

MEETING	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
DATE	17 NOVEMBER 2020
SUBJECT	DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC AND IN FUTURE.
PURPOSE	To submit an update for members on the developments that have been recently taking place in the background.
RECOMMENDATION	Members of the Committee are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider whether any further support is required to assist elected members in their role • support the direction for webcasting and voting • Note any observations with regards to shape and format of future meetings
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WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING?

1. Back in March 2020, everything changed due to the arrival of the lockdown in light of the Covid-19 crisis. With it came new demands for everyone. It has resulted in new demands on you in your role as elected members, and a new way of working for you and the Council officers who support you.

Elected members.

2. At the beginning of the crisis, a number of you noted that you had prioritised your limited time to assist residents within your wards and ensure that they received the services that they needed.
3. The pandemic has been challenging for everyone's well-being, and every member has been under significant strain and remain under pressure. Geraint Owen, Head of Democratic Services has contacted all members to offer support if your mental health is under pressure. It is also important to note that support is available on the Welsh Local Government Association website and others (see the contact links in **Appendix 1**).
4. Recently, the demands in terms of your work with the Council have also recommenced. In order to assist members with this, a number of training sessions were held (general sessions and sessions for each specific committee) in order to give members an opportunity to practice on Teams and Zoom prior to the committee itself. Guidelines were created for chairing virtual meetings and tips to remember when

taking part in virtual meetings. It was a pleasure to see so many in the Council's first virtual meeting - all members now have the technology available to virtually connect.

5. Members of the committee are asked to consider whether any further support is required to aid elected members in their role. So far, only a few members have responded to the note sent by the Head of Democratic Services.

Developments in the Council.

6. Below is a brief outline of the main developments made by the Council over the past months.
7. Prioritising resources. At the beginning of the crisis, resources needed to be prioritised to deal with the crisis across the Council, which meant that some services were not being provided. The committees held also needed to be prioritised, and this was done in regular consultation with the Business Group. A virtual meeting of the Cabinet was successfully held in April 2020, and it was recorded for broadcast to the public. Gwynedd was one of only three Councils to successfully hold a virtual meeting so early on during the crisis.
8. In order to assist the Council to respond to the crisis, eight members from the Democracy and Language Service transferred to the Community Resilience team, and I would like to thank them for being so flexible. I am also very grateful to the remaining small core group who worked so diligently to develop the Council arrangements to enable us to hold virtual meetings, including a simultaneous translation service over the period.
9. Meetings of the Council have been prioritised to be held in four phases as noted in **Appendix 2** and we are now commencing stage 4, which is to hold all Council committees virtually.
10. Below is a summary of the recent key developments.
 - ✓ Development of simultaneous translation arrangements on Zoom and Teams.
 - ✓ Training held for members and others who participate in committees on Zoom and Teams - a total of 23 sessions have been held.
 - ✓ Holding the first virtual meeting in April, and managing to hold every virtual meeting in both languages.
 - ✓ Recording and publishing meetings in both languages - usually published within 24 hours
 - ✓ 28 formal committees held during the period up to the end of October.
 - ✓ 30 informal meetings with elected members held during the same period.
 - ✓ 98% of members have taken part in a virtual committee meeting.
 - ✓ Development of the skills of the Democracy and Translation Team staff to use the new provision and train others on their use.

- ✓ Adjusting working arrangements to ensure the continuation of the service virtually.
 - ✓ Publishing a decision notice for every decision made at the committees held over the period in accordance with the requirements of the Covid-19 regulations, which is a new requirement for the majority of committees.
 - ✓ Publishing meeting minutes as soon as possible on the website.
11. Clearly, we are continuing to learn from every experience and there are also specific fields that need to be developed further.
12. Live Webcast. We have managed to hold a pilot of a live webcast of a virtual Cabinet meeting successfully. Over the coming weeks, we will continue to pilot by webcasting Cabinet meetings in order to learn lessons from the experience. Our intention is to return to a situation of webcasting the committees that used to be webcast previously - Cabinet, Full Council, scrutiny committees and planning committee. The Committee is requested to support this direction.
13. Voting. Covid regulations requirements mean that a decision notice of each committee meeting must be published within five working days. As part of the decision notice, the numbers who have voted in favour/against/abstained must be recorded in all our committees.
14. We have trialled arrangements to enable voting, have listened to observations made by members and officers and, having learned from experience, we have reached the conclusion that the following arrangements meet the requirements at present.
- Meetings of 10 members or fewer - voting by raising a virtual hand in favour/against/abstaining.
 - Meetings of 10 members or more - voting by a roll call and members stating if they are in favour/against/abstaining.
 - Full Council - electronic vote
15. We accept that the arrangements are not perfect, and possibly slightly frustrating at times for elected members, especially the roll call process. Whilst it feels slightly clumsy, it does allow us to report the vote accurately - which is something we are not entirely confident we can do by raising a virtual hand only. We will continue to work on possible solutions and developments over the coming period and will ask for the committee's support to the direction and potential developments.
16. Operating Framework for meetings. As noted several times already, we have learned and developed a lot over the past months, and some of the lessons are matters that are to be kept and sustained to the longer term. To this end, it is important to consider the format of holding meetings (formal and informal) to the future.

17. Council officers have already discussed some of the benefits, disadvantages and lessons which have become clear over the past months, and have developed an operating framework for internal meetings in order to ensure that we do not lose any of the clear benefits and slip back to old ways without thinking.
18. Similarly, it is intended to develop such a framework for elected members also. Committee members are asked for their opinion about the format of holding meetings from now on, on the basis of what has become apparent during the past months. We will feed in the comments of the Democratic Services Committee to the discussions that are to be held shortly with Cabinet Members.

APPENDIX 1

USEFUL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT:

The following sites may be useful:

- The WLGA workbook on managing stress and personal resilience is available [here](#).
- NHS guidelines on stress and anxiety can be found [here](#).
- A [webinar](#) (and [slides](#)) by the Local Government Association on 'maintaining your own resilience as a councillor' – 14 September.
- Also by the Local Government Association, an [E-learning Module](#) on 'Stress Management and Resilience'.
- Academi Wales has resources on resilience and Covid [here](#).

If members are threatened or harassed, the following guidelines on the WLGA website might also be useful:

- online personal safety and abuse guidelines [here](#).
- guidance on dealing with threats [here](#).
- and "don't feed the trolls" by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate [here](#).

APPENDIX 2 – PRIORITIES OF COMMITTEES TO MEET DURING THE PANDEMIC

PHASE	TIMETABLE	COMMITTEES
PHASE 1 - Return priority 1	April, May and June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet • Planning • Licensing Sub-committee • North Wales Economic Ambition Board • GwE • Public Services Board • Business Group
PHASE 2 - Return priority 2	July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and Governance • Employment Appeals Committee • Pensions Committee
PHASE 3 - Return priority 3	First committees following the summer break September and October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Council • Scrutiny Committees • Joint Planning Policy Committee • Transport sub-group (NWEAB) • Schools Budget Forum • Central/General Licensing Committee
PHASE 4 - return priority 4	As soon as practically possible in light of setting up the above - November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Services Committee • Standards Committee • SACRE • Language Committee • Advisory Joint Committee • Porthmadog Harbour Consultative Committee • Pwllheli Harbour Consultative Committee • Aberdyfi Harbour Consultative Committee • Barmouth Harbour Consultative Committee • Local Joint Consultative Committee • North Wales Residual Waste Joint Committee • Traeth Iafant • Dwyfor Area Committee* • Meirionnydd Forum* • Gwyrfai Forum* • Ogwen Forum* • Cambrian Coast Railway Conference

*There are sessions per Cabinet Member for all Council members to receive an update on the developments over the period of the pandemic and to ask any questions have been arranged instead of area forums. Nine sessions have been arranged for November.