

Report of the Head of Democratic Services

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DEMOCRATIC SERVICES FUNCTION

Head of Service & Designation. Linda Rees Jones Head of Administration & Law	Directorate Chief Executive	Telephone No. 01267 224010
Author & Designation Gaynor Morgan Head of Democratic Services	Directorate Chief Executive	Telephone No 01267 224026

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.

The Head of Democratic Services has a statutory responsibility to organise the discharge of the "democratic services functions" in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 which includes:- The production of reports, as required, on the number of staff required to support democratic services and how the staff should be organised to ensure the Council, the Cabinet and Committees receive high level support in the discharge of its democratic functions.

Democratic Services manages the Authority's decision-making process. The Council constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.

Democratic Services Staffing Resources

Staffing resource to support the Democratic Service is split into three distinct teams:-

- a) Committee Support
- b) Civic & Member Support
(both under the management of the Head of Democratic Services)
- c) Cabinet support
(under the management of the Chief Executives' Business Support Manager)

In addition to myself, as Head of Democratic Services, the Democratic team comprises 2 Principal Democratic Services Officers 5 Democratic Services Officers, 1 Assistant Democratic Services Officer, 3 Member Support Officers, an Official Car Driver and 2 casual drivers called upon as and when necessary.

The Democratic team deals with a wide range of activities, which include, but are not limited to:

- Maintain and develop the Council's decision-making processes to include the preparation of agendas, reports and minutes, to ensure decision made are accountable and transparent.
- In accordance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 convening multi-location meetings (hybrid). This means that participants can joint either in person at County Hall, Carmarthen or remotely and the meeings are combined as one using a specialist piece of technology.
- Webcasting of all Council and Committee meetings – approximately 200 per annum./
- Managing and providing Scrutiny and Committee Services support to the Council and its various Committees.
- Support services to Elected Members, including maintaining and managing local councillor information on our website (includes information on declarations of interests; gifts and hospitality; Committee membership; remuneration etc) and providing a support service for enquiries and advice on the Council's Constitution and Members' Code of Conduct.
- Administer appeals relating to school admissions and school permanent exclusions.
- Servicing and hosting joint working arrangements namely, . Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Panel, Wales Pension Partnership Joint Governance Committee and Y Partneriaeth.
- Administering the Council's arm's length companies - Llesiant Delta Wellbeing Governance Group and CWM Environmental Ltd Shareholders Board.
- Managing internal meetings between Group Leaders, Constitutional Review Group, Cabinet member meetings with Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs, amongst others.
- Managing members' constituency casework via a Member Enquiry system, processing Member expenses and making arrangements for attending conferences and seminars. A report on a review of the Member Enquiry system is also agendaed for consideration at the meeting.
- Support to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Council in their civic duties.
- Developing and updating the Democracy web pages managing democratic room bookings/

The Chief Executive's Business Support unit supports the work of the Leader and the 9 Cabinet Members and comprises a small team of staff. The Cabinet Support Office provides professional advice, research and information gathering, prepares speeches, and manages day to day correspondence and diary coordination

Key Challenges and successes during the Year

Local Government Elections were held during the year, and following a review of electoral wards by the Local Government Boundary Commission the new Council was elected in May 2022. The Council now comprises 75 Councillors of which 47 are returning members and 28 are new. The team successfully managed the work involved in creating the new Council. This required a review of the political balance of the Authority, discussion with the new group leaders and unaffiliated members on political representations and the appointment to Committees of the Council, joint committees and external bodies, all within a very tight timescale.

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 a timing of meetings survey was undertaken, canvassing all members. The results of the survey were considered by the Democratic Services Committee and then a recommendation made to Council.

The Authority in accordance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced multi-location meetings from its annual meeting in May 2022 allowing participants to attend the meeting either physical in the Chamber, County Hall or remotely via Zoom. A new hybrid kit was installed which allowed both the physical and remote meeting to be managed using a mix of a remote platform (Zoom) and physical presence in the Chamber at County Hall and merging into one meeting.

Working along side the Learning and Development Team a full and comprehensive Member Induction Programme was held for both returning and new members over a period of 6 months. Over 40 separate training sessions were convened for this purpose.

The service supported the Council approved change to the remits of the Scrutiny Committees in that each Scrutiny Committee was now responsible for the overview and scrutiny of specific Cabinet Portfolios and their respective service areas.

The Cabinet also agreed a move from systematic referral of Scrutiny reports to Pre-Decision Scrutiny. This allowed Scrutiny Committee members to decide which reports from the Cabinet Forward Plan that they wished to come before them, allowing them greater control of their own agendas by deciding on and agreeing content and prioritising the issues that each scrutiny committee examined. As per normal process, each Scrutiny Committees would also continue to identify their own topics and Cabinet could invite a Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise a decision which is in the pipeline

The service entered into new contracts for webcasting services with our webcasting provider Public-I in early 2022 and with our Committee Management System provider Civica Mod.gov in March 2023.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has had a direct impact on the workload of Democratic Services, for example additional resources are required to facilitate a combination of both physical and virtual meetings. The team has also suffered some long term staff absences during the year and work has been re-allocated between team members in order to maintain, as much as possible, statutory service requirements.

Key Challenges and Priorities for 2022-23

The priorities for the coming year involve continuing to build on the very firm foundations already in place.

We will examine and develop our scrutiny arrangements following the work of Audit Wales on the 'Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for purpose follow up review.

Manage the changes put in place in respect of the Member Enquiry process.

Administer any changes that come forward as a result of making of orders in the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Council constitution.

Having taking into account the extremely difficult (and ongoing) economic pressures facing the Council generally and the need for the service to continue to identify, deliver and contribute to further savings, the staffing structure (if provided with support from other teams within the department) is considered to be sufficient for current service demands, however this will need to be continually monitored as elements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act come into force, the team is asked to further develop and support the Scrutiny process and further joint working arrangements are introduced.