

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 30 November 2020.

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.

Member Services

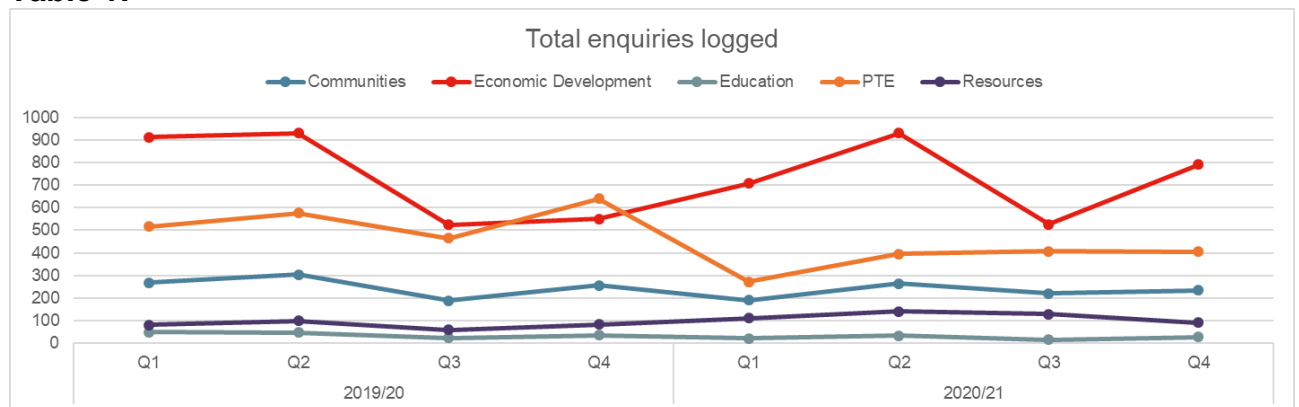
3. The Member Services Team has remained unchanged since the last meeting of the committee. At the start of the initial Coronavirus lockdown the Team began agile working and with the exception of a small number of essential tasks has continued to work remotely to provide the service.

Member Enquiries

4. The Members Enquiry System (MES) is an important tool to effectively deal with the issues raised by residents with their Councillor. Members Services team have operational responsibility for the Members Enquiry System (MES) which includes logging enquiries to provide Senior Managers with data on the key service issues, logging frequency and trends. The complexity and multi-service nature of some enquiries means that response times can exceed the 10 working day Service Level Agreement (SLA).
5. The Members Services team is continually monitoring the MES and responses for Councillors and chasing or escalating matters as necessary. The team liaise closely with agents in Directorates and regularly meet with teams to deal with specific issues in particular in relation to Requests for Service.

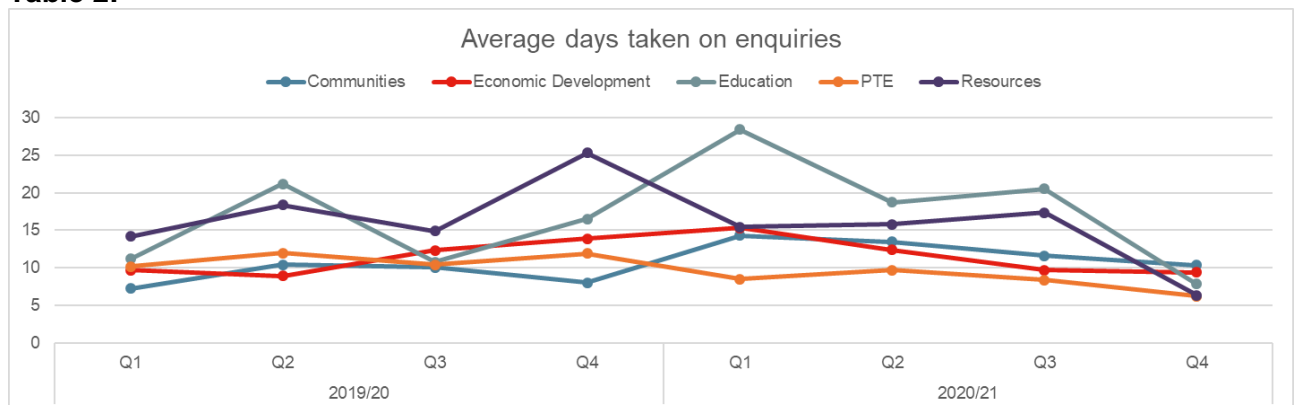
6. In 2020-21, 5901 Member enquiries were logged which was a reduction of 10.72% of the 6,609 enquiries logged in the previous year. Table 1 shows the number of Member Enquiries logged by Directorate in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Table 1:



7. In March 2020, the normal 10 day SLA for Member Enquiries was suspended due to need for the Authority to prioritise the support for the communities of Cardiff during the pandemic. In November, the SLA was restored on the understanding that not all service areas would be able to achieve the 10 day target.
8. As a result the time taken to complete enquiries was generally longer than the 10 day SLA. However, as the pandemic progressed and the focus of the directorates return to more normal business the time taken to address the enquiries improved and at the end of Q4 in 2020-21 the average time taken to complete enquiries had returned to approximately 10 working days. Table 2 below shows the average number of days taken to address enquiries in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Table 2:



9. Although these were average times to complete enquiries some enquiries took significantly longer than the SLA. The team is working with agents, directorates and Senior Management Team to complete enquiries in a timely manner. Regular reporting to SMT has helped to reduce the number of long term outstanding enquiries and this improvement is anticipated to continue in 2021-22.
10. The recent improvements in reporting arrangements of the MES identified some of the shortcomings of the system. The Nethelpdesk software was originally implemented as a call handling system with limited functionality. Its recent upgrade to HALO has provided the opportunity to improve the functionality available including:

- a. Enhancing the ease of recording an enquiry will be achieved by updating the “capture form” process for enquiries and enable elected members to easily record and update their enquiries.
 - b. Developing the data collected for an enquiry to enable meaningful local intelligence to be gathered. This may include having specific types of enquiries i.e. fly tipping which can then be linked to ward locations of the reporting councillors to identify hotspots or trends across the authority area. This will require a full process review to ensure that the systems are optimised to fully support Elected Members. HALO are also developing an MES application for a mobile phone which would allow photographs and GPS locations to be tagged with the enquiry logged using the application.
 - c. The monitoring and reporting functionality does need enhancement to enable the team to identify surges in enquiries with specific services. This may be achieved by have live dashboards with key information identifying any issues or indicating that further support will be needed to address the surge in enquiries in a timely manner.
11. Some of the underspend in 2020-21 has been used to fund the development work with the HALO team. Initial meetings have been held to schedule the review of the MES and to make appropriate cost effective improvements. Further work will be needed by the team to progress the review and the Democratic Services Committee will be updated in due course.

Scrutiny Services

12. The Scrutiny Services Team currently have 4 Principal Scrutiny Officers (PSOs) due to the resignation of one of them in March 2021. A recruitment exercise is being undertaken. It is hoped that the recruitment will be completed in June. The remainder of the team are providing cover for the Environmental Scrutiny Committee and it is hoped that the team will return to full strength as soon as possible.

External and internal Audits.

13. Significant effort has been made in achieving the recommendations of Audit Wales report entitled Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future and the internal Audit of the Scrutiny Function. The Impact of Scrutiny recommendations tracking process is currently being piloted and initial outcomes will be reviewed later this month.
14. The team is also producing a single Scrutiny Annual Report for the 2020-21 municipal year. This will replace the existing individual scrutiny committee annual reports, agreed by all five scrutiny committees. The report will focus on the outcomes that have been achieved and encourage public participation and engagement with Scrutiny. It is anticipated that the new Scrutiny Annual Report will be presented in draft, for approval, to all Scrutiny Committees at their June meetings, prior to being submitted to Council. The Director of Governance and Legal Services has agreed that some funding will be made available from the Democratic Services Reserve to support the development and delivery of this service change.

Electoral Services

15. The team completed the Annual Canvass in 2020-21 with the Electoral Register being published on 01 December 2020. The canvass achieved 90.2 % of voter registrations which was a good result given the changes in the process for recording registrations and that an alternative process was used out to replace the physical canvass which could not be undertaken due to coronavirus measures.
16. The new Electoral Services Manager joined the Authority on 4th January 2021 and began preparations for the Police and Crime Commissioner's and Senedd Elections. These elections were undertaken with a wide variety of additional measures to ensure that the Elections could be safely delivered and which took into account all of the relevant coronavirus safety measures.
17. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act has introduced an additional requirement in respect of engaging with the electorate of Cardiff to improve electoral registrations and participation in election by 16-17 year olds, eligible foreign nationals and hard to reach communities. Options are being developed regarding how this can be further developed to improve the initial arrangements and if any additional resources may be needed.

Committee Services

18. The Committees team began the year with a vacancy in the role of Committee and Member Services Officer and a note-taker for Education Appeals. Some work has been undertaken to address these vacancies using Cardiff works and progress the other options which are being considered to provide career progression opportunities within the team and enhance its capacity to support and develop services for Elected Members.

Remote Meetings

19. Under statutory powers granted in the Coronavirus Act 2020, the Welsh Ministers issued The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 ('the Regulations'), which temporarily relaxed the rules governing local authority meetings during the COVID-19 response period. The Regulations came into force on 22nd April 2020 and were in effect until 30th April 2021.
20. These arrangements have now been superseded by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act which enables Local Authorities to develop a policy for "holding meetings in multiple locations". Guidance from the Welsh Government is being developed will provide an outline of how meetings can be held whether fully remotely, face to face or as hybrid meetings. The Authority is actively engaged with them and once the guidance has been released a proposed policy will be developed and considered by the Constitution Committee prior to its submission to Council for approval.
21. The Committee Services Team is developing a range of services and functionality to deliver the various types of meetings that will be needed for the new policy. These include:

- a. Simultaneous Welsh language Interpretation – the Welsh Language Standards for public meetings remain unchanged. The use of Microsoft Teams as a remote meeting software does not currently support the effective provision of dual language facilities. Microsoft have indicated that a dual language version of its Teams software will be available by the end of June 2021. This cannot be guaranteed and therefore the team have had a trial version of the Zoom software installed for testing and development. Some progress is being made with the use of Zoom but with other commitments this is not expected to be fully realised until July 2021.
- b. Hybrid Meetings – A hybrid meeting which would allow a small number of participants to attend a socially distanced physical meetings using microphones and cameras, as in Committee Room 4, and link to a remote teams meeting with a larger number of remote attendees. The audio visual elements would be integrated and provide a seamless meeting for participating, viewing and broadcasting.

A bid from the Welsh Government's Digital Democracy fund was made for the provision of the hybrid equipment. The grant bid was successful and the necessary hybrid meeting equipment was procured and installed for use in Committee room 4 and in the Council Chamber in County Hall. Testing and development of this equipment for its effective use will be undertaken in the next few months

Webcasting

22. A significant majority of the Council's public meetings were recorded or streamed to the Council's webcasting website with only those meetings which contained primarily exempt information not being streamed or uploaded. This has led to the target for 2020-21 of 5,500 views of the Council's meetings being exceeded with a total of 15,557 webcasting views being recorded for this period.

Modern.Gov and E-petitions

23. Modern.Gov is the Committee Management System used by the Democratic Services team to co-ordinate the production of agenda, minutes, Forward Plans and provides a dual language website with an array of information. Modern.Gov has been procured for a further three years and members of the team have played an active role in developing its functionality.

The Council's Modern.gov software has been updated to version 1506 which provides additional functionality including the provision of a dual language e-petition facility. This functionality will not be made publically available until the team is able to test and determine how it can be best used. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act has a requirement to include a Petition Scheme (with effect from May 2022) and the development of this functionality may assist the council in providing e-petitions within its petition scheme. Proposals for the revision of the Council's petition scheme will be submitted to the Constitution Committee for consideration in due course.

Education Appeals

24. The Committee and Member Services Team have supported the 46 Education Appeals that have been held recently and are planning the support for an estimated 230 appeals that are planned in the next few months. Both the Committee and Member Services Teams will continue to be involved in delivering the necessary support for these appeals.
25. This commitment has been eased by the recruitment of a Committee Officer from Cardiff Works to assist the team in taking the official notes of these meetings. A further round of recruitment is being undertaken with Cardiff Works to identify an additional Committee Officer with the necessary skills to support this role.

Digital Democracy Fund

26. The Welsh Government made £500k available as part of its Digital Democracy fund which could be used to support any bids from Local Authorities to support the digitisation of services provided to support a Council's democratic intentions.
27. The Head of Democratic Services submitted the following 5 grant funding bids for the provision of:
 - a. Zoom software for Democratic Services to facilitate dual language meetings. (£5,000)
 - b. Hybrid Meeting Equipment upgrade to improve and enhance the accessibility for future Council meetings. (£35,000)
 - c. Cyber Security E-Learning Modules for 3 years (£3,000)
 - d. Tablet devices for use with Electoral Services to support the Annual Canvass and to assist Polling Station Inspectors (Tourers) with their duties. (£25,000)
 - e. Democratic Awareness Communications videos to inform the residents of Cardiff of the role of the Council, its Councillors and their Election process. (£35,000)
28. The Electoral Services funding bid for tablet devices was not accepted.
29. Cardiff Council was awarded £35,000 for its hybrid meeting equipment upgrade and £5,000 for the procurement of Zoom software.
30. The Cyber Security E-Learning bid was accepted by the Welsh Government who determined that this module would be funded and provided to all Local Authorities in Wales based on Cardiff Council's recommendation. The Head of ICT has been liaising with the Welsh Government to progress the provision of this E-Learning Module.
31. The Democratic Awareness Communications videos bid was accepted and £50,000 was offered by the Welsh Government for Cardiff and Carmarthenshire Council to work in partnership with the WLGA to provide a series of awareness videos which would be available on an all-Wales basis. An initial meeting of the Partners is planned to be held on 19th May and a further verbal update on the plans for these videos may be provided at the Committee meeting.

Potential Candidate Session

32. The work being undertaken with the Democratic Awareness Communications videos will be used as the basis for enhancing democratic awareness and will be supplemented by the Potential Candidate session. The initial plans for this Potential Candidate session are looking to hold an interactive remote public session between September and December 2021.
33. The Council's Communications Team will be used to promote the session and any members of the public interested in learning more about the role of the Council and its councillors will be requested to register their interest in attending the event.
34. The event will contain:
 - a. A quiz relating to the role and responsibilities of common activities undertaken by the various tiers of Government. (UK Government, Welsh Government, County Council and Community Councils)
 - b. The role of the Council
 - c. An example of the diary of a Councillor explaining the responsibilities and commitments
 - d. The training, remuneration and other mechanisms available to support Elected Members.
 - e. Experiences of current councillors (cross party representation)
 - f. The process for standing for Election as a Cardiff Councillor
 - g. Q & A session
35. To support this session and the Democratic Awareness Communications videos, enhancements will be made to the Council's Website to provide a portal for sharing and signposting information.
36. No budget allocation has been identified for this event and its associated activities. When relevant costs have been identified, appropriate funding will be identified from existing budgets, although some funding could be made available from the Democratic Services Reserve to facilitate the successful delivery of this event.

Member Development

37. At its last meeting the Committee confirmed that a number of Member Development topics would be progressed. Initial discussions have been held to develop and deliver these sessions.
 - a. Completed Learning:

The following Member Learning sessions have been held and the attendance details have been included for information:

Serial	Date	Topic	Numbers Attended	% Attended
1.	09 Feb 21	Census 2021	28	37.33%
2.	11 Feb 21 02 Mar 21	People & Communities All Member Briefing	29	38.67%
3.	16 Feb 21 18 Feb 21	Planning – All Member session	35	46.67%

b. Scheduled Learning:

The following Member Learning session has been scheduled:

- a. 25 May 21 Cardiff Replacement LDP

c. E-Learning - Safeguarding

The Democratic Services Committee agreed that the Safeguarding E-Learning module should be completed to meet the requirements of the safeguarding strategy which identified that 85% of Elected Members complete the module by 31 March 2021. The following table shows the completion status to date:

Status	Number	Percentage
Completed	33	44.0%
In progress	5	6.7%

The completion of this E-Learning module is being followed up by officers with Political Group Whips.

d. Planned Learning:

Delivery of the following learning topics are being progressed:

- i. Elected Member Code of Conduct Refresher – The Monitoring Officer has requested that this learning be provided as soon as possible.
- ii. Unconscious Bias – a facilitator for this topic has been identified and the details for the delivery of this session are being finalised. Any costs for the provision of this learning will be met from the Member Development budget.
- iii. Dementia Awareness – This was identified from a scrutiny recommendation. Initial plans for providing access to the Dementia awareness E-Learning module on the Members portal have been agreed. Many Elected Members have undertaken the Dementia Friends course with their political groups and if this can be evidenced, it will be taken as completion of this learning.
- iv. Biodiversity and Natural Resources - This was identified from a scrutiny recommendation and initial discussions with the Head of Planning have agreed a phased approach which will support the development of the Replacement LDP and subsequently, the wider requirements of this topic will be met with the use of an external facilitator. Any costs for the provision of this learning will be met from the Member Development budget.

- v. Welsh Language – Elected Members have been made aware of the Welsh language courses which are being provided by Cardiff Academy. Learners follow a timetable of three hours online learning per week, with breaks in learning over half terms. They will complete 60 hours between 17 May 2021 and 19 September 2021.
- vi. Rights of a Child in Practice Parts 1 and 2 – dates being identified with the UN providers of this learning.
- vii. Wellbeing of Future Generations – Following the initial pilot, officers are being consulted to provide a wider roll out of this learning which may be combined with the Socio-Economic Duty.
- viii. Social Housing and Section 106 – A request for the Planning Committee to undertake learning on this topic is being progressed with the Head of Planning.
- ix. E-Learning – The following E-Learning topics are available for completion and guidance is sought from the Committee on which topics should be prioritised.
 - a. Dementia Friendly
 - b. Corporate Parenting
 - c. Fraud Awareness

Financial Implications

- 38. The body of the report provides details of the requirements for and sources of funding in respect of Democratic Services activities and services support. Sources of funding include the Digital Democracy Fund, Member Development Budget and the Democratic Services Reserve, with the agreement of the Director of Governance and Legal Services.
- 39. Initial development of hybrid remote meetings and the associated costs have been met from the Digital Democracy Fund; however, the ongoing development of this system may require additional equipment. These costs could be met from the capital funding allocated for the procurement of a new conferencing system, as the hybrid facility will form a stepping-stone to achieving the requirements of the new conference system.
- 40. All costs from Democratic Services activities and services support are to be monitored and contained within the respective funding sources and budgets, and any new costs will require an identified source of funding.

Legal Implications

- 41. 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.
- 42. 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.

43. In determining how to exercise its functions, the Committee must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers: [https://gov.wales/local-government-measure-2011-guidance \(chapter 3\)](https://gov.wales/local-government-measure-2011-guidance-chapter-3)

44. 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.

RECOMMENDATION

45. The Committee is requested to consider the detail in the report and:
- a. note the content of the report.
 - b. provide any feedback on the Support Services provided to Councillors
 - c. receive a report on the updated Member Development programme at the next meeting of committee.
 - d. Identify any matters it would wish to add to the Work Programme.

GARY JONES
HEAD of DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
18 May 2021

Background Papers: None