COMMITTEE	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
TITLE	Ffordd Gwynedd Working Group Review
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1. **BACKGROUND**

Earlier this year every Head of Department was invited to undertake a Ffordd Gwynedd self-assessment for their department. This was undertaken to get an overview of how the Ffordd Gwynedd principles have embedded and to enable us to develop a Ffordd Gwynedd plan that will ensure appropriate support for the coming three years.

A working group was established comprising four Elected Members, the Chief Executive. Head of Corporate Support and the Ffordd Gwynedd Advisors, to initially agree on the form of the questionnaire and then analyse the responses and agree on the way forward.

The questionnaires were completed by the heads of department in February/March with the majority reporting that they undertook this by consulting with their staff and managers prior to submitting the responses to the Working Group.

This report presents the Working Group's conclusions on the basis of the responses received.

2. **KEY MESSAGES FROM THE SELF-ASSESSMENTS**

In the first place, the Working Group wishes to praise the honest and thorough responses received.

Although there was a feeling that some Departments had underestimated their progress and some had possibly overestimated; generally, there was a belief that the responses provided a fair picture of the current position of Ffordd Gwynedd in the Council and it was heartening to see that every Head could report that they had commenced the work/made considerable progress within some Services whilst also highlighting that there are pockets across the Council where considerable further work is required.

From the responses it was seen that considerable progress had been made to change the culture but that the process of culture change and changing the mindset was slow and difficult and that further work was required to ensure that the changes are disseminated and kept alive.

It was noted that the Ffordd Gwynedd method of conducting service reviews could be burdensome and it was difficult to release the capacity of managers and staff to undertake this on top of the day-to-day work.

It was obvious that a number of common themes arose from the responses and these are summarised below:

2.1 Change of culture

It is evident that considerable progress has been made in terms of the culture change, however, further work is required across the Council in some teams. It is acknowledged that the process of culture change and changing the mindset can be slower and more difficult in some circumstances and this will need to be given consideration when further necessary work is undertaken with those teams.

e.g. the Adults Department reported that this change was seen as something that was done "to" staff, as a great deal of the work was being done by the Transformation Team.

Recommendations
i)   Present simple and clear 'Ffordd Gwynedd Behaviours' that

- Set expectations in the 'welcome' (induction) at the start of a career/new post
- Basis for discussion in the Continuous Appraisal sessions

ii)   Supporting leaders / managers to adapt and apply 'flexible' working arrangements to confirm and strengthen Ffordd Gwynedd principles

iii)   Continue to ensure, by holding service reviews, that staff who undertake the work are part of identifying what needs to be changed and the process for change.

2.2 Training / Workshops / Developing skills

Praise was given to the training for managers, however, they noted that workshops/short reminder sessions to stimulate them to resume the work would be useful, especially following the COVID period gap.

Furthermore, it was identified that any sessions/workshops should take into consideration the change to virtual working and for the need to develop skills to undertake virtual reviews whilst also highlighting how to operate without conducting intensive reviews.

It was suggested that providing shorter awareness raising sessions for staff would be beneficial with those sessions being offered via e-learning packages, short videos etc.

A number of departments were keen for the current soft skills training to continue and that it should be provided for more managers and staff in future e.g. Communication / DiSC Workshops, Leading and Managing Training, Emotional Intelligence etc.

Recommendations
i)   Develop a 'refresh' course and make it mandatory for every manager and team leader.

ii)   Advertise and develop the soft skills courses in order that more Council   officials take advantage of the provision.

iii)   Develop a brief overview course for all Council staff whilst targeting some teams as a priority on the basis of evidence submitted in the self-assessment.

iv)   Break-down the managers' course into short e-modules for all staff and produce a catalogue of examples of good practice to support them.

v)   Present and offer practical sessions to all Council staff in respect of developing soft skills (similar to those used in assessment centres.

2.3   **Impact of the COVID period**
Without doubt, the COVID period has had an impact on the progress of Ffordd Gwynedd with several heads reporting a slow down in holding formal reviews. However, a number of examples were also noted where the situation with Covid had pushed the agenda forward and led to a change in arrangements that many previously thought was impossible to achieve. Prior to the COVID period it would be true to suggest that some services were afraid to 'venture' and use new methods and technology but the lockdown and the restrictions forced the changes.

Many reported that they have failed to maintain their arrangements during lockdown in terms of recording obstacles to good performance, primarily since they were previously recorded on whiteboards within individual offices. It is acknowledged that this example demonstrates that working from home or working partly from home/from the office means that alternative guidance needs to be provided for staff in future, in terms of recording and sharing issues which prevent them from working effectively.

Recommendations
i)   Ensure that the teams identify and discuss examples of having moved the agenda forward to ensure that they develop the new principles and that they do not slip back to old ways of doing things. Also to take the opportunity to discuss what did not work as well and discuss how they could have done this differently.

ii)   Introduce a method of recording obstacles electronically to the Managers' Network.

iii)   Ensure that our training considers the impacts of hybrid working.

2.4   **Celebrating Successes**

It was conveyed that the Council does not sufficiently celebrate Ffordd Gwynedd successes and does not share many experiences in order to learn from others.

Recommendations

i)   Revisit "Gwynedd ar ei Orau" awards to reflect the work culture we currently have within the Council.

ii)   Ensure that the teams share experiences (failures and successes) within their teams and across their service with a view to include a standard item on the agenda of service team meetings.

iii)   Develop the Ffordd Gwynedd network to share and develop ideas and learn about what everyone does. This would provide the opportunity to share ideas, discuss ideas on overcoming obstacles, sharing good practice, identifying support needs.

iv)   Develop the Ffordd Gwynedd site on the intranet in order to facilitate the sharing of good practice examples.

2.5   **The Ffordd Gwynedd method is burdensome and slow**

There was a sense that the Ffordd Gwynedd method of conducting a service review can be, or appears to be, a burdensome process and therefore difficult to release capacity to undertake such reviews. It is true to say that conducting a cross service review can take time and extensive resources but it is possible to hold smaller reviews on simple systems that can be undertaken as part of the day-to-day work. They are often effective and can easily be implemented.

Recommendations

i)   Increase number of smaller-sized reviews on individual processes/work systems.

ii)   Adapt training/workshops to spread the message that it is possible to implement a Ffordd Gwynedd review in various ways (not only as an intensive review).

iii)   Teams, who have already completed less intensive reviews, to share examples of how they conducted the review and the improvements which were realised.

2.6   **The lack of capacity to deliver reviews / present improvements**

It was reported that a number of reviews are already being conducted across the Council and making a difference but with an acknowledgement that there is scope to do more.
However, it became clear from the majority of responses that the departments found it difficult to release capacity to commence reviews and to deliver improvements. This can be split into two - lack of managers' capacity to step out to lead and support reviews and lack of staff capacity to respond to obstacles etc. They already have many other set priorities on top of the day-to-day work e.g. the Highways and Municipal Department reported that the managers and staff regularly work additional hours and find it difficult to release time for the purpose of conducting a service review.

Recommendations
i)   If teams had comprehensive lists of the obstacles then these could be used to prioritise, assist in identifying the necessary resource and manage staff expectations (who expect things to change once they are on the list).

ii)   To consider utilising specific additional resource in the short term in order to fulfil some of the day to day work subsequently releasing capacity to drive forward with individual service reviews.

2.7   **Working cross-departmentally or with external partners**

It was noted in several responses that there were obstacles when trying to work cross-departmentally and with external partners. It is obvious that every department/partner is not on the same page and this hinders success.

It is suggested that we need to consider whether current arrangements lead us to focus too much on departmental performance and achievement i.e. departments / managers are pushed to continuously improve and held accountable for performance and are therefore reluctant to cooperate as one across the Council.

Recommendations
i)   Consider prioritising support for cross-departmental reviews

ii)   Consider the need for the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors to drive the effort to conduct and complete cross-departmental reviews.

2.8   **Statutory requirements / grant conditions**

It was noted that having to comply with statutory requirements / grant conditions sometimes make it difficult to operate in line with Ffordd

Gwynedd principles e.g. the Education Department reports that grant conditions tie them to specific outcomes and methods of presentation and this means that at times they present services that can be ineffective and duplicate other provisions.

Recommendations
i)   Since conducting the self-assessment, Welsh Government has stated its intention to conduct a piece of work with authorities in an attempt to lessen the administrative burden on local government. The concern voiced as part of the self-assessment will be considered as part of that work in the first place.

2.9   **Information Technology**

Conducting a Ffordd Gwynedd review raises a number of opportunities to use technology to overcome obstacles / work more efficiently. The Information Technology Service has found it increasingly difficult to provide a timely response to action plans emanating from reviews and this leads to frustration amongst officers who have undertaken those reviews.

These comments have highlighted the need to ensure that sufficient resource is allocated for both maintaining and also developing systems and that we need to ensure that one element is not competing against the other for the same resource.

Recommendations
i)   The Digital Strategic Transformation Group to analyse the IT support position and to lead on priorities corporately ensuring that Ffordd Gwynedd arrangements are given prominent consideration.

2.10   **Unwillingness to accept a reduction in performance while undertaking a review**

Some departments reported that staff/managers were not comfortable to accept a reduction in performance whilst reviews were being undertaken and that this was often an obstacle to commence or undertake reviews.

Recommendations
i)   Manage expectations and ensure that all Members are aware and accept that there is a possibility that performance levels will drop in the short term whilst conducting a review.

ii)   To consider not challenging the performance of the specific Service for a period during the review.

2.11 Understand the Customer's real needs

It was reported that considerable progress had been made within some services but a number of respondents also noted that there was room for improvement in this respect and acknowledged the need to reach out in order t understand the needs of those individuals who do not currently use services.

Recommendations
i)   Ensure that every department regularly engages with their customers and introduce the need to demonstrate the impact of such engagement within the performance challenge arrangements

ii)   Introduce training/brief workshops on analysing the demand (identify examples of where undertaking this has led to changes and share).

2.12 Purpose and Measures

All departments were able to report that they have made considerable progress on developing their purpose and performance measures but also identified that further work needs to be undertaken by some teams to review their purpose when circumstances change e.g. the Children and Supporting Families Department reported that they needed to revisit their purposes as the demand for the service had changed so much over the last two years, this highlighting the need to review consistently rather than a once and for all exercise.

There was some feedback which suggested that there remains a sense that setting the purpose and developing measures is considered as something for which managers need and retain responsibility. This demonstrates the need to conduct further work to ensure that staff take ownership of the purpose and the performance whilst accepting and acknowledging their role and contribution in improving services.

Some departments brought our attention to the requirement placed upon them to report on national measurements on top of the local performance measurements e.g. the Children and Supporting Families Department noted that it was challenging to have to gather and report on national statutory measures. As previously noted, Welsh Government has stated its intention to conduct a piece of work with authorities in an attempt to lessen the administrative burden on local government. The concern voiced as part of the self-assessment will be considered as part of that work in the first place.

Another issue which was identified as part of the self-assessment was the conclusion that the Council has realised much improvement in

measuring its effectiveness but that the same development was not evident in demonstrating how efficient t conducts its work.

Recommendations
i)   Present training/short workshops on using measures for improvement for staff at all levels (identify and share examples where using the measures has led to an improvement).

ii) The Data Sub-group (Digital Transformation Board) to consider support to ensure that data is easily available and timely rather than something they have to get others to produce monthly (good examples of where this has commenced using e.g. Power BI).

iii) Ensure that performance review is a standard item on the agenda of every service team meeting.

iv) Regularly revisit our current performance measures and present additional efficiency measures in future.

2.13   Obstacles

It was agreed that further work is required to ensure that action takes place to overcome identified obstacles. Some departments reported that the action required often falls between two stools whilst others reported that there is no capacity to take action.

The result of non-action is that staff lose faith in the "way of working" because of the fact that obstacles are slow in being removed or are even not attended to at all.

Recommendations
i)   Ensure that obstacles are on the agenda of every service team meeting, and are prioritised with an owner identified for each one with regular monitoring of progress.

ii) Development of short training sessions on acting upon removal of obstacles.

2.14   Teams being creative and working innovatively

Every department was able to quote examples of having worked creatively and innovatively but noting that there is a need to continue to develop staff confidence in order to continue working in this manner e.g. the Corporate Support Department notes the importance of continuing to demonstrate, through managers and leaders, that experimenting and not always succeeding is acceptable.

Recommendations

i)   Members and managers to accept that things go wrong from time to time in order to create a working environment that allows enterprise and experimenting.

2.15   Support from outside the department

A number noted the value of having a fresh pair of eyes to look at matters from the customer's perspective and to challenge the current operational arrangements, be that from the Ffordd Gwynedd Team or from managers and staff from other teams/services within the Council.

Recommendations

i)   Need to market the available support better. This can be achieved via the Ffordd Gwynedd network.

ii)   Arrange for staff from other services to come in to ensure that matters are challenged from the perspective of someone who does not understand the service and therefore can look at it as a customer.

2.16   Matters come to a stop when someone leaves.

Some reported that matters come to a stop when the person leading on the Ffordd Gwynedd work leaves his/her post. These comments are of concern since they suggest that it is an individual that takes ownership of the review and that the rest of the team do not feel that ownership.

Recommendations

i)   There is a need to refer to this and provide guidance on it to managers/team leaders as part of the "follow-up" training.

2.17   Staff wellbeing

Some comments were presented in relation to the fact that the natural focus of "Ffordd Gwynedd" is on the customer and on improving performance but that there is a need to also ensure appropriate attention within this culture on the well-being of staff who provide the services.

Recommendations

i)   That staff well-being needs to be introduced and emphasised as a central part of the culture.

3.   CONCLUSIONS

The current three-year "Ffordd Gwynedd" plan needs to be reviewed and this exercise, in terms of the self-assessment, is timely in that respect. It is proposed that the recommendations in this report (a summary of which appear in Appendix 1) provide a solid base on which to further embed the culture and the way of working within the Council.

Committee members' comments would be much appreciated, as a further addition to the evidence collated, prior to drawing up and submitting a final draft of the revised Action Plan for the Cabinet to consider adopting in due course.

Appendix 1

Ffordd Gwynedd Working Group Review - Table of Recommendations

Recommendation	Priority
Service Teams	
Ensure that the following are on the agenda of every service team meeting: • Performance • Obstacles • New examples of good practice and lessons learnt	
Engage regularly with customers.	
Increase number of smaller reviews.	
Revisit our performance measures and consider efficiency measures.	
Conduct a session to identify examples of good practice as a result of COVID	
Managers	
Ensure that their service teams implement the above and support them to do so.	
Accept that things go wrong from time to time in order to create a working environment that allows enterprise and experimenting.	
Ensure, when holding service reviews, that the staff who undertake the work as part of identifying what needs to be changed and the process for change.	
Invite staff from other services to come in to ensure that matters are challenged from the perspective of someone who does not understand the service and therefore can look at it from the customer's perspective.	
Identify and organise for the training needs and support for their teams.	
Ensure that examples of good practice is shared across the teams and corporately.	
Ensure that Ffordd Gwynedd behaviours are grounds to continuous evaluation discussions.	
Ensure that cross-departmental work occurs rather than being avoided because it is not easy.	
Manage expectations and ensure that all members are aware that reviews are proceeding and it is expected to have an effect on the performance.	
The Chief Executive, Directors and Members	
Consider prioritising support for cross-departmental reviews	
Accept that a review proceeds and is expected to have an impact on the performance.	
Accept that things go wrong from time to time in order to create a working environment that allows enterprise and experimenting.	
Agree not to challenge performance for a period during the review.	

Recommendation	Priority
Revisit "Gwynedd ar ei Orau" awards to reflect the work culture we have within the Council.	
Staff well-being	
Digital Strategic Transformation Group / Data Sub-group	
Digital Strategic Transformation Group to analyse the IT support position and to lead on priorities corporately ensuring that Ffordd Gwynedd arrangements are considered.	
Refer to the Data Sub-group to consider support to ensure that data is easily available and timely rather than something they have to get others to produce monthly (good examples of where this has commenced using e.g. Power BI).	
Core Support Group	
Develop a 'refresh' course and make it mandatory for every manager and team leader.	
Develop an overview course for all Council staff by targeting some and consider making it mandatory	
Ensure that our training considers the impacts of hybrid working and spreads the message that is possible to implement Ffordd Gwynedd in various ways.	
Break-down the managers' / overview course into short e-modules for all staff and produce a catalogue of examples good practice in support for the following fields: • Analyse the demand • Use measures to improve • Act on the barriers • Innovative/creative working	
Advertising and developing soft skills courses.	
Present/offer similar practical sessions to those used in assessment centres	
Present simple and clear 'Ffordd Gwynedd Behaviours' that set expectations in the 'welcome' (induction) at the start of a career/employment	
Supporting leaders / managers to adapt and apply 'flexible' working arrangements to confirm and strengthen Ffordd Gwynedd principles.	
Present a method of recording obstacles electronically to the Managers' Network.	
Develop the Ffordd Gwynedd network.	
Develop the Ffordd Gwynedd site on the intranet to share examples.	
Marketing the available support.	