

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>Monday, 29 June 2026</b>
<b>Relevant Scrutiny Committee:</b>	<b>No Relevant Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Urgent Decision Procedure Used (If yes, why)</b>	Not applicable
<b>Item Type</b>	Part I
<b>Report Title:</b>	Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services 2025/26
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
<b>Strategic Leadership Team:</b>	Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Head of Democratic Services

## 1.0 What is this report about?

1.1 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.

1.2 The report covers a range of areas within Democratic services including:

- Team overview
- Areas of responsibility
- Multi-Location Meetings
- Digital
- Reshaping Scrutiny
- Other Committees
- Mayor's Office
- Cabinet Office
- Other Democratic areas
- Collaboration with other areas
- Financial position
- Upcoming priorities for 2026/27
- Overall Assessment of 2025/26.

## **2.0 What are the Recommendations?**

	<b>Recommendations – What and How?</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation – Why?</b>
2.1	T H A T the Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services (Appendix A) be noted.	To keep Members informed of the operational delivery of the Council's Democratic Services function.
2.2	T H A T the Committee provide assurance that they are satisfied there are adequate resources to undertake the Council's Democratic function.	To keep under review the provision by the Council of adequate resources to discharge Democratic Services functions as per the Committee's Terms of Reference.

## **3.0 What is the background to this report?**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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 nonexecutive 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.
- 3.4 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.

## **4.0 What issues are there to be considered?**

- 4.1 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.

4.2 The report attached in Appendix A sets out the various elements within the service area Democratic, Scrutiny and Committee Services which fall within the remit of this Committee and the activities undertaken to date for the Committee's information

#### **5.0 How has evidence been used to inform the report, including the views of others?**

5.1 The report has been produced based on a range of evidence used to inform Democratic Services improvement planning, including the Performance Panel Assessment findings, Audit Wales recommendations, internal audit findings, alongside regional and national research.

#### **6.0 What are the next steps if the recommendations are approved?**

6.1 If the recommendations are agreed, the Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services will be shared with all Members for information.

#### **7.0 How does this report support Vale 2030 and Reshaping?**

7.1 The Annual Report highlights a range of improvement activity undertaken, including Reshaping Scrutiny, as the Council seeks to maximise skills and resources whilst utilising digital technology, in line with "Being the Best Council we Can Be".

#### **8.0 How does this demonstrate the Five Ways of Working?**

8.1 The report demonstrates how a range of Members and Officers have collaborated across the year to improve the long-term strategic direction of Democratic Services, including a focus upon preventing future challenges through developing a continuous improvement in an involved way with a range of stakeholders. Due to the broad range of the work undertaken by the Service, the report highlights how it integrated with other areas within the Council to maximise how it achieves its outcomes.

### **Resources**

#### **9.0 Finance**

9.1 There are no finance implications as a result of this report.

#### **10.0 Workforce**

10.1 There are no workforce implications as a result of this report.

#### **11.0 Legal and Equalities**

11.1 **Does an Equalities Impact Assessment need to be completed? If not, why?** An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed as this is analysis of internal service delivery and does not relate to any areas for proposed change. As areas for improvement are further identified, individual workstreams will be assessed to consider if an impact assessment

is required.

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

11.3 The report also demonstrates how the Council meets various aspects of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

## 12.0 **Key Contacts**

**12.1 Who are the primary officers to contact with any comments and/or queries on the report?**

Lead Officer: James Langridge-Thomas, Operational Manager (and Statutory Head of) Democratic Services <a href="mailto:jangridge-thomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk">jangridge-thomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk</a> 01446709457	Democratic Services Officer: James Langridge-Thomas, Operational Manager (and Statutory Head of) Democratic Services <a href="mailto:jangridge-thomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk">jangridge-thomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk</a> 01446709457
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## **Appendix**

Appendix A – Annual Report of Head of Democratic Services

### **Background Documents**

[Local Government \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#), Welsh Government

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

[Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales](#), Welsh Government

[Internal Audit Review of the Council's Multi-Location Meeting Arrangements](#), Democratic Services Committee, Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2026

[Member Development Programme - Phase 4 Progress Update](#), Democratic Services Committee, Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2026

[21st Century Democratic Services](#), Democratic Services Committee, Monday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2025

[Reshaping Scrutiny](#) Cabinet, Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2025

**HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC  
SERVICES  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2025-26**

**VALE of GLAMORGAN**



**BRO MORGANNWG**

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## Introduction

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.

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.

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.

Democratic Services provide advice and support to a range of stakeholders to support the effective discharge of the Council’s governance function, including to Officers across the Council, Elected Members, Co-Opted Members, Independent Members and residents of the Vale of Glamorgan. This report aims to give an overview of the work of the Service but does not represent all work undertaken.

## Team Overview

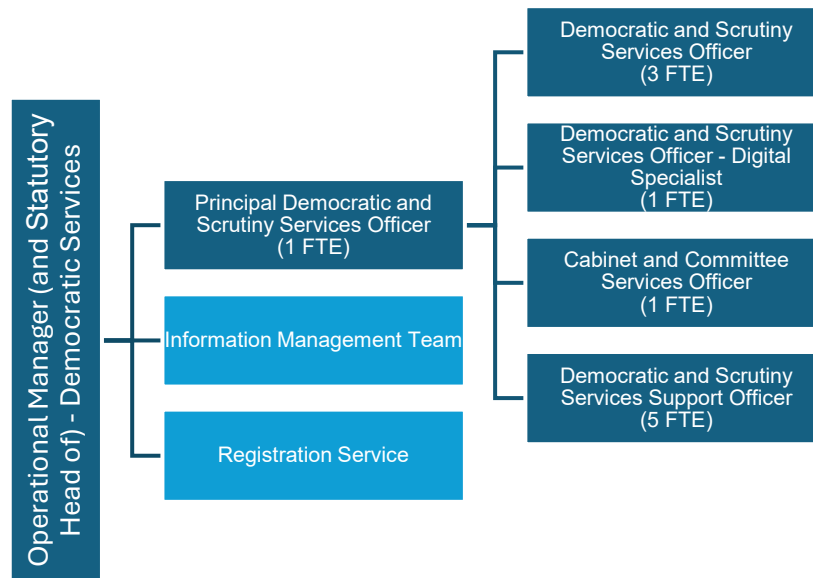
### Areas of Responsibility

The team are responsible for a broad range of responsibilities, including but 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 Mayor and 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.
- Providing support to Members in accessing information, data and analysis by signposting to relevant areas of the Council and working with other departments.
- Being an initial point of contact and supporting Members with ICT related queries.
- Implementing the Member support offering, including Well-being, remuneration and learning and development.
- 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.
- Developing and updating information for Members on MemberNet, an internal Council site for Members.
- Managing the Land Charges Register and the Records Management Unit.
- Managing the Council's committee room bookings and corporate responsibility for all Council inward-bound and outward-bound mail.

## Structure

The Democratic Services area is structured as below:



There have been several areas of workforce change in the year, including:

- Embedding the newly promoted Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (postholder previously Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer);
- Embedding the newly promoted Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (postholder previously Assistant Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer);
- Introduction of a Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer – Digital Specialist position to replace the vacant Assistant Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer position;
- Restructure of various support positions consolidated into a singular sub-team with shared responsibilities based upon the position Democratic and Scrutiny Services Support Officer;
- Exit of long-standing Relief Chauffeur due to personal circumstances.

## Human Resources and Organisational Development

Sickness absence has remained lower than previous years for the Service and lower in comparison to the wider organisation in 2025/26.

The team has also been consistently supported throughout the year with monthly team meetings to discuss Service and wider Council priorities, alongside undertaking six monthly “It’s About Me” appraisal conversations to reflect upon achievements, upcoming priorities, areas for concern and future individual development needs.

Training and development have also been a key area of focus amongst staff within the Service throughout the year as we seek to ensure future resilience whilst also supporting the culture of innovation; examples of training undertaken include:

- Lunch and learn sessions surrounding Microsoft digital platforms;
- Microsoft Sharepoint and Granicus content management training;
- Involvement in Council's Management Development Programme;
- Systems Thinking training (delivered by University of South Wales);
- Access to Council's iDev self-directed e-learning covering a range of modules;
- Coaching and mentoring (provided through Academi Wales).

### **Finance**

The Service area's revenue budget was £720k (including Information Management and Registration Services), with the provisional outturn position being £754k. Whilst there were minor overspends in a range of areas as a result of inflationary costs, the £34k overspend was largely driven by the Service holding the budget for the Council's usage of the postal service, which was significantly above the original forecast.

### **Wider Organisational Support**

It is important to acknowledge that providing Members with support does not happen in a vacuum and requires positive collaboration with a range of internal colleagues including Finance, Human Resources and Organisational Development, Digital Services, Legal Services, Property, Corporate Policy and Insight, and Engagement and Communications for example. Additionally, it is through the positive engagement of Officers in supporting with queries, case work and expert advice during Committee meetings and wider that support Members to undertake their roles effectively.

## Multi-Location Meetings Policy

The Democratic Services team 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 multilocation meetings issued by Welsh Government (last amended August 2023).

The Council is committed to working with its solution provider, 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 Members' language preferences.

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.

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.

In terms of functionality requests, the Council has been working with the solution provider to expand how it presents the Welsh language publicly and has gone live with dual streaming for meetings with simultaneous translation in May 2026. In addition to this, we are working with the

provider to expand its simultaneous remote translation functionality to allow a translator to translate remotely.

During Winter 2025, the Regional Audit Service undertook a dual review of the Council's solution both with distinct areas of focus. The initial area of focus was upon "Hybrid Council Meetings", which focused upon the Council's delivery of its Multi-Location Meetings Policy, with the technical audit focus upon EasyConf connect, the Council's meeting solution provider. Both audits identified that there was substantial assurance, meaning that there is a sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

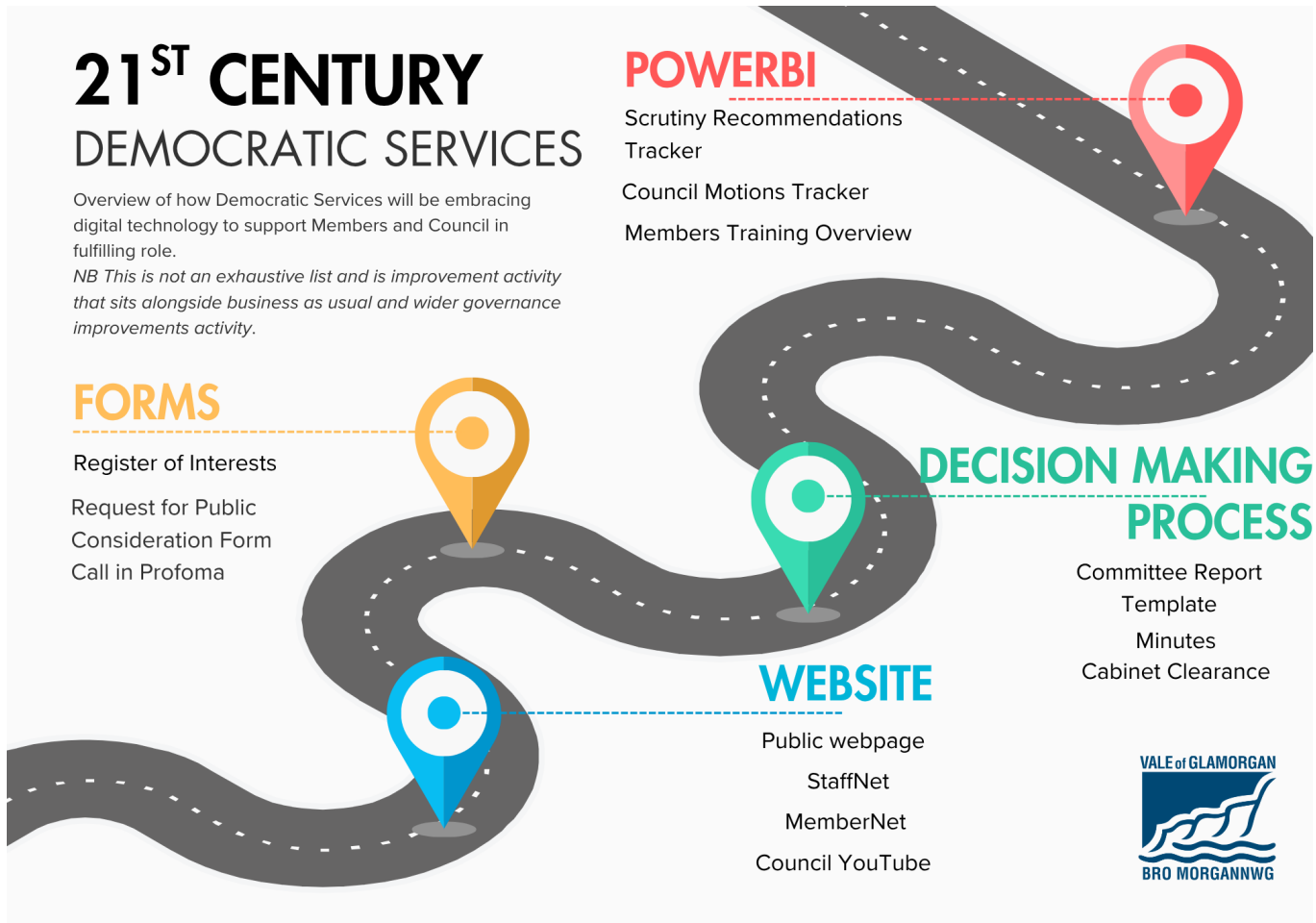
Following the audit exercises, four low priority actions to be taken forward during the upcoming year were identified including:

- A contingency plan for the storage of recordings should be drawn up in the event of potential access issues to the social media platform.
- Procedures should be documented to support business continuity.
- Continued efforts should be made to further improve the accessibility of live broadcasts and archived recordings for Welsh language speakers.
- The service should ensure that the DPIA is reviewed and updated in line with the stated annual review requirement.

A revised version of the Council's Multi-Location Meetings Policy is anticipated to be shared for consideration in Summer 2026.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democratic Services

As presented to the Committee, the Service area have embraced a significant modernisation agenda during the year, with some areas outlined on the below roadmap:



Key outward achievements within the year include:

- ✓ Updating the Council's public webpages that explain how Scrutiny works
- ✓ Updating of the Council's e-petition webpage to simplify content following Full Council approval
- ✓ Updating the Council's Agendas, Minutes and Report webpages providing improved accessibility for people wishing to access information
- ✓ Enhancing content surrounding Democratic functions that are shared via the Council's social media channels
- ✓ Developing and embedding a Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker using the Power BI platform

- ✓ Transition of MemberNet to a standalone SharePoint, including the transition of the Committee Hub to a cloud-based solution
- ✓ Development of regular news sharing (with increasing bilingualism), Committee hub and Scrutiny hub on the MemberNet platform
- ✓ Rebranding of the Council's YouTube channel for streaming live meetings (in line with Vale 2030 Corporate branding changes)
- ✓ Adoption of SMS messaging as a key channel of communication to Members
- ✓ Delivering Member Drop-In sessions to support Members with any ICT queries
- ✓ Replacing a range of word forms with digital forms to improve user accessibility and processing efficiencies.

Alongside these changes, the Service have been working to improve a range of internal operating functions using digital technology to improve efficiencies such as the Service's Workload Planner.

A further update on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democratic Services roadmap is due to be presented to Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2026, and many aspects of the Service's digital transformation have informed preparations for the 2027 Election.

## Member Development

The team have supported Members in undertaking Phase 4 of the Development Programme throughout the year and delivered this through a variety of mediums.

Where training is delivered locally, where possible materials are stored and made available to view through the Council's MemberNet site. To support a culture of improvement, all training provided by the Council is evaluated to understand if it has met the anticipated aims and objectives.

## Member Briefings

Throughout the year, Members have been provided with briefings in a range of topics covering:

Session	Delivered	Description
Tackling Poverty – Citizens Advice	October 2025	Remote session delivered with Citizens Advice providing Members with insight into poverty-related issues affecting communities and available support mechanisms.
Public Participation Strategy	November 2025	Remote session covering how the Council engages with residents.
Placemaking	November 2025	Remote session on the principles of placemaking and how future development in the Vale is shaped.
Mid-Term Code of Conduct	December 2025	A mandatory refresher session on the Elected Members' Code of Conduct.
Council Risk Register	December 2025	Remote session providing insight into the Council's strategic risks, how risks are identified and monitored
Budget Update	December 2025	Remote session providing an update on the Council's budget cycle.

Session	Delivered	Description
Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation	January 2026	An introduction to the WIMD helping Members to understand deprivation levels and interpret local need and inequalities.
Glamorgan Voluntary Service	February 2026	A session delivered with GVS offering an overview of voluntary sector support and partnership working.
Community Cohesion	March 2026	A session delivered to provide an overview of how the Council supports various areas to improve community cohesion
Child Exploitation	March 2026	Remote session explaining how the Council supports Child Exploitation and how Members can raise awareness and support this area.

### Member Expos

Two Member Expos were held during the year (July 2025 and January 2026). The Expos were held in person at the Civic Offices and gave the opportunity for Members to receive a “State of the Nation” briefing from the Council’s Chief Executive and to meet with Services from across the Council to discuss a range of areas, including challenges, priorities and practical support in undertaking their role.

### Other Training

The Council have also provided support to Members to support their learning and development by signposting to a range of external opportunities via MemberNet alongside sharing areas available from Welsh Local Government Association, Local Government Association, New Local, Wales Safer Communities Network and various other public bodies. Members have also attended sessions such as WLGA Leadership Programme and WLGA Progressive Community Leadership Programme.

Alongside this, the Monthly Members Newsletter also signposts to areas of national policy development which may be of use for Members in undertaking their role.

Councillors can access information on a self-service basis through the Council's e-learning platform, iDev.

### **Personal Development Reviews (PDRs)**

During the year, the PDR template was updated to reflected upon the principles of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Councillor research, and all Members were invited to undertake PDRs to reflect upon any learning and development needs to inform the Member Development Programme.

## Reshaping Scrutiny

During the year, the Council undertook the first Scrutiny cycle under new arrangements, a transformational approach where there were fundamentals in ways of working and undertaking Scrutiny for all involved. For further details about these arrangements, please see [Reshaping Scrutiny](#).

### **What has gone well**

- All Scrutiny Committees under their new remits have met regularly throughout the year and considered a range of topics including multiple modes of Scrutiny.
- There have been five pieces of Task and Finish completed during the year, covering a range of topics including Procurement, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Resources Bases, Access to Beaches and Communications Strategy.
- Several Member briefings have been held across the year to complement Scrutiny, delivered through a range of organisations and speakers around a wide range of topics.
- The Council held its first Joint Scrutiny meetings throughout the year, looking at areas in an integrated manner, including performance against the Corporate Plan and the Council's Budget.
- A range of information only items which previously would have been noted have been shared with Members of Committees via different mediums. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of noting recommendations at Committee meetings.
- Committee have made a positive number of recommendations across the year. These are available in the revised [recommendation tracker](#), now available on the Council's public website, has been developed to more robustly and openly monitor the impact of recommendations.
- The Council has been actively working with community groups such as Youth Forum, Tenants Representatives, 50+ Forum, Scouts and Vale Stepping Stones to raise awareness of how democracy works in Wales, including how residents can use their voices to get involved in the Scrutiny process.

- There have been social media campaigns to promote the Council's Scrutiny meetings, including details as to how to participate, alongside improving communications surrounding Scrutiny including updating public webpages and the Council's YouTube channels.
- A Scrutiny Hub resource has been developed for Members to have a one stop solution to support them with a range of tools in undertaking their role.
- Public participation has increased during the year, with several requests for consideration received, alongside written representations, public speakers at Committee meetings and involvement within Task and Finish.
- Scrutiny Committees have considered a range of topics and provided coverage against areas on the Council's Corporate Risk Register.
- Members and Officers have demonstrated positive engagement with the new ways of working progressed through Scrutiny and provided positive feedback for how they are experiencing it in comparison to previous arrangements.

### **What has not gone so well**

- Whilst there have been significant efforts made to engage Members of the Scrutiny process and identify opportunities for involvement, there is an inconsistent level of involvement from the public during the process.
- During the proposal stage, the Council wished to complete 2 Task and Finish's per Committee across the year. However, due to the depth of work required and several external factors, this has not been feasible. While the aspiration remains to deliver two Task and Finish reviews within a single municipal year, the Council continues to prioritise the quality and robustness of outcomes over the quantity of work undertaken.
- The Council has been unable to consistently embed reflective practice into its Scrutiny meeting arrangements, including mode of reflection and timings

### **Key challenges and lessons learned**

- The Council will be reviewing and further developing its strategic approach and secure resources to support broadening public participation and involvement on a regular systematic basis to ensure relationships are built consistently.

- We are also considering how we further best engage young people during Scrutiny and wider decision-making processes and will be working with Youth Services and other partners to develop future working relationships.
- We will continue to develop the learning and continuous improvement within Scrutiny Committees and seek to build upon the regular reflections of the overall function by encouraging in-Committee reflective practice on a regular basis.
- The progress within Scrutiny has been due to the positive engagement of involved stakeholders, and this will need to be maintained in future years despite nearing the end of the Electoral Term.

### Assessment of Changes

To understand the direct impact of Scrutiny changes on decision making processes, the Council monitors whether each recommendation made is “Noted”, “Partially Accepted” or “Accepted” using a [Recommendation Tracker](#). This is updated on a regular basis and contains examples of where Scrutiny has made recommendations to Cabinet and other areas and is readily available to members on MemberNet.

Alongside the areas identified, the changes to Scrutiny arrangements have also had a positive impact in a number of softer areas, such as Scrutiny now getting involved earlier in the decision making process and proactively identifying areas for improvement, better visibility of risk, moving to a more strategic level in consideration of their Scrutiny of delivery against the Corporate Plan and annual Budget setting process, and an inability to advance cross party relationships, and potentially standards and behaviours, through Task and Finish scrutiny.

Overall, Scrutiny has provided effective governance assurance during 2025/26, supporting informed decision making through strengthened challenge, improved integration with risk and performance management, and more transparent tracking of recommendations. While the new scrutiny arrangements are still being embedded, the Council has demonstrated a clear commitment to learning, improvement and openness, with Scrutiny increasingly effectively influencing decisions and shaping policy development. This provides a sound foundation for further strengthening Scrutiny’s role in 2026/27. Further specific details around the work of Scrutiny throughout the year will be included within the Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/26.

## **Audit Wales**

In March 2026, Audit Wales undertook a review of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements to understand how effectively we are undertaking our functions. They considered a range of evidence alongside contributions from Members and Officers. Whilst the recommendations are still to be provided, these will be shared with Members alongside improvement actions as soon as reasonably practicable.

## Other Committees.

Alongside Scrutiny Committees, Democratic Services continue to support a range of Statutory and Non-Statutory Committees. These include statutory Committees such as Cabinet, Governance and Audit Committee, Planning Committee, and Licencing Committee for example, alongside local choice or partnership Committees such as Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee, Joint Consultative Forum and Glamorgan Heritage Coast Advisory Group.

Key developments within other Committees throughout the year include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting Cabinet to consider 8 Reports of Meetings prior to agreeing to take a quarterly report concerning 'Reporting Minutes of Joint Committees and Committees where the Vale of Glamorgan Council is an Active Participant', as requested by Governance and Audit Committee alongside Cabinet considering 48 Scrutiny references and 148 standalone reports.
- Pausing Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee as we work along Glamorgan Voluntary Services and the wider Sector to consider how to best work together collaboratively in the future.
- Working with the Regional Internal Audit Service to develop a revised training plan for Governance and Audit Committee Members.
- Recruitment and appointment of a new Independent Member to Standards Committee (as outlined later in the report).
- Supported several Senior Management Appointment Committees throughout the year to enable recruitment to various positions within the Council.
- Worked alongside Legal services to provide refresher training to Planning Committee Members to support during the planning process.
- Supporting Licensing Committee (Statutory and Public Protection) to move to hybrid meetings to help applicants during the public speaking process.
- Developed a longer-term Forward Work Programme for Democratic Services Committee to improve visibility and awareness of support available to Members and being undertaken to improve the Council's governance processes.

- Leading on a recruitment for new Local Access Forum members, who have been appointed and are due to commence in May 2026.
- Supporting several partners in collaborative forums and meetings including Shared Regulatory Services (alongside Bridgend and Cardiff Councils), Cardiff Airport Consultative Committee, Cardiff Bay Advisory Committee, Glamorgan Coast Heritage Group and Joint Consultative Forum for example.

## Mayor's Office

The Service also provides support to the Mayor and Deputy-Mayor in undertaking their roles.

Areas of ongoing work include:

- Managing communications with members of the public and other bodies;
- Co-ordinating the Mayor's diary in attending Civic engagement events;
- Providing event management support, such as Remembrance events;
- Supporting with procedural advice in supporting the Mayor ahead of meetings of Full Council;
- Managing the Mayor's Foundation Grant Fund.

During the year, the Service made a number of improvements, including developing a Mayor's Handbook to support any future Mayors, a standardised request form and case management system for people requesting the attendance at events, introduction of an "Unsung Heroes" campaign which sought to raise awareness of community groups and volunteers within the Vale of Glamorgan, and reviewing the Council's Mayoral webpages to improve accessibility.

## Other Democratic areas

### Well-being

The Service continues to provide advice and assistance to Members to support their Well-being, including signposting to occupational health and other support services as required. During the year, the Well-being support available to Members was shared at Democratic Services Committee and later became a dedicated resource on MemberNet for individuals to access at their discretion including use of social media, misinformation, physical health, personal safety and individual well-being.

### Standards and Code of Conduct

The Service support provides support to the Monitoring Officer in the discharging of the Council's Standards function, including supporting Town and Community Councils, and Standards Committee in the delivery of its core functions as outlined within the Council's Constitution.

Key areas of note within this area during the year include:

- Recruitment and appointment of a new Co-Opted Member for Standards Committee;
- Delivery of refresher Code of Conduct training to all Members;
- Working with Members in discharging Group Leader duties as required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021;
- A working group of Standards Members are reviewing the Local Dispute Resolution Policy;
- Undertaking observations of Town and Community Council meetings.

Further detail is available within the Standards Committee Annual Report, due to be published later in the year.

### Town and Community Councils

Alongside supporting Town and Community Councils from a Standards perspective as outlined above, the Service also provide a range of support for all Town and Community Councils within the Vale of Glamorgan, with examples including:

- Support in Constitutional or procedural queries;
- Acting as a conduit to the wider Council for queries;

- Sharing of tools and knowledge;
- Liaison with One Voice Wales;
- Advice and guidance to prepare for changes in boundaries following review from Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru.

During 2026/27, we will be exploring how we best work with Town and Community Councils in the future in line with the partnership principles outlined in Vale 2030, with consideration of the [Senedd Review of Role, Governance and Accountability of Community and Town Council sector.](#)

## Democratic awareness

In addition to the “traditional” work of Democratic Services, the team have sought to, in collaboration with the Electoral Registration team, undertake several events raising awareness of democracy in a local context.

### **Group Visits**

The team have worked with a few groups throughout the year to raise awareness of how Democracy works in Wales, and how people can get involved in decision making processes including Scrutiny. Groups include:



During the year and in preparation for 2027 election, we will be working alongside Electoral Registration and Communication and Engagement teams to see how we can build relations with a broader range of groups within the local community to raise democratic engagement.

### **Schools Senedd**

The Team has supported several schools in delivering the citizenship element of Curriculum for Wales, hosting various democratic engagement events throughout the year. These include events with local Primary Schools, using the Council’s Meeting Chamber technology, giving pupils firsthand experience of how local democracy functions. Pupils also took part in question-and-answer sessions with the Mayor and debated on topics of local importance. To further enhance learning a mock polling station was set up within the Council Chamber to demonstrate how elections work in practice. In addition, the Team has also worked in partnership with representatives from all Secondary Schools in the Vale of Glamorgan School who run quarterly meetings with support from the Youth Service, providing an opportunity for their students to understand how active citizenship works.

## Collaboration with Others

The Service also actively works with several other Regional and National groups to support development including:

**Heads of Democratic Services Network (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 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act and preparing for the 2027 election. When updates are now available, these are shared with the Democratic Services Committee.

**Heads of Policy Network (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.

**Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)** – The Ombudsman investigates complaints that members of local government bodies have breached their Authority’s Code of Conduct.

**Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC)** – The Council works with the DBCC (who have taken over responsibility from Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales) in respect of Members’ remuneration on an annual basis. Their latest annual report is available to view [here](#).

**One Voice Wales** – We work alongside the national, representational body for Community and Town Councils in Wales, to share practice in our supporting role as Principal Council.

**Regional Scrutiny Group** – Alongside Cardiff and Bridgend Councils, we come together with Scrutiny Chairs to share areas of practice and development to support a culture of continuous learning within scrutiny.

## Working with Higher Education (HE) Providers

During the year, we continue to explore partnership opportunities with several HE providers. This is a new way of working within the Service, with the aim of developing mutual beneficial long-term relationships:

### **Cardiff University**

We have provided advice and support to students within the University as part of their Career Mentoring Programme, supporting students with an interest in politics, policy development and governance, sharing practical experiences and opportunities to develop their skillsets before deciding upon their future career pathway.

### **University of South Wales**

The Council is exploring how it can work in collaboration with the University's Global Business School to develop active citizenship and social responsibility as part of its curriculum offer.

### **Bangor University Welsh Graduate School for Social Sciences**

The Council is working alongside the University to explore how PhD research students can support the delivery of its Scrutiny Task and Finish arrangements in the forthcoming year through the provision of research support.

## Learning from Feedback

The Service has a demonstrated culture of continuous improvement and iterative development. To monitor and review the impact of these changes and ensure that there is learning from feedback, there are a number of avenues which support the improvement agenda.

## **Complaints and Compliments**

The Service has only received one formal complaint this year, a Stage 2 complaint surrounding public speaking at Scrutiny Committee, which was not upheld as the Council's procedures as publicised on the website and through subsequent communications were followed.

There have been several compliments from Members, the public and officers received throughout the year including:

Can I give you my personal thanks for all of the hard work and support you have given us

The support received to help in our role is excellent

The group were really positive about your work and your support

Please know how genuinely grateful we are for the time, effort and generosity shown to our school community... you have given our pupils a memory.

The team are always so polite and courteous to me

Thank you for your guiding hand and sterling efforts during the process

## **Internal and External Audit**

As outlined earlier within the report, the Service has been involved in several reviews this year, including an internal audit review of its Multi-Location Meetings arrangements and an external audit review of Scrutiny arrangements. As a result of these reviews, alongside assurances provided, areas for improvement have been identified and subsequently, action plans have been developed forming a key part of the upcoming priorities for the Service. An external audit of Scrutiny arrangements has also been undertaken with the findings due to be reported imminently.

## Service User Feedback

Due to the supporting function of the Service area and the number of developments throughout the year, the team regularly seek feedback from stakeholders involved, including Members, Officers and the wider public. Learnings from these surveys are reviewed on a regular basis and used to inform future improvement activities within Democratic Services. Examples of this include:

Survey	How are improvements considered?
Annual Members Survey	A report outlining survey findings and proposed improvement actions is due to be presented to Democratic Services Committee in June 2026.
Post Briefing Surveys	This survey is reviewed on an ongoing basis to iteratively inform briefings on an ongoing basis throughout the year, with the overall findings reported to Democratic Services Committee in March 2026 as part of a wider update around the Member Development programme. Learnings include around the formatting of sessions and the need to make materials readily available and promoted.
Public Scrutiny Questionnaires	Following speaking at Scrutiny, Members of the public are invited to complete a survey to understand their experiences of the process. This information is reviewed on an annual basis with high level data forming part of the Scrutiny Annual Report, and any learnings considered as part of updates to the Council's public speaking policy.
Task and Finish Lessons Learned	At the completion of the first round of Task and Finish, groups were invited to reflect upon the experience and reflect upon what worked and what they may do differently in the future. This is shared with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group with the learnings applied to the next iterations of Task and Finish.

## Upcoming priorities for 2026/27

Alongside continuing to deliver the range of services outlined within the report, the areas identified represent the upcoming priorities for the forthcoming year are:

Undertake preparation for the 2027 Local Government election, including Member induction

Respond to the Audit Wales review of Scrutiny arrangements

Respond to the Internal Audit review of Multi Location Meetings

Explore opportunities to further develop the Council's outreach offer in encouraging participation and engagement in democracy, including working with young people.

Working alongside Town and Community Council's to understand how we can more effectively work together.

Delivery of projects of work outlined within the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democratic Services programme.

Continue to identify opportunities to improve processes using digital technologies to improve efficiency.

Continue to support the Council in securing effective governance in it's decision making processes.

However, it's important to note that the above is not an exhaustive list, as Democratic Services now regularly demonstrates a culture of continuous improvement, and members of the team are empowered to identify and enact changes on a regular basis.

## Overall Assessment from Head of Democratic Services

This report goes some way in highlighting most (but not all) of the work that the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team have undertaken in a busy year where there has been a significant amount of change – both in terms of personnel but ways of working. It's important to note that alongside this work, there are a range of other areas of work undertaken by the team which are not of relevance to this Committee.

However, the Team have adapted and continued to develop to meet the needs of the service and to comply with the provisions of various legislations. They 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, whilst continuously seeking opportunities to improve the Council's Democratic functions.

Throughout the year, the team have adapted to changes to ways in working in embedding new Scrutiny arrangements, re-aligning roles and responsibilities and through reviewing processes to maximise efficiencies through alternative ways of working including digital.

To conclude, I would like to provide assurance to Members of the Democratic Services Committee that the Service has exceeded local expectations when reflecting upon the delivery of how it exercises its functions and are currently using the existing resources effectively, efficiently and economically to do so.