

RESEARCH SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR ELECTED MEMBERS – PROTOCOL

The Statutory Guidance issued under section 8(1A) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 states that “all elected members should be able to access a range of information and support” in order to undertake their roles effectively.

This Protocol provides guidance and information as well as sources, for how and where Elected Members can access information and support.

Access to Information

Section 15 of the Council's [Constitution](#) sets out clearly the Access to Information Procedure Rules that apply to all meetings of the Council, the Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Standards Committee, and Regulatory Committees.

Section 15 also includes details of where an item is deemed confidential and exempt from publication as well as the various categories of Exempt Information and the public interest test.

Section 19 of the Constitution, which covers the Code of Conduct for Members, furthermore addresses the legal obligation of all Elected Members in relation to maintaining the confidentiality of exempt information.

Papers and Reports

All Committee papers and reports are accessible via the Council's [Meetings, Minutes and agendas webpage](#) or via the Mod.Gov App. For Members that sit on a specific Committee, the agenda and papers are sent via email or a paper copy can be provided upon request.

The Council's corporate report template provides a section on background papers to allow Members access to any additional information which have been relied on to a material extent in the preparation of the report and are not already within the public domain.

Performance, Budget and Management Information

Quarterly performance and budgetary updates (backward looking) are provided to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) for detailed monitoring and scrutiny of progress against the Corporate Plan. These reports are then also shared for information with all other Overview and Scrutiny Committees and subsequently reported to Cabinet for approval.

The Council's Self-assessment is reported annually to the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) where the approach is determined. This is then followed by pre-decision Scrutiny of the draft Self-assessment by COSC and GAC prior to final consideration by Cabinet and Full Council for approval.

The development of the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan (forward looking) is reported to COSC at the start of its development process and again for pre-decision Scrutiny of the final version followed by further consultation on the targets.

Updates on the Performance Management Improvement plan, new Corporate Plans and updates to the Performance Framework are also led by COSC and reported to Cabinet and Council for final approval.

As well as quarterly budget updates, frequent Budget briefings are held for all Members to ensure that they are kept informed of the current budget situation as well as the key areas being considered for future budgets. This runs alongside a Scrutiny budget process which aims to assist in the development of the annual budget draft proposals with a concluding detailed public scrutiny of the resulting final proposals.

Local Demographic Information and Services

The Councillor Portal provides links to various information such as planning applications, roadworks, street crime statistics and Data Cymru's ward profile. The Portal also provides a link to [Dewis Cymru](#) which provides wellbeing information and links to other local organisations and services.

Local and National Events – Weekly Bulletin

A bulletin publication is sent out to all Elected Members (and Town and Community Council (TCC) Clerks for sharing with TCC Councillors) on a weekly basis. This contains a range of the Council's top news stories from the previous week, as well as details of local campaigns such as the Waste campaign or National campaigns such as Foster Care fortnight. Varied content is included from each directorate as well as partners.

Each story contains links or signposting so Members can get more information on each item if required. The links often direct Members to different sections of the BCBC website as well as the websites of partner organisations such as Awen, Halo, South Wales Police and South Wales Fire and Rescue.

The bulletin also reflects BCBC's Corporate Plan and objectives which demonstrates the range of strategic work taking place right across the council. For example, some stories demonstrate a one council approach (e.g response to severe weather), other stories show how the council works with partner organisations or how it protects the most vulnerable for instance through signposting to key benefits/grants.

There is a dual purpose to the bulletin, firstly to share news related information with members for information purposes and secondly for Members to use the information in the bulletin to share with their residents via their social media accounts, email updates, surgeries and face to face encounters etc.

Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny have their own process for research support and scoping out potential scrutiny items for their Forward Work Programmes, that focuses on impact, risk, performance, budget and community perception and considers a set criteria that looks at the following:

- Public Interest - the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny;

- Ability to Change - priority should be given to issues that the Committee can realistically influence, and add value to;
- Performance - priority should be given to the areas in which the Council is not performing well;
- Extent - priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or large parts of the County Borough, or a large number of the Authority's service users or its population;
- Replication - work programmes must take account of what else is happening in the areas being considered to avoid duplication or wasted effort.

More in depth processes are required for Research and Evaluation Panels when undertaken by any of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Additional Sources of Information

- Any relevant information received from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Data Cymru, Welsh Government Consultations, that are sent to the Democratic Services Manager are shared with all Councillors via email.
- Regular briefings and training are provided to all Members on relevant changes in policy or introduction of new legislation.
- Changes to performance requirements and the development of approaches to meet them (e.g. self-assessment and Panel Performance Assessment) are reported to COSC.
- The Councillor Portal provides links to Data Cymru's ward profile, Welsh Government's consultations as well as the aspects mentioned above.
- Useful sources of information across a range of different topics are also generally included as part of announcements from the Mayor, Leader and Chief Executive to meetings of full Council.
- In the event of a significant issue which warrants a wider update for Members e.g. preparations for the arrival of severe weather, a briefing note will be issued via email to all members to ensure they are aware and are supported in responding to enquiries from constituents.
- Briefing notes are produced when required for Cabinet Members on aspects such as serious case reviews, media interviews or background briefings on high profile issues.
- Weekly briefing meetings are held with the Leader and Cabinet Members with staff on aspects including news grid (media and social media) and campaign information is also provided such as the Budget Awareness Campaign.

Additional Information Requests

On occasion Members may request additional or alternative information to undertake their role. Any such requests will necessitate additional resource and as such will require consideration by the Head of Democratic Services who will evaluate in line with the following criteria:

- Is this information already available and accessible elsewhere, such as via the Council's website or Member Portal?
- Does the information request help toward the achievement of corporate priorities?
- Is the information request of a political nature?
- Would the information enable a Councillor to undertake their ward role to a higher standard, and would the information bring benefits to Councillors from more than one electoral ward?
- What are the budget and resource implications of the request?

The statutory guidance highlights that research provided to councillors should not be politically motivated or compromise officers' political neutrality.

It also states that a robust framework will be required to ensure decisions are reached based on merit rather than as a consequence of the individual Councillor they have been submitted by, which group the submission comes from, which ward of the Borough it may relate to etc.