

<b>SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	3 DECEMBER 2015
<b>TITLE</b>	SUPPORTING AND ASSISTING THE WORKFORCE
<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	COUNCILLOR PEREDUR JENKINS

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Committee has noted its wish to scrutinise the provision for supporting and sustaining staff during a period of cuts to services.

## 2. What can the Scrutiny Committee consider?

### 2.1 What is the Council's best current assessment of the number of staff that could be affected by the cuts and efficiency savings?

The cuts and the efficiency savings will have an effect on every member of staff, either indirectly or directly and the Council has made its arrangements to support staff on this basis e.g. there is a requirement to support staff who remain in employment as well as those staff who face a redundancy situation.

With reference to the specific question, it is estimated that realisation of both efficiency savings and cuts in full, will lead to a reduction of approximately 500 in the workforce.

### 2.2 Does the Council have a strategy to prepare the workforce for the cuts and to support them during the process (e.g. re-training) and what are the arrangements in terms of relocating staff within the Council and identifying other opportunities, again within the Council? (e.g. identifying other posts, assisting staff with skills to find alternative employment)

The Council has a detailed communication strategy in respect of preparing staff for the cuts. The emphasis thus far has been on ensuring that messages are relayed timely, both in a written format and verbally in collective meetings, team meetings and on a one to one basis. The Internal Communications Unit has been incorporated within the Communication and Engagement whilst the Organisational Development Manager works closely with the service in order to ensure that information in respect of developments with the Gwynedd Challenge are related to staff.

The Council ensures both a close and regular contact with local trade union representatives and has gained their support in encouraging trade union members to participate in the consultation and to relay information about the support available in a redundancy situation and when staff are concerned about their employment and future. Managers have an important role in this respect and there is an intention in the next few weeks to provide a reminder of the support available to them.

Arrangements to refer other employment opportunities within the Council to the attention of those in a redundancy situation are well established and the work of identifying appropriate relocations to staff in such circumstances has been

comparatively successful over recent years. It is acknowledged that such relations will become more difficult during the period ahead. Individuals in a redundancy situation receive details about all vacancies within the Council and are also guaranteed an interview for any post if they meet the essential requirements for that post.

Furthermore, each individual receives assistance to prepare for an interview, to complete an application form and to identify training to develop skills and knowledge. There is a substantial package of documents and guidance available and the HR Advisory Team will refer individuals to the relevant material.

### **2.3 Are members of staff who are facing loss of employment provided with emotional as well as practical support?**

There is comprehensive provision of both emotional and mental support. This support is co-ordinated by the Occupational Health Unit with the support of a number of other officers within the Department as well as specialist external agencies.

The MEDRA counselling service is available to every member of staff. Individuals can be referred by the Occupational Health Advisers to the Service or individuals can contact MEDRA directly and confidentially themselves.

The corporate policy for dealing with stress has been reviewed recently with generic risk assessments provided in order to facilitate the work of managers when responding to situations within their service. Anyone who reports that they are suffering from stress are immediately referred for advice and support to the Occupational Health Advisers (this is also done when musculoskeletal problems are reported and there is much evidence which supports the assertion that one affects the other).

Stress management courses for managers are held in order to assist them in identifying symptoms amongst staff (and themselves) whilst work is ongoing currently in preparation for "Managing your Own Stress" sessions. 24 members of Council staff have attended a Mental Health First Aid course in the past six months. These courses prepare individuals to be local champions in terms of providing basic support to colleagues who exhibit signs of mental stress.

Some individuals are referred to 'mindfulness' sessions by the Occupational Health Unit and a series of Dru Yoga sessions will be offered from January 2016.

Both advisers and officers within the HR Advisory Team maintain close contact with individual members of staff when anyone is in a redundancy situation (or concerned about their employment) and this resource is often much appreciated.

### **2.4 What arrangements exist with other agencies to identify skills and relocate those staff with those other agencies?**

There are arrangements with other authorities in Wales to advertise our vacancies on their websites as required and similarly, this Council allows adverts for vacancies from other local and national public bodies, to appear on our jobs website.

Welsh Government, together with members of the Workforce Partnership Council, has submitted further recommendations which are currently being considered in respect of enabling the transfer of individuals' employment across the devolved public sector. A Sub-Group under the leadership of the Deputy Minister has reached a consensus in terms of these recommendations. They include:

- i. that the transfers would be voluntary (no compulsion on individuals in a redundancy situation to accept the offer of a post in another establishment).
- ii. extending the current advertising arrangements by not externally advertising vacancies beyond the devolved public sector for a period.
- iii. developing a protocol in order to address concerns by individuals in respect of their employment rights with an emphasis on the sharing of any risks between the individual, the current employer and the new employer in a fair and pragmatic manner.

No final decisions will be taken on this proposed development until later in 2016.

**2.5 It is likely that there are alternative methods of providing some services which have traditionally been provided by the Council. Is there any work being conducted or planned interventions to support current staff to establish their own business in order to respond to the new/different provision?**

The support package for staff in a redundancy situation includes details about schemes to assist individuals to gain new skills. Careers Wales' ReAct Scheme provides financial assistance (up to £1,500) in order to pay costs involving development of new skills to individuals who are in a redundancy situation or who have been made redundant in the previous three months. This support also includes an assessment of training needs and advice on appropriate training courses. This support and assistance includes guidance on establishing their own business.

However, there are proposed developments to resurrect general introductory sessions previously provided in order to raise awareness about self-employment. The intention is to work with agencies such as 'Business Cymru' and 'Menter a Business' in this instance. The introduction of this development will further enrich the programme of support to staff.

**2.6 Further, from those posts which have been deleted from the establishment, it is very likely that some individuals decided to retire/retire early. However, it is likely that the work remained. Has there been an assessment in terms of the stress on staff and what were the conclusions?**

An increasing number of staff are considering early and/or flexible retirement and it would be true to say that some of these retirements have led to savings and re-structuring within services. The Flexible Retirement Scheme allows staff to reduce their working hours whilst identifying a date when they will retire in full. This is advantageous to the employer in terms of retaining expertise for a period whilst new arrangements are given an opportunity to settle whilst the member of staff gains from pension release and retiring gradually over a period of time.

On any occasion, when there is a reduction in the workforce, it is essential to consider and assess the effect that re-structuring and the re-allocation of responsibilities will have on those staff who remain in employment.

The generic risk assessment (Appendix 1) assists managers to assess and evaluate the stress on staff in these circumstances whilst providing guidance or techniques to manage the Specific risk. The HR Advisers, who advise on all re-structuring in the services, bring managers' attention to the need to consider such issues whilst the Health, Safety and Well-Being advisers and the Occupational Health Advisers provide support by means of expert advice.

**2.7 The Council will face a further challenge if Local Government reorganisation takes place. Have any steps been taken to start preparing support for staff in this respect?**

The good practice and support offered by the Council shows that we take our 'duty of care' seriously.

The wide range of assistance and support which has already been referred to is just as crucial when staff face local government re-organisation and the uncertainty about employment continuity which follows.

No specific further steps have been taken in this context but it is obvious that the support currently provided in respect of dealing with change, coaching sessions etc. will be crucial to the assistance provided to individuals when facing this change as well as any other changes in their working and personal lives.

The timely provision of information to staff in respect of developments in this context will again be central to the support provided. There is nothing that upsets staff more than being informed of details affecting their futures from a source other than their employer!