

**s c r u t i n y**



**Scrutiny Research Team**

# **Members' Information and Library Support Needs**

**Research report for the  
Democratic Services Committee**

**9 October 2014**



The City and County of Cardiff

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Research aim and objectives:**

The aim of this research is to identify the current Members' support and information requirements.

Specifically this research will:

- Identify the various types of information resources that should be made available to Members from both internal and external sources;
- Determine Members information support requirements;
- Identify changes or improvements required to the current Members' Library in County Hall; and
- Identify other forms of support required by Members that will enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities within the local authority.

The findings of this research will inform the scoping and delivery of an enhanced support service accessible to all Members of Cardiff Council.

## **1.2. Research methodology**

A series of focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with the Leader of the Council, 4 Cabinet Members, and 11 other Members consisting of Committee Chairs, Party Whips and backbenchers representing all political groups in the Council.

Meetings were also held with staff from the:

- Glamorgan Archives to identify relevant information resources and services that can be made available to Members;
- Cardiff Research Centre to discover the types of research undertaken and how it is delivered; and
- National Assembly for Wales Research and Library Service to gain an understanding of the range of research and information and library services that they provide to elected Assembly Members of the Welsh Government.

The findings of the focus groups, interviews and meetings were used to inform the formulation of a survey questionnaire that was distributed to all Cardiff Council Members.

A survey questionnaire was formulated both in English and Welsh and was sent out to all Members including those who had already been involved in the focus groups and individual interviews. The survey instrument was hosted in Survey Monkey. To encourage a high response rate, Councillors were also sent two reminder emails and received follow-up telephone calls. A hard copy version of the questionnaire was made available as well as the option to complete the survey via telephone were also offered to Councillors who had difficulties in completing the survey online be it through disability, accessibility and/or technological issues. This offer was undertaken by 3 Members.

In total, there were 43 respondents who completed the survey. Of this total, 26% stated that they were Committee Members, 16% stated that they were Cabinet Members and 7% indicated that they were Committee Chairs. There was a small percentage (5%) who described themselves as having 'Other' responsibilities.

## **2. Executive summary**

This research project was commissioned by the County Clerk and Monitoring Officer to identify elected Members' support and information requirements. A series of focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs, Party Whips and randomly selected backbenchers representing all political groups in the Council. Meetings were also conducted with staff and representatives of the Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff Research Centre and the National Assembly for Wales Research Service. A total of 16 Members participated in the focus groups and the interviews while a total 43 Members completed the survey. The findings from this research will be used to inform the scoping of the development of a more enhanced information support service that can be provided to all Cardiff Council Members.

The research found that there are a number of Members who are currently not aware of the various types of information resources that they can access internally from the Council. There were also Members who are not aware of and have not used the existing Members Library provision within County Hall.

Members were mostly in agreement that improvements should be made with regards to their access to Council documents and publications as well as selected external documents and publications that are relevant to local authority operations. Members stated that they would greatly benefit from being able to easily locate and access key Council documents that are relevant to the various roles and responsibilities that they undertake in behalf of the Council. Similarly, they also drew attention to the need to have access to selected externally produced documents and publications e.g. audit and

regulatory reports and relevant legislative guidance, that relate to Council's performance and operational responsibilities.

In accessing these documents and publications, most Members have indicated their preference for accessing these by using an electronic facility or format. They stated that they would find it useful to have access to a dedicated webpage where they can access these information resources in an electronic format or by using a web link to externally available information resources and service providers.

Most Members indicated that they would benefit from being made aware of and from receiving updates on policy and legislative developments that are relevant to local government operations. With regards to Council activities, they also felt that it would be useful for them to receive periodical updates on Council Committees' and the Cabinet's work programmes and agendas. Most Members would prefer to receive these updates electronically via e-mail. Members' views were split regarding receiving updates via "Twitter".

Where resources and capacity are available most Members stated that they would benefit from being able to get support from a "Dedicated Contact Point" who could assist them with accessing or signposting them to information resources that are not readily available within the existing provision. Members also emphasised the need to make use of a simple and efficient "information or document storage and retrieval system" which are easily accessible to Members, as they anticipate that this will reduce the demand for one-to-one support that they may need in accessing information.



Depending on availability of research capacity, Members indicated that they would benefit from having access to some research capacity which could “provide/prepare short briefings” on topics that are relevant to Council business. In particular, some Members drew attention to the need to provide capacity to support the information and research requirements other Council Committees apart from Scrutiny Committees who currently have access to this type of support.

The majority of Members were in agreement that improvements need to be made with regards to the existing Members’ library space. Some of the suggested improvements include: the removal of old publications and out of date documents; increasing the number of workspace areas for Members, better technical facilities, better lighting and ventilation and where possible better location. Concerns over suitability of the existing Members Library accommodation were also raised by other Council staff.

As part of improvements that can be made on Members’ accommodation, the majority of Members indicated that there is a need for a “dedicated work space area” that is accessible for all Members and located within County Hall.

Other support that could be made available to Members include the provision of the Citizen’s Advice Bureau’s “Advisernet” software which provides essential information on a range of issues including welfare, employment, benefits, tax etc. Although the survey results showed that there is limited usage of the existing Member’s Dictation Service, views of the Members were divided on whether they would support the continuity of these service. Only a third of Members (33%) have categorically stated they would not support this. The results also showed that a high proportion of Members make use of the Member Enquiry Service.

### **3. Research Findings**

#### **3.1. Low awareness of information resources available within Cardiff Council**

During the focus groups conducted with Committee Members and Cabinet Members, some of them indicated that they were not fully aware of the information resources that are currently available within the existing Members' Library and whether these information resources are current and up-to-date.

When asked about their knowledge of the ASK Cardiff website there were Members who stated that they were unaware of this website and had no knowledge of the information resources that that can access from there. Others also stated that they struggled with finding or accessing corporate as well as service area specific policy documents.

For those who have previously used the Members' Library, they found that the majority of the documents and publications stored there are mostly out of date. They also highlighted the need for a cataloguing system that is essential for locating documents and publications that are stored there.

#### **3.2. Improvements in Members' access to internal and external information resources**

##### **3.2.1. Access to Council documents and resources**

Most Members who participated in the focus groups and interviews stated that they would benefit from being able to easily access key Council documents such as Cabinet papers and decisions, Scrutiny Committee papers, reports and recommendations, research reports and briefing papers. They would find it useful to have access to hard copies of the Corporate Plan, service

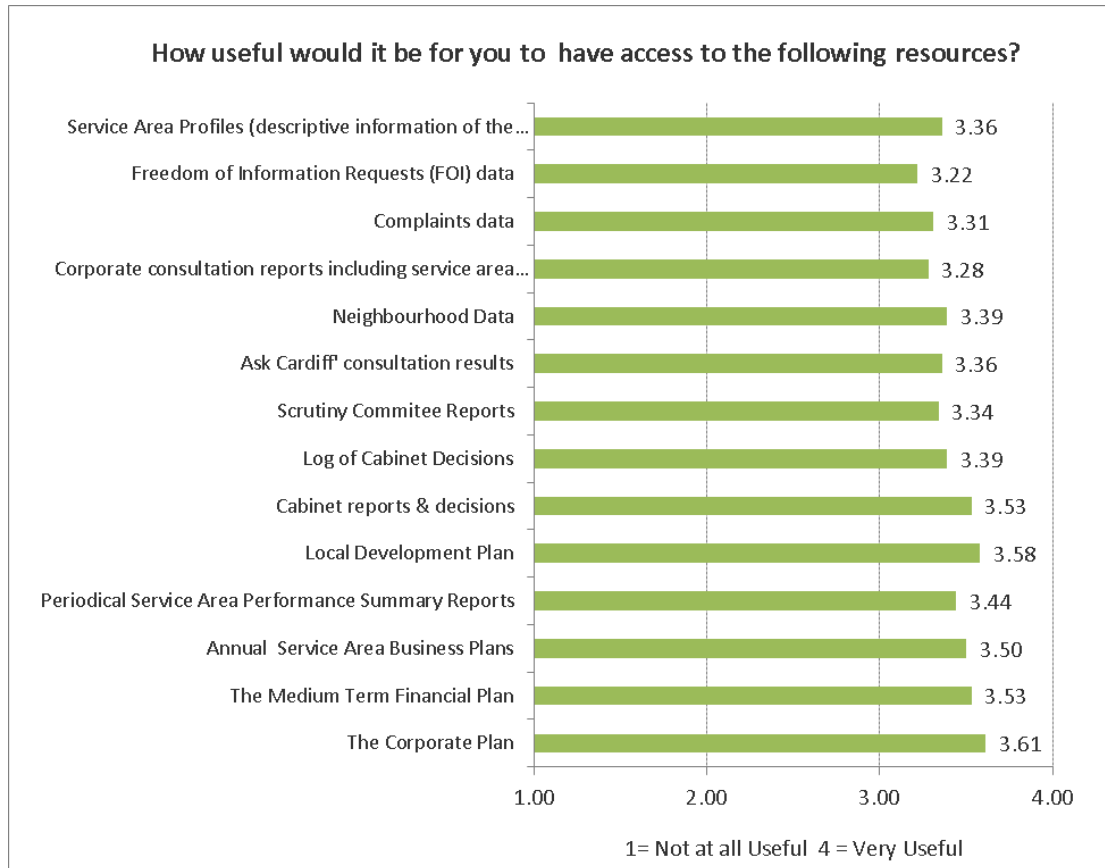
area business plans, results of school consultations, various regulatory inspection and audit reports within the Members' Library setting.

Some of the Committee Chairs stated that they would also benefit from being made aware of consultation reports and other research reports produced by the Corporate Research Team and where to access these.

Several Members also confirmed that they would like to have access to an up-to-date database of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests made to Cardiff Council as the existing information that is available from the Council's website is out of date.

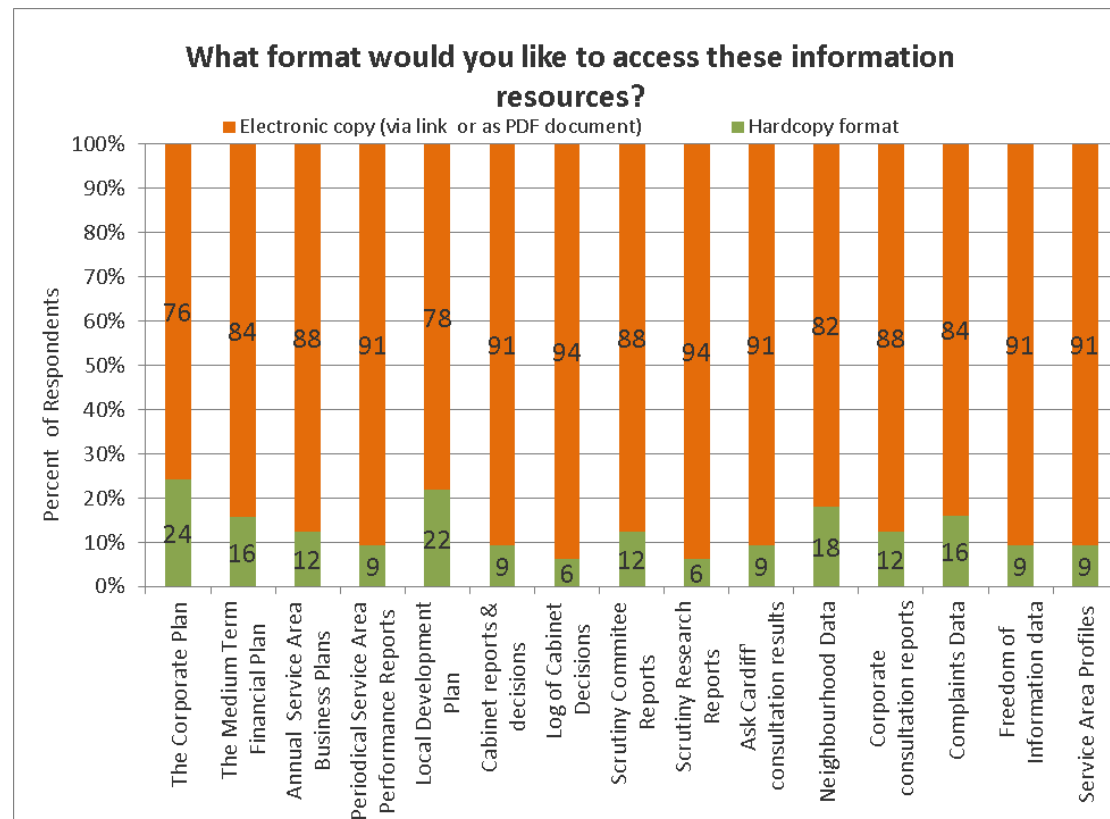
Other Members also indicated that it would be useful to have access to an up-to-date staff directory detailing names and contact details of selected members of staff from Director down to the Operational Manager level specifying their current job title, departmental unit, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

The results of the survey as shown in the graph below further confirm Members views on the usefulness of selected Council information resources.



A calculation of the mean values (the average) of the ratings given to selected internally produced documents, indicate that most Members would find it useful to have access to these resources or documents. The documents which were rated as most useful include the following: the Corporate Plan, the annual Service Area Business Plans, the Local Development Plan, the Medium Term Financial Plan, and Cabinet reports and decisions.

When asked what format they would like to access these information resources, the results presented below show that the majority preferred electronic copies instead of the hard copy format.



### **3.2.2. Access to externally available documents and publications**

During the focus groups, Members have enumerated a number of externally available publications that they would find useful in relation to their individual roles and functions within the Council. These information resources include:

- Local Authority relevant Welsh Government, National Assembly and parliamentary documents and publications
- Regulatory and inspection reports
- Comparator Authorities to Cardiff Council
- Member Development information
- Selected Academic publications

Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales's documents and reports, etc.

Most members who participated in the focus groups believe that they would benefit from being able to easily access various national government documentation and Welsh Government data and publications that are relevant to local government operations. Examples of these publications and documents that were deemed useful include: current WAG consultations particularly on environment and transport issues relevant to Scrutiny Committee work programmes and inquiries and the research and briefing papers produced by the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) Research Service

Receiving updates on UK Parliament reports, changes in current legislation and regulations relevant to their Committees' work programmes were also regarded as useful by some of the Scrutiny Chairs.

#### Regulatory, inspection and audit reports

A number of the Committee Chairs also stated that they could benefit from having access to inspectorate and audit reports on the performance of various service areas of the Council.

#### Comparator Authorities to Cardiff Council

Some of the Cabinet Members indicated that information on European comparator authorities or cities which are relevant to scrutiny inquiries and cabinet proposals would be useful. Similarly, some of the Scrutiny Committee Chairs had also indicated that it would be useful Committee Members to be made aware of English local authorities that who are currently regarded as comparators to Cardiff Council as well as information on best practice and innovations that had been adopted by these local authorities.

## Member development information

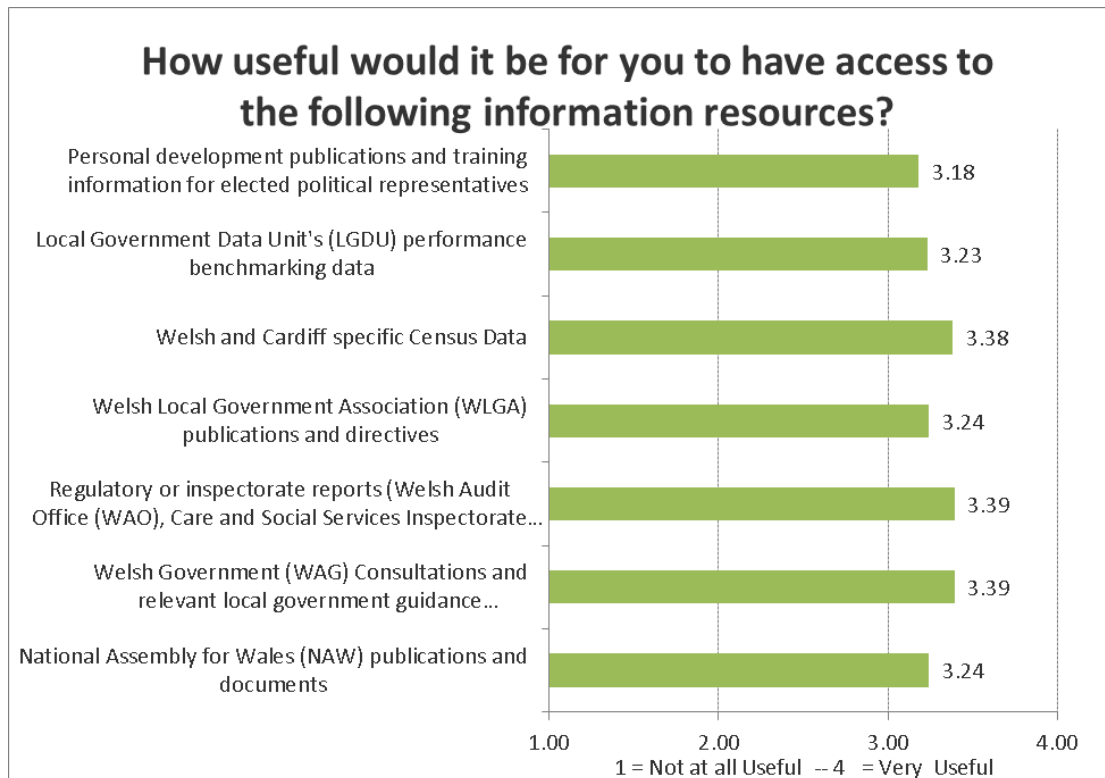
Other information resources that were deemed useful and should be made available within the Members library include: training course information and schedule, and self-help publications that would be relevant to the current development needs of Members.

## Academic publications

There was a suggestion from a few Members that they would benefit from having access to academic research reports or publications that are relevant to the Council's operations.

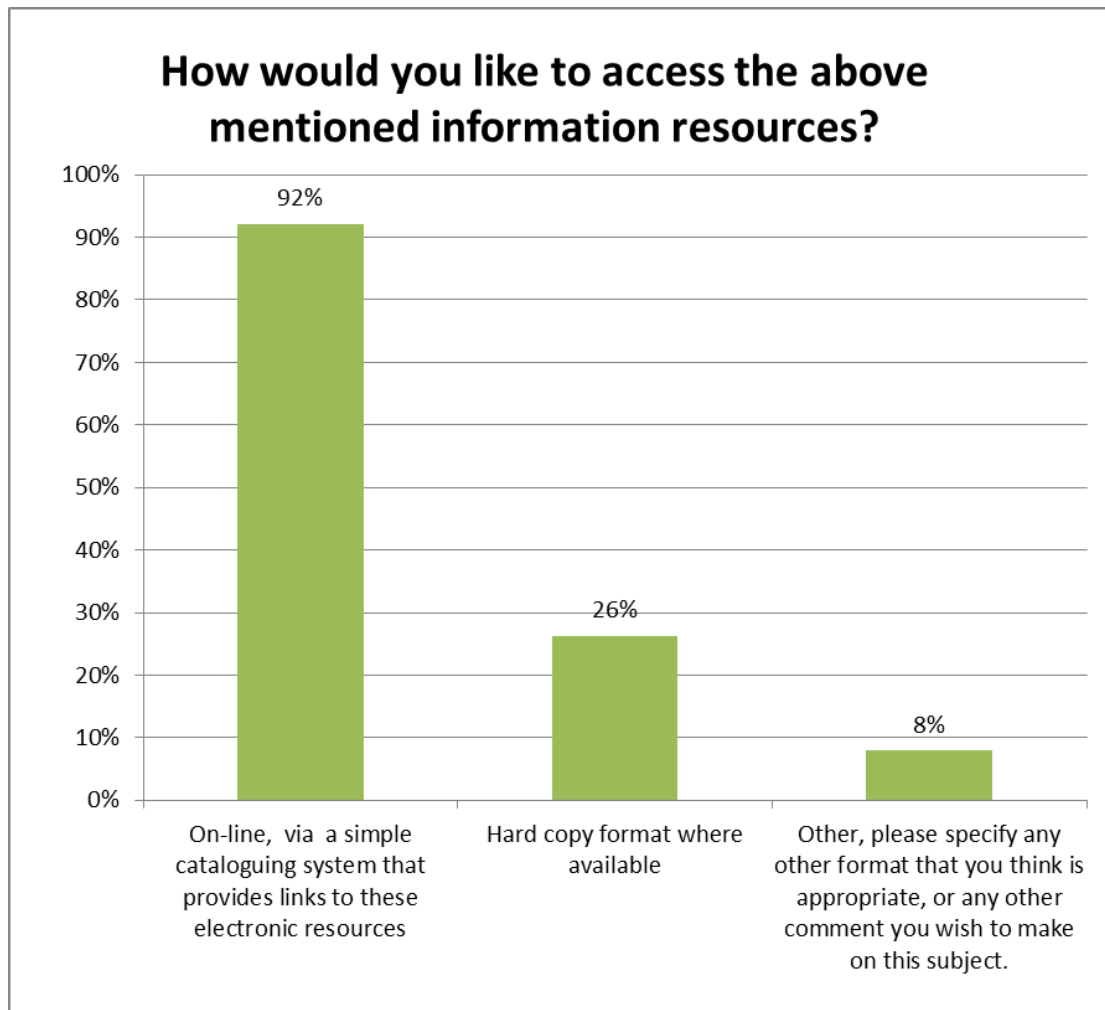
The results of the survey as shown in the chart below confirm the range of externally available resources that Members would consider as useful.





The results in the chart above show the average of the ratings given by Members on the usefulness of various information resources outlined there. Overall, Members regard these information resources as mostly “Somewhat Useful” or “Very Useful”. In particular, the Welsh Government consultations and related documents, regulatory reports, and census information were rated highly whilst personal development information was not rated as highly as other externally available documents/publications.

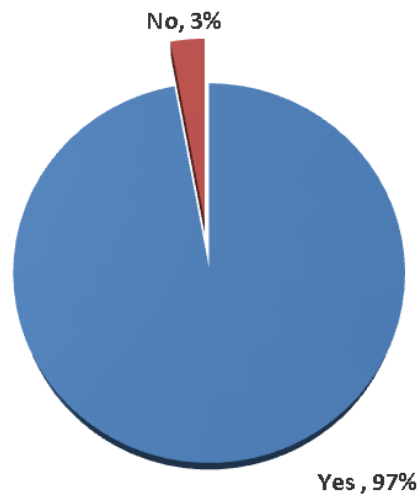
When asked how they would like to access these external publications, the vast majority indicated a preference for accessing these via an on-line system as shown by the results in the chart below.



### **3.2.3. Suggested delivery arrangements**

When asked whether they would find it useful to have dedicated webpage which provide access to and links to a range of information resources, the vast majority of Members gave a positive response as illustrated in the chart below:

**Would it be useful to have a dedicated webpage which contains electronic copies and links to online resources?**



### **3.3. Be made aware or updated of local government relevant developments, publications legislation etc.**

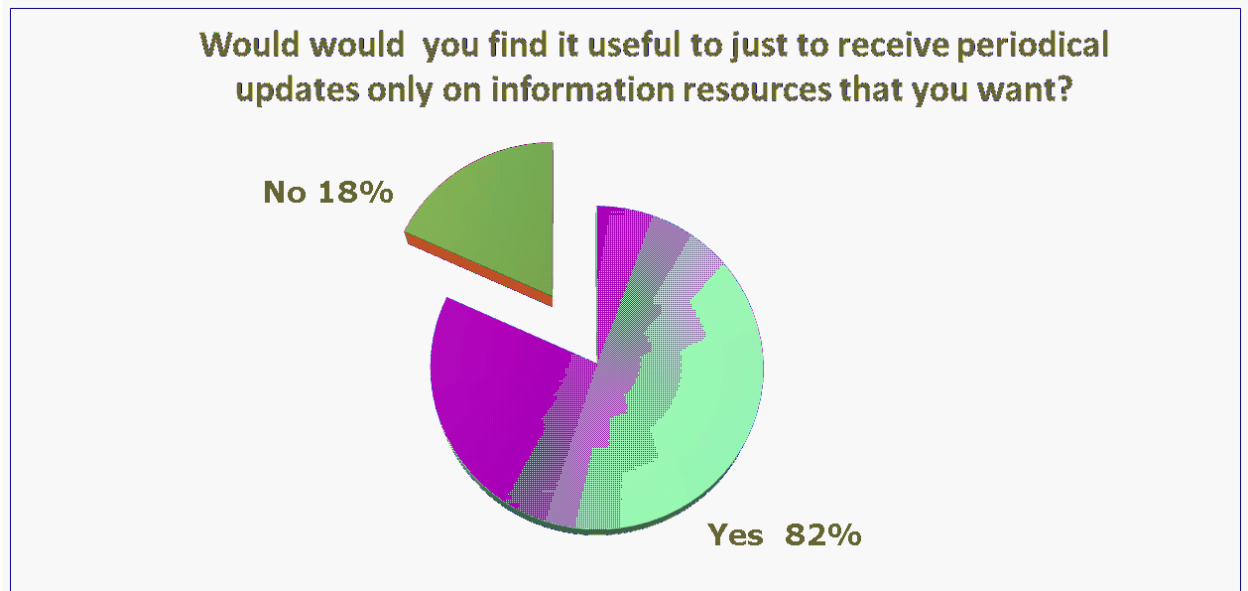
Most Members who participated in the focus groups and interviews felt that that they would find it useful to receive updates or be alerted of relevant local government and legislative developments and as well as associated documents and publications on a regular basis. They would however prefer to receive these relevant updates on a monthly basis via electronic means or preferably by e-mail.

When asked in the survey whether they would find it useful to receive periodical updates and newsletter relating to various Council Committees' and Cabinet work agenda, the majority of respondents gave a positive response as illustrated in the chart below.



However, Members' views regarding receiving Twitter feeds/updates were split. There is an equal divide in the percentage of respondents who gave positive (50%) and negative responses (50%) with regards to this particular option.

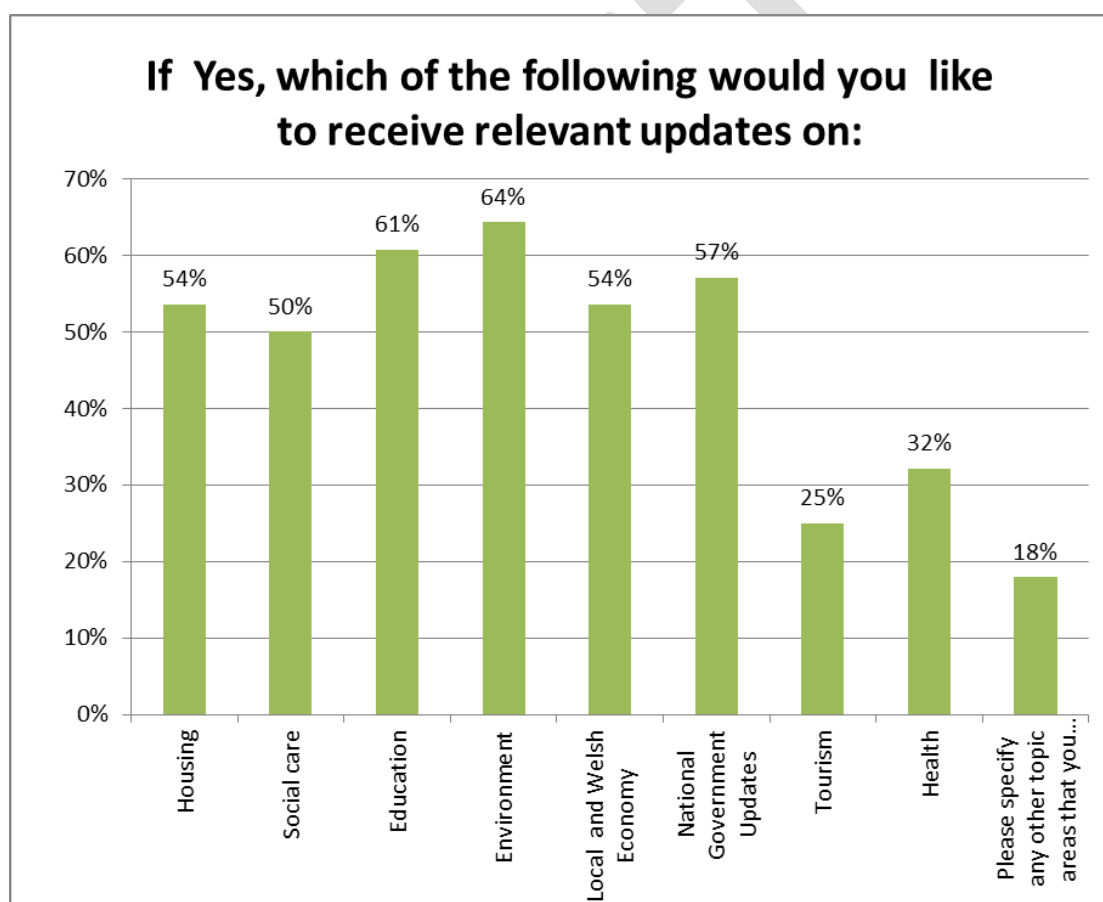
### 3.4. Receiving periodical updates on information resources that Members want



The results of the survey as illustrated in the chart above show that the majority of the respondents (82%) would only want to receive updates on the information resources they wanted. A relatively small proportion (18%) indicated that they would want to receive broad information which was not interest specific.

### 3.4.1. Member's preferred subject areas for information updates

The results below illustrate Member's preferences of the topic areas that they would like to receive updates on a periodical basis.

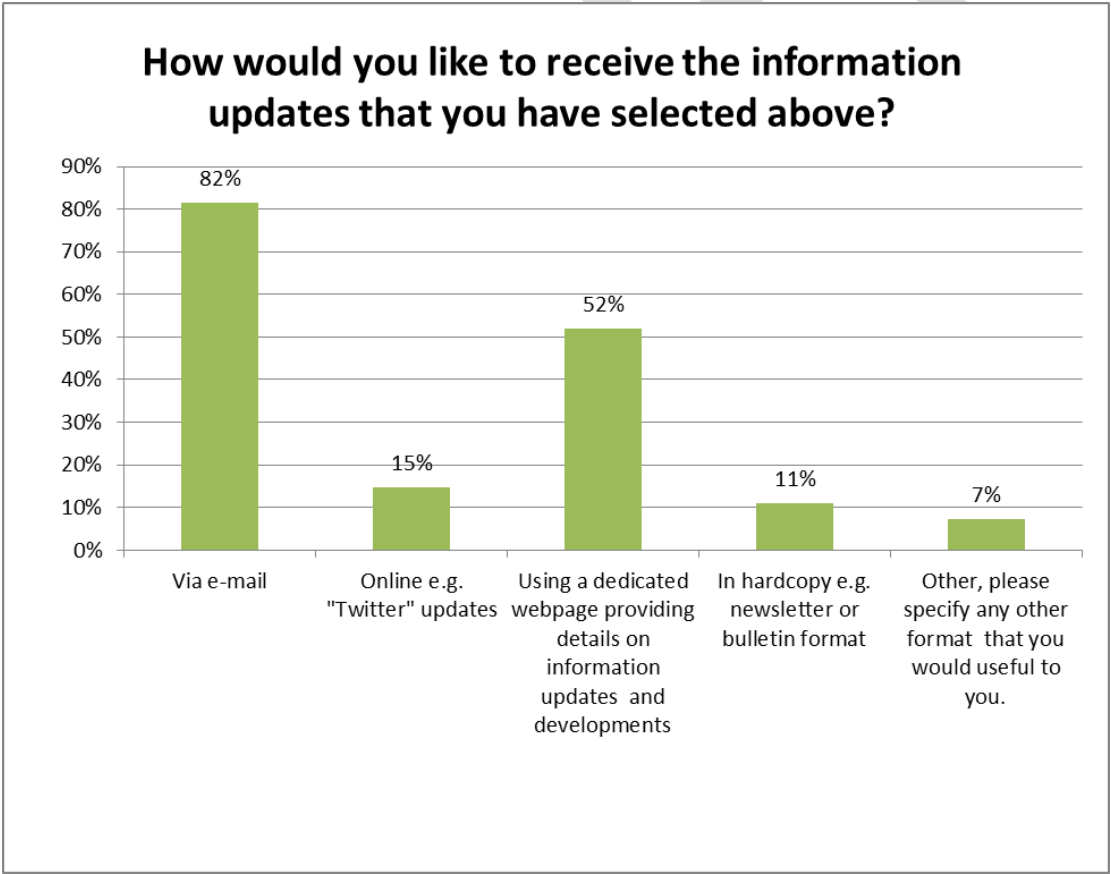


Of those who indicated that they would like to receive information updates, the majority (64%) stated that they would want to receive information on Council relevant environmental topics. More than half also confirmed that they would

like to receive updates on the following subject areas: education (61%), the national government (57%), the economy (54%), housing (54%), and social care (50%).

Of those who specified 'Other' (18%), their subject areas of interest include: welfare reform, HMO licensing, regulatory services, Welsh Government, governance papers, and equality were suggested.

**3.4.2. Members’ preferred format for receiving updates**

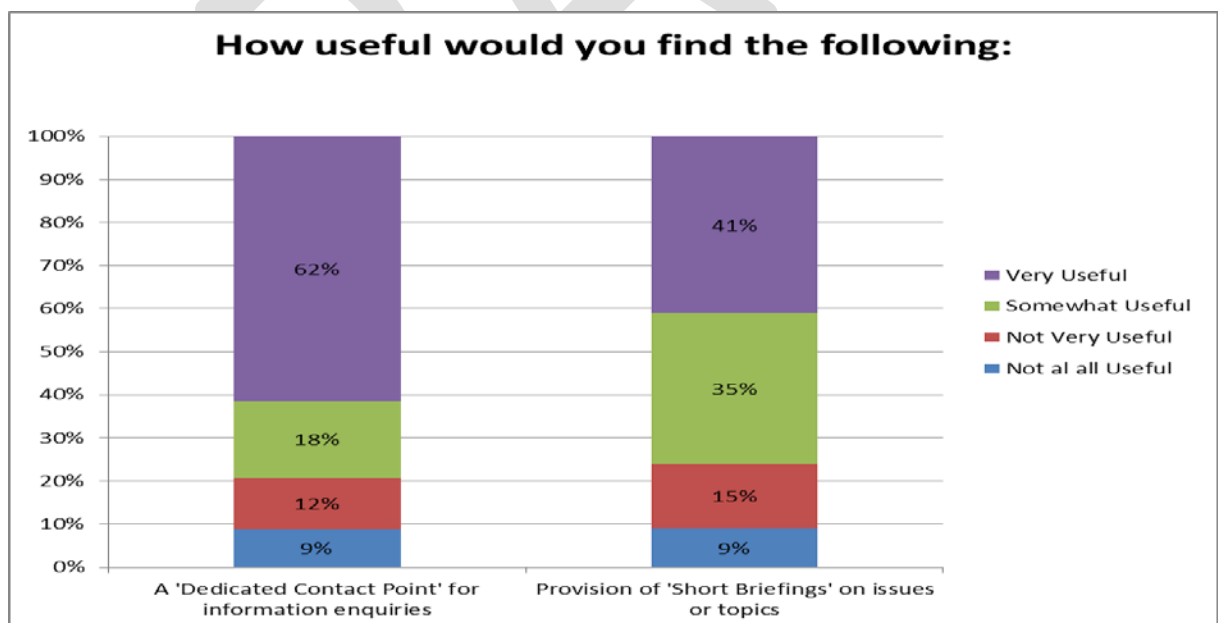


When Members were asked how they would like to receive information updates on their preferred topic areas, the results in the chart above show

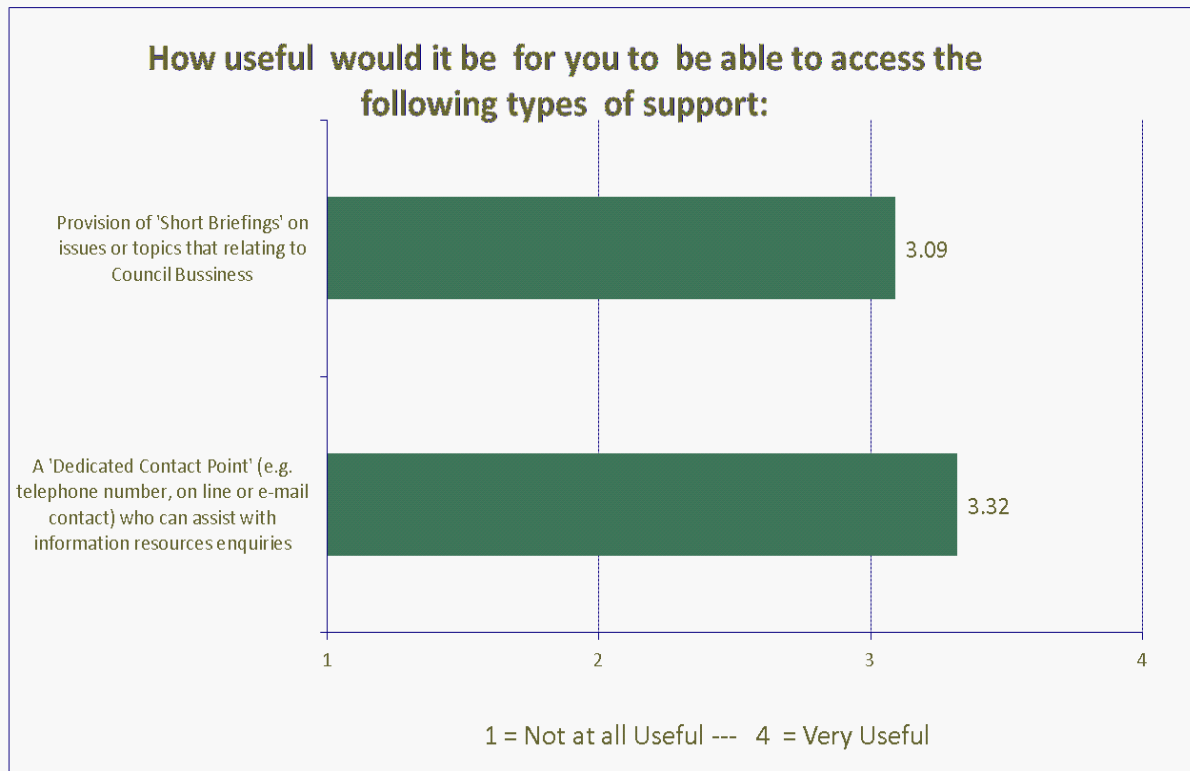
that the vast majority, (82%) indicated they would like to receive these “Via email”, and just over half (52%) indicated they would also like to make use of a “dedicated webpage” where they can independently locate these information. A comparatively smaller percentage stated that they would like to receive updates via “Twitter” (15%) and an even much smaller percentage stated that hardcopy newsletter (11%) would be useful. There is also a small percentage (7%) who suggested other preferred formats for receiving updates including: making use of a word document attached to email, and including relevant web links into the Members regular email updates.

### 3.5. Other types of information support

When asked about other types of information support that Members would find useful, the chart below illustrates their views on the usefulness of the two options that were cited.







The results in the charts above show that most Members would find it “Somewhat Useful” or “Very Useful” (in the range of 76% - 80% in total) to be able to access a “Dedicated Contact Point” who could assist with information enquiries as well as being able to access research capacity that could “Provide short briefings on issues and topics that relate to Council Business”.

During the focus groups and interviews, some of the Members were able to elaborate how they felt they could benefit from having access to a “Dedicated Contact point” who can provide assistance with locating, accessing or signposting them to the information resources that they need when these are not readily available from the Members’ Library provision. In recognition of the current financial and resources challenges faced by service areas, most Members believe that the provision of a readily accessible, simple and efficient information and document “storage and retrieval and system” is

crucial, as such a system could potentially reduce the demand for one-to-one support when accessing the information and documents that they need.

Some of the Members also indicated that they would benefit from having access to some research capacity which could “Provide/prepare short briefings on topic areas relevant to Council business”.

One of the of Scrutiny Committee Chairs and a number of Committee Members stated that they would benefit from having additional small scale information/research support to further support their individual information need on specific topics covered by Committee work programmes. In particular, they felt that this type support would be particularly useful to all Members during the Council’s budget setting and Budget Scrutiny process and during the review of the Local Development Plan. Although they could see the benefits of this additional support that could be provided, they recognise some of the challenges and difficulties associated with providing this service, particularly in providing available resources and capacity to meet the potential level of demand from all Members as well as in managing Members’ expectations to meet their demand. If resources and capacity were available to provide this service, it was suggested that a system should be developed and put in place to effectively manage and prioritise the demand for this type of support.

Other non-Scrutiny Committee Members have highlighted the need to provide some degree of research and information support to other Council Committees such as Democratic Services Committee, Constitution Committee, Planning Committee, and Ethics Committee. They cited that these Committees currently do not receive any research support and would benefit from having some type research and information support similar to those

provided to Scrutiny Committees. Although these Committees receive officer support from the Democratic Services Team, these officers currently do not have available capacity and skills/expertise to undertake research that is required.

Most Members who participated in the focus groups and interviews were in agreement that providing an information and research service similar to those provided by the National Assembly for Wales Research Service would not be necessary. This is in recognition of the limited resources and research capacity that the service area currently has to be able to support this type of service. Instead, they felt that it is important for the service area to develop and support a service that provides an efficient information/document search facility complemented by effective signposting service to already existing information providers/services.

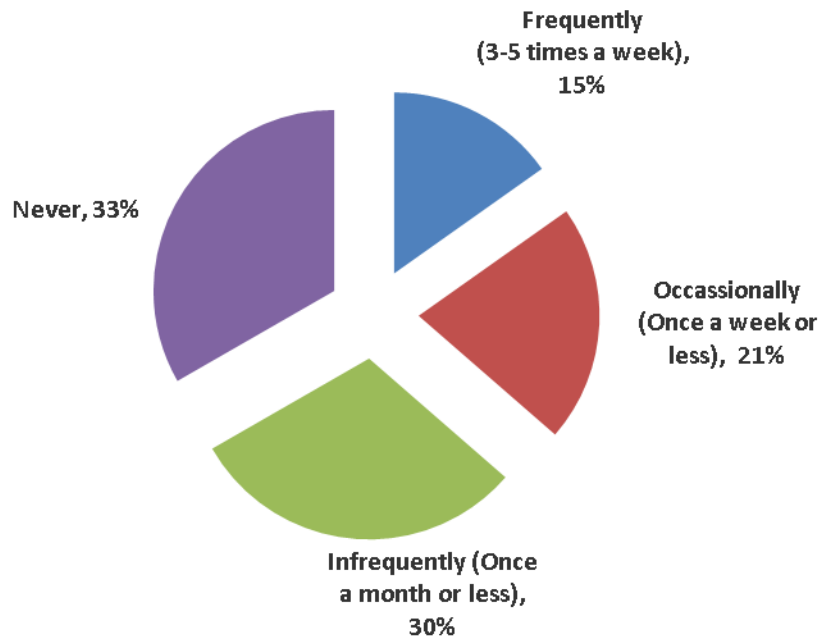
### **3.6. Improvements in the Members' Library space and usage**

#### **3.6.1. Usage of the Members' Library**

During the focus groups, there were a few Members who stated that they were not aware of the existing Members' Library within County Hall, its location and the documents and publications that are available from there.

The results of the survey also confirm that currently there are Members who have "Never" (33%) visited the Members' Library.

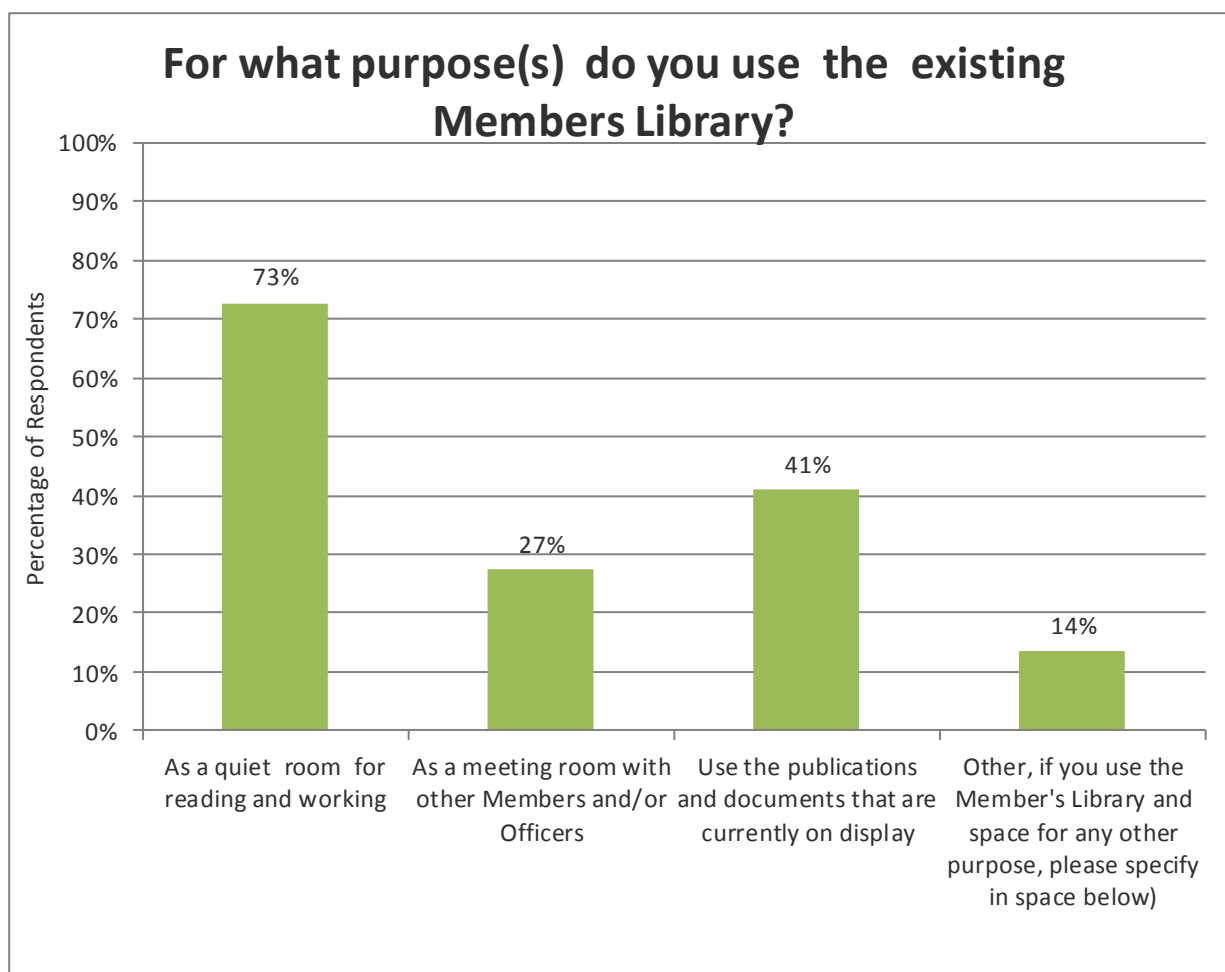
### How often do you use or visit the existing Members' Library in County Hall?



There is only a very small percentage of Members (15%) who have indicated that they frequently use the Members' Library. As shown by the results above around half (in total 51%) of Members only use the Members' Library at least once a month (i.e. "Infrequently" or "Occasionally")

#### 3.6.2. Purpose for using the Members' Library

When Members were asked for what purposes do they use the Members' Library, the result in the chart below show that most (73%) of them mainly use the area as a quiet room for reading and working.



### 3.6.3. Suggested improvements to the Members' Library

During the focus groups and interviews most Members have identified a number of improvements that can be made within the existing Members' Library environment. The results of the survey as shown in the chart below confirm the views that had been raised.

**Should improvements be made to the existing Members' Library space?**

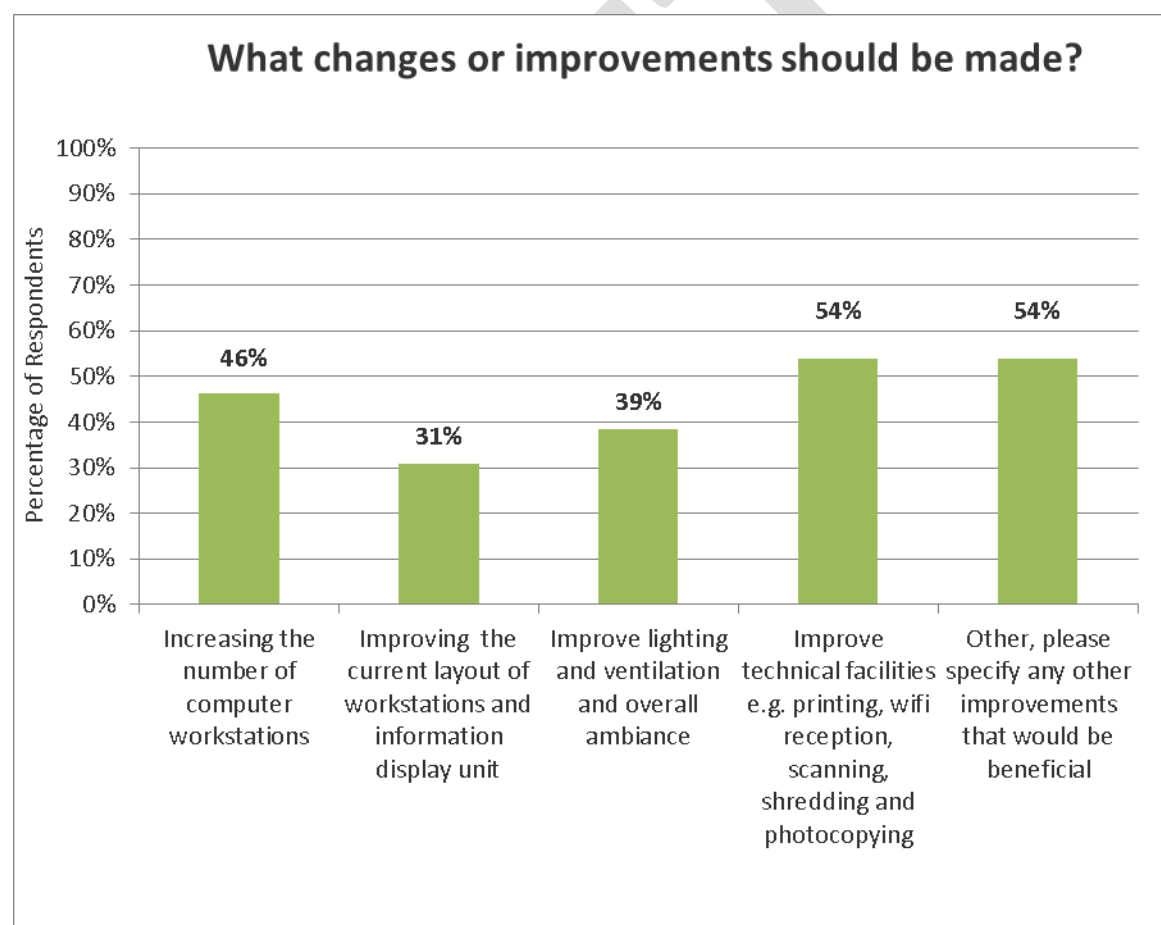


One of the improvements that was suggested involves the removal of old publications and out of date documents that are currently stored within the existing Members' Library to make way for more workspace area for Members. They believe that the work space provision within the existing library is limited and had recommended that current layout of the work desks should be improved. They also felt that lighting and ventilation within the current location is very poor.

Members also felt that the number of PC workstations could be increased, and provision should be made for terminal points for Tablets as well as reliable printer/scanner with Tablet compatibility. More specifically, they suggested that an additional 2 more working spaces should be provided. In addition they also drew attention to current Business Support Room in City Hall which could be used as a blueprint for how County Hall should improve Members' workspace environment

Cabinet Support staff who visited the existing Members' Library echoed most of the Members' views regarding location and suitability of existing premises. They were also in agreement with Members' views regarding the work space layout.

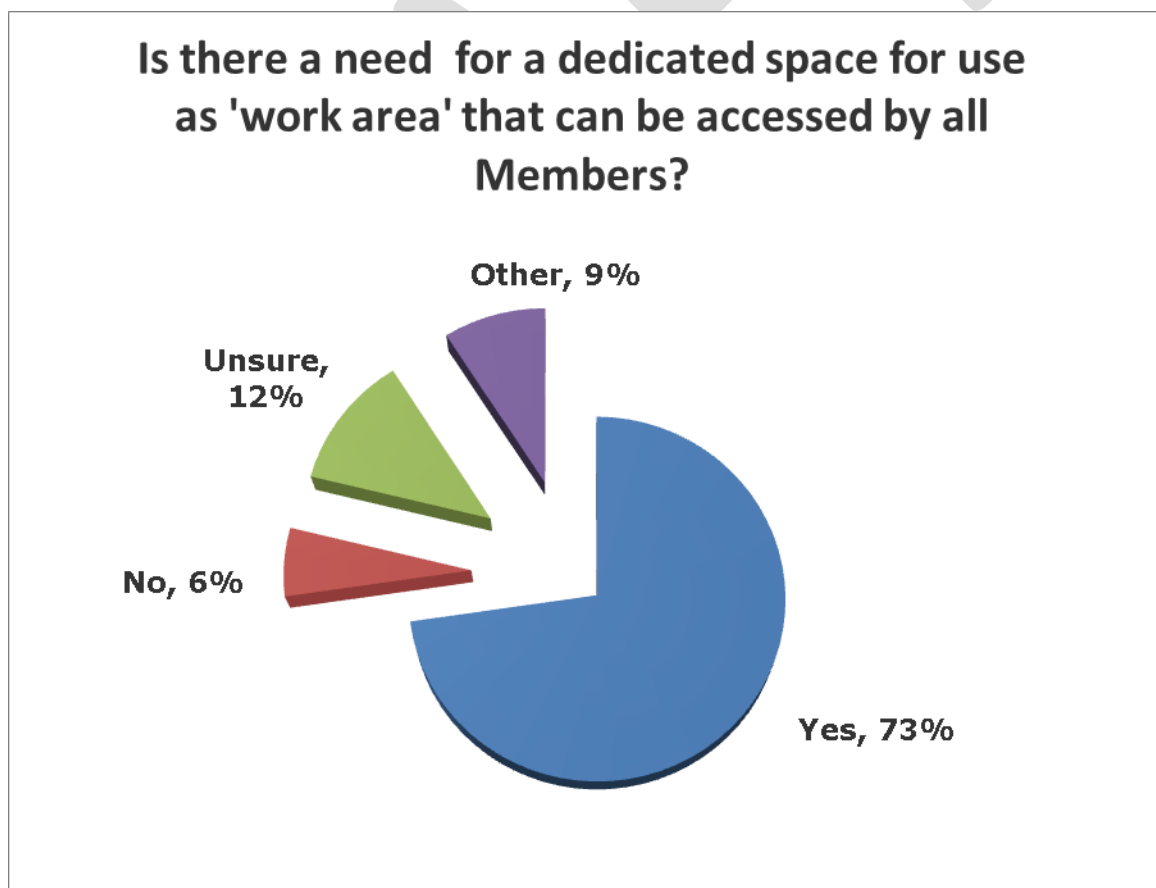
The survey results shown the chart below support the views that were raised during the focus groups and the interviews.



### 3.7. Provision of a “dedicated work space” for Members

During the focus groups, there were some who felt that there was no need for the existing “Members Library” but instead suggested that provision should be made of a quiet working/office environment that can be accessed by all Members.

When asked in the survey whether they see a need for a “dedicated work space environment” the vast majority (73%) of Members gave a positive response as shown in the chart below.

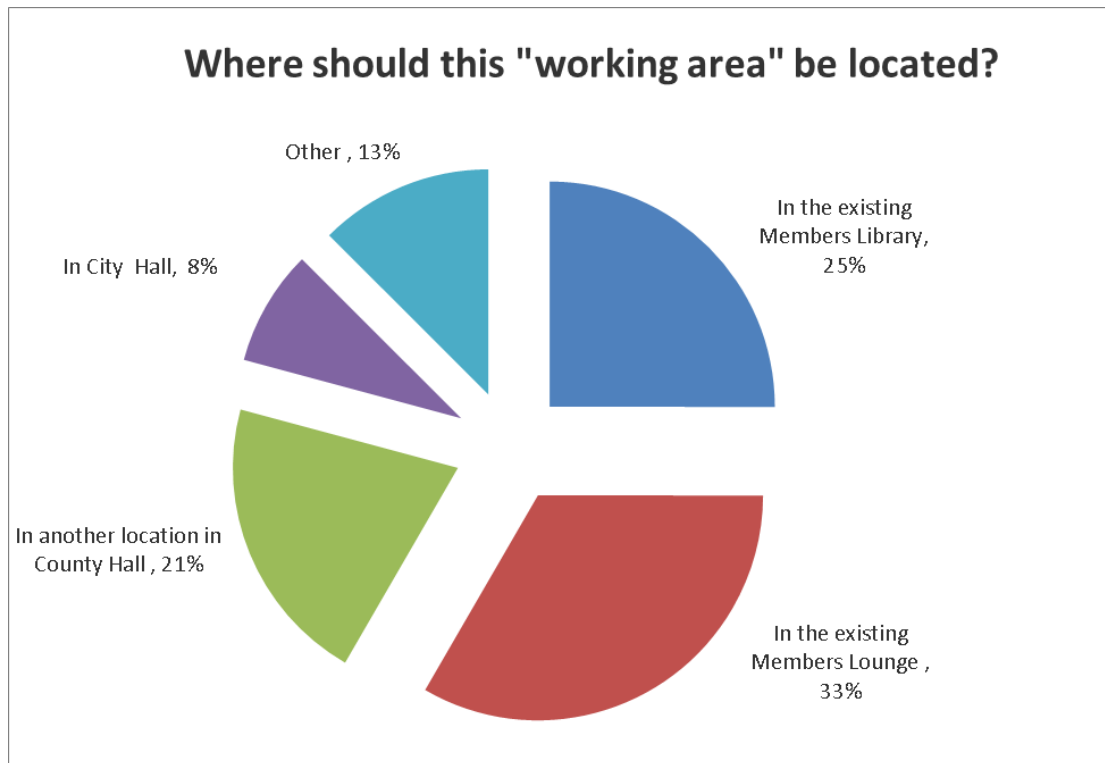




### **3.7.1. Location of the “dedicated work” area for all Members**

One of the Members holding a senior responsibility for the Council who was interviewed suggested that this “work space” should be located in an area where Members can easily access support staff that can provide the necessary logistical support, provide expert advice on specific subject matters or signpost them to relevant resources or organisations who could provide assistance required.

When Members were asked in the survey where their preference is for this “work space area” the results in the chart below show that most of the choices that were selected suggest a preference for locating this within County Hall (in total 79%) area instead of City Hall (8%). Of the total, only 25% stated that this should be located in the existing Member’s Library, while others (in total 54%) have suggested other locations (33% “in the existing Members Lounge” and 21% “in another location”) within County Hall.



Of those who had indicated a preference for County Hall (in total 79%) there is higher proportion within this group who indicated that the existing Members' Lounge area as their preferred location for the "work space" area for Members. This survey result however does not mean that the Members' Lounge should adopt a dual function and continue to be used as an informal lounge, meeting and relaxation place for Members as well as an office space/working area as well.

Most of the Members views during the focus groups and the one to one interviews specified that the suggested dedicated "work space area" should not be incorporated within the existing Members Lounge as those who wish to undertake work should be given the space and privacy to undertake this effectively and not be disrupted by other Members involved in "non work activities" around them.

### **3.8. Other support services for Members**

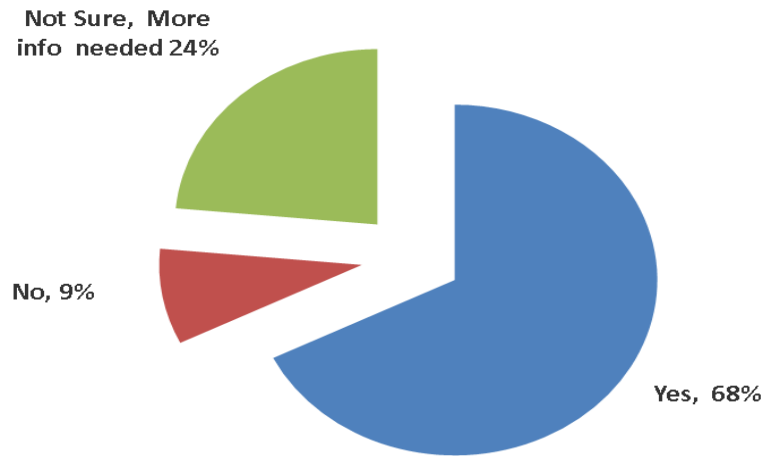
#### **3.8.1. Citizens' Advice Bureau's "Advisernet" software**

One of the facilities/software that Members were made aware of during the focus groups and interviews was the availability of a Citizen's Advice Bureau software called 'AdviserNet'. This software provides essential and up-to-date information resources covering all welfare issues from employment to benefits, housing, debt, tax, immigration, health, education etc. and could potentially be made available within the Members' Library environment. This software is currently made available to Welsh National Assembly Members and their teams and is regarded as generally useful for those who provide advice and information to members of the general public.

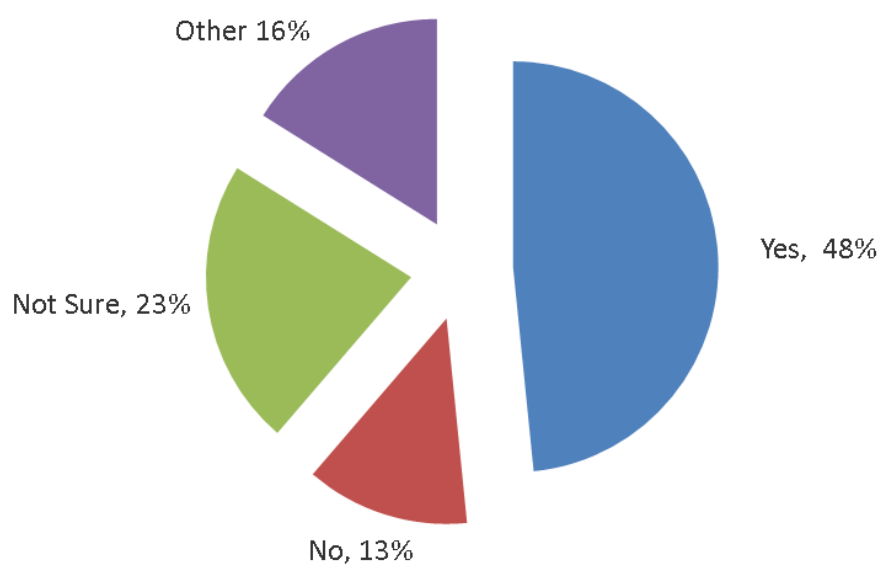
When asked whether they would find access to the 'AdviserNet' software useful in your role as a Councillor, most Members indicated that this could be useful in supporting their individual "casework".

The results of the survey as shown the chart below also suggest that most Members (68%) are interested in being able to access this software, with nearly a quarter (24%) who would like to receive more information about it. Even when provided with the costs of procuring the software, nearly half (48%) indicated that the service area should go ahead procure this.

**Would you find 'AdviserNet' software useful in your role as a Councillor**

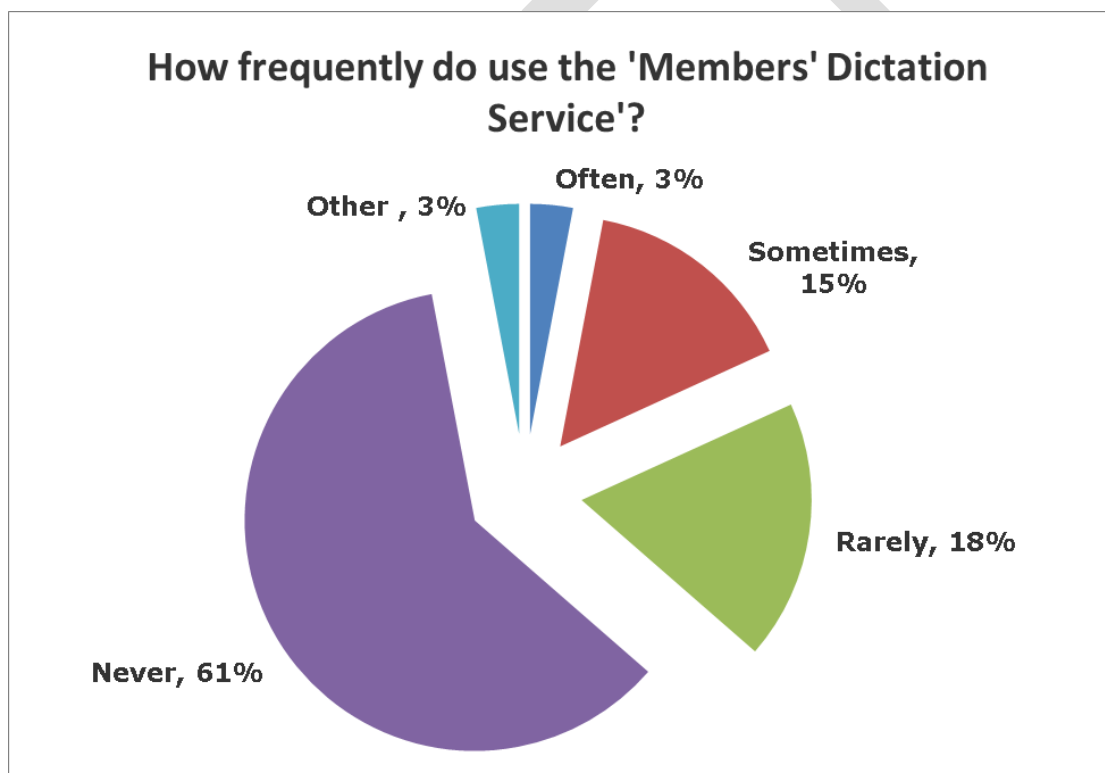


**The current cost of securing a license will be £1908.00 annually. Do you think that the service area should go ahead and procure this software?**



### 3.8.2. Members' Dictation Service

When asked in the survey how frequently they use the “Member’s Dictation service”, the results in the chart below show that the vast majority (in total 79%) indicated that they have “Never” (61%) used or have “Rarely” used (18%) the service. Only a very small percentage (3%) indicated that they use this service “Often”.

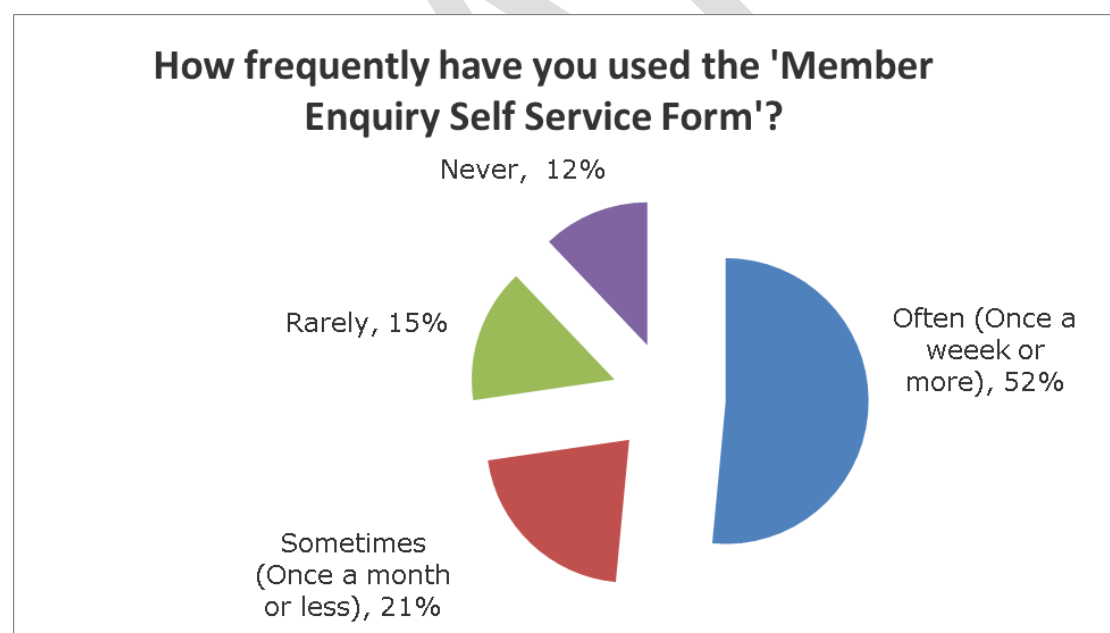


Members' views were varied when asked whether they would support the continuity of the “Dictation Service” given the annual costs of running the service. Although there is only small percentage (in total 18%) of Members

who stated that they “Often” (3%) and only “Sometimes” (15%) use the dictation service, as many as nearly a quarter (27%) confirmed that they would support the continuity of the service, while only a third (33%) stated that that they would not support this.

### 3.8.3. Member’s Enquiry Service

The results of the survey show that there is a good proportion (in total 73%) that use the existing Members Enquiry Service. Just over half (52%) indicated that they use this service “Often” (at least once a week) and nearly a quarter (21%) stated that they “Sometimes” (Once a month or less) use the service.



Those who do not use the service “Often” have justified their choice in saying that they are able to achieve quicker resolution of their requirements by contacting officers directly instead of using the ‘Enquiry Service’. Other Members also cited difficulties in accessing the service as an issue.

Some of the improvements that were suggested for this service include: making use of a feedback and closure report; providing Members with electronic responses through email; having access to a service area named Officer to contact; and the facility to copy individual enquiries to other Council Members and ward constituents.

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