Review of Decision-Making Arrangements

Ceredigion County Council

August 2026

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

1 Our review looked at whether Ceredigion County Council (the Council) has put in place proper decision-making arrangements.

2 The audit covered:

- whether the Council has clear decision-making arrangements in place;
- whether those arrangements are working effectively; and
- if the Council has reviewed the effectiveness of its arrangements.

Why this is important

3 Decision-making is a key corporate arrangement for all councils. Proper decision-making arrangements are important because they help councils make timely, well-informed choices that use public money effectively. Clear roles, good-quality information and appropriate challenge reduce the risk of poor decisions, financial failure, or legal challenge. They also strengthen accountability and public trust by making it clear who is responsible for decisions and why they were taken.

4 Therefore, because decision-making arrangements are central to how the Council secures and demonstrates value for money, this review is an important element of the Auditor General's assurance work.

What we have found

5 The Council's decision-making arrangements are generally working well. The Council has set out its arrangements in its constitution, which it keeps updated. Meetings are generally well run and effectively administered. Councillors are provided with training to help ensure their understanding of roles and responsibilities. There are opportunities to strengthen:

- the processes around taking and publishing delegated decisions;
- the accessibility of information and openness;
- the impact of scrutiny; and
- the arrangements for assessing the effectiveness of its decision-making.

What we recommend

6 We have made three recommendations. The recommendations focus on improving the Council's decision-making arrangements by:

- ensuring that it follows the process set out in its constitution for recording and publishing delegated decisions made by cabinet members;
- deciding what types of officer delegated decisions need to be published and having a clear system for doing this; and
- engaging with councillors and officers to review decision-making arrangements as a whole, to help identify opportunities to strengthen and support improvements.

Our findings

The Council has clearly set out its decision-making arrangements except for delegated decisions

7 The Council has set out its decision-making arrangements in its constitution, which is kept up to date. There is a Cross-Party Constitution Working Group that keeps the constitution under review. Updates are reported through to Council for approval.

8 The Council's arrangements for taking and publishing cabinet member delegated decisions are set out in the constitution. The Council told us that in practice it is rare for decisions to be delegated to a cabinet member. We saw a small number of examples where cabinet had delegated a decision to a cabinet member and officer. In each case, the subsequent decision was not published in line with the procedure set out in the Council's constitution. There is a link on the Council's website to a list of decisions by 'Cabinet, committees, etc'. However, under this there is no facility to search for decisions by individual cabinet members. The Council should adhere to the provisions in its constitution by publishing cabinet member delegated decisions. This is important to ensure that these decisions are accessible and provide the opportunity for the call-in of such decisions.

9 The Council has clearly set out in its constitution the delegation of certain functions to officers. However, the constitution does not set out the arrangements for the recording and publishing of officer delegated decisions. In 2022 and 2024, the Leadership Group (the chief officers in the Council) considered reports on potentially implementing an officer delegated decisions register. Leadership Group decided not to implement one. Some services publish some decisions but there is no corporate approach or guidelines in place for officers to follow. There is a link on the Council's website under its committee pages to officer delegated decisions, but this page does not contain any information. There is also a link under the Council's business pages to 'delegated decisions registers' but that link only contains one record for a traffic regulation order from 2025. To provide clarity on its arrangements, the Council should set out what officer delegated decisions should be published and develop consistent arrangements to publish them.

10 The Council's 'Call-in Guidance and Checklist for Members' states that a non-key decision taken by an officer under delegated powers cannot be called in.[1] However, it has not defined what constitutes a key or non-key decision or clearly set out how an officer key decision could be called in.

11 The Council publishes up to date forward work plans (FWPs) for committees, which list the report title and which committee it will be considered at. However, the report title does not always allow the reader to understand what the content of the report might be. There is an opportunity to further strengthen the published FWPs, for example, by providing a brief description of the report content and the purpose of the committee in receiving the report. Further information provided in the FWPs would assist scrutiny in identifying those reports it wishes to undertake pre-decision scrutiny on. It would also support greater transparency.

[1] A call-in is a formal process that allows councillors to review or challenge certain decisions.

The Council's decision-making arrangements are generally working well but there are opportunities to enhance openness and how the impact of scrutiny is demonstrated

12 Meeting arrangements are generally working well. Agendas, reports and minutes are all available in a timely manner. Declarations of interest appear well managed. The Council has a Code of Conduct for Members which is kept up to date. In the meetings we observed, councillors and officers demonstrated respectful behaviours and appropriate challenge.

13 Agenda items are accompanied by a written report that sets out the purpose of the committee receiving the report in line with its terms of reference. The Council uses agreed report templates for its reports to council, cabinet and scrutiny. The report templates prompt officers to set out the relevant legal, financial and equalities considerations. There is a robust system for reports to council and cabinet being signed off by key officers before consideration by councillors.

14 The Council webcasts meetings of council, cabinet and the development management committee. These are available to view live and after the meetings have ended. The public can request a link in advance from the Council to view any committee meeting whilst it is taking place. But the Council does not make webcasts of other meetings available after the meeting has finished. We found greater availability in other councils of recorded meetings that could be viewed by the public at any time. For example, in all other councils in Wales, recordings of overview and scrutiny committee meetings are available. The Council's decision not to do the same limits accessibility to its decision-making process.

15 As part of this review, we did not undertake a detailed assessment of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. However, from the work we did, we found overview and scrutiny committees to be well integrated into the Council's decision-making process. Scrutiny committees regularly receive and consider reports prior to them going to cabinet. Reports to cabinet include scrutiny committees' observations. Cabinet also demonstrates consideration of scrutiny's views when making a decision. When scrutiny committees recommend specific changes, cabinet is generally responsive to those. However, there are limited examples where scrutiny has recommended changes to the decisions being proposed. Therefore, the impact and added value of scrutiny on decision-making arrangements is not clearly demonstrated.

16 The Council has good arrangements to ensure that councillors receive training. It has agreed on a set of mandatory training and e-learning modules for councillors and monitors the completion of that training. All councillors have completed the initial training provided immediately after the election. The majority have also completed the e-learning modules provided throughout the electoral term. The councillors we spoke to were content with the training they had received.

The Council has not reviewed the overall effectiveness of its decision-making arrangements but has assessed some elements

17 Councillors have not been asked for their views on decision-making arrangements generally. Councillors have been involved in some elements of review, for example, in updates to the constitution and the arrangements for scrutiny. The Council has undertaken a self-assessment on its scrutiny function and of its Governance and Audit Committee. The Council is in the process of developing action plans based on the results.

18 The Council does not assess the overall effectiveness of its decision-making arrangements to determine if they are working well and enabling informed decision-making. Engaging with councillors and officers to review its arrangements would help to identify if there are opportunities to strengthen and support improvement.

Recommendations

R1 The Council should ensure that it adheres to the process set out in its constitution for recording and publishing delegated decisions made by cabinet members, to support accountability and accessibility **(paragraph 8)**.

R2 The Council should decide what types of officer delegated decisions need to be published and have a clear system for doing this, to support greater clarity and openness in decision-making **(paragraphs 9 and 10)**.

R3 The Council should engage with councillors and officers to review decision-making arrangements as a whole, to help identify opportunities to strengthen and support improvements **(paragraphs 11, 14, 15 and 18)**.

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

The audit looked at the Council's decision-making arrangements.

We undertook our fieldwork between April and May 2026.

We did not look at individual policy decisions or undertake an in-depth review of scrutiny or regulatory committees.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

This audit covered the following questions:

- Does the Council have clear decision-making arrangements?
- Are the Council's arrangements working effectively to ensure there is transparency and accountability in its decision-making?
- Does the information provided to councillors enable them to take well informed decisions?
- Does the Council have arrangements to support officers and councillors in their decision-making?
- Does the Council review the effectiveness of its decision-making arrangements?

Criteria

The audit criteria for this review have been informed through our cumulative audit knowledge. They cover statutory and good practice requirements in relation to:

- the decision-making framework;
- information provided to councillors, and
- the effectiveness of decision-making arrangements.

Methods

The audit used the following methods:

- a review of key Council documents, including its constitution;
- a review of a sample of committee papers and minutes;
- observing a selection of council, cabinet and development management committees via webcasts from the Council's website; and
- interviews with officers, councillors and a lay member.

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