
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – ACTIVITIES & SERVICE SUPPORT

Reason for this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Democratic Services Committee on the performance of the Council's Democratic Services since the last meeting 06 February 2023.

Background

Role of the Democratic Services Committee

2. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, Part 1, Chapter 2, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/4/part/1/chapter/2> requires local authorities to appoint a Democratic Services Committee to oversee the Democratic Services functions of the Council, ensure that the work is adequately resourced and report to the full Council accordingly. The Democratic Services functions include Members' Services, Committee Services and Scrutiny Services, but not Cabinet Support Services.

Issues

Staffing Arrangements

3. An additional £100,000 funding was added to the Democratic Services base budget in 2022-23 to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 and to maintain its existing commitments.
4. The workload of the Democratic Services team in 2022 including the Member Induction and implementation of the Multi-Location Meeting Policy required the prioritisation of tasks to ensure compliance with the statutory duties and the maintenance of the Council's governance arrangements. The creation and recruitment of additional staff was delayed but since the last meeting of the Democratic Services Committee a revised structure of the Committee and Member Services team has been developed. This has included:
 - a. the recruitment of two Grade 6 Committee and Members Services Officers
 - b. the planned recruitment of an apprentice from Jan 2024
 - c. the planned creation of two new Committee and Members Services Assistant posts which are anticipated to be Grade 5 by March 2024.

5. The recruitment of these posts will enable the team to better support the additional requirements of the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021, its statutory and non-statutory guidance and the provision of support for the National Adoption Service.
6. An application for a corporately funded apprentice is being developed for submission in September, which if successful will enable the recruitment to this post. It is anticipated that the Apprenticeship will be a level 2 Diploma in Digital Application Support. This is a broad-based apprenticeship allowing scope for specialisation in: Data management, administration and processing multimedia and web applications. This will enable the qualified Apprentice to troubleshoot and solve problems using a range of different application software packages as appropriate to the business context in which they are working.
7. The planned Democratic Services Structure Chart is shown at **Appendix A** which includes reference to Electoral Services which fall within the team for administrative purposes but do not fall within the remit of the Democratic Services Committee.

Democratic Services - Proposed Budget Savings

8. Currently, the authority is experiencing a significant increase in demand for its services. A number of factors have led to a general increase in workloads with Democratic Services being no different to other services areas. As previously advised the level of resources of the Committee & Member Services Team necessary to support elected members and remote meetings continues to be high.
9. At the same time the Authority is facing some significant financial challenges which need to be addressed. To support these challenges the Democratic Services Committee is requested to identify potential savings which may include but which are not limited to:
 - a. Minimising the provision of printed and posted agenda packs or other meeting documents
 - b. Streamlining Democratic Services processes which appear overly bureaucratic to reduce resources i.e. claims for reimbursement for costs of care.
 - c. Revision of timescales for the delivery of tasks to ease the pressure on resources i.e. longer lead in time for production of ward letters.

Financial Implications

10. Any costs from Democratic Services activities and services support are to be monitored and contained within the respective funding sources and budgets. The Cabinet budget report in October set out the £53 million budget gap for 2023/24, which is mostly to be addressed through budget savings. As always, every effort will be made to continue to identify efficiency savings (defined as achieving the same output (or more) for less cost). However, building on the levels of savings found over the past decade, it will not be possible to balance the 2023/24 budget through efficiencies alone, and there will inevitably be a need for savings that impact on service delivery.

Legal Implications

11. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, Part 1, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for overseeing the democratic services functions of the Council, ensuring this work is adequately resourced; and reporting to full Council accordingly.

12. The Democratic Services functions (which must be discharged by the Head of Democratic Services) are defined as follows:

- a. to provide support and advice: to the authority in relation to its meetings; to committees of the authority and the members of those committees; to any joint committee which a local authority is responsible for organising and the members of that committee; in relation to the functions of the authority's scrutiny committees, to members of the authority, members of the executive and officers; to each member of the authority in carrying out the role of member of the authority (but excluding a member's role as an Executive member);
- b. to promote the role of the authority's Scrutiny Committees;
- c. to make reports and recommendations to Council in respect of the number and grades of staff required to discharge democratic services functions and the appointment, organisation and proper management of those staff; and
- d. any other functions prescribed by the Welsh Ministers.

13. In determining how to exercise its functions, the Committee must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers: [Statutory and non-statutory guidance on democracy within principal councils: governance and scrutiny \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#), which has recently been updated and incorporated within consolidated guidance on democracy within principal councils.

14. The information set out in the body of this report enables the Democratic Services Committee to oversee the work of democratic services, ensure the work is adequately resourced and report to full Council, as appropriate.

15. Other relevant legal provisions are referred to in the body of the report.

RECOMMENDATION

16. The Democratic Services Committee is requested to note the information set out in the report.

GARY JONES
HEAD of DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
29 August 2023

Appendix A: Democratic Services Structure Chart 2023

Background Papers:

[Democratic Services – Activities & Service Support Report](#) to the Democratic Services Committee Dated 06 February 2023