



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 27TH MAY 2015

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

REPORT BY: INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present the Democratic Services Committee with the annual report of the Head of Democratic Services which includes details of the current and planned services and support provided to Elected Members.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The annual report of the Head of Democratic Services sets out the current services and support provided to Members. It also provides an overview of how the resources within the Democratic Services Team are being maximised in the provision of the support, the conclusion is that adequate arrangements are currently in place.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, requires the Council to provide support to Members and for the Democratic Services Committee to monitor the support.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Democratic Services has several different functions to support members; Committee services, Members training and development, Scrutiny, Civic Office and all types of support for Members.

Committee Services

- 4.2 There have been 211 committee meetings arranged between the annual meetings of Council in 2014 and 2015. This includes a number of special scrutiny meetings to consider the medium term financial plan. In addition thirteen Planning Committee site visits have been held.
- 4.3 There have been eleven members' seminars, which included a wide range of issues (medium term financial plan (4), common housing register, NATO Summit, school categorisation, Website ReLaunch, WIMD, Caerphilly collection services and 20 mph zones).
- 4.4 All meetings were properly advertised, agendas and minutes produced. In 2014, the Democratic Services Committee also successfully implemented the Modern.Gov system which contains all documents relating to Council meetings.

Members training and development

- 4.5 A number of Member training and support sessions have also been held as part of the training and development programme (including mandatory training, annual refresher training, and recommended training and requested training). A full review covering the review of the programme will be presented to the Democratic Services Committee in due course.
- 4.6 Following the Members training needs analysis which was presented to the Democratic Services Committee on 17 March 2015, the Democratic Services team are working on a programme of requested training to start in September 2015 incorporating recommendations from the committee.
- 4.7 The Council was recently awarded the WLGA Charter for Members Support and Development in line with the report to Democratic Services Committee in December 2014. This included a programme of personal development reviews commencing for those who have senior salaries. This programme is currently underway.

Scrutiny

- 4.8 Members of the Democratic Services team have provided support and advice to the Council's 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings in 2014/15, including several special scrutiny meetings to consider the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Scrutiny Research Officer also provided support to task and finish groups and was instrumental in organising the Many Hands – Sharing Public Accountability in Wales event in Llandrindod Wells on 27 March 2015.
- 4.9 Members will be aware, following the report to Democratic Services Committee on 17 March 2015, that a review of scrutiny is currently underway following recommendations from the Wales Audit Office and that the outcome of the review will be reported to the September meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

Civic Office

- 4.10 Members will be fully aware of the activities of the Civic Office as the Mayor gives regular updates at each full Council about the engagements attended. Between 2014-2015, the Mayor attended 370 engagements. Members of the Democratic Services team provided continuous support to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in all of their duties including organising the Civic Service and Christmas concert.

Other support

- 4.11 Members will be aware that the Democratic Services team have implemented and are operating the webcasting system for full Council meetings. The protocol agreed by the Democratic Services Committee in September 2014 is being used for these purposes and so far 3 Full Council meetings have been webcast live.
- 4.12 The Council was one of the only Councils in Wales to publish Annual Reports for all Members in 2013/14 and again in 2014/15. This was partly due to the support provided by the Democratic Services Team in preparing these reports and templates. The team are due to start assisting with the preparation of these for 2015/2016 shortly.
- 4.13 The Social Media Protocol approved by the Democratic Services Committee in September 2014 is being used by Members for guidance and social media has been used to promote the webcasting and other important events.
- 4.14 The Council had provided all Members who required it with broadband lines, and iPads or laptops or Weiss machines so that they are able to access online reports and Council emails in order to carry out their role as Councillors. The Council's systems are to be upgraded and all Members are currently being trained to use any new software. Printing costs are still high and Members views are sought about any suggestions to reduce these costs.

- 4.15 One member with specific requirements was provided with software to enable reports to be read out to ensure that their needs were met. Any requests for special assistance by Members are always met by the Democratic Services team.

Staff and resources in Democratic Services

- 4.16 In May 2014, the Democratic Services Committee designated the Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer as the Head of Democratic Services. The Interim Head of Democratic Services has overall responsibility and statutory duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and manages the Democratic Services team.
- 4.17 Each member of the Democratic Services Team provides specific support in the areas mentioned above. In particular, the Senior Committee Clerk coordinates all committee services and manages the 3 other Committee clerks and the Scrutiny Research Officer takes a key role in coordinating the FWP and deals with member/public requests as well as attending the scrutiny officers' network meetings.
- 4.18 The Democratic Services Manager who managed the team under the overall responsibility of the Interim Head of Democratic Services left on 1 May 2015. It has been proposed that this post is not replaced and that existing members of the team provide these duties by utilising the support of the wider Legal and Governance team, including the Business Manager and other solicitors.
- 4.19 The Interim Head of Democratic Services will take a key role in coordinating this support for members.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's EqIA process does not need to be applied.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct implications from this report. However, the Welsh Government funding for progressing Webcasting was based on a one off support grant opportunity.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct implications as a result to this report although reference to the wider Directorate structural review undertaken has been made.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 Members and officers have been involved in various stages of the component parts of the support and services outlined in the report. Some areas of work, such as scrutiny are also subject to external consultation with bodies such as the Wales Audit Office.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 It is recommended that Democratic Services Committee note the contents of the report and provide any comments about support for 2015/2016.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The annual report of the Head of Democratic Services sets out how the statutory duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 have been met.

11. STATUTORY POWERS

- 11.1 This report has been prepared following the Statutory Guidance relating to the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011; Chapter 3 Section 16: Democratic Services Committee.

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