

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 17 November 2025
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	21 st Century Democratic Services
Purpose of Report:	To consult and comment on the proposed approach of developing a 21 st Century Democratic Services.
Report Owner:	James Langridge-Thomas, Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	James Langridge-Thomas, Head of Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This is an internal matter and consultation is, therefore, not necessary. However, all Members of the Council will be engaged as appropriate about the workstreams detailed within.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter of local choice.
Executive Summary As of Autumn 2025, the Democratic Services function has been undergoing a period of transformation, both in terms of its ways of working, and resourcing, due to several staff changes within the team, alongside wider environmental factors such as the development of the new Corporate Plan, Vale 2030, and the outcome of Council's Performance Panel Assessment. This report has been entitled "21st Century Democratic Services" due to the outcomes being sought and signals change to the team's wider direction of travel; in that we are actively seeking to modernise the service area's approaches and practices to reflect innovations in technology and ways of working, aiming to improve efficiency and productivity for all stakeholders involved. Not all changes outlined within this report are digitally focused, and some relate to areas where local and national policy has developed iteratively over time, but the Council has not fully adapted its working processes to reflect this situation. This roadmap builds upon an internal review undertaken in 2024 which identified opportunities to modernise existing processes and optimise technologies to improve ways of working and seeks to take this further than the scope of the review based upon the additional factors previously outlined. To navigate these wider environmental factors, build upon the internal review and draw upon good practice from other Local Authorities, a roadmap has been designed identifying priority areas for improvement in the next 2 years. In being implemented, these changes will have an impact upon resources within Democratic Services team (of which this Committee has oversight), alongside having an impact to wider	

Members, and all will be communicated and collaborated with as needed to ensure that any changes are sufficiently embedded.

The report does not purposefully consider the Council's Multi-Location Meeting Policy as this is being reviewed by both internal and external audit and will be presented for Committee consideration at a later meeting.

Members are invited to comment on the workstreams detailed within the report; to identify any opportunities they consider appropriate for improvement in terms of ways of working within Democratic Services function to support both Council staff and Members in delivery of this function, and to comment on the scale of the aspirations outlined.

As and when changes are implemented, they will be navigated via the appropriate decision-making channels and communicated with all stakeholders, including the details of changes alongside the training and support available to help embed the change.

Summary of Changes

Theme	Project	Target Implementation Date
PowerBI	Scrutiny Recommendations Tracker	November 2025
PowerBI	Council Motions Tracker	March 2026
PowerBI	Members Training Overview	March 2026
Decision Making Process	Committee Report Template	April 2026
Decision Making Process	Minutes	April 2026
Decision Making Process	Cabinet Clearance Process	April 2026
Website	Public webpages	July 2026
Website	StaffNet	July 2026
Website	MemberNet	April 2026
Website	Council YouTube	April 2026
Forms Automation	Register of Interests	December 2026
Forms Automation	Request for Public Consideration	May 2026
Forms Automation	Call in Proforma	February 2026

Recommendations

1. T H A T the Committee notes the content of the report and proposed approach being undertaken in becoming a 21st Century Democratic Services, including the roadmap within Appendix A.
2. T H A T the Committee considers if there are any additional areas they would like to see within this roadmap in relation to the Democratic Services function.
3. T H A T the Committee is assured that the Democratic Services function has sufficient capacity, resource and skills to deliver the changes outlined within the report
4. T H A T the Committee agrees for a further update surrounding 21st Century Democratic Services to be reported in 12 months' time highlighting progress to date, lessons learned and any changes to the roadmap contained within Appendix A.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure Members are apprised of developments within the Democratic Service's function.
2. To allow Members to be able to contribute additional suggestions for consideration
3. To allow for the Committee to exercise its responsibility in ensuring oversight surrounding resourcing within the Democratic Services function.
4. To allow for the Committee to monitor and review the proposed roadmap provided.

1. Background

- 1.1** Democratic Services within the Vale of Glamorgan Council is undertaken by a small team, consisting of:

- i. Operational Manager – Democratic Services (1 FTE)
- ii. Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (1 FTE)
- iii. Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (3 FTE)
- iv. Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer – Digital Specialist (1 FTE)
- v. Cabinet and Committee Services Officer (1 FTE)
- vi. Democratic and Scrutiny Assistant (1 FTE)
- vii. Member and Committee Services Assistant (1 FTE)
- viii. Land Charges and RMU Assistant (3 FTE)

- 1.2** In the last 12 months, there has been significant change within the team including:

- i. Recruitment of new Operational Manager – Democratic Services following the retirement of the previous postholder
- ii. Recruitment of Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer following the retirement of the previous postholder

- iii. Recruitment of Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer being promoted from within the team
 - iv. Removal of Assistant Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer post and replacement with Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer – Digital Specialist to reflect organisational direction of travel
 - v. Reduction of Democratic and Scrutiny Assistant (1 FTE), who has chosen to move to another area within the Council.
- 1.3** In 2024, the Council’s Business Improvement Team undertook an internal review of working practices within the Democratic Services team and identified a range of areas for improvement, which were paused due to the previous postholder retiring. This review formed the initial basis of the proposed roadmap, which was then built during Spring 2025 upon following review with the Team as to how they could modernise in the future.
- 1.4** The Council undertook an external Performance Panel Assessment (as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021) in November 2025. Upon review, the Panel made several recommendations around Governance and the use of resources; including:
- i. Reviewing and revising the cycle of formal democratic meetings and formal reporting requirements, exploring ways to better engage members in more proactive and cross chamber collaboration – in both formal and informal ways including reviewing the effectiveness of online meetings.
 - ii. Reviewing the balance between the internal corporate demands placed on members and their role as representatives of their constituents to deliver the Council’s vision of place.
 - iii. Using the strong local politics as a force for good, whilst ensuring civility in public life is promoted and kept front and centre to encourage respectful and constructive debate including online and in-person meetings.
 - iv. Enhancing the effectiveness of the Council’s scrutiny arrangements, specifically meetings, by assessing current practices to identify opportunities for improvement to make them more effective.
- 1.5** During the year, the Council has also developed its new Corporate Plan, Vale 2030, and identified a new Well-being Objective, “Being the best Council we can be”. The proposed activities identified help support several actions within the Plan, including:
- i. Transform our services and how we work to better meet the needs of the community and to make the best use of our resources.
 - ii. Improve accountability and transparency by sharing more information about how decisions are made & scrutinised, priorities set, and budgets determined
 - iii. Use digital technology more innovatively to improve services whilst ensuring that services are accessible to everyone.
 - iv. Invest in our colleagues and improve our skills, diversity, recruitment, retention and engagement, making the Council an employer of choice.

- 1.6** Work identified as part of being a 21st Century Democratic Services also demonstrates how the team have considered the Brilliant Basics charter, by ways of working such as proactively seeking improvements, looking to be more efficient, and maximise existing systems for example.
- 1.7** The team also undertook the foundation stage of the Reshaping Scrutiny workstream during the year. Engagement with Officers and Members during this period identified several ways to further enhance the Democratic function, which did not sit within the confines of the Scrutiny changes.
- 1.8** Learning has also been undertaken from other Local Authorities, whether it be from networking with other Local Authority equivalents, participating in WLGA Heads of Democratic Services Network and WLGA Heads of Policy Network or findings from Audit Wales reports for example.
- 1.9** The areas outlined are designed to complement wider transformational activity within the Democratic function; most notably Reshaping Scrutiny, and to complement general day to day improvement activity happening within the operational functioning of the team.
- 1.10** The proposed activities also supports the Council's Digital Strategy, notably commitments surrounding:
- i. (To) Create and embed reliable processes, so that digital projects are delivered successfully
 - ii. Develop a digital culture, where digital is seen as a key enabler of all services in the organisation
 - iii. Support and empower colleagues to develop and use their digital skills
 - iv. Invest in and harness data insights to inform and improve decision-making
- 1.11** It is important to note that the function has already undertaken a range of initiatives to improve ways of working and modernising in the last 12 months, including examples such as the introduction of Microsoft Planner to support workflow management, the use of Microsoft Forms to routinely capture information in a systematic manner, and the use of CoPilot to support day to day activity.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** This report sets out an overview of some of the key workstreams for becoming a 21st Democratic Service, with a diagrammatic overview in Appendix A. This is an overview of proposed activities that will sit alongside business-as-usual activity for the Service and does not represent a full view of all work within the team or potential areas for improvement. This programme of work will likely develop iteratively over time to respond to the Council's emerging needs, or any changes in legislation.

Training and Development within Democratic Services

- 2.2** To facilitate any changes within ways of working, it is important to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to deliver these changes.
- 2.3** In general terms, all Members of Democratic Services officers have been undertaking a range of training to improve their knowledge surround digital, with skill levels identified based upon a training needs assessment.
- 2.4** Training undertaken to improve these skill levels include self-directed learning through platforms such as iDev (the Council's e-learning system), Microsoft Learn (Microsoft accredited learning pathways), cross-Directorate Lunch and Learn sessions where knowledge, skills and ideas are shared, and training sessions via the Council's Learning Café (facilitated by Workforce and Organisational Development).
- 2.5** Additional training surrounding Sharepoint (MemberNet and StaffNet) and Granicus (Council's external webpage) has also been provided to identified individuals within the Service who are responsible for content management (in collaboration with the Communications team).
- 2.6** Several Members of the team are also undertaking a combination of peer learning and self-directed learning in tools such as PowerBI, Microsoft Forms and Microsoft Lists to improve their baseline knowledge of these applications to support them in practically implementing these solutions.
- 2.7** The team are also being supported in their understanding of the general principles and approaches to change management, with some participating in the Council's Management Development Programme or undertaking external training such as Institute of Leadership and Management accreditation or accessing training and resources provided by University of South Wales such as Systems Thinking and Digital Change
- 2.8** The appointment of a Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer – Digital Specialist to the team also allows for a dedicated individual to be able to undertake larger areas of this work (whereas others will be undertaking alongside their business as usual), and lead on the testing of solutions, development of training, relationship management with wider colleagues, and ensuring effective change governance such as project planning/requirements documentations etc).
- 2.9** Due to the wide-ranging nature of the changes proposed, it is important to note that they are not undertaken in isolation. All areas identified within the report will be supported by a range of colleagues with specialisms from across the Council to maximise skills and knowledge utilisation, including Digital, Communications, and Workforce and Organisational Development.
- 2.10** During the last 12 months, due to developments within the Service area as identified above, officers have been empowered to express themselves through a solution-based approach, alongside being encouraged to explore and innovate whilst taking well-managed risks to meet the desired outcomes.

21st Century Democratic Services Roadmap

- 2.11** The below areas represent an overview of the activities proposed; with implementation being approved through the appropriate decision-making channels as needed.

PowerBI

- 2.12 Scrutiny Recommendations Tracker – Target Implementation Date: November 2025**

Development of an interactive tool to be embedded on the Council’s website which monitors the status of recommendations made by the Council’s Scrutiny function, particularly to Cabinet to understand how many have been “Accepted”, “Partially Accepted” or “Noted”. This is being designed to visualise information at a glance to provide an overview, with the ability to filter into the level of detail sought, whilst seeking to provide the public and Council with increased visibility and transparency about the impact of the Scrutiny function.

- 2.13 Council Motions Tracker – Target Implementation Date: March 2026**

At Full Council on 29th September, 2025, it was agreed to update the Constitution to include the ongoing monitoring of motions. This entails developing an interactive tool which would be embedded on the Council’s website which monitors the impact of Full Council following the agreement of a motion. This aims to monitor and readily display the outcomes of decisions being made by a wide range of Members across the Council Chamber and seeks to raise public awareness of any passed motions and close the loop by displaying voting results, the associated debate and what has happened because of a motion in a singular space.

- 2.14 Members Training Overview – Target Implementation Date: March 2026**

Development of an interactive tool to provide an overview of training undertaken by Members, including mandatory training as part of their induction process, and monitor compliance with any renewal requirements, such as refreshes on GDPR. Whilst initially intended for intended for internal usage within Democratic Services to support ensuring training undertaken, this could also be shared with Group Leaders in supporting them in maintaining high standards of conduct within their Political Groups, and Town and Community Councils where there are “twin-hatted” Members to be able to support with training accordingly (reflecting upon potential upcoming legislative changes). Further consideration would need to be given if this would be published externally to the Public.

Decision Making Process

2.15 Committee Report Template – Target Implementation Date: April 2026

Revision of the existing Committee report template used to make decisions, based on a number of factors including:

- i. Improving the quality of reports and understanding of content (aligned to the principles of Brilliance Basics and Tone of Voice)
- ii. Further articulation of the decision-making process, including increased evidence around as how decisions have been made
- iii. Improved alignment with the Council's Corporate Risk Register
- iv. Details of how the Council will monitor, review and communicate any decisions being made to improve accountability
- v. Consideration of engagement with Trade Unions surrounding strategic decisions, as required by Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023
- vi. Further embedding of the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015, including a proportionate impact assessment surrounding the Well-being Goals (and linking to other impact assessment processes) and evidencing of the Sustainable Development Principle.

This is currently early in its design phase and is being consulted upon with a range of officers, with a paper being planned to be brought to Democratic Services Committee in April 2026 to endorse the proposed approach.

2.16 Minutes – Target Implementation Date: April 2026

Revision of the existing Minutes template to combine both formal minutes of a meeting with the Decision Notice into a singular document whilst still meeting the relevant legislative requirements.

In terms of composition of this Decision Notice, alongside the standardised items such as apologies, minutes of previous meetings and interests, this would entail:

- i. A hyperlink to the relevant Committee report
- ii. A summary of the report based upon the executive summary from the Committee report document
- iii. A hyperlinked URL to the recording of the debate surrounding this item during a meeting
- iv. Recommendations made, including the reasons for these recommendations

This is currently in its design phase and is being consulted upon with the Welsh Language Commissioner and National Library for Wales.

This change has already been undertaken by a number of Local Authorities in

Wales and it has been informally acknowledged that legislative guidance surrounding this has not been updated to reflect the digital and hybrid arrangements introduced in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. This also mirrors the functionality of the ModernGov system and seeks to enhance democratic awareness by signposting individuals directly to the debate surrounding an item rather than summarised comments.

Based on internal metrics, there are significantly more views to YouTube meetings than formal existing minutes documents. A paper is being planned to be brought to Democratic Services Committee in April 2026 to endorse the proposed approach (timing due to its close alignment with the Committee report template).

2.17 Cabinet Clearance – Target Implementation Date: April 2026

We are seeking to review and automate the process to which papers from officers' reach Cabinet for consideration, ensuring that they are done so in a timely manner with relevant approvals received from the Council's statutory officers (Proper Officer, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer).

This aims to enhance the Council's Democratic functions by improving the timeliness of information and seeks to reduce the use of the Chief Executive's Emergency Powers and the Urgent Decision Procedure (Section 15.14 Council Constitution).

Website

2.18 Public Webpages (surrounding Democratic functions) – Target Implementation Date: July 2026

Whilst a provisional review of the Council's external webpages surrounding the Democratic function has been undertaken to incorporate the changes made as a result of Reshaping Scrutiny, work is due to commence to explore the information presented to increase accessibility and understanding of these functions, to improve end user experience, and to configure into a more mobile friendly output, as c.70-80% of the Council's website views are accessed via mobile device. This includes re-designing webpages such as Scrutiny, the Mayor, Participation in Meetings and Minutes/Agendas/Reports, and will be undertaken in collaboration with Communications team.

2.19 Council YouTube Channel – Target Implementation Date: December 2025

The Council currently has a YouTube channel which holds all meeting recordings for all Committees. In supporting Vale 2030, the channel will be re-branding to include iconography and colour schemes to reflect the Council's wider corporate identity.

Alongside this, video formats are being reviewed to remove excess "blank" space at the start of some meetings to improve the viewing experience, and bookmarks

introduced as standard across all Committees (aligned to meeting agendas) to improve ease of access for the viewer. It is hoped that this will allow for ease for Communications to signpost to key activity during any communications activity to raise awareness of decisions being made by the Council.

2.20 MemberNet - Target Implementation Date: April 2026

Whilst the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) of the revised MemberNet has been re-launched as a hub to support Members in undertaking their roles, and developed to include areas such as briefings, training, a calendar of events and news items, planned future enhancements include:

- i. Launching of a Scrutiny hub to act as a one stop shop for all things Scrutiny in a singular web space for Members
- ii. Permanent transition of the CommitteeHub from X Drive/Desktop Shortcut to MemberNet (cloud-based environment)
- iii. Development of an aggregated Monthly Update to be disseminated to all Members providing an overview of any key updates made within the site, signposting accordingly
- iv. Reviewing the Member Development Section in preparation for the 2027 election.

2.21 StaffNet, Target Implementation Date: July 2026

Aligned to the Council's internal transition to Sharepoint, a Democratic Hub is being proposed to be developed to provide an overview of relevant forms, guidance, tools and processes that officers need to be aware of when interacting with the Council's Democratic function. This is hoped to educate a wider range of officers to ways of working whilst improving the accessibility of democratic knowledge within the organisation and preventing future issues arising.

Forms

2.22 Register of Interests Process – Target Implementation Date: December 2026

The Council currently operates a traditional, paper-based system of managing its register of interests, with a significant amount of information being contained in Microsoft Word documents. Considerations when reviewing this process include:

- i. The development of a digital submission process for any register of interests (replacing the existing RM1/RM2 forms)
- ii. Automation of dispensations from Standards Committee proforma
- iii. Digital Form Submission for "Disclosure of Members Interests"

The creation of a structured dataset would allow for this information to develop automated process to notify members of any reviews. This could also be presented in a PowerBI to allow for oversight by the Monitoring Officer and Group Leaders, whilst also being increasingly accessible to all stakeholders in

having an overall picture of any interests a particular Member may have.

2.23 Request for Consideration Form (Public) – Target Implementation Date: May 2026

Aligned to the Council's website usage for the public, Digital services will be exploring building a form on the website instead of the existing Microsoft Word form which requires completion and submission. This is aligned to the Council's wider approach for forms on the public website, and should enhance user experience, whilst also automating the submission process. The development of a digital solution will also allow for monitoring to analyse trends, which could inform future improvement activity.

2.24 Scrutiny Call In Proforma – Target Implementation Date: February 2026

Aligned with the Council's digital workflow agenda, it is being proposed to introduce an electronic form to complete to call in items for Scrutiny. This will allow for the subsequent notification and approval chain to be automated and allow for automated monitoring to analyse trends in the number of call-ins being received.

As noted, the below is an overview of workstreams to modernise the Democratic Services function in terms of way of working and does not represent the entirety of improvement work within the Democratic Services function.

Delivery

2.25 Communication

During any changes, stakeholders will be communicated via several mediums including:

- i. Internal communications to officers
- ii. Direct to Member communication via MemberNet News functions
- iii. Information shared as part of Democratic Services monthly update
- iv. Raising awareness during the Chief Executive's State of the Nation, held ahead of Member briefings
- v. Reminder communications to Members during key milestones associated with the activity
- vi. Where appropriate, the public will be notified of changes via the Council's communications channels

2.26 Monitoring and Review

In order to ensure effective implementation and ensure that the desired outcomes are being achieved is necessary to monitor all changes post-implementation, both quantitatively and qualitatively, including user feedback. This will be outlined when these changes are being implemented.

As outlined previously, the Roadmap provided (Appendix A) will likely develop over time based upon the Council's needs and wider legislative changes. To ensure monitoring and review are happening systematically, it is proposed that Democratic Services Committee receive an update in 12 months-time based upon the implementation and progress made to date, any lessons learned and identified new projects for inclusion.

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

- 3.1** In becoming a 21st Century Democratic Services, the area is taking a long-term view and seeking to prevent future issues from arising by proactively working to review existing processes to ensure they work. Due to the nature of the area of work, there will be opportunities for integration due to the interlinked nature of the areas of work.
- 3.2** A lot of the areas identified will be undertaken in collaboration with other departments, such as Digital Services, alongside involving a range of stakeholders including Elected Members, wider Council Officers and National partners.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no climate change or nature implications associated with this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** There are no direct financial implications because of this report. Where possible, any proposal identified will be managed within existing budgets and largely be cost minimal due to the utilisation of existing resources, including staff and technology. If additional funding is required, this will be identified from within the Service's current departmental budget.

Employment

- 5.2** There are no direct employment implications because of this report. However, as outlined, the areas identified will release capacity for existing staff to focus upon value adding activities.
- 5.3** In implementing any changes, there will be significant consultation with staff involved in line with the principles of change management to ensure that they are familiar with processes, and that their skills and development needs are supported in implementing the identified changes.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4 There are no specific legal implications associated with this report. In development of proposals for change, there will be consideration of legal requirements to ensure that all changes are compliant with the relevant legislation.

6. Background Papers

[Vale of Glamorgan Council Performance Panel Assessment](#)

[Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan – Vale 2030](#)

[Vale of Glamorgan Council Digital Strategy](#)

[Vale of Glamorgan Council Participation Strategy](#)

[Vale of Glamorgan Council Constitution](#)

[The Local Government Digitalisation Almanac, Local Government Association](#)

[Local government Digitalisation Framework: Missions, principles and enablers, Local Government Association](#)

[Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#)

[Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance on Democracy within Principal Councils, Welsh Government](#)

[Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021, Welsh Government](#)

[The Good Scrutiny Guide, Centre for Public Scrutiny](#)

[Digital by Design? Audit Wales](#)

[Digital Strategy for Wales, Welsh Government](#)

21ST CENTURY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Overview of how Democratic Services will be embracing digital technology to support Members and Council in fulfilling role.

NB This is not an exhaustive list and is improvement activity that sits alongside business as usual and wider governance improvements activity.

FORMS

Register of Interests

Request for Public
Consideration Form
Call in Profoma

POWERBI

Scrutiny Recommendations
Tracker

Council Motions Tracker

Members Training Overview

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Committee Report
Template
Minutes
Cabinet Clearance

WEBSITE

Public webpage

StaffNet

MemberNet

Council YouTube