



Date of meeting:	15 June 2023
Subject	Priorities of the Head of Democracy Services - update
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked to receive the report for information.
Contact Officer:	Ian Jones, Head of Democracy Services

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. As part of my first annual report I noted that I have four priority fields that will receive attention during 2023/24. To remind you, the priorities can be viewed below
 - Safety and support for Councillors
 - Personal development conversations (consultative session)
 - Examine our scrutiny arrangements
 - Paperless Council
2. A separate report is submitted to you today on safety and support for Councillors. This report therefore seeks to address two of the other priorities, namely personal development talks and a paperless Council.
3. For information, I will not report on the Scrutiny arrangements aspect to this committee as they relate to governance arrangements and therefore will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee.

Consultative Sessions

4. All Elected Members have been invited to take advantage of the Consultative sessions available.
5. Everyone is different, with different strengths and a wide variety of development requirements. Maybe an individual is unsure of the development that they need, or what is available.
6. An informal discussion with a Specialist from the Development and Learning team will provide you with an opportunity to discuss your role as

an Elected Member, consider the things that come easy to you, elements that are more challenging and maybe of concern to you, and your hopes for the future. It will also be an opportunity for you to discuss how you wish to learn – what suits you?

7. A Personal development plan is usually agreed at the end of the session (personally developed for you) with a variety of development and learning elements.
8. You may contact the Councillor development officer (Cara Williams) to arrange a session.

Paperless Council

9. I have already reported on the proposal to move towards becoming a paperless Council to reduce our carbon footprint and to realise savings by reducing printing and postage costs (in accordance with the Full Council's decision).
10. The grounds for action are clear:
 - environmental benefit of being paperless, particularly as a result of the Council declaring a Climate Emergency in March 2019.
 - benefit from electronic communication with information shared directly, avoiding any issues that may arise with a slow postal service having an impact on the receipt of committee papers etc.
 - evidence that it is possible to work paperless very effectively.
 - the need to deliver the relevant savings plans in accordance with the decision of the Full Council on 03/03/2023
11. We have already started to prepare and encourage everyone to move to be paperless for some time and recognise that changing habits can take time and can be challenging at the start.
12. At the start of the new Council term, the Councillors were given a choice of IT equipment to best respond to their requirements when attending meetings (remotely and on location). The offer of an additional screen was made to enable effective paperless working, using one screen to read the agenda and the other screen to be part of the committee (joining via Zoom).
13. We have continued to offer paper copies of agendas following the 2022 Election and 29 Councillors have chosen to currently receive paper copies. This was on the grounds of the individuals' choice.
14. As a result of the full Council's decision the printing and postage budgets has been reduced significantly, with only a small budget left for paper provision where there are specific medical requirements.

15. Following the decision an equality impact assessment was drafted before moving on to form a plan of action. The assessment notes the mitigation steps which includes providing hard copies where there is a medical need. In addition, the impact assessment also identifies that working electronically can be more beneficial and accessible, as it is possible to change screen and font size etc., to correspond with the requirements of the individual.

16. In addition, we have also consulted with health and safety experts to identify standard criteria and specific 'health conditions' to be considered eligible to receive paper copies - should this be the individual's choice.

17. We have already concluded that forcing change and doing so overnight would not be sensible. We recognise that changing long-term habits may be difficult, and therefore we are very keen to support you through this change.

18. As noted, 29 currently receive paper copies and therefore we will offer:

- a. Screens for those who have not requested screens so far (if they wish to receive them)
- b. Training will be offered on using the equipment - this will probably be 1:1 based training as everybody's questions will be about their own personal use. It will be necessary for Councillors to organise a specific time with the appropriate officer.
- c. Correspond with Councillors to explain the above and give individuals time to contact us and present evidence if they continue to require paper copies.

19. We are aware that there will be a few exceptions to the rules and are currently in the process of forming the exceptions.

20. We hope to be as paperless as possible by the Autumn term.

Recommendation

21. The Democracy Services Committee is requested to accept the report for information.