

MEETING	Full Council
DATE	12 May 2016
TITLE	Annual Report by the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee outlining support for members
REPORT	Present the annual report on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee outlining the support available to elected members, the developments implemented and the support currently being developed.
AUTHOR	Councillor Tom Ellis Chair – Democratic Services Committee

1. Under the 2011 Local Government (Wales) Measure, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for specific matters (Under Section 11), as follows:
 - Fulfil the local authority's role to appoint a Head of Democratic Services
 - Review the support available with regards to staff, buildings and other resources available to the Head of Democratic Services, in order to ensure they are sufficient for the requirements of the role
 - Produce a report, at least annually, to be presented to the Full Council in relation to the above.
2. The last annual report was presented to the Full Council in its meeting on 14th May 2015, outlining the support available for the Head of Democratic Services (Geraint Owen) and elected members, including details of the support being developed.
3. Regular consultation is undertaken with the members of the Democratic Services Committee about the support available to elected members, and as representatives of their fellow members, their guidance is subsequently followed. This year, to ensure an opportunity for all members to present their views, it was decided to consult, in the form of an online questionnaire, with all elected members to establish their views on the support available and to ask for constructive comments on how to improve the support within the resources available. The opportunity to share your views is still open, by filling in the questionnaire which is available in Rhaeadr.
4. The following provides an update of the current situation with regards to support for members.

A. Supporting effective communication?

1. **Information / Workshops / Consultation** – Once again this year, several workshops have been held for elected members, with the main focus in this

challenging year on the Gwynedd Challenge. A number of scrutiny workshops were held for all elected members under the guidance of the Chief Executive in order to establish a significant degree of shared understanding on the issues relating to the Financial Strategy and the cuts in order to ensure that members were armed with information to explain matters to their constituents. The workshops proved to be very important to establish an understanding of the matters presented, prior to the discussion of the issue at the Full Council in March. It should be noted that the workshops were held in various locations and at various times in response to concerns raised by members in the past regarding the difficulties faced by elected members in employment to attend such workshops. The informal feedback received is very positive, with work currently underway to capture lessons learned from the engagement undertaken with the elected members and the people of Gwynedd for the future.

2. **Champions** – The champion’s role in Gwynedd is to support and advise the Cabinet Member who has direct responsibility for the field is continuing to develop. The following have been appointed:

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| • Older People | Selwyn Griffiths |
| • Carers | Eryl Jones Williams |
| • Autism | Elin Walker Jones |
| • Member Development | Chair of Democratic Services Committee |
| • Scrutiny | Chair of the Scrutiny Forum |
| • Disability | Peter Read |
| • The Welsh Language | Craig ab Iago |
| • Voice of Children and Young People | Annwen Daniels |
| • Equality and Diversity | Gwen Griffith |
| • Fairtrade | R Hefin Williams |
| • Biodiversity | Angela Russell |
| • Mental Health | Beth Lawton |
| • Sustainability | Aled Evans |
| • Small Businesses | Sian Gwenllian |

3 **Area Forums** – The Area Forums continue to be held in the four areas, namely Bangor / Ogwen, Gwyrfai, Dwyfor (Area Committee) and Meirionnydd. Generally, they are considered as a success; however the success, input from members and attendance varies from area to area.

4 **Electronic Information and Communication** – Electronic information and communications has been one of the main issues discussed at the Democratic Services Committee since it was established. Following requests from members further training sessions have been held for those wishing to further develop their use and skills with the ipad. It was emphasised that those attending the further training had a role to share any information gained and to mentor their fellow members, as sharing information in an informal situation has been proved to be as effective as learning in specific training courses. In general, the sessions have been a success, with a number of members

developing their confidence to use the ipad, with some even progressing to sending electronic Christmas cards!

One of the requests by members over the last few months is the ability to send/receive official councillor emails from their personal mobile phones. We have received confirmation by now that we will be able to provide a service where members can send/receive official councillor emails on their personal mobile phones, on condition that this is done in a secure way which has been agreed with inspectors. There are costs to the Council with the provision. We will pilot the provision over the coming months to ensure that all works well before offering the service to all members.

On the other hand, however, it has become apparent during the year that the numbers requesting hard copies of committee agendas has risen. In addition, and of more concern, it has become apparent that a number of elected members who have an ipad, have not been using them to receive electronic mail, and due to a lack of using their official email account, the accounts were closed automatically. The Democratic Services Committee, in its meeting on 10th December 2015 decided that they wished to continue to support the Council's aim of communicating electronically with members where possible, and through the official email address provided by the Council.

Some members have faced difficulties in changing their passwords or similar problems, but having contacted the IT helpdesk problems have been resolved. If members have technical difficulties, they should contact the IT helpdesk on 01286 679 114.

In addition, work has already started on trying to identify the best electronic device to meet the Council's and elected member's requirements for the period following the Local Government elections in May 2017. It may feel a long way away, but careful planning and consideration needs to start now to ensure the most suitable device.

- 5 **Modern.Gov** - Modern.gov was a new development during the year to assist elected members. It is a system to receive committee agendas in an easier way, so that agendas for relevant meetings are loaded automatically onto the ipad thus ensuring that the member does not have to look for an email link to download information etc. This can all be done through the Modern.gov app. A training session was held for elected members in November 2015 with approximately half of elected members present. It has come to our attention that some members do not use Modern.gov, and officers have been trying to assist members to promote its use.

A large number of members have stated that the new website is much improved, and much easier for Gwynedd residents to gain information about their local elected member. The individual page for each member has been praised. Note that information about all members' attendance is now published automatically on these pages, with the information updated regularly. Note that we are continuing to develop the site, and more information about additional committees will be included in the future.

Attendance (except in circumstances of sickness / long term sickness) has been a topic of discussion in a number of different forums, and political leaders receive information if individual members have not been present for a specific time.

- 6 **Information Bulletin – *Rhaeadr*** – *Rhaeadr* was originally established in response to a request from members to receive information swiftly and timely, through electronic means from one source (rather than emails from various sources).

Articles included in *Rhaeadr* contain information about the Cabinet and Cabinet Members work, support for elected members, what is happening within the council (latest news, press releases) and issues within wards (roadworks, land disposal, planning issues etc). This year

- A total of 308 articles have been published (an average of 27 articles a month),
- with an average 942 “visits” per month to the Welsh site and 309 “visits” on the English site – a visit being the number of times an individual clicks on a specific article to read it fully. Note that a synopsis of the various articles can be seen by visiting the home page only.

Work is currently being undertaken to review how *Rhaeadr* looks and how it is published, to ensure that it meets members and officers’ requirements. The work has looked at three principal areas:

- a questionnaire sent to members;
- develop a test site based on the comments from the questionnaire and further research work by officers;
- trial the test site with some elected members in a recent Democratic Services Committee and 1:1 sessions with some members.

The response to the proposed changes was positive and valuable feedback was received by members. Work will now progress with the changes, with the new look *Rhaeadr* to be released soon.

- 7 **The relationship between Scrutiny and Cabinet** – The relationship between Scrutiny and Cabinet continues to develop, with all members agreeing the need to ensure respect and collaboration in order to achieve the best for the residents of Gwynedd. Meetings were held between the Scrutiny Chairs and Cabinet to discuss, in an open and constructive manner, the lessons learned so far, and future improvements. Scrutiny items have already changed over the last year, with a number of items being presented for scrutiny prior to discussions at the Cabinet meetings.

In addition, a new development is the formal arrangements for the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees to present their recommendation to Cabinet members in Cabinet meetings. The Cabinet Member will then either agree or reject the recommendation, stating his/her reason. This leads to transparency in the scrutiny arrangements, and a clear path for the various

recommendations. Work is currently ongoing to review our scrutiny arrangements, with the focus on ensuring that scrutiny adds value.

8 Web-casting Council meetings

The Council has web-cast a number of its main committee meetings since January 2015, in order to try and promote and improve democratic accountability and the public's awareness of the Council's work. The viewing figures have increased during the last 18 months, as more and more Gwynedd residents become aware of the facilities following promoting the webcasting in news papers and on the Council's twitter and facebook accounts. The viewing figures obviously vary from committee to committee, and it appears that a number make use of the archive facilities rather than viewing the live feed.

It is nearing the end of the Council's current webcasting agreement, and in the spirit of promoting democracy and transparency, the Democratic Services Committee is eager to continue with the service, especially in light of the recent consultation on the Local Government Bill, which will promote more web-casting.

Web-casting can be seen through following the link below:

<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/Councillors-and-committees/Councillors-and-committees.aspx>

- 9 Remote attendance to Council meetings** – Elected members are already accustomed to holding informal meetings through video-conferencing facilities, and this practice has worked very well over the years, enabling members to attend the nearest location rather than travelling to the Council headquarters on each occasion. This year, a pilot was held of a full committee meeting through video link between the Hywel Dda chamber, and the video-conferencing rooms at Dolgellau and Pwllheli. The pilot was a success, however a few lessons were learnt. We will continue with trying to improve this service over the next year.

B. Support for elected members to undertake their specific duties

- 10 Personal Development Interviews** – the Personal Development reviews are a chance for members (excluding Cabinet members) to assess their individual development needs in a confidential one to one conversation, with the outcome of the conversations used to influence the training programme for all elected members or to arrange specific training sessions for the individual. A number of the themes raised in previous reviews were addressed in the 2015/16 training programme, and the reviews were also a way of raising the awareness of members of some courses already provided and available for all.

Elected members were invited to take part in individual reviews again this year, with invitations sent through *Rhaeadr* on a number of occasions. Unfortunately, the uptake this year was very low.

- 11 **Developments in local areas on specific matters (enquiries or complaints)** – We saw this year that Cabinet Members and officers have been true to their word and included elected members early in any discussions. Individual members have also committed to respect trust and confidentiality until any proposals for change were mature enough for public consultation and release.

Operational contact arrangements – we are fully aware of the frustration faced by members on identifying contact points within services, and we are currently developing ‘contact’ sheets in response. Members should continue to make contact through Galw Gwynedd as they are very efficient at tracking enquiries. If there is a specific enquiry or complaint, members should try and contact the service in the first place for a response, and if the response is inadequate, the query should be sent to the relevant Cabinet Member. We continue to encourage members to use the appropriate avenues available to them.

- 12 **Individual Member’s Right in Cabinet meetings** - The local member is invited to be present if a local matter arises. It is the Democratic Service’s responsibility to identify local members for local items and the local member’s responsibility to ensure that he / she is aware of the content of the Cabinet’s agenda.

13. **Promoting the role of an Elected Member (preparations for May 2017 elections)** – The Local Government White Paper, Local Government Reform: Power to Local People, noted that there is a lack of diversity of elected members in Local Government, especially in terms of young people, ethnic minority, disabled and females. Whilst there is national work progressing in the field, a small group of members have been working on trying to understand the situation in Gwynedd, raising awareness of Gwynedd residents what is democracy, what the Council does, and what opportunities exist to take part, in the hope of encouraging more individuals from different backgrounds (in particular young people and females) to stand in the Local Government elections in May 2017. They are also working on trying to identify the obstacles facing individuals which prevent them from standing in elections, which will then lead to specific projects to respond to the obstacles, where possible. The Council have recognised the work, which has been included in the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan, 2016 – 2020.

Preparing for the May 2017 elections – Part of the above work programme includes preparing for the Local Elections to be held in May 2017. After listening to the comments of a number of elected members who have joined the Council since May 2012, a clear message is that a number were not fully aware of what to expect following success at the polling station. In response to these comments, the following work is underway to:

- a) Develop awareness raising sessions for potential candidates prior to the elections in May 2017. These sessions will be an opportunity for potential candidates to develop a fuller understanding of the situation prior to elections – aiming at ensuring that individuals are aware of the opportunities available, the expectations on them, and the support available for elected members following successful elections.

- b) Develop an induction programme for elected members following May 2017 elections. Again, members have shared their experiences with us of sessions held at the beginning of the current Council term, and work is underway to plan the induction sessions and the subsequent training sessions in a meaningful and rational way, whilst considering the comments received so far and consulting with current members.
- c) Electronic Equipment. At the same time we need to start considering the requirements of elected members and the Council for the future, and start considering the best form of IT equipment available for elected members following the elections in May 2017.

C. Support for scrutiny members and other committees

14 Administrating committees and publishing agendas and recording minutes (all committees) – The Democratic Services Team administers the agendas and minutes of over 40 different committees, publishing bilingually on the Council's website. We continue to review the work constantly, working to ensure clarity in the minutes at all times. Work has been ongoing with the chairs of various committees to try and summarise decisions / recommendations at the end of each item to ensure clarity amongst all members present.

15 Scrutiny Investigations – the purpose of the scrutiny investigations is to look in depth at the true effect of different policies on the residents of Gwynedd, looking in more depth than can be done compared with scrutinising an item in committee. With a small number of members per investigation, along with support from officers who specialise in specific fields to support the work and support from the Democratic Services Unit, a number of 'start and finish' scrutiny investigations have been on the work programme during 2015/16.

Services Scrutiny Committee

- Welsh Language Education
- Education support services
- From Hospital to Home
- Alltwen

Communities Scrutiny Committee

- Homelessness
- Street enforcement

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

- Holiday Homes and taxes
- Engagement

Ch. Support for all members – administrative, practical and developmental

16 Administrative support for the political groups - administrative support for political groups is implemented in accordance with the Council's decision in May 2012 with the three largest groups receiving administrative support according to their size.

17 Administrating, processing and paying wages and travelling costs - Wages and travelling costs are administered, processed and paid in line with the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales's guidelines. Information with regards to members remuneration will be published on the Council's website annually in accordance with the guidelines. The guidelines for making claims are on the website. I will take this opportunity to remind members of the guidelines and the need for them to submit their applications on a monthly basis.

18 Annual reports from elected members – The Council must make arrangements to enable elected members to produce and publish annual reports but currently it is not compulsory for any member to prepare such a report. Members will remember that the Council responded positively to a suggestion that members annual reports be made compulsory as part of a recent consultation.

A further increase in the number of annual reports published was seen in 2014/15 (published July 2015) with 39 members choosing to produce a report. The guidelines for producing an annual report in 2015/16 will be distributed through *Rhaeadr* shortly.

19 A comprehensive training programme – as 2016/17 is the last year prior to the Local Government elections of 2017, we were therefore aware that the training requirements of elected members may be different this year. Consultations with officers took part as usual to ensure that the most important elements were included in the training programme. In addition, a consultation session was held at the end of the Democratic Services meeting on 22/03/2016 in order to seek opinion from members on the content of the programme for 2016/17. The views of the Democratic Services Committee have been incorporated in the 2016/17 training programme.

Attendance on training courses remains a concern. Members are expected to try and attend training sessions in order to ensure that they possess the latest information as there are a number of changes in various fields. It is understandable that attending training courses can be a challenge to a number of members due to work commitments and so forth, and therefore the Learning and Developing Services are currently developing web based learning, which will, hopefully, provide an alternative and additional way for members to partake in training and increase participation in training.