

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

15 APRIL 2024

Present: Councillor Lancaster(Chairperson)
Councillors Carter, Davies, Derbyshire, Jackie Parry and
Simmons

74 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Palmer, Elsmore, Lay and Thomson.

75 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

76 : MINUTES

To minutes of the meeting held on 05/02/2024 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

77 : DRAFT MEMBER PROTOCOL FOR ACCESSING INFORMATION AND RESEARCH SUPPORT

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that the purpose of this report was to update the Democratic Services Committee (DSC) on the initial draft of a "Member Protocol for Accessing Research Support and Information". The committee were requested to provide their views on the draft and proposals to ensure ease of use and access to information which could subsequently be incorporated into an updated version of the protocol.

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a comprehensive outline of the report and key headings, after which the Chair invited questions, comments, and observations from Members.

Members were informed that the protocol sought to make it easier for Members to identify exactly what they needed in terms of research and how to use it. It would improve accessibility to information by putting all the data in one place on the Members' intranet page, which would take some time to set up but probably be ready in September.

Members heard that bespoke data analysis training would also be made available, as would Data Cymru training guides. The draft protocol would be shared with the political groups via the whips to ensure it met Members' needs.

Members were invited to ask questions and make observations which are summarised below:

- It was important for Councillors to have access to as many different kinds of research as possible;
- It was sometimes difficult to define what exactly constituted a political request when it came to official Council research, and this might pose a particular issue in split wards;
- Resources needed to be carefully managed if a much higher level of research support were to be delivered, considering budgetary constraints;
- Some Councillors would need more technical assistance than others;
- Research departments at the Senedd, Parliament and other local authorities could be consulted to ensure best practice.

RESOLVED to:

1. note the content of the report and the draft Member Protocol for Accessing Research Support and Information.
2. identify any changes that may be needed to the proposed improvements for using the intranet to enhance access to the research information and support arrangements.
3. agree that wider consultation be undertaken with Members via Group Whips and colleagues prior to the final version of the Member Protocol for Accessing Research Support and Information being submitted to a subsequent meeting of the committee.

78 : REVIEW OF THE ELECTED MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that the purpose of this report was to enable the Democratic Services Committee to consider a draft of the revised Elected Member Learning & Development Strategy 2024-29.

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a comprehensive outline of the report and key headings, after which the Chair invited questions, comments, and observations from Members.

Members heard that the original strategy had been created in 2019 and subsequently reviewed after the local elections in 2022. There were a number of new timescales in the draft strategy, including a goal of providing all new Members with their council devices within a week of their election. Mandatory training would be provided for all key roles assigned at Annual Council as soon as possible after that meeting. The strategy also contained information on conference attendance and online training.

Members noted the updated personal review process, which was required by legislation but hadn't yet been formally agreed by Council. Officers were seeking Members' initial views on the draft strategy which would be shared with the Senior Management Team and party whips. The strategy would be reviewed again in 2026 ahead of the induction of new Members in 2027.

Members were invited to ask questions and make observations which are summarised below:

- It would be beneficial for new Members on specific committees to have introductory training covering its background, jargon and workflow;
- Those sitting on Community Councils might benefit from mandatory training as well, this was currently up to individual Councils, but it might overlap with what this authority was training its Members on;
- The personal review process was similar to the mentoring program Members had undertaken in the past. There was no obligation for Members to undergo a personal review, but if they did, they needed to be supported through it. It wasn't a performance review but rather a closer look at how they were personally developing.

RESOLVED to:

- a. Note the report and the revised draft Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy at Appendix A.
- b. Confirm that the proposed changes outlined in Paragraph 5 of the report are appropriate and identify any additional changes to the draft strategy.
- c. Note the proposed arrangements for the consultation, approval and adoption of the Strategy.
- d. Receive a further report on this matter in due course.

79 : DEMOCRATIC SERVICES - ACTIVITIES & SERVICE SUPPORT

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that the purpose of this report was to inform the Democratic Services Committee on the performance of the Council's Democratic Services since the last meeting on 5 February 2024.

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a comprehensive outline of the report and key headings, after which the Chair invited questions, comments, and observations from Members.

Members were advised that some savings were needed within Democratic Services, with the Protocol Office moving within this team before Annual Council. The behaviour survey undertaken earlier this year had received 59 responses, which equated to 63% of all elected, independent and co-opted Members. They were analysing the data now and it would go to Standards & Ethics Committee, likely in July.

In terms of Member development, six activities had been undertaken since the last meeting of this committee. These were mostly done online and recorded, so live attendances were relatively low. Officers were considering how to keep track of how many Members watched the session videos back afterwards, so that more accurate attendance figures could be provided.

Members noted plans for future training, which included an introduction to carbon literacy, and the development of the Members' intranet page.

Members were invited to ask questions and make observations which are summarised below:

- It would make sense to make the Members' intranet page the homepage of the browser on Councillors' devices, rather than the standard Microsoft Edge homepage.
- Any Members not present at the meeting are welcome to provide feedback on the report.

RESOLVED to:

- a. note the information set out in the report.
- b. provide their views in respect of any requirements for future training and the improvement of the Members Intranet website.

80 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that the purpose of this report was to propose topics for inclusion on the Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme. The main work streams of the Committee are to provide the framework to support Democratic Services functions and the work of Elected Members, as well as supporting Elected Members with learning opportunities in their specific roles within the Council and for their personal development. The proposed business items for consideration at meetings of the Democratic Services Committee were attached to the report at Appendix A for Members' consideration.

The Chair invited questions and comments from Members, of which there were none.

RESOLVED: To approve the Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme.

81 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

82 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed.

The meeting terminated at 5.10 pm