
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

CONSULTATION - WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (WLGA) CHARTER SELF ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Purpose of Report.

1. To consider the proposed self-assessment framework which is planned to replace the WLGA Charter for Member Support and Development and provide feedback to the WLGA as part of this consultation.

Background.

2. Elected Members today face increasing challenges. Under the modernisation agenda, there are heightened expectations on them to undertake a diversity of roles ranging from that of community leader to their special responsibilities within the Council. Throughout Wales, authorities are striving to provide the best possible support for their members to enable them to meet these challenges. This takes the form of skill and knowledge development, support facilities, and support services.
3. The WLGA has a long history of working with authorities to help them develop these activities. To provide structure to the national programme of support, the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development was developed collaboratively by the Association, Elected Members representing each of the political groups and member support officers from each authority.
4. The Charter aimed to provide a broad framework for local planning, self-assessment, action and review together with networking and comparison amongst authorities and the sharing of good and innovative practice. Its adoption has raised the overall amount and standard of support given to members in Wales. For this reason the Charter was planned to be used to assist in the delivery of Cardiff's Diverse Council Declaration.
5. However, given the increasing demands placed on Democratic Services across Wales and the restraints of council budgets, the take up of the WLGA Charter was limited and a more appropriate solution was needed to confirm the quality of the services being provided to Elected Members.
6. The Democratic Services Committee considered a report entitled Achieving the WLGA Charter for Members Support and Development on 28th November 2022 and determined to consider the amended Charter and refer it to political groups for their consideration.

Issues

7. The WLGA has been working with Heads of Democratic Services to develop a voluntary self-evaluation framework for councils to use to assess the effectiveness of the support they provide for councillors. This framework is a modernisation of the former Wales Charter for Member Support and Development which it replaces.
8. The framework takes account of the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#), the [Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper](#), the [WLGA Exit Surveys](#), the [WG survey of councillors](#), the [Civility in public life initiative](#), the WG [Guidance for Principal Councils](#) and the emerging local government improvement and self-assessment framework.
9. Attached at **Appendix A** is the proposed framework which the WLGA has requested be considered by all Democratic Services Committees. The framework is divided into a number of themes, as shown below:
 - a. **Democracy**
 - Candidates and prospective candidates
 - Councillors understand their role, responsibilities, and accountabilities.
 - Standards of conduct
 - The constitution
 - Officer Support
 - Equality of access
 - Support for councillors' rights, safety, and wellbeing
 - Diversity
 - Digital
 - b. **Community**
 - Public awareness
 - Communities contacting councillors
 - Surgeries and community meetings
 - Community engagement, leadership, and co-production
 - Casework support
 - Oversight and safety
 - c. **Learning**
 - The Councillor Development Strategy
 - Personal development reviews (Annual Review)
 - A learning and development Programme.
 - Induction
 - Quality of development
 - Participation
 - Learning from others

Initial Considerations

10. Whilst the framework is intended to be applied by Local Authorities, not all of the criteria that have been identified may be deliverable by the council alone, as they are more likely to be within the remits of the political groups and parties e.g. 'the actions that the

council takes to ensure that councillors from underrepresented groups are actively encouraged to stand and given positions of responsibility wherever possible' (under the proposed framework heading of Democracy, theme of Diversity).

11. The Council's Draft Participation Strategy identifies the elements of the Diverse Council Declaration that have been demonstrated with any outstanding actions being integrated into the Participation Strategy Action Plan. One of the actions is to "Identify opportunities to demonstrate high standards of support and development for our Elected Members" which this proposed framework may provide.

Consultation response

12. The Committee is requested to provide any relevant feedback, comments or suggestions on the suitability of the framework as a shared, national foundation document that councils can use to develop their own approach to self-assessment, recognising their local needs and priorities. The Committee's feedback will be returned to the WLGA.
13. Following this consultation, the WLGA proposes to update the framework and to issue it as a shared support resource to all councils for use.

Financial Implications

14. There are no direct financial implications contained within the report. Should the Council determine to undertake the voluntary self-assessment in the future, any costs associated with addressing any shortcomings identified will have to be met from the existing budgets or an appropriate source of funding will need to be identified.

Legal Implications

15. The statutory functions of the Democratic Services Committee include the responsibility to review and make recommendations to Council in relation to the adequacy of resources provided for the democratic services functions of the Head of the Democratic Services, which includes the provision of support to enable each member of the authority to carry out the role of member.
16. The proposed Councillor Support Self-Assessment Framework aims to provide assurance that councillors are being provided with the support needed for them to effectively discharge their role. The Committee should consider whether it is satisfied that the proposed framework is clear and helpful and appropriately covers all issues which may be relevant for supporting members in Cardiff (as well as other LA's in Wales) and make any appropriate comments in this regard.

Recommendations

17. The Democratic Services Committee is requested to consider the information contained within the report and its appendix and identify any appropriate feedback on the suitability of the WLGA's Councillor Support Self-Assessment Framework as a shared, national foundation document that councils can use to develop their own approach to self-assessment, recognising their local needs and priorities.

GARY JONES
Head of Democratic Services

7 November 2023

Appendix:

Appendix A From Charter to Self-Assessment, the Evolution of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development

Background Documents:

[Draft Participation Strategy](#) report to Cabinet dated 13 July 2023

[Diverse Council Declaration](#) report to Council dated 27 January 2022

[Achieving the WLGA Charter for Members Support and Development](#)

to the Democratic Services Committee dated 28th November 2022