Archwilio Cymru
Audit Wales

Recruitment and retention challenges – the right people at the right time?

Cyngor Gwynedd

November 2026

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We have prepared and published this report for presentation under the following duties:

- section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) to help enable the Auditor General to be satisfied (or not) that the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources; and
- section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to help enable the Auditor General to assess the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

1 We looked at the recruitment and retention challenges Cyngor Gwynedd (the Council) is facing. Including how well the Council understands its challenges, what it is doing in response, and how it reviews the value for money of its approaches.

2 Our main audit question was, “Does the Council have proper arrangements to address its recruitment and retention challenges?”

Why this is important

3 Having the right workforce in place is essential for a Council to deliver the services its communities need and to meet its legal duties. To do this the Council needs to employ the right number of employees, with the right skills, at the right time.

4 The majority of the Council’s day-to-day spending is used to pay for its workforce.

5 However, it is facing a number of challenges to recruit and retain people to deliver its services.

What we have found

6 We found that the Council generally understands its recruitment and retention challenges and is using a range of approaches to address these, with some success. However, it does not always evaluate whether its approaches represent value for money.

What we recommend

7 We made two recommendations. These focus on the Council strengthening its arrangements to understand why staff leave and assessing the value for money of its key approaches to recruitment and retention.

Our findings

Understanding the challenges

The Council generally understands its recruitment and retention challenges and has identified how it can improve its data in the future

8 The Council knows which posts are hard to fill and the reasons why. The Council has identified which posts are hard to fill across the organisation. It reviews its key roles and uses risk registers to highlight how vacancies impact service delivery. The Council is aware of some of the reasons why roles are hard to fill. These include fewer university places for some courses, pay scales that are not always competitive with the private sector or other public sector bodies, and the need for staff to have Welsh language skills. By understanding which posts are hard to fill and why, the Council reduces the risk of putting resources to work in the wrong place.

9 The Council can manually access the information it needs to understand its recruitment and retention challenges. For example, managers review the response rates for vacancies and know which ones are consistently low.

10 The Council does not have all the information it needs to predict future recruitment and retention trends and challenges. Apart from the Council's research into future risks to its social care department, the data the Council produces is largely retrospective and is unlikely to help it identify long term recruitment and retention trends and challenges. One of the objectives of the Council's proposed new human resources (HR) system is that it will produce timely reports to inform workforce planning decisions and give useful information on current and potential future vacancies. In the meantime, managers that need more detail must produce it manually at individual team level.

11 By not having all the information to help it identify current issues and predict future trends the Council risks missing opportunities to prevent recruitment and retention problems from occurring or getting worse. It also risks designing short-term solutions that do not provide value for money over the longer term.

12 The Council understands its use of workforce management approaches such as recruitment freezes, fixed-term contracts, market supplements, and agency staff. Recruitment freezes and use of agency staff are not considered suitable by the Council because they are not long-term solutions to recruitment and retention challenges. The Council occasionally uses market supplements in accordance with its 'by-exception' policy because it feels they are a short-term solution that may cause instability. The Council makes use of secondments to fill some vacancies and considers this a more sustainable solution where it has recruitment and retention challenges. However, the Council recognises that backfilling vacancies for staff on secondment can also be disruptive.

13 By understanding why it uses different workforce management approaches, the Council reduces the risk of negative impacts on the culture and morale of the organisation.

Addressing the challenges

The Council actively addresses its recruitment challenges using a range of approaches but is not consistently addressing its retention issues

14 The Council uses a range of approaches to attract candidates and address barriers to recruitment. For example, the Council uses its social media platforms to draw attention to specific hard to fill jobs. For care roles, the Council organises on-site open days and uses professionally produced videos to raise awareness about the nature of the work. The planning service has also complied their own job information packs to promote some vacancies.

15 The Council has well-established learning pathways for training and developing staff to help address its recruitment and retention challenges. The Gwynedd Yfory and Academi Gofal programmes aim to attract graduates, undergraduates, and school leavers into hard to fill roles and teams where the Council projects there will be a future demand. These programmes emphasise that there is a fulfilling career path at the Council. The Council acknowledges this is a long-term investment and that there remains a risk of losing staff after they gain qualifications.

16 Having a range of approaches to attract candidates can help the Council secure the talent it needs to deliver its objectives and services in ways which secure value for money.

17 The Council has addressed some barriers to staff retention. For example, as well as the support package for foster carers, the Council has also identified colleagues' caring responsibilities as a potential risk. In 2025 it launched a project aiming to provide appropriate support to unpaid carers. The Council expects the outcomes for the unpaid carers employed at Cyngor Gwynedd to include,

- improved staff satisfaction;
- reduced absenteeism;
- an aid to employee retention; and
- boost their motivation.

18 The Council offers a range of staff benefits. However, it does not highlight the benefits package to prospective candidates. By not making prospective candidates aware of the advantages of working for the Council, it may be reducing its attractiveness to potential applicants.

19 The Council does not engage its workforce specifically to help address recruitment and retention challenges. Whilst it has internal staff networks, a staff survey, and an exit interview process, it does not use these sources of information to explore recruitment and retention challenges specifically. The Council also does not carry out exit interviews or analyse responses consistently across all services which limits its understanding of why staff leave.

20 Involving employees in addressing its recruitment and retention issues, can help the Council to reduce the risk of missing ideas and failing to introduce solutions successfully.

21 The Council has arrangements in place to ensure senior leaders have oversight of recruitment and retention challenges. Senior leaders receive regular updates at formal meetings on how recruitment and retention challenges can impact service delivery. Councillors receive feedback through the Council's Workforce Plan, the annual HR report, and regular service challenge and support meetings. Regular reporting ensures senior leaders are sighted of recruitment and retention issues. This increases the likelihood of them identifying emerging issues and taking action to address them.

22 The Council does not always explore opportunities for collaboration with other organisations when it considers its recruitment and retention challenges. There are some examples where the Council has worked with partners to address its challenges. These include collaborating with a local university, other councils, and the health board to address specialist recruitment challenges. The Council also works with higher and further education bodies to publicise job opportunities for students. However, by not always exploring opportunities to work with partners to resolve recruitment and retention challenges, the Council may miss other opportunities to share resources, expertise, and good practice.

Reviewing value for money

The Council does not assess the value for money of its approaches to addressing recruitment and retention challenges

23 The Council does not have arrangements to assess and monitor the value for money of its approach to addressing recruitment and retention challenges. It has also not set out who has responsibility for this. By not monitoring and assessing the value for money of its recruitment and retention approaches, the Council risks not making the best use of its resources and identifying opportunities for improvement.

24 Where the Council has identified weaknesses in its approach to recruitment it seeks to address them. For example, it has improved its onboarding arrangements for new staff to ensure they receive and understand the information they need to perform well.

25 The Council has also identified further improvements to make to its onboarding arrangements, such as ensuring that staff have access to the intranet via personal devices. The Council has also identified improvements it can make to its job application process. It analysed when prospective candidates drop out of recruitment process and plans to address this by ensuring the information it asks for is proportionate to the relevant job specification.

26 By identifying and making improvements to its recruitment and retention practices, the Council increases the likelihood of it getting value for money.

Recommendations

R1 To inform its approach to staff retention, the Council should strengthen its arrangements to understand why staff leave across all services areas. **(paragraphs 19-20).**

R2 The Council should develop arrangements for assessing and monitoring the value for money of its approaches to recruitment and retention. **(paragraph 23).**

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

We looked at the challenges the Council faces in recruiting and retaining staff. This included how well the Council understands the challenges, the steps it is taking to respond to these challenges, and the how it reviews the value for money of its approaches.

We did not look at the wider topic of workforce planning.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

We set out to answer the following questions:

- Does the Council understand its recruitment and retention challenges?
- Is the Council taking action to its address recruitment and retention challenges?
- Does the Council review the value for money of its approaches to address recruitment and retention challenges?

Criteria

We have assessed the Council's arrangements by answering the above audit questions. To help us do that, we have created a set of audit criteria which explains 'what good looks like'. We have used the audit criteria to help us analyse the evidence we collected from our review of documentary evidence and the interviews we conducted

Our audit criteria were informed by a combination of our knowledge and experience and research into this topic. It was also informed by our conversations with national stakeholders.

Methods

We interviewed senior officers and the cabinet member responsible for developing and delivering the Council's strategic approach to meeting its recruitment and retention challenges.

We also interviewed senior officers from three Council services that have faced acute recruitment and retention challenges.

We also reviewed a range of documents relevant to the audit questions we were seeking to answer.

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