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## **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

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### **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 the existing legislative 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.
5. An application for a corporately funded apprentice has been successful and is currently being recruited for a January 2024 start date. 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.

6. 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
7. 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, additional staff to support Democratic Services are being planned. Due to the current financial challenges, a full business case is being developed to progress the planned creation of two new Committee and Members Services Assistant posts which are anticipated to be Grade 5 by March 2024.
8. 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 are not within the remit of the Democratic Services Committee.

#### Democratic Services - Proposed Budget Savings

9. 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.
10. 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.

#### Member Survey 2023-24

11. At regular intervals Elected Members are requested to undertake a survey which includes questions from the Democratic Services and Standards and Ethics Committee. On 14 February 2023, the Standards and Ethics committee agreed a series of questions to be included in the next Member Survey in 2023-24.
12. At a meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023, Council approved a Notice of Motion regarding Neurodiversity. One of the resolutions was:

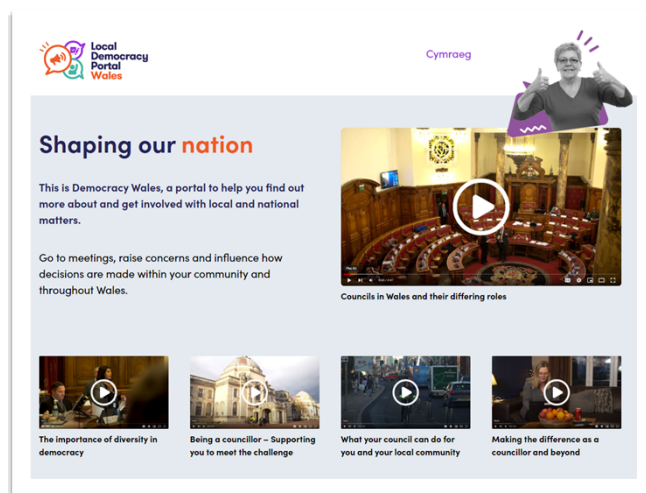
*To review and implement reasonable adjustments for our elected members, to ensure the role of Councillor is accessible to people with neurodivergent traits and*

*conditions and that the skills and talents of all people can be harnessed for the benefit of the citizens of Cardiff.*

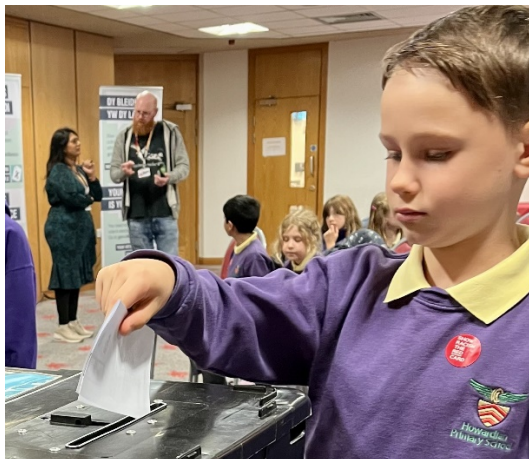
13. To progress this resolution, it is proposed to include a series of neurodiversity questions in the Member Survey 2023-24. The survey would include questions which would enable a better understanding of:
  - the numbers of councillors who identify as neurodivergent.
  - the types of neurodivergence experienced by Councillors.
  - the strength and challenges of neurodivergent councillors and how it impacts their role as a councillor.
  - the measures that could be developed to support neurodivergent councillors in their role.
  
14. Following the survey it should be possible to:
  - a. Identify any initial support that can be made available for neurodiverse councillors.
  - b. provide some evidence for wider corporate discussions regarding neurodiversity across the organisation.
  - c. Identify additional support that could be provided to the existing elected members.
  - d. Identify how we can develop our support in readiness for the potential councillors intending to stand at the next Local Government Elections in 2027.
  
15. The Head of Democratic Services has been consulting with a subject matter expert who has offered to assist with developing appropriate survey questions to ensure that they are correctly phrased and will provide the necessary baseline information. The proposed questions once developed will be submitted to the Committee for consideration and prior to the launch of the survey in March 2024.

### Improving Democratic Awareness

16. In 2022, following a successful bid for Digital Democracy funding, Cardiff received £50,000 for creating a series of videos to improve democratic awareness. The videos and an [all-Wales web page](#) was developed by Democratic Services with support from Cardiff's web team.



17. The website and videos were launched during Local Democracy Week (16 – 21 October 2023). The launch of these videos and webpages was coordinated across Wales using social media posts and local networks and with the support of partner organisations including the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The outcomes from this collaborative work will be assessed at the next Head of Democratic Services meeting with the WLGA in December.
18. In addition, Electoral Services have launched the Democracy Ambassadors Programme 2023-24 for all primary and secondary schools in Cardiff. The aim of the programme is to support schools to implement democratic education and engagement activities that are practicable for teachers to deliver. Participating schools will select their ambassadors to lead democratic sessions/discussions and promote the democratic/voting rights of young people in Wales.
19. To support this work, a pilot of a Democratic Engagement workshop hosted by the Lord Mayor with Howardian Primary's Years Three to Six to help broaden their knowledge of how local democracy works. At this Local Democracy Week event, pupils learned about voting and how election counts work, including taking part in their own mini-ballot. The young people were then invited to take their seats in the Council chamber, trying out the electronic voting system used by members during Full Council meetings, and hearing how hybrid meetings work with some members attending the chamber and others joining remotely.



20. Following the success of this event, 14 schools participating in the Democracy Ambassadors Programme and the Cardiff People First organisation have signed up to take part in similar events scheduled to be held during this academic year. The Democratic Services Team will be looking for support from Elected Members to assist with these sessions to explain their ward and cabinet member roles.

## Financial Implications

21. Any costs from Democratic Services activities and services support are to be monitored and contained within the respective funding sources and budgets. The Council budget report in September set out the £37 million budget gap for 2024/25, 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 2024/25 budget through efficiencies alone, and there will inevitably be a need for savings that impact on service delivery.

## **Legal Implications**

22. 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.
23. 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.
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. Other relevant legal provisions are referred to in the body of the report.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

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

**GARY JONES**  
**HEAD of DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**  
**07 November 2023**

Background Papers:

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