

Meeting of:	COUNCIL
Date of Meeting:	23 SEPTEMBER 2026
Report Title:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT
Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member	CHIEF OFFICER - LEGAL, REGULATORY & ELECTORAL SERVICES CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE 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:	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: • The Membership of the DSC • Dates of meetings of the DSC • DSC Terms of Reference • Activities of the DSC for the period May 2025 to May 2026 • The Structure of the Democratic Services Team covering May 2025 to May 2026

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Council with the Democratic Services Committee's Annual Report for the period May 2025 to May 2026 for 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 the 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 25 June 2026.

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 2025.
- 3.2 The Committee is serviced by the Democratic Services Manager. The role also has the responsibility of being the Head of Democratic Services.
- 3.3 During previous consideration of the Committee's Annual Report, requests have been made to incorporate details of the Committee's attendance at Democratic Services Committee meetings, to provide an indication of hours, whether full time or part time for the Democratic Services staff listed in the report and also to better reflect mandatory training participation for Members.

Membership of the Democratic Services Committee

- 3.4 The Membership and attendance details for the Democratic Services Committee for the period May 2025 to May 2026 is as follows:

Councillor	26 June 2025	20 November 2025
Cllr Tim Thomas (Chair)	Present	Present
Cllr Sean Aspey	Present	Present
Cllr Paula Ford	Not Present	Present
Cllr Richard Granville	Apologies - Other Council Business	Present
Cllr David Harrison	Present	Present
Cllr Martin Hughes	Present	Present
Cllr Malcolm James	Present	Apologies – medical appointment
Cllr Heidi Bennett	Present	Present
Cllr Ian Spiller	Apologies – Work Commitments	Present
Cllr Graham Walter	Present	Present
Cllr Elaine Winstanley	Present	Present

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 to:
- 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. 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 2025 to May 2026

- 3.7 **Member Development** - Regular Member Development updates have been received by the Committee who have provided valuable comments and suggestions which were added to the Member Development Programme. The Committee also received and discussed details of mandatory e-learning modules for Members. Following the Committee's focus on this, with requests for regular reminders, drop-in sessions and detailed reports, it is confirmed that has resulted in 37 Members completing their modules, with 50 having accessed the system to commence them at the time of drafting this report.
- 3.8 **Member Development Working Group** - At its meeting in November 2025 the Committee agreed to establish a Working Group to assist with preparations for Member Development ready for the upcoming local election in May 2027. This Working Group will look to undertake detailed work on the Member Development Strategy, the Member Induction Programme and ongoing Member Development Programme as well as assist with planning for the potential Candidate events. The Group has now met on two separate occasions, starting with a planning session to determine how to set out their work over the forthcoming months. They also met again this month to consider and discuss the arrangements for the Candidate sessions that are now scheduled for the evenings of 13th and 14th October 2026.
- 3.9 **Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC) Annual Remuneration Report 2026/27** – At its meeting in November 2025, the Committee considered the

draft DBCC Annual Remuneration Report for 2026/27 and provided the following response back to the Commission:

In relation to the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC) Draft Annual Remuneration Report for the municipal year 2026/27 the Committee expressed diversity of opinion in relation to the 6.4% increase to the basic salary increase for Councillors. Members highlighted that whilst this was in line with all-Wales 2024 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), the proposed increase was written at a time when the UK inflation rate was at 3.2%. Concerns were expressed about this significant gap and the fact that this could result in very negative public perception of Councillors and Local Government as a whole.

Whilst noting this, there were also concerns from the Committee that sufficient provision had to be put in place to ensure that certain groups are not disincentivised as potential candidates in the 2027 Local Government Elections. Members noted that the financial aspect should not become a barrier preventing individuals from standing, especially from marginalised groups.

The Committee felt that there was a fine balance between the two that needed to be considered and monitored, particularly for any new Framework for 2027 onwards. A balance to prevent a greater divide between the public and local government that also did not discourage or exclude any potential candidates from putting themselves forward as a future Councillor to represent their community. Whilst appreciating that the purpose of using the ASHE was to try and align salaries to national average, the proposal was made for keeping Councillor salaries in line with current inflation rates.

Further comment was also made in relation to the disparity between Bands 1 and 2 within the report, for Leader and Deputy Leader. Members proposed that this be considered as part of the new framework and whether this gap was too large and needed addressing. Members also suggested that consideration be given to splitting the bands for Councillor salaries (as with staff), to have performance-based levels within each band.

On the subject of resettlement payments for councillors who are unsuccessful when seeking re-election, the Committee agreed that this did not sit comfortably with them. Whilst understanding that for some roles, such as that of an Executive Member, councillors may have given up other jobs to commit to these positions, the Committee agreed that councillors are fully aware and understand the risk when putting themselves forward in an election; the risk that, whether new or returning, the title could be limited to one term of 5 years. There was also the view that councillors do not always go into roles for financial reasons and wanted to do so for the good of their community. Any financial recompense, therefore, should not be necessary and would again risk public perception of Councillors and Local Government.

- 3.10 These comments were submitted to the DBCC as part of the consultation process.

Democratic Services Team for the period May 2025 to May 2026

- 3.11 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.

3.12 Following Medium Term Financial Strategy Budget Reductions in both 2024/25 and 2025/26, the Democratic Services Team underwent a restructure with the removal of some posts and an agreement for a reduction of hours for certain Members of staff. Secondments and backfilling were also necessary during 2025/26 to ensure cover for maternity leave. The structure therefore for the majority of 2025/26 is 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)
- Democratic Services Officer – Committees (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 (Full time)

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. 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 Democratic Services Committee Annual Report for the period May 2025 to May 2026.

Background documents

None