

MEETING	Democratic Services Committee
DATE	4 April 2017
SUBJECT	Annual report by the Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee with regards to support for members
PURPOSE	Submit a draft report to be submitted to the Full Council in June 2017 outlining the support that has been developed and is being developed on behalf of members.
AUTHOR	Geraint Owen Head of Democratic Services

1. A draft report is presented below which is to be submitted to the Full Council at its June 2017 meeting. The report outlines the support for members delivered to date over the term of this Council together with the elements that are still being developed for elected members.
2. From the draft report, you will see that some elements are still incomplete and some elements will need to be updated as a result of other discussions.
3. We also intend to further develop the design of the report, making it easier for present members and new members to read.
4. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for specific matters (under Section 11), as follows:
 - Appointing a Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the Local Authority
 - Reviewing the available support for the Head of the Democratic Services in relation to staff, buildings and other resources, ensuring they are adequate for carrying out the requirements of the role
 - Producing a report, at least once a year, to present to the Full Council in relation to member support.
5. I wish to thank all members of the Committee for their support, enthusiasm, and constructive discussions, along with the work carried out over the past five years.



THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

- Support for Gwynedd
Elected Members



RHOI POBL GWYNEDD YN GANOLOG I BOPETH RYDYM YN EI WNEUD • PUTTING THE
PEOPLE OF GWYNEDD AT THE CENTRE OF EVERYTHING WE DO

FOREWORD

With the 2017 Local Elections in May, this year is a good opportunity to reflect on the past year and Council term since the Democratic Services Committee was established for the first time in 2012.

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Reviewing the available support for elected members in order that they can fulfil their role has been a fundamental part of my work and that of the Committee and I sincerely thank everyone who has contributed over the past few years.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Owen'. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Head of Democratic Services
Head of Corporate Support Department

BACKGROUND

In 2012, 75 members were welcomed to the new Council; a combination of returning members and new members. During the term, we have also welcomed nine additional members.

What changes have taken place since 2012?

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS



- Setting up a Cabinet/Scrutiny procedure for the first time following the 2012 elections, and developing the arrangements over the past five years.
- Reviewing the scrutiny arrangements in order to make improvements. The scrutiny system was not working as well as it could, and this was acknowledged. During the past year, therefore, arrangements were revised and a decision was made by the Full Council on 3 March 2017 on how to proceed.
- Holding a number of workshops on specific topics - informal workshops that provide opportunities for members to understand the topic in question, thus, ensuring they are able to come to a fair conclusion having received all the information e.g. the Gwynedd Challenge, Boundary Commission etc.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION



- Electronic communication - the vast majority of Members now have electronic devices which enable them to receive information quickly. It also reduces the Council's carbon footprint by using less paper. £220,379.60 of savings have been made since 2012 through cutting printing and posting costs.

- Modern.gov is now used to distribute committee papers. This is an electronic system and many have said that it is more straightforward for the user than the previous arrangements. 65% of council papers are able to be distributed at least five working days before the Committee date and x% are distributed three full working days before the date of the Committee
- Modern.gov has also made it far easier for the people of Gwynedd to find information about their local Councillors. Every member has his/her picture on the website along with contact details and interesting statistics e.g. information about the committees or outside bodies of which they are members, and their attendance at those committees.

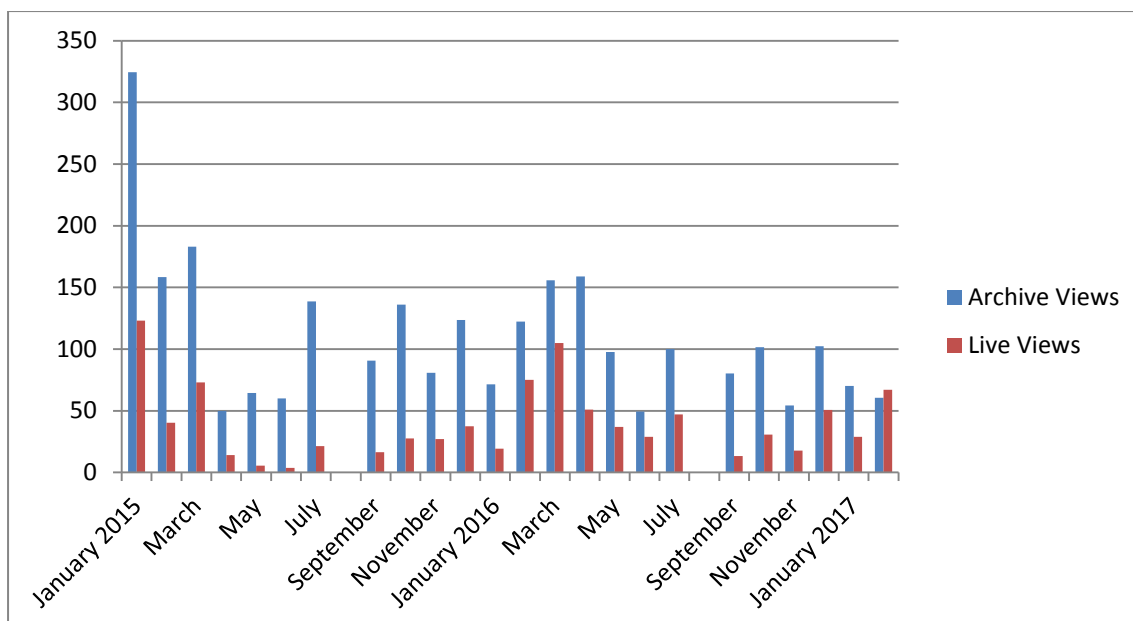
Meetings and committees are held in Welsh with a simultaneous translation provision available. All information is published bilingually, and Gwynedd Council has worked with outside companies to ensure the Modern.gov provision is readily available in both languages.

- At the beginning of the Council's term, members noted that they received information them from various sources. To resolve this, an electronic information bulletin was developed named 'Rhaeadr'. Important information is shared in good time through Rhaeadr.

LOCATION OF MEETINGS AND ENSURING A MORE OPEN DEMOCRACY



- Meeting rooms were updated, including Siambr Dafydd Orwig and Siambr Hywel Dda.
 - Modifications were carried out on disabled entrances.
 - 'Hearing loops' were installed in a number of meeting rooms to help with sound
 - Specific steps were taken through the identity cards to ensure staff and member safety
- As part of the above, the translation equipment at the Caernarfon chambers was updated and, at the same time, an electronic voting system was installed in Siambr Dafydd Orwig. Members enjoy testing the system at the beginning of every Council meeting!
- In January 2015, Gwynedd Council began web-casting some of the main committees in order to encourage more people to take part in democracy in Gwynedd and for people to see what goes on at committees. Viewing figures show that interest in the web-casts is quite high, especially archived web-casts. Graphs show higher viewing figures for contentious issues, or if specific promotional work has taken place.

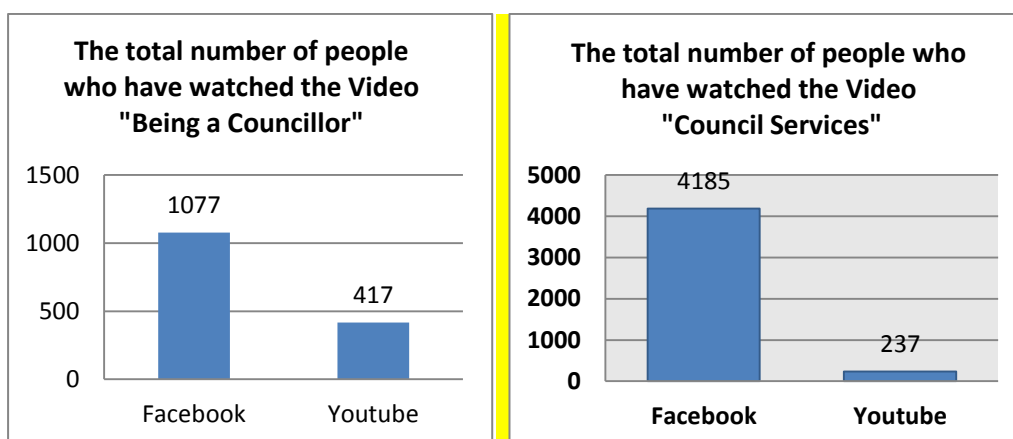


Again, Gwynedd Council is seen to be at the forefront of ensuring a bilingual web-casting provision.

- The Council also acknowledges that it is challenging for some members to attend some meetings. We have, therefore, piloted and made use of video conferencing facilities for less formal meetings in order to reduce the need for members to travel. Whilst use of this resource has increased, it still, clearly, needs improving in the hope of being able to use the resource at formal committees.
- Following a review of the old Area Committee arrangements, four Area Forums were set up in 2013 - Gwryfai, Ogwen, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd, which meet five times a year. Area Forums/Committees were set up in the hope of improving community engagement, achieve better results for the area and make better use of member and officer resources.
- In addition, a specific project was run to attempt to promote Democracy for all. An attempt was made to encourage people from all backgrounds to take part in Democracy and especially to stand as a candidate in local government elections. This was achieved by
 - Improving the website and providing more information for prospective candidates
 - Producing videos to try to help explain in simple terms the role of a Councillor and the Services for which Gwynedd Council is responsible
 - Generating a questionnaire to try to understand the obstacles to standing for election

The questionnaire was promoted in the press, the Council's website and in social media, namely, Facebook and Twitter. From the responses, it appears that there are no specific obstacles that the Council has not already attempted to address e.g. the Council has raised awareness of the childcare assistance available. The highest levels of interest were seen in the 26 - 49 age group, which shows that the campaign attracted the attention of a younger age range than the average age of Gwynedd Council members before the May 2017 Election

Number of viewers of both videos since July 2016:



OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- Salaries and higher salaries of members resolved and reviewed and published in line with requirements.
- Arrangements were developed to report back when representing the Council on outside bodies or in their roles as Champions
- 39 members were assisted to produce 102 annual reports, and they were published on the website so that the people of Gwynedd could see what their local member has been up to.
- Induction arrangements were ensured for new members who joined the Council during the term.
- A Committee sub-group was established to assist officers with the work of preparing an application for a Members' Charter by the end of 2017.
- Personal development interviews were held so that members could identify a specific training programme to improve their own skills, using the messages as a basis of the members' general training programme. In addition, huge steps were taken to develop the following elements:
 - On-line training
 - Unique training for individual members in accordance with their requirements
 - Training for small groups of members which encourages better learning
 - Webinars
 - Experimenting with filming training so that members who are unable to attend are able to watch the course
 - Feedback from members was very positive, especially for new fields of training e.g. social media

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2017 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS



- ❖ Much work has also been carried out to try make rigorous preparations for the period before and directly following the May 2017 elections. A number of conversations have been held with current members to ask them about their experiences and how things can be improved for the benefit of those members who will be joining the Council after the elections. Following the discussions, a number of preparations are under way, including:
 - Holding sessions to prepare candidates
 - Develop an information 'portal' specifically for elected members
 - On-line training
 - Arranging welcome days in a different way, ensuring more interactive sessions for members
 - Prioritising the information to be presented to members at the beginning of term
 - Making sure that members are able to source information for themselves.
 - Ensuring developments in Information Technology
 - Ensuring that members understand the requirements of outside bodies: what the work would entail should they be nominated for these bodies

What are the plans for 2017/18 and onward?

xxxxx new members were welcomed to the Council following the May 2017 elections and, in order to support them and the other members, the following plans are in the pipeline:

- ❖ Intense induction/training - specific work programme created for 9 and 10 May, 2017, with a full programme for the first year already in place. The Democratic Services Committee will assess the training programme during the first year in order to ensure that the correct issues are identified for the following year, and so on.
- ❖ Develop the new scrutiny model and implement it. The Council made its decision about the new scrutiny model at its meeting on 3 March, 2017. Specific work will take place to establish and implement the new arrangements in 2017/18.
- ❖ Online arrangements for claiming travelling costs and payments of salaries. The intention is to move away from paper forms when claiming travelling costs and paying the Salary of elected members. Claiming through electronic methods would enable members to process their claims from home and would reduce paperwork for everyone.
- ❖ Further response to the Government's White Paper on Reforming Local Government
- ❖ Consult continuously with Members of the Democratic Services Committee in order to identify areas for improving efficiency and service
- ❖ Adopt a description of roles for the different functions of members. The recommendation of the Democratic Services Committee is to be presented to the Full Council on 15 June in order to ensure guidance and clarity for members on the expectations of various roles. This would also contribute to ensuring a decision on the 'members' charter' for the Council
- ❖ Continue to develop the Members' Portal. The Members' Portal is a recent development for the new Council term. It is an 'intranet' for members where useful information will be available in one central location. Members would be consulted on a regular basis in order to constantly improve this resource.
- ❖ Assist members in their role as Local Members. This matter was identified by current members. Rather than only being able to file information that's relevant to their work for the Council, the intention is to develop the way in which members can file work that is related to their work in their ward.

The current consultation on Constituency Boundaries by the Boundary Commission is ongoing. When the result of the consultation is made clear, it will be necessary to implement it from 2022 onward.

- ❖ Continue to consult with members, especially members of the Democratic Services Committee about how to improve the support they receive.

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