

## **Report of the Head of Democratic Services**

**29<sup>th</sup> January 2019**

### **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES FUNCTION ANNUAL REVIEW**

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Members will be aware of the requirement under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure") for each local authority to establish a Democratic Services Committee. The Measure also requires the Council to designate one of its officers to the statutory post of "Head of Democratic Services" and provide that officer with sufficient resources to discharge these statutory functions. This report provides the Committee with an outline of the staff resources existing within Democratic Services and a summary of the wide range of duties undertaken, ongoing developments and plans for the future to support Members in their respective roles.

#### **Transform Innovation and Change Programme**

Members will be aware that the Team participated in the Authority's Transform, Innovate & Change (TIC) Programme during 2017/18. As part of a systems thinking review of the Democratic Services function a number of opportunities were identified to adopt smarter ways of working, especially through the use of technology. Members will also be aware that Democratic Services Officer vacancies were put on hold pending the review outcome, these posts have now been released and new staff members are in place. Due to internal promotions, 2 Member Support Officer posts have recently been advertised and will hopefully be filled shortly. Executive Board Support has transferred to the Business Support Team with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2018, to ensure that the complete executive support function is accountable to one reporting line.

## **Democratic Services Resources**

Although Staffing within the unit has reduced in recent years, it is considered adequate to allow the Head of Democratic Services to discharge democratic services functions. The service is split into three teams namely Committee Support and Civic & Member Support under the management of the Democratic Services Manager (Nominated Head of Democratic Services) and Executive Board support under the management of the Chief Executives' Business Support Manager:-

### **Committee Support**

This is a team of 6 staff, comprising a Principal Democratic Services Officer, 5 Democratic Services Officers and an Assistant Democratic Services Officer, which is a new post created as a result of Joint Working agreements. The team provides a wide range of services to the Executive, Regulatory and Scrutiny Committees and is also responsible for servicing a number of Joint Working arrangements i.e. Wales Pension Partnership Joint Governance Committee, Dyfed Powys Police & Crime Panel, Swansea Bay City Region Joint Committee and ERW Joint Committee. The team provides advice and support in relation to the Council Constitution, law and practice relating to committee administration, advice on the role of Councillors, protocols and code of conduct and supports the democratic function in the production of handbooks, research and liaison with external bodies as part of Scrutiny Task and Finish reviews

The Committee Support team have administered the following official meetings over the past 12 months:-

Council 13

Executive Board 16

Executive Board Member Decision 59

Scrutiny 48

Regulatory & Other 65

Joint Committees (Regional working) 16

In addition the team administer the School admission appeals process and facilitate the work of the Independent Admission Appeals Panel having managed over 298 appeals in the last 12 months.

### **Civic & Member Support**

The team consists of a Principal Democratic Services Officer, 3 x Member Support Officers and 1 x part-time Official Car Driver.

The Team is the designated point of contact for all non- executive elected member enquiries (64) and provides a comprehensive support function to the Chair of Council, and non-executive elected members. The team also undertakes, on request, research and information gathering and diary co-ordination for the Leader of the Opposition.

The Civic & Member Support team have processed over 2,819 Councillor Enquiries and webcast 53 meetings during the period 1<sup>st</sup> December 17 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 18.

The Civic & Member Support team administer the Councillor Enquiries system, facilitate member's expenses, non-executive day to day correspondence including local surgery notices, support the production of their annual reports, arrange attendance at Conference and Seminars and operate the Authority's webcasting of Council meetings.

#### Business Support for the Executive Board

The Executive Board support team located within the Business Support unit, provides business support for the Leader and the 9 Executive Board Members which includes professional advice, research and information gathering, preparing speeches, EBM expenses checks, day to day correspondence, arrange EBM attendance at Conference and Seminars and diary co-ordination. The team consists of the Executive Board Support Manager (directly responsible to the Director of Regeneration & Policy) a Business Support Officer (Leader Support) and 1 designated Executive Board support officer. The Business Support Team also provides business support for the Chief Executive's department.

## **Elected Member Support & Accommodation**

All elected members are allocated a tablet device and laptop computer, and have access to printing facilities within Council offices. As from May 2017 local government elections, all elected Members can also claim a £20 per month communication allowance (returning members were offered the option on retaining their Authority issued Broadband or moving over to the Communication Allowance), as of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 56 members have opted to receive the allowance with the remainder making use of the Authority issued broadband.

Members can access their emails, council diary, committee papers and the Authority's intranet site' via their iPads, and the introduction of 'Modern.gov' committee decisions management system in September 2015 has assisting in the Authority's commitment towards a paperless system of communication and allows members to perform their duties as efficiently as possible. The Authority has made a commitment to move towards a paperless system of communication with all Councillors with effect from 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019 and a training programme has commenced. (A paperless working update is included as a separate agenda item).

Elected member are also provided with a @sirgar.gov.uk / @carmarthenshire.gov.uk email address to be used for all electronic communication in relation to Council business. No communication will be accepted via personal email addresses.

Co-opted members also have the option of an authority issued iPad and email address, and can access printing facilities at Council Offices.

All members are also provided with basic office supplies, such as pens, pencils, files, paper envelopes etc and also direct practical support from the Democratic Services Unit (non-exec members) or the Business Support Unit (Executive Board Members). Members are also encouraged to access information via the Democracy Tab on the Authority's intranet site, allowing access to information outside of office hours.

The following accommodation is available for elected members, all accommodation includes telephone and IT equipment to assist members with their duties:-

- Members' Lounge – Carmarthen & Llanelli
- Chairman's Room – Carmarthen & Llanelli
- Leaders Office – Carmarthen, Llanelli & Ammanford
- Executive Board Member accommodation x 5 - Carmarthen
- Opposition Group Leaders' Office – Carmarthen
- Opposition Group Room – Llanelli
- A small meeting room is also available within County Hall for Elected members to use by appointment.

**Meetings** of the County Council normally take place in the Chamber at County Hall, Carmarthen. Committees of the Council normally meet in the Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen or the Chamber, Council Offices, 3 Spilman Street, Carmarthen. Refreshments are also available at these locations.

## **Car Parking**

Councillors are provided with designated car parking spaces at County Hall, Carmarthen which can be used, only when attending formal meetings of the Council or its committees. Councillor car parking spaces are shared with members of staff and are therefore unavailable at all other times.

## **Member Development**

The Learning and Development Service within the People Management and Performance Unit in consultation with the Democratic Services Unit support all Councillors to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and behaviour to fulfil their roles effectively, thus ensuring the Council meets its key aims and priorities. To this end, both units work together to promote learning and development opportunities which support Councillors in continuously developing their roles, both as part of the Council's decision making processes and in the communities they serve.

### Priorities for 2019

- Training for all members on the Modern.gov app in readiness for paperless meetings from September 2019 (December 2018 – July 2019)
- Additional Scrutiny training needs for Members and staff, as identified by the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum
- A 'tidy up' exercise of Scrutiny Structures to ensure that the Scrutiny Committee remits reflect departmental structures and Executive Board Member portfolios (as far as is reasonably practical).
- Pilot of Members' Self Service Resource
- Democratic Accommodation Review as part of Agile Working arrangements for County Hall.