

Date of meeting :	27 February 2023
Subject	Support for Councillors
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked to note the observations and accept the report.
Contact Officer:	Annes Sion

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. The Democracy Team is working hard to ensure full support for Councillors. In order to ensure appropriate support, we ask for your views regularly.
2. We are eager to improve our service continually and provide the support that Councillors need. Therefore, it was timely to seek feedback on the service being offered by the democracy team in particular.
3. A variety of questions were asked, about satisfaction with the team's work as well as any future developments the team might make. 31 Councillors responded to the questionnaire in full and set out their views on the team's service.
4. 91% rated the service as very good or good with 1 indicating it was acceptable, and 2 not answering the question.
5. A number of additional responses were received, which included the following:

"Everything happens without fuss. Papers on time, committees and so on run smoothly. A lot of work goes on in the background by the team, quietly and effectively"

"I get the papers to read in good time. I also know that I can ask for help if there is a problem or something I don't understand.

It is good to feel that there is somewhere to turn for advice / help"

"I feel that I know the officers better than any other team and can ask 'yup' questions without being judged. - a lot of support and the officers have helped me personally in a number of ways"

"Effective service, conscientious and kind staff"

6. The person who noted that the service was "acceptable" offered comments that were relevant to a different Department, and therefore their comments did not reflect the team's service. I will arrange to have a direct conversation to get the person's views on the team's work.

7. A question was asked about whether there are any developments or changes the team could make to further support Councillors in their role. The majority indicated that no development was needed. However, among the responses one noted that information on the appointments of Councillors to Outside Bodies needed better consistency. The need to update the information regularly to ensure it is up to date was highlighted. As a team we have started looking at the update work and ensuring that arrangements are in place to do this regularly.
8. Among other comments one indicated the need for assistance with email management and to receive further training about this. We forwarded this request to the learning and development team.
9. One member expressed dissatisfaction with going paperless. It is noted that the steps to going paperless follow the Full Council's decision to reduce our carbon footprint and realise savings by reducing printing and postage costs. We understand that changing habits can be challenging, but we hope over time it will get easier. We will discuss with the individual to see if it is possible to assist the Councillor with this change.
10. Another person indicated that they were happy with the team's service, however dissatisfaction with the Cabinet system in particular was highlighted. It must be stressed that this is the statutory system that exists and that there are no steps that the team can take to change this system.
11. It was also highlighted that the role of a Councillor can be challenging, and that Councillors should be treated respectfully bearing in mind that everyone has feelings. There was a request for Councillors to remember to treat each other respectfully always. This is an opportunity for us to remind you of the range of support available for mental health issues, or threats from the public for example. The 'Look after yourself' tile on the member intranet is extremely important and committee members are asked to remind your fellow members of the contents of the intranet and that particular tile.
12. We received an opinion that the questionnaire was potentially more relevant to the new Councillors who are continuing to settle into their new roles. But as we are keen to improve our service and meet the requirements of all Councillors on an ongoing basis it is vital that we ask all members about the support available.
13. In addition to the electronic questionnaire that is sent to Councillors once a year, we will re-start our arrangements to hold a conversation with 2 or 3 Councillors each month to discuss the support being offered to you and gain a better understanding of the barriers.

Female Councillors

14. As part of the activities of the Promoting Diversity in Democracy programme, arrangements were put in place over the last Council term to hold specific sessions for Women who are Councillors. These informal sessions (chat over a cuppa) have offered a safe space where Councillors have had an opportunity to:

- support each other and compare experiences and learn from each other
- discuss barriers or issues that concern them and offer solutions.

15. Two meetings were held before Christmas, but it must be noted that attendance was very low and therefore weren't as successful. We hope to hold a session again in early March.

Recommendation

16. The Democracy Services Committee is asked to note the observations and accept the report.