

Report of the Head of Democratic Services

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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.

Democratic Services Resources

The current structure of the Democratic Services Unit has been in place since July 2015 and is considered adequate to allow the Head of Democratic Services to discharge democratic services functions. The service is split into two teams namely Committee Support and Civic & Member Support under the management of the Democratic Services Manager (Nominated Head of Democratic Services):-

Committee Support

This is a team of 6 staff, comprising a Principal Democratic Services Officer and 5 Democratic Services Officers. The team provides a wide range of services to the Executive, Regulatory and Scrutiny Committees together with the administration of partnership agencies i.e. ERW and the Dyfed Powys Police & Crime Panel . 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 15

Executive Board Member Decision 47

Scrutiny 42

Regulatory & Other 60

In addition the team administer the School admission appeals process and facilitate the work of the Independent Admission Appeals Panel having managed over 359 appeals in the last 12 months.

Civic & Member Support

The team consists of a Principal Democratic Services Officer, a Senior Member Support Officer, 4 x Member Support Officers and 1 x part-time Official Car Driver.

The Team is the designated point of contact for all elected member enquiries and provides a comprehensive support function to the Chair of Council, and all elected members. The team also assist the Executive Board Members and the Leader of the main opposition Group with research and information gathering and diary co-ordination. Member Support Officers also administer the Councillor Enquiry system, member's expenses, members' day to day correspondence including local surgery notices, support Members with production of their annual reports, arrange attendance at Conference and Seminars and operate the Authority's webcasting of Council meetings.

The Member Support team have processed over 1700 Councillor Enquiries and webcast 55 meetings over the past 12 months.

Elected Member Support & Accommodation

All elected members have access to a tablet device, laptop computer, printer and are provided with a new telephone line for councillors who have no telephone and a second broadband line for the exclusive purpose of providing on line data services.

Members can access their emails, council diary and committee papers 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.

A report on IT provision post 2017 elections will be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its next meeting in March 2017.

All members are also provided with office supplies, such as pens, pencils, files, paper envelopes etc and also direct practical support from the Democratic Services Unit. . Members can also access information outside of office hours via the Council's intranet site.

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 – Llanelli
- Opposition Group Room – Carmarthen
- A small meeting room is also available within County Hall for Elected members to use by appointment.

Democratic Services Committee Work Programme

In the past year, the Democratic Services Committee has considered a number of issues, including:-

- **Ongoing Member Development/Induction Programme 2017 elections**

The Democratic Services Committee has considered two reports on the Member Development Programme during the past 12 months and has endorsed a WLGA Member Induction Programme for both new and returning elected members which will be implemented following the Local Government elections in May 2017. The Committee has also approved a Councillor Induction Survey which will seek the views of existing members regarding the induction they received in 2012. All Group Leaders and unaffiliated members have also been reminded, following discussion by the Committee, of the need to conduct Personal Development Reviews which are tailored to meet the development needs of individual members.

- **Members' Annual Reports**

The Committee agreed that Members should be encouraged to complete their Annual Reports and approved a revised annual report template and guidance at its meeting held on the 17th March 2016. The Democratic Services unit provided support in the form of assistance in drafting the reports, providing advice and publishing the report. 14 Annual Reports have been completed to-date for 2015/16.

- **IRPW Annual Reports**

The Committee has considered the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual report in relation to determinations regarding the rates of payment which are made to elected and co-opted Members of Welsh local authorities for the following municipal year and has powers to make recommendations on proposed variations to the remuneration of Chief Executives and Chief Officers of Principal councils in Wales. A separate report on the IRPW's draft report for 2017/18 is included on the Agenda.

- **Wales Audit Office - Corporate Assessment Report 2015**

The Committee considered the outcome of the WAO Corporate Assessment Report and agreed a Forward Work Programme for 2016/17. A separate report on an updated FWP is included on the agenda.

- **Reviewing the council's on-line information under council & democracy**

The Committee considered the information currently available on the Council and Democracy section of the corporate website, and noted that over the next few months, further information would be added in readiness for the local government elections in May 2017.