

MEETING	Full Council
DATE	15 <sup>th</sup> June 2017
SUBJECT	Annual report by the Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee with regards to support for members
PURPOSE	Annual report outlining the support that has been developed and is being developed for members.
AUTHOR	Geraint Owen Head of Democratic Services

1. I present below my annual report to the Full Council outlining the support to members that has been developed to date, over the term of the previous Council. In addition the report outlines the elements that are still being developed for elected members which will be the focus of the work over the months and years to come.
  
2. I wish to thank all members of the Committee during this period for their support, enthusiasm, and constructive discussions, along with the work carried out by them and their support officers 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.

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.

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 over the past few years. Providing the support would not have been possible without the hard work and commitment of the Democratic Services officers and I would like to note my sincere thanks to them for the work accomplished during the period.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geraint Owen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Geraint Owen,**  
**Head of Democratic Services**  
**Head of Corporate Support Department**

## BACKGROUND

In 2012, 75 members were welcomed to the new Council; a combination of experienced returning members and newly elected members. During 2012 - 2017, ten other members were also welcomed.

## What changes have taken place since 2012?

### GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS



- The Cabinet/Scrutiny arrangements were implemented for the first time following the 2012 elections, with the arrangements developed over the past five years.
- Scrutiny arrangements have been reviewed in order to make improvements. It has been acknowledged that the scrutiny system was not working as well as it could, therefore, during the past year, arrangements were revised. The Full Council adopted the new arrangements at its meeting on 2nd March 2017, and the new arrangements will be implemented over the coming months.
- Arranging a number of workshops on specific topics. A number of informal workshops that provide opportunities for members to understand specific topics were held, thus, ensuring that members had the relative information to enable them to come to a fair conclusion for a specific topic. Examples of the workshops include the Gwynedd Challenge workshops, Boundary Commission etc.

### ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION



- Electronic communication – by the end of 2016/17 the vast majority of Members had electronic devices which enable them to receive information quickly. It also reduces the

Council's carbon footprint by using less paper. Savings of over £220,000 have been made since 2012 through reducing printing and posting costs.

- Modern.gov is now used to distribute committee papers. This is an electronic system and many have commented that the system is more user-friendly than the previous arrangements. 65% of council papers are able to be distributed at least five working days before the Committee date and 99% 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 at Gwynedd Council, with a simultaneous translation provision available. All information is published bilingually, and Gwynedd Council has worked with outside companies to ensure that provision is readily available in both languages.

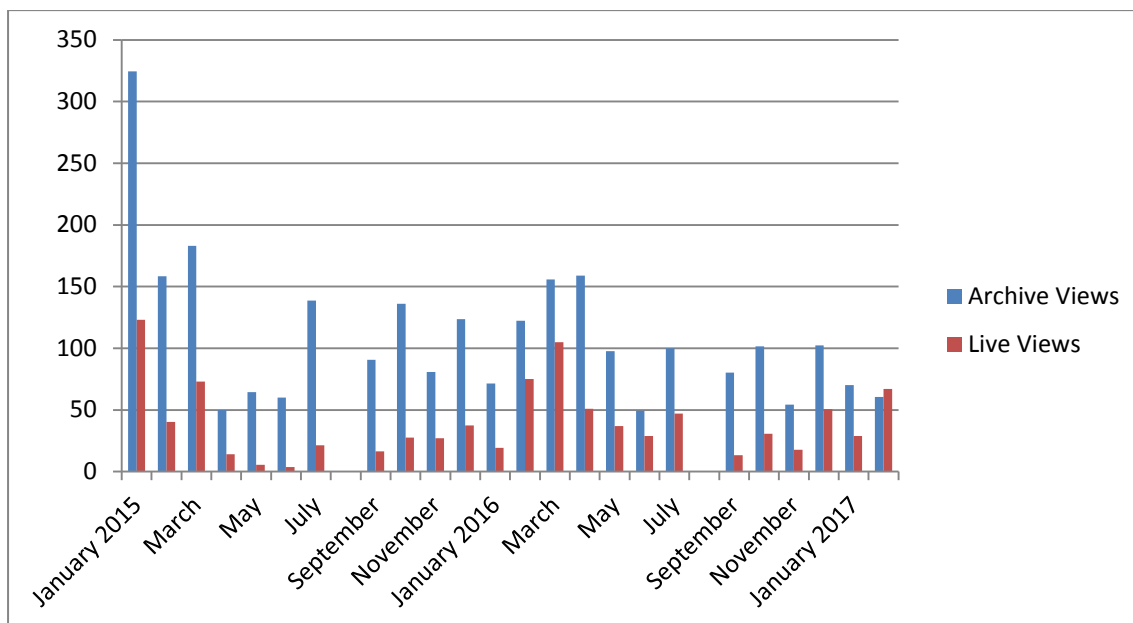
- At the beginning of the Council's term, members noted that they received information from various sources. In order to try to channel the information, an electronic information bulletin was developed named 'Rhaeadr'. Important information is shared in good time through Rhaeadr, which is now available on the members "porth".

#### 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 access.
  - a number of meeting rooms have been adapted to assist with sound levels
  - Member and staff safety has been updated through the identity cards issued
- 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!
- Web-casting. 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 to ensure transparency in our committee discussions. Viewing figures show that interest in

the web-casts is fairly high, especially archived web-casts. Graphs show higher viewing figures for contentious issues, or if specific promotional work has taken place.



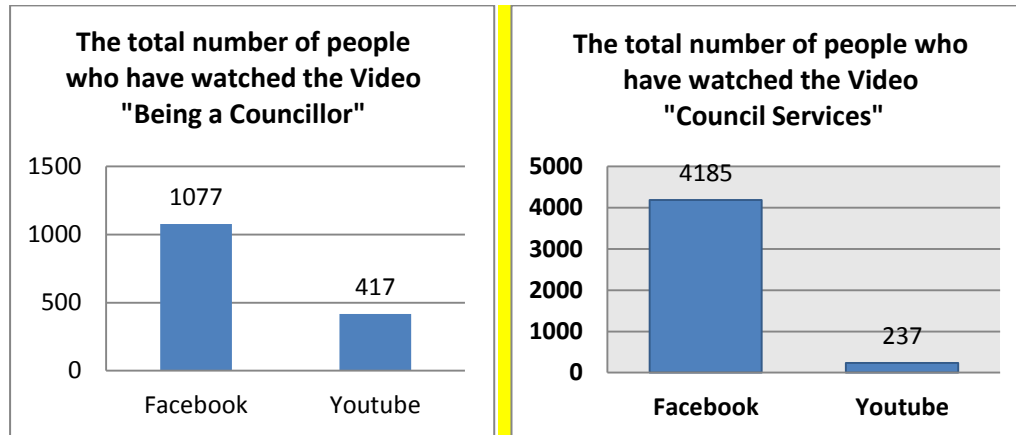
Again, Gwynedd Council is seen to be at the forefront of ensuring a bilingual web-casting provision.

- The Council also acknowledges that it is challenging for some members to attend some meetings. The Council has 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 with the ambition of being able to use the resource at formal committees.
- A review of the old Area Committee arrangements was undertaken in 2012-13, and as a result, four Area Forums were set up in 2013 - Gwyrfai, Ogwen, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd, which meet five times a year. Area Forums/Committees were established to improve community engagement, achieve better results for the area and make better use of member and officer resources.
- In addition, a specific project was established with the aim of promoting democracy for all - encouraging 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 explain clearly the role of a Councillor and the services Gwynedd Council provides
  - 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 senior salaries of members reviewed and resolved and published in line with requirements.
- Arrangements have been developed to report back when representing the Council on outside bodies or in their roles as Champions, which will be implemented during 2017-18
- 39 members were assisted to produce 102 annual reports, and they were published on the website so that the people of Gwynedd could view the work of their local member.
- Ensure that induction arrangements were in place for new members who joined the Council during the term. Ten members were welcomed during the 2012-17 term.
- A sub-group of the Democratic Services Committee 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, significant 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 later
- 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 was also undertaken over the last year to make rigorous preparations for the May 2017 elections. The arrangements included preparation work prior to the elections, as well as preparation for welcoming newly elected members following the elections. A number of conversations were held with members to understand their experiences and to ask how things could be improved for the benefit of those members who will be joining the Council after the elections.
- ❖ The arrangements included :
  - Holding sessions to prepare candidates
  - Develop an information 'portal' specifically for elected members
  - Develop On-line training
  - Arranging welcome days in a new and 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



## **What are the plans for 2017/18 and onward?**

24 new members were welcomed to the Council following the May 2017 elections and, in order to support them and all members, the following plans are being developed:

- ❖ Intense induction/training – Welcoming days were held on 9th and 10th May, 2017, with initial feedback being positive. In addition, a full training and information providing programme has already been developed for the first year. The Democratic Services Committee will assess the training programme during the first year in order to ensure that the correct issues are identified and prioritised for the following year's programme, and for the future.
- ❖ Develop the new scrutiny model and implement it. The Council adopted a new scrutiny model at its meeting on 2nd March, 2017. Specific work will take place to establish and implement the new arrangements in 2017/18.
- ❖ Arrangements for claiming travelling costs online and online salary slips. Over the last few weeks arrangements have been implemented to allow members to claim travelling costs online. Claiming through electronic methods will enable members to process their claims from home at a time convenient for them, and will 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 opportunities for improving the service
- ❖ Adopt role descriptions for the various roles for members. The Democratic Services Committee has worked to develop role descriptions for the various roles which are undertaken by various members in order to ensure guidance and clarity for members on the expectations of various roles. The role descriptions will be presented to the Full Council on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2017 for adoption.
- ❖ Ensuring that members understand the requirements of outside bodies, and what the work would entail should they be nominated for these bodies
- ❖ 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 former members and the intention is to develop a way in which members can file information that is related to their work in their ward, rather than their Council work only.

- 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.