

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 27 September 2022
Cabinet Member: Councillor Menna Jones
Contact Officer: Geraint Owen
Contact Number: 01286 679335
Title of Item: Annual Report - Employment

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

Approval of the annual report for 2021/22

2. THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

To reflect and agree on the corporate strategy in this crucial area for the future.

3. INTRODUCTION

The intention of this report is to present an annual update of the workforce details and their employment together with outlining our objectives for developing our workers and setting the direction for the future.

The Local Consultative Joint Committee (the joint forum between the recognised union representatives and Elected Members) receives an annual report on activity in the human resources field also but with more emphasis on the operational relationship between the employer and the workforce representatives.

a) THE COUNCIL'S WORKFORCE

The numbers employed on a full time and part time basis within the Council for the last three years are noted in the table below. Note that these numbers include staff who work in our schools but not those staff employed on a casual basis or during holiday / sickness periods of the permanent workforce.

	31/3/20	31/3/21	31/3/22
Full time	2,923	3,073	3,258
Part time	2,781	2,776	2,650
Total	5,704	5,849	5,908

Whilst the trend over the years has seen a reduction in the number of staff members, the details for 2021/22 are in general consistent with the data for last year; there was an increase of 185 in the number of individuals employed on full time contracts with a reduction in the number employed on temporary arrangements. This led to a net increase of 59 in the number of staff working for the Council during the 12 month period. In general, this increase can be attributed again to the need for us as an employer to recruit additional staff to certain areas in response to the pandemic.

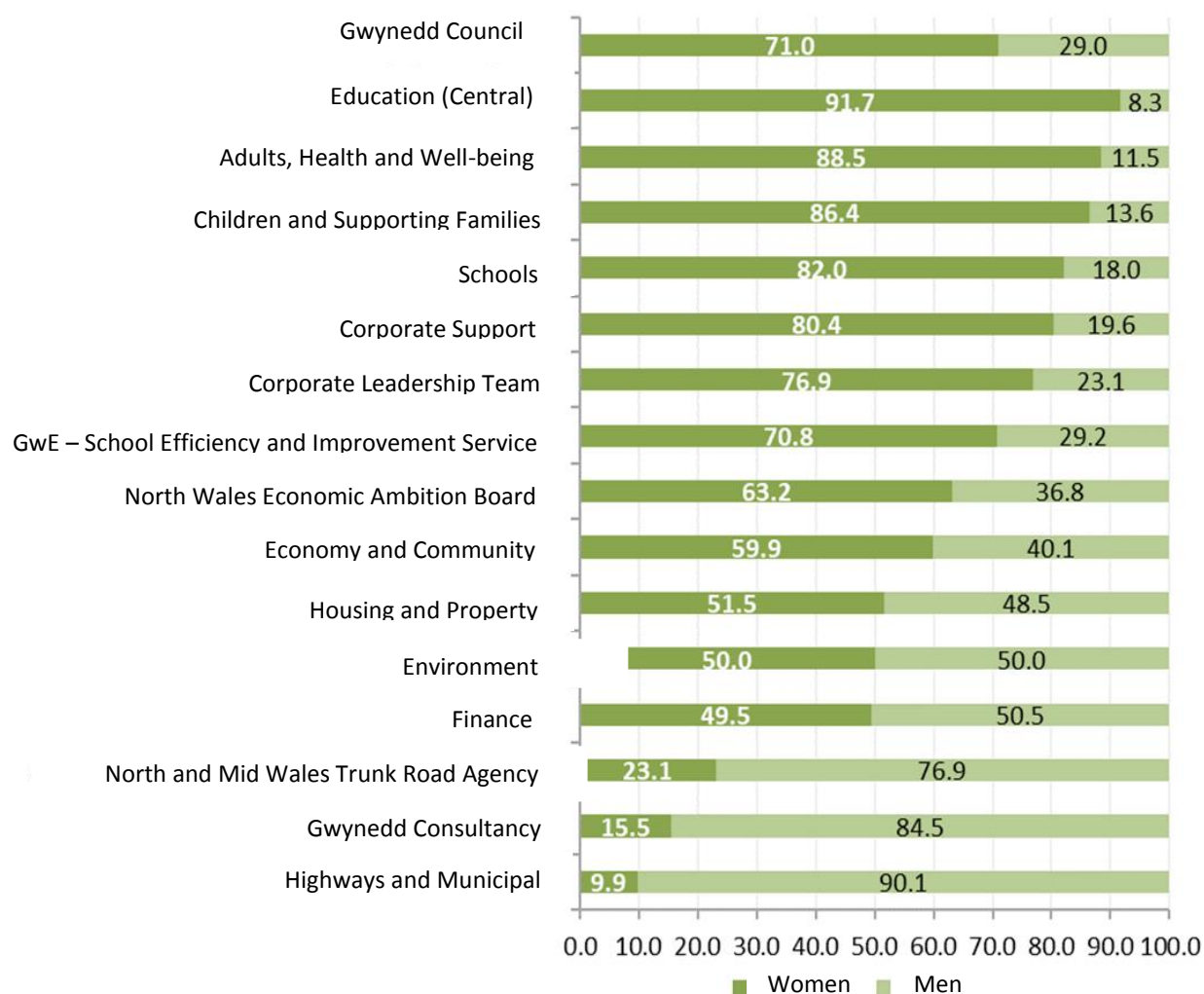
b) **WORKFORCE SPLIT BY GENDER**

A further analysis is seen here of the number of men and women employed on a full time and part time basis over the same period. The primary message is the fact that there is substantially a higher percentage of women working for the Council, whilst a substantially greater number of those women are employed on a part time basis in comparison to men.

		31/3/20	31/3/21	31/3/22
Full time	Men	1,329	1,336	1,434
	Women	1,594	1,737	1,824
Part time	Men	313	314	280
	Women	2,468	2,462	2,370
Total	Men	1,642	1,650	1,714
	Women	4,062	4,199	4,194
Total %	Men	28.8%	28.2%	29%
	Women	71.2%	71.8%	71%

The following is a further analysis on the basis of the split within the Council's major departments.

Distribution of female / male Gwynedd Council staff per Department, 31 March 2022



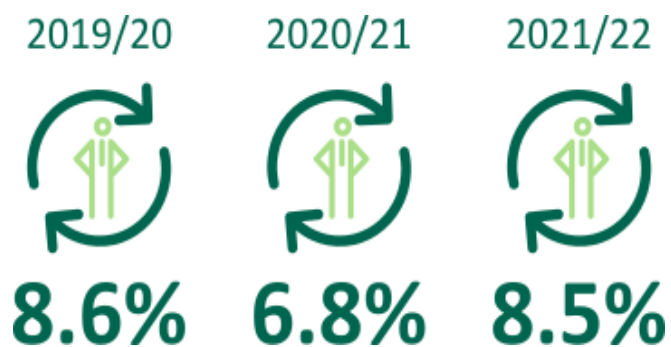
c) AGE PROFILE OF COUNCIL STAFF

Last year, it was reported that the age profile for the workforce as a whole was increasing. This year, it seems that the situation has somewhat stabilised but the core message remains the same. 65% of the workforce is over 40 years of age, with 39.6% of staff over the age of 50. This is important because the ageing age profile means that there is an increased risk for the Council to lose skills and experience in a relatively short period of time. In response, a significant investment has been made in attracting apprentices and professional trainees, in addition to developing those our current workforce. The task of preparing for a time when the older group of staff leaves the Council is a long term piece of work and therefore an important part of workforce planning. Further reference will be made to this work later in the report.

A detailed analysis of the age profile on a departmental basis can be seen in Attachment 1.

d) **STAFF TURNOVER**

In 2019/20 a small increase was seen in the number of staff who left the Council's employment, whilst there was a substantial decrease in the percentage for 2020/21. For 2021/22, the percentage of staff leaving returned to pre-pandemic levels (8.5%). This percentage is low in comparison to rates within other sectors of the economy, but this is consistent with the message that is in the data on the age profile for our staff, as reported earlier; on average across the organisation it seems that the percentage of staff leaving our employment is not high, and this adds to the risk that we could lose an abundance of skills and experience at a certain point in the future.



There is however a variation in the turnover rate on a departmental level. The highest level was within the Leadership Team and Legal Service (31.4%), the Economy and Community Department (22.1%), Corporate Support (11.8%), and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department (11.5%). The lowest levels of turnover were within Finance (5.4%) and Housing and Property (6.6%).

Measuring staff turnover, and understanding in detail the reasons behind the situation, is a complex issue and numerous reasons could be behind the rates within individual teams and departments. So as to better understand why staff are leaving the Council's employment, we are currently working on introducing formal arrangements for undertaking exit interviews for staff, which will over time contribute to our understanding of the high level data that we are currently recording.

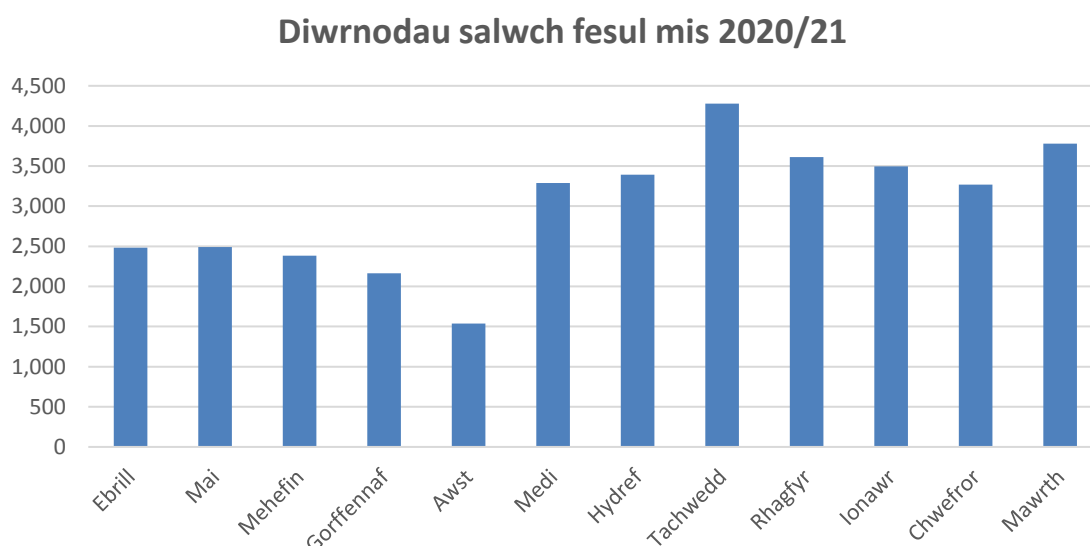
e) **SICKNESS ABSENCES**

The number of days lost due to sickness across the Council increased to 10.07 days per head during 2021/22, and increase from 6.35 days per head during the previous year. We

are therefore now returning to the trend as was seen before the pandemic, with that trend on the whole consistent with what is taking place across local government in Wales. The figure of 10/07 however is higher than any figure seen within this Council for a number of years and therefore it is important for us to understand what is behind the levels, so as to plan any actions or interventions to try and ensure that the rate is decreasing over time.

Sickness absence has an effect on a number of elements of the Council’s work, including our ability to provide services, our duty of care towards our staff, and of course the costs incurred as a result. It’s therefore an important topic and officers from the human resources, health and safety and research and information services are investing an increased amount of time in analysing the high level data that is available so as to support departments to respond to the situation.

The following table shows the levels of sickness absences, month on month, during the past year.



The following table shows the average number of days lost per head to sickness absence, within the Council’s departments over the 12 months in question.

Average days lost per individual	Cyfanswm
Education – Central	8.18
Education – Schools	9.45
Environment	9.62
Corporate Support	6.94
Finance	4.67

Economy and Community	6.27
Adults, Health and Well-being	15.38
Children and Supporting Families	7.49
Highways and Municipal	13.73
Housing and Property	10.01
Gwynedd Consultancy	6.20
Other	3.59
Total for the Council	10.07

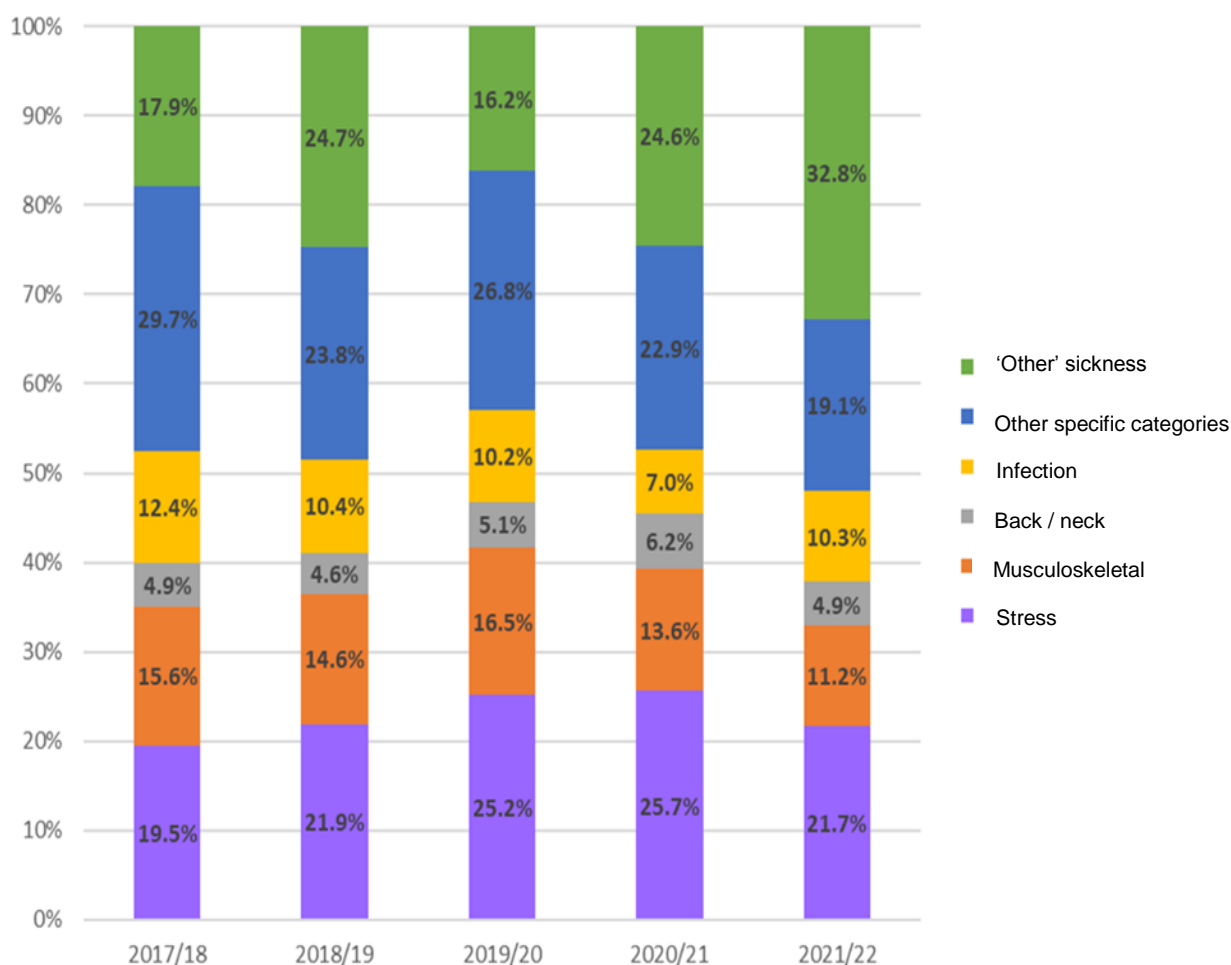
As for 2020/21, the sickness absence levels were at their highest within front line services, and in considering the effects of the pandemic this is completely understandable.

It's important to note that 43% of staff did not report that they had been absent due to sickness at all during 2021/22.

There was a reference earlier to work from human resources, health and safety and research and information officers in relation to this agenda. To provide some flavour of the work, substantial steps have been taken recently to develop the data that is available for analysis; we are re-launching our strategy on staff well-being and a new sickness absence policy has been adopted. In addition, officers are working closely with service managers to support individual staff members who are suffering from ill health.

The following table analyses the category of illness that has been recorded over the past five years. This information is used to steer the discussion when reviewing the health and well-being programme on an annual basis.

Analysis of sickness absence per category, 2017/18 – 2021/22



The substantial increase in the absences recorded as 'Other Sickness' is a matter to note. This category should only be used in unique circumstances, and the fact that nearly 33% of cases have been recorded as such in 2021/22 means that we basically do not know the reason behind the absences in the category. We can speculate that Covid has some contribution to this figure, in that the sickness has been more prevalent over the 12 months in question and managers may be unsure as to how it should be recorded, but further steps are being taken to resolve the situation and remind managers to try and avoid using this category. This is an important request as recording an absence as 'other sickness' means that we cannot be sure what support is needed for individual staff members.

There was a reduction in the rate of sickness recorded as stress over the last year. This is good news of course, but the rate remained high in general, and it must also be possible that some of this sickness could have been recorded as 'other sickness'. We are relaunching our strategy on staff well-being whilst also constantly reviewing how we can add to the provision. We will also continue to provide practical support to managers in

working with staff members who are ill, as this is also a key aspect of reducing sickness absence.

f) **ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Service is now looking forward to offering a full Learning and Development Programme, which provides a balance between 'distance' and 'face to face' provision, which in turn provides a greater variety of learning approaches. This follows a challenging period in terms of providing learning and development programmes during the pandemic, when the emphasis was solely on 'distance' learning, with only some essential titles being provided on a face to face basis, such as First Aid. The period was transformational with positive and exciting elements, and the opportunity to develop and trial new approaches and technologies. We are offering an increasing number of titles through *Teams*, and are honing our approach through trialling different ideas and interactive elements such as discussion groups.

Creating 'distance' ('virtual') and 'face to face' ('traditional') versions for a learning title means re-designing the sessions and amending the presenting approach, with 'distance' learning tending to be shorter, for smaller groups. We are developing an online site with resources to enable staff and member to learn from distance.

We believe that the developments offer advantages in terms of learning (including advantages from the perspective of access, better use of time and environmental e.g. reduction in travelling).

Whilst the number of staff (and Members) taking advantage of the opportunity to take up a learning opportunity did reduce during the pandemic, they have now increased slowly in tandem with the development of the learning programme. Excellent feedback was received on a number of titles; this is evidence that the learning approach works well with flexible working patterns, with a number of new individuals taking advantage of what is on offer. We believe that this is because its possible for those individuals to gain access virtually to the learning title.

Whilst learning and development in traditional fields of work is essential e.g. Health and Safety, Financial Management etc and will continue as such, our main programmes now concentrate on developing the working culture, and supporting staff and leaders to adjust to different working patterns. This includes sessions such as Ffordd Gwynedd, and titles such as Leading Change, Dealing with Change, Leading a Team that works flexibly, Customer Care (this title is co-presented with the Ombudsman). We will also continue to undertake

workshops on developing a team, with sessions on topics such as Communication (based on DiSC personality profiles).

The use of technology for learning is constant, and whilst more staff complete e-learning modules, it can be difficult for some groups of staff to gain easy access to titles, and as a result we provide a variety of delivering methods, including 'face to face' sessions.

The Service has developed an excellent relationship with local providers e.g. Coleg Llandrillo Menai, and we are working closely on some programmes such as ILM Leadership and Management. The Service is responsible for dealing with complaints from residents also, and in doing so provides an emphasis on improving the services that is provided. Positive feedback was received by the Ombudsman's Office for our arrangements here in Gwynedd, and as referenced above we are working closely on developing and presenting a learning title.

Talent Plans are a priority for the Council, as a means of responding to the challenges that face the Council in terms of service continuity in the future. In May 2021 the Cabinet approved an investment of £1.1. million, a combination of £600,000 for an Apprenticeship Scheme over 3 years, and £500,000 on a Future Leaders and Specialists Scheme.

The Talent team within the Service lead on a number of schemes that contribute substantially to recruiting, developing and retaining staff. We foresee that we will recruit ~ 20 apprentices and ~ 7 Professional Trainees on an annual basis, which means that ~ 60 individuals will be on our Talent schemes by September 2024.

Apprenticeship Scheme: The scheme is considered to be pioneering within local government in Wales.

- An initial investment of £300,000 was issued in 2019 with a further £600,000 approved by the Cabinet to extend the scheme in 2021.
- The scheme has provided an opportunity to 40 apprentices since its commencement
 - 12 apprentices currently on the scheme
 - 20 apprentices have completed an apprenticeship with 70% of them appointed to a role within the Council
 - 8 new apprentices have started with us in August
- 9 of the apprentices are at graduate level
- 40 are in priority areas where there are recruitment problems, including care for adults and children, IT and engineering.

Scheme for Tomorrow's Leaders and Specialists (graduate trainee scheme):

- The Council has invested an additional £500,000 in this scheme in 2021
- Since 2017, the Council has appointed 26 trainees, with 10 currently taking part in the scheme.
- 12 have been appointed to roles within the Council.
- 4 new trainees are to be appointed in September 2022.
- A number of priority areas have been addressed through the scheme
- The quality of participants remains high.

Developing Potential Scheme: In addition to recruiting new talent, developing our current staff remains an important aspect of identifying and developing talent within the organisation.

- A number of officers have taken part in the scheme, leading to promotion and undertaking key responsibilities as a result.
- In addition, a specific developing potential scheme has been presented over the past 12 months on promoting women in leadership.

Innovative work was undertaken in developing 'distance' recruitment processes, including virtual assessment centres.

Promoting the use of the Welsh language is a priority for the Council, with the aim of ensuring clear language requirements for all of the Council's roles, and in turn identifying development needs for staff. The Council has been pioneering in terms of providing services through the medium of the Welsh language. It's continuous work to ensure that the language skills of our staff are developed and maintained.

90% of staff members within 6 of our departments have received a language assessment, and we have been working closely with those departments whom have found this more of a challenge. In looking to the future, we will proceed with gathering self-assessments and information from managers, but with the increased emphasis now on developing language skills.

The Service is also leading on the Women in Leadership project, supporting and encouraging women in leadership roles. A successful event was held in June to raise awareness amongst men.

The Learning and Organisational Development Team also lead on a number of Benefit / rewards schemes such as:

- Promoting Local Businesses: About 240 businesses have joined the scheme
- Vectis Scheme (Discount cards) – 2300 individuals have registered
- Cycle to work scheme – 11 had bought new bikes through the scheme by April 2022 (75 in 2021/22 and 125 in 2020/21), with an increased interest in electric bikes
- Green Cars scheme – to encourage the use of electric cars
- AVC Salary Sacrifice Scheme: approved by the HMRC

g) **PAY STRUCTURE**

The Pay Policy for 2021/22 was approved by the Council at its meeting on 5 March 2021. During subsequent months, the National Joint-Committee for Local Government Workers reached an agreement on pay increases for the year up to 31 March this year. This meant awarding 1.75% on staff salaries for the year, and setting the lowest pay point at £9.59 per hour. At the time, this was above the Living Wage rate (determined by the Living Wage Foundation).

Ensuring equal pay has been one of the Council's cornerstones as an employer for years, and in order to verify that the arrangements continue to be robust, we routinely carry out an audit of our systems every three years. The latest audit by an independent consultant is drawing to a close and we hope to be in a position to report on the outcomes later this year.

h) **WORKFORCE PLANNING**

The Council's ability to plan its staffing requirements in the medium and long term is one of this Council's priorities. Gwynedd Council is not unique in that respect as workforce planning is now receiving attention employers across the country. Reference was made to some of the high level statistics that is an indicator for this work. The statistics is an effective means of beginning the process of assessing workforce needs in the long term, possibly a number of years in advance. The core purpose of the workforce planning project is to eventually develop how we plan staffing requirements in the long term, ensuring that we are proactive in planning rather than reacting when we have staffing problems.

At the same time a number of areas of Council services are currently suffering from recruitment problems, and further work is being undertaken to analyse those problems as a means of taking action to mitigate the situation through amending how we recruit.

The pandemic has changed the labour market, and it is now a market that is in favour of candidates for jobs rather than employers. This means that there is competition for staff, and the introduction of virtual working / working has increased the importance of flexible working, which in turn means that prospective candidates have a greater variety of

employers that they can choose from. It's true that this could be a threat to us, but there is also an opportunity here for us to show the Council's strengths as an employer. Workforce planning will therefore be a key area for us in the medium and long term.

i) **LOCAL CONDITIONS OF SERVICE**

A review of a number of staffing policies and terms and conditions were completed over the past 12 months, including flexible working, recruitment, and addressing staff concerns, with the emphasis being on ensuring that the policies reflect the Council's working culture. The work as a stand alone project is drawing to a close, and will in effect again form a part of the day to day work of the HR team. In developing the work there was a greater degree of emphasis on consulting with key groups of interest whilst working on a policy, and this approach will be develop further as the HR team develops an annual review programme.

j) **WORKING FROM HOME**

The work of establishing flexible working arrangements following the pandemic is ongoing. Hybrid working arrangements are currently being trialled, and it is expected that we will be reviewing the situation over the winter period so as to examine whether our arrangements have been a success or not. The emphasis is of course on ensuring that hybrid arrangements support service requirements and this will be a crucial aspect of ensuring that our arrangements are a success. Following from this review, the focus will be on whether offices can be amended to ensure the best use is being made of the facilities available.

k) **RECRUITING AND APPOINTING**

See below statistical details regarding the number of jobs advertised by the Council over the last four years together with the number of applications received and also the number of vacancies which needed to be re-advertised. Analysing these details again contributes to our ability to identify fields in which the Council needs to focus its attention in relation to developing expertise and planning the workforce for the future.

Year	Number of jobs advertised	Number of applications	Number of jobs re-advertised	Number of applications for the second advert
2017 / 2018	472	2312	47	179
2018 / 2019	555	3281	57	240
2019 / 2020	586	2726	101	249
2020 / 2021	486	2112	77	227
2021 / 2022	515	2394	114	369

Our recruitment arrangements were adjusted in response to the pandemic and we will now need to change our approach further, including tailoring our approaches for specific roles, and a further development in how we use social media. We are already strengthening our contacts with educational establishments so as to improve how we are attracting younger staff to the workforce.

CONCLUSIONS

The information in this report, with careful analysis, assists managers and those officers who advise them, to plan services and promptly identify those matters requiring further research and action. This is increasingly important within a work culture that needs to base decisions on robust evidence.

The information also provides insight into the steps being taken to address some priority areas, and to prepare for the next steps to ensure that we use our workforce's abilities and knowledge to the maximum.

There are important messages here, which are integral to ensure the continuity of our services in the future. It is essential that we strive to act to address those matters, in order to sustain services and continually improve our ability to deliver on behalf of our communities.

The main messages encompass the following:

- Planning the workforce for the future, including recruitment, appointment and creating a career pathway - this now needs to be done in a new context, which is a substantially changed employment market as a result of the pandemic.

- Continue to promote staff's general mental well-being and health, in order to look after our staff.
- Continue to create fit-for-purpose working arrangements for the 'new normal', and build on the advantages emerging from that, but ensuring that services for the County's residents is the priority.
- Continue to develop our work culture and behaviours expected of Council staff, including reviewing and developing local conditions of employment - developing the work culture to correspond with Ffordd Gwynedd principles is core to our development as an organisation.

VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

The report provides an important overview of the staffing and employment situation in the Council. I have no further observations to add in relation to propriety.

Head of Finance Department:

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of Gwynedd Council's employment situation in 2021/22. The Employment Annual Report contains useful and important information that will assist the Council in planning for future challenges, but adopting the decision sought would not create an additional spending commitment.