

Report of the Head of Democratic Services

27th November 2015

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES UNIT HALF YEARLY ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1ST MAY 2015 – 23RD NOVEMBER 2015

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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.

Staff and resources in Democratic Services

As part of a review of the Democratic Services and Scrutiny functions and in order to strengthen the function in terms of resilience and flexibility, staff from Scrutiny and Executive Board support transferred to the Democratic Services Unit in July 2015 under a new Democratic Services Manager and the nominated Head of Democratic Services. As a result of these changes the structure was revised in order to ensure that the Democratic function was robust and able to meet the requirements of the Local Government Measure.

The Structure seeks to strengthen the support provided to Scrutiny Committees by allocating a lead Democratic Services Officer to each of the 5 scrutiny committees. Each lead officer would also have non-scrutiny committees to administer which will expand their existing breadth of knowledge across the whole political spectrum and bridge the gap between the executive and the scrutiny function.

The transfer of Executive Board Support Staff to the Democratic Services Division will also strengthen the support provided to all members and will allow greater capacity and flexibility in the support provided to the Executive Members, Non-Executive Members and the Leader of the main Opposition Party.

The service is split into two divisions namely Committee Support and Civic & Member Support.

- **Committee Support:-**

This is a team of 6 staff, comprising a Principal Democratic Services Officer (new post which will be advertised shortly) 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 supported the following official meetings over the past 6 months:-

Council Meetings - 8
Executive Board & EBM Meetings - 37
Regulatory & Other Meetings - 34
Scrutiny Committees - 24

The Democratic Services Officers also process School admission appeals and facilitate the work of the Independent Admission Appeals Panel having processed over 160 appeals in the last 6 months.

- **Civic & Member Support**

This is a team of 7 staff, comprising a Principal Democratic Services Officer, a Senior Member Support Officer, 4 x Member Support Officers (one of which is a new post which will be advertised shortly) 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 assists 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, members 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 900 Councillor Enquiries and webcast 24 meetings over the past 6 months.

Member Accommodation

Leaders Office – Carmarthen, Llanelli, Ammanford
Executive Board Member accommodation x 5 - Carmarthen
Opposition Group Leaders' Office – Llanelli
Opposition Group Room – Carmarthen
Members' Lounge – Carmarthen & Llanelli
Chairmans Room – Carmarthen & Llanelli

A small meeting room is also available within County Hall for Elected members to use by appointment.

ICT Equipment for Elected members

In July 2015 the ICT division provided tablet devices to all members who had expressed an interest in receiving a companion device and this facility was provided in addition to members' existing Laptops or PC 's.

To coincide with the roll out of the tablet devices, the Democratic Services Unit also introduced 'Modern.gov' a committee decisions management system in a move towards less paper and faster and easier access to key information, this allows Members to perform their duties as efficiently as possible.

Feedback in respect of both the tablet devices and Modern.gov are extremely positive.

Members training and development

A number of Member training and development sessions have also been held as part of the Member Development Programme. An updated draft programme is included as a separate item on the Agenda. The Member Development Programme is delivered by the People Management and Performance Learning & Development Team.

Conclusion

Having taking into account the extremely difficult economic pressures facing the Council generally, and the need to strengthen the Democratic Services function in terms of resilience and flexibility, the new Democratic Services structure is considered to be appropriate and the Chair of the Committee has been fully briefed and supports the structure as detailed within Appendix 1 below.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES STAFFING STRUCTURE

