

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 22 July 2019
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Annual Report of Head of Democratic Services
Purpose of Report:	To outline for Members the resources available to support the Democratic Services function (as provided for under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011) following the previous report presented to the Committee on 18th April 2018
Report Owner:	Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Jeff Rees
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	No consultation has been necessary.
Policy Framework:	The terms of reference of the Democratic Services Committee include "to have regard to Welsh Ministerial guidance when exercising its functions".
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an outline of the staff resources existing within Democratic Services and a summary of the wide range of duties undertaken, ongoing developments and plans for the future.

Recommendation

1. That the report be noted.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To keep Members informed.

1. Background

- 1.1 Members will be aware of the requirement under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure") for the Council to appoint a Democratic Services Committee. The Measure also requires the Council to designate one of its officers to the statutory post of "Head of Democratic Services" and provide that officer with sufficient resources to discharge these statutory functions.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Democratic Services division as a whole comprises three distinct sections:
 - Scrutiny and Committee Services
 - Freedom of Information / Records Management / Land Charges
 - Registration Service.
- 2.2 This report, by its very nature and its linkage with the requirements of the Measure, covers the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Committee Services section.
- 2.3 The functions of the Head of Democratic Services are set out in the Measure and relate particularly (but not exclusively) to the provision of advice and support to non-executive Members. The Committee, at its first meeting in July 2012, agreed that the Operational Manager for Democratic Services be designated as the Council's Statutory Head of Democratic Services. The Welsh Government Guidance associated with the Measure specifically provides for the Head of Democratic Services to perform other roles apart from the statutory functions. This recognises the fact that the creation of the position would have been an unacceptable burden on the budget of most, if not all, Councils at a time of economic pressures.

Staff Structure

- 2.4 For the reasons set out below, and taking into account the extremely difficult (and ongoing) economic pressures facing the Council generally and the need for the Division to continue to identify / deliver / contribute to further savings, the current structure is considered to be appropriate.
- 2.5 In addition to myself, as Head of Democratic Services, the section comprises a Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, two Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers, one Scrutiny Support Officer, one Assistant Democratic Services

Officer, one Members' and Committee Services Assistant and two WP / Administrative Support officers and two Administrative Assistants.

- 2.6** The above team deals with a wide range of activities, which include, but are not limited to: Maintaining and developing the Council's decision-making processes to include the preparation of agendas, reports and minutes, facilitating accountability and transparency; Managing and providing Scrutiny and Committee Services support to the Council and its various Committees; a range of support to Elected Members, including advice on the Council's Constitution and Members' Code of Conduct, Member Development and Members' Services, Maintaining the Register of Members' Interests; Overseeing appeals relating to school admissions and school permanent exclusions; Developing and updating the content of MemberNet; Managing the Council's committee room bookings; Corporate responsibility for all Council inbound and outward bound mail (Royal Mail and Whistl (formerly TNT) contract) the provision of administrative support for processing activities relating to TransAct, Council Tax, Housing Benefits and C1V.
- 2.7** I have also led on a number of Corporate Projects which have included the procurement and implementation of a new Council Webcasting solution and currently the project manager leading a corporate project team with the responsibility for the procurement, Proof of Concept (POC) of a Hybrid Mail Solution and subsequent implementation of the Solution Council wide. The POC will be undertaken over the next six months.
- 2.8** Members may be aware that I was appointed to the role during May, 2018 in accordance with the Council's policy for Recruitment and Selection arrangements, taking up my position on 4th June, 2018.
- 2.9** One of my first tasks was to implement previously agreed restructuring proposals approved by the Managing Director to reduce the level of administrative support within the Cabinet Office (including Town Twinning) and Mayor's Office. The net effect of the restructuring proposals resulted in staff changes including redundancies as part of changes with both Cabinet and Mayor's functions transferring to the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team at the beginning of June to provide resilience to both functions once transferred. The proposals were part of a wider corporate review and in an effort meet the Directorate's saving target for 2018/19.
- 2.10** The challenge of implementing the above proposals has been an interesting proposition to deliver taking into account that only the Cabinet Officer transferred to the Democratic and Scrutiny Team. The challenge of absorbing both functions with limited additional resources has posed certain problems in terms of bedding down new arrangements within the team relating to service requirements, related service knowledge, understanding and learning particularly, in terms of processes and procedures relating to the Mayor's Office and Twinning arrangements. The task has been made more challenging given the inability of the Cabinet Officer to assist in this process having been on long term sickness absence.
- 2.11** Whilst the Democratic and Scrutiny Services team have coped admirably with the above changes, the team itself has also be subject to staff turnover over the last 2 years in key roles with the inability to recruit to vacant positions for a number a

reasons i.e. low number of applicants despite posts being advertised internally and externally, coupled with the subsequent inability to find candidates with the right knowledge / experience and skill sets. This has resulted in pressures on the team to deal with service requests for support etc. Taking account of these pressures and following consultation with the Managing Director and the Monitoring Officer, I submitted a business case in November last year seeking additional resources to review the grades of posts which had proved difficult to fill and to establish one new post to support the wider work of this Team. This business case was subsequently agreed by the Managing Director and the Monitoring Officer to provide additional funding to enable the above. I wish to place on record my thanks to both for their support in agreeing to additional funding and to the staff within the team for their hard work and commitment over the last 12 months. The additional funding was approved by Council in March of this year as service cost pressure.

- 2.12** Work is currently underway to deliver on filling vacant positions with two of these posts filled following a recruitment and selection exercise with both successful candidates taking up respective positions during May.
- 2.13** I will be interviewing shortly to fill the remaining vacancy within this team.
- 2.14** The following is a summary of work undertaken in the last twelve months and ongoing work / initiatives in which the section is actively engaged. The Democratic Services Committee will continue to be kept fully informed on progress of these, and other, initiatives.

Wales Audit Office Review: "Overview and Scrutiny - Fit For the Future"

- 2.15** As reported in my predecessor's Annual Report the WAO had been undertaking a review designed to explore with Councils how 'fit for the future' their scrutiny functions are across Wales. This included considering how Councils were responding to current challenges, including the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG Act), in relation to their scrutiny activity, as well as how Councils are beginning to undertake scrutiny of Public Service Boards. The review examines how well-placed Councils are to respond to future challenges, including continued pressure on public finances and the possible move towards more regional working between Local Authorities.
- 2.16** To remind Members of this exercise, in late 2017 / early 2018, the WAO undertook document reviews, interviewed a number of key officers and ran focus groups with key Councillors to understand their views on the Council's current scrutiny arrangements and, in particular how the Council intends to respond to the challenges identified above.
- 2.17** A number of Scrutiny Committee meetings at that time were observed as subsequent to this activity the WAO published its report relating to the Council in July 2018, which included a number of proposals for improvement which have been reported to the Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Group at its meeting on 19th September, 2018 which was also attended by WAO representatives. The WAO report was also considered by the Scrutiny Committee Corporate Performance and Resources in November 2018. Both the Group and Scrutiny Committee considered a draft action plan in response to the report findings. An update report in relation to progressing the above Action

Plan is planned to be considered at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Group in late July 2019.

Council Constitution


- 2.18** The Council Constitution remains under review and reports to Council are submitted when changes are deemed necessary with the Constitution being updated as and when required.

Webcasting

- 2.19** As indicated earlier in this report the Council procured a new webcasting solution appointing Civico as our streaming provider and was implemented November, 2018. The Council continues to provide live broadcasting of the Planning Committee and Full Council with this service recently been extended to Scrutiny Committee meetings in circumstances when a Scrutiny Committee will be considering Council proposals where it affects residents and the public on a County wide basis e.g. proposed Car Parking Charging Policy. A decision on whether to broadcast any meeting in the above circumstances is taken in consultation with the relevant Scrutiny Committee Chairman.
- 2.20** The new Local Government and Elections Bill which is likely to be enacted early in 2020, may include a requirement of all Council meetings to be webcast in the future.

Public Speaking at Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committee

- 2.21** The arrangements for public speaking at meetings of the Council's Planning Committee have been in place since February 2015 and are working well, with public involvement at the vast majority of meetings. The process provides an opportunity for increased public engagement in the planning application process. During the Municipal Year 2018/19, 28 individual registrations to speak at Planning Committee meetings.
- 2.22** As far as Scrutiny Committees are concerned, the arrangements for public speaking were introduced at the beginning of 2016. Again, the process is designed to enhance / increase opportunities for public participation in the Council's democratic processes. Officers from Democratic Services and the Communications Unit will continue to look at ways of increasing the level of public engagement in the Scrutiny process. During the Municipal Year 2018/19, 45 individual registrations to speak at Scrutiny Committee meetings.
- 2.23** The below table sets out the performance indicator used to measure satisfaction rates with the above arrangements:

Performance Indicator	Q4 2017/2018	Q4 2018/2019	Q4 Target 2018/2019	Direction of Travel	Commentary
CPM/227: Satisfaction with the process for public speaking	64.55%	66.67%	75%		The performance of 67% represents 4 satisfied or very satisfied responses received out of a total

at committees.					<p>of 6 responses by respondents when asked how satisfied they were with the overall process for public speaking during the year.</p> <p>2. Although this is below the target of 75% it is important to note that this only relates to a small number of responses.</p>
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Member Development

- 2.24** A significant amount of work has been undertaken by the Democratic Services Team (supported by colleagues) in this area as alluded to in my earlier comments within this report e.g. Member Expo events.
- 2.25** The team also undertook to provide a number of Member Development sessions in relation to Rules of Debate processes and procedures knowledge building. This subject had been identified from Member feedback at the Member Focus Group facilitated by the WLGA in April, 2018.

Central South Consortium and Cardiff Capital Region: Scrutiny Arrangements

- 2.26** Work of the Central South Consortium continues to be monitored by the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee holding the Consortium to account, with invitations being extended throughout the year for officer attendance at Committees. The Managing Director of the Central South Consortium also attends each Scrutiny Committee in the South East Wales Consortium on an annual basis, in January / February each year.
- 2.27** The Central South Consortium continues to hold regular group meetings with Chairs of Scrutiny Committees and the Democratic Services Officers in each of the Local Authorities in order to consider proposals to deepen the Consortium's relationship with the scrutiny function on a regional level to consider regional performance and share best practice and information.
- 2.28** In terms of the Cardiff Capital Region Joint Scrutiny Committee is now in existence to scrutinise the various project streams relating to the Regional City Deal. The Council's representative on the Joint Committee is the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee Environment and Regeneration as agreed by Council. To date three meetings of the Joint Committee have been held including, one site visit to the Semi- Conductor site in Newport. The meetings are also attended by one of the Team's Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers.

The Year Ahead

- 2.29** The Council's Member Development Programme will be an ongoing process. The outcome of the Member Personal Development Interview process will inform the content of the Programme going forward in addition to Member Expo events.

- 2.30** The Team will also be undertaking a Member Scrutiny satisfaction survey and will continue to consult with the public have participated in our public speaking arrangements at Planning and Scrutiny Committee meetings.
- 2.31** The Team will be involved in part with the rollout of Microsoft Office 365.

ICT colleagues have established a project team who will be initiating all aspects of the rollout, including training requirements, governance and policies to safely use the applications.

The “Early Adoption” phase will be completed by the end of August, 2019 which will include a small number of Elected Members taking part in a pilot. This will be followed by the Council-wide rollout beginning in September, 2019 which is anticipated to be completed in the following 6-8 months.

- 2.32** As part of my Tranche 4 budget savings I have a £2k target to achieve relating to the reduction printing of hard copy Committee agendas.
- 2.33** Finally, I will be undertaking a review of the Member Development Strategy.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act sets out effective transparency as a key part of improving the delivery of public bodies.

The Act requires public bodies to communicate and explain the processes of selecting its well-being objectives and how these objectives have been chosen, how decisions are taken in line with these objectives and what difference these objectives have made.

The importance of presenting the report is to ensure that transparency has taken place and to inform the Council and the public of the above arrangements which are required to be undertaken to comply with the terms of reference of the Democratic Services Committee include "to have regard to Welsh Ministerial guidance when exercising its functions".

- 3.2** The Measure makes arrangements for changes to the political structure of local government in Wales and the way in which local government operates.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** As set out above.

Employment

4.2 As set out above.

Legal (Including Equalities)

4.3 The Council is required to comply with the relevant provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 with regard to the provision of Democratic Services and support for such.

5. Background Papers

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011