

Meeting of:	COUNCIL
Date of Meeting:	18 OCTOBER 2023
Report Title:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
Responsible Officer:	RACHEL KEEPINS DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules
Executive Summary:	<p>The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Democratic Services Committee (DSC) to make a report at least annually to the Council.</p> <p>The report details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Membership of the DSC • Dates of DSC • DSC Terms of Reference • Activities of the DSC for the period May 2022 to May 2023 • The Structure of the Democratic Services Team covering May 2022-23

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Council with the Democratic Services Annual Report for the period May 2022 to May 2023 for receiving and noting. The report outlines the work of the Committee during that period.

2. Background

2.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires each Council to establish a Democratic Services Committee. The Measure prescribes the functions of the committee and requires the committee to make a report at least annually to Council.

2.2 The Democratic Services Committee cannot discharge any other functions or perform any dual role.

2.3 The Democratic Services Committee approved their Annual Report at its meeting on 8 June 2023.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 Councillor T Thomas was elected Chair of the Democratic Services Committee at the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2022.

3.2 The Committee is serviced by the Democratic Services Manager. The role also has the responsibility of being the Head of Democratic Services.

Membership of the Democratic Services Committee

3.3 The Membership of the Democratic Services Committee for the period May 2022 to May 2023 was as follows:

Councillor	Councillor
Cllr T Thomas (Chair)	Cllr Malcolm James
Cllr S Aspey	Cllr Rob Smith
Cllr Paula Ford	Cllr Ian Spiller
Cllr Richard Granville	Cllr G Walter
Cllr David Harrison	Cllr Elaine Winstanley
Cllr Martin Hughes	

Dates of the Democratic Services Committee Meetings

3.4 The Committee met on the following dates during the period May 2022 to May 2023:

- 7 July 2022
- 20 October 2022
- 23 February 2023

Democratic Services Committee Terms of Reference

3.5 The remit of the Democratic Services Committee is set out under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and is:

- Designate an officer as the Head of Democratic Services;
- Review the adequacy of provision by the Authority of staff, accommodation and other resources to discharge Democratic Services functions;
- Make reports and recommendations to the Authority in relation to such provision;
- At the request of the Authority review any matter relevant to the support and advice available to members of the Council, and the terms and conditions of office of those members.

- 3.6 There is also a Sub-Committee of the Democratic Services Committee which consists of a Panel to deal with Member family absence under the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013.

Activities of the Democratic Services Committee for the period May 2022 to May 2023

- 3.7 Following the Welsh local elections in May 2022 the Committee undertook a review of the All-Wales Model Constitution and accompanying guides in order to agree them in principle before being presented to Cabinet and Council for approval and adoption. The Committee determined to establish a Working Group to conduct this work which consisted of six volunteers from the Committee, chaired by Cllr T. Thomas.
- 3.8 The Model Constitution Working Group met on two separate occasions in July and August 2022. In addition to going through each section of the Constitution in depth and providing a series of recommendations, the Group also reviewed the Council's process for questions from Members to Council. This consisted of consideration of the process followed in four neighbouring Welsh Local Authorities to provide an idea of various methods that could be used.
- 3.9 The recommendations from the Working Group were approved by Council on 19th October 2022 along with the revised Constitution and Guide.
- 3.10 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) Report 2023-24 was considered at the Committee's October 2022 meeting where Members discussed the proposed changes particularly in relation to the proposed increase in pay for Members. The Committee agreed to provide the following response to the IRPW and WLGA in respect of the IRPW Draft Annual Report 2023-2024:
- 'The Committee recognise that given the cost-of-living crisis and the undeniable difficulties that many people in the County Borough are experiencing at the moment and likely to in the near future, it appears somewhat inappropriate to have pay rises for Elected Members for 2023-2024. However, it is also accepted that personal circumstances of Members need to be considered and therefore it should be a personal matter for Members to determine themselves whether or not they accept the pay rise or make the choice to opt-out.'*
- 3.11 At the Committee's meeting held on 23 February 2023 Members were presented with a report that provided an update on the Digital Platform and Member Portal. The Committee requested further information, recommended methods for promoting the digital platform with the public and also established a working group to take forward the development of the Member Portal. It was recommended that the membership of the working group consist of volunteers from the Democratic Services Committee, as well as Group Leaders, with the following Members putting themselves forward to sit on the group: Cllr Tim Thomas, Cllr Martin Hughes, Cllr Graham Walter, and Cllr Ian Spiller.
- 3.12 The Councillor Portal Working Group met on the 3rd May 2023 and discussed potential areas for consideration with the Head of Partnerships and the Democratic Service Manager. The Group agreed to divide their work up into the following specific categories:

- Quick wins
- Training and development
- Responses
- Technical & Compatibility
- Dashboards
- Engagement

The 'quick wins' will be monitored by the Group to see how they develop and other areas will be explored more with the Group and discussed with Officers to try and find solutions which can be progressed and monitored.

- 3.13 Following the Local Government Elections in May 2022 the Committee considered and reviewed the delivery of the Member Induction Programme 2022 as well as the ongoing Member Development Programme 2022-23. Whilst there was consensus that the Induction Programme had been successful, there were various methods for improvement proposed including holding a Marketplace event sooner after the elections.

Democratic Services Team for the period May 2022 to May 2023

- 3.14 The structure for the Democratic Services Team is set out below:

- Democratic Services Manager (with the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services)
- Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees
- Democratic Services Officer – Committees
- Democratic Services – Technical Support Officer
- Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny
- Scrutiny Officer x 2
- Senior Democratic Services Officer – Support
- Democratic Services Assistant
- Democratic Services Officer – Support
- Democratic Services Officer – Leadership, Members and Mayoral
- Chauffeur
- Business Administrative Apprentice (Soon to be in place at the time of drafting)

- 3.15 The provision of staff, accommodation and other resources by the Council has been adequate to discharge the statutory requirements in relation to decision making, democratic administration and scrutiny as they currently exist. However, there are increasing statutory responsibilities and an appetite for further development amongst Members and the Executive. If progressed, these will result in various pressures across the team and whilst the new Apprentice post will temporarily assist with alleviating some of this, there may be a need to submit budget pressure bids during the future budget setting process. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 places the responsibility on the Authority itself to ensure that the Head of Democratic Services (HDS) is provided with sufficient staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in the Council's opinion, sufficient to allow the HDS's functions to be discharged.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations Implications and Connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there is no significant or unacceptable impact upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change implications as a result of this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 There are no Safeguarding or Corporate Parent implications as a result of this report.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. There are no specific costs associated with the running of this Committee other than those involved in the cost of administration of this and other Council functions within the democratic process.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Council receive and note the Democratic Services Committee Annual Report.

Background documents

None