Agenda Item No: 4

Meeting of:	**Democratic Services Committee**
Date of Meeting:	**Monday, 16 November 2026**
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	**No Relevant Scrutiny Committee**
Urgent Decision Procedure Used **(If yes, why)**	Not Applicable
Item Type	Part I
Report Title:	Update from Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Heads of Democratic Services Network
Portfolio Holder:	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Strategic Leadership Team:	Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)
Lead Officer:	Head of Democratic Services

1.0 What is this report about?

1.1 The Heads of Democratic Services Network is a WLGA group which is convened on a quarterly basis. This group consists of officers from WLGA, alongside officers delegated Heads of Democratic Services from across all Councils in Wales, which aims to share tools, resources and develop policy to support Council's in discharging their democratic functions.

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide an update from their last meeting held during September 2026 and the previous meeting held in June 2026 and provide an overview to Committee of areas of work which are being explored nationally in supporting the Democratic Services function.

1.3 A number of areas will be explored in further detail within this report; including preparation for the 2027 induction and development programme, supporting Town and Community Councils through boundary reviews, promotional activity to encourage participation in upcoming elections, Debate not Hate survey results, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance for Councillors on Reviewing Impact Assessments.

2.0 What are the Recommendations?

	Recommendations – What and How?	Reason for Recommendation – Why?
2.1	T H A T the Democratic Services Committee notes the contents within the report.	To ensure that the Committee and all Members are aware of the work being undertaken on a national basis to support the Council in discharging its Democratic Services function.

3.0 What is the background to this report?

3.1 The Heads of Democratic Services Network is a WLGA group which is convened on a quarterly basis. This group consists of officers from WLGA, alongside officers delegated Heads of Democratic Services from across all Councils in Wales, which aims to share tools, resources and develop policy to support Council's in discharging their democratic functions.

3.2 To network works in collaboration with several external stakeholders including Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru, Electoral Commission, Equalities and Humans Right Commission and Local Government Association for example.

4.0 What issues are there to be considered?

Preparations for the 2027 Member Induction Programme

4.1 There has been extensive consideration of the 2027 Member Induction Programme, including consideration on how programmes are being developed locally based upon local and national survey results from the previous induction programme, alongside the collective development of source draft materials for local implementation including revised member role descriptions.

4.2 Learning from these conversations will inform the Council's approach to Member induction and development, of which Democratic Services Committee will be sighted upon.

4.3 Technical changes such as Member role descriptions will be considered as appropriate and incorporated into any wider constitutional changes agreed by Full Council ahead of May 2027.

Supporting Town and Community Councils through boundary reviews

4.4 Alongside Vale of Glamorgan Council, many Councils across Wales are also in the process of responding to boundary reviews following the ministerial issuing of Orders, albeit it should be noted that there are a range of outcomes across Wales with no direct comparable findings to the local review undertaken in the Vale of Glamorgan.

4.5 This sought to understand how Councils were supporting Town and Community Councils in their role as Principal Council based upon the outcome of their community reviews, and offered

a practical guidance note produced by Swansea Council. Different Councils offered varying levels of support based upon the extent of the findings of the review.

4.6 It should be noted that the Council has worked in collaboration with One Voice Wales to deliver a workshop session to Town and Community Clerks outlining the activities required in preparations for May 2027, and this is a standard item at quarterly meetings between the Monitoring Officer and Clerks to discuss progress and identify any issues.

Promotional Activity to Encourage Participation in the 2027 Election

4.7 The Network received an update Elect Her Wales and Disability in Wales in preparation for the 2027 Election to support broadening participation in politics.

4.8 Elect Her provides tools and skills through online workshops and resources for prospective female Councillors to encourage them to stand for office, reflecting upon the individual experiences female politicians face.

4.9 Disability Wales provided an overview of their Access to Politics Toolkit, which seeks to be a practical resource for disabled people interested in entering and navigating political life, including mentoring and step by step guides.

4.10 Resources from both groups will be incorporated into promotional activity to raise awareness of becoming a Councillor ahead of the May 2027 Election as appropriate.

Debate not Hate Survey Results

4.11 In June 2026, the Local Government Association (LGA) launched the fourth edition of the annual Debate Not Hate survey, which for the first time was undertaken as Four Nations.

4.12 The survey identified a number of key findings including:

4.12.1 Abuse and intimidation remain widespread in public life - more than three-quarters of responding councillors (78 per cent) feel at least some level of personal risk when fulfilling their role as councillor, while three-quarters (75 per cent) reported experiencing some level of abuse or intimidation in their role over the last 12 months.

4.12.2 Abuse and intimidation appear to be worsening, particularly in England - more than half of responding councillors (52 per cent) reported that abuse and intimidation had increased sharply or slightly over the past 12 months. This was significantly higher in England (55 per cent) than Wales (41 per cent) or Scotland (36 per cent).

4.12.3 Abuse has a tangible impact on councillors' lives and democratic participation - more than a third of respondents (35 per cent) had made, or felt they needed to make, security modifications to their home because of safety concerns due to their role. Furthermore, among responding councillors who were undecided about standing again or had decided not to stand, 30 per cent said the possibility of abuse or intimidation had influenced their decision.

4.12.4 Police reporting is relatively uncommon, and satisfaction is mixed – a quarter of respondents (25 per cent) had reported an incident of abuse or intimidation

experienced in their role to the police and of those that had, 34 per cent felt the issue had been addressed to a great or moderate extent whilst 33 per cent felt it hadn't been addressed at all.

4.12.5 Operation Ford is showing signs of success - more than half of all respondents in England and Wales (56 per cent) were aware of the Force Elected Officials Adviser post – an increase from 40 per cent last year. Awareness was particularly high in Scotland, at 76 per cent. Of those who had engaged with the programme, three-quarters (74 per cent) found the engagement very or fairly useful.

4.13 Due to the response rate, local findings are yet to be made available for Vale of Glamorgan. However, Members are provided with practical guidance surrounding Well-being and Personal Safety via MemberNet, and this topic has been incorporated as a mandatory module for the next iteration of the induction programme.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) guidance for Councillors on Reviewing Impact Assessments

4.14 The EHRC provided an overview of updated guidance to support Councillors during the development of Equality Impact Assessments in making sure decisions are fair, evidence-based and make effective use of public resources, noting that Councillors have responsibilities as part of the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty and Socioeconomic Duties.

4.15 They advertised a webinar to launch the framework to all Members, due to be held on Tuesday 29th September, which was highlighted via MemberNet on 21st July and 3rd September.

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

5.1 This report has been derived as a holistic update from various supporting materials presented during Heads of Democratic Services, featuring the input of all Welsh Local Authorities and wider stakeholders.

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

6.1 If agreed, this will form the basis of the Committee's work activity for the forthcoming year.

7.0 How does this report support Vale 2030 and Reshaping?

7.1 The role of Democratic Services Committee is ensuring that Councillors are equipped to support in their various roles in delivering all aspects of Vale 2030.

8.0 How does this demonstrate the Five Ways of Working?

8.1 The Council's involvement in this network allows it to take a longer-term view of the Democratic Services landscape and its improvement journey and seeks to collectively prevent challenges. The use of shared, collaborative resources allows for the Council to consider how

they can work with other bodies in an integrated manner to improve the discharging of its duties.

Resources

9.0 Finance

9.1 The update outlines a range of opportunities available to the Council, which will incur no additional cost as they have been included as part of the Council's annual membership fees to WLGA. Any additional activities and related expenditure identified because of any of the areas included in the above will be subject to the Council's usual finance processes

10.0 Workforce

10.1 There are no direct impacts to the workforce 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 been not completed because this is a related to an update surrounding national policy development. Any subsequent policy changes locally will undertake Equality Impact Assessments as required.

11.2 Member Training and development is required by the Local Government Act 2000 and Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011.

11.3 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places new duties on Local Government in relation to Member knowledge and development.

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 jlangridge-thomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk 01446709457	Democratic Services Officer James Langridge-Thomas, Operational Manager (and Statutory Head of) Democratic Services jlangridge-thomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk 01446709457

Supporting Documents

https://www.elect-her.org.uk/wales

https://www.disabilitywales.org/introducing-the-access-to-politics-toolkit/

https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-survey-councillors-across-all-four-uk-nations-2026

https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/public-sector/public-sector-equality-duty/reviewing-equality-impact-assessments-framework