

Meeting of:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	13 JUNE 2024
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 covering the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Membership of the DSC • Dates of meetings of the DSC • DSC Terms of Reference • Activities of the DSC for the period May 2023 to May 2024 • The Structure of the Democratic Services Team covering May 2023 to May 24

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Democratic Services Committee with the Annual Report for the period May 2023 to May 2024. 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 the Council.
- 3.2 The Democratic Services Committee cannot discharge any other functions or perform any dual role.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 Councillor Tim Thomas was elected Chair of the Democratic Services Committee at the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2023.
- 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 2023 to May 2024 is as follows:

Councillor	Councillor
Cllr Tim Thomas (Chair)	Cllr Malcolm James
Cllr Steven Easterbrook	Cllr Rob Smith
Cllr Paula Ford	Cllr Ian Spiller
Cllr Richard Granville	Cllr Graham 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 2023 to May 2024:
- 8 June 2023
 - 16 October 2023
 - 8 February 2024

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 2023 to May 2024

- 3.7 **Member Annual Report Process** - Following a review of the Elected Member Annual Report Process in June 2023, templates and guidance were issued to all Members and 39 were received, translated and published on the Council's website. The report template has been reissued and Members are encouraged to complete and return them by 30th June 2024 for translating and publishing by 1st September 2024.
- 3.8 **Member Development** - On the subject of Member Development, regular updates have been received by the Committee who have provided valuable comments and suggestions. These include a request for further exploration into the methods of delivery and timing of training, particularly in relation to the future Member Induction. In-person support sessions were also proposed to assist Members to access their e-learning training and also the suggestion to survey all members on what topics they would like to include in their training programme. As referenced in the Member Development Update report of 13th June 2024, a survey is proposed for all Members to seek views on numerous aspects of the Member Development Programme to help inform it going forward, and sessions are currently being arranged with the Learning and Development and Democratic Services teams to support any members in undertaking their e-learning.
- 3.9 Many of these suggestions above followed the Committee's consideration of the Welsh Government Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales at its October 2023 meeting, where Members also made proposals relating to Member privacy as well as some for improved collaboration and methods of engagement for Scrutiny. It is further proposed that consideration be given to the development of a Member Research Protocol later in the year.
- 3.10 **Multi-location Meetings Policy and Elected Member Personal Safety Protocol** - At its meeting in October 2023 the Committee undertook a review of the Council's Multi-location Meetings Policy and received a draft of the Council's Elected Member Personal Safety Protocol. On the former, the Committee were very supportive of keeping cameras on in meetings and recommended as such to Full Council when the review was presented in November 2023. Members highlighted that this was particularly significant when it came to contributing to discussions and important meetings involving votes. This was an issue of transparency and accountability.
- 3.11 As part of the review of the Multi-location Meetings Policy the Committee also briefly discussed the flexible nature of hybrid meetings and whether some committees could go fully remote by default, with specific exceptions, broadly supporting the practice followed by Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council, where Members were canvassed in advance about whether they would be attending a meeting in person or remotely. The recommendation was presented to full Council on 15th May 2024 for consideration but not approved.
- 3.12 Following the Committee's consideration of the draft Elected Member Personal Safety Protocol, which was developed in consultation with the Corporate Health and Safety Unit and Officers from South Wales Police, the protocol was presented and approved by Council in March 2024 and is now available on the Council's intranet site.

- 3.13 **Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report 2024/25 and the Councillor Portal Working Group** – the Committee considered the draft Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report 2024/25 and provided feedback to the Panel and has also undertaken work via a small Working Group on the Councillor Portal, providing regular feedback to the Committee on this. The Portal Working Group was established to take forward the development of the Member Portal, and throughout 2023/24 has met on four separate occasions where a series of issues and actions were created, discussed and monitored at each meeting of the Group.
- 3.14 As part of this work, recommendations were presented that highlighted the need to develop dashboards within the Portal in order for both Members and Officers to monitor referrals effectively and improve response rates with a specific recommendation for dedicated staff within the Communities Directorate to assist with Member referrals. Unfortunately, as reported in October 2023, due to the financial constraints across the Authority it was concluded by the Committee that there was a need to address what realistically could go forward in terms of the Portal and these recommendations may not be able to be progressed at this time. However, there was general agreement that issues with member referrals, especially the timeliness of responses, needed to be addressed. At a further meeting in February 2024 the Committee considered an update from the Working Group and Members expressed concerns about the financial constraints related to the Portal against the corresponding need for it to be developed further. Whilst Members agreed the 'Report it' function of the Portal was an excellent and positive development, there were still issues that needed resolving in relation to Member Referrals and without further investment this would not be possible.
- 3.15 At its meeting in November 2023 the Working Group agreed to meet again in approximately 6 months, to enable time for further work to be undertaken by the Experience and Improvement team. The Group is scheduled to meet again in June 2024 and, at the request of the Committee, will consider the financial constraints and what potential there is for any further development.

Democratic Services Team for the period May 2023 to May 2024

- 3.16 The current 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 (Vacancy)
 - 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

3.17 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. The Democratic Services team have worked tirelessly to ensure that all of the expected outcomes have been achieved despite a number of vacancies and the service being required to find savings as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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 To receive and note the Annual Report for submission to Council for information.

Background documents

None