

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	11 SEPTEMBER 2014
TITLE	SYSTEMS THINKING
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Peredur Jenkins

1. Background

1.1. The Scrutiny Committee has noted its wish to scrutinize the latest developments on systems thinking, specifically asking me to respond to the questions noted below.

2. To what extent has Systems Thinking been extended across the Council?

2.1. The work of extending across the Council is starting at the moment.

2.2. The Committee Members who were part of the original scrutiny review will be aware that "systems thinking" is not a matter of setting a process in place but a matter of ensuring a consistent way of thinking amongst all the Council staff and that the Council's wider culture and working processes also support that way of thinking.

2.3. These working processes, culture and way of thinking (having been rooted amongst all the Council's staff) will then lead to arming those staff with the necessary skills to discover solutions to meet the real needs of the people of Gwynedd.

2.4. The title "Ffordd Gwynedd" has been given to this package of work arrangements, thinking, and culture, which is the way we will be ensuring that we put the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do, and this is the plan referred to as DT1 on page 38 of the Council's Strategic Plan.

2.5. In order to extend all this across the Council, we must ensure that the most important elements for achieving this are in place before we start the journey (or we will be accused of talking about it but with nothing in place to support it in practice). This would lead to staff thinking that it is only talk and that we are not serious about it. This in turn would make it impossible to change the culture.

2.6. The work of ensuring that the most important necessary supporting elements are in place is nearly complete, with one essential element including developing an internal programme (having learnt lessons from the two "systems thinking" pilots already completed) to ensure assistance is available for service teams to challenge what they are presently doing. This will be the programme for implementing Ffordd Gwynedd.

2.7. The first run of this programme will take place in one service in October in order that we can test it in practice before extending it to more units.

2.8. The Ffordd Gwynedd Strategy document, outlining what it entails, will be going before the Cabinet for approval in the autumn.

2.9. Those who were present in the Council when the Chief Executive Designate was appointed in May, will remember that he was appointed on the basis of his vision to change the Council's culture to one that is consistent with systems thinking, and he has already started on the work of extending the concept amongst the Council's managers and staff by holding a series of sessions during July and August.

3. What efforts have been made to ensure that the Cabinet Members and Senior Managers understand the principles of Systems Thinking? And as a result of this, has any one of the Council's services been re-designed for the benefit of the customer?

3.1. The Senior Managers have been part of the sessions referred to above held by the Chief Executive Designate and whilst all the Cabinet members are aware of what is contained in the DT1 project of the Strategic Plan they will gain a better understanding of what is involved when the strategic document is presented to them.

3.2. Obviously, no service has been re-designed as yet but the Strategic Plan anticipates that we will have supported 7 Teams to implement the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd by the end of the financial year. Assuming that no further obstacles arise I am confident that we will be able to do this.

3.3. The point made about the need for members to understand what is expected from us is a very important one that should not be overlooked.

3.4. Obviously Councillor Ioan Thomas and I have been managing the development of the system and understand the elements of the requirements on staff and managers but there will also be requirements on us as members. We will not be able to change the Council's culture if the members' culture stays the same.

3.5. I am currently discussing with officers what we need to do in order to ensure that all the Council's members have a sufficient understanding of the concept behind Ffordd Gwynedd in order to assist in supporting our ability to change the general way of thinking within the Council.

4. What support is there available to officers to provide the 'day job' and to work on the Systems Thinking project at the same time?

4.1. The programme for implementing Ffordd Gwynedd includes the need for managers to consider any requirements of carrying on with the "day job" whilst the redesigning goes ahead.

4.2. This is considered to be crucial to any process of change and is not unique to Ffordd Gwynedd.

4.3. Of course, we must be aware of the fact that this could on occasions mean that we cannot bridge the gap in the short term and that the "day job" will have to be completed with less resources for a period of time whilst the team dealing with the changes undertake that work.

4.4. This could mean that performance could therefore get worse for a period of time, but maybe this is the price we have to pay in the short term in order to gain a better service in the long term.

5. In developing the scheme across the Council, how is a balance intended to be struck between undertaking the work internally and obtaining external, independent input when the need arises?

5.1. One of the things learnt from the pilot work was that the final system needs to be tailored to meet the specific culture of Gwynedd Council.

5.2. We have therefore developed our own model under the Ffordd Gwynedd banner since this also enables us to learn as we go forward rather than being dependent on expensive external consultants.

5.3. Creating an internal programme and utilising the staffing skills we already have in place is going to be much more cost effective than depending on external consultants.

5.4. Having said that, we must not deceive ourselves by thinking that we will be able to solve every problem that comes our way on this journey and we do foresee that we will need to call upon the services of external consultants for support if we come across obstacles that we cannot solve internally.

5.5. We are presently also considering whether there should be an element of external assessment by consultants on our internal arrangements in case something fundamental has been missed out, but we have not yet reached a conclusion on whether this would be worthwhile.

6. How is consideration given to comments and feedback from customers, and how are the nature of demand and the true needs of the customer assessed? What are the public's views, do they believe that systems thinking works?

6.1. The first part of the question is an integral part of the programme for implementing Ffordd Gwynedd.

6.2. The answer to the second part will become apparent when the concept has been extended across more of the Council's services, but we must be careful not to ask the wrong question. Ultimately, the true measure is whether the service is improving, not whether the public believe that systems thinking works. Of course one should lead to the other.

7. What measures have been set in order to assess the successes and problems in implementing the scheme across the Council and to report on any matters of concern to the Cabinet?

7.1. The important measures are of course those that measure how successful we are in achieving the purpose set for any team operating within the Council.

7.2. It is essential to ensure that the Council's performance system contains these measures and enables us to report to the Cabinet through the relevant Cabinet Member when things go wrong.

7.3. This underlines the need to look again at the Council's performance arrangements as one important element which is part of the work of ensuring that all elements of the Council's culture support our ability to implement systems thinking.

7.4. This work is taking place as part of the DT1 scheme in the Strategic Plan.

8. What work has been completed to assess the cost of the scheme in order to identify the extent of the expenditure and any savings that have already resulted from it, and what are the projections for the future?

8.1. A record of the costs involved in implementing Ffordd Gwynedd is kept, and eventually when we have extended the idea across the Council it is anticipated that savings will arise from stopping undertaking things which do not add value to the people of Gwynedd.

8.2. We can then consider whether it has been a financial success.

8.3. However care must be taken not to think of it as a tool for saving money.

8.4. The essence of Ffordd Gwynedd is to focus on the needs of the people of Gwynedd and thereby ensure that we truly meet the needs of the people of Gwynedd.

8.5. Savings will undoubtedly arise, but the main aim is to improve our ability to meet the needs of our people.

9. What is the opinion of the specialists from Cardiff Business School e.g. on the Council's attitude towards system thinking?

9.1. We do not know because we haven't asked.

9.2. Having to create documents and paying for the assessment would divert effort and resources from ensuring that we move forward to change the culture of the Council and to create a system which will improve the quality of our services.

9.3. The arrangements we have in mind correspond with statements heard from officers of the Business School when they came here to explain how they would ideally implement systems thinking but we have not specifically asked them to make an assessment.

9.4. Ultimately the only way to assess if our attitude is correct is to see whether it improves services and in this respect, only time will tell.