

Meeting of:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	26 JUNE 2025
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 2024 to May 2025 • The Structure of the Democratic Services Team covering May 2024 to May 2025

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Democratic Services Committee with the Annual Report for the period May 2024 to May 2025. 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.
- 2.2 The Democratic Services Committee cannot discharge any other functions or perform any dual role.
- 2.3 During last year's consideration of the Committee's Annual Report the following proposals were made:

- That details of the Committee's attendance at Democratic Services Committee meetings be added to the report at paragraph 3.3;
- That any further detail be provided as to the meetings of the Sub-Committee to deal with Member Family Absence at paragraph 3.6;
- That an indication of hours, whether full time or part time be provided for the Democratic Services staff listed in the report.

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 2024.
- 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 and attendance details for the Democratic Services Committee for the period May 2024 to May 2025 is as follows:

Councillor	13 June 2024	21 November 2024
Cllr Tim Thomas (Chair)	Present	Present
Cllr Sean Aspey	Not Present	Not present
Cllr Paula Ford	Present	Apologies
Cllr Richard Granville	Present	Present
Cllr David Harrison	Not Present	Not present
Cllr Martin Hughes	Present	Present
Cllr Malcolm James	Apologies	Present
Cllr Heidi Bennett	Present	Present
Cllr Ian Spiller	Present	Present
Cllr Graham Walter	Present	Present
Cllr Elaine Winstanley	Present	Present

Democratic Services Committee Terms of Reference

- 3.4 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.

3.5 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. The Panel's Terms of Reference are set out below:

- a) Determine a complaint made by a Member regarding cancellation of family absence by the authority;
- b) The Sub-Committee may confirm a decision made or substitute its own decision as to the Member's entitlement to a period of family absence in accordance with the 2013 Regulations;
- c) Determine a complaint made by a Member on maternity absence or parental absence regarding a decision made by the chair of the authority as to the Member attending any meeting or performing any duty;
- d) The Sub-Committee may confirm the decision of the chair of the authority or substitute its own decision as to the Member attending any meeting or performing any duty;
- e) The decision of the Sub-Committee is final.

Activities of the Democratic Services Committee for the period May 2024 to May 2025

- 3.6 **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 requests for additional information on the Cardiff Capital Region and the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (SEWCJC), which the Democratic Services Manager is in the process of arranging with the Monitoring Officer for the Cardiff Capital Region. It also included a request for Media training for all Members which is now scheduled in for 26 June 2025. A survey has also been undertaken with Members, the results of which are helping to inform the future Member Development Programme. More frequent reminders as well as drop in sessions for Member e-learning modules have also been undertaken in the hope of getting more Members through their mandatory modules. This has resulted in 28 Members completing their modules, with 38 having accessed and started completing them. Additional training sessions have also been undertaken at the request of this Committee on the Mod.Gov App in readiness for it to go live for voting in future meetings.
- 3.7 **Research Support and Services Protocol** - At its meeting in November 2024 the Committee considered a report and initial assessment to evaluate the existing research support provided to Councillors with the aim of developing a Research protocol for Elected Members. Members provided detailed comments and suggestions which have been considered in the drafting of the final protocol.
- 3.8 **Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report 2025/26** – the Committee considered the draft Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) Draft Annual Report 2025/26 and provided the following response back to the Panel:

- The Committee queried why there is no remuneration for Members that sit on the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) or Public Services Board (PSB), yet Members get remunerated for sitting on the Fire and Rescue Authority. Members also raised the point that generally female orientated roles (such as anything related to Social Services, for example the Regional Partnership Board) generally receive less remuneration which is creating a gender pay gap for Members. The Committee requested that these aspects be considered by the Panel as Members on both the RPB and PSB do a considerable amount of work.
- Members highlighted that the IRP Annual Report refers to the work of a Cllr based on assessment of a 3 day week, however this was assessed in 2021. The Committee proposed that this might be worth revisiting.
- Members asked for more guidance on the remuneration for Members in job share roles.

In addition to this, the Committee made the following comments:

- The makeup of the existing Panel does not reflect diversity. Members would like due regard and understanding that we live in a diverse community.
- Members highlighted that there was insufficient information on the IRPW website, in that it was a basic website and supplementary information should be readily available.
- Members requested further information and detail as to how the new Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru will exercise the functions of the Panel moving forward.

A letter from the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee was also sent to the Chair of the Panel thanking them for all their work.

Democratic Services Team for the period May 2024 to May 2025

3.9 During 2024/25, the Democratic Services Team underwent a restructure in order to make the approved Medium Term Financial Strategy savings for both 2024/25 as well as 2025/26. This led to a removal of the full time Chauffeur position as well as the part-time Democratic Services Officer – Committees post and an agreement for a reduction of hours for certain Members of staff. The current structure for the Democratic Services Team is therefore set out below:

- Democratic Services Manager (with the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services) (Full time)
- Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees (Part-time – Flexible retirement 22.2 hours)
- Democratic Services – Technical Support Officer (Full time)
- Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny (Full time)
- Scrutiny Officer (Full time)
- Scrutiny Officer (Part-time – 30 hours)
- Senior Democratic Services Officer – Support (Full time)
- Democratic Services Assistant (Full time)
- Democratic Services Officer – Support (Full time)
- Democratic Services Officer – Leadership, Members and Mayoral (Full time)

- Business Administrative Apprentice (Full time)

3.10 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 the restructure and reduction in staff 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 and Nature Implications

6.1 There are no climate change or nature 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.

9. Recommendation

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

Background documents

None