

# CYNGOR GWYNEDD



## Report to meeting of Cyngor Gwynedd

**Date of meeting:** 4 May 2023

**Title of Item:** Annual report by Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee with regards to support for Members.

**Contact Officer:** Ian Jones, Head of Democratic Services

### 1. DECISION

The Full Council is asked to adopt the report for information.

### 2. What is the background and relevant considerations?

- 2.1 I am required to submit a report to the Full Council on an annual basis outlining the support available to Councillors.
- 2.2 In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Act 2011, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for specific matters (under Section 11), as follows:
- Appoint a Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the local authority
  - Review the available support for the Head of the Democratic Services in relation to staff, buildings and other resources, ensuring they are sufficient for carrying out the requirements of the role.
  - Produce a report, at least once a year, to be presented to the Full Council in relation to support for Members.
- 2.3 It has been a very busy year, especially as a result of the Local Government election, welcoming 69 Councillors this term, with 25 new Councillors to the role.
- 2.4 I am also new to the role since November 2022 and eager to continue to learn and support you in the most effective manner. I will build on the firm

foundations that have already been laid by the former Head of Democratic Services, Geraint Owen. I will take this opportunity, on our behalf, to thank Geraint officially for all his hard work.

2.5 Also, I wish to thank members of the Democratic Services Committee for their welcome and constructive comments. I would also like to thank the officers of the Democratic and Language Services for their hard work and support, the Monitoring Officer for his continuous guidance, and all officers who help support you in your roles. I look forward to collaborating with you all in the future to further develop the provision.

2.6 This year's annual report is brief and focuses on the developments made during the year rather than outlining all the support that is available to Members. It also outlines the priorities for the coming year.

### **3. ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION**

3.1 A draft of the report was presented to the Democratic Services Committee meeting on 16/03/2023 for their comments on the content and the direction for the future prior to recommending the report to the Full Council.

#### **3.2 STATUTORY OFFICERS COMMENTS:**

##### **Monitoring Officer:**

I appreciate the close co-operation which takes place between Legal Services and Democratic Service and welcome this report.

##### **Statutory Finance Officer:**

No comments to add from the perspective of financial propriety.



**The Annual Report of the Head of Democratic  
Services - Support for Gwynedd Councillors**

2022/23

## FOREWORD

I am pleased to present my annual report outlining the support available for Gwynedd Councillors. It has been a very busy year, especially as we welcomed 69 of you as Councillors in May 2022, with 25 new Councillors to the role.

A year after a Local Government election is inevitably very busy and I am pleased to have been a part of this excitement. It has been a jam-packed year for all of you - as you get to grips again with your role as Councillor, some of you with different wards, others of you starting in the role for the first time.

It has also been a new experience for me after commencing my role as the Head of Democratic Services since November 2022. I will build on the firm foundations that have already been laid by the former Head of Democratic Services, Geraint Owen. I will take this opportunity, on our behalf, to thank Geraint officially for all his hard work.

I am eager to continue to learn and support you in the most effective manner and this will not be possible without your support as Councillors and the support of the different officers working in the background. Thank you to everyone, especially the Democratic and Language Service.

I look forward to collaborating with you over the coming years.

Regards,

Ian



**Ian Jones,**

**Head of Democratic Services**

## 2022/23 SUCCESSES

As I have had the privilege of taking over this role during the year, I have taken this opportunity to reflect on what has been delivered during the past year. I have been amazed that so many things have happened for the first time this year.

### 2022/23 – the first time we...

- welcomed **69** Councillors following the election based on the new wards in Gwynedd
- had **a third** of Councillors as female Councillors
- held **multi-location welcome days**, held over a two-day period to adhere to Covid-19 safety regulations
- give a choice of **information technology** provision in order to facilitate your role, encouraging everyone to have an additional screen to facilitate multi-location meetings
- created a small, useful **handbook** for Councillors to welcome and assist them in their role over the first few days. The handbook has already dated, but it is updated electronically on the Councillors' intranet.
- held **multi-location committee meetings** (Full Council, Cabinet, Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committees) ensuring simultaneous translation and webcasting in both languages - since the beginning of May 2022. This enables Councillors and officers to join remotely and be more flexible for Councillors who work or have caring responsibilities.
- had to call the **police** to a meeting of the Full Council due to a public disturbance. It has led to more robust **safety arrangements** and risk assessments, and it has brought the safety of Councillors to the forefront.
- had a **period of mourning** during the term, which led to rearranging a number of public meetings that led to more requirements on Councillors and staff in a short period
- received **a question from a member of the public** during one Full Council meeting
- adopted a **Petitions Scheme** so that the public had clarity on how to submit a petition to the Council
- adopted a **Participation Strategy** to promote the public's input to democratic decisions
- communicated regularly with you via the **Councillors' Bulletin** on a weekly basis to ensure the sharing of information directly and timely with you as Members.

## **2022/23 – continue with the support**

In addition, we have also succeeded in maintaining normal services and work programme in the post-election period. It was succeeded to

- ✓ Maintain the committees programme for the year, holding over 150 meetings in total, which was condensed to a shorter period than usual as a result of the post-election period and the period of mourning. It was necessary to take time to establish the committees after the election and to hold training to ensure an understanding of the role of different committees at the same time.
- ✓ Administrate the salaries and expenses of Councillors and publish the information in accordance with the statutory requirements.
- ✓ Undertake all the required post-election background work - set up a payroll number, e-mail address, web page for every Councillor, administrate salaries etc.
- ✓ Publish the election results live from the counting centre, with all the work successfully completed by early afternoon.
- ✓ Offer a full programme of 'presenting information and training' for Councillors during the year. This included programming an information session with every Head of Department during the first 6 - 8 weeks in order to give Councillors an overview of the work of all Council Departments. A recording of the sessions is available on the members' intranet.
- ✓ The training sessions were prioritised to deal with the main issues that Members needed to address at the beginning of their term. This was based on consultation with members of the Democratic Services Committee.
- ✓ As a result of low numbers attending some training sessions, we have reviewed our arrangements to ensure the best value of any training sessions being offered.
- ✓ Trained Chairs on hybrid arrangements after their appointments and as they led a committee meeting! It has been an experience of learning as we go for staff and Councillors, and we continue to learn and adapt to this day. We remain grateful to all for your co-operation and patience as we continue to move forward in this field.
- ✓ Review the political balance and appoint to committees based on the political balance, and administrate this within a very tight schedule.
- ✓ Send out a questionnaire regarding the timing of Council meetings for the term and incorporate the results in the 23/24 calendar onwards.
- ✓ Administrate the arrangements to appoint to external bodies.
- ✓ Continue to administrate the North Wales corporate joint-committee and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, and also administrate their sub-boards.

- ✓ Use and continue to develop the members' intranet in its new format. It is much easier to use to find information - let us know what is missing or needs to be adapted further. There is a great deal of information about mental well-being, Councillor safety etc. on the intranet site.
- ✓ Send out a satisfaction survey about the services of the democratic team and restart our performance arrangements of holding conversations with one or two Councillors every month to obtain different perspectives on how to improve our service and support for Councillors.
- ✓ Hold informal 'teatime talk' sessions for female Councillors as informal support.
- ✓ Hold informal 1-1 sessions with Councillors as the need arises to offer support e.g. mentoring sessions and opportunities to discuss personal development.
- ✓ Hold specific training for Cabinet Members.

## **2022/23 – continue with the support**

The work continues from year to year to try to support you to achieve in your role as Councillors. As I have noted, the priorities for the coming year involve continuing to build on the very firm foundations already in place.

It is likely that we will also focus on the following priorities:

<b>PRIORITY</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>
Safety and support for Councillors	Continue to focus on safety matters for Councillors as well as mental health and well-being support for Councillors.
Personal development conversations	We will offer 1-1 sessions for Councillors to discuss support in terms of development in their role and to prepare for potential future roles e.g. role as Chair.
Examine our scrutiny arrangements following the work of Audit Wales	We will examine our scrutiny arrangements in light of the work output of Audit Wales on our current arrangements, examining whether there is a need for more training or to adapt our committees in any way.
Paperless Council	Move towards becoming a paperless Council to reduce our carbon footprint and to realise the relevant savings for the Council

Members of the Democratic Services Committee have a key role to play and I sincerely thank each of them for being a voice for you all as they bring different issues to my attention. We seek to respond as we can.

Remember to contact me or anyone from the team directly to discuss any concerns. I look forward to collaborating with you over the coming year.