

Reshaping Services Programme review – **Vale of Glamorgan Council**

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 The Vale of Glamorgan Council's (the Council) Cabinet approved the Reshaping Services strategy in November 2014. The aim of the strategy was 'to reshape the Council to enable it to meet the future needs of citizens of the Vale of Glamorgan within the context of unprecedented financial challenges'¹.
- 2 The Reshaping Services programme has three objectives. These are:
 - to identify alternative ways of delivering services which provide better outcomes for citizens and/or more efficient means of delivery;
 - to meet the future financial challenges while mitigating the impact of cuts on service users; and
 - to develop the Council and its partners to ensure they are able to meet future challenges.
- 3 The Council has identified projects in different tranches: some projects have been completed but there are a range of ongoing projects recognising the medium-term nature of the programme.
- 4 We undertook the review during the period December 2019 to February 2020.

What we found

- 5 Our review sought to answer the question: Does the Council have effective arrangements in place to deliver its Reshaping Services Programme?
- 6 Overall, we found that the Council's Reshaping Services Programme is effectively managed and has helped deliver savings, but there is now an opportunity to refocus the programme and strengthen workforce planning to support its delivery. We reached this conclusion because:
 - the Council has made progress in meeting the objectives of its Reshaping Services Programme; however, there has been a conflation of transformation and savings, and there is more work to do to progress the third objective around partnership working;
 - the Council has effective arrangements in place to govern and manage the programme, but there is scope to now refine these to support the changing direction of the programme;
 - there is an opportunity to strengthen workforce planning, although the support from Human Resources for individual projects is valued; and

¹ Vale of Glamorgan Council, Reshaping Services Strategy, November 2014

- the Council recognises the Reshaping Services Programme now needs repurposing to focus on transformation.

Proposals for Improvement

Exhibit 1: the table below sets out the proposals for improvement that we have identified following this review.

Proposals for Improvement	
P1	The Council should consider what more it can do to work with partner organisations in order to help deliver the partnership objective of the Reshaping Services Programme.
P2	As the Council intends for the Reshaping Services Programme to move away from being primarily associated with savings, it should review the criteria used to determine which projects are included, and the measures used to monitor the progress of projects.
P3	The Council should identify further training and support to help staff develop the skills necessary to respond to transformational change.
P4	The Council should ensure that its forthcoming workforce plan supports the delivery of the Reshaping Services Programme and there is robust identification and consideration of workforce needs in project documentation.
P5	If there is to be a focus on more genuinely transformational projects, the Council should ensure lessons are learned from earlier projects and put in place mechanisms to strengthen any identified areas of weakness.

Detailed report

The Council's Reshaping Services Programme is effectively managed and has helped deliver savings, but there is now an opportunity to refocus the programme and strengthen workforce planning to support its delivery

The Council has made progress in meeting the objectives of its Reshaping Services Programme; however, there has been a conflation of transformation and savings, and there is more to do to progress the third objective around partnership working

- 7 We reached this conclusion because:
- the Council was able to give several examples of services that had been reshaped through the programme:
 - community libraries;
 - setting up a commercial catering company;
 - remodelling Neighbourhood Services; and
 - changing day services provision in Adult Services.
 - although not all Reshaping Services Programme projects have met their savings targets, overall, the Council has made significant savings as a result of the programme. The Council's 2018-19 annual report sets out that the Council achieved 82% of the 2018-19 Reshaping Services Programme savings target of £6.298 million.
 - some of the savings have been achieved through remodelling the workforce, but despite that there is evidence that the programme has had a largely positive impact on the culture of the organisation, particularly in terms of encouraging staff to think innovatively.
 - the Council recognises that the programme to date has been mainly focused on projects internal to the Council, so there is more to do to develop partners in line with the third objective of the programme.
 - there are some examples of the Council working with community groups or Town and Community Councils, but the majority of these initiatives are focused on asset or service transfer, as opposed to being genuinely transformational.
 - given that one of the objectives of the programme was about partnership working, the Council may wish to consider how it can develop a medium to long-term approach to developing relationships with a range of partners. The Council works with a diverse range of organisations with differing levels of

resource and capacity. Our review found that existing engagement methods may not be sufficient to allow the Council to realise its aspiration of developing partners to help meet future challenges.

- the Council told us that they want to shift the focus of the programme away from savings to transforming services. At present, there are some projects included in the programme that will make savings but are not transformational. There is also work going on in the Council that could be considered transformational but is not included in the programme because there are no savings associated with it. For example, the Council is developing community mapping, where officers engage with a specific geographical area and map what services and facilities they have and what they are lacking. This information helps the Council determine how best to spend section 106² or Strong Communities grant monies.

The Council has effective arrangements in place to govern and manage the programme, but there is scope to now refine these to support the changing direction of the programme

8 We reached this conclusion because:

- the Reshaping Services Programme Board regularly receives 'all projects summary highlight' update reports setting out the progress that is being made with each project, along with more detailed reports on specific projects. Reports are also provided to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.
- interviewees consistently told us that they were happy with the quality and quantity of the information they receive in respect of the Reshaping Services Programme. The Business Improvement Team, which provides central corporate assistance to Reshaping Services projects, is well regarded by members and officers.
- South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) was commissioned by the Council to conduct an internal audit evaluation of the Reshaping Services Programme in April 2019. SWAP looked at four specific projects within the Reshaping Services Programme. Although SWAP found some minor governance issues, for example, certain role changes not being reflected in the all-project summary reports, overall SWAP found that the project management and governance arrangements were in line with the Reshaping Services Programme requirements.
- our review also found that the criteria for including a project in the programme are not always clear, leading to the inclusion of projects that are

² Section 106 monies refers to planning obligations – agreements made between local authorities and developers.

based on making savings rather than being truly transformative. The Council would benefit from reviewing the criteria it uses to determine which projects are included, particularly as it shifts its focus from savings to transformation.

- currently, progress reports contain a red/amber/green (RAG) status for each project that reflects whether or not it has achieved the intended savings. If the Council wishes to reduce the association between the programme and making savings, it will need to reconsider how it monitors individual projects, with less focus on savings as the key measure of success or failure.

There is an opportunity to strengthen workforce planning to support the delivery of the Reshaping Services programme, although the support from Human Resources for individual projects was valued

9 We reached this conclusion because:

- the Council does not currently have a Human Resources (HR) strategy and its workforce plan is due to be replaced in 2020. The Council had a period without a Head of HR, but that position has now been filled and we gather both a new HR strategy and a new workforce plan are currently being worked on.
- staff we spoke to felt well supported by HR in their Reshaping Services projects.
- there is an opportunity to strengthen HR involvement in the programme at a more strategic level, for example, in terms of modelling what the Council's future workforce might need to look like. The Council has a clear profile of its current workforce, but recognises it needs to develop its use of data to further develop its understanding of its future workforce needs.
- the current workforce plan recognises that the Reshaping Services Programme will generate additional training and development needs. There has been some training, such as the commercial awareness training that was rolled out as part of the catering services project. However, further training and support are necessary to help staff develop the skills necessary to respond to transformational change.
- the Council should consider how its new workforce plan can support and inform the delivery of its Reshaping Services Programme. In doing so, the Council should ensure that workforce needs are robustly identified and considered in project initiation documents and project reports.

The Council recognises the Reshaping Services Programme now needs repurposing to focus on transformation

10 We reached this conclusion because:

- members and senior officers have reflected on the programme and concluded that they should shift their efforts towards an increased focus on transformation and partnership working, with less focus on savings.
- it is positive that the Council's Internal Audit service has completed reviews of aspects of the Reshaping Services Programme. For their April 2019 review, SWAP reviewed a sample of projects within the programme. Overall, the report found a 'reasonable' level of assurance, with some examples of good practice, such as the communications relating to the catering and Neighbourhood Services projects. SWAP also noted that there was no formal requirement to conduct and record a 'lessons learned' review upon the conclusion of the Catering Service project. SWAP's view was that in not doing this, the Council may be missing opportunities to share and capitalise on its learning to date.
- Internal Audit reported on the new catering company in October 2019 and gave an opinion of limited assurance. A follow-up report in January 2020 found that the response to their earlier recommendations had been slow, so an opinion of limited assurance was given again. Although the catering company was cited as a good example of a transformative project, the Internal Audit report makes it clear that there are certain fundamental issues that needed to be resolved, such as the lack of contracts or formal agreements between the Council and the catering company for support services such as finance, ICT and payroll. Given the proposals to create the company were approved in April 2017, it would be reasonable to expect such matters to have been decided before the company began trading in January 2020. The Council should learn from its alternative delivery projects and put in place more robust arrangements for future transformational projects.
- the projects that were most often mentioned to us as being successful and transformational tended to be associated with the earlier tranches of the programme. Later tranches tended to have a corporate rather than service specific focus and there was a perception that they had been less impactful. Some interviewees told us that they felt the programme had lost some momentum in later tranches.
- the Council recognises that it needs to reflect on progress that the programme has made to date and consider the way forward. It has a new Corporate Plan 2020-25 and is revising its performance management arrangements. This, together with the more positive 2020-21 financial

settlement, provides the Council with an opportunity to refocus the programme.



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