and adding further measures and data collection requirements which don't add value.

Recommendation 14: The Council should;
14.1 Articulate a narrative, building consensus among Cabinet and Executive Board
14.2 Engage wider members, staff and partners in developing that narrative
14.3 Rationalise priorities to ensure a focus on the most important things, which will help deliver the vision
14.4 Encourage and support everyone in the organisation to adapt their role to deliver the priorities
14.5 Manage and monitor the priorities effectively, systematically involving members (i.e. ensuring a focus in regular Cabinet Member/ Director meetings). (*See also point 3.3*)

> 14.6 Ensure that the priorities underpin all of the Council's activity, aligning change and financial planning to deliver the priorities.

City and County leadership

5.10 While members and officers evidently want to achieve the best for Swansea and the people who live there, the Review Team, along with some members, officers and partners, felt the Council could be even more ambitious. They felt there was scope to further enhance the Council's role as both a city and community leader.

5.11 Expanding the Council's city leadership would involve developing a stronger national presence for Swansea in Wales and the UK. One way of developing this could be building stronger links with Cardiff, recognising areas of mutual gain and exploiting opportunities to advance shared interests. An area of shared interest, for example, is the electrification of the Great Western mainline.

5.12 The Review Team sensed the pride that members and officers had in Swansea and recognised its strengths and the achievements of the organisation. On that basis, the Council should do more to promote the good work they are doing- both to Welsh and UK governments, local government and to partners in the public and private sector. This is more than just good communication and public relations. It is about the management of Swansea's image and reputation and harnessing the support of everyone to help drive the city and county forward. Positive opportunities will come from having a strong reputation locally and nationally.

5.13 The Council is showing leadership in tackling poverty and strengthening the local economy. The team felt it essential that these two areas were seen in combination. They suggested the Council should ensure there is a coordinated approach to sector development, job creation, job search and skill development which enables local people to benefit from growth.

5.14 Within the city, developing the city centre appeared as a prominent issue. One external organisation even described it as 'the biggest local issue'. The Review Team heard a number of proposals for the future of the city centre, which could be transformative- such as the relocation of the civic offices or the development of new student accommodation. The leadership should consider what kind of city centre they want to see and how it will relate to the 'out of town' offer. They should agree key actions and engage partners- such as the university, local businesses and public sector partners in planning and delivery.

Recommendation 15: Build positive relationships with key city and regional stakeholders- including business and the universities- to get everybody on board

with the Swansea story and engage them in the delivery of priorities, particularly relating to regeneration and jobs growth.

Recommendation 16: Investing and improving the city centre is rightly a key priority. At the same time, the Council must ensure this is not done, or seen to be done, at the expense of improvements and core services to the outer areas in such a way as to alienate communities who may not benefit directly.

Community leadership

5.15   Given the recommendation above, it will be vital to balance leadership of the city and county with leadership within all local communities. The Council must be mindful that they do not create the impression that they are developing an external focus to the detriment of local residents and communities.

5.16   The Review Team suggested this could be helped by a series of measures including empowering local councillors to respond to local priorities by devolving budgets across the county. This could be allocated on the basis of need or priority, for example using deprivation and population. This is done in Nottingham City Council, where each local councillor is allocated a small budget to support their role as 'Champion of place'. Further funds are allocated based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the ward population. This budget allows councillors to allocate funds that support ward initiatives and projects put forward by the community such as family fun days, community BBQs, play equipment and park benches.

Recommendation 17: The Council should balance leadership of city and county, which could be done through practical measures such as:
- Ensuring new housing investment is used to regenerate communities
- Using local infrastructure to provide job search and opportunities for skills and jobs within the community
- Developing a programme to upgrade district centres
- Empowering local councillors by devolving budgets across the City and County
- Co-locating/ jointly delivering services within communities, to maximise resources across departments and organisations and to maintain a presence within communities.

Regeneration and commercialism

5.17   More broadly, interviews and discussions on how the Council could deliver improved economic outcomes focused heavily on job growth and the Council becoming more commercial. The Review Team felt there was more opportunity to refine and prioritise the sectors Swansea should focus on, attracting and then ensuring via job clubs and tailored training provision and other measures that local people are well placed to secure the new employment that is created. This was thought to be particularly important given the city's historical reliance on public sector employment and the 'vacuum' created by recent Department for Work and Pensions job losses.

28

5.18 The Review Team felt there were a number of commercial opportunities the Council could exploit to help meet the budget and promote city growth. At the time of the review a commercial manager had very recently been appointed and the Council were already considering a number of ways of achieving this.

5.19 Many councils are looking at how they develop a commercial mind-set across the organisation, rather than only focusing on those services most typically associated with trading. This centres on encouraging and supporting staff to identify and implement commercial opportunities in their areas.

CASE STUDY: Nottingham City Council's Commercialism Programme

Nottingham City Council has developed a Commercialism Programme which recognises that all services can be more commercial in the way they work. A clear vision and definition of commercialism has been developed, agreed and communicated to colleagues, which is '… the process of considering everything we do as a Council in a more business-like way. This ranges from trading services as a commercial business to taking a more business-like approach to processes and budget planning'. Colleagues understand that taking a more commercial approach will 'protect services and jobs', which has provided a catalyst for positive engagement with the Programme.

The Council has taken a comprehensive approach to staff engagement, identifying commercial strengths and areas for development across the organisation. This has allowed them to develop a range of tools, tailored to needs in different areas. They include; communication from senior managers, provision of self-service tools, a training programme, commercialism support service roadshows, commercialism clinics, an intranet site, induction training for new colleagues, presentations at team meetings, mentoring, coaching and opportunities for managers and colleagues to express barriers to commercialism. In particular, colleague to colleague support has inspired and enabled other individuals to apply the principles of commercialism and this has been a cornerstone of the engagement strategy.

5.20 The Review Team felt the Council had opportunities to think about how they use their assets smartly, delivering the best rate of return over the longer term. They also felt there may be opportunities to look at existing arrangements, such as exploring the possibility of renegotiating the terms of the Liberty Stadium contract so the Council can derive financial benefit.

CASE STUDY: Sheffield City Council: Polishing the family silver

Sheffield has been exploring the idea that rather than conducting 'fire sales' of spare assets, councils may be better off using them to generate sustainable income and improve run-down areas – delivering on key outcomes for the city. It's about not simply 'selling off the family silver' but polishing it up and using it in a more productive way.

DRAFT DECEMBER 2014

Sheffield decided to turn these under-used assets into drivers for local economic growth – selling where necessary to create the capital for reinvestment in the right places, and along the way creating employment opportunities for local people. Another benefit is that the project has freed up land for new housing projects (21 hectares for private and affordable housing use).

The Council has been working with other public sector agencies in the area to ensure that everyone can benefit from the asset improvement approach. A joint asset board, chaired by Sheffield's Chief Executive, has been set up as a platform where each organisation can work together to maximise the potential of joint and independently owned assets.

Nalin Seneviratne, Director of Capital and Major Projects at Sheffield City Council, explains: "Where the Sheffield approach differs from others is the attention given to asset enhancement – enhancing the value of the original assets and their saleability. Then, rather than using the enhanced receipts generated to plug short-term gaps in spending, we are using the funding in conjunction with private sector leverage to create a revolving Sheffield Investment Fund for investment in local infrastructure and economic growth projects."

Recommendation 18: The Council should invest in building a more commercial skills set and capability among staff and develop tools and training which help them identify opportunities across the organisation. (See Nottingham's Commercialism Toolkit, for example)

Recommendation 19: The Council should develop its trading arm, looking for opportunities in building management, vehicle maintenance, landscaping, solar energy and district heating and be aware of the market and what it takes to be competitive- in terms of cost and quality.

Recommendation 20: The Council should maximise its use of resources by considering how reserves and the property portfolio could be used to provide a rate of return over the long term. For example, create a trading account in property services to recycle revenue earning capital receipts. The Council should review the capital programme, being flexible in how the deficit is reduced and considering the balance between sales, borrowing and use of own cash flow.

Annex 1: List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop more formalised briefing of Cabinet members, which would include regular meetings with senior managers who have responsibility within their portfolio, with notes of the meeting and action points to ensure members' priorities and decisions are followed through. The emphasis should be on proactively engaging members in decisions, rather than briefing them too late into the process.

Recommendation 2: If the Cabinet Advisory Committees are to be effective, their responsibilities and relationship to existing arrangements needs to be clarified and set out clearly in the Constitution so that all members and officers understand their respective roles.

Recommendation 3: The Council should consider how scrutiny could be closely oriented towards the Council's top priorities by, for example, establishing inquiries shaped around them. This would help develop scrutiny's improvement role as well as ensuring activity and resources have maximum impact.

Recommendation 4: The Council could consider reducing the time that Cabinet has to respond to scrutiny recommendations (currently 3 months).

Recommendation 5: The LSB could develop a small number of priorities, based on defined operational problems, which partners commit resources to and tackle on a task and finish or rolling basis.

Recommendation 6: The Council should communicate the role, purpose and activities of the LSB to members. Moreover, the Council should look for opportunities to involve members in the work of the LSB, including projects which may be taking place in their ward or local engagement and consultation.

Recommendation 7: The Council should aim to create space where staff can come together to solve shared problems ie. the session to consider horses being kept on council-owned land- and staff outside senior management should be empowered with the authority to bring officers together, rather than relying on or waiting for senior managers to convene a meeting or workshop. Frontline staff in particular should be more actively involved in the Innovation Programme and in developing savings proposals. Middle managers and their team managers should be encouraged to seek ideas from within their teams so that staff feel they have an opportunity to propose new ideas either informally or at team meetings.

Recommendation 8: The Council should look for more thematic transformation and savings opportunities such as, for example shared administration, which is currently being taken forward in the People directorate, but could be expanded across the whole organisation.

Recommendation 9: The Council should seek to better align finance with priorities and change, and in so doing move away from departmental savings targets to a more priority-based approach to financial planning.

Recommendation 10: The Council should achieve longstanding culture change by advancing a coherent Swansea story, supported by clear priorities and helping staff see how they fit and contribute to that story, while providing support for them to adapt within their role and a means for them to influence decisions and change.

Recommendation 11: Members, senior and middle managers should consistently model the behaviours they want to see and commit to avoid blaming staff when things don't go to plan. Senior and middle managers should encourage their staff to use their initiative and try new things and create time within their own teams and wider corporate settings to unpick and share the learning.

Recommendation 12: The Council should aim to develop a more systematic approach to sharing learning and practice - both positive and negative. This could be through team meetings, managers groups, lunch time sessions or problem-solving session.

Recommendation 13: Senior managers should be encouraged to get out into the organisation, meet and listen to staff. Regular formal or informal staff visits would create an opportunity for staff to communicate their experiences (particularly relating to what's working and what's not working) and propose ideas. It would also give the leadership a direct understanding of how successfully and quickly change is being implemented.

Recommendation 14: The Council should;
  14.1   Articulate a narrative, building consensus among Cabinet and Executive Board
  14.2   Engage wider members, staff and partners in developing that narrative
  14.3   Rationalise priorities to ensure a focus on the most important things, which will help deliver the vision
  14.4   Encourage and support everyone in the organisation to adapt their role to deliver the priorities
  14.5   Manage and monitor the priorities effectively, systematically involving members (ie. ensuring a focus in regular Cabinet Member/ Director meetings)
  14.6   Ensure that the priorities underpin all of the Council's activity, aligning change and financial planning to deliver the priorities.

Recommendation 15: Build positive relationships with key city and regional stakeholders- including business and the universities- to get everybody on board with the Swansea story and engage them in the delivery of priorities, particularly relating to regeneration and jobs growth.

Recommendation 16: Investing and improving the city centre is rightly a key priority. At the same time, the council must ensure this is not be done, or seen to be done, at the expense of improvements and core services to the outer areas in such a way as to alienate communities who may not benefit directly.

Recommendation 17: The council should balance leadership of city and community, which could be done through practical measures such as;
- Ensuring new housing investment is used to regenerate communities
- Using local infrastructure to provide job search, skills development and jobs within the community
- Developing a programme to upgrading district centres
- Empowering local councillors by devolving budgets across the City and County
- Co-locating/ jointly delivering services within communities, to maximise resources across departments and organisations and to maintain a presence within communities.

Recommendation 18: The Council should invest in building a more commercial skills set and capability among staff and develop tools and training which help them identify opportunities across the organisation. (See Nottingham's Commercialism Toolkit, for example)

Recommendation 19: The Council should develop its trading arm, looking for opportunities in building management, vehicle maintenance, landscaping, solar energy and district heating. Be aware of the market and what it takes to be competitive- in terms of cost and quality.

Recommendation 20: The Council should maximise its use of resources by considering how reserves and the property portfolio could be used to provide a rate of return over the long term. For example, create a trading account in property services to recycle revenue earning capital receipts. Review the capital programme; be flexible in how the deficit is reduced and consider the balance between sales, borrowing and use of own cash flow.

Annex 2: Full case studies

Barrow Borough Council: Empowering staff
http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11643/Barrow+Borough+Council_+Empowering+staff.pdf/e3fb9ed9-93b1-4fd1-9029-4c248641c29f

Nottingham City Council: Commercialism Programme
http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/6281932/6282225/Nottingham+MJ+Awards+Submission+-+Commercialism.pdf/868bc9b4-efde-443e-a744-2e82ef84ecf3

Sheffield City Council: Polishing the family silver
http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11643/Sheffield+City+Council_+Polishing+the+family+silver.pdf/abe05cb0-9726-4477-bb14-405eb9fc9b86

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service: Change management
http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11643/Staffordshire+Fire+and+Rescue+Service_+Change+management.pdf/3d8cfaf7-83b8-43e9-b575-f73897c3b8e5

DRAFT DECEMBER 2014