

Meeting of:	<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Monday, 30 June 2025</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources
Report Title:	Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services
Purpose of Report:	To outline for Members work of the Committee and activities undertaken within the Service throughout the 2024-25 municipal year.
Report Owner:	James Langridge-Thomas, Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	James Langridge-Thomas, Head of Democratic Services
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"> <li>The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the wide range of duties undertaken within the service area throughout the year, alongside ongoing developments and plans.</li> </ul>	

## **Recommendation**

1. THAT the report be noted.

## **Reason for Recommendation**

1. To keep Members informed of the operational delivery of the Council's Democratic Services function.

## **1. Background**

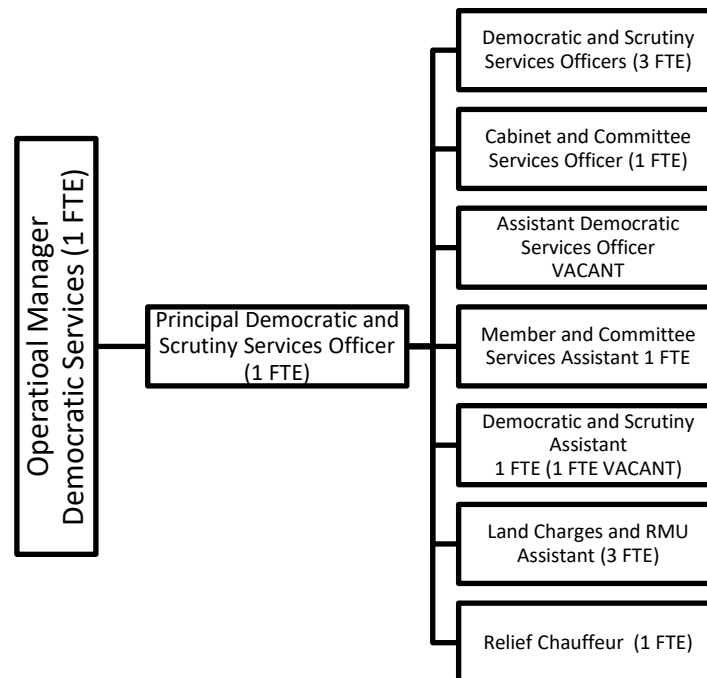
- 1.1 There is a requirement under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure") for the Council to appoint a Democratic Services Committee. The Measure also requires the Council to designate one of its officers to the statutory post of "Head of Democratic Services" and to provide that officer with sufficient resources to discharge these statutory functions.
- 1.2 This report, by its very nature and its linkage with the requirements of the Measure, covers the work undertaken by the Democratic, Scrutiny and Committee Services section.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1 The Democratic Services division comprises three distinct sections:
  - (i) Democratic, Scrutiny and Committee Services (together with Records Management and Land Charges)
  - (ii) Registration Service
  - (iii) Information Management Team
- 2.2 The following paragraphs set out the various elements within the service area Democratic, Scrutiny and Committee Services which form the remit of this Committee and the activities undertaken to date for the Committee's information.

## Staff Structure

**2.3** The team's structure is outlined as below as at 30/04/2024:



**2.4** The team therefore consists of twelve staff members with three working in the office on a regular basis and eight working on a hybrid basis with the relief chauffeur who supports the Mayor's office working on an ad hoc basis.

**2.5** As Members will be aware, there has been a significant amount of workforce change within the Democratic Services function during the year, including:

- Appointment of new Operational Manager – Democratic Services
- Retirement of previous Principal and Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (and previously designated Head of Democratic Services)
- Promotion of Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer to the Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer position
- Promotion of Assistant Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer to the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer position
- Exit of longstanding Democratic and Scrutiny Assistant (to another team within the Council).

This leaves the team with 2 vacancies currently, which are planned to be recruited to where possible within the upcoming year.

**2.6** The team deal 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 for all Council hybrid and remote meetings.
- Managing and providing support to the Council's Executive.

- 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 the Council's website relating to Members, Committees and the Scrutiny Function including the processes for Public Participation at meetings.
- Member research support is provided throughout the year with support from the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team and officers from each department, as required. Alongside this, research is a fundamental element of the Reshaping Scrutiny changes, with the team undertaking alongside existing Task and Finish work and undertaking whole team development sessions alongside academia to develop these skills further.
- Developing and updating information for Members on MemberNet, an internal Council site for Members including reference to all Training provided.
- Managing the Land Charges Register and the Records Management Unit:
- Managing the Council's committee room bookings; Corporate responsibility for all Council inbound and outward-bound mail, the provision of administrative support for processing activities relating to Employee Services, Council Tax, Housing Benefits and C1V.
- Providing support to Members in accessing information, data and analysis by signposting to relevant areas of the Council and working with other departments.

**2.7** The following paragraphs also provide a summary of work undertaken in the last twelve months and ongoing work / initiatives in which the section is actively engaged with. The Democratic Services Committee will continue to be kept fully informed on progress of these, and other initiatives going forward.

### **Multi Location Meetings Policy and Software Solution**

**2.8** The Democratic Services section continues to support the Council's governance and meeting arrangements in line with its Multi-Location Meetings Policy as established in April 2022 (and last amended in July 2024) in line with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance on multi-location meetings issued by Welsh Government (last amended August 2023).

**2.9** The Council is now nearing the end of its second-year contract with VP-AV Sound Limited, and the Easy Conference Connect Software, which allows the Council to support both remote and hybrid meetings and provide simultaneous Welsh translation for select Committees based on Member's language preferences. The Council currently operates five hybrid Committees: Full Council, Cabinet, Planning, Governance & Audit and the Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee Annual

Meeting. All other Committee meetings, including the Annual Meeting, are conducted on a Remote basis or in-person as appropriate.

- 2.10** Since August 2024 (the start of the second contract year following the first-year implementation period), Democratic Services Officers have maintained an Easy Conf System Stability Tracker document to record any issues experienced at meetings or service functionality requests that are identified as being required. This has been invaluable for supporting officers with trouble shooting during live meetings as well as identifying patterns when engaging with the VP-AV support desk. The tracker has been designed using the Key Performance Indicators as set out in the service contract and will therefore be used as an evidence base for future contract negotiations.
- 2.11** The Tracker does not include any user error issues that have been identified but Democratic Services Officers continue to offer support to all types of meeting attendees, as and when required, and continue to build a skill set for responding to common technical issues despite not being part of the Council's ICT Department. Democratic Officers also continue to promote the importance of maintaining regular software updates on member corporate laptops as well as allowing adequate time to join a meeting online.
- 2.12** Most entries on the Stability Tracker relate to audio-based issues which could be attributed to the inherited desk top mic equipment reaching end of life. Therefore, Officers are mindful of impending funding requirements to ensure that the Council Chamber infrastructure remains up to date and operational.
- 2.13** In terms of functionality requests, the Council would like to expand its simultaneous remote translation functionality to allow a translator to translate remotely. Due to restrictions with the software, it has not been possible to introduce this functionality to date, however, remains a topic for discussion with VP-AV and the software developer MVI. The Council would also like to provide an entirely Welsh language YouTube Stream but, again, due to software limitations at the current time, this has not been possible to date.

### **Planning Protocol**

- 2.14** In March 2023 Audit Wales advised the Council that their local audit work for 2023-2024 would be regarding Planning. In July 2023 Audit Wales (AW) forwarded their project brief, which explained that the review would be focussed on the Planning Service's Governance arrangements.
- 2.15** The Audit Wales review was undertaken during July/August 2023 and Recommendation 1 outlined:

R1: The Council should strengthen its Planning Service's governance arrangements by:

- agreeing a Terms of Reference for the Council's Planning Committee to clearly state its purpose, role and responsibilities. The Council should regularly review this Terms of Reference.
- developing a plain language Planning Protocol and include it in the constitution and on the Planning Service Council webpage so that it is easily accessible to members and the public. The Council should ensure members and officers understand and act in accordance with the Planning Protocol.
- undertaking its planned review of the Scheme of Delegation to ensure the Planning Committee is focussed on the most strategically important planning applications; and
- ensuring planning applications submitted by, or on behalf of, the officers in the Planning service and supporting services are considered by the Planning Committee and not under officer delegated powers to safeguard against any perceived conflicts of interest and to promote independence and transparency.

**2.16** Subsequently, the Head of Sustainable Development conjunction with Democratic Services devised a new Terms of Reference for the Planning Committee and amended the scheme of delegation. In addition, a Planning Protocol was developed which was considered by Cabinet and the Governance and Audit Committee prior to approval by Full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025. The Council's Constitution has subsequently been updated to include the new Terms of Reference, Planning Protocol and Scheme of Delegation.

### **3. Mayor's Office**

- 4.** The team has supported the Mayor in the municipal year with a number of initiatives, including managing the Mayor's Foundation Grant, supporting them to Chair Full Council meetings, and attending or arranging a series of events including:
- Presenting the RNLI with free men and free women's status;
  - Attending many veterans events in partnership with Royal British Legion;
  - Supporting local pride events;
  - School visits;
  - Attending a range of community groups.

### **Member Development**

- 4.1** Following the Local Government Elections in May 2022 All Elected and Co-opted Members took part in a comprehensive Induction Programme and further training as and when required will continue to be provided. Members receive regular briefing updates throughout the year, which are also made available on MemberNet for future viewing. iDEV training modules are also available on MemberNet together with mandatory training modules.
- 4.2** On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2025, the Democratic Services Committee considered a report in relation to the Member Learning Needs Analysis Self-Assessment Exercise Outcomes and resolved that:

(1) T H A T the comments raised by Members in response to the 2023 Learning Needs Analysis Self-Assessment Survey and Annual Scrutiny Impact Surveys 2023 and 2024, as well as associated commentary from Officers, (Appendix A) be noted.

(2) T H A T the proposed development topics and associated delivery timescales, as presented (Appendix B), be endorsed, subject to the topics of Community Cohesion and Child Exploitation being provided earlier in the schedule during the .2025 calendar year.

With the reasons for decisions being:

(1) Having regard to the contents of the report to meet the Committee's responsibility for overseeing the Council's approach to Member Development in accordance with the Council's Member Development Strategy.

(2) To provide Democratic Officers with approval to schedule and disseminate a Member Development Programme Schedule to all Elected Members (and Co-opted Members where appropriate) based on the proposals as agreed, in line with development topics identified as required by Elected and Co-opted Members themselves prior to the 2027 Local Government Election.

Since the Committee's resolutions, development sessions have been arranged and undertaken as follows and the schedule remains on track based on the agreed topics and timescales:

2025	
With Immediate Effect:	Enrolment on the following, non-essential, <b>iDev Courses</b> : - Group A Safeguarding (if not already enrolled) - Health & Safety Basics - Introduction to Neurodiversity
Quarter 1: Feb and Mar.	<b>Reshaping Scrutiny, Performance and Corporate Plan</b> A session to understand the Council's new approach to Scrutiny, including the revised performance arrangements to support the new Corporate Plan.
Quarter 2: Apr, May and Jun.	<b>Code of Conduct/Rules of Debate</b> (Mandatory for Scrutiny Chairs. Combined with WLGA Session below). Sections 4 and 19 of the Council's Constitution.
	<b>Chair &amp; Vice-Chair Training (WLGA)</b> A session to review the role of the Chair, consider useful practice, develop individual approaches and discuss solutions to challenging situations.

The next development session due for delivery imminently is:

Quarter 3: Jul, Aug, and Sept 2025.	<b>Child Exploitation.</b> Child Exploitation is a type of abuse. When a child or young person is exploited, they are groomed by being given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection. This is usually in exchange for carrying out a criminal activity. Child exploitation is complex and often cannot
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	be categorised neatly into one definition and many children and young people crossover the different definitions.
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### **Scrutiny Activities During the Year and Effective Scrutiny**

- 4.3** The Council's five Scrutiny Committees develop their own Forward Work Programmes for the Municipal year having regard to the Cabinet's Forward Work Programme. A number of items are monitored on a quarterly basis e.g. performance, financial management, Committee recommendations together with consideration of any call-in requests and Requests for Consideration of a Matter either put forward by Members of the Council or members of the public. Ad hoc reports are also requested as appropriate as well as the consideration of referrals from Cabinet and / or any other Committees. The link to the work programmes of the Scrutiny Committees agreed can also be found at [https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our\\_council/Council-Structure/scrutiny/scrutiny\\_committees.aspx](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/Council-Structure/scrutiny/scrutiny_committees.aspx).

### **Key Issues of Interest During the Year for Each Scrutiny Committee**

- 4.4** Scrutiny Committees must submit an Annual Report of their work to Full Council and the report for 2023/24 was submitted to Full Council on 30th September, 2024. The link to the report can be found [here](#). The promotion and awareness raising of the Scrutiny process has been further enhanced this year with information regarding the meetings and matters to be considered being made available on social media.
- 4.5** For the Committee's information the below sets out some examples of the key interests for each Committee during the year together with details of some public engagement that took place at various meetings.

### **Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**

- 4.6** The Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee considered several key issues for 2024/25 including:
- i. Petition Submission – School Crossing Supervisors enabled the Scrutiny Committee to consider a public petition submitted relating to Council proposals for the removal of School Crossing Supervisors. The Director of Environment and Housing subsequently presented the report to the Committee, with a key update being that there were no plans to remove staff / manned crossing services currently situated in the Vale of Glamorgan. Council would review the pedestrian crossing points to see if they would benefit from the use of lights / controls or Zebra crossings, particularly in light of the natural reduction in numbers of school crossing staff over time, and with the introduction of controlled crossings and 20mph zones near schools which had yielded benefits. However, the remaining staff that manned the remaining eleven manned crossing sites had been reassured that their jobs were not under threat. This hopefully would provide reassurance to the members of this petition and the wider communities they represent. Subsequently, following significant discussion, scrutiny and debate by Members on this topic (including suggestions such as external sponsorship



for this service), they recommended that the Committee supports the decision that no steps be taken to remove current school crossing patrols until a review has been carried out as appropriate to ensure child safety.

- ii. Vale of Glamorgan – Tourism and Events: Committee were updated on the latest developments in the tourism sector and events within the Vale of Glamorgan, the impact the tourism industry had on the local economy and of current legislation and how that would impact the industry. Following a number of queries, comments and suggestions from the Committee, recommendations were made concerning additional information being provided on the following: methodology used for the tourism statistics for the Vale of Glamorgan, the resilience of the tourism sector within the Vale of Glamorgan, the impact of the new legislation on this sector, how to improve internet, Wi-Fi and overall digital connectivity for the local tourism industry, how Vale of Glamorgan residents can participate in the discussion about how they can support local tourism and events going forward, and how the local tourism industry will be impacted by climate change and how this can be mitigated. The Committee should receive also an annual report on the progress being made with tourism and events within the Vale of Glamorgan.
  - a. Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP): the Committee scrutinised the plan and report, referred to them by Cabinet, and made a number of recommendations. These included training be made available for the Council's Elected Members on the Geographic Information System (GIS) to help them to directly address questions on land, pathways, etc. made by residents of the Vale. Also, greater prominence is given to Rights of Way information on the Vale of Glamorgan Council's website, i.e. on how Elected Members and residents can report obstructions and other issues around Rights of Way, etc. to the Local Authority. Furthermore, future consultation on Rights of Way includes and actively engages with Elected Member Champions and key interest groups and the Committee be updated annually on the progress being made in this area.
- iii. Draft Tree Strategy (2024-2039): reported the results of the public consultation exercise and to seek the views of Committee on the proposed final Draft of the Tree Strategy (2024- 2039). There was a significant debate as a result at the Committee, with Members raising a number of comments and queries, as well as pointing to the positive results from the consultation and as an example of how the Vale of Glamorgan Council could listen and respond to comments and feedback made by the public and other stakeholders in an effective and fair way. Recommendations centred around strengthening communication, improvements to the relevant website, the Council should continue to use all available leverage and means at its disposal to ensure that local developers safeguard and retain existing trees, to promote opportunities for local community volunteers to support the implementation of the Tree Strategy, and highlighting the consultation process for the Tree Strategy to be an exemplar of best practice, which should, where appropriate, be rolled out and mirrored across other

consultation processes that the Council undertakes.

- iv. [Bathing Water Quality](#) at Designated Bathing Beaches in the Vale of Glamorgan: the report explained the proposed arrangements to assist in improving bathing waters at designated bathing beaches in the Vale of Glamorgan and the Council's role in this with the relevant partners, as well as the key issues, legislative framework and context. The Committee welcomed a local Friends of the Earth representative, who spoke at the Committee to raise a number of issues on this. There were also a number of contributions from external partners about their work in achieving this, namely Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Dwr Cymru / Welsh Water (DCWW).
- v. The Committee also welcomed a number of public speakers and undertook a lengthy scrutiny and debate concerning the Cabinet reference and report concerning Car Parking measures for the Vale of Glamorgan at a Special Meeting of the Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025. From this meeting, a number of recommendations were made following significant scrutiny and debate by Members, around the use of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), to be applied to each of the proposals referred to in the report, the future of Court Road car park should be set within a vision for the town centre in relation to town centre renewal, concerning on-street car parking proposals, further consideration be given on this, and with regard to street parking charges, the Committee's view was that work should be done to improve the car parking facilities at Cliff Walk – Penarth, and Bron y Mor – Barry, prior to the implementation of charging at those locations, amongst others.

### **Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.24 The Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee considered a number of key issues in 2024/25 including:
- a. Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) 2023: aimed to provide Committee Members with an overview of the draft Local Housing Market Assessment (attached as an appendix to the report) for their consideration and any comments to be forwarded on to Cabinet as part of their consideration and approval of this review, prior to submission to Welsh Government (WG). Following the review and debate by Members, which included questions on the Council's housing waiting lists, the figures for social housing need being fed into the RLDP and the importance of the Council considering the provision of suitable housing for older persons, it recommended that consideration should be made on the importance of the Council considering the provision of suitable housing for older persons and this be embedded within Council policies, strategies and planning (i.e. the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Replacement Local Development Plan).
  - b. There was also considerable scrutiny and debate by the Committee on the Work to Tackle Poverty and the Current Cost of Living Crisis and PSB update on Working with People who live in our Communities that Experience Higher Levels of Deprivation. Due to this, the Committee made recommendations on greater Committee engagement and scrutiny through visiting the Vale Foodbank to see the work being

undertaken to address food insecurity and related issues, as well as the importance for the Vale of Glamorgan Council to review whether the data it collected provided sufficient detail on how easy it was for residents to access the benefits, entitlements and financial support that the Council administered locally. Also, the Committee wanted further updates to monitor this appropriately.

- c. The Committee raised a number of questions and comments on behalf of residents and communities within the Vale of Glamorgan when it received a presentation from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) at its November meeting. This included identifying anti-social behaviour 'hot spots' and how to combat this, to ensure that the police maintained a strong community presence and engagement, and to enhance and protect neighbourhood policing. Reference was also made to the Vale of Glamorgan Council's contribution to the South Wales Police Crime Panel and how it scrutinised the PCC's work and for further updates to be provided by the PCC in future. A letter was also sent on the Committee's behalf, following the presentation, to the PCC highlighting key areas such as CCTV funding, which contributed to securing funding for CCTV for both 24/25 and 25/26.

#### **Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee**

- a. The Healthy Living and Social Care Committee considered a number of key issues in 2024/25 including:  
The Annual Report for Sports Development, 60+ Active Leisure Scheme and National Exercise Referral Scheme, which highlighted many of the successful initiatives undertaken during the past year to support the least active residents in the Vale to become more active and to support the community to play which positively impacted on the health and wellbeing of residents, and  
The Social Care Records System report, to update Committee members in respect of the implementation of a replacement social care system for 'CareDirector' ("WCCIS").

#### **Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee**

- The Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee considered a number of key issues in 2024/25 including regular Estyn school inspection summary reports on a termly basis. This allowed the Scrutiny Committee to assess progress of those schools inspected by Estyn during the year. The Committee also assessed the Library Service through an Annual report.
- The Committee also had a detailed debate on a number of reports including:  
Initiatives to improve reading in schools and from that and regarding data sharing of pupil attainment levels, the Committee agreed for the Chair to write to the Welsh Government Minister for Education calling for improved data sharing arrangements. A response from the Cabinet Secretary highlighted that Welsh Government was continually assessing arrangements around data sharing and school improvement with an emphasis on support for school improvement plans.

- b. Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee The Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered a number of key issues in 2024/25 including:

Let's Talk About Life in the Vale – Survey Report and Further Engagement: due to the scrutiny and debate undertaken regarding this report/reference at the meeting, the Committee made a number of recommendations for action, including:

- That further work be undertaken to engage residents in the decision-making process of the Council.
- When specific projects, for example Eagleswell, are to be explored, consideration to consultation within the local community be undertaken prior to decisions being made.
- The Council's website be reviewed and updated to ensure that it is more user friendly to the public.
- The priorities identified within the Survey be progressed as soon as possible and considered in line with the review of the Public Participation Strategy.
- The responsibilities of the Council be more easily identified to the public so that they are aware of the responsibilities and accountabilities that the Council has; and
- Initiatives be developed that show the public that the Council is listening, with further opportunities to be considered to engage with 16- 24-year-olds.

Audit Wales: [Financial Sustainability of Local Government](#) – following significant scrutiny and debate on this report in early 2025, the Committee highlighted a number of areas and made a number of recommendations for consideration by the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet:

- That the Committee's view that Welsh Government be requested to consider multi-year settlements going forward be pursued.
- That the comparisons with other Local Authorities in Wales and the national picture was important to see the commonalities and differences between Local Authorities with it being suggested that the Governance and Audit Committee may be the best avenue to consider with officers what lessons could be learned from other Local Authorities in similar situations to the Vale;
- That further considerations / initiatives be considered to encourage community engagement.
- That a further report on the work being undertaken within Digital Services be provided to the Committee in due course.
- That consideration be given as to what external guidance could be provided to support the Council's budget setting process; and

- That the figures in relation to the ALN provision for students be reviewed.

The Committee also scrutinised sickness absence data and through scrutiny and debate on the two reports received over this period, made a number of recommendations including further information be presented to the Committee in relation to the service provided by the 30 Mental Health Champions, the good work being undertaken and to include details of training opportunities.

### **Joint Consultative Forum (JCF)**

- 4.1** The JCF's purpose is to provide a formal mechanism for joint consultation between elected members, employee representatives and management of the Council in order to maintain good employee relations, examine and discuss matters of mutual concern and to provide a means of regular communication between members, management and staff on problems and proposals that impact on the effective delivery of Council services.
- 4.2** The JCF has considered a number of key areas over the municipal year in question, with contributions from employee representatives, elected members and management of the Council as part of the consultation process and updates on these items, including:
  - Draft Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan 2025-30.
  - Reshaping Programme Update.
  - The Council's Culture Plan.
  - Recruitment and Retention.
  - Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) report.
  - Hybrid Working Review.
  - New People's Strategy; and
  - Guide to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

### **Reshaping Scrutiny**

- c. During the year, following a significant amount of consultation and engagement with Members, proposals were developed to review the existing Scrutiny Committees and their ways of working; with the key changes being:
  - Changing from 5 to 4 Committees
  - Changing of the frequency of meetings
  - Changing of Committee's areas of focus (aligned to the Council's new Corporate Plan)
  - Revisions to the Council's performance monitoring arrangements
  - Introduction of systematic Task and Finish scrutiny arrangements

These changes were approved by Full Council on 28th April 2025, to be implemented in the upcoming municipal year. A summary of the changes can be seen [here](#).

## **Collaborative Working and Networks**

- d. **South East Wales Scrutiny Officer Network** – The Network provides opportunities for Local Authorities to share information, develop good practices, raise and discuss issues of mutual concern and make suggestions for improvements.
- e. **Heads of Democratic Services Network** supported by the WLGA – This Network also provides opportunities for Local Authorities to share information, develop good practice, raise and discuss matters of mutual concern and make suggestions for improvements. Recent meetings have included opportunities to discuss matters directly with Welsh Government representatives having regard to the provisions of the LG&E (Wales) Act and related consultations regarding guidance developed in respect of various provisions of that Act e.g., Corporate Joint Committees (CJs) and multi-location meetings. When updates are now available, these are shared with the Democratic Services Committee.
- f. **Heads of Policy Network** supported by the WLGA – This Network also provides opportunities for Local Authorities to share information, develop good practice, raise and discuss matters of mutual concern and make suggestions for improvements within the policy space. Recent meetings have included opportunities to discuss matters surrounding areas such as the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act.
- g. Attendances at the above Networks offer opportunities for the Team Members in Democratic and Scrutiny Services to also facilitate the effective provision of support to Elected Members.

## **Independent Bodies**

- h. **Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW)** – The IRPW is responsible for determining the level of payments to elected Members of Councils, National Park Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales. The current report for the year 2024/25 can be found here - <https://www.gov.wales/independent-remuneration-panel-wales-annual-report-2024-2025>
- i. The report references the IRPW's consistently expressed view that maintaining the democratic values of local government could not be cost free. Payments to Members and Co-opted Members are made available to encourage a diversity of willing and able people to undertake local governance through their elected, appointed or co-opted roles. The report also includes reference to Reimbursement of Costs of Care and the promotion of awareness raising of the scheme so that Members with caring responsibilities for other dependents, such as the elderly, are encouraged to claim.
- j. It is important to note that from April 2025 onwards, the responsibilities of the IRPW are being undertaken by the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru.

### **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) –**

- k. The PSOW has legal powers to investigate complaints about public services and independent care providers in Wales. The Ombudsman also investigates complaints that members of local government bodies have breached their Authority's Code of Conduct. Following a request from the PSOW, the Council has also introduced a Local Dispute Resolution Procedure to deal with low level allegations by a Member against a fellow Member. The current PSOW Code of Conduct guidance for Members of Local Authorities has been forwarded to all Members for their information. The Monitoring Officer and officers within the Democratic and Scrutiny Services section also continue to provide guidance to elected Members in this regard. A copy of the guidance can also be found at <https://www.ombudsman.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Code-of-Conduct-Guidance-CC-CBC-NPA-PCP-31-10-2022.pdf>
- l. A similar guide was also issued by the PSOW for TCCs.

The Ombudsman also produces an Annual Report of its activities which can be found here <https://www.ombudsman.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2022-23-19-07-2023-Auditor-signed.pdf>

### **The Year Ahead**

- 4.3** The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team have regard to a number of activities that will be undertaken during 2025/2026 within the Committees' remits, as follows:
- a. Appointing to the vacant positions identified within section 2.3 of the report.
  - b. Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – Continue to manage / address the provisions of the Act.
  - c. Continue to address the provisions of the Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance issued by Welsh Government in respect of the LGE Act 21 in June 2023.
  - d. Continue to address and review any further statutory and / or other guidance received and the sharing of good practice and to make arrangements in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer for amendments to the Council's Constitution where necessary.
  - e. Continue to support a range of quasi-judicial Committees, alongside wider partnership Committees where appropriate and other internal governance groups (such as the Council's Corporate Parenting Panel)
  - f. Work in partnership with Corporate Communications, Participation, Equalities and Directorate Development Strategic Advisory Group to deliver aspects of the Public Participation Strategy, ahead of a wider refresh.
  - g. Work alongside Electoral Registrations to support proposed changes to the Council's boundaries.
  - h. Work alongside Members and Officers to support the implementation of the Council's new Scrutiny arrangements.

- i. Seek to rationalise processes for officers and members using a digital approach to develop a “21st Century Democratic Services” which is digitally equipped to meet the needs of users.
- j. Commence preparations for the Senedd elections in 2026, alongside the next Council election in 2027.
- k. Continue to monitor the provision of Hybrid and Remote meetings including the use of the Welsh Language Translation service.
- l. Support the Mayor in its Civic duties; and maximise opportunities to raise awareness of the Council within communities.
- m. Explore opportunities for more young people to participate within democracy in conjunction with Youth Services
- n. Work alongside HM Land Registry to standardise and migrate the Local Land Charges Register information (LLC1) to one accessible place.
- o. Work with Scrutiny Committees, Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group and officers in the Authority to promote public participation and engagement in the scrutiny process.
- p. Continue to work with the Communications Team in the development of pursuing ways of raising awareness of the work of Committees and the decision-making process having considered the outcomes of the “Let’s Talk About Life in the Vale” Survey.

**4.4** In conclusion, this report highlights some of the work that the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team have undertaken in an extremely challenging year where there has been a significant amount of change – both in terms of personnel but also ways of working. However, the Team have adapted and continued to develop to meet the needs of the service and to comply with the provisions of legislation. The Team have been successful in ensuring service resilience and through creativity have delivered the desired outcomes that have supported Elected Members and the Council’s governance arrangements and are continuously seeking opportunities to improve the Council's Democratic functions. The 2025-26 municipal year represents an exciting time within Democratic Services, as the service seeks to settle as a team following a significant amount of personnel changes, adapting to the new scrutiny arrangements, explore becoming a 21st century Democratic Services through the use of technology and alternative ways of working, whilst continuing to develop in their respective roles and functions.

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

- 5.1** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act sets out effective transparency as a key part of improving the delivery of public bodies.
- 5.2** 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.

- 5.3** 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".
- 5.4** The Measure makes arrangements for changes to the political structure of local government in Wales and the way in which local government operates.

## **6. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 6.1** None as a direct result of this report.

## **7. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

- 7.1** As set out above.

### **Employment**

- 7.2** As set out above.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 7.3** 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.
- 7.4** Comply with other legislation and Statutory Guidance e.g., Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

## **8. Background Papers**

### **[Local Government \(Wales\) Measure 2011](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Democratic%20Services/2025/25-02-10/LNA-Self-Assessment-Exercise-Outcomes.pdf)**

**[https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/ Committee%20Reports/Democratic%20 Services/2025/25-02-10/LNA-Self-Assessment-Exercise-Outcomes.pdf](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Democratic%20Services/2025/25-02-10/LNA-Self-Assessment-Exercise-Outcomes.pdf)**