





Date of meeting :	16 March 2023
Subject	Support for Councillors – Performance of the Democracy Services Team
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked to note the observations and accept the report.
Contact Officer:	Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Team Leader)
What is the background and relevant considerations?	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Democracy Team is working hard to ensure full support for Councillors. In order to ensure the appropriate support, we ask for your views regularly. We gather opinions via a Satisfaction Survey twice a year. We also speak to two or three Councillors each month to hold in-depth conversations about the support and what can be done to assist Councillors in their role.2. The outcome of the last Satisfaction Questionnaire was reported at the last meeting of this Committee in November 2022. We will arrange to send out a further questionnaire to you in the spring in order to receive regular feedback and reflect continuously on the service that is provided.3. In the meantime, we have recommenced our arrangements of holding conversations with individual Councillors. These conversations allow us to gain a better understanding of any issues causing concern. Below, some of the highlighted themes and matters have been outlined. Note that some of the observations are ambiguous to maintain the confidentiality of the conversations.4. The majority of the conversations confirmed the hard work of the Democracy team and the willingness of staff from the team to try to assist with any issues immediately. There were specific matters to be praised, as follows:5. Arrangements for all committees, including the background support provided to committee Chairs– from notes or briefing sessions with the officers responsible for the committee to the practical matters arranged by the Democracy team.6. A particularly good programme for presenting information and training sessions held over the past year.	

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7. General praise for the **hybrid system** arrangements and Cyngor Gwynedd's ability to hold multi-location meetings and webcast them. It is a source of pride how much Cyngor Gwynedd has been able to do in comparison with a number of other authorities and public bodies. As part of the same praise, some frustration was noted regarding the sound in Siambr Hywel Dda, and it is noted that work is ongoing to find a better solution. Members who join hybrid meeting virtually are encouraged to wear headphones with a connected microphone in order to make it easier for those in the Chamber to hear them.
8. Standard of the **minutes** is particularly good and manage to strike the right balance in Committees.
9. Some observations were also offered about areas for improvement, such as:
10. **Information about salaries, costs and how to obtain a P60 at the end of the year.**
- It was highlighted that some people were unclear about where to find information about Members' salaries. the basic wage, where to find pay slips and P60.
 - It was also highlighted that there were higher costs for Councillors in rural wards as they had to travel to visit individuals in the ward etc.
 - *It is intended to use the members' bulletin to note the information that was submitted to the Democratic Services Committee today regarding Councillor salaries. Political party assistants will have been briefed and will be able to instruct any Councillor who wishes to see their P60 on how to do so.*
 - *We have already drawn the attention of the Independent Remuneration Panel to the comparative costs of rural wards compared to urban wards. They intend to visit county councils next year (23/24), and the matter can be raised again then.*
11. **Office space for use by Councillors.**
- A request has been made to use locations within the Council for work purposes and/or holding Councillor surgeries.
 - *The work location of each Councillor is home, and they are welcome to attend meetings in the chambers when they are multi-location meetings, or attend meetings with specific officers by prior arrangement if required. We are continuously encouraging all to think of the most efficient way of meeting bearing in mind that we as a Council have declared a climate emergency.*
- Council buildings only provide workspace for officers (with the exception of Cabinet members) and there is insufficient space to enable a work*



location or space for Councillors to hold surgeries in Council offices. All Members are asked to respect this. Specific arrangements have been implemented on particular occasions to assist individual Councillors in the event of a power cut or no internet connection, although this was by prior arrangement.

12. Information about attendance on Modern.gov.


- We have received a query about why the system chooses a specific period when displaying Councillor attendance at Committees. Also, a Member has noted a wish to explain that another organisation had arranged a meeting that coincided, which meant that they had to apologise in relation a Council meeting.
- *Any individual who views the statistics can change the period being viewed, and we have made enquiries to see whether the period of 6 months which is automatically displayed can be extended. Additionally, it is not possible to note the reason for an individual's apology, and traditionally the Councillors' annual reports have been used to provide the explanation.*

13. Options for further training.

- It was noted that the scrutiny training had been extremely useful at the beginning of the process, but that it was perhaps timely to hold a 'refresher course', as everyone now had a better understanding of the role. In addition, the praise for the specific training for Scrutiny Chairs was noted.
- It was noted that the volume of all the reports that needed to be read and understood in order to make informed decisions could be extremely challenging. It was asked whether the reports could be simplified, or training provided on how to read reports more effectively and quickly.
- *We will work with the Learning and Development service to try to arrange the above. It is noted that Councillors can arrange a 1-1 session with the Learning and Development team in order to identify training needs such as these - and I'm sure that this will serve as a reminder for some of you. We also note that there is detailed information on the about training on the Members' intranet.*

14. Safety, and support for Councillors.

- Individual members have reported that they take specific steps in relation to ensuring their personal safety while out in the community.
- Observations have also been received regarding providing emotional support to Councillors, and the need to offer face-to-face sessions to ensure that Councillors do not become depressed and isolated.
- An observation was received about the importance of ensuring timely breaks in Committees.

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- *We are continuing to address the issue of Councillor safety, and there is a specific report to the Committee today outlining the overall support for Councillors.*
 - *The policy for holding hybrid meetings also continues to be in force. In reviewing it, it will be mandatory to consider savings (Councillor travel costs) and the capacity of the Democracy team, particularly due to the current recruitment challenges.*
 - *Officers will continue to remind Chairs of the need to ensure a timely break in Committees according to need.*

15. Further action

- The Democracy team intends to hold conversations with Democracy Services in other councils to identify good practice and other working methods that could lead to opportunities for improvements. We have already held a beneficial discussion with one other Council and have shared good practice. We believe that it is a method of ensuring continuous evaluation.

Recommendation

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