
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Reason for this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Democratic Services Committee (DSC) on the existing research support available Councillors and to seek directions for the development of a Research Protocol for Elected Members.

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

3. The Welsh Government Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales relating to Research Support and Services for Councillors at **Appendix A** ('the Statutory Guidance') was considered by the DSC at its meeting on 13 November 2023.
4. The Statutory Guidance identifies that Councillors who are part of the executive (or assistants to it) have the benefit of working closely with officers of the council and have ready access to information and professional support. In order to undertake their roles effectively all elected members should be able to access a range of information and support.
5. To begin this process the guidance indicates that the baseline of support which is already available to members be identified by the DSC, then work with members to identify how this support and its parameters could be developed over time.
6. It specifies that through their DSC's Councils **should**, put in place a protocol or other set of rules governing how councillors should expect to be able to access and use research services, to ensure that it is accessible to all councillors and that it is used equitably and proportionately. This service should not be solely reactive, the proactive

provision of timely briefings on new policies, changes in the law or other matters that could impact on the work of members should form part of the service.

7. Research may be related to a specific issue or issues that have a more general impact on the work of elected members across the council but would usually be connected to the delivery of the council's priorities or the scrutiny of their delivery. It should work in harmony with and not be expected to duplicate the support members might be provided by virtue of their membership of a political group, for example where political assistants have been appointed (section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989).
8. Research provided to councillors through this part of the Research Support and Services for Councillors guidance should not be politically motivated or compromise officers' political neutrality.
9. The benefits of pro-active research support for councillors may include:
 - Councillors are better able to engage with the business of the authority in an informed, proactive manner.
 - Different officers do not have to deal with requests for information and duplication is reduced.
 - A reduction in the demand for bringing of reports to committees (particularly scrutiny committees) for information, or to note, freeing up committee time and resources.
 - The products and outcomes of research can be shared equitably, rather than through one-to-one councillor-officer conversations which privileges those more capable in "navigating" the authority and its officer structures.
10. The proportionate use of research support by councillors is an important part of ensuring local democracy is functioning effectively. It is also important to ensure that members do not get frustrated by feeling they are not able to access or have available to them the support they need to make a difference to their local community or undertake a role they have been asked to do on behalf of the council effectively.
11. The Committee should set out what steps it will take to improve research services to members, with actions and timelines and communicate this to members.

Research Support and Services – Meeting the requirements of the Guidance

12. The guidance indicates that it is for the DSC to advise on the nature and level of support for research by elected members that would be suitable for their council and the level of resources that the Head of Democratic Services (HDS) might require to provide a sufficient set of services in this regard.
13. To determine a baseline the existing research support, an assessment has been undertaken by the HDS and the initial assessment is shown at **Appendix B**. Although significant research support has been identified the guidance indicates that the DSC and the HDS should consult and involve members to shape and regularly review the usefulness and effectiveness of the support provided. The committee is requested to consider the assessment at **Appendix B** to provide further direction prior to wider consultation with Elected Members.
14. Given the initial assessment the DSC is requested to consider the following question:

- Are there any other areas of research support which you consider should be included in this list?
- What research support has been useful in your role as Councillor?
- What could be improved?
- What information / data do you require that is not currently available on the Council's website or reports provided to committees?
- How should other members be informed about the draft Research Protocol and their views on its content be sought.
- What information / data do you require that is not currently available via external providers such as Data Cymru, Open data sources etc.
- Please list any areas of research that you may find useful to your role as Councillor, where this information is not already available in the public domain.

Data Analysis Training

15. Data Cymru offer a range of 'data-focused' training courses, two of which are specifically aimed at Councillors:

- [Data 101 – An introduction to understanding and using data](#)
This training course offers practical guidance to help build skills and confidence in understanding and using data. The course explains the different types of data and how to find it. Facilitators will guide attendees through a series of questions designed to help make sure you understand the data you are working with. This will be followed by some techniques to help turn data into knowledge. The course will assist those attending to understand:
 - what data is and how to find it
 - the questions you need to ask to make sure you understand data
 - some basic techniques for using data.
- [Understanding and using performance data](#)
This course focuses on understanding, challenging and using data as a Councillor. This introductory course aimed at beginners and those new to using data. The course will assist those attending to understand:
 - what performance data is and how to find it
 - what you need to consider when working with performance data
 - how to use performance data.

16. During 2023-24, Data Cymru are offering each local authority the option of taking one cohort of members (up to 20 people) through the training for free. Cardiff have yet to take up this offer.

17. Information about all Data Cymru training courses, which includes 'survey design and analysis' and 'presenting data', can be found on their [website](#):. They also publish their [training guides](#), which you can use alongside the training,
18. They also offer a training programme, called [DataBasicCymru](#). The programme is designed to help individuals build their data culture by building skills and, perhaps more importantly, confidence in using and analysing data. It's a fun and interactive programme that was originally developed by researchers at MIT and was "adapted" for use in Wales by Data Cymru.

Categorisation of Research

19. To assist in structuring the Research Protocol it is proposed that the following categorisation be used:
 - a. Self- Service Research

Elected Members will be signposted to relevant available or open data sources and will use their own skills and knowledge to undertake relevant research.
 - b. Level 1 - Simple Research Support

Elected Members may request that low level research be undertaken which may include:

 - A member enquiry with a clearly defined request for the information required. i.e. the number of children Looked After in Cardiff.
 - A members has a clear research intention which will be discussed with officers on how best to use existing data sources and potentially some basic analysis to achieve the required outcome
 - c. Level 2 – Assisted Research Support

A simple survey of 5-10 questions on a specific topic which will seek the views of a small number of residents. This survey will require some support from suitably trained researcher to ensure that the research requirements are met. will be a hard copy survey and utilise the resident letter facility to ensure that there will be no additional costs. Responses will be assessed with outcomes being provided to the originator.
 - d. Level 3 - Scoped Research Support

This category of research will primarily be undertaken by a qualified researcher for Scrutiny and other committees. This type of research is likely to include use effective scoping processes, desktop research analysis, new and independent research, the use of focus groups and appropriate research methodologies to deliver the required outcome. It is unlikely there will be capacity for individual Member Scoped research requests within existing resources.

Resources

20. The Democratic Services Team has limited resources to extend the existing arrangements for providing research facilities for Members. However, funded additional capacity is being created to support the Committee and Members Services

Team deliver the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. These posts will have a cross cutting role in the team and will provide Elected Members with some Simple Research Support.

21. The Democratic Services Team has access to the SNAP electronic survey software with a primary user to create online surveys and two users with web access to the software to run the high-level analysis reports.
22. It is proposed that Level 2 and 3 Research Support requests will be submitted to the HDS who will prioritise the request to ensure that the available resources are not exceeded. The HDS will also ensure that these research requests are not overtly political and that they will not compromise the neutrality of officers.

Data Governance and Protection

23. All research activities must comply with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Councils' Information Governance Policies and procedures.

Financial Implications

24. The body of the report provides details of the current the research facilities being used for Elected Members. These facilities are being met from within existing Democratic and Members Services budgets and reserves and includes funding to provide additional posts for the Committee and Member Services Team to enhance the research capability. To further increase the research capacity will require additional sources of funding be identified in agreement of the Director of Governance and Legal Services.

Legal Implications

25. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ('the 2011 Measure'), section 8(1)(b), a local authority must provide its Head of Democratic Services with 'such staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in its opinion, sufficient to allow his or her functions to be discharged'; and must have regard to statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers. The statutory functions of the Head of Democratic Services (under s.9 of the 2011 Measure) include the provision of support and advice to each member of the authority in carrying out the role of member of the authority.
26. The Democratic Services Committee is responsible (under s.11 of the 2011 Measure) for overseeing the democratic services functions of the Council, ensuring this work is adequately resourced; and reporting to full Council accordingly.
27. In considering the Council's arrangements for providing research support and services for elected Members, 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](#) (Chapter 3.0 within Part 2), which is appended as **Appendix A** to this report and referenced within the body of the report.
28. Other relevant provisions are referred to in the body of the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

29. The Committee is requested to:

- a. Note the content of the report and the initial assessment of current research facilities for elected Members at **Appendix B** undertaken by the HDS.
- b. Consider the questions in paragraph 13 and the proposed categorisation of research as set out in paragraph 18 and provide direction for the development of the Research Protocol.
- c. Agree that a draft version of the Research Protocol be submitted to the next meeting of the committee.

GARY JONES
HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
30 January 2024

Appendices:

Appendix A: Research Support and Services for Councillors Statutory Guidance
Appendix B: Research Support Assessment - Baseline data

Background Papers:

[Updated Proposals - Draft Outline Member Induction Programme 2022](#) dated 24 January 2022

[Welsh Government Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales](#) report to Democratic Services Committee dated 13 November 2023.