

<b>MEETING</b>	Full Council
<b>DATE</b>	14 May 2015
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Annual Report from the Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee with regards to support for members
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To submit an update to members regarding the support available and developments realised and those in progress.
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Councillor Lesley Day Chair – Democratic Services Committee
<b>RELEVANT OFFICER</b>	Geraint Owen Head of Democratic Services

1. Under the new 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. As you are aware, two departments within the Council were amalgamated at the beginning of 2015/16 and Geraint Owen was appointed as Head of the Corporate Support Department. The Democratic Services Committee, in its meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015 decided that the Head of the new Department would be appointed to the role of Head of Democratic Services. As the outgoing Chair of Democratic Services, I would like to pay a personal tribute to Mr Geraint George for the way he undertook that role since the inception of the Democratic Services Committee and to wish Mr Geraint Owen every success in his new role.
  
3. On 17 July 2014, a report was submitted to the Full Council outlining the support available for the Head of Democratic Services and elected members, including the support which was being developed.
  
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, notably including vital workshops on the Financial Strategy, led by the Cabinet Member for Finance. The workshops proved particularly valuable in establishing a significant degree of

shared understanding on the issues related to the Financial Strategy, prior to the discussion of the issue at the Full Council. The informal feedback from members was overwhelmingly positive although there were some concerns that their timing meant that it was difficult for councillors who have work commitments to attend. This has been noted and will inform any future arrangements.

2. **Champions** – A generic job description for the “champions role” is in place and the following have been appointed:

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| • Older People                     | Selwyn Griffiths                                       |
| • Carers                           | Eryl Jones Williams                                    |
| • Autism                           | Elin Walker Jones                                      |
| • Member Development               | Chair of Democratic Services<br>Committee (Lesley Day) |
| • Scrutiny                         | Chair of Scrutiny Committee (Peter<br>Read)            |
| • Disability                       | Peter Read   |
| • Poverty Prevention               | Brian Jones  |
| • The Welsh Language               | Craig ab Iago  |
| • Voice of Children and You People | Gethin Glyn Williams                                   |
| • Equality and Diversity           | Gwen Griffith  |
| • Fairtrade                        | R Hefin Williams                                       |
| • Biodiversity                     | Angela Russell   |
| • Sustainability                   | Aled Evans   |
| • Small Businesses                 | Sian Gwenllian   |

3. **Area Forums** – Following the review undertaken in 2013/14 the Area Forums have continued in the same form during 2014/15. The four Area Forums (Bangor / Ogwen, Gwyrfai, Dwyfor (Area Committee) and Meirionnydd) have been operational during 2014/15 and overall, they were seen mostly as a success.
4. **Electronic Information and Communication** - Every elected member has received the offer and the opportunity to receive an i-pad. Over the last few years basic training on how to use it, further sessions on how to make better use of the i-pad and/or 1:1 sessions with the elected members have been offered to those members who wished to participate. A number of members have requested further training to make better use of the i-pad and develop their skills, and arrangements have been made to undertake a pilot of such training.

By now, nearly 70 of the 75 members have received an i-pad to assist them with their work as elected members and a substantial number use them as their main method of communication and they report that they receive information far more easily and in a timely manner through the i-pad.

Some elected members have no i-pad provision and others have made specific requests to receive paper copies of the documentation for some committees. Since implementing the system we have seen a gradual increase in the number of

members who request paper copies despite the fact that they have an i-pad and we are keeping an eye on the situation.

It seems that the technical difficulties with the ipads are decreasing, however, if members do have some difficulties it is crucial for members to contact the IT Help Desk on 01286 679 114 for assistance.

5. **Information Bulletins** – During the past year, a total of 333 main articles were published in *Rhaeadr*, which corresponds on average to 28 articles a month. These articles usually contain information about what the Cabinet and Individual Cabinet members are doing, member support issues, what is happening more widely within the Council (latest news/press releases) and matters within wards (road works / disposal of properties / planning etc.) In addition, information on matters such as committee agendas and cabinet members decisions are published every few days. On average, the main articles published receive 875 views every month. This means that the Councillors who have access to the web, on average click into around 12 articles each per month.

Based on the review undertaken last year it was decided to continue to publish *Rhaeadr* every fortnight for an additional year and to fund it from a one-off budget for that year.

6. **Cabinet Members' Reports to the Council** – The system of having an individual Cabinet member reporting on an element of his / her work at every Council meeting, with an opportunity for questions remains in operation, although the current cycle of presentations has finished.
7. **Meetings between Scrutiny Chairs and the Cabinet** - The relationship between Scrutiny and Cabinet continues to develop, and is established on ensuring respect and collaboration in order to achieve the best for the residents of Gwynedd. Meetings are held between the Scrutiny Chairs and Cabinet with the discussions being open and constructive to assess progress to date and share lessons learnt by the Scrutinisers and Cabinet. By now, the direction of scrutiny has adjusted slightly, which includes pre-scrutiny prior to matters being presented to Cabinet as well as scrutinising the effect of policies which are already operational, with continuous focus on the effect on the people of Gwynedd. This is already being reflected in the draft scrutiny programme for the coming year.
8. **Social Media** – The Full Council has, of course adopted a protocol on the use of social media by councillors to give members guidance on the opportunities and potential pitfalls in such use, and training in this field has already been offered with arrangements being made also for further training.
9. **Web-casting and Community Council websites** – In order to increase democratic accountability and public awareness of the work of the Council, one of the main developments this year has been the move to web-casting some of the Council's committees. Prior to going live with the web-castings in January 2015, training

was provided to members offering guidance on important matters to remember whilst web-casting, and a further workshop was held with Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

The Council has an annual agreement to web-cast up to 60 hours, and by now over 35 hours have been webcast from various committees. The viewing figures vary from committee to committee, but the numbers increase continuously, with many viewing the archive rather than the live webcast. The web-castings can be viewed by following the link below:

<http://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/en/Council/Councillors-and-committees/Councillors-and-Committees.aspx>

At the same time the Council has been promoting the development of Town and Community Council web-sites, using a Welsh Government grant to do so. A total of 43 Town and Community Councils have received a formal grant offer via Cist Gwynedd to develop or establish their own an individual website; with 20 Councils also expressing an interest in working with neighbouring councils to procure web-provision jointly. The Information Technology Department has recently prepared a specification to help with that.

## **B. Support for elected members to undertake their specific duties**

- 10. Personal Development Interviews** – For the first time this year, members outside the Cabinet were offered the chance of a Personal Development Interview to provide an opportunity to assess their development needs. 20 members took advantage of the opportunity, and interviews were held in September and October of 2014. The outputs of the interviews have been key in shaping the training programme offered in 2015/16. Please note that a number of themes are already included in the current training programme for elected members, and the interviews have been a way of increasing awareness of some of the courses.

The Democratic Services Committee has started to assess the value of the personal development reviews, and the comments received with regards to the interviews were positive, noting that members appreciated the chance to have an informal discussion and hearing. The Committee will soon report on how the members who were part of the process have benefited, if at all.

An invitation will be sent to elected members shortly to express an interest in a Personal Development Review for the period September/October 2015.

- 11. Developments in the local area** - Some such information is included in *Rhaeadr* but this is an area requiring further attention. A joint Task Group of elected members and officers looked at the matter during 2014/15. They acknowledged that it is a vast and complex area, and the group came to a consensus on two main areas:

Big Strategic Changes eg Gwynedd Challenge – a consensus that pre-scrutiny was to be used more extensively, a commitment from Cabinet Members and officers

to contact local members who may be affected early in the process, and a requirement from individual members to respect trust and confidentiality until new proposals are ready to be published and consulted upon.

Operational Contact Arrangements – it is deficiencies in this area that causes the greatest frustration amongst members, and it was decided, amongst other things, to encourage members to make use, in the first place, of Galw Gwynedd because of the effectiveness of their tracking system for enquiries.

12. **Responding to enquiries or complaints by Local Members** - A procedure is already in place to ensure that a local member contacts the specific service first to seek an answer to an enquiry. If the answer provided is not adequate, the specific matter should be referred to the attention of the relevant Cabinet Member to ensure a response is received. Members have been urged to use the appropriate systems as it is more likely to lead to a resolution to the enquiry.
13. **Individual Member's Right in Cabinet meetings** - The local member is invited to be present if a local matter arises. It is the Cabinet Team'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.
14. **Promoting the role of the Councillor** – The Welsh Government's White Paper, Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People, (consultation until 28 April 2015) notes that there is a lack of diversity amongst Local Government Candidates, in terms of young people, ethnic minorities and women. A national task group has been set up looking at widening participation. In Gwynedd, a small group of councillors has been asked by the Democratic Services Committee to look at the area and to prepare ideas for specific actions. The working group has started its work considering data on the extent to which the body of elected councillors in Gwynedd reflects the population as a whole. This will assist the group by providing a framework for any proposals that can be developed over the coming months. In the longer term, steps are being taken to promote understanding of democracy within local government amongst children and young people, and to raise awareness of the role they could play to make a difference. We are also looking at identifying the obstacles for young people and women within local government, in order to try and encourage these groups - which are under-represented at present - to play a more prominent role within local government in the future.
15. **Disabled Access** – During the year, Councillor Peter Read, the Disability Champion and Geraint George, the Head of Democratic Services commissioned a report on accessibility to the Council Offices. The Democratic Services Committee has approved a sensible programme of adaptations to improve this. Many of those changes, including, the provision of ramps within the Dafydd Orwig Chamber and widening doors around the suite of meeting rooms at the Headquarters, have been completed.

## **C. Support for scrutiny members and other committees**

- 16. Independent advice and guidance for the Chairs and members of the Scrutiny Committees** – The Head of Democratic Services, Senior Manager (Corporate Commissioning) and the team within the Corporate Support Department advise the committees on their work programme, hold preparatory meetings and advise on the live work programme to ensure that scrutiny adds value.

The three Scrutiny Committees have received training on their role and receive independent advice and guidance. This year, whilst planning the 2015/16 work programme, Scrutiny Chairs and Cabinet Members have agreed to use pre-scrutiny more extensively and that there is regular dialogue on issues that could be dealt with in this way. Additionally, the Scrutiny Forum, considers the work programme and priority fields across all committees, with the preparatory meetings considering performance issues, and including any issues of concern into the work programme.

- 17. Administer and record minutes of meetings and publish the minutes** (scrutiny and others) – The Support Team arrange and minute in brief the work of the scrutiny committees, Cabinet and other committees. The style of committee minutes are under review currently following observations in the governance review of the Audit Committee to make them more concise and clear.

Modernisation work in the chambers prepares us further for the future requirements in the context of remote attendance.

- 18. Scrutiny Investigations** – The Investigations undertake work to examine the effect of policies on the ground. During 2014/15, members of the Scrutiny Committees supported by the Democratic Service Unit and the Senior Officers of the former Strategic and Improvement Department undertook several ‘start and finish’ scrutiny investigations. Here are the Scrutiny Investigations for 2014/15:

### Services Scrutiny Committee

- From Hospital to Home (part 1) - completed
- From Hospital to Home (part 2) – in progress
- Welsh Language Education – in progress

### Communities Scrutiny Committee

- Post 16 Education Transport - completed
- Homelessness – in progress

### Corporate Scrutiny Committee

- No scrutiny investigation was undertaken by the committee during the year.

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

19. **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.
20. **Administering, 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. The claiming guidelines 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. Information with regards to members remuneration will be published on the Council's website annually in accordance with the guidelines.
21. **Annual reports from elected members** – The Council must make arrangements to enable elected members to produce and publish annual reports but it is not compulsory for any member to prepare such a report. A standard template to assist members in producing annual reports was produced in 2013/14 with data on the number of committees attended and the number of training sessions attended by each individual member already included. 26 elected members produced and published an annual report last year. A note will be sent out soon through *Rhaeadr* to Members containing the details for publishing the annual reports for 2014/15.
22. **A comprehensive programme of training** – As noted previously, the output of the Personal Development Reviews identified the areas of training that members wished to see and the Learning and Development Service continued with plans and adapted the training programme for members based on the work of the findings along with any other feedback they had received.

During 2014/15, a varied programme was offered to members, but attendance has been a matter of concern. The content and delivery of sessions are regularly reviewed in order to make them as useful and attractive as possible for members. Further work is ongoing at the moment to develop e-learning for members, which will, hopefully, provide an alternative option and increase participation in training.