

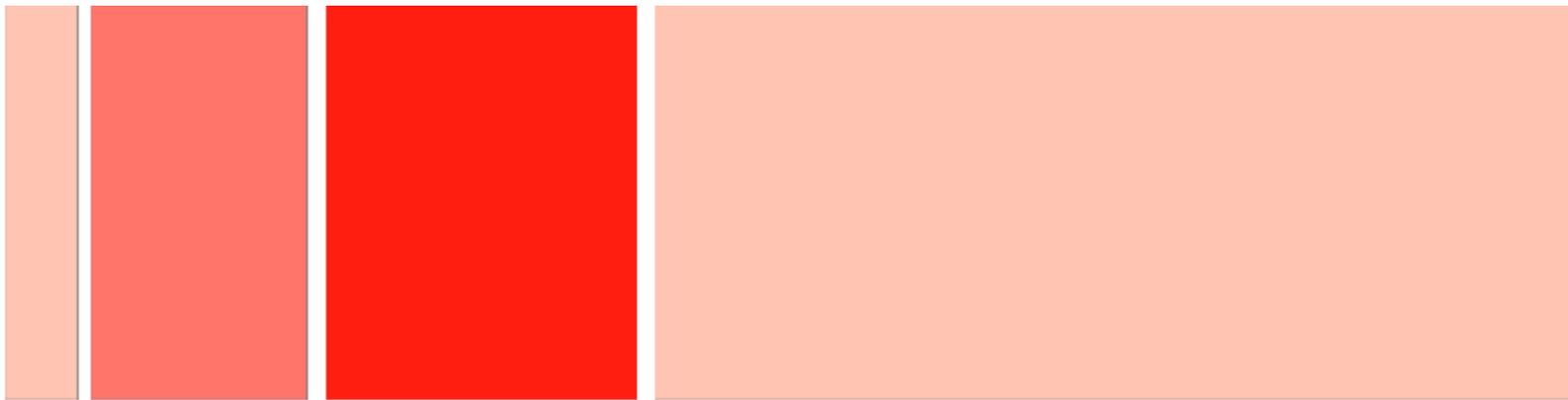
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# Leadership development and talent management in local authorities in Wales



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# Leadership development and talent management in local authorities in Wales

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Table 1.1 Local authority and management tier of interviewees **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

## **Glossary**

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
GSR	Government Social Research
HR	Human Resources
ILM	Institute of Leadership & Management
IRP	Internal Research Programme
L&D	Learning and Development
LDP	Leadership Development Programme
LGC	Local Government Council
LIPS	Leadership in Public Services
OD	Organisational Training and Development
RSP	Reshaping Services Programme
SOLACE	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
WAO	Wales Audit Office
WLGA	Welsh Local Government Association

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This research aimed to explore the varying nature of the rationale, implementation and impact of leadership development offers within local authorities in Wales. The research was carried out on behalf of Academi Wales, the Public Service leadership and management development organisation, based within Welsh Government, which provides development for staff working in a wide range of public service and third sector organisations. Academi Wales seeks to drive improvement in public service delivery through implementing high-quality development opportunities for staff and fostering leadership in order to successfully drive forward organisational change. In the years since its establishment, it has created a programme of leadership and management development to support public sector managers and this has bolstered programmes that exist within those organisations to develop their talented staff.
- 1.2 The development of leadership skills for managers in professional life has long been recognised as an important component of training and development for those at middle and senior management level in the private sector. These values have gained traction in the public sector due to the New Labour policy initiatives of the late 1990s and the implementation of managerialist principles within the public sector (McGurk, 2011; Spicker, 2012). This is no less important in public sector organisations, where the impacts of austerity since 2007 have created the need for effective and efficient leadership approaches to be developed in order to ensure that organisations deliver on their objectives whilst demonstrating effective value for money to the taxpayer. The identification of able staff upon their entry into an organisation can be couched within a comprehensive talent management and leadership development programme to enable staff to develop the requisite skills to move through the hierarchy to senior management level, absorbing the values of management and leadership as they go. This has consequent benefits in promoting the organisation's values to others and instilling those values in all employees. This has positive impacts on succession planning, ensuring that organisations do not lose skills, expertise and capacity as senior leaders leave, whilst maximising the potential of the incoming 'talent' and providing a sense of fulfilment for individual staff as they develop.

- 1.3 However, research has demonstrated that definitions of ‘talent’ or talented individuals varies widely across organisations and within training and development programmes (Tansley, 2011), meaning that there are huge differences in the conceptualisation and fostering of talent across public services. The fostering of talent, and its conversion over time into staff that adopt and possess leadership qualities is beneficial in moving organisations into system-wide culture change. This can be inconsistent, however, as organisations adopt different principles and approaches, meaning their definition and realisation of talent and leadership can vary. This can potentially be problematic in a network of public service organisations that need to work harmoniously, and particularly when there are significant differences in organisations’ ability to resource such development in a climate of austerity. Consequently, some organisations become much more advanced in this respect, where others simply do not have the budget or expertise to offer such opportunities.
- 1.4 This is known to be the case among the 22 local authorities across Wales; with some having established long-standing leadership development programmes, whilst others are unable to resource the investment in training and development due to more pressing frontline service issues in their locality. However, little is known about the rationale, design, implementation or impacts of the programmes, nor is there sufficient information about the links that have been made between local authorities with regard to sharing and replicating approaches to leadership development. In June 2017, Academi Wales approached the Internal Research Programme, an in-house research function within the Welsh Government, to undertake research to explore in-depth the progress a small number of local authorities have made in setting up and running their leadership development programmes. The purpose of the research was to identify the differences in approaches used, identify good practice and to engage learning development leads in local authorities about the best ways to support leadership development. The research findings were intended to enable Academi Wales to determine how it may facilitate and support the development of leadership development capacity and knowledge transfer within local authorities.
- 1.5 The overarching research aim was therefore to improve understanding of talent management and leadership development approaches and practices across local authorities, and to identify opportunities for sharing knowledge and best practice

with those who currently have no leadership development offer in place. The research objectives were as follows:

- Explore theoretical underpinnings, current structure and operation of talent management and leadership programmes within local authorities, paying attention to the relationship between leadership development and changes in organisational culture;
- Identify local authorities with developed leadership programmes and understand the process of their development and implementation in further depth;
- Identify leadership models / programmes implemented within local authorities and assess evidence of their impact on (i) individual skills and behaviours and (ii) organisational culture and performance, where data are available, and;
- Explore, with appropriate stakeholder engagement, opportunities for using best practice in leadership development programmes to support other local authorities in developing or modifying their own offer.

1.6 A case study approach was adopted in three areas with developed programmes; this method enabled a detailed and multi-perspective approach to the programmes from the perspectives of senior management who had helped to implement the programme, staff who had participated in the development and line managers who had supported them through the process. This report constitutes the findings of the case studies, with the literature review outlining the key conceptualisations of talent and leadership, as well as the most recent research on their application in public sector organisations, and section three outlines the methodological approach to the research. Section four presents the key findings; presenting each case study separately as well as comparing the approaches of each authority in a discussion section. Finally, the report makes some headline conclusions and recommendations which intend to provide insight into how Academi Wales might further support local authorities with leadership development.

## **2. Literature review**

- 2.1 This section of the report on Academi Wales leadership development aims to review and summarise key academic and public literature on the meaning and impact of leadership development and talent management programmes. The majority of this literature is at the UK or Wales level, however due to a deficit in temporally relevant information this review also includes evidence from studies outside of the UK. For this reason also, literature has been included which spans both the public and private sectors, although where pertinent a distinction has been made.
- 2.2 In order to provide an informed basis for the study, this review looks to: define key concepts related to leadership development and talent management; provide insight into the types of development which are offered; summarise evaluations of workforce development programmes; and highlight public sector issues and variations.

### **Key concepts**

- 2.3 Despite widespread use of the terms 'leadership' and 'talent', literature on the subjects reveal each concept to be more loosely and variably defined than one might imagine (Tansley, 2011; Spicker, 2012). In order to understand how leadership and talent can be developed in workforces, firstly, it is crucial to state their definition in this context.

#### *Leadership*

'Leadership is about change' (Spicker, 2012)

- 2.4 There are copious definitions of leadership, which explains Spicker's (2012) suggestion to categorise them in groups as opposed to setting out each single definition in turn. Categories can be devised based on the themes of definitions, such as defining through personal attributes and traits, defining through roles, or defining through relationships. These could be that a leader motivates, a leader is fair, or that a leader is someone with followers (Spicker, 2012).
- 2.5 One theme evident across literature is that a leader is someone at the forefront of change and vision, as opposed to simply managing 'business as usual' (Spicker, 2012; NHS Leadership Academy, 2015; O'Reilly and Reed, 2010). In this way leaders differ from managers as 'management is said to be about the status quo, leadership is about change' (Spicker, 2012, p.35). One might argue that the

concepts of management and leadership overlap as that in order to exercise leadership or managerial qualities one must be in the correct position in an organisation to do so (ibid), which may explain why in a large body of literature the terms are used interchangeably. Possibly because of this, the leadership development industry often focuses on individuals at the middle or top of an organisation holding managerial positions (Edmonstone, 2011).

- 2.6 Despite leadership development focusing on individuals, Spicker (2012) argues that neither the tasks, roles nor qualities of leadership dictate that it apply to a person as opposed to a group. Collective (or distributed) leadership is the antithesis of individual leadership, where there is no requirement of formal authority and instead is a group of people enhancing the ability of others to work together successfully (Edmonstone, 2011). A survey of high level UK local government officials set out the benefit of a collective leadership model – ‘you are more likely to have the skills needed in a group than all in one individual’ (Blyth, 2011, p.17).
- 2.7 Although a view is emerging that individual leadership is ‘outmoded’ (Blyth, 2011, pp17), this does not mean that collective leadership is suitable or beneficial in all circumstances. Situational variance means that the most suitable type of leadership must be contextualised ‘in time and space’ (Edmonstone, 2011, p.11), therefore although some models suggest one leader is the optimum type (Rooke and Torbert, 2005; Rooke, 1997) this will not hold in all contexts (Spicker, 2012).

### *Talent*

‘At its broadest then the term ‘talent’ may be used to encompass the entire workforce of an organisation’ (CIPD, 2017)

- 2.8 As with leadership, talent too can be defined in terms of either an individual or a group, (CIPD, 2017; Tansley, 2011). Although Tansley (2011) notes that there is no universal definition of talent, the UK public sector tends towards an inclusive view of the concept (NHS Leadership Academy, 2015). In this situation, therefore, talent might refer to those who can make a difference in an organisation, either by fulfilling a business critical role in the short term, or by showing high potential for the long term (CIPD, 2017; NHS Leadership Academy, 2015). In this way, talent can be viewed as including all members of an organisation (ibid). When talent is considered universal, then segmentation is required in order to decide on an appropriate action. This leads to the description of discrete talent groups: high potential for leadership;

key talent; core talent who perform business processes well and ensure productivity; and peripheral talent which is key contractors and partners (Tansley, 2011).

- 2.9 On an individual level, definitions of talent are far more multifarious, encompassing a breadth of individuals from those who appear to have exceptional ability and capacity without seeming to exert much effort (Pellant, 2006, as cited in Tansley, 2011), to those who perform within the top ten per cent of their peers (Gagné, 2000, as cited in Tansley, 2011). Welsh Government defines talent as having three aspects: the ability to perform roles with increased complexity and ambiguity; commitment to the organisation; and desire or motivation to progress (Welsh Government, 2014).
- 2.10 Despite these varied definitions, for most, talent is considered to comprise a matrix of high performance and high potential (Tansley, 2011). High performance can be linked with other characteristics associated with talented individuals too such as high levels of expertise, leadership behaviours, creativity and initiative or a 'can-do' attitude (Tansley, 2011, p.272).
- 2.11 Just as definitions of good leadership are irrelevant without the context of where and when they are applied (Edmonstone, 2011), so too is found with the concept of talent (Tansley, 2011). Without knowledge of the type of organisation and the nature of work it undertakes and prioritises, it would be very difficult to say what talent might look like (ibid). An example of this may be that in the private sector a service can specialise in its strengths and leave the rest to competitors, therefore specialist skills would be seen as talent (Spicker, 2012). In the public sector, however, an organisation has less scope to be weak in a certain area as they still need to provide a universal service, meaning talent may have a more general conception (ibid).

### *Leadership Development*

'Those who are willing to work at developing themselves and becoming more self aware can almost certainly evolve over time into truly transformational leaders' (Rooke and Torbert, 2005).

- 2.12 The provision of leadership development is important on both an individual and organisational level if desired leadership is to be achieved (McCracken et al., 2012).

For individuals, reasons for completing leadership development can be: to improve their ability to manage others in an environment where cost saving exercises result in greater pressure on staff; to improve their own job security; to improve their chances of career advancement; and to improve their employability given the precarious nature of their employment (ibid).

- 2.13 At the organisational level good future leadership is needed because: delivering services and outcomes need clear direction (Blyth, 2011); falling income means that successful prioritisation by leaders is necessary (ibid) as is cultural change which leaders can inspire (Rooke, 1997); certain types of leaders result in better corporate performance (Rooke and Torbert, 2005); and because the future of organisations is dependent on long term planning of upcoming leadership (NHS Leadership Academy, 2015; Blyth, 2011). In order to achieve these outcomes, there is an implicit assumption that by providing leadership development, development into leaders will occur. This hypothesis appears sound as there is evidence supporting the view that leadership development programmes can provide the appropriate leadership that achieves the stated outcomes (Rooke and Torbert, 2005; Rooke, 1997; McGurk, 2010), thereby making it beneficial for organisations.
- 2.14 Dependent on the accepted definition of leadership, views on development can vary greatly. If leadership development sees leaders as individuals, it might be seen more as leader development rather than leadership development (Edmonstone, 2011). This can involve enhancing the skills and attributes of an individual leader with the assumption that this will in turn benefit the organisation (ibid). Alternately, a collective model of leadership may involve development which looks more widely at the system when designing development offers (ibid).

### *Talent Management*

‘It’s not sufficient simply to focus on attracting talented individuals. Developing, managing and retaining them as part of a planned strategy for talent is equally important’ (CIPD, 2017).

- 2.15 As the above quote implies, talent management was once seen only as hiring those who demonstrated talent, however the definition has since evolved (CIPD, 2017). Now it is understood that in order to benefit from talent in the workplace, organisations must attract, identify, develop, engage, retain and deploy individuals

who are either business critical at present or have the potential to be in the future (ibid).

- 2.16 In one piece of research on UK chief executives and directors of local governments, 47 per cent said they plan to leave their current role within two years (Blyth, 2011), and separate research has noted that factors such as job offers with better development or rewards and current job dissatisfaction influence staff members to leave their current job (NHS Leadership Academy, 2015). Despite being previously overlooked, retention of talent is crucial for workforce as loss of key employees can be financially costly in terms of obtaining a direct replacement, and also costly in other, less obvious ways (ibid). On top of financial implications, without retention, knowledge is lost, and there is likely to be a direct impact on productivity (ibid). Considering that there are numerous factors that influence employees' motivation to leave an employer, and that loss of talent has a detrimental effect on organisations, talent retention can neither be a passive phenomenon nor be overlooked in organisational strategy (ibid).
- 2.17 As noted when describing talent, if one takes an inclusive view then the concept applies to all members of the workforce (CIPD, 2017; NHS Leadership Academy, 2015), meaning that talent management too must be for everyone (ibid). In order to talent manage an entire workforce, one must use insight to identify skill or attitude gaps, before working out the most appropriate way to fill them, then developing talent in order to fit the need (NHS Leadership Academy, 2015). By doing this, and providing staff with the right development opportunities to progress, the organisation will make the best use of their staff when delivering priorities thereby maximising organisational potential (Welsh Government, 2014).

### **Workforce Development**

- 2.18 Although some literature focuses specifically on leaders as individuals at the middle or top of organisations this does not appear to always be the case (Edmonstone, 2011). With the concept of distributed leadership and the idea that leaders do not need formal authority, there is a tendency for contemporary leadership development practices to span the majority of the workforce (Spicker, 2012; Edmonstone, 2011).
- 2.19 As talent management can also be considered at a whole-workforce approach (CIPD, 2017), there is a great degree of overlap between both the provisions and the findings of talent management and of leadership development as noted in the

literature. This section, therefore, will discuss methods of developing a workforce (workforce development) which are used both in leadership development and talent management.

### *Action Learning*

- 2.20 Action learning is where a set of diverse people meet in a group and help each other reframe their problems in order for the person with an issue to formulate their own solution (Marquardt, 2000). It is prevalent in literature on workforce development as it allows for self reflection and helps people learn from their experiences facilitating real-life practice of skill (GVA and Outcomes UK, 2011; Marquardt, 2000). Marquardt (2000) states that it is also beneficial because the majority of organisations have leaders who are good at strategy and technical skills, but may lack strength in dealing with 'human issues' such as a demoralised workforce. Action learning doesn't separate 'human issues' from 'technical issues', therefore ought to result in the development of a 'whole leader' (Marquardt, 2000, p.234). Interviews, surveys and case studies of UK mental health services have found action learning to be popular among staff, with participants expressing that it was important for their development (GVA and Outcomes UK, 2011).

### *Mentoring & Coaching*

- 2.21 Mentoring and coaching are other workforce development techniques which are common in literature. Despite being discrete practices, there is often conceptual confusion between mentoring and coaching, with definitions conflicting and varying by author (D'Abate, et al., 2003). This may be why in the literature identified the two practices were mentioned in tandem in almost all instances, with no separate evaluation or feedback on each (Blyth, 2011; Rooke and Torbert, 2005; Welsh Government, 2016).
- 2.22 For those in senior positions in organisations, mutual mentoring can be a useful way to create networks and build upon necessary leadership qualities which they are yet to develop (Rooke and Torbert, 2005). This mutual mentoring or one to one coaching was valued by UK chief executive and directors of local government, purportedly because these roles can be lonely, so it provides a safe environment to discuss topics freely without concern over ramifications (Blyth, 2011).

- 2.23 In other levels of organisations, coaching and mentoring can be good methods of cascading information from various development courses, although this is often in an informal manner (Welsh Government, 2016).

### *Competency Frameworks*

- 2.24 According to Edmonstone (2011), the majority of UK leadership and management provisions are based on developing leadership competencies. This competency approach relies on the assumption that there is one set of universal leadership skills and attributes which can be identified, codified and taught (Edmonstone, 2011). This assumption might be criticised when universal competencies are applied to all staff regardless of their profession, role or level as this ignores the important contextual and environmental factors that influence performance in a particular role (ibid).
- 2.25 A second assumption behind the competency approach is that leadership is within the individual as opposed to the relationship between individuals, and therefore by developing individual human capital the organisation overall will benefit (ibid). Given that definitions of leadership can be collective (Spicker, 2012), one might assume that competency as a basis for talent management is flawed.

### **Evaluations of Workforce Development**

- 2.26 The need to evaluate workforce development programmes is explicitly stated in many sources of literature (McCracken et al., 2012; Edmonstone, 2011; CIPD, 2017), but so too is the fact that these evaluations often do not occur (ibid).
- 2.27 Evaluations that do occur can be at the organisational or individual level, focusing either on human capital built in individuals, or social capital in the organisation (Edmonstone, 2011). Providing services aimed at increasing human capital implicitly assumes that this will indirectly benefit the organisation, and social capital aims to do this directly. Because of this, evaluating workforce development programmes at either level could be done through explicitly linking them to desired service outcomes and noting whether these come to fruition (ibid).
- 2.28 When linking programmes to outcomes at an organisational level, it is possible that workforce development programmes could be detrimental as they equip staff with the skills they need to apply for other jobs, thereby countering the objectives of talent retention policies (ibid, CIPD, 2017). This leads to the perspective that

programmes need evaluations given that employing them could be more harmful than providing nothing. If the programmes are successful, evaluation is no less important, as it then provides justification for further attention or funding in the area (GVA and Outcomes UK, 2011).

- 2.29 On an individual level, it is important to track the outcomes of those who are identified as having talent. This provides feedback as to whether talent identification methods are robust and how they can be adapted (Blyth, 2011), thereby ensuring that the right people are targeted with the right types of development. This also ought to allow for evaluating the assumption that developing individuals leads to improved organisational and social learning, as the ideal provision varies by context meaning that it is important for organisations to find out what works for them at that time (Edmonstone, 2011).

#### *Facilitators & Barriers*

- 2.30 There is a small body of evidence from a variety of sources which highlights certain factors that facilitate or impede the implementation and positive outcomes of workforce development programmes.

#### *Flexibility*

- 2.31 One factor mentioned repeatedly as a positive is the flexibility of programmes (GVA and Outcomes UK, 2011; Welsh Government, 2016; Edmonstone, 2011). From evaluating workforce development provisions in UK Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS), it was found that flexibility in terms of being responsive to local needs was seen as important in development programmes, and the service-specificity of the provision encouraged participation (GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011). 'Off the shelf' training is thought to be flawed in that it provide pre-defined solutions to problems which do not necessarily match the needs of localities, therefore programmes with the flexibility for participants to input into their design and express their needs are preferred (Edmonstone, 2011; GVA and Outcomes UK, 2011).
- 2.32 Although the CAHMS evaluation identified flexible offers as a key strength, the same evaluation noted that generic workforce development training holds value also (GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011). Generic training saves on costs (ibid), which is useful given that 72 per cent of those surveyed in one study in Wales cited costs as the biggest consideration in workforce development programmes (Welsh Government,

2016). It is also helpful as generic provisions allow for attendees from either across the service or from multiple organisations, thereby facilitating networking (GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011). As network building is prized throughout the literature both in and out of the public sector (Edmonstone, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 2005; Blyth, 2011; CIPD, 2017; GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011; Kippin & Taylor, 2017), it stands to reason that one ought not to ignore generic programmes as a provider of networking opportunities in facilitating workforce development.

### *Networking*

- 2.33 As noted above, networking was seen as a facilitator of development, and a way to add value to workforce development programmes (Edmonstone, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 2005; Blyth, 2011; CIPD, 2017; GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011; Kippin & Taylor, 2017). Networking is described as a method of knowledge transfer, as well as specifically a way to share innovative or best practices (GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011; Welsh Government, 2016). This potentially makes it more relevant to leadership development as opposed to talent management, as leaders are defined with greater reference to innovation and vision (Spicker, 2012).

### *Applicability*

- 2.34 In addition to a general preference for flexible programmes, literature also notes an overall leaning towards development programmes that result in learning which can be applied directly to the workplace (GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011; McCracken, et al., 2012; Edmonstone, 2011). This can involve either providing training that is highly relevant to day-to-day working, or alternately including practical examples (GVA and Outcomes UK, 2011). Programmes that do not include this have been criticised due to a lack of realism, for example learning communication skills in isolation is suggested to fragment behaviours and be unrealistic when compared to learning communication skills as part of a role (Edmonstone, 2011). Similarly, although workforce development programmes have been described as creating potential, without the opportunities or context to employ this potential, this 'development' could be viewed as illegitimate (Peters & Baum, 2006).

### *Resources*

- 2.35 As noted in paragraph 2.32, the cost of workforce development is a real consideration when looking at provision (Welsh Government, 2016), and can therefore act as a barrier to providing training (GVA and Outcomes UK, 2011).

Although in the CAHMS evaluation, service managers said that they prioritise service benefits when selecting individuals to attend training, this was caveated by saying that both time and costs were key considerations (ibid), thereby implying that they may prevent some from attending.

- 2.36 Scarcity of resources (both financial and temporal) were seen as barriers in public sector work from Northern Ireland and Canada, where managers were asked about their reasons for participating or not participating in leadership training (McCracken, et al., 2012). Participants explained the pressures when there is only the budget to attend one course per year, and therefore deciding whether workforce development is the one they will prioritise (ibid). As well as tight finances, it was noted that ‘when you go to training you have to think about who is covering you’ (ibid, p.308), highlighting that time is also a scarce resource inhibiting the impact of workplace development offers.
- 2.37 This perspective of lacking time as a barrier does not solely apply to time in the workplace. One manager noted that if they ‘had someone who was more supportive when rearing the kids that would have helped’ in terms of their career development (ibid, p.306). This implies that scarcity of time in home life can also prove a barrier to the efforts of workplace development.

### *Outcomes*

- 2.38 Despite an implicit view in literature that workforce development programmes are a good thing, as noted in paragraph 2.26 there is a deficit of evidence in terms of their impact. There is, however, still some relevant literature which can be examined. The aforementioned CAHMS evaluation found evidence that workforce development programmes led to career progression<sup>1</sup> (GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011), which is reinforced with a similar finding from Welsh Government who noted 87 per cent of those who attended the Workforce Development Programme (WDP) felt it had improved their prospects going forward (Welsh Government, 2016). Benefits of these programmes have also been demonstrated at an organisational level (GVA & Outcomes UK, 2011), including in the private sector with profitability and turnover (Welsh Government, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Although the chosen methodology did not include a counterfactual meaning attribution of effects cannot be certain.

2.39 In order to provide more robust commentary on outcomes, it would at the very least be necessary for improved record-keeping and publication of impact. Ideally the use of experimental designs would provide greater confidence in the causality of programmes, however without more rigorous evidence it does appear that there is some benefit both to the individual and to organisations of workforce development programmes.

### **Public Sector Workforce Development**

2.40 As mentioned in paragraph 2.3, it is important to consider the context when looking at talent, leadership and workforce development. Because of this, for the purpose of this research, a focus on the public sector is necessary.

#### *Public versus Private Sector*

2.41 The majority of research into workforce development appears to be in the private sector, which is important to be recognised if one intends to apply the learning to the public sector. Although one might expect the findings to be generalisable, there are some key areas where they differ.

2.42 The motivations behind each area are substantially different, with private sector focused often on profit maximisation, whereas public sector is motivated by legal requirements and government projects (Spicker, 2012). In this way, public services may desire leaders who are less open to risks as they offer the stability to provide consistent services when innovation is not required, for example in the field of refuse collection (ibid). This risk aversion could also be in part due to asymmetric incentives, where the reward for successful actions in the public sector is of a smaller magnitude than the punishment for unsuccessful ones (Borins, 2001). Innovation and risk taking may, however, be desirable in the public sector regardless, due to budget cuts from austerity and increased service user demand (Jefferies, 2013).

#### *Inter-sector Transitions of Senior Leaders*

2.43 As noted in the definition of talent management (paragraph 2.15), one aspect of workforce development is the attraction of talented individuals to the workforce (CIPD, 2017). By the time a person reaches the rank of senior leadership, there is an expectation that they will have already honed a large number of skills which are required to be a successful leader (Rooke and Torbert, 2005), and as good leadership is thought to improve organisational outcomes (Edmonstone, 2011),

acquiring skilled senior leaders from other sectors is a way to talent manage leadership in the public sector.

- 2.44 Limited research explores senior leaders' experiences of transition from different sectors into the public sector, but research undertaken with leaders in the Australian public sector (Thompson & Flynn, 2014) identifies that the successful transition of senior public sector leaders has the potential to make a significant contribution to performance, employee engagement and cultural change outcomes (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001; Day and Halpin, 2004; Ndofor et al., 2009, cited in Thompson and Flynn, 2014). Equally, the risks and potential costs associated with unsuccessful transitions are very high should leaders leave before making a significant contribution (Downey, 2002; Pawar and Eastman, 1997; Watkins, 2003, cited in Thompson and Flynn, 2014).
- 2.45 Research suggests that senior leader inter-sector transitions were not typically found to be a managed process. Organisational input with regards to the induction, training and support of senior leaders was found to be lacking. For a minority, a mentor played an important role in helping individuals navigate and pace their development. Senior leaders interviewed identified that 'change goals', which were seen to be a key motivation for recruiting to leadership positions, did not often reflect the actual 'change task'. Instead, senior leaders described encountering constraints in how they could achieve these goals and that messages about transformational change were often contradictory (Thompson and Flynn, 2014).
- 2.46 For all senior leaders, the intrapersonal experience of transition was felt to be negatively emotive. Common among those challenges were experiences of feeling isolated, set up for failure and often feeling caught up in problematic relationships of which a lack of transparency and trust, a reluctance to share information and networks and involve others were common characteristics. In some cases these difficulties extended to Ministerial relationships where some encountered territorialism and hierarchical structures which determined that Ministers were inaccessible (Thompson and Flynn, 2014).
- 2.47 Those senior leaders who assessed their transitions as successful had been able to overcome bureaucratic practices and dysfunctional dynamics and retain more autonomy to create options for change. A more common experience, and particularly for those below the level of CEO, tended to be about adopting defences

against attempts to isolate, marginalise and undermine processes of change (Thompson and Flynn, 2014).

- 2.48 Research suggests that six common factors may explain successful inter-sector senior leader transitions; the level at which an inter-sector transition occurs being at CEO level, rather a level down; political sponsorship of change; establishing personal boundaries to reduce stress; rejection of becoming enmeshed in bureaucracy and regulation; having the discretion to create positive change and dealing directly with dysfunctional relationships (Thompson and Flynn, 2014).

*Impact of Leadership Development in Public Services*

- 2.49 Although the workforce development section of this literature review looks at the outcomes, facilitators and barriers, due to the influences of sector-related context it is crucial to investigate these not only in general, but also with a specific focus on public services (Spicker, 2012).
- 2.50 Given the growth and integration of the leadership discourse into the UK public service reform agenda, it is important to note that the concept of distributed leadership (discussed in paragraph 2.4) tends to under-acknowledge structural inequalities of power, span of responsibility and accountability (Wallace, et al., 2011). Though Spicker (2012) argued that nothing about the definition of leadership dictates it being held by an individual, and metaphors of transformational and distributed leadership have become associated with driving forward change agendas, existing evidence points to Ministerial engagement in reform narrowing the perimeters for leaders' choice and agency to set their own direction (Blackler, 2006; Currie and Lockett, 2007, cited in Wallace et al., 2011). This reinforces other evidence suggesting that hierarchical organisations inevitably create systems in which power is hierarchically distributed (Wallace and Hall, 1994; Wallace and Huckman, 1999; Collinson and Collinson, 2006; Bolden et al. 2008, cited in Wallace et al., 2011), thereby invalidating the concept of distributed leadership in the public sector context. Despite this, research into the US public sector found that perceptions of hierarchy and bureaucracy were not always valid, meaning distributed leadership may be possible, an idea which theoretically could be true in the UK as well (Wright and Pandey, 2009).
- 2.51 Wallace et al. (2011) found that public sector senior leaders, whether they have attended external leadership development provision or not were found to identify

aspects of the discourse of transformational leadership with their role. Their study would suggest that fewer leaders associate their role with forms of personal agency and fewer still with aspects of the discourse of distributed leadership (p.80). The study found that few informants associated their approach explicitly with delivering on government-driven reform, instead defining their role as general agents of change, which fits with the view of leadership revolving around change and vision as opposed to managing the status quo (Spicker, 2012). The majority of those that did recognise their role in implementing reforms viewed it as a platform from which to adapt them to their local circumstances and priorities and to drive their own independent change agendas (Wallace et al., 2011).

- 2.52 Leadership development provision in the public sector has been reported to hold practical value for leaders, though accounts of its impact are variable. Wallace et al. (2011) report diffuse impacts such as influences on leaders' practice and informing leaders' thinking and reflective capacities. The authors argue that the cultural impact of external leadership development provision may be to reinforce recipients' existing culture, although augmenting it through heightening leaders' awareness of said culture. They also propose that it may strengthen leaders' sense of autonomy as agents of change, a finding confirmed by McCracken et al. (2012) who noted that leadership development increases confidence in the ability to make change. As such, recipients may feel empowered to distance themselves from government objectives and harness leadership provision to realise their own organisational vision (Wallace et al., 2011).
- 2.53 Case study research exploring the perspectives of local government managers on the drivers for change and continuous improvement in an English local authority found that managers consistently identify leadership as an important intangible asset and vital for the achievement of high performance by the authority (Douglas et al., 2012). This is consistent with the public management literature which emphasises the relationship between senior management and public service performance (Douglas et al., 2012).
- 2.54 Research has also identified the leadership of the management team as an important resource, particularly the concept of community leadership which recognises the influence of environmental factors, such as strong partnerships, on the development of dynamic capacity (Douglas et al., 2012). This aligns with a large body of findings cited in the introduction to key concepts section of this report,

noting that environmental factors can be hugely influential (see the section introducing key concepts). This highlights the importance of management learning, and in particular management team experience, in order to identify and develop under-utilised assets, services and opportunities. In this context, tangible assets were only considered significant when combined with people-based intangible assets that create complex capabilities. The findings hint at the importance of complementary strategies, a concept that is underdeveloped in dynamic capability theory (Douglas et al., 2012) to unlock the value of shared capabilities via partnership working across organisations.

- 2.55 Among mixed results, evaluations of the impact of leadership development provision have suggested that impacts may extend beyond the participant and to participants' teams and to the operation of services (McAllen and MacRae, 2010). Like Wallace et al. (2011), Mc Allen and MacRae (2010) found that participants reported greatest impact on an increased sense of self-awareness; their impact on others' behaviour; and their ability to manage and lead. Importantly, this finding was supported by managers' reflections on changes to their senior colleagues' behaviours in the workplace, increasing the likelihood that it is a valid observation. Leadership development provision would appear to enhance leaders' reflective capacity with possible benefits for solution-focused, collaborative working and decision-making.
- 2.56 This methodology, however, relies on competency frameworks, which as noted in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6 can be flawed. Other evaluations that have focused on the impact of leadership development provision, rather than the impact of leadership competency frameworks, have found negligible impacts on performance. Tourish et al. (2007) reported a lack of support for leadership development provision among senior management, partly due to a lack of evidence to prove links between participating in development opportunities and increased performance and partly owing to a lack of time to implement the perceived learning from such training.
- 2.57 An important lesson to be drawn from literature on workforce development in the public sector is to invest time and energy in preparing for learning and change. Findings suggest that providing recipients with clarity about the ethos and objectives of the programme; explicit criteria to guide the selection of potential participants; and discussing the rationale for participation with staff are important features of preparing the ground for change and improvement (McAllen and MacRae, 2010).

Equally, the authors refer to previous research (Peters and Baum, 2007) which indicates that development opportunities may create potential but it is the context which legitimises activities and empowers participants to invest the time and resources to applying what has been learned (McAllen and MacRae, 2010, p.68). This supports the conclusion drawn in paragraph 4.9, which suggests that development programmes work best when they teach activities and skills applicable to real-life.

### **Summary**

- 2.58 In order to cultivate a workforce development programme, it is crucial to define ‘talent’ in the relevant context (Tansley, 2011). This document aimed to summarise a number of varied definitions, both for leadership, talent, and perspectives on development (see section 2), understanding that on the basis of a clear definition, a clear programme of development can be set out (ibid).
- 2.59 It must be noted that the public sector has different drivers for their workforce in comparison to the private sector. This means that it is not appropriate to simply copy a successful private or third sector model of leadership development and expect similar outcomes (see the section on public sector workforce development).
- 2.60 In terms of evaluations of leadership development offers, this review found that flexibility in programmes, the opportunity to network, programmes with real world applicability and suitable resourcing all facilitate development offers (see section on evaluating workforce development programmes). A lack of evaluative material has somewhat limited this literature review. Evaluations are needed to avoid negative impact in future programmes, improve upon current provisions, and demonstrate the value of leadership development in a climate of shrinking public sector budgets (see section on evaluating workforce development programmes), and therefore hold great value.

### **3. Methodology**

- 3.1 The aims of this research were to obtain in-depth data from local government employees at different tiers of leadership and management about the rationale, implementation and impact of leadership development provision in a small sample of local authorities across Wales. The purpose of the research was to develop a better understanding of the talent and leadership development approaches and practices adopted by local authorities and to identify opportunities for sharing knowledge and best practice with those who currently have no formal leadership development offer or are seeking to develop a leadership development offer in future. It was determined that a qualitative study comprising a series of semi-structured interviews with Managing Directors, HR representatives, line managers and staff would be the preferred method of primary data collection to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategic development and approach, practical application and impact of participation in talent and leadership development provision. Qualitative interviewing is a useful method when seeking to elicit and capture comprehensive information and comparable data on a defined topic. Semi-structured interviews, facilitated by an interviewer and written topic guide allow participants to express views and opinions in their own terms on a focused subject area and other relevant topics. The method can be a useful means of identifying new perspectives on a given question or topic. Semi-structured interviews were considered best suited to gain a detailed understanding of experts' experiences in this potentially sensitive area; the method is flexible and allows interviewers the opportunity to spend more time on certain aspects of the topic as required.
- 3.2 IRP researchers collaborated with Academi Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to scope what was already known about existing talent and leadership development provision across local authorities in Wales. IRP researchers delivered a presentation and facilitated a Q&A discussion with HR Directors in attendance at a WLGA quarterly meeting held in September 2017. This approach allowed IRP researchers to build knowledge and understanding of the approach to talent and leadership development in each local authority. It also enabled an opportunity for HR Directors to inform the methodological approach to the research and dissemination of information about the research directly to local authorities. Discussions elicited some minor changes to the proposed methodology, principal among them being the need to focus on talent and leadership development

distributed among middle tiers of leadership and management and to identify ways in which talent and leadership development may address issues of workforce and succession planning in local government.

- 3.3 Following the meeting, IRP researchers circulated a draft research specification to: capture further comments and revisions, request further information about existing talent and leadership programmes, and seek expressions of interests from those local authorities that were willing to participate. In addition to comments on the specification, information relating to existing talent and leadership development schemes was received from a further five local authorities including Carmarthenshire, Monmouthshire, Powys, Rhondda Cynon-Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan. To outline the approach to the research and discuss the demands and distribution of fieldwork, a set of scoping interviews were held with Chief Executives and or Organisational Training Development Leads in four local authorities with established talent and leadership programmes, including Gwynedd, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan. A further scoping interview was held over the phone with Torfaen County Council, which had an interest but had not yet implemented any talent and leadership development offer. These scoping interviews enabled contact with the Organisational Training Development (OD) Lead who often acted as the gatekeeper for recruitment of research participants in each local authority.
- 3.4 It was determined that a case study approach would be adopted in three areas with established talent and leadership development programmes. This method enabled a 360 degree and multi-faceted approach to conceptualising programmes from the perspectives of senior management who had helped to design and implement them, staff who had participated in them and line managers who had supported them prior, during and after the process. A case study approach is considered a useful method through which to explore and present the institutional, environmental and broader socio-cultural factors which influence individuals' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. To inform the development of the case studies, document analysis of the information and resources to support the delivery and implementation of the talent and leadership development provision in place in the local authority was undertaken. These documents included an overview of the development of the scheme, course content and anonymised staff evaluation data. Document analysis of information and resources that were received relating to talent and leadership

development programmes in Carmarthenshire and Monmouthshire informed the discussion of the research findings.

- 3.5 It was decided, in collaboration with Academi Wales that the semi-structured interview topic guide would focus principally on drawing out participants' perceptions of the rationale, definition, content and implementation of talent and leadership development in which they had participated in their workplace. Secondly, the interview would present an opportunity to discuss participants' experiences of the enablers and barriers to talent and leadership development during their careers in public service and in their current role as well as their future plans and aspirations with regards to leadership development in the local authority. Finally, participants would be asked about the perceived impact that participation in talent and leadership development activity had made to their personal and professional development and the wider workplace culture in the local authority. To accommodate the experiences of staff at different tiers of leadership and management, four interview topic guides were developed to facilitate discussions with Chief Executives, HR Leads, line managers and staff. An additional interview topic guide was created to facilitate discussions with those who had aspirations to design and implement a leadership development offer in future.
- 3.6 IRP researchers began recruitment of participants for interviews in January 2018 across four local authority areas and continued throughout the fieldwork phase until June 2018. The sampling approach to the fieldwork took account of the variation in the maturity and in the approaches to talent and leadership development as well as the geographical and linguistic diversity of local authorities. It was determined to undertake fieldwork in three local authorities, namely the Vale of Glamorgan, Powys and Gwynedd, with established talent and leadership development offers and in Torfaen, where there were aspirations to design and implement a leadership development offer in future. An additional local authority with an established leadership development programme was also invited to participate in the research and participated in an initial scoping interview but declined to proceed with the research owing to resource constraints. Fieldwork was staggered over a four month period between February to June 2018; beginning in the Vale of Glamorgan, followed by Gwynedd and finishing in Powys. IRP researchers allocated two days to each local authority to undertake interviews with participants in person and

undertook any additional interviews needed to ensure a broad representation of views over the telephone.

- 3.7 To comply with the Welsh Language Standards (2016), all recruitment materials including invitations to participate in the research, accompanying privacy notices and participant information sheets were disseminated in Welsh and English, and interviews were arranged and distributed amongst the team in accordance with participants' language of preference. To ensure compliance with General Data Protection Regulations brought into effect from May 2018, IRP researchers secured approval for the accompanying privacy notice from the Government Social Research (GSR) Head of Profession and the Information Rights Unit. An ethics checklist was completed and approved to ensure all necessary measures were taken in designing and undertaking the study to protect the identity of participants and consider ethics in the collection of workforce data relating to talent and leadership development. Consequently, outcome data were collected that referred to the evaluation of programme objectives, content and impact and not to the personal and professional development or performance of individual staff.
- 3.8 Local authorities provided support to identify and contact a sample of potential interviewees drawn from their records of those staff who had participated in talent and leadership development activity. This means that there will be an element of selection bias in each sample as staff who have participated in leadership development provision are likely to have a greater interest and value these opportunities sufficiently to have participated in a leadership development programme. As such, it should be expected that local authorities are drawing from a sample of individuals who are already engaged and positive about the concept of leadership development and are more likely to be positive about their experience of accessing opportunities in their workplace. IRP researchers selected a purposive sample of staff from each broad management tier and across a range of directorates and service areas. Research participants volunteered to participate in response to information circulated by HR departments in local authorities. In addition to interviews undertaken with senior management and the HR representatives in each local authority the breakdown of the number of staff interviewed in each local authority, their directorate and management tier is provided below in Table 1.1. Information relating to the directorate and service area

in which staff were employed has been omitted to protect participants' anonymity and ensure confidentiality.

**Table 1.1 Local authority and management tier of interviewees**

Local authority	Senior management / HR representatives	Line managers	Staff	Graduate trainees
Vale of Glamorgan	3	3	4	n/a
Gwynedd	3	5	1	2
Powys	2	4	4	n/a
Powys Teaching Health Board	n/a	1	1	n/a
Torfaen	2	n/a	n/a	n/a

- 3.9 The interview topic guide explored the nature and scope of learning and development (L&D) opportunities currently available in the local authority, the policy drivers that influenced the decision to develop a talent and leadership development offer, the barriers and enablers to implementing an offer, the extent to which partnership working might facilitate the development of an offer and the future goals and aspirations the local authority held for implementing an offer.
- 3.10 IRP researchers interviewed senior management and an HR representative for Torfaen County Council. The council did not currently have a LD offer in place but aspired to implement one in future. In this instance, the topic guide explored the current barriers and potential enablers that would need to be in place to allow the council to implement an LD offer. It also included discussion of the purpose, content, and outcomes of previous LD provision that had been in place at the council.
- 3.11 A further interview was undertaken with a representative of the Good Practice Exchange at the Wales Audit Office (WAO) following conclusion of the fieldwork. The purpose of this interview was to capture the views of an external stakeholder, which has oversight and a role in capturing and disseminating case studies of good practice among local government, public and third sector bodies across Wales. The

topic guide explored perceptions of leadership capacity and capability across local government, the relationship between leadership, organisational culture and performance and the future supply and demand factors at play in workforce planning and service delivery across local government. All telephone interviews were recorded. Transcriptions of the recordings and notes taken during the interviews were collated and coded in MAXQDA to identify themes in line with grounded theory. The identity of the local authorities has been made transparent in this research to enable the acknowledgement and sharing of good practice, but the identity of participants remains anonymous and all efforts have been made to ensure that that no individual can be identified from the information presented in this report.

## 4. Key findings

- 4.1 This section summarises the key findings emerging from the document analysis and interviews with staff who have implemented and/or participated in talent and leadership development offered by local authorities across Wales. The findings are presented in the form of illustrative case studies which seek to provide a 360 degree view of participants' perceptions and experiences of leadership development and talent management in the local authority. Each case study explores the vision and views of senior management and/or staff in senior leadership positions in Human Resources and the perceptions and experiences of line managers and staff who have participated in leadership development opportunities.
- 4.2 The analysis will discuss prominent and recurring themes drawn from in-depth semi-structured interviews and synthesised with secondary data drawn from analysis of internal documentation that details the rationale, approach and implementation of the leadership development offer in each of three local authorities that opted to participate in the research. The analysis also comprises key themes drawn from an in-depth interview undertaken with senior management and HR at Torfaen County Council. The council does not currently operate a leadership development or talent management offer but has aspirations to implement a scheme to meet this need in future.

### **The Vale of Glamorgan**

#### *Rationale, design and implementation of the talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.3 The rationale underpinning the need for a leadership development offer in the Vale of Glamorgan was informed by a number of external factors, such as increasing financial constraints influencing the future priorities, capacities and capabilities of the council. Increasing pressure on funding for local public services drove the imperative to think and work creatively about how the local authority continues to provide essential public services.

I think the main purpose [of our leadership development offer] that we've always pointed to is the change we need to make as an organisation and for us to continue to work very differently and to continue to deliver services, even though the money is going down. We need to be more creative and more innovative.

4.4 The approach taken to talent and leadership development in the Vale of Glamorgan was informed and shaped by a Council-wide staff engagement programme, entitled The Big Conversation. The Big Conversation was launched in 2015 in response to increasing pressure on local government funding and increasing demand on local public services and aimed to develop innovative means of ensuring business continuity. The Reshaping Services Programme (RSP) aims to take a collaborative approach to providing priority and valued public services by working across local government departments and the public, voluntary and community sectors to transform and deliver services. To include and engage staff in designing the scope and process of reshaping services, the Vale of Glamorgan ensured that each member of staff was invited to attend a personal briefing from a member of the senior management team. This was the first staff-engagement exercise to take place in the Vale of Glamorgan Council at this scale and with the intent to give every member of staff at every tier of the local authority the opportunity to influence the transformation agenda.

In the main, it's the way we need to engage with our staff and to give them space and time to be a bit more creative, a bit more innovative because we need to do that in order to move forward as an organisation.

4.5 The importance of the approach and process taken to designing and implementing the leadership development offer in the Vale of Glamorgan was echoed among the views of senior HR representatives. The process was considered to be as important as the content of the leadership development offer itself because it was considered a means of fostering a workplace culture that was thought conducive to facilitating service transformation. The approach taken was seen by senior leaders in the council and HR department as representative of the leadership values and behaviours it wished to engender and nurture within the workforce. It was also considered to be important to the coherence and legitimacy of the leadership development offer that content be agreed and developed from the ground-up and through staff participation.

I think the enablers [of implementing the offer] are the fact that we are selling this as a community of learning so it's based around a model that's actually being

built by employees and therefore everything's coherent now. So, people don't, when people come tomorrow for example, they know that they're coming to explore the element that we've already agreed. It's not random.

HR, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.6 However, there did appear to be some different views expressed with regards to the culture change which may still be required to embed a community or a culture of learning and development which may in turn nourish an appetite for leadership development across the council.

We don't have a learning culture, so we are very traditional training culture but that is therefore very passive, so people are waiting to be developed, so they are sitting there saying – so wait, send me on a training course, I go to the training course then I sit there and wait for the trainer to input into me.

HR, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.7 Though the value of this process appeared to be reflected in the views of line managers and staff who largely welcomed the extent to which they had opportunities to participate in the Big Conversation and subsequent working groups, there were some indications that further steps may be needed to fully embed a learning culture that extends to leadership development and talent management within specific service areas.

I think there are different cultures in different departments; access to training, access to technology, access to...some departments are very, you only talk about [development] once a year or it's seen as a sort of privilege [...] I think it's very different in different Directorates.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.8 *The Big Conversation* also led to the development of the Vale of Glamorgan Council Staff Charter 2016-2020. The purpose of the Charter was to ensure that the local authority 'continue to provide the best possible service to [our] customers through the best possible contribution from all [our] employees'. The Charter aimed to set out a framework of expectations for both the Council and council employees and sought to outline the support that council employees can reasonably expect from their employer and the responsibilities and qualities that are expected in return. The Charter was developed in partnership with staff, through the engagement

mechanism of The Big Conversation, and in partnership with recognised trade unions and reflects the objectives, values and aspirations set out in the Council Corporate Plan 2016-2020. To ensure the realisation of the objectives, values and aspirations set out in the Charter, it also defines and provides update on progress against the actions required of the Council and council employees to implement the Corporate Plan. Primary research data suggest that awareness of the Staff Charter is high and it is valued as a means of translating council commitments into actions and outputs.

The staff charter [is important], because that's been developed to put the council values into action.

Staff, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.9 Following *The Big Conversation*, the Council issued the Vale of Glamorgan Staff Survey to all council employees (excluding schools) in September 2016. The intention was to capture the views of staff on a series of twenty assertions articulated in the Staff Charter. These assertions were clustered in four main areas of activity including communications, staff development, leadership development and engagement. The Staff Survey has enabled the Vale of Glamorgan Council to collect evaluation data with regards to staff's perceptions and experiences of the progress the Council is making against the commitments set out in the Staff Charter. Though response rates to the Staff Survey varied across service areas, the local authority identified a number of key priorities to take forward in relation to the Council's approach to learning and development, namely the need to ensure that staff are appraised of the ways in which their contribution supports the strategic and business objectives of the Council and the need to review the accessibility of talent and leadership development provision to support staff to realise their potential.
- 4.10 A summary of the key findings from the Staff Survey presented to the Council Cabinet identified that a review of the Learning and Development Strategy, the development of a Passport to Training Scheme and the implementation of a new staff appraisal process, entitled #ItsAboutMe would be key in responding to this feedback. The Council identified a need to develop a revised Management Competency Framework to support managers to further develop and apply leadership behaviours. Finally, a commitment was also made to strengthening its Leadership Café offer, a series of monthly leadership development sessions available to all staff with an interest in developing their own leadership capacity and

capabilities across the Council. Sessions delivered since the commitments set out to Cabinet have included those on decision-making, mental toughness, engaged leadership and building and sustaining trust. The Leadership Café has since been named the Public Sector People Managers' Association award winner in 2016, been shortlisted for a Personnel Today award in the same year and been shortlisted for a Local Government Council (LGC) Team of the Year Award in 2017.

#### *Components of the talent and leadership development offer*

##### *Staff performance and appraisal system*

- 4.11 The Vale of Glamorgan identified that the main priority emerging from The Big Conversation was the need to redesign the staff performance and appraisal system (Personal Development and Review System (PDRS) in favour of a more personal, flexible and meaningful #ItsAboutMe process. Staff feedback about the new appraisal system, captured through the Staff Survey, has been largely positive. The #ItsAboutMe appraisal process is supported by a refreshed approach to the staff induction which is reported to be more dynamic and interactive, focusing on relationships, customer service, team working and the diversity of local authority services rather than on processes, procedures and systems.

We had [an appraisal system] called PDR – Personal Development and Review and one of the [working] groups completely dismantled it in terms of defining and identifying talent. We developed the #ItsAboutMe programme which is [...] an ongoing conversation and it has to be meaningful and it has to be based around the staff charter and one size doesn't fit so, not every manager needs to use the same form, as long as their having that conversation around those key issues: what do you need to be to be a better employee regardless of what it takes to be a good employee in this particular job and what are your future development goals and needs.

HR, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.12 Line managers consistently mentioned the #ItsAboutMe appraisal process as a key mechanism and tool for identifying and discussing development needs and aspirations. Those staff who cited the appraisal process as an important factor in identifying their aspirations to participate in leadership development opportunities tended to highlight the nature of the conversations they had with their line managers and the impact a coaching approach had on their decision to raise and follow up

opportunities. Staff consistently noted the self-directed nature of conversations and participation in leadership activities as important features of the process and valued the environment line managers were largely able to create to support leadership development. There were however, variations in the extent to which staff felt a supportive and encouraging approach to leadership development may be found across the organisation. Line managers talked about the presence of pockets within service areas that remained resistant to change with perceived impacts on the true universality and accessibility of the leadership development offer.

You can have your corporate message but it's only as good as the people who are taking it on board as it goes down.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.13 With regards to the corporate infrastructure in which the staff performance and appraisal system operates, the local authority has made changes to its approach to internal communications. A Keeping Me Informed group aims to disseminate better, more immediate and more relevant communication items to council employees. Primary research data also suggest that internal communication methods such as the staff intranet pages and all staff email circulars are effective information sharing mechanisms. Though staff generally welcomed the self-directed nature of participation in leadership activities, a small number of staff and line managers identified a need for a more coherent corporate approach to consolidating and guiding individuals to make choices about which opportunities may meet their aspirations.

It's quite difficult you know, there's not people sat there saying you should go on this course, you've got to look for it yourself but I suppose I know the courses I have to do which are attributed to my current role.

Staff, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.14 Staff were readily able to identify the skills and professional qualifications required to perform their roles, but when it came to identifying suitable development opportunities to fulfil their leadership potential or aspirations a number identified a need for corporate input to define and navigate the provision aimed at developing leadership skills and behaviours. Furthermore, there were indications that greater rationalisation of the leadership development offer would enable staff to make a

broader assessment of where their existing skills and knowledge may take them and plan their development to meet the future needs and aspirations of the council.

There aren't people looking across the council, right these are the people we've got, these are the roles they're in, this is where we've got to be looking and identifying the people who should be attending those courses.

Staff, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.15 The Council's staff engagement strategy has asserted a particular focus on employee recognition which resulted in a number of staff-led presentations drawing attention to a range of employee recognition initiatives, including an electronic staff recognition board, a number of staff awards schemes and an Employee Awards evening held in June 2018. Finally, these and other corporate-level changes, such as focus on organisational health and resilience, appear to have enabled a number of employee-led wellbeing initiatives, each sponsored by a member of the Corporate Management Team. This focus on empowering staff would also appear to have initiated the development of initiatives to promote and support talent and leadership development within specific service areas.

4.16 The Council's staff engagement strategy set out to ensure that the development of the leadership development offer was employee-led and reflective of the needs of the workforce.

It's very much about self-directed. People have got to tell us very much what they want, and then we will explore whether what we can do.

HR, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.17 However, in addition to the staff and line managers who suggested that they would like greater clarity and transparency regarding the means and criteria through which staff are selected for leadership development opportunities, some articulated the potential cultural implications of not having clear selection processes. A lack of transparency, particularly in organisations which may traditionally be viewed as hierarchical, may lead to assumptions being made about the nature and rationale used to identify potential among existing staff.

I must admit, I assumed, I mean it's above my pay grade, I assumed all that [selection process for talented staff] was pretty covert.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.18 There were some concerns articulated about the ways in which a lack of a formal selection process may be interpreted and the attitudes and behaviours it may elicit at management level where there may be a need for consistency and at an employee level where there may be a need for greater transparency.

I'm not sure about the mechanisms being in place to say "I could be a leader" or for us sort of identifying people [...] I feel like the council is identifying leaders very quietly. Might be wrong [...] You could end up really alienating people and having that sort of favouritism culture in different places.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

*Management Development Framework and sessions*

4.19 The Reshaping Services transformation agenda and The Big Conversation staff engagement activity also culminated in the launch of a simplified management behavioural framework which focuses on cultivating relationships, leadership, resilience and commercial aptitude.

The Management Development Framework, is a means of looking at general management competencies as opposed to those related to any professional area; the need to be able to manage the future cuts across any professional area, the need to manage a team, the need to manage partnerships and collaborations, no matter where you are based. Competencies in the Management Development Framework are then supported by CPD and the work of various professional groups.

HR representative, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.20 The Management Development Framework provides the foundation for mandatory bi-annual Management Development sessions for line managers at all tiers of management in the Council. Literature and resources provided by the local authority provide an overview the content delivered as part of the Spring Management Development session which had a focus on leadership and management theory and techniques and tools for managing oneself, including reflexive activities on communication and learning styles and participatory problem-solving techniques.

4.21 Key among the benefits identified of the Management Development Framework and sessions were the ability to network, develop relationships and learn about the pressures and opportunities experienced by counterparts in other Directorates and

service areas and the value of developing a shared understanding and language with regards to collaboration and problem solving. The content of Management Development Sessions was considered to be relevant and useful in promoting a set of leadership and management principles expected to underpin good practice in the council.

- 4.22 Notable among the observations made among line managers were indications of an apparent lack of a formal approach to identifying and selecting individuals to participate in the development of the Management Development Framework.

I could see that there was change obviously going on in the council because of part of our reshaping processes. And I wanted to be part of that change, I wanted to help influence the direction and say well actually we need to look at more around leadership and management.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.23 Where little formal structure and processes exist to single out or select individuals for leadership development opportunities, there were indications that staff may begin to identify an implicit criteria or set of behaviours which are considered desirable or indicative of talent.

You kind of get brought into stuff because you're kind of seen as proactive or you've got a talent in a particular area.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.24 As well as considering the entry point and selection process for leadership development opportunities, there may also be a need to develop more consistent process for communicating the outcomes of staff participation and input.

I was thinking what rarely happens is that you get a follow up from the session; as a result of this and your input into this, this is happening. It's more like, right come and hear about this, and next week's session's about this, and next week's session's about this.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.25 Ensuring a robust feedback loop may be a particularly important internal communications consideration when staff engagement continues to be a key driver and enabler of change.

### *The Leadership Café*

- 4.26 The Vale of Glamorgan hosts a monthly Leadership Café which is a cross-departmental and voluntary programme of leadership development sessions, initiated and facilitated by staff and available to all staff irrespective of their role or responsibilities. The Leadership Café was designed as leadership and management programme without the attendant costs, selection processes or accreditation commitments expected of formal leadership and management provision. It launched in 2015 with the aim to create an informal “café” style environment for employees to discuss and share leadership issues and examples of best practice.
- 4.27 Senior staff and representatives within the HR department attribute an important role to the Leadership Café in providing mechanism to sustain long-term culture change. There is recognition of the position the Leadership Café occupies with respect to its visibility and perceived influence, accessibility and the opportunity it presents for collective action.

It's the operational managers and the team leaders who're really in a position to influence, because they're in a position where they speak to their staff daily, and they're sort of attitude and culture rubs off on staff. That's where the strength of the Leadership Café came from is that you had a group of people who wanted to run it and then more and more people have become involved in it. And not just got involved in it by coming and listening, but actually participating.

Senior management, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.28 However, a number of staff and line managers did raise questions about the strategic relevance and perceived quality of the content of the Leadership Café. It was suggested that there may be a need for Leadership Café sessions to be planned with greater strategic consideration of the key skills, knowledge, values and behaviours that the council wishes to cultivate to realise its long-term objectives.

For me, it would have be about having more strategic framework [around the Leadership Café]. What are the best learning opportunities or expertise that we would like to develop in people and for what long-term goals? It's the forward planning of it and getting that balance.

Staff, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.29 There were indications that some staff and line managers recognised a need for a source of external validation of the LD offer. For some, that meant a better balance to be found between internal and external speakers to ensure that the content of the Leadership Café is not always self-determined. For others, that meant access to accredited training and professional qualifications in leadership and management, coupled with corporate guidance regarding the suitability of these courses, in light of their prior learning and future aspirations.

In terms of what I would like more of in the future, I suppose the chance to do maybe a management qualification. Something that is a bit more recognised and transferable really.

Staff, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.30 Some line managers perceived that internal recruitment and progression routes within the council required successful candidates to hold professional but unspecified qualifications in leadership and management and that this and other restrictive HR processes may be preventing lateral moves or promotions within the council. They described the variety of external accreditation and training courses on offer as being difficult to navigate and in need of rationalisation to enable informed decisions about their career pathways.

I'm sort of being pushed towards leadership training but I can't identify... I'm not sure what classification of training would be valid. If you look at a job description, you don't know what an appropriate leadership qualification is...whether it's an ILM or whether what I've already got is enough.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan

4.31 The operating principles of the Leadership Café state that it is aimed at all employees who are leaders, aspiring leaders or simply those with an interest in leadership. It is run on a voluntary basis where the only reward is the sharing of knowledge and ideas. It is cost-neutral to ensure that there are no resource implications, other than the café's coffee and refreshments. Finally, it operates on a "low-industry" basis where all that is required and expected is a desire to learn and share learning rather than any technical expertise in delivering or facilitating training.

4.32 Awareness of the Leadership Café was high among staff and line managers across a range of service areas and staff recognised the value of having a universal and

informal environment in which to network and learn. Staff and line managers identified a number of benefits including improved collaborative working and increased motivation and morale among staff. However, it was notable that principal among the barriers staff and line managers identified to participating in leadership development opportunities was a shortage of time and an imperative to focus on the immediate or short-term pressures of service delivery.

Everyone's so busy, with cuts to staffing, with the operational side of things it's difficult to spare time to think about your own career progression, your own career development because you're bogged down with the day to day.

Line manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.33 It may be important to note that some line managers and staff may not share the view that participating in the Leadership Café is low-impact given the perceived demands on staff time, perceived impacts on the capacity of the wider team and the diversion of resource away from day to day operations.
- 4.34 The Leadership Café annual programme is designed by participants and in consultation with participants. As such, the content of Leadership Café sessions is shaped by the interests and issues faced by participants across the management infrastructure of the Council. Examples of the ways in which stakeholders have been involved in the delivery of the annual programme have included the facilitation of inspirational and motivational sessions, on topics such as the benefits of 'marginal gains' and its impact on the British Cycling Team. Academi Wales has also provided event leaders to facilitate sessions, introducing the Council's newly developed Staff Charter and leading an 'Apprentice' style leadership challenge for staff.
- 4.35 There is evidence to suggest that despite the participatory, staff-led nature of the Leadership Café there may be more work necessary to ensure that it is making every effort to be inclusive to all staff. Some staff and line managers noted that the timings and locations of the Leadership Café sessions could exclude or put unnecessary barriers in the path of individuals with caring responsibilities or those who work remotely with limited capacity to engage in sessions held in the evenings.
- 4.36 The value of the Leadership Café has been recognised and endorsed by the Council Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee and is supported by the Management Team. Recently, the Leadership Café has hosted colleagues from other local

authorities who have indicated an interest in developing similar provision. The work of the Leadership Café team has also been profiled as a Wales Audit Office (WAO) Good Practice case study.

*Experiences of participation in talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.37 Among the key enablers to participating in leadership development opportunities that staff identified was the attitude of their line manager. Staff cited the support and encouragement offered by their line manager as an important factor underpinning their decisions to seek and take up the opportunities on offer. The #ItsAboutMe appraisal process was considered an important facilitator of conversations about personal and professional development for some, but in the main, this was secondary to the quality of day to day support and communication with their line manager. This was echoed among the responses of line managers who identified that they drew on their own experiences of validating relationships with previous line managers or professional role models who had in turn inspired them to take up opportunities to support their staff. However, line managers identified a number of tools that enabled them to shape and direct relationships and conversations about development with their staff.

What the management framework has given me is the tools to back up my beliefs because it's given me opportunities to push people forward and develop them.

Line Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.38 Similarly, line managers identified the importance of securing support from the wider team to enable participation in leadership development opportunities. Line managers focused on different enablers they could employ to secure the wider sponsorship of the team. Most commonly, line managers highlighted the importance of their role to advocating and promoting the value of investing in leadership development and creating a supportive learning culture within their teams. The majority spoke about the need to be seen to support team members to dedicate and protect time allocated to undertaking leadership training and opportunities and to manage the short-term impacts on team resources to leverage opportunities for others to take additional responsibilities and build capacity among colleagues to work flexibility across the department.
- 4.39 Line managers also recognised the importance of supporting team members to manage the complex shifts in team dynamics which can take place in the face of

changing culture. The ability to recognise and manage the emotional impacts of perceived or actual changes arising from individuals' pursuit of professional development opportunities and personal ambition was considered to be importance to maintaining team harmony and cooperation. This was considered to be one of the key ways in which line managers noted drawing on their own learning, particularly with regard to developing self-awareness, interpersonal and communication skills, to create a safe and supportive environment for others to develop and progress. Line managers spoke about the role they played in helping team members to apply their learning so that others may experience the benefits of participation.

I can't offer development to somebody and then sit back and watch them get on with it. I have to be involved so they get value from it because if I don't do that, I don't get value from it either.

Line Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.40 A lack of transparency was considered a barrier to creating a positive and supportive learning environment. Some referred to an apparent lack of transparency about the institutional processes that underpin selection and participation as a potential contributor to challenging team dynamics which may be triggered by feelings of suspicion, envy and loss among team members who experience the interpersonal impacts of change in teams. A small number were able to draw on examples of the ways in which these dynamics may present challenges in their professional relationships and may colour individuals' perceptions of the likely gains and costs of participating in leadership development opportunities.
- 4.41 Interviewees were asked about participation through the medium of Welsh and the degree to which they perceived the leadership development offer took account of the cultural aspects and considerations which may be necessary when leading in or for bilingual communities. The majority of staff and line managers tended to highlight the importance of the council meeting the standards of compliance set out in the Welsh Language Standards. They viewed the need to deliver the content of the leadership development offer in Welsh as driven by demand-led factors. However, a number of staff described that they had found attending Welsh Language Awareness sessions delivered by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office helpful in altering their perceptions of the need to promote the Welsh Language.

We tend to think in terms of what do we have to do, or what is it going to cost ... but this was really good because it was about the heritage of the language and it did give a much better understanding from the customer perspective – so the implications if they're not able to communicate with somebody in their first language.

Line Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

*Outcomes and impact of the talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.42 On reflection, staff were largely positive about their experiences of participating in leadership development opportunities. Most commonly reported among staff was the welcome sense of empowerment and renewed energy they felt in their roles to challenge norms and suggest new ideas and ways of working.

It's probably made me feel more confident, that I can speak up and offer suggestions and improvements. You're not speaking out of turn.

Line Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.43 Staff consistently reported that they felt they had permission to challenge assumptions about ways of realising team and organisational objectives, an increased ability to view challenges from different perspectives and better skilled in managing relationships with peers and staff. For staff, these skills often allowed them to take a different perspective firstly on their internal capabilities and capacities and secondly, on the scope and potential influence of their role. The majority of interviewees first identified ways in which participating in leadership development opportunities had broadened their sights, networks and ability to maximise the scope of the current role. A large number of staff articulated how they had translated the broader perspective afforded to them to identify new career pathways for themselves.

I think it's sometimes that prompt to say actually I can move onto something else and widen those horizons a bit more.

Staff, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.44 Among the most consistent impacts that line managers attributed to leadership development was the extent to which staff who had participated facilitated wider culture change. Line managers identified long-term positive impacts on staff resource and capacity owing to time saved as a consequence of staff reconfiguring

and redefining their roles but also as a result of staff challenging and influencing attitudinal and behavioural change in others.

We're actually investing in these people and the benefit of that is that they help you change the culture.

Line Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.45 Some line managers also identified positive impacts with regards to their own learning and development. One noted that knowledge transfer may be facilitated within the relationship between line manager and staff and take place during reflective discussions the learning outcomes staff had gained as a result of participating in training or other development opportunities. This line manager identified these discussions as key to supporting staff to begin embedding their learning into their practice.
- 4.46 There were mixed views among line managers with regards to the relationship between investment in leadership development and staff retention. There was acknowledgement of the risk that staff who benefit from leadership development opportunities may choose to move onto new challenges in a different organisation or sector and recognition of the need for managers to broker and raise awareness of opportunities for staff to use their skills across the wider work of the council. Line managers, to different degrees, expressed some anxiety about the time and cost implications of losing talented staff to other departments or employers, but some line managers acknowledged that there were potentially as many reasons why staff might choose to stay in an organisations as those that might prompt them to leave. Broadly, those line managers who were quick to acknowledge the mutually supportive role they play in supporting the development of future leaders were more likely to suggest that they had a role to play in creating a working environment to which staff wished to make a contribution.

It's a concern if you're investing money and time in somebody but should you not do it because of that [...] What you've got to do is make the working environment a place they want to be. If they feel that they are a valued member of that team and that the skills that they've got are enhancing that team the chances are they will stay with that team. There's never any guarantees, but what do you do, don't take the gamble, don't develop people at all?

Line Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

### *Future plans and career aspirations*

4.47 When asked about the future aspirations for the leadership development offer, staff and line managers shared the view that both the skills and attributes developed as a result of participating in leadership development and the working environment that staff find themselves in during and following their participation plays a key role in maximising the value of the leadership development offer. Staff and line managers both identified the importance of having space and time to reflect on their learning and their practice and translate this into long-term change. Fostering this environment for staff appeared to be acknowledged at a senior level in the council as key to adopting more creative ways of delivering its long-term agenda of service transformation.

I think people need time. It's that capacity word again. I think we need time to give people the opportunity to develop and to be creative [...] We need to build capacity, we need to build space for those people to be able to develop and we need the enthusiasm, and it's not just the enthusiasm of people to make it happen, but for people to be willing participants and to get involved in it.

Senior management, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.48 With regards to the components of the leadership development offer, there appeared to be consensus among HR representatives and line managers that further work may be needed to formalise the council's approach to attracting and supporting the development of talent.

We really need to do more work around succession planning and talent management, perhaps more of a conscious entry through and up [...] We've got a succession planning process. It's fairly embryonic and we've got to define what's talent, what are the skillsets that we rely on, that we find hard to recruit to and hard to retain. But yes, talent I think is something we need to do a lot more work on.

HR representative, Vale of Glamorgan Council

4.49 Among HR representatives, the identification, development and retention of talent tended to be associated with strategies to attract and recruit new staff. Finding ways to work effectively within existing apprenticeship frameworks and sources of funding was considered an enabler of future talent management pipelines.

The way apprenticeships work in Wales and in comparison with how the frameworks work in England is very different and is quite restrictive.

HR representative, Vale of Glamorgan Council

- 4.50 Line managers articulated different definitions of talent which were largely equated with specific qualifications or knowledge sets rather than with skills sets and behaviours. This may suggest that the present identification of talent may be dependant on the context in which staff are working, which in turns shapes how talent might be defined, nurtured and deployed.

People will take a job, so if you can't get a job in a field you're qualified in, you will take a job just to have a job but they've still got those skill sets. We discovered through the PDRS process that one of our labourers is [...] a qualified locksmith. What a waste of talent.

Line Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

### **Gwynedd County Council**

- 4.51 The following information has been drawn from a combination of initial discussions with senior leaders at Gwynedd and an analysis of key documents produced by the LA which set out the principles of their Developing Potential scheme.
- 4.52 Initial discussions were held with HR and Learning and Development representatives at Gwynedd County Council. The Developing Potential scheme is Gwynedd's development programme, setting out the key principles of staff development at all levels, from entry to senior leaders. The development scheme is integrated in the council's three year plan and has been considered alongside the developmental objectives relating to workforce planning and coaching.

### *Rationale, design and implementation of the talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.53 Ffordd Gwynedd or 'The Gwynedd Way' was reported to play a fundamental part in the positioning and approach to the leadership and talent development offer in Gwynedd County Council. HR professionals and some line managers reflected that the council used to offer a menu of optional leadership development opportunities but Ffordd Gwynedd now aims to provide a strategic framework and narrative to conceptualise the principles, aims and purpose of the leadership development offer.

Ffordd Gwynedd now plays a central role in setting out the priorities that we expect our officers within the council to reflect. There's a great deal of scope to support managers to develop skills and understanding around the principles underpinning Ffordd Gwynedd - and it's available across the council, not just for managers, and encourages staff to develop skills according to their specific needs.

HR, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.54 This change in the council's approach to leadership development was reflected in the comments of the majority of line managers who identified that they felt afforded greater autonomy in shaping the identity and setting the direction of their team and developing staff. Some line managers described that this perceived change in approach had equipped them with a greater sense of self-determination and ownership, rather than feeling absorbed as part of a wider and less personable system.

Going back fifteen to twenty years, it was much more task-focused, handing work out and planning the work programme, but now I would say I'm much more involved in the development of staff, setting the direction and identity of the unit. I'd say the whole ethos of the council has changed considerably and managers now have more responsibilities and accountability for their work.

Line Manager, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.55 Ffordd Gwynedd resonated with the majority of line managers because it was perceived to enable a focus on a 'whole team' approach to leadership development and performance management. The principles of Ffordd Gwynedd would appear to promote the value of a distributed leadership model in ways that resonate with line managers who prefer to advocate a universal leadership offer rather than a targeted approach to the development of select individuals.

I think one of the main things is the Ffordd Gwynedd agenda within the council, where there's a clear emphasis on the work of the whole team, and it's the team that's responsible for their performance management. It's less of a task for the manager to have to report everything.

Line manager, Gwynedd County Council

4.56 Some line managers associated Ffordd Gwynedd with the impetus and means to create a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement. This would appear to be particularly relevant in departments with responsibility for delivering front-line services.

I've started to train the team on the principles of the Ffordd Gwynedd programme and emphasised the importance of continually checking our processes to ensure that we put the customer first.

Line manager, Gwynedd County Council

*Components of the talent and leadership development offer*

4.57 Senior management within Gwynedd County Council conceptualise the leadership development offer as workforce planning strategy. The leadership development offer was positioned as a mechanism to deliver effective services for the public.

Ultimately [the leadership development offer] it's all to do with workforce planning in a way, so we need to ensure that it all ties together [...] Success will ultimately depend on us having the right people in the right positions because having gaps in the staff structure will mean that we're unable to offer an effective service.

Senior management, Gwynedd County Council

*Graduate Development Scheme*

4.58 For staff entering the organisation, there is a graduate development scheme, named Managers of Tomorrow. The scheme has been running for around 15 years and seeks to address the need of the council to develop the generic management skills of those at entry-level. A small number of trainees currently engaged on the Managers of Tomorrow Scheme do identify that they hold aspirations to progress into management positions and report enjoying the content of the qualification, benefiting from coaching and taking up a diverse range of opportunities within the council. There may however be a need to reflect on the intention of the scheme and consider the scope and number of practical opportunities available to trainees to put their understanding of management theory into practice.

There haven't been any opportunities to manage staff, but I understand that it would be difficult and quite artificial in a way, to create a situation where we could have experience of managing people. It would be nice to have that type of experience.

4.59 In recent years, the two year scheme has been delivered in collaboration with Bangor University as part of a two year scheme which provides an opportunity for graduates to gain the experiences, networks and qualifications needed to build a firm foundation on which to develop their careers within leadership and management. The content of the scheme itself comprises three six-month placements intended to firstly to introduce trainees to the culture and operations of the council and thereafter, to deploy the trainee to work on discrete strategic projects in specific service areas. The scheme requires completion of formal qualifications which include a Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Level 7 qualification in Strategic Management and Leadership through the Management Centre at Bangor University. The programme comprises five taught modules delivered through a combination of face to face sessions, networking, webinars and regional events on the following topics:

- Strategic Project Management;
- Being a Strategic Leader and Strategic Leadership in Practice;
- Organisational Direction;
- Strategic Performance Management; and
- Organisational Change.

4.60 By completing a short application assignment about your learning you could complete your first module, thereby obtaining an Award. Trainees who complete the five 4 modules over a period of 6-12 months can achieve a Diploma qualification in Strategic Management and Leadership.

#### *Corporate Competency Framework*

4.61 Employees at all levels are expected to engage with various aspects of training, development and performance management. The most fundamental aspect of this is the Corporate Competency Framework, constructed around the five council values of (i) respect; (ii) serving; (iii) positive; (iv) working as a team; and (v) value for money. The core competencies of customer care, teamwork and collaboration, effectiveness in the role, corporate focus and performance improvement apply to all employees and aim to reflect the council's values as articulated in the Ffordd Gwynedd. HR representatives with the council described the practical orientation of the Ffordd Gwynedd and how it aims to provide a framework through which to identify and develop staff according to individual and departmental needs.

[Departments'] particular development needs were a key driver to this process  
[...]

HR representative, Gwynedd County Council

4.62 The competencies map directly onto the behaviours, thereby describing how to demonstrate them in employee's work. The introduction of the competencies is made to employees through the induction process, and is used to define job descriptions, guide learning and development needs and inform performance reviews.

#### *Talent management*

4.63 More broadly, the Corporate Training and Development Programme supports all staff to gain appropriate skills and knowledge in order to perform their roles effectively. The aim is to improve the performance of all staff, and to address poor performance as soon as it arises.

4.64 The performance review process is used to identify individuals to be considered for the Developing Potential scheme, and therefore constitutes the talent identification mechanism for council employees. The scheme forms one part of the talent management process, and once selected to take part in the scheme, individuals have access to training development which is geared towards helping them attain the level of development to which they are aspiring. This includes conventional training, coaching, mentoring and opportunities aimed at broadening their experience, such as secondments and shadowing. Individuals selected for the scheme have to consistently demonstrate high performance and a commitment to development with promotion as the end goal. This process is applied throughout the workforce via two streams. Stream 1 focuses on the development of team leaders or managers, and stream 2 on directors, heads of department and senior managers.

4.65 The broader strategic aim of the scheme is focused on retaining talented staff within the council, and therefore ensuring that the staff are adequately skilled to be able to take up senior leadership positions in the future. This means staff are available to replace the skills lost through retirement or those leaving the organisation. HR professionals identified current disparity in the ways in which different departments and individuals may identify talented staff.

If you asked different people within the organisation I think you'd get a lot of different definitions.

HR representative, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.66 Recruitment onto the programme is reportedly determined by the needs of workforce planning, those meeting the criteria for participation and budget constraints.

We've identified that on a management level we have a lot of very talented individuals, but who are perhaps not overly comfortable with certain aspects of managing people. These people are very good at managing finance, resources and so on, but perhaps not as comfortable in dealing with those difficult conversations and those types of issues. So, we've decided to establish a development centre.

HR representative, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.67 There is a further element to the scheme in development, which aims to develop staff in particular areas of expertise within their departments. There is at present a pilot scheme being developed in the leisure sector in line with these aims and objectives. The scheme comprises a suite of externally accredited Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) qualifications followed by an offer of formal coaching to support staff to develop specific leadership and management skills necessary to pursue defined career pathways within the sector.

*Experiences of participation in talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.68 Key among the enablers to creating a leadership development offer would appear to be the visible support and advocacy for leadership development lent it by senior leadership within Gwynedd County Council. The degree to which staff witness the personal investment of senior leadership and management in the offer was considered to be influential in driving the attitudinal and behavioural change necessary to shape organisational culture.

Even in a period of financial constraints the Council continues to place an emphasis on looking for, and developing, future managers [...] so, it's the Chief Executive's vision and he's been holding the training sessions on this, and staff have really values the time and the effort that he's put into it. He's very busy and I'm sure he could ask someone else to deliver the training because that's not

really his background, but he's very determined to deliver it himself. The staff recognise this and it's certainly been a success.

Line manager, Gwynedd County Council

4.69 An important enabler of implementing the leadership development offer was also considered to be adopting a pragmatic and evidence-based approach to supporting the progression and retention of the workforce. HR professionals spoke about the importance of committing to accept and reconcile the costs and benefits of investing in leadership development, but not without seeking to capture and analyse robust data regarding the career decisions and trajectories of beneficiaries.

I think that's something we've all come to accept by now, at all levels – that we should be developing individuals, whilst at the same time accepting that some will be retained and others will leave.

HR representative, Gwynedd County Council

4.70 The council operated different approaches to the selection of individuals to participate in each strand of the leadership development offer and talent management schemes. There is a recognised preference to provide a universally accessible leadership development offer, which is underpinned and supported by a wider culture of learning and development realised through Ffordd Gwynedd.

The people who I sit around the table with to design this process are keen to offer an open invite rather than selecting individuals.

HR representative, Gwynedd County Council

4.71 The development of new and existing talent within the council however, was thought to require more formal selection processes. Acceptance onto the Managers of Tomorrow scheme involved the submission of an application form and completion of a one-day assessment centre and formal interview designed to test specific skills and personal attributes such as motivation, adaptability and problem-solving abilities. With respect to identifying talent among the existing workforce however, applying a workforce planning lens to the process may be necessitating a more formal and corporately driven selection process.

We've already held development sessions for our team managers, and another cohort of managers will be going through the process in a couple of weeks. After that we'll have an important process where we try to identify the talent within

those teams that we'd like to develop further, or at least give priority to these individuals. And we'll need to treat this process very carefully as the reason it hasn't seen the light of day within the council to date is that it appears that we've found that people can be a bit scared and suspicious of change. And it's also about having that difficult conversation with individuals who perhaps haven't been put forward for further development when a talent or leadership management process has been introduced.

HR representative, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.72 Operationally, Ffordd Gwynedd would appear to be an effective vehicle for clarifying the role and expectations of line managers when it comes to encouraging and facilitating the development of staff.

There's an expectation for all line managers to support their staff and to give them opportunities to develop.

Line manager, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.73 The importance of management in unlocking and ring-fencing time for their staff to participate in leadership development opportunities emerged as a key link in the behavioural chain facilitating consistency and equality of opportunity for all staff, whose capacity to prioritise their own development over that of their team may vary and become comprised by the need to manage operational pressures.

I'm quite poor in terms of sending myself onto courses, purely down to time management. I often encourage my staff to go on courses, but I'm bad at booking myself onto courses.

Line manager, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.74 The leadership attitudes and behaviours expected of line managers would appear to be reflected in the goals and priorities of the learning and development team within the HR department. The establishment of a two-way, mutually supportive dialogue between HR representatives and staff may be key to embedding the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd and encouraging participation from among those that identify a need.

The attitude, desire and behaviours that we have amongst the majority of our staff is something we are very proud of and should take advantage of, and we need to make sure that we respond to their development needs.

HR representative, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.75 The accessibility of the long-term strategic narrative that underpins Ffordd Gwynedd may also have a role in empowering staff to conceive leadership development as a natural response to change.

It was time for change – the industry is changing, how we communicate and leadership and management is all changing [...] I thought, I had to change.

Staff, Gwynedd County Council

*Outcomes and impact of the talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.76 Most commonly mentioned among the outcomes attributed to participating in leadership development were an increased sense of empowerment and autonomy to affect change in their roles. A number of staff welcomed the use of coaching as a means of continuing to develop and practise newly acquired skills following training.

It's empowered me to make decisions for myself and I feel better for that.

Staff, Gwynedd County Council

- 4.77 This observation was also noted among the majority of line managers who highlighted that staff who had completed leadership training tended to take a greater interest and ownership of their work.

- 4.78 Line managers identified multiple impacts which they attributed to different aspects of the leadership development offer. Broadly speaking, a number of line managers identified valuable gains from networking and building relationships with other colleagues, which were felt to alter individuals' perspectives on problem solving, approaches to management and their own career progression.

The experiences I gained during my time on the scheme and moving from one role to a different one has made the issue of working in a role in a department I've never worked before much less daunting.

Line Manager, Gwynedd County Council

4.79 Others noted that participating in leadership training had allowed their team members to initiate more open discussions about their future career aspirations and the skills they need to acquire to attain their goals. However, apparent pressure on council service provision and operational systems, profoundly felt in service areas responsible for front-line delivery, would appear to place strain on capacity and aggravate concerns about staff progression exposing skills gaps and weaknesses in workforce and succession planning.

I'm aware of a lot of individuals who have the ability to be very good managers, but because of existing structures and cuts and so on, there aren't as many opportunities for them to move forward and so it's often difficult for line managers to know how to support and guide them. To be completely selfish as well, if you have a talented team member, you want to keep them in your team - so it's difficult.

Line Manager, Gwynedd County Council

4.80 Commonly mentioned among other outcomes line managers attributed to the Ffordd Gwynedd programme was more effective dissemination of information and a more collaborative relationship with senior management. Participation in the programme had also provided a framework within which to discuss challenges in-depth and explore different approaches with management. Others noted a shift in emphasis that enabled greater consideration of the outcomes and long-term impact of the work of individual teams.

In terms of our unit now, there's much more of an emphasis on the benefit and impacts of the work we do. We've started to become much better at identifying the benefits of our work to residents.

Line Manager, Gwynedd County Council

4.81 As a number of staff and line managers highlighted, cuts and pressure on existing capacity may be affecting the availability of opportunities for staff to apply and practise their skills following training. For some line managers, sustaining the focus and momentum generated from participating in leadership training was considered challenging in the context of day to day operational pressures. It was recognised that line management may also require ongoing support to create opportunities and time to help their team use their skills.

4.82 Similarly, creating long-term opportunities for trainees on the Managers of Tomorrow scheme was perceived to need a more strategic approach. Due to sampling constraints it was only possible to speak to two trainees currently engaged on the Managers of Tomorrow scheme, both of whom suggested that further consideration should be given to the scope and possibilities of the placements offered to trainees, how they complement each other over the length of the scheme and the support provided to trainees to maximise the value of the placement. Similar comments were made about the alignment between the academic study and the work-based learning, with trainees recommending that there should be more time afforded to work-based learning early in the scheme to allow trainees to accrue experience on which to reflect to meet the requirements of the qualification.

The placement manager needs to think carefully about what the role will involve for the trainee - what experiences and support they'll get - and acknowledge that the trainee is there to gain experience rather than to fill a gap.

Trainee, Managers of Tomorrow scheme

4.83 There were other indications the Managers of Tomorrow scheme would benefit from longer-term planning and greater alignment with council strategy on workforce and succession planning, which might comprise an annual skills audit and gap analysis to identify development needs.

The reality is you're busy completing tasks for the few first weeks and then I found that things slowed down [...] This needs to be levelled out much more in the planning of the scheme in discussions between the scheme coordinator and the placement manager.

Trainee, Managers of Tomorrow scheme

#### *Future plans and career aspirations*

4.84 Staff and line managers consistently noted the importance of brokering opportunities to use and maintain the relevance of their training following participation in the leadership development offer. Some recognised the value of coaching in embedding learning outcomes but described variable degrees of engagement with coaches dependant on availability and levels of commitment.

4.85 There were some suggestions among staff that a more formal process for identifying talent would be welcome, as well as the opportunity to shape the council's approach.

I do think we need a more formal process for recognising talent – I can't see why we can't do this.

Staff, Gwynedd County Council

4.86 The potential to integrate existing schemes to attract and nurture new talent with the long-term workforce planning strategy that would appear to underpin Ffordd Gwynedd may enable challenges with respect to skill shortages and limited capacity to support development in specific service areas.

When we do have a vacancy it's often very difficult to find individuals with the right skills and training for the role and with an understanding of the council and the way it works. It's difficult to employ someone external because there's a time commitment to get them up to speed with what's happening. So, we'd like to take advantage of the Specialists of Tomorrow scheme.

Line Manager, Gwynedd County Council

### **Powys County Council**

#### *Rationale, design and implementation of the talent and leadership development offer*

4.87 Powys County Council invested in implementing leadership development provision following the publication of a Wales Audit Office review in 2009, which identified that improvements were needed to build the leadership capacity and capability of the Council. The review noted that Powys County Council had undertaken a self-assessment which identified that its capacity and capability to manage change was a potential risk and recommended that it take steps to develop and implement a leadership strategy to deliver its improvement agenda. The Council commissioned a programme of external accreditation in leadership and management (Institute of Leadership and Management, Levels 3 and 5), coaching and mentoring and complemented these training and qualifications with the introduction of internal action learning sets and a register of qualified coaches. In support the development of a leadership culture, the then Interim Head of Human Resources recommended the evaluation of leadership development programmes and a more formal

mechanism for the sharing and effective application of best practice across the organisation.

- 4.88 The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) undertook action research in 2011 aiming to assess the impact of leadership development, as well as the systems and processes that comprise its component parts and its effects on participants. Findings from that study highlighted the need to align leadership development activities with organisational strategic objectives and to ensure knowledge transfer to the workplace. The themes that emerged from the study reportedly shaped the design of the Powys County Council's subsequent Leadership Development Programme. Following these recommendations, Powys County Council launched its Leadership Development Programme (LDP) in 2012.
- 4.89 Primary research data suggests that as well as the external drivers that had initiated a review of the leadership capacity and capabilities of the council, senior HR representatives explicitly identified external stakeholders as among the key intended beneficiaries of its investment programme in leadership development.

It's very much about the customer first approach. You know, so not thinking internally about what's important to Powys Council, it's actually what's important to the citizen.

HR representative, Powys County Council

#### *Components of the talent and leadership development offer*

##### *Leadership behaviours framework*

- 4.90 Powys County Council commissioned HayGroup to develop a framework of leadership behaviours to inform strategic decision-making. The framework identified a number of key behaviours considered to be important to embedding strong leadership and included courage and resilience, innovative strategic thinking, entrepreneurial drive, working across boundaries and building alignment and community engagement.
- 4.91 The council commissioned the University of South Wales to tailor a suite of professional accredited leadership development programmes, packaged and branded for staff operating at different tiers of leadership and management within the council. The LDP comprised a suite of qualifications respected by the ILM, part of the City and Guilds Group, delivered at Level 3 (entitled the Discover Leadership

Programme) and Level 5 (entitled the Develop Leadership Programme) initially, and followed by the development of a level 7 aimed at senior leaders. These professional qualifications formed the basis of the LDP and were complemented by the offer of professional coaching delivered by an ILM Level 5/7 certified coach. Though it would appear that Powys County Council chose to take a different approach to other councils in the design and implementation of its leadership development offer, a senior HR representative highlighted the value of being able to retain some flexibility to tailor the design of the accredited training and professional development opportunities to suit the needs of their workforce.

What [the training provider] did, was they really worked with us and said well this has really got to work for you so we shaped it and moulded it and flexed... and that's enabled it us to run more ILM Level 3s than Level 5s when we've needed to. It's enabled us to change the programme when we've needed to and really shape it as an organisation.

HR representative, Powys County Council

4.92 An interim review of the LDP undertaken by the University of South Wales in 2014 made a number of recommendations to support the continued implementation of the LDP. At a strategic level, the review identified a need to map LDP activities with greater clarity and visibility to the existing Leadership Capability Framework with the intention to increase awareness of the ways in which the LDP seeks to develop specific leadership behaviours in order to address gaps in the leadership capacity and capability of the organisation. Research with staff indicated that there may still be a need to map more coherently the ways in which the leadership training and qualifications on offer complement each other. Interview data with staff and line managers alike suggested that individuals were more like to cite personal aspirations, rather than strategic awareness and organisational objectives as a key motivation for participating in leadership development. However, there were some indications among staff and senior managers that a clearer understanding of the ways in which the LD offer maps to specific leadership development behaviours and competencies may empower staff to take ownership of, broker opportunities for and rationalise their professional development activities.

We've said to some people; actually we're not sure it's the right course for you, maybe if you go on this one first. And that works both ways, and actually more people are applying to L3 because they've never done any management training

before and we've said 'look, you're not going to find it challenging, you're not going to find it stretching at your level... but when you don't know about it, you don't recognise that. And sure enough, we had one or two people who, after two three sessions, said 'yeah, you're right, I think we need to go on the L5'.

HR representative, Powys County Council

- 4.93 Furthermore, the interim review recommended that a strategic view needed to be taken to decisions about how best to deploy the skills of leaders who had benefited from the LDP. Finally, the review identified a need to secure greater participation and endorsement from among senior leadership with a view to promoting and embedding a culture of strong leadership built on a shared understanding of leadership values and behaviours. This research suggests that staff and line managers recognise a need for the continued engagement of senior leadership in embedding a culture of leadership development. A number of staff perceived that a previous lack of engagement among senior leaders had resulted in different approaches to management and the absence of a shared language to articulate the vision and objectives of the council. Staff also suggested that leaders may encounter unexpected team dynamics and challenges to their leadership, which may not feel comfortable.

I'm not entirely convinced that it's always been comfortable for directors to allow leaders in the organisation to challenge what they may or may not think is the right direction.

Staff, Powys County Council

#### *Partnership working*

- 4.94 The implementation of a shared approach to leadership development between the council and strategic partner, Powys Teaching Health Board may also require further articulation to ensure that the values and the behaviours which underpin the leadership competency framework are threaded through the approach to partnership working.

If we're talking about creating a leadership and workforce culture across the two organisations so we can work together, you have to hold to that and walk the talk so we have to make sure that all those opportunities are joint and combined. Having a conference that is separate again didn't quite fit with the narrative but that said it was still an excellent conference and people took a lot from it.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.95 At an operational level, recommendations included a need to clarify the role of line management in supporting the process of leadership development, specifically in relation to the identification and selection of individuals for leadership development and the application of this rationale and subsequent process to address priorities around workforce development and future proofing. The review also recommended a more structured approach to the promotion and selection of individuals for the different levels available through the LDP, with a particular focus on considering which level would be appropriate for which staff. This research suggests that there may still be a need to rationalise systems and processes to facilitate the formal communication and selection of individuals to participate in leadership development. Some staff and line managers were able to identify the long-term gains of the council's approach to communicating and encouraging participation in the leadership offer and enabling culture change.

It's been a long-term vision about encouraging volunteers rather than conscripting, you must do... Although it takes longer, I think that's the right way to do it. It becomes more embedded that way and you build the culture it permeates more naturally that way rather than it coming from the top and saying this is how it's going to be done now. It's important to build from the bottom up, open to all...

Staff, Powys County Council

- 4.96 However, the lack of a formal and structured approach to the selection and development of future leaders was recognised as a potential cause of inconsistencies and disparity across service areas. Staff recognised the role of line managers as key to enabling a transparent and consistent approach to leadership development.

I heard about it because these things come out on the intranet and on emails to everybody and I asked my line manager at the time if I could go on it. I think that's one of the issues with it really, that it does rely on line manager's 'allowing' [indicated inverted commas] their staff to go on the training.

Staff, Powys County Council

4.97 HR representatives described an application process that was necessary to aid the selection of individuals to participate in leadership development training. HR professionals emphasised the importance of considering the level, suitability and motivation for accessing development opportunities, as well as the supportive systems in place to commit sufficient time and capacity to undertake and apply the training.

We would look at so what's their current role, the level they're working at, what's their aspiration. We'd look at what's their motivation. Generally, we'd look at their motivation for wanting learning.

HR representative, Powys County Council

4.98 However, among staff, the perceived lack of a corporate approach to the selection of individuals for leadership development may also leave too much margin for error with respect to the awareness of leadership development opportunities, their suitability and intended learning outcomes, which this research suggests may require greater consideration.

I may have missed but it wasn't necessarily clear, well how do you get onto that talent programme, who gets selected, where could that take you, what are the processes around it.

Staff, Powys County Council

4.99 It may also depend on the motivation, ability and capacity of staff to make an accurate self-assessment of their existing skills and leadership potential.

[*The Leadership Development offer*] is a point of discovery rather than a 'this is available for you'.

Staff, Powys County Council

4.100 With regard to continuous professional development, knowledge transfer and progression, the review suggested that the LDP could be integrated into

development pathways of those seeking to progress into management and considered a precursor to promotion. Greater education and promotion around provision offered to participants to support knowledge transfer following the LDP, such as action learning sets was recommended to facilitate the cultural shift required to support continued professional development. Coaching was considered to be highly valued but in need of further promotion and clarity with regards to the outcomes participants might expect to achieve.

- 4.101 The interim review also identified a number of factors which evidence suggests need to be in place to achieve culture change. Undertaking an environmental analysis to identify the changes that may be required to enable a supportive culture to foster desirable leadership attitudes and behaviours was felt to be needed. The review identified a number of aspects to consider in an environmental analysis and recommended that the Council begin to understand the personal motivation and ability of individual leaders to engage in leadership development and the role that institutional and structural factors play in influencing these attitudes and behaviours. As such, it suggested that individuals who held positions or skills in influencing opinion within the Council be engaged in LDP activities. The review also suggested introducing a rewards structure aligned with participation in the LDP to incentivise further involvement in the LDP.

*Experiences of participation in talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.102 According to HR professionals, critical to implementing and enabling participation in the leadership development offer in Powys County Council was the approach taken to ring-fence a centralised budget for leadership and management training drawn in equal proportions from departmental budgets. Though, there were indications that different financial provision or funding sources may need to be made available to ensure the sustainability of leadership and management training to meet the needs of the current workforce. It was suggested that a balance may need to be found between the provision of funding and support to attract new talent, such as through apprenticeship schemes and provision to support the long-term development of existing staff.

In the current financial climate among local authorities, I need to spend money prudently and I think we need to look at how levy funding can be used for training, upskilling our existing staff.

HR representative, Powys County Council

4.103 HR representatives consistently cited the benefits of being able to collaborate with the contracted training provider to tailor the offer and suite of qualifications to suit the needs of their workforce and professional environment. However, both HR professionals and staff highlighted restrictive HR policies and procedures as a barrier to participating in leadership development opportunities.

There's something about needing to be flexible and creative to give people the space to grow, whilst also having these rigid HR policies and procedures. There is a bit of tension between those two things I think.

Staff, Powys County Council

4.104 Staff and line managers identified similar enablers and barriers to participation in leadership development opportunities as those in other local authorities. Most commonly mentioned among the enablers staff identified was the attitude of individuals' line manager and the extent to which they were able to promote or model the value of leadership development. The principal barrier that line managers faced with regards to enabling the take up of leadership development opportunities was creating sufficient capacity within the team to manage the short-term impacts of participation in training on day to day operations. This finding was echoed among staff employed with Powys Teaching Health Board.

I think, for a small team, with pretty much all single points of failure, for people to take time out to do the training has an impact that the rest of team has to carry.

Line Manager, Powys Teaching Health Board

4.105 In the perceived absence of a transparent corporate selection process, capacity appeared to be a key factor influencing staff perceptions about the availability and accessibility of leadership development opportunities. Sufficient capacity may be key to the provision of equality of opportunity and choice.

I get accused then of being a little bit, what was it? I can't remember the term now, it wasn't favouritism, but it was oh you spend more time with that person than you do with me, you should treat everybody the same.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

4.106 The support provided by line managers during and following staff participation in leadership development provision was considered key to sustaining a culture of

learning in which staff might put their skills into practice. Data suggest that the infrastructure and support to build upon the learning staff take away from participating in formal training may be sustained through the efforts of supportive and influential 'champions' of leadership development. A number of line managers identified that they played a key role in role modelling the leadership values and behaviours which may be attained through leadership development and encouraging others to aspire to similar positions.

I have a huge role to play in terms of being a role model, encouraging leadership development and talent across the whole team.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.107 The effect of former line managers role modelling these values and behaviours were noted to have influenced the positive views these line managers held about leadership development. Positive and supportive relationships with former line managers who had promoted the value of leadership development and continuous professional development, more broadly, were felt by line managers to be an important factor in their own career progression and to influence their perceptions of their role as line managers.

I had two fantastic role models as managers who really set this off for me and really encouraged me to do it. I've very much taken the lead from how they encouraged me and others to do it and supported others to lead and up-skill and so I've continued on the journey.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.108 However, some staff identified the risks that may emerge when influential leaders and managers leave the team or organisation and prompt changes in the focus and momentum of the team.

Once [line manager] left the support went, it just started to collapse a little bit – the interest was lost.

Staff, Powys County Council

- 4.109 Some line managers highlighted the role that the management structure of which they were a part and drew upon for support played in helping them to envision and create a working environment conducive to further learning and development. The ways in which interpersonal factors intersect with environmental factors to create

and embed a culture of learning and development were recognised to contribute to establishing the attitudinal and behavioural norms valued by the majority of line managers and staff alike.

Yeah, it's been, it's been fairly easy to do, because I am in a position where I have the freedom to do it. I manage my team and I have a line manager, my line manager doesn't micromanage anything I do so it is essentially up to me as to how I use my leadership skills and how I develop my team. And I see it more about how I transfer my learning to other people, and help the team to develop themselves.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.110 There were however some indications in interview data from some line managers and staff that the provision of organisational structure and formal processes to support the application and transfer of leadership skills and knowledge may be needed. Views differed with regards to the potential frameworks and support which may be required to encourage shifts in practice following participation in formal training and where responsibility should best reside for setting out the intended outcomes of participating in the various aspects of the leadership development offer.

I think we could perhaps be a bit more specific about what we're expecting and it is more self-governed, down to individuals as to whether they choose to make those changes and choose to put it into practice. I think we ought to be using the investment; given the investment we've had we ought to be much more focused in terms of what our expectations of those individuals are. It's a huge investment.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

*Outcomes and impact of the talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.111 Among the outcomes about which the majority of staff and line managers agree was a reorientation of individuals' focus in their relationships with themselves and with others. Line managers and staff alike valued the focus which the training placed on the emotional and relational aspects of leadership and management. A number of participants cited the approach of the trainer and the quality of the relationships fostered during the training. Learning and development outcomes most commonly mentioned among staff and line managers were enhanced self-awareness, refined communication and relationship building skills, an improved ability to manage

difficult conversations and undertake effective performance management and greater tendency to seek different perspectives from outside their immediate area of responsibility to solve problems. One line manager noted that their views about what should comprise the definition of effective leadership had shifted to include values and behaviours.

Before doing the ILM 7, I don't think I would have considered values and behaviours an important part of leadership [...] Now I consider it to be key.

Line Manager, Powys Teaching Health Board

- 4.112 A number of line managers identified that leadership development training had helped to develop the emotional intelligence, language and understanding to apply management processes more effectively.

I think the training has given me and them a new narrative to have those difficult conversations. You know, to come at it in a slightly different way and looking at things through a slightly different lens.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.113 Highly rated among the learning and development outcomes mentioned by both staff and line managers were the strength and diversity of the relationships they formed with others as a consequence of participating in the training.

I think one of the main unexpected benefits has been actually working and developing relationships with people across different service areas across the organisation. Because we partner up with the health board too, it's actually getting to know people that I wouldn't otherwise have go to know.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.114 There were mixed views about the effectiveness of action learning as a tool to achieve specific outcomes, such as problem solving but there were indications that some were able to draw synergies between the principles of action learning and the values and behaviours leadership development training may seek to embed.

I'm not very good at the action learning – that was a new experience for me and I did struggle with it [...] I am very much a sort of problem solver and, I'd come with

a problem hopefully we will discuss it, we are out of the door and hopefully we've got an action. Whereas I think that was one of the learning elements I've taken out of it, in that you can't solve everything.

Staff, Powys County Council

- 4.116 For some, action learning groups appeared to provide staff with opportunities to address cultural issues or areas of interest in a safe space where participants may create supportive relationships and networks and to explore how features of supportive and productive group dynamics may be transposed into the broader work environment.

There's a small group of us that have been talking about setting up a female action learning set and exploring that particular dynamic of how as a group of women, how we can create that sense of solidarity and support each other as a group of leaders. So we've got a meeting scheduled to look at what that might be. So you start to build those mutually supportive networks I think.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.117 Those who spoke positively about action learning tended to identify parallels between it and coaching approaches. They viewed action learning as a safe forum in which to practise skills, apply reflective thinking and capture different perspectives on a challenge.

It has been more use helping other people with their issues. I've taken a few issues to them, but generally speaking I'd say what I do is I helped more with other people's issues. It is a bit like coaching in some respects. But group coaching I suppose.

Staff, Powys County Council

- 4.118 There was evidence among staff and line managers on the positive effects of upskilling individuals to take a coaching approach to leadership and management. Line managers tended to comment on the greater likelihood of staff to take ownership of tasks, formulate solutions and take the initiative to implement improvements and changes.

It's taking the ownership of tasks. So if there are changes, or there are processes that they've done, like I say now they'll take ownership of it, so they'll actually formulate the answer first. And then say is this the way we can do it now, and

they've already done it, they've taken it and said there you go, and I can now instead of me having to pick it up they're actually challenging the things that we do and making it more efficient or making things better or actually getting rid of processes. And it's quite good because with the shrinking workforce you've got to manage your time well.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

- 4.119 The benefits of coaching were also identified by staff, some of whom noted that coaching was key to building their confidence and self-efficacy within the structure of a supportive managerial relationship.

I found that it was more about [my line manager] challenging me to start thinking about it for myself. So it was more around enabling me to do things. To have that confidence, to make decisions for which my role allows. And [...] without you know, thinking that I have to go up the chain of command to get an answer, so I can have that autonomy in my role, so lots of support.

Staff, Powys County Council

- 4.120 A number of staff described how they were able to invest value in their current roles and translate a renewed sense of confidence and self-belief into the motivation to aspire to new challenges. One member of staff suggested that participating in leadership development training enabled an appreciation of the experience they had gained through their role, enough to consider it sufficient to seek new opportunities.

I think it's given me the confidence to go for promotions; it's made me value myself as a support service because very often you concentrate on front end services as being important, but I think it's made me take time out and reflect and think well maybe sometimes front line services can't function without the back office support.

Staff, Powys County Council

#### *Future plans and career aspirations*

- 4.121 There were suggestions among some staff and line managers that there may be a need for the council to provide a more formal framework following the leadership development programme to facilitate the transfer of learning into practice. There were indications that greater support to continue to use the skills that had been developed would be welcomed.

People form quite strong bonds on the [learning development] course and generally people oh let's get together and never do. I think some of the really strong networking opportunities are lost. I think what's needed is maybe a more formal inclusion of a follow-up session, whether that's six months after the course or something like that, to bring people back and not only re-establish the network but also share the learning that they've had through implementing some of the learning in the workplace. I've always felt that's a missed opportunity.

Line Manager, Powys Teaching Health Board

4.122 There was evidence of some staff struggling to complete assignments following participation which were necessary to secure a recognised qualification and access continuous professional development opportunities. These barriers were noted among HR professionals who acknowledged previously high attrition rates among those who had completed coaching training but failed to secure the qualification and therefore further opportunities to apply the skills in a formal capacity. This highly skilled section of the workforce may not be being deployed to their full potential meaning that capacity building gains within the organisation are potentially being lost. Some suggested that support to continue with relevant assignments and opportunities to put learning into practice may need to be put in place centrally to ring-fence time and space for both staff and line managers to continue their learning.

I think there should be probably more engagement after the process, otherwise [...] if you go on any training or development and you don't put it into practice afterwards you will just naturally revert back to where you were before [...] So I think it is important that with the ILM 5 there was that action learning set that came out of it that continued, I don't know what the answer is with it, because I think it has got to be down to line managers to keep reviewing how they're doing. But I don't think, there's no culture of, of doing that. And there's no requirement for people do it, and if there's no requirement, people generally won't do it.

Staff, Powys County Council

4.123 There were some suggestions among line managers that the Personal Development and Review process may not be being applied consistently or in ways that complement the council's approach to leadership development. A number of

staff had received information about LD opportunities through various channels, including but not consistently, conversations with their line manager, the performance review process, peer to peer word of mouth and wider strategic communications. The lack of a formal and consistently applied LD selection process may be a factor influencing the perceptions of some staff, that the attitude of line managers to development or more arbitrary beliefs and assumptions shape decisions with regards to the selection of staff for LD opportunities.

I think that's one of the issues with it really, that it does rely on line manager's 'allowing' in inverted commas their staff to go on the training because they can say no.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

4.124 Assumptions about the consequences of development for succession planning may determine line managers' different attitudes towards development. There were indications that the approach taken to implementing and encouraging participation in the LD offer was driven to some extent by the need to address potential cultural barriers to leadership development.

I think that it's quite an old fashioned concept which is still very much alive in today's culture that there are some line managers that want everybody to be behind them or beneath them, and don't want anybody getting too big for their boots if you like. I think that's a real issue in some parts, and with some people... Line managers have just got to accept that some people might go on to bigger and better things and overtake their line managers, which is the way it happens sometimes.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

4.125 Finally, a number of line managers articulated a need for more robust tools and processes to identify talented staff. Again, the need for definition of talent may be an unintended barrier to individuals assessing their own or the potential of their staff. One line manager suggested that strategic thinking with respect to talent management may be inadvertently narrowing the talent pipeline and potential career pathways open to staff rather than focusing on the development and testing of generic leadership and management competencies as a gateway to progression.

I think we could be far better at talent spotting; for example, I was told I was Mr Transport and if anyone wants something to do with it they come to me. But [...] I

would much rather be known as a really good manager. Do you know what I mean? Rather than shoehorned in. That's what we do. We promote, we probably promote architects, really good architects into managers. And they probably don't do the management as well as they do their architecture.

Line Manager, Powys County Council

### **Torfaen County Council**

- 4.126 The following information has been drawn from a scoping interview with senior leaders at Torfaen.
- 4.127 Discussions were held with senior management and HR at Torfaen County Council. The case study draws out senior managers' experiences of previous approaches to leadership development and talent management within Torfaen County Council and further afield, explores the current barriers and potential enablers of leadership development provision and focuses on the Council's future aspirations with regards to leadership development and talent management.

#### *Rationale, design and intended outcomes of the talent and leadership development offer*

- 4.128 Owing to budgetary constraints there is no structured programme of development currently in place to support leadership development at Torfaen County Council. Instead, the council encourages a focus on leadership development within individual service areas which may include a combination of professional qualifications and participation in external leadership development programmes where supported by business need.
- 4.129 Previous approaches to leadership development have involved offering an MBA accredited Leadership in Public Services (LIPS) programme which was attended by local authority officers and members and colleagues from across the public sector in the police, fire and rescue and health services and the voluntary sector. The accreditation had been provided through the University of Wales, Trinity St. David (then Trinity Carmarthen). The principal aim of the programme was to take a collaborative approach to fostering leadership capacity and capability within and across local public sector partners to ensure shared approach to problem solving and innovation. This collaborative approach to problem solving was perceived to have delivered positive outcomes with regards to delivering service improvement and facilitating networking opportunities.

[The cohort] were working on real time examples of issues ...they took on a project - I think it was maternity waiting times - and thought it through as a team and got some service improvements out of it.

Senior management, Torfaen

- 4.130 Despite the perceived initial successes participants attributed to the LIPS programme, limited financial resources were prioritised to support the delivery of essential public services and brought an end to structured provision to support leadership development.

Our plans are limited by what resources we have to deliver. And if we were to deliver a leadership development programme, it would require external resources to deliver that and it's very expensive. We haven't got the funding to do that so it's a bit of a catch 22 [...] If you've got to fund a package of care for a person who's very vulnerable, or spend £20,000 into getting someone an MBA, you're going to fund the social care, I'm afraid that's the reality.

HR representative, Torfaen County Council

- 4.131 Since delivery of the LIPS programme ceased, support to build leadership capacity and capability has largely been focused on the top tier of management and comprises development sessions aimed at the cabinet and leadership team, delivered on a needs-led basis.

*Barriers and enablers to the leadership development and talent management offer*

- 4.132 A lack of funding to support the development and sustainability of leadership development provision was considered to be most significant barrier to offering a structured and accredited leadership development offer. Limited resources necessitated a focus of service delivery and continuity rather than a long-term, strategic approach to workforce and succession planning. Interviewees were conscious of potential consequences arising from these spending decisions, and attributed a perceived lack of individuals described as being ready to undertake leadership roles within the council as an impact of a lack of investment in leadership development.

We're seeing a consequence of the lack of investment [in leadership development], and I'm speaking from experience now, in that it's drying up. We are seeing fewer people with the capacity to be able to – and the ambition to a

certain extent – move into leadership roles... We're having to look externally for candidates for – Heads of Service roles, in particular – because we don't have the cohort of staff in-house who have been prepared and are ready to take on those roles.

HR representative, Torfaen County Council

4.133 The rationale and maturity of selection processes in place to identify talent and potential was considered to be a barrier to implementing formal approach to talent management and identifying future leaders. Interviewees perceived there to be gaps with regards to the way in which the current performance appraisal system and processes enables robust identification of talented staff with leadership potential and justification for investment in their development. It was felt that further consideration may need to be given to issues of equality and diversity and how they might influence the selection and development of future leaders.

4.134 Informal collaboration with other local authorities and public sector bodies was felt, to some extent to be an enabler of professional development opportunities. It was recognised that informal mentoring already takes place across the public sector at a senior leadership level and particularly in the case of women progressing or looking to progress into senior roles. It was felt that a formal programme or forum established to facilitate the brokerage of mentoring relationships could add value to a leadership development offer. However, with respect to collaboration with stakeholders and potential delivery partners of leadership development and talent management provision, it was stressed that collaboration may only be considered an enabler when other resources and conditions were in place to ensure that the process could be sufficiently financed and the outputs co-designed and produced, with particular attention paid to the specific needs of the organisation.

I guess we are all in the same boat and coming together without any money collectively doesn't solve the problem, y'know, we can collaborate, but if we don't have the resource to collaborate...and we're all in the same boat and we are talking about collaboration ultimately, not just from a leadership development or just a development perspective generally, then there isn't the cash to be able to deliver anything meaningful across the government.

HR representative, Torfaen County Council

Over the years we've had offers coming out of Academi, previously, known as Public Services Management Wales( PSMW), but it was almost offering something that we had already implemented ourselves. When we had more money, we had various programmes [...] and then PSMW would offer us something that they had created without really much dialogue with local government about our needs.

HR representative, Torfaen County Council

- 4.135 The expertise of universities were considered to be an enabler to designing and implementing leadership development provision but it was felt that limited funds had stunted the growth of previous relationships with academia which had been facilitated in partnership with the WLGA.

## 5. Discussion

- 5.1 This section of the report synthesises key findings of the primary research with data drawn from a semi-structured interview undertaken with a representative from the Wales Audit Office, the public sector watchdog for Wales, in order to make some interpretations with respect to the development of good practice in leadership development and talent management. The Wales Audit Office facilitates the Good Practice Exchange, which constitutes a series of free, shared learning events across Wales intended to promote good practice and collaboration within and between public sector organisations and those responsible for delivering public services.
- 5.2 It is important to note that these findings are based on the perspectives of a small cross-section of staff across three local authorities that have taken different approaches to the design and implementation of leadership development provision and one local authority that aspires to implement, but does not yet have a leadership development offer.
- 5.3 Efforts have been made to sample from a broad cross-section of employees, but it is important to acknowledge the potential for selection bias in the study in that those who have participated in LD activities, and are therefore more likely to have positive views of LD, may have been more likely to volunteer for the study. However, in the case of this study, participants who have engaged in LD are better positioned to share their informed views and experiences to provide us with rich, empirical data to better understand the scope, outcomes and potential impact of LD provision in local government settings
- 5.4 While these findings should not be generalised beyond this sample, they do provide rich in-depth data with regards to the perceptions, views and experiences of leadership development among staff at various tiers of management within local authorities that have taken diverse approaches to implementing LD provision. The strength of these case studies is that they provide empirically rich, context-specific and holistic accounts of the LD provision that has been implemented in different local authorities. The intention is that they will provide both Academi Wales and local authorities with rich data from which to test theories and approaches to leadership development.

## **Situational leadership in the current context of austerity**

- 5.5 Given the current financial context in which local authorities are delivering public services, it is arguably to be expected that public sector leaders cite a need to futureproof as a key driver for designing and implementing leadership development programmes. All senior leaders interviewed over the course of this research associated leadership development to some extent, with organisational capacity and capability to drive change and transformation. However, the extent to which line management and staff were able to articulate the ways the leadership development offer in their local authority was a product of and a response appropriate to these external conditions and drivers was more limited.
- 5.6 Fairly consistently reported among line managers and staff alike was the importance of equipping and empowering staff with the strategic insight and long-term objectives of the organisation and explicitly mapping the aims, content and intended outcomes of the leadership development offer to that shared vision and goals. The evidence suggests that providing one without the other or failing to clearly articulate the links between leadership development activities, pathways and outcomes to organisational strategy may be a barrier to embedding the self-directed learning culture organisations reportedly wish to cultivate. In these case studies, it appears that even within the organisation which adopted a participatory, staff-led model of leadership development there is a perceived need to situate and articulate the leadership development offer within a broader strategic framework, within which its activities, outputs and outcomes can explicitly be traced to organisational goals.
- 5.7 A significant number of staff expressed a desire for greater coherence, integration and in some cases, external validation of the leadership development activities on offer. Staff wanted to be able to clearly identify their appropriate entry point into leadership development, understand the relevance and contribution of their prior learning and experience to their choice of LD activities and plan the outcomes they wish to achieve. Some staff, particularly in the Vale of Glamorgan, felt the need for greater choice with respect to combining or progressing onto external accredited learning to achieve their goals. In addition, staff wanted to be able to access information, advice and guidance about these questions in relation to the LD offer through two principal avenues; though a mutually supportive and progressive relationship with their line manager and through an informed and impartial learning

and development workforce trained to help individuals make decisions about and navigate pathways through and external bolt-ons to the LD offer.

- 5.8 With respect to the case studies featured in this research, there is evidence to suggest that staff across a small sample of service areas and tiers of management in Gwynedd County Council may be better able to consistently articulate and identify the strategic framework, aims and outcomes expected of the LD offer. Line managers and staff were better able to identify the different component parts of the LD offer, the sections of the workforce at which they were aimed and the intended outcomes of LD activities. Ffordd Gwynedd or the Gwynedd Way would appear to be an effective communications vehicle through which to disseminate more universally consistent messages about the approach to LD within and beyond the council to potentially include external stakeholders and citizens. The LD model at Gwynedd County Council, excepting some areas for future research and development, would appear to represent a promising values and behaviours framework in which to address and develop the leadership development needs and aspirations of existing staff and attract and develop the talents and competencies of new staff to the council.

### **The emotional business of leadership**

- 5.9 Staff at all tiers of management within the local authorities that participated in the research recognised the role of culture and the working environment in facilitating, or indeed stifling learning and development. For most, a common *outcome* of leadership development was considered to be providing leaders and potential leaders with the attitudes, behaviours and the relational capacity to enable culture change.
- 5.10 Most commonly valued among the outcomes staff and line managers attributed to the different LD activities in which they had participated were the interpersonal capabilities and capacities they felt they had acquired to reflect, communicate, influence and collaborate more effectively with others. Interviewees, across all local authorities that participated in this research, tended to attribute most value to the elements of the LD offer which were felt to be rooted in the concept of emotional intelligence and its relationship to effective leadership. This was considered to be a particular feature of the LD offer, comprising a suite of ILM accredited courses, available to staff at Powys County Council.

- 5.11 Line managers tended to give credit to the training for helping them to develop their reflective thinking capacities and their relational and communication skills, which they felt enabled them create space and time for innovation and long-term strategic planning and to manage the performance of their teams more effectively through facilitating more attuned and outcome-driven conversations with their staff. Staff who had participated in LD activities tended to highlight the role it had played in giving them confidence to voice their views and ideas, take ownership of meeting challenges or introducing new approaches to problem solving and take a broader view on the opportunities and pathways to career progression that might be available to them in future.
- 5.12 In the case of the Vale of Glamorgan however, the development and implementation of the LD offer may be considered a *method* of enabling culture change, rather than an *outcome* of participating in LA activities, such as the Leadership Cafe. Interviewees valued the *Big Conversation* staff engagement activity undertaken by the council to inform the Staff Charter, Management Competency Framework and the #ItsAboutMe performance appraisal process, and acknowledged that the Leadership Cafe had emerged from and sustained, to some degree, a culture of participation which some had been able to transfer to their service area. However, some evidence suggests that for some staff, in pockets of the council where there may be a less positive and inclusive approach to leadership development, the Leadership Cafe may remain out of reach. The open-access nature of the Leadership Cafe may only be experienced by those staff who are already working within Directorates that take a progressive approach to leadership development and encourage staff to engage in such opportunities. In addition, there is evidence that some staff, who may work in satellite offices or having family and caring commitments, feel excluded from the Leadership Cafe owing to the timings and locations of sessions, which has implications for the way in which employers strengthen the pipeline of future leaders with inherent and acquired diversity. The voluntary and staff-led nature of the Leadership Cafe model may be a barrier to addressing these challenges. It does appear to be clear that the approach taken in the Vale of Glamorgan to involve staff in the long-term transformation agenda of the council and the role LD has to play in that can create and sustain an environment conducive to continuous learning, networking and creative practices, but it is less clear to what extent the Leadership Cafe is a genuine entry point into further

development and progression for participants or yet inclusive forum for all who may lack the desire and potential but the capacity and supportive structures to participate.

### **Citizen involvement as a driver of leadership development**

- 5.13 There are indications that the councils who partook in this research are, to different degrees, beginning to consider the views, experiences and expectations of citizens in approaches to leadership development. This is particularly evident in the long-term thinking articulated by senior leadership at Powys County Council, who identify a role for the public in the transformation of public services. It is not altogether evident to what extent public engagement and consultation may inform its approach to leadership development, but this research points to some appetite among councils to better capture and consider public opinion, not just a means of shaping and transforming services but as a means of shaping the accompanying workforce strategy and planning to achieve long-term change. Here, the approach taken in Gwynedd County Council to align the strands of its LD offer with the future needs and development of a workforce that must be fit for purpose in a changing public service environment, may represent an example of good practice.
- 5.14 There are indications that the organisations who participated in this research are considering ways in which they might utilise public involvement to inform their workforce planning. The WAO recognise the potential of adopting a staff engagement approach to involve citizens in shaping the workforce development strategies of organisations that are required to futureproof public services. Referring to the work of the Good Practice Exchange, the WAO suggests that there may need to be a shift in the way some local authorities view and approach leadership development; moving away from a more historic approach where the skills and aptitudes in demand across local government were defined from within and resulted in an arguably more internalised model of assessing potential and organising development and progression. Instead, WAO argues that local government may need to equip staff and future leaders to work in a more dynamic, multi-dimensional environment, which is shaped by cross-sector collaboration and partnership working, innovation and individuals' abilities to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing environment.
- 5.15 Behaviours associated with adaptive leadership were frequently highlighted by staff, line managers and senior leaders alike across all organisations that participated in

this research. These included leaders' abilities to think and act during times of complexity, solve complex problems, engage groups in organisational change and have the emotional intelligence necessary to build resilient teams and drive change that responds to the evolving needs of citizens and communities. Leadership development, in this context, was felt by senior leaders in these organisations to be facilitator of change and in Powys County Council, a key enabler of the sustainability that was perceived to arise from collaborating within and across the wider systems in which the organisation is situated.

### **Line management practice as a vehicle for culture change**

- 5.16 Participants across every tier of management in these local authorities spoke about the need for the development of a learning culture, underpinned by leadership behaviours to be supported by the organisation's approach to performance management. Though it would appear that line management practice varies greatly, both in terms of approach and application, across the local authorities that participated in this research, the evidence suggests that the quality of the relationship staff enjoy with their line manager can be a key motivator to participate and embed learning from LD opportunities and a vehicle for creating a positive learning culture that is ripe for leadership development. Many line managers themselves attributed their positive approach to professional development and leadership development more specifically to an encouraging and supportive line manager who had set them on a path to leadership. These line managers articulated that they had a considerable role to play in role-modelling the attitudes, behaviours and sustaining a culture in which their staff and peers could thrive. They tended to accept and take a more positive view of the internal change and movement that investing in staff development can create by noting that they had a responsibility to create an environment in which their staff felt motivated to work and progress.
- 5.17 Most commonly, line managers who took a particularly positive view of leadership development tended to think of it as a reciprocal relationship with mutual benefits for staff, themselves and the wider team. Most chose to highlight that though LD opportunities may only be available to select staff at particular times, owing to the distribution of work with the team, the readiness of staff and the pressure of prioritising service delivery, that the impacts of participating in LD could be shared and multi-directional. It is important to acknowledge that line managers highlighted

the sometimes difficult feelings, behaviours and conversations that could be provoked in peers and colleagues, who might perceive LD to only be available to a select few or to reward good performance, or experience the impact of colleagues participating in LD activities on the dynamics of the team or their trusted relationships. However, they offered multiple examples of how supporting staff through LD activities had helped them to develop their own management practice, apply their own learning, reconfigure their professional relationships to allow for growth and had notable benefits with respect to their capacity to delegate, generate innovative ideas and harness the energy of their staff to advocate for and deliver change.

### **Sustaining and sharing the impact of leadership development**

- 5.18 Across all local authorities that participated in this research, line managers and staff spoke about how the pressures of increased demands on public services and working in front-line service delivery could limit the time and degree of importance placed on professional development, and LD more specifically. In some service areas, LD or any professional development exceeding the qualifications and training required to work in a particular profession, could be crowded out completely owing to the pressures of meeting day to day demand on services. Most commonly valued among line managers and staff alike was the support of line managers to ring-fence time and space to enable individuals to apply what they had learned, without fear of reproach or envy or the need to compromise their development to meet the immediate demands of the service, and share that learning among their peers.
- 5.19 Organisations that participated in this research had different approaches to helping staff sustain their development following participation in LD activities, ranging from participation in action learning sets to working towards a coaching qualification and opting to coach others. Though there were mixed opinions about the value of action learning, potentially owing to different understandings of the intention behind action learning sets, and difficulties engaging in coaching owing to the capacity required to complete assignments, individuals who had participated in LD identified the value of coaching approaches in supporting them to implement their learning, challenge existing practices and identify their next steps. A WAO representative also suggested that evidence captured through the Good Practice Exchange points to benefits of performance management systems and processes that are underpinned by coaching principles and practice. The majority of both staff and line managers

identified the importance of coaching to helping them to develop a reflective stance on their practice and to empower themselves and others to question, challenge and take ownership of work. There was evidence that different service areas, and specific teams, may be more proactive in creating opportunities for staff to build on their learning following their participation in more centralised LD activities. There were indications that the attitude and approach of line management in creating a safe team culture in which staff can apply, seek and receive feedback and review what they have learned can be instrumental in knowledge transfer.

- 5.20 The impact of culture and the working environment on individuals' ability to translate into practice and transfer the benefits of what they have learned to others appears to be an important factor influencing the indirect benefits of leadership development. Though there were differences of opinion with regards to where this follow-up support might be provided, there were some suggestions of interesting models to facilitate the effective application and transfer of learning. Most staff and line managers appear to favour follow-up support and opportunities delivered within teams and service-areas, rather than through a centralised provision; however there was acknowledgement among some line managers that dedicated forums in which groups of learners could meet regularly, retain the relationships and networks they had created and support each other to problem solve would be welcome.
- 5.21 Among those models suggested by some participants which would benefit from being trialled and evaluated were project or working groups situated within teams that were tasked with identifying efficiencies or solving problems through developing innovative methods or models of delivery. These groups were supported or sponsored by senior management and in some cases, had received recognition for their work through a staff recognition or reward scheme. Others included assigning or 'seconding' staff who had participated in LD activities to other teams to work on specific projects that might require alternative perspectives on a problem or particular expertise.

### **Defining, identifying and supporting talent**

- 5.22 Across all local authorities that participated in this research, staff, line managers and senior leaders identified that talent identification and development was an area of their LD offer that required better conceptualisation. It was clear that no accepted definition of talent was in use within any local authority or across particular service areas within organisations. Among the case studies presented here, Gwynedd

County Council has the most articulated mechanism and pathway for identifying and supporting talent development through its Developing Potential Scheme. The scheme is available at management level and above and looks to equip talented individuals within the existing workforce with the leadership and management behaviours associated with a more senior leadership position. This model would appear to be most formal talent management pathway of those explored in these case studies, but evidence suggests that definition of talent and the accompanying selection processes in place to identify staff with talent may require more formulation and if not, better communication.

5.23 There is however evidence to suggest that some staff are supportive of talent management programme equipping individuals who may demonstrate talent in their field of expertise or profession with the generic skills and behaviours to progress into leadership positions. The provision available to attract new talent into the council, namely the Managers of Tomorrow and the Specialists of Tomorrow Schemes would also appear to be valued by staff and line managers within Gwynedd County Council as means of meeting the skills shortages some identify within particular professions or as a result of an aging workforce. It is important to note however that this particular approach to talent identification and management conflates talent with the desire to progress into leadership and among staff who are already operating at management level. In the Vale of Glamorgan, for example there were some indications that in some service areas the #ItsAboutMe staff appraisal process was facilitating conversations between line managers and staff that were allowing some line managers to identify opportunities to deploy and build on the prior learning, qualifications and experience of staff. Some line managers recognised the need for a more holistic approach to talent management that acknowledges the specialist skills and expertise that individuals may neither be maximising in their existing roles nor utilising through an existing LD offer. This approach might be particularly important for unlocking the talents and interests of staff whose potential may otherwise only be assessed in the context of their current profession or within the scope of the opportunities available to them to progress. It may promote alternative ways of thinking about talent management as a potential route to both vertical and horizontal leadership; that is a route to either progress vertically through tiers of management into senior leadership or to expand the scope

of an individual's current role and influence through deploying them as a mentor, coach or secondee.

### **Evidence based approaches to leadership development**

- 5.24 Among all local authorities represented in these case studies, there was a consensus that adopting an evidence-based approach to developing, measuring the impact and sustaining leadership development provision was an important and necessary means of justifying future investment in LD. All local authorities had taken steps to measure the outcomes of LD provision.
- 5.25 Gwynedd County Council had undertaken a cost benefit analysis of the LD provision to understand to what extent an investment in leadership development may have been offset by individuals who had participated in LD choosing to take up progression opportunities outside the council.
- 5.26 Powys County Council had undertaken an exercise to better understand the internal take-up and progression of individuals who had participated in the LD offer as a means of mapping internal cultural variations between teams that may be more or less supportive of leadership development.
- 5.27 The Vale of Glamorgan undertakes a Staff Survey as a means of measuring the perceptions of staff with respect to council progress against the objectives set out in its Staff Charter. Although it cannot be said to be a means of attributing impacts specifically to the presence or any participation in the Leadership Cafe, which is its distributed leadership development offer, it is an indicator of change underpinned by data which allows comparisons to be made across Directorates on measures such as performance management, leadership and communication.
- 5.28 Given the importance of the working environment and culture on the perceived effectiveness of leadership development, there may be a need to develop approaches to evaluation which allow local authorities to measure the institutional and cultural factors influencing the implementation of LD provision and knowledge transfer.

## **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

- 6.1 This section sets out a series of conclusions and recommendations formulated on the basis of the key research findings presented in this report. It is important to acknowledge that these findings are based on the perspectives of a small cross-section of staff across three local authorities that have taken different approaches to the design and implementation of leadership development provision and one local authority that aspires to implement, but does not yet have a leadership development offer.

### **Conclusions**

- 6.2 Local authorities make positive associations between leadership development and capacity and capability to deliver service transformation and organisational change. Leadership development was considered, among those that had an LD offer in place and those that aspired to, as a key enabler of better collaboration, partnership working and innovation. The majority of research participants identified examples of the ways in which participating in LD opportunities had prompted attitudinal and behavioural change with respect to themselves and their teams, which they equated with their abilities to influence positive culture change.
- 6.3 Local authorities held mixed views and approaches with respect to the need for and the application of selection processes for leadership development provision. The majority of research participants were hesitant to define, formalise and communicate selection criteria, particularly with respect to supporting their existing workforce, owing to concerns about the impact of a centralised selection process on the culture and relationships within and between teams and the effect on staff morale and performance. There were also some concerns about the extent to which robust, mature and defensible frameworks were in place to underpin a selection process, such as a strategic and clearly articulated definition of talent or leadership potential. The lack of clarity or in some cases communication, with respect to any selection criteria for LD opportunities was felt by some to be contributing to attitudes and perceptions among staff and peers that may be an obstacle to progression for some staff.
- 6.4 There was a need among staff for better information about and communication of LD opportunities to empower staff to make informed decisions about and plan their LD pathway. Staff and line managers in some areas wanted clearer information

about the objectives, content, and intended outcomes of development opportunities in order to better judge the level, relevance and direction of development opportunities with respect to individuals' prior learning and experience and their aspirations for progression. There was evidence that staff and line managers, to some degree, would benefit from guidance from HR with regards to the scope, relevance and linkages between courses and accreditation. Staff and line managers articulated a need for options to undertake external accredited development and wanted information to be made available about how this provision might complement the suite of internal LD opportunities for staff.

- 6.5 The attitudes and behaviours of line management were considered an important indicator and enabler of a positive learning culture within teams. The majority of research participants identified that the relationship and interactions they had with their line manager were key to their decision to register their interest or accept encouragement to participate in LD. Performance management tools could be an effective facilitator of holistic conversations that supported line managers to identify untapped talent, leadership aspirations and potential, but this appeared dependent on the perceived value of LD to service delivery and continuity as well as the attitude and capacities of line management to engage in discussions about LD.
- 6.6 Among the elements of LD provision that were most highly valued by line managers were those that equipped participants with an understanding of the part of emotional intelligence, interpersonal and team dynamics to performance and organisational culture. Line managers, and some staff, identified that participating in LD had enabled them to develop better communication skills, stronger negotiation and influencing skills and to improve their relationships with others by emphasising the role of reflective thinking skills and emotional attunement in positive and productive relationships.
- 6.7 Highly valued among line managers and staff were the outcomes attributed to the coaching methodologies and practices embedded within most LD provision. There was agreement among the majority of research participants that taking part in LD opportunities that comprised coaching approaches and techniques, had allowed them to reconfigure their relationship with their line manager and their peers. For most staff this was a positive outcome, which staff described gave them permission to offer constructive challenge, explore ideas and test new ways of working, allowed them to take greater ownership over work and take a more proactive approach to

problem solving, team working and collaboration. Line managers noted that adopting a coaching approach allowed them to critically evaluate the work of the team, redistribute work more effectively and retain more time for strategic thinking and planning.

- 6.8 The creation of a safe and supportive relationship between line management and staff, in which both may experience the mutual benefits of investment in LD was considered a key condition necessary for effective knowledge transfer. All line managers identified that they perceived themselves to have an important role to create space and supportive structures for staff to reflect on, apply and share their learning with others. Most highlighted that this supportive environment for development extended to the ways in which they engaged, communicated and shared their time, feedback and new challenging projects with the wider team. The majority articulated that colleagues and peers, who may not be directly participating in LD, must experience indirect benefits through knowledge transfer, role-modelling and delegation of different work which also allows them opportunities for professional growth.
- 6.9 Line managers and staff wanted better ways of being able to transfer and exercise the knowledge and skills gained through LD within and beyond their immediate teams. Evidence suggests that existing LD provision in some local authorities may not always provide sufficient or structured opportunities for staff to either seek out experiences that allow them to exercise their new skills and knowledge or to share among peers the further learning they acquire as a result of putting their new skills and knowledge into practice following participation in LD. Some staff saw a role for HR in helping to continue to bring together, coordinate and share learning and good practice in a group forum following participation in LD in order to maintain the professional network and practice of continuous learning among staff committed to further personal and professional development. Others felt that the team environment could operate as a safe space in which to practise the skills and approaches acquired from participating in LD opportunities, receive feedback and undergo coaching for continuous improvement.
- 6.10 Local authorities would welcome more meaningful strategies for conceptualising, attracting and developing talent. There was broad agreement at every tier of management across the local authorities represented in these case studies that there is a lack of consensus with respect to the definition of talent and therefore,

what might comprise effective talent management. Approaches to identifying and nurturing talent within the existing workforce, where they were currently in place and distinct from approaches to LD, were typically unique to a service-area or specific profession, informed by a need to succession plan and often dependent on the skills of line managers. Where local authorities had more formalised mechanisms for identifying and developing talent, it tended to be as a means of attracting new staff into local government. This was also reflected among those who were planning to develop their thinking around talent and talent management who intended to capitalise on the apprenticeship levy available to employers through the Apprenticeship Provider Network.

### **Recommendations**

- 6.11 These recommendations have been put forward with a view to informing how Academi Wales and local authorities may, independently or in partnership, implement the findings of this research.

#### *Local authorities*

- 6.12 Local authorities should consider developing mechanisms to include the voice of the citizen to inform its workforce planning activities. Local authorities, through the provision of Public Service Boards (PSBs)<sup>2</sup> and Local Wellbeing Plans<sup>3</sup> have an opportunity to ensure that the views and long-term aspirations of citizens are included in the development of a future workforce that has the skills and behaviours to meet the demands of the local community.
- 6.13 Leadership development provision should be formulated on the basis of an understanding of the skills, profile and aspirations of its current workforce integrated with the needs, assets and demands of the local community. A needs assessment undertaken in the context of understanding the likely future trends affecting the provision of public services may help local authorities to address the demand and supply of skills across the workforce and in particular service-areas, which highlight

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<sup>2</sup> Public Service Boards (PSBs) are statutory boards established under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and operational across every local authority in Wales. Their purpose is to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing in its area by strengthening joint working across all public services in Wales.

<sup>3</sup> Every Public Service Board must produce a Local Wellbeing Plan setting out its objectives and the steps it will take to meet these. The PSB is required to undertake an annual review of their plan and progress.

the potential impacts of skills shortages and a lack of diversity on future service provision.

- 6.14 Local authorities may wish to consider making provision for a combination of universal and targeted LD to develop a consistent approach to leadership development at every tier of management. There is evidence to suggest that a universal internal LD offer that makes coaching widely available to staff at all tiers of management may support staff to take ownership of their development, challenge existing working practices and adopt new ways of working which may be effective across other service areas. A selection criterion may be applied to targeted LD provision which looks to build the leadership skills and behaviours of staff aligned to workforce planning priorities.
- 6.15 Local authorities may wish to include expectations and commitments to LD, underpinned by a consistent management competencies framework, that provides staff with the leverage to seek out and expect to access LD opportunities. Staff and line management should be engaged in developing the aims, objectives and content and evaluating progress against these commitments. Evaluation data may be used to facilitate the development of a positive learning culture and equal participation across Directorates which have different pressures and resources to engage in LD.

#### *Academi Wales*

- 6.16 Academi Wales should consider the support it provides to local authorities to monitor, measure and evaluate the collective impact of leadership development. The findings of this research may be utilised to inform the development of a Theory of Change and accompanying outcomes measures to monitor the medium and long-term impacts of leadership development and strengthen the evidence base on the relationship between leadership development, performance and culture. A consistent framework for measuring the collective contribution of local government to the development of future leaders of public service in Wales could be aligned to the seven wellbeing goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and support the five ways of working that aspire to the leadership behaviours, some of which research participants attribute to participation in LD.
- 6.17 Academi Wales should consider the role Welsh language mainstreaming has to play in the development of future leaders in Welsh public service. There is some evidence to suggest that local authorities may benefit from guidance with respect to

the role of the Welsh language in leadership, particularly in the context of the cultural and social wellbeing of local citizens and delivery of the Welsh language strategy, and independently of its obligations to meet the Welsh Language Standards.

*Academi Wales and local authorities*

- 6.18 Academi Wales may wish to work with local authorities to rationalise its suite of external accreditation and leadership development opportunities, with a view to mapping and developing clear pathways for individuals wishing to build on internal leadership development undertaken in the local authority. Staff and line managers wanted clearer guidance from HR professionals and external stakeholders to take ownership of their career development and make informed decisions about the scope, relevance and likely direction of their LD activities.
- 6.19 Academi Wales and local authorities may wish to undertake further research to develop a fuller understanding of approaches to identifying and managing talent that may be unique to particular service areas and professions. Future research should look to build an understanding of talent in the context of internal and external drivers which impact on the resources of external stakeholders, such as Further and Higher Education and the wider public sector, that influence supply and demand on the talent pipeline.

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