

# **GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET**



## **A Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet**

<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>28 September 2021</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	<b>Councillor Nia Jeffreys</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Geraint Owen</b>
<b>Contact Telephone Number:</b>	<b>01286 679335</b>
<b>Title of Item:</b>	<b>Annual Report - Employment</b>

### **1. DECISION SOUGHT**

Approval of the annual report for 2020/21.

### **2. THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION**

To reflect and agree on the corporate strategy in this crucial field for the future.

### **3. INTRODUCTION**

The intention of this report is to present an annual update of the workforce details and their employment together with outlining objectives for developing our workers and setting the direction for the future.

The Local Consultative Joint Committee (the joint forum between the recognised union representatives and Elected Members) receives an annual report on activity in the human resources field but that report focuses on the operational relationship between the employer and the workforce representatives.

This is the first report to be submitted to the Cabinet on this subject since September 2019, and in the meantime of course, the Council's workforce has faced unprecedented situations when providing services for the residents of the County. This report therefore reflects the unique situation experienced and refers to some possible challenges facing the Council over the coming years.

a) **THE COUNCIL'S WORKFORCE**

The numbers employed on a full-time and part-time basis within the Council for the last three years are noted here. Note that these numbers include staff who work in our schools but not those staff employed on a casual basis during holiday/sickness periods of the permanent workforce.

	31/3/19	31/3/20	31/3/21
Full-time	3,011	2,923	3,073
Part-time	2,871	2,781	2,776
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,882</b>	<b>5,704</b>	<b>5,849</b>

Whilst the pattern over the years has been one of a reduction in staff numbers, the details regarding 2020/21 shows that there has been an increase of 145 in the number of staff members employed. You will see that the most increase is seen in the number of full-time staff appointed, and the increase reflects the need that we had as employers to appoint to caring and cleaning posts so as to be able to cope with the crisis.

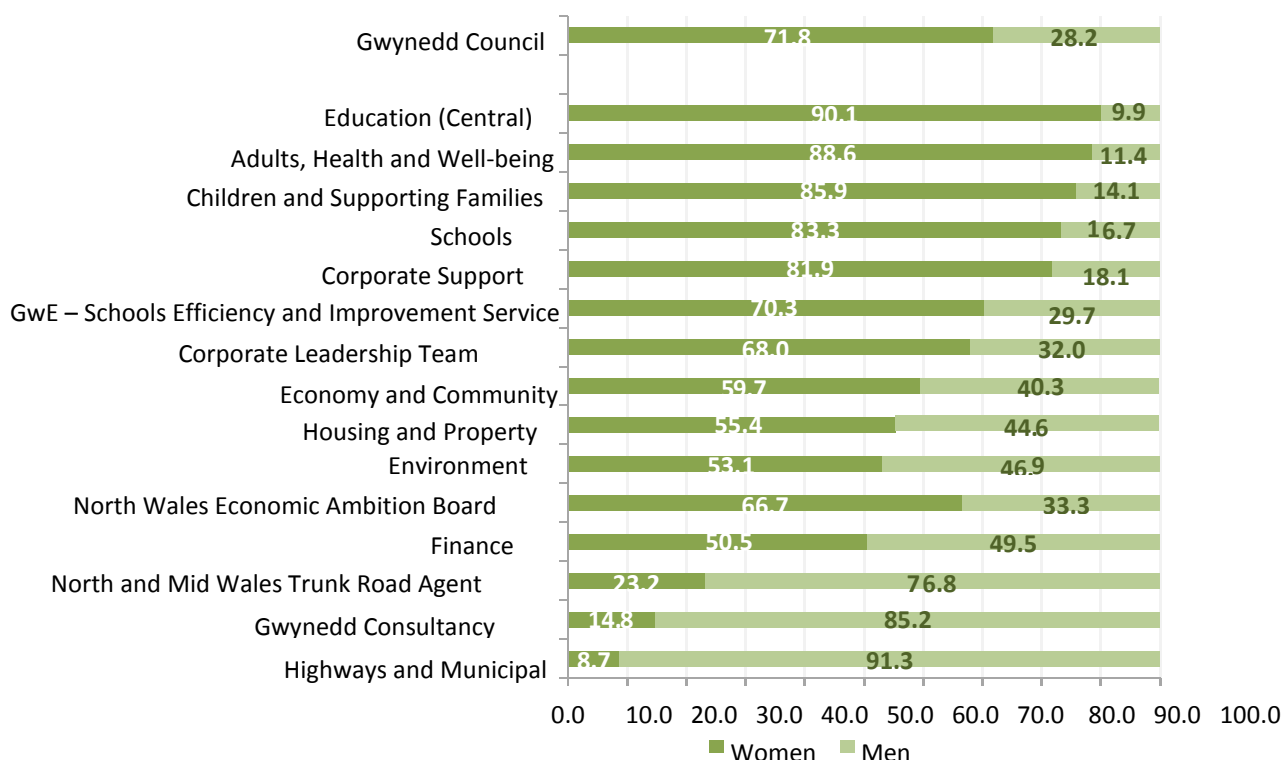
b) **WORKFORCE SPLIT BY GENDER**

A further analysis is seen here of the number of men and women employed on a full-time and part-time basis during the same period. The split in terms of percentages remain relatively stable in the context of the number of women and men employed, and yet notice the increase of 143 in the number of women who work under full-time arrangements.

		31/3/19	31/3/20	31/3/21
Full-time	Men	1,390	1,329	1,336
	Women	1,621	1,594	1,737
Part-time	Men	303	313	314
	Women	2,568	2,468	2,462
Total	Men	1,693	1,642	1,650
	Women	4,189	4,062	4,199
Total %	Men	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>28.2%</b>
	Women	<b>71.2%</b>	<b>71.2%</b>	<b>71.8%</b>

## Distribution of female / male Gwynedd Council staff per Department, 31 March

2021

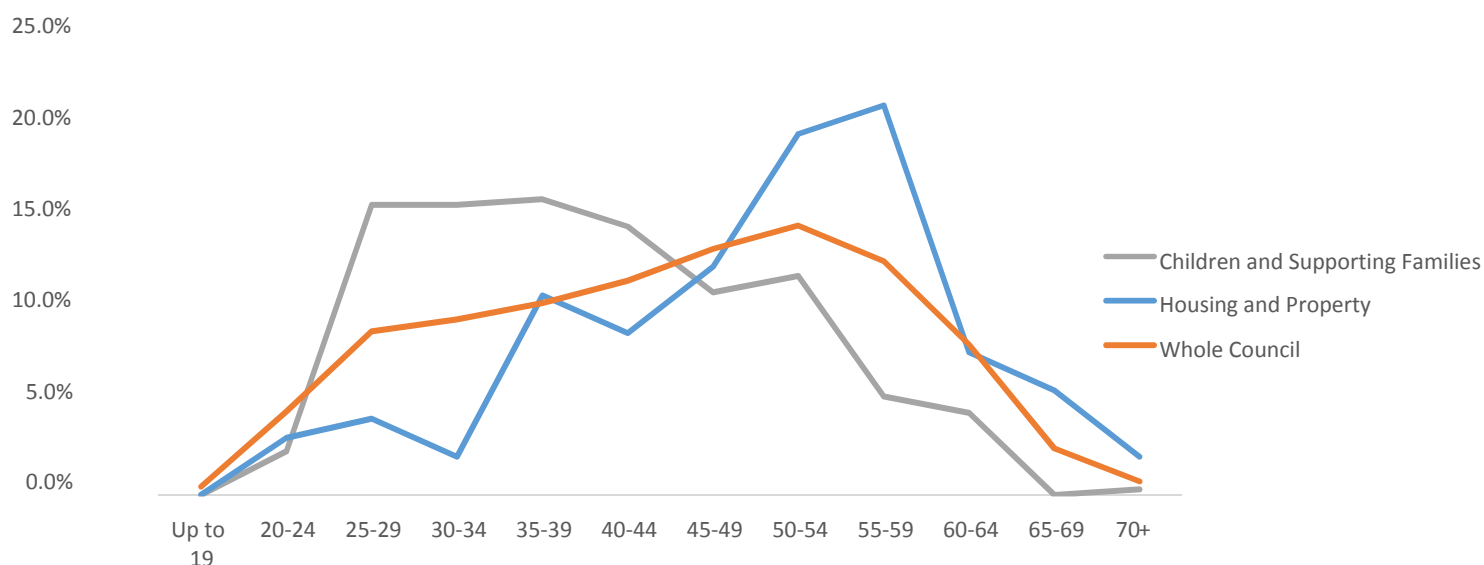


### c) AGE PROFILE OF COUNCIL STAFF

It is possible to interpret the age profile of Council staff in all types of ways, but the core message is consistent with what was reported in previous years. There has been a further increase in the number of staff aged over 40 years. On 31 March 2021, 67% of the workforce was over that age. The equivalent figure was 64.5% on 31 March 2019, and 64% in the previous year. The same pattern is also true for the workforce aged over 50 years. The pattern where we are seeing an ageing age profile for our workforce continues and it is one of the reasons why we as an employer must intensify our efforts to plan for what our workforce needs may be in the future. This will be further addressed later in the report.

The graph below shows the Department which has the youngest age profile and the Department with the oldest age profile, as well as the age profile for the entire Council.

### Proportion of staff per age band, 31 March, 2021



#### ch) **STAFF TURNOVER**

In 2018/19 and 2019/20, a small increase was seen in the number of staff who left the Council's employment. However, in the year 2020/21, this percentage dropped to 6.8%. The largest turnover is seen within the Economy and Community Department (27.7%) and the Highways and Municipal Department (9.8%), whilst turnover was at its lowest in the Finance Department (4.5%), Corporate Support Department (4.7%), Education Department (5.1%) and Consultancy Department (5.1%).



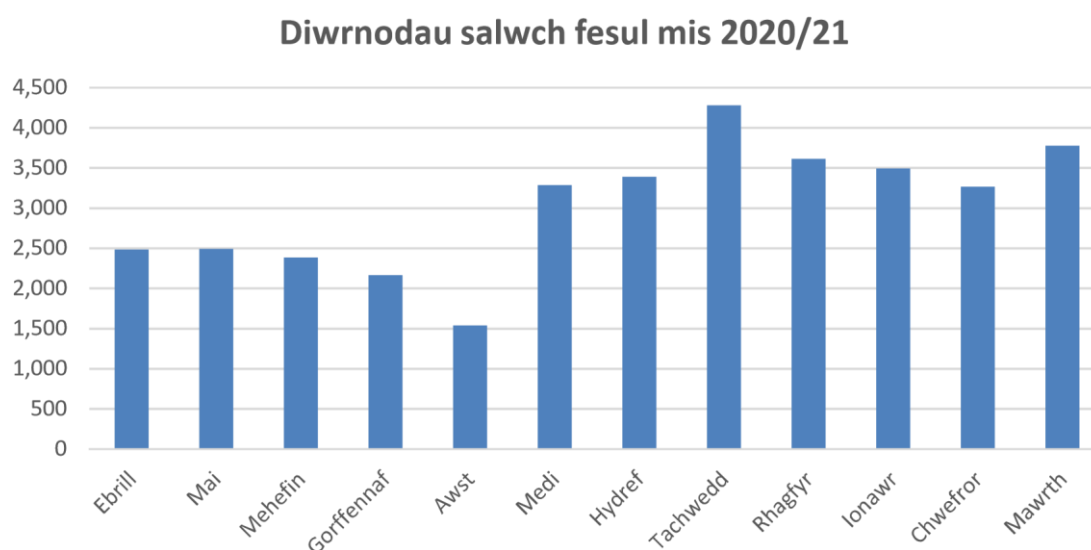
It is very likely that the crisis has had a major influence on the reduction in turnover over the past year, as staff decided to remain in their jobs during an unstable and concerning period. The long-term pattern of seeing a reduction in staff turnover continues, and considering that the age profile of our workforce continues to rise, this is a further sign that we as an employer need to intensify our efforts to plan our staffing needs for the long-term and to attract a new workforce. If the current pattern continues, there is a risk for us in due course to lose a substantial cohort of experienced staff in a relatively small period of time, and this could indeed cause problems for our services.

Work is already underway to do more in this field, but there are signs emerging already that the labour market has changed substantially as a result of the pandemic. The success of home-working arrangements, for example, means that the staff recruitment market has developed into a broad market, which of course brings threats and opportunities to employers.

#### d) **SICKNESS ABSENCES**

The number of days lost due to sickness across the Council reduced to 6.35 days per head during the 2020/21 year. This was a substantial reduction from 9.78 for the previous year. Whilst this reduction is substantial, there is no doubt that the pandemic, and its impact on work arrangements during the year, has a central role to play. It is possible that the switch to home-working arrangements has meant that staff find it easier to cope when they are feeling sick, and that there was some confusion at the beginning of the year regarding recording, dealing with and discussing sickness absences virtually, instead of the traditional arrangements. It is likely that we will see an increase in the rate in 2021/22; although society has 'opened up' once again and any work arrangements are well established, the pandemic continues and as the COVID infection rates increase, it is likely that this will affect our staffing levels.

The following table shows the levels of sickness absences, month on month, during the past year.



Naturally, during the year, sickness absences were at their highest within the Community Care Service (15.29), and the Cleaning Service in the Housing and Property Department

(13.90), whilst the lowest levels were seen in the Finance Department (3.09), Education - not including school staff (3.31) and Gwynedd Consultancy (3.56).

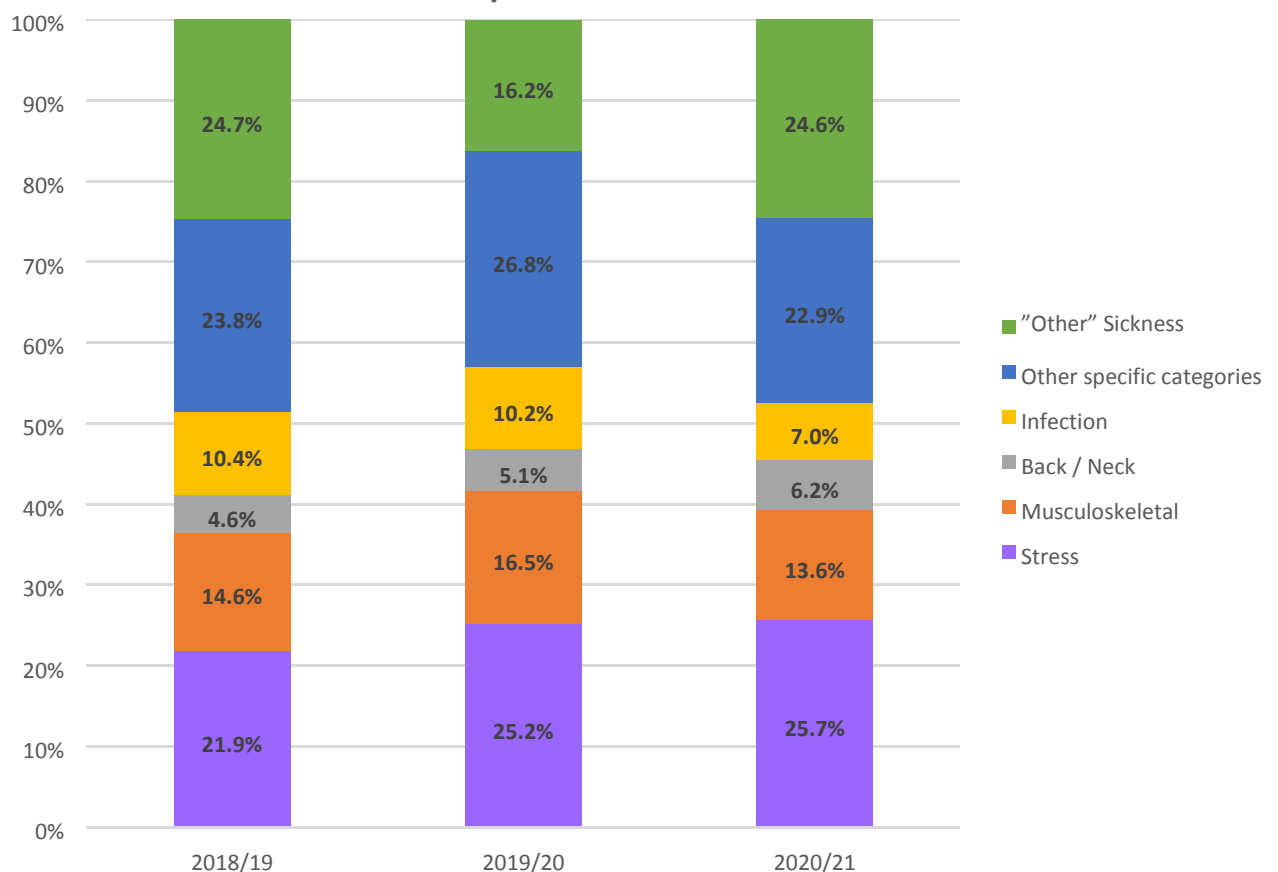
It is important to note that 62.5% of staff did not report that they had been sick at all during the past year.

Officers from the Corporate Support Department are collaborating closely with the Council's Services more broadly in order to review individual cases of absence. Following a period of delay in the early days of the pandemic, this work was re-instated, which ensured that the necessary support was available for staff to enable them to cope with a deterioration in their health, as it was transferred to virtual means.

The early signs show that sickness absence levels will return to pre-pandemic levels over this year, and consequently, the human resources officers are currently planning how some specific services can be supported further over the coming months.

The table below gives a further analysis of the type of sickness which has been recorded for absences over the last three years. This information is used to steer the discussion when considering the content of the programme to promote health and well-being annually.

**Analysis of sickness absence per category, 2018/19 to 2020/21**



The substantial increase in the absences recorded as 'Other Sickness' is a matter to note. This category should only be used in unique circumstances in reality, and the fact that as many as 1 in every 4 cases have been recorded in this manner in 2020/21 means that we basically do not know the reason behind the absences in the category. This in turn is important as the information enables us to tailor the support needed for individuals. Of course, it is likely that much of the figure can be attributed to COVID-related absences, and the uncertainty that existed in the early days of the crisis, but this is speculation and we will strive over the year to come to reduce this percentage again. Over the years, there were suspicions that much stress sickness was concealed under the 'Other Sickness' heading, and so if there is any possibility that this is the case again, it is important that we as an employer seek to address the problem, so that we can attempt to manage work-related stress levels within the Council.

dd) **ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

The pandemic has been a challenging time in terms of providing learning programmes, and no face-to-face training was presented since its outset (apart from 'necessary' titles such as First Aid in order to maintain key services).

However, the challenge of the pandemic has presented an opportunity to develop and trial new learning methods and technologies. To this end, the Organisational Learning and Development team has developed a web portal that enables staff to distance learn (Distance Learning Environment), as well as an increasing number of virtual learning titles. With developments in Teams software, opportunities now exist to increase the on-line networking element, and discussions groups could be held as well as contributions made to whole groups. It is inevitable that shorter virtual sessions are provided to smaller groups and that the presentation style is adapted, but we believe that this provides learning advantages (as well as access advantages, time and environmental savings, e.g. reduces travelling).

Although the numbers of staff (and Members) who take advantage of learning opportunities has reduced at the start of the pandemic, they are now increasing as additional virtual titles become available. It appears that many 'different' individuals are taking advantage of the new learning style (some never previously seen on learning programmes). It is believed that this can be attributed to the convenience of remote access.

Excellent feedback was received from a number of attendees (staff and Members) who provide robust evidence of the value, propriety and effectiveness of learning by virtual means.

We are continuing to hold virtual team development workshops, with sessions tailored in fields such as Ffordd Gwynedd and Communication (based on DiSC personality profiles) proving to be popular. Emphasis was placed on supporting managers, e.g. 'Distance Leadership' and a range of resources to assist staff and managers to cope with the COVID situation.

It is anticipated that the 'demand' for tailored workshops will increase over the year to come, with requests for support to cope with 'new' work arrangements, and an intensification in developing the 'Ffordd Gwynedd' culture for a broader audience.

With the increasing reliance on technology, there is demand for upgrading information technology skills amongst the workforce. Despite the substantial increase seen as a result of campaigns to encourage staff to undertake e-learning training in specific fields, e.g. *Violence Against Women*, it must be acknowledged that there is a need to provide a range of training methods, and we will offer face-to-face sessions again, once the COVID restrictions allow.

As a result, the work of producing quality packages continues to be one of the priorities of the Organisational Learning and Development Service with a view to ensure that those packages are fit for purpose.

The Talent Schemes is one of the Council's priorities, and in May 2021, the Cabinet approved a £1.1 million investment, comprising of £600,000 towards the Apprenticeships Scheme over the next three years, and £500,000 towards the Leaders and Experts of Tomorrow Scheme (the Council's graduates schemes). Not only do these schemes contribute towards local employment, but they also contribute towards ensuring the Council's service continuity in the future.

Apprentices have been appointed in many fields across the Council, including engineering, information technology and care. Following a very successful campaign, we have attracted a high number of quality applications which has led to the appointment of 17 apprentices in phase 1 (2019), which includes 7 women (some in cyber security and electrical fields). In phase 2 (2021), 12 new apprentices have been recruited (September 2021), with at least 8 more apprentice posts to be advertised. Nine apprentices have already been appointed to jobs with the Council.

*Cynlluniau Yfory* (professional trainees) attract the Managers and Experts of the future. Seven trainees were appointed in the fields of leadership and management, procurement, translation, finance and revenue (commencing in post in September 2021). Again, the quality of the applicants was particularly good.



It is anticipated that the Council will recruit ~20 new Apprentices and ~7 new Professional Trainees annually, which means that ~60 individuals will be enrolled on our Talent Schemes by September 2024.

As well as attracting 'New Talent', the emphasis on developing existing staff forms an important element of our efforts to identify and develop talent within the organisation.

The Organisational Learning and Development Team is also leading on the Language Designations project, with the aim of reconciling language designations for all jobs within the Council, and identifying staff development needs following a self-assessment of their skills. By September 2021:

- **65%** of central staff have submitted a self-assessment
- **92%** meet (or exceed) the Language Designations of their post

Language Skills data contributes to the annual report of the care workforce for Welsh Government, with new Quarterly reports sent to each Head of Department and Language Designations Forum Representative.

The Organisational Learning and Development Team is also leading on Benefits, with the menu increasing on an ongoing basis, including:

- The Vectis Scheme (Discount Cards) 1988 registered (September 2021)
- The new 'Salary Sacrifice AVC' Scheme - approved by HMRC
- The new Green Car Scheme has been developed - Electric Cars.
- Bicycle scheme - 155 staff members have got new bikes since 01/04/2020
- Local Scheme - 214 businesses have now joined the scheme to date

#### e) **PAY STRUCTURE**

The Pay Policy for 2020/21 was approved by the Council at its meeting on 5 March 2020. During subsequent months, the National Joint-committee for Local Government Workers reached an agreement on pay increases for the year up to 31 March this year. This meant placing 2.75% on staff salaries for the year, and setting the lowest pay point at £9.43 per hour. At the time, this was above the Living Wage rate (determined by the Living Wage Foundation). Since November 2020, this rate has been £9.50, however, local government employers and trade unions are currently discussing a pay rise for the 2020/21 year which

could ultimately mean that the lowest pay point of this Council will overtake the Living Wage rate again.

Ensuring equal pay has been one of the Council's cornerstones as an employer for years, and in order to verify that the arrangements continue to be robust, we routinely carry out an audit of our systems every three years. The latest audit is currently underway and we will report on this later on in the year. We will also undertake an audit of the difference between the salaries of men and women. As previously reported in the past, we know that there is a gender pay gap, which reflects the pattern in society in general; however, we as an employer are eager to see what steps we can take to reduce the gap. This field forms part of the 'Fairness for All' corporate project.

f) **WORKFORCE PLANNING**

We have already referred to this important field earlier in the report. Some of the statistical information in the report suggests that potential challenges lie ahead, as our current workforce ages and as the employment market changed over the past 18 months.

A lot of good work is already being done to address this, as we invest in attracting apprentices and trainees, however, there is most certainly a more general shift in the jobs market nowadays. On the whole, we have, over the years, been recruiting our workforce from amongst the people who live here in Gwynedd or in nearby counties. There are signs that this is already changing and that we could be competing against organisations outside the traditional boundaries in order to recruit staff, but also to retain our current staff. The success of technology and the home-working arrangements means that doors are being opened to prospective job applicants. Of course, this does open potential doors for us, but we must be clear that it also brings risks in relation to retaining talented staff. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly apparent that effective workforce planning will be a critical field for us and for other public organisations in the medium and long term.

ff) **LOCAL CONDITIONS OF SERVICE**

The work of reviewing and ensuring that staff's conditions of employment. and staffing policies more generally, reflect the Council's culture, is one of the priorities within the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan. Over the year, the Group that is leading on the project developed a number of policies, and adopted a new code of conduct, reviewed our recruitment and appointment policy and developed a new policy for dealing with sickness absences. Having approved new policies as an employer, the challenge for the group leading the work will be to raise

awareness on the content and ensure that training etc. is available for managers on how to implement the content. This work is currently in progress, as well as development work on other matters such as processes for dispute resolution and for dealing with disciplinaries. Consulting with different key groups, and listening to views and sharing ideas, is central to what needs to be achieved and the work programme is long-term and it will hopefully mean that staff and managers, as well as unions, will have increasing input into the development of the Council's working conditions and staffing policies.

g) **WORKING FROM HOME**

A project has been established, under the leadership of the chief executive, which is focusing on our plans for staff's long-term working arrangements. On the whole, the arrangements for working from home have proven successful, and it appears that there is a desire in the public sector in general to extend the arrangements to be long-term and more permanent. The discussion about how that could develop within this Council continues, but any discussion will be based on ensuring that the services for the County's residents will be given first priority. We are currently consulting with staff on those plans; further information will come in the months ahead.

ng) **WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP**

The main purpose of this project is to promote the number of women who apply and work in senior roles within the Council through reviewing the working environment and conditions so as to attract more women to undertake the work in the future. A Developing Potential Programme for Women was drawn up, with the specific intention of responding to the development needs of women within the Council. A mentoring programme was also established recently to support individuals involved with the programme.

h) **RECRUITING AND APPOINTING**

See below statistical details regarding the number of jobs advertised by the Council over the last four years together with the number of applications received and also the number of vacancies which needed to be re-advertised. Analysing these details again contributes to our ability to identify fields in which the Council needs to focus its attention in relation to developing expertise and planning the workforce for the future.

Year	Number of jobs advertised	Number of applications	Number of jobs re-advertised	Number of applications for the second advert
2017 / 2018	472	2312	47	179
2018 / 2019	555	3281	57	240
2019 / 2020	586	2726	101	249
2020 / 2021	486	2112	77	227

A reduction was seen in the number of jobs advertised in 2021, and it is likely that this is to be expected considering that it took some weeks, if not months, for the Services to cope with the changes seen in the spring of 2021.

In association with the previous comment on workforce planning, it is anticipated that this field will become increasingly important for us as an employer over the year to come. The recruitment arrangements were successfully adapted because of the pandemic, and they were most often carried out virtually. For example, we managed to create an effective recruitment and appointment process for the posts of Chief Executive and Head of Housing and Property, and we managed to adapt to the circumstances. An increasing number of the Council's services in a broader sense also familiarised themselves with virtual recruitment methods. It appears that these developments in attracting and appointing staff are here to stay.

#### i) **FFORDD GWYNEDD PLAN**

The crisis affected much of the activities that promote the Ffordd Gwynedd culture. Nevertheless, we succeeded to hold sessions and courses with managers from several departments, and the Core Group that is supporting the Plan in the Council has now re-established the work. With the appointment of our chief executive, the momentum will pick up again over the coming months; a review will be carried out into how the way of working is sustained, with each Department carrying out a self-assessment. The progress made will be audited by a members' working group.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The information in this report, with careful analysis, assists managers and those officers who advise them, to plan services and promptly identify those matters requiring further

research and action. This will become increasingly important within the work culture, which needs to base decisions on robust evidence.

The information also provides insight into the steps being taken to address some priority fields, and to prepare for the next steps to ensure that we use our workforce's abilities and knowledge to the maximum.

There are important messages here, which are integral to ensure the continuity of our services in the future. It is essential that we strive to act to address those matters, in order to sustain services and continually improve our ability to deliver on behalf of our communities.

The main messages encompass the following:

- Planning the workforce for the future, including recruitment, appointment and creating a career pathway - this now needs to be done in a new context, which is a substantially changed employment market as a result of the pandemic.
- Continue to promote staff's general mental well-being and health, in order to look after our staff.
- Create fit-for-purpose working arrangements for the 'new normal', and build on the advantages emerging from that, but ensuring that services for the County's residents is the priority.
- Continue to develop our work culture and behaviours expected of Council staff, including reviewing and developing local conditions of employment - developing the work culture to correspond with Ffordd Gwynedd principles is core to our development as an organisation.

## **VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS**

### **Monitoring Officer:**

The report provides an useful overview of staffing patterns but the recommendation does not have any propriety implication.

### **Head of Finance Department:**

The report contains useful information for dealing with the employment and workforce development issues of the Council. The decision before the Cabinet for approval here does not create any additional expenditure commitment now. However, I note that the report

refers to recruitment and retention issues, and suggests that this may be increasingly challenging. If the Council will need to respond to that, it could pose a financial challenge for the future.