

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>29th September 2015</b>
<b>TITLE OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>Members' Annual Reports (2014/15)</b>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>Update Members on the reports published in 2014/15 and present a chance for an early discussion about the opportunities and obstacles for 2015/16</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>Note the contents of the report</b>
<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>Geraint Owen Head of Democratic Services</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The committee will be aware of the expectation on the Council to make arrangements for members to be able to produce an annual report if they so wish. The purpose of the report is to support communication between elected members and the public by presenting factual information of activities.
- 1.2 One important factor in the link between the annual reports and the white paper which was discussed recently. The White Paper consulted on changing the status of the annual reports to statutory. The Committee will recall that it agreed that the production of such reports should be mandatory for all members; the Cabinet agreed with that view and that is now the public view of the Council on that issue, a view that has been communicated to the Welsh Government.
- 1.3 To remind Members, the original guidelines received have been included in **Appendix A**.

## 2. 2014/15 REPORTS

- 2.1 Over the last years the number of elected members who have chosen to publish an annual report has risen:
- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| 2012/13 | 8 reports (pilot undertaken)              |
| 2013/14 | 26 reports (using the template developed) |
| 2014/15 | 39 reports                                |
- 2.2 The reports have been published on the Council's website.
- 2.3 As Members presented their reports, a few comments were made which have been summarised below.
- Templates for the reports.  
Some Members felt that the template was too restrictive, and meant that they had to produce something less colourful than what they would have produced of their own accord eg more colourful and containing pictures. It was also noted that some

members were uncomfortable with the editing work that was sometimes made on reports, but the Council has a duty to edit in accordance to the guidelines.

- Template for the number of Committees attended.  
Some Members believed that the current template did not offer enough information for the reader, as it only includes the number of committees and % attendance. Some have suggested that the template should include the number present, number absent/apologies, total and the percentage.
- Data in the table of committees attended.  
There was some frustration that the data received was incorrect. The Committee will remember that it decided to include information about the preparatory meetings as well as the area forums in the table. The decision was taken after the original tables were sent out to Members. In the future, we hope that Modern Gov will be able to facilitate the reporting of this information.
- Timetable.  
A number of Members reported that they found it difficult to remember what had happened during the previous year and to report it in June/ July. One possibility is for Members to keep a diary, and present their reports in May of each year. In addition, if the template is approved earlier, it would be possible to share the template with Members allowing them to record events as they rose during the year. Attendance data could be added at a later date.

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 The Democratic Services Committee is asked to consider the comments above and present any further comments they may have fresh from the process, in order to make things easier for next year, 2015/16.

## Appendix A – Guidelines

### **ANNUAL REPORTS BY MEMBERS OF A LOCAL AUTHORITY**

#### **Introduction**

Part 1 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (“the Measure”) contains provisions intended to strengthen local democracy. Chapter 1 of that Part concerns the support provided to members of a local authority and section 5 within that chapter provides for the production of annual reports for these members.

This statutory guidance is issued under section 5(4) of the Measure. The guidance relates to local authorities making arrangements for the production of annual reports.

#### **What the Measure requires.**

Section 5 requires county and county borough councils (local authorities) to ensure that all their elected members are able to make an annual report on their council activities during the previous year. This includes enabling any member of the council’s executive to be able to report on their executive activities also. Any reports produced by members of a county or county borough council must be published by that council.

A local authority is free to set conditions/limits on what is included in a report. A local authority must publicise what arrangements it has for publishing annual reports and in drawing up these arrangements must have regard to this guidance in so doing.

#### **Guidance**

##### Duties of a local authority

A local authority must make the arrangements enabling its members to produce annual reports. This means it must tell its members how and by when to do this. The Measure, at section 8 *et seq*, provides for a Head of Democratic Services (HDS) to carry out democratic services functions as defined in section 9. This includes the provision of support and advice to members to assist them in the carrying out of their functions and organisation of the annual report process would fall within this. The Measure prevents the HDS from providing support and advice to a member of an executive in relation to the carrying out of that member’s executive functions, but production of an annual report, even if it made reference to the member’s executive activities, is not an executive function in itself.

It is anticipated that the first annual reports would be published no later than the end of June 2013.

##### Publication of reports

How a local authority decides to publish is a matter for that authority to decide upon. The minimum requirement would be for the authority to include a link to a member’s annual report on that part of the authority’s website which carries details of individual members. There is no requirement for any publicity beyond this, and authorities should be careful that, if they decide to provide any further publicity for the reports, the same provision is provided for all members. Therefore, should a member request that his/her report is given any greater publicity, that request should be declined unless carried out in respect of all members.

Local authorities should ensure also that their website includes information about the introduction of annual reports and how members of the public can

access them.

### Content of reports

The central purpose of the reports is for members of the public to find information about their local councillor's activity.

Local authorities may place their own restrictions on content in reports.

Annual reports should include only factual information. In the main that would suggest information on meetings, events and conferences etc. attended, training and development received. While it might be acceptable to record information such as "made representations on behalf of the campaign to save the local hospital in the following ways", it would not be acceptable to say "succeeded in saving local hospital by my efforts on my constituents' behalf".

Similarly, care should be taken to avoid including in reports information concerning activities when the member concerned is not operating in the role of councillor. So, whereas it would be acceptable to include information concerning, for instance, a speech made at a conference where the member was attending because of their council role, it would not be acceptable to refer to a speech made to, for instance, a Party conference, where the member was a delegate from their local party organisation.

Care should also be taken not to include information which could be interpreted as critical of another member. For instance, it would not be acceptable for a member to compare his/her attendance or activities with that of another member or members.

The following areas are proposed as standard items to be included:

- Role and responsibilities – to include details of membership of committees and outside bodies, attendance records for these and full council.
- Local activity – details of surgeries held, representations made on behalf of electors and the results of these
- Major projects – involvement in local, county or regional initiatives or projects.
- Learning and development – details of training and development events attended or undertaken, conferences and seminars attended.



