



Complete Agenda

Democracy Service
Swyddfa'r Cyngor
CAERNARFON
Gwynedd
LL55 1SH

Meeting

DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Date and Time

1.00 pm, TUESDAY, 14TH NOVEMBER, 2023

Location

Virtual Meeting - Zoom

For public access to the meeting, please contact us.

Contact Point

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(DISTRIBUTED 06/11/23)

DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP (15)

Plaid Cymru (8)

Councillors

Annwen Hughes
Olaf Cai Larsen
Gwynfor Owen
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Vacant Seat - Plaid Cymru

Linda Ann Jones
Edgar Wyn Owen
Llio Elenid Owen
Beca Roberts

Independent (5)

Councillors

Anwen J. Davies
Eryl Jones-Williams
John Pughe

Anne Lloyd-Jones
Dewi Owen

Labour / Liberal (1)

Councillor Stephen Churchman

Ex-officio Members

Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council

A G E N D A

1. APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

To receive any declaration of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

To note any items that are a matter of urgency in the view of the Chairman for consideration.

4. MINUTES

4 - 6

The Chairman shall propose that the minutes of the last meeting of this committee held on the 15th of June 2023 be signed as a true record.

5. THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES' DRAFT REPORT

7 - 18

To ask the Committee for their observations in order to respond to The Independent Remuneration Panel's draft report consultation.

6. PRIORITIES OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRACY SERVICES - UPDATE

19 - 22

To submit the report of the Head of Democracy Services.

7. SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR MEMBERS

23 - 33

To consider the report.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE, 15/6/23

PRESENT:

Councillors: Dewi Owen (Chairman), Anwen J. Davies, Annwen Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Linda Ann Jones, Olaf Cai Larsen, Anne Lloyd-Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, John Pughe, Arwyn Herald Roberts and Beca Roberts.

Officers: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department / Head of Democracy Services), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Sian Ellis Williams (Civic and Democracy Services Officer), Ffion Elain Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillor Menna Trenholme (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

Present for items 6 & 7:

Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Support) and Cara Williams (Members' Development Officer).

1. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Two names were proposed and seconded for the post of vice-chair, namely Councillor Arwyn Herald Roberts and Councillor John Pughe.

RESOLVED To elect Councillor Arwyn Herald Roberts as Vice-chair of the Democratic Services Committee for the year 2023/24.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Gwynfor Owen and Councillor Stephen Churchman.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

4. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

5. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 16 March 2023, as a true record.

6. PRIORITIES OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRACY SERVICES - UPDATE

The item was presented as a continuation to the annual report of the Head of Democracy Services concentrating on two of the four priority fields noted as part of this report: personal development discussions and a paperless council. It was explained that work had already started on trying to ensure that the Council was moving to be as paperless as possible, to reduce carbon footprint and reduce printing and posting costs, in accordance

with the decision of the Full Council. The intention was to try and move to be as paperless as possible from the start of the autumn term, recognising that changing habits can take time and can be challenging at the beginning.

It was noted that such a change will not happen overnight and it was emphasised that support and guidance was available to guide the councillors through this gradual change. The intention was to offer a screen to the councillors that hadn't received one already as well as offering an opportunity for councillors to arrange 1:1 training on how to use ITC equipment. It was noted that it was likely there would be exceptions to the rule and by undertaking the changes gradually, it could be ensured that there's an opportunity for councillors to contact and present evidence in order to justify why they should be excluded and continue to receive paper copies.

Other matters raised during the discussion:-

- In response to the report, some councillors made reference to their current situation noting why they would need to continue to receive paper copies. The Head of Democracy Services noted that the meeting was not an opportunity to discuss personal circumstances but by introducing the changes gradually consideration could be given to the personal situations of individual councillors.
- The Democracy and Language Services Manager noted that there would be an opportunity for members to arrange a session with the Development Officer to address any concerns they had and asked the members to spread the word on the sessions amongst their co-members. She noted that the Council's officers had already undertaken the change to be as paperless as possible and had seen a benefit in doing so.

RESOLVED to accept the report for information.

7. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS AND COUNCILLOR SAFETY

Submitted - the report of the Democracy and Language Services Manager as an update of what was available as support for councillors. Attention was drawn to the Members Intranet, which was a comprehensive source of support for councillors, the members bulletin which includes a monthly item on the well-being of councillors, and the training opportunities available for them. It was noted that the numbers attending the training sessions were low and the Democracy and Language Services Manager asked the members to share the information on the training opportunities with their co-members.

Other matters raised during the discussion:-

- It was noted that the safety pack for councillors had improved compared to the situation a few years back but that there was still room to develop and increase the pack.
- Some members made reference to the way councillors had to be thick-skinned when dealing with the public out in their wards and that observations from members of the public could be extreme at times.
- It was noted that councillors were used to being judged by members of the public but that the situation had significantly worsened over the past few years. It was argued that the public were far more willing to challenge things today and this was highlighted by current matters.
- Reference was made to the way that the use of social media had increased the criticism of councillors. It was asked if it was possible for the Council to do anything

to help councillors that receive nasty, false messages from fake profiles on social media.

- In response, the Head of Democracy Services noted it would be difficult for the Council to intervene in the context of personal specific messages, but it would be possible to send out a general message against this type of behaviour.
- The Democracy and Language Services Manager noted that the safety pack that was available for councillors sought to get to grips with the different elements and there was a need for councillors to ensure they draw the attention of Council officers to the matters that were a cause of concern to them.
- The Head of Democracy Services added that councillors needed to report any matter that caused them concern for the Council to be able to respond and take appropriate steps. He noted that this meeting was a valuable opportunity to identify the different concerns and risks that face councillors and was an opportunity to develop a fuller risk assessment.
- Praise was given to the support of the Democracy Team and the Legal Service.

RESOLVED to accept the report for information.

The meeting commenced at 1:00pm and concluded at 1:50pm.

Date of meeting:	14 November 2023
Subject	The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales's Draft Report
Recommendation	The Democratic Services Committee is asked for comments in order to form a response to the Independent Remuneration Panel's draft report consultation.
Contact Officer:	Vera Jones, Democracy and Language Services Manager
What is the background and relevant considerations?	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales publishes a draft report every year in October. It outlines the proposal for the subsequent financial year. The draft was published at the end of October 2023, outlining the proposed changes for the 2024-25 financial year. There is an opportunity to respond to the recommendations by 8 December 2023. This year they have drawn up a list of specific questions to answer as part of the consultation. 2. The draft changes, should they come into force, will be published by 28 February 2024 and will be effective for the 2024-25 financial year. <p>The Role of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The Panel's responsibility is to set the salary levels of Wales' Councillors, and their role is fully independent. Since its establishment, the Panel has expressed regularly and firmly that local democracy and public service governance is not cost-free, and that a value must be given to them if we are to enable everyone to participate. It is important to promote a culture that encourages individuals to receive remuneration to ensure that people from all parts of society can participate confidently in our democracy. 4. In addition, the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 makes it a requirement for the Panel to consider the financial implications of its decisions. The Panel has had to seek to balance both elements in parallel every year as it makes its decisions. <p>The Panel's Main Decisions relevant to the Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. A full copy of the report in its draft form is available by clicking on the following link. 	

[Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales: draft annual report 2024 to 2025 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

- Note that the Panel has recently changed its method of reporting, by only reporting on the changes in their annual reports. This can be difficult to follow at times as it is necessary to go back to previous annual reports to fully understand the situation for some matters when 'no other changes' is reported. The Panel has noted that they will need to look at the matter again.

Remuneration for Elected Members.

- The basic salary, which is paid to every elected member, is remuneration for the responsibility of representing the community and participating in the scrutiny and regulatory work and the functions associated with local governance. This is based on an amount that equates to three full days a week. The Panel reviews this time commitment regularly, and no changes are proposed for 2024 - 2025.
- The Panel has decided, for the financial year running from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, that it is right to maintain the link between the basic salaries of councillors and the average salaries of their electors.
- The basic salary will be **£18,666**. The payment for 2023/24 is £17,600.

Higher Salaries for Elected Members

- There has been no change to the maximum higher salaries that can be paid. 18 is the maximum number of higher salaries that can be paid to Group B authorities, which includes Cyngor Gwynedd.
- The table below shows the details of Group B payments for 2023-24.

	The likely remuneration payment for 2024/25	Remuneration Payment for 2023/24
Basic salary (payable to every elected member)	£18,666	£17,600
Band 1: leader	£62,998	£59,400
Band 1: deputy leader	£44,099	£41,580
Band 2: executive members	£37,799	£35,640



Band 3: committee chairs (if they receive a recognition payment)	£27,999	£26,400
Band 4: the leader of the largest opposition party	£27,999	£26,400
Band 5: leaders of other political groups	£22,406	£21,340

12. The posts of the civic head and the deputy civic head have not been included in the cap. The civic heads are senior posts in councils and they are different to political or executive leadership. As well as chairing important meetings, the civic head is the 'first citizen' and the authority's 'ambassador', who represents the council in its dealings with all types of organisations and bodies.

13. The level for 2023/24 has been set as follows:

Civic Head	£27,999 (£26,400 in 2023/24)
Deputy Civic Head	£22,406 (£21,340 in 2023/24)

Co-opted Members

14. This year, the Panel has given attention to matters related to payments for Co-opted Members (see "Decision 5" in the consultation document despite the fact that the title refers to payments made to elected Members).

15. The current arrangements note that Co-opted Members should get financial remuneration on a day or half day basis, with a relevant officer of the authority deciding on the total number of days for which financial remuneration is given in one year, and appoint reasonable time to prepare for meetings.

16. Due to changes to work practices such as more frequent on-line briefing meetings etc., the panel has considered offering flexibility when paying co-opted Members, including an hourly rate as noted in Table 3 of the consultation (copy below)

17. Table 3: Payments made to Principal Councils' Elected Members, National Parks Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities

Role	Hourly rate payment	Payment rate up to 4 hours	Payment rate 4 hours and above
Standards Committee Chairs, and Audit Committees	£33.50	£134	£268
General members of Standards committees that also chair Standards	£29.75	£119	£238



Committees for Town and Community Councils			
General members of Standards Committees, Education Scrutiny Committee, Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee and Audit Committee	£26.25	£105	£210
Town and Community Councillors that are Members of Principal Councils' Standards Committees	£26.25	£105	£210

Other costs

18. No further changes are made to the payments and benefits paid to elected members therefore all other decisions from 2023/2024 still stand and they should be applied to 2024/25.
19. It should also be noted that the report refers to matters relating to Town and Community Councils, but this is not elaborated upon in this report.

Consultation Questions

20. Six questions have been included in the consultation (see **Appendix A**). Note that there are some specific questions to the above consultation and some asking for an opinion on possible decisions for the future. Observations on the following fields are requested:

Question 1. Balance between affordability and sufficient financial remuneration for representatives?

Question 2. Opinion on the flexibility of payments to Co-opted Members

Question 3. Good practice in terms of using the Panel's powers to encourage more sustainable travel amongst Members.

Question 4. Awareness of the Councillors' rights for reimbursements and the steps to improve that.

Question 5. Town and Community Councils

Question 6. Opinion on reports for the future to merge Members' travel and subsistence costs instead of per individual.

Recommendation

21. The Democratic Services Committee is asked for:

- comments in order to form a response to the Independent Remuneration Panel's draft report consultation.

APPENDIX A

Consultation on Draft Report 2024 to 2025

We welcome feedback on this draft Report and have included some additional questions where we would appreciate your views. The consultation period will end on the **8 December 2023**, and you can either [email us](#) your comments or complete the form on our [website](#).

You are also welcome to submit comments in writing to the address below.

To request a printed versions of the Report please [email us](#) or write to:

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales
Third Floor East
Crown Buildings
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Question 1 - Uplift of remuneration using the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

The Panel is fully aware of the current constraints on public funding and the impact its decisions will have on the budgets of Principal Authorities. The Panel is also mindful of our Aims and Objectives to provide a fair and reasonable remuneration package to support elected members and to encourage diversity of representation. We therefore propose to uplift their remuneration based on the average earnings of their constituents.

Do you think that the Panel has struck the right balance between affordability and adequate remuneration for representatives? If not, do you have other suggestions?

Yes

No

No Opinion

Any additional comments

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Question 2 - Local flexibility for payments to co-opted individuals

The Panel has received evidence that it would be more cost effective and fairer to provide for flexibility in paying those who are co-opted to serve on committees of Principal Councils, National Park Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities.

The Panel has therefore proposed there should be local flexibility for the relevant officer to decide when it will be appropriate to apply a day or half day rate or to use an hourly rate where it is sensible to aggregate a few short meetings.

Do you agree with this proposal? If not, do you have any suggested alternatives?

Yes

No

No Opinion

Any additional comments

Question 3 - Encouraging sustainable travel

The Panel would like to ensure that we support environmental sustainability in our decisions about remuneration. We are aware that there are schemes in many bodies in Wales which encourage sustainable travel and we have advised that, if possible, elected members should be encouraged to participate in these schemes.

Do you have any examples of good practice or other ideas of ways in which we might use our powers to encourage more sustainable travel among members?

Yes

No

No Opinion

Any additional comments

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Question 4 - Awareness of the entitlements of representatives

The Panel has seen evidence of a lack of awareness amongst local elected members of the payments to which they are entitled. We would like to find out if this is a significant issue, and if so, we will aim to raise awareness further, targeted at areas where this may be a problem.

Please identify which type of body you serve (select all that apply):

Principal Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community or Town Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire and Rescue Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>
National Park Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is your status?

Member	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-opted Member	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you know that you may be entitled to some of or all the following?

- Remuneration for your role

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Pension (Principal Councils only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Reimbursement of expenses

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Reimbursement for caring responsibilities

Yes

No

- Family absence payments (Principal Councils only)

Yes

No

What steps does your council or authority take to make its elected members and co-opted members aware of their entitlements?

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Question 5 - Publication of consolidated sums for Community and Town Councils

Community and Town Councils are required to submit an annual statement of payments to the Panel by 30 September each year, and also publish this on their website. The Panel have provided a template return for clerks to use. The Panel have discussed and considered changing the requirements for Community and Town Councils when submitting their statement of payment returns. The Panel's aim is to simplify administration and encourage Councils to ensure all mandatory payments are made to individual members.

The Panel proposes that from September 2024, the returns need only show the total amounts paid in respect of the mandatory payments mentioned above. That is the £156 contribution to the costs of working from home, the £52 set rate consumables allowance and the travel and subsistence expenses paid.

This brings these in line with the reporting of the costs of care and personal assistance allowances.

Do you agree that these figures may be published as a global total rather than individually?

Yes

No

No View

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

What are the reasons for your view?

Question 6 - Publication of consolidated sums for other bodies

In future reports, we are thinking of allowing consolidation of the travel and subsistence expenses of members of principal councils, National Park Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities and would be interested in your views.

Do you agree that these figures may be published as a global total rather than individually?

Yes

No

No View

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

What are the reasons for your view?


Date of meeting:	14 November 2023
Subject	Priorities of the Head of Democracy Services - update
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked to accept the report for information.
Contact Officer:	Ian Jones, Head of Democracy Services

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. As part of my first annual report, I reported that I have four priority fields that will receive attention during 2023/24. They are listed below as a reminder for you
 - Safety and support for Councillors
 - Personal development conversations (consultation sessions)
 - scrutiny arrangements
 - Paperless Council
2. The intention of the report is to update you on the priority areas. For information, I will not report on the Scrutiny arrangements to this committee as governance arrangements are discussed and therefore there is a need to report to the Governance and Audit Committee. However, you are already aware of the workshops which were held recently where there was an opportunity for Councillors to discuss our scrutiny arrangements.

Safety and support for councillors

3. A report was given on the steps already taken by the Council to try to respond to the challenges that face Councillors in regard to health and safety in the committee's most recent meeting. Constant attention is given to Councillors' safety, as we are aware that different and challenging situations face you regularly. Social expectations have changed as well as the overall nature of society.
4. You are aware that there is information on health and safety matters on the Members' Intranet, and there are regular updates given on the field in the Members' Bulletin. Recently (during October), an invitation was given to all Councillors to join sessions regarding on-line safety by the Local Government Association.

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5. However, we understand that several Councillors continue to not be aware of the array of information available on the Members' Intranet, and also the important information provided in the weekly Member's bulletin. We accept that this could reflect Councillors' busy lives, with Councillors enquiring about health and safety matters when matters arise. However, it is a consideration for the committee's members on how to ensure better use of the Members' Intranet and the weekly bulletin for Members' that communicate crucial key messages.

Consultation sessions

6. Every member has received an invitation to take advantage of Consultation Sessions.
7. Everyone is different, with various strengths and a wide range of developmental needs. Maybe the individual is unaware of which type of development they need, or what is available.
8. An informal conversation with experts in the learning and development field will be an opportunity to discuss your role as a member, by considering the things that come easy to you, the things that are a challenge and might cause concern, and your future wishes. There will also be an opportunity to discuss how you would like to learn- what suits you?
9. The outcome of the session usually is a Personal Development Plan (a programme that has been tailored for you) with a range of Learning and Development elements. It can also lead to general matters that can be included in the corporate training programme where all the Councillors benefit from the training.
10. Currently, only 3 have attended. It is recommended that you contact the Members' Development Officer (Cara Williams) to arrange a Consultation Session if you have not benefited so far.

Paperless Council

11. It was reported to the previous meeting on the steps we intend to follow to move towards being a paperless Council. Over the summer and the beginning of September, many conversations with Councillors took place.
12. Many of the Councillors now
 - have ordered extra screens to be able to assist them in their work.
 - Some have arranged specific training sessions with the officer from the Learning and Development Service to better understand the equipment.
 - Those Councillors who have declared medical needs continue to receive paper copies.
 - Some other Councillors receive paper copies in specific situations as a result of their role.

13. In addition, it was arranged that officers from the IT service were available on the day of the Full Council to answer questions if any matters arose. There was no interest in these sessions.

14. I would like to remind you that you can contact us if you wish to receive an additional screen, and to arrange a 1:1 training slot at a time convenient to you.

15. I acknowledge that it has been a difficult time whilst adapting, and I am grateful to you all for your co-operation as we drive this change forward.

Other Developments

16. We continue to drive on with other improvements on a regular basis in addition to the list of priorities mentioned above.

17. During the summer, changes were made to the sound system in Siambwr Hywel Dda following observations from Councillors that it was hard to hear some individuals at times. The sound has certainly improved in the Chamber following these changes, but remember the other steps that make a difference:

- Earphones with a microphone should be worn whilst joining remotely to ensure clearer sound in the Chamber.
- Ensuring a wired connection when joining remotely ensures a better connection and also assists with the sound level.
- Members in the Chamber can wear earphones which allows them to personally adapt the sound level in the Chamber.
- Whilst participating, speaking slowly and steadily to the microphone will also facilitate the situation.

18. We continue to hold our training programme that offers a variety of opportunities for you as a Councillor to take advantage of them. Since the committee's last meeting, the following sessions have been organised and held by the Development and Learning service. The number of Councillors that have attended each session is also noted.

EVENT	ATTENDEES (Number)
Mental health and suicide awareness	14
Article 4 Direction: Raising awareness session:	30
101 Data training: A presentation to understand and use data (Wales data)	4
Gypsies and Travellers: Cultural sensitivity training	13



Public speaking	5 (room for 6 on the course)
Assertiveness	10
Recruiting in the care field	15
Training for Scrutiny Committees Chairs and Vice-chairs on legal considerations	5
Adults Departments - Work together to ensure good outcomes for the people of Gwynedd	19
Organised Crime - County Lines	11

19. The numbers appear quite low for some sessions. We will report on the above to this meeting regularly to the future.

20. A report on the training programme for 2024/25 is presented to meet on February of the committee.

Recommendation

21. The Democracy Services Committee is asked to accept the report for information.

Date of meeting :	14 November 2023
Subject	Self-assessment - Supporting and Developing Members
Recommendation	Members of the Democracy Services Committee are asked for their observations on the response to the consultation and the next steps in Gwynedd.
Contact Officer:	Vera Jones, Democracy and Language Services Manager.

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. It has always been essentially important to ensure support and development to Councillors in Cyngor Gwynedd, and we try to ensure that we continually aim towards the highest standards.
2. When aiming for the highest standards, we collaborate and compare with other authorities, and have benefited and learned from their experiences, and we continue to do so via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).
3. Nearly twenty years ago the WLGA developed the Wales Charter to Assist and Develop members, a charter that gave guidance and expectations on the most suitable support to Councillors. The charter has been adapted over the years, but recently a full review was undertaken by the WLGA, acknowledging that there is a need now for a different framework that reflects a more prominent method of improvement. At the same time, the framework needs to reflect the Welsh Government's latest legislation, statutory and other guidance and also acknowledge the increasing restricted resources available to councils.
4. The new offer moves from the more bureaucratic past requirements to submit evidence of achievement for each relevant field. Now, the voluntary self-assessment framework offers different fields that different Councils can concentrate on by self-evaluating their work and acknowledging risks and improvements that will make the biggest difference to the support for the Councillors from each individual Council.
5. The consultation document has been developed by the WLGA, with the opportunity to provide observations until the end of October, 2023. However, we have secured an opportunity to present additional observations if desired after the closing date.



CONTENTS OF THE DRAFT DOCUMENT

6. The draft document has been included in **Appendix A** and it can be seen that three main fields have received attention, which are democracy, the community and learning. On each field, there are specific questions that the Council can choose to respond to or aim to achieve.
7. There is a brief response to the consultation, that was provided by Gwynedd officers, included in **Appendix B** for your information. The committee is asked if there are any further comments on the response to the document.

FURTHER STEPS

8. As Cyngor Gwynedd take pride in trying to ensure that the correct development and support is presented to Councillors, we are very eager to plan to move this work forward following receiving the final Framework.
9. It is recommended that a small group of the Committee's members meet to assess the following within the final framework
 - Is the Council responsible for the field or not?
 - the Council's current performance against the framework's expectations
 - is it a priority from the Council?
 - are there any potential improvement steps?
10. The above steps can then lead to identifying a work programme of improvements that have been prioritised from the success criteria in the final document. As the final document has not been received, the committee is asked to establish the above principle for implementation. We will report back on the timetable and ask for volunteers in due course.

Recommendation

11. The Democracy Services Committee is asked to accept the report for information.

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

Consultation July 2023

Background

Twenty years ago, support and development for councillors in Wales was less well established than it is today. In 2002, the first improvement team at the WLGA (then Syniad), worked with every council and a cross party group of councillors to identify what further support and training opportunities councillors would find useful. Councils requested that good practice in this area should be agreed, described, and disseminated.

In response to this request, and in line with wider UK practice, the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development was co- developed by the WLGA and councils to:

- provide a framework for good practice across Wales,
- be an incentive for councils to provide their councillors with the support and development they needed, and
- provide assurance to councillors that they were being given the best support possible.

Over the last 20 years, the Charter has been further developed and instrumental in both enabling and recognising local good practice. The majority of councils, national parks and fire and rescue authorities have been awarded the Charter, whilst others have used it as a framework to identify good practice and check that they have effective support mechanisms in place.

Since the inception of the Charter, the local government landscape has changed significantly. The role of councillors has become even more challenging and wide ranging. Resources are scarce and ways of working post Covid radically different. Councils now have more sophisticated and well-established approaches to councillor support. The Welsh Government has introduced legislation with statutory guidance for councillors and democratic services. The improvement landscape has also evolved. In 2021-22 a new Improvement Programme was launched to support sector-led improvement across local government in Wales. Leaders and chief executives have expressed a commitment to sector-led improvement, underpinned by peer challenge, support and mutual aid.

Against this backdrop, the Charter has been reviewed by the WLGA and councils represented by their Heads of Democratic Services. We recognise that although the Charter provided a framework for good practice, impetus for, and recognition of councillor support in the past, there is now a need for a different framework which reflects a more progressive approach to sector led improvement, recent WG legislation, statutory and other guidance and which recognises the increasingly limited resources available in councils.

A Councillor Support Self-Assessment Framework.

Proposal

We propose that the existing Charter be replaced by a voluntary self-assessment framework that focusses on the support provided for councillors to deliver the outcomes needed by their communities. The framework aims to cover all aspects of good practice in councillor support. However, as priorities and resources differ between councils, it would be for councils to decide locally how much of the framework to use and which sections should be prioritised.

The framework would be developed according to the following principles:

1. Aims of the framework

- To provide assurance to councils that councillors are provided with the support, information, guidance, and development needed to enable them to secure the best possible outcomes for their communities.
- To provide an ambitious but pragmatic national framework of good practice which recognises legislative requirements, statutory and other guidance, the expressed needs of councillors and widely accepted examples of what works.

2. Principles for development

- To develop the framework collaboratively with councils, WLGA and other stakeholders to ensure that it meets needs and reflects national aspirations.
- To develop a framework which works with the wider programme for improvement and self-assessment in Wales with a potential to develop as part of the peer review programme if required. Councils may decide that this self-assessment should be led by democratic services committees.
- To develop a framework that reflects the needs of all councillors regardless of political party or independent status.
- To provide opportunities for practice sharing between councils.

3. Scope of the framework

The framework would cover:

- support and development for councillors in the widest sense to incorporate support provided by the whole council. Including, but not limited to, for example, democratic services, legal, digital, communications, learning and development teams, and directorates in their support for scrutiny, the executive and frontline councillors,
- the needs of all councillors before election, as new members and as experienced politicians,
- all councillor roles both within the council and in the community,
- the personal and 'professional' support to councillors within the influence of councils and
- the expectations placed on councils, officers, and councillors themselves.

4. Context

The framework will take account of, for example: 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.

5. An example framework for discussion

The framework below is based on the proposed aims and principles and offered as a starting point for discussions between all stakeholders. Councils are invited to comment 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.

Democracy	Outcomes sought: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are encouraged and enabled to stand for office. • Councillors understand their role and undertake it effectively and ethically. • Councillors can participate equally in council business. • Councillors are provided with the support, information, and resources they need. • Councillors represent the diversity of the people they serve. • Councillors are safe and protected from harm.
Theme	Questions to ask
Candidates and prospective candidates	<p>Does the council provide comprehensive information to prospective and official candidates about the role of the councillor, the council and any associated responsibilities and benefits?</p> <p>Are the approaches to the outreach to and information for prospective candidates made according to the need to encourage diversity in candidates and informed by the council's Diversity Declaration?</p> <p>Does the council signpost prospective candidates to information provided by the WG, WLGA, Electoral Commission and other organisations providing information for candidates?</p> <p>Do councillors, the council and local parties promote fair and respectful campaigning initiatives?</p> <p>Are prospective candidates informed about support for standing such as the Access to Elected Office fund?</p> <p>Are prospective candidates informed of the expectations placed on them to take part in induction and continuing professional development some of which will be mandatory?</p>
Councillors understand their role, responsibilities, and accountabilities.	<p>Are all councillors, when elected or when being selected for a specialist position, provided with information and guidance about all aspects of their role?</p> <p>Are all members provided with a competency framework to understand the skills and knowledge required of councillors?</p>

	<p>Have role descriptions (see WLGA models for examples) been formally adopted by the council and agreed by individual councillors?</p> <p>Have councillors serving on outside bodies been provided with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guidance on their role and responsibilities, • legal information such as their accountabilities and interests, • an explanation of the expectations placed on them by their nominating council, • requirements for communication with and reporting back from the outside body?
<p>Standards of conduct</p>	<p>Do all councillors understand their responsibilities in adhering to the local code of conduct? Have they received local guidance and any information provided by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales?</p> <p>Do standards committees and chairs understand their particular roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>Do political group leaders promote and maintain high standards of conduct and cooperate with the standards committee?</p> <p>Have all councillors formally committed to undertake all aspects of their role with civility and respect towards each other, the public and officers in all settings and media?</p> <p>Are instances of bullying, harassment and intimidation dealt with quickly and effectively?</p>
<p>The constitution</p>	<p>Do all councillors understand the constitution including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the roles, responsibilities, and limits to the roles of committees, • the role of individual councillors and officers, • councillor /officer protocols, • meeting practice, • standing orders, • rules of debate, • public engagement, • roles on the council where councillor training is deemed mandatory?
<p>Officer support</p>	<p>Does every committee, panel, forum etc. have an appropriate level of officer support?</p> <p>Are councillors supported adequately in their collaborative and joint work with other councils or organisations, for example on corporate joint committees?</p> <p>Are councillors supported in their community and case work?</p> <p>Are all councillors provided with the information and research they are entitled to according to the requirements of the statutory guidance issued under section 8 (1A) of the Local Government Wales Measure 2011.</p>

	<p>i.e. All councillors are proactively and also in response to specific requests, provided with information, data, briefing and training relating to their decision making, committee work and community and casework.</p> <p>This service is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided equitably to all members according to a published protocol which includes standards and response times, • exclusive of information for party political use, • provided confidentially where necessary and with due regard to data protection and other information law, • undertaken by the council or external agencies, • proportionate and provided within available resources. <p>Democratic services committees ensure that the service is effective and adequately resourced.</p> <p>Do overview and scrutiny committees have dedicated support from officers who can provide impartial research, support, and advice?</p> <p>Has the nature of any support information including research services has been clearly publicised and explained to all councillors?</p>
<p>Equality of access</p>	<p>Are the arrangements made for the business of the council flexible and do they enable councillors to participate fully regardless of personal circumstances?</p> <p>Do meeting times, modes and venues reflect the expressed needs of councillors as closely as possible?</p> <p>Do councillors have equal access to meetings regardless of any protected characteristics?</p> <p>Do the arrangements for multi-location meetings meet the needs of councillors?</p> <p>Are councillors and other meeting participants able to use both Welsh and English in meetings?</p> <p>Do council recess times reflect the needs of councillors with, for example, caring responsibilities?</p> <p>Are job share arrangements for cabinet members supported so that the workload is clear and appropriate?</p> <p>Are occasional physical spaces available for informal meetings on request?</p>
<p>Support for councillors' rights, safety, and wellbeing</p>	<p>Are councillors provided with guidance on their rights and benefits. For example, salaries, family absence, job sharing for members of the executive/cabinet, allowances, tax and benefits, pensions, indemnities, data protection and freedom of information?</p> <p>Are councillors actively encouraged to take up the salaries and allowances they are entitled to and is foregoing allowances and salaries actively discouraged?</p> <p>Does the council have an informal duty of care in place which demonstrates a proactive commitment to protecting councillors' health and wellbeing? Is this recorded and available for members to view? Does it set out the nature of any support available to councillors for example counselling and health checks and those responsible for helping councillors access this support?</p>

	<p>Are councillors provided with guidance on maintaining their wellbeing and personal safety? For example, lone working, bullying and harassment?</p> <p>Does the council act proactively to support councillors who experience bullying and harassment, including liaison with the police if appropriate?</p>
Diversity	<p>Has the council's Diversity Declaration been agreed by the Full Council? Is it monitored?</p> <p>Does the Diversity Declaration set out 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?</p> <p>Are councillors with special access requirements supported in their work in the council and community?</p>
Digital	<p>Have all councillors been provided with the equipment or funding to buy equipment, software, apps and connectivity required to undertake their role in the council offices, at home and when travelling in the council area?</p> <p>Does this include smart phones and laptops/tablets?</p> <p>Has full training been provided in the use of equipment and packages? Is technical support available?</p> <p>Are councillors sufficiently supported in their attendance at multilocation meetings?</p> <p>Are councillors supported in the use of social media through guidance on its use and online safety?</p>

Community	<p>Outcomes sought:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors lead, represent, advocate for, and enable their communities. • Councillors make sure that local resources are available and maximised. • Councillors encourage citizen participation and innovation. • Councillors work with communities to make them sustainable and resilient.
Theme	Questions to ask
Public awareness	<p>Does the council ensure that the public understand the role and responsibilities of councillors and of local MSs', MPs and community and town councillors?</p> <p>Do people know which tier of representative should be contacted for different local issues?</p> <p>Does the council publicise and promote the value of councillors to the community?</p>
Communities contacting councillors	<p>Are systems in place for local residents and community groups to contact their local ward councillor, and/or councillors with specific roles, if appropriate?</p> <p>Are these systems and standards for their application clearly articulated and publicised to the public and councillors?</p>

Surgeries and community meetings	<p>Is the support provided by the council for councillors to organise surgeries and community meetings adequate? Do the relevant officers attend community meetings when requested by councillors where appropriate? Is the extent of the support available to councillors clearly articulated to all councillors?</p>
Community engagement, leadership, and co-production	<p>Are councillors informed, supported and resourced to enable their communities to be sustainable and resilient through, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal and informal community consultation • joint working with community leaders to meet needs at a local level, • co-production with local people of policies and actions which lead to successful communities? <p>Is this support for councillors clearly articulated to all councillors?</p>
Casework support	<p>Are adequate systems in place to support councillors in their casework? Is this support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided equitably to all members according to a published protocol, • exclusive of party-political activities, • provided confidentially where necessary and with due regard to data protection and other information law, • proportionate and provided within available resources. <p>Are councillors provided with guidance on managing casework. Through, for example casework management systems?</p>
Oversight and safety	<p>Does the council have clear protocols in place for protecting the personal safety and wellbeing of councillors which are clearly articulated to councillors and the public? Are the expectations and access of the community managed so that councillors are not contacted inappropriately? Are councillors provided with information and guidance on managing their relationships with the public and maintaining appropriate boundaries?</p>

Learning	Outcome sought: Councillors have the skills and knowledge to deliver what local people need.
Themes	Questions to ask
The Councillor Development Strategy	Does the council have an effective and defined approach to councillor development which includes the expressed needs of every councillor and the needs of the organisation and community?

Personal development reviews	Does the council provide all councillors with useful personal support and development reviews undertaken by people competent to do so?
A learning and development Programme.	Does the council have an annual learning and development programme fully promoted to councillors? Can all councillors access the programme equally? Is the programme regularly monitored, evaluated, and updated? Are councillors able to identify positive outcomes from the training such as improved understanding and performance and specific outcomes for the community?
Induction	Are all new or returning councillors provided with a comprehensive, prioritised, multi session, programme of induction which enables councillors to participate effectively during their first year of office?
Quality of development	Do councillors believe that the learning activities are sufficiently stimulating, relevant and provided in progressive and appropriate styles? Does the council have a systematic and effective approach to commissioning, developing, delivering, and evaluating its training and development activities?
Participation	Do councillors attend all the development opportunities that are relevant to them? Is any non-participation addressed?
Learning from others	Do councillors participate in shared regional and national development opportunities? Are councillors encouraged and supported to collaborate with other councils and national bodies to act as political peers, mentors and in networks to share approaches to the role of councillor, identify good practice and to contribute to sector led improvement?

WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CONSULTATION

MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

(July 2023 Consultation)

CYNGOR GWYNEDD'S RESPONSE

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the development of the old Charter to support Councillors development with the self-assessment that is now advised.

We see eye to eye with the general principles that it is timely to review and update the old Charter, by reflecting new legislative requirements and especially the reduced capacity and the financial challenge that faces every Council.

We are extremely glad to see a shift from the old bureaucratic procedure of collecting evidence and to prove what had been accomplished by authorities towards equipping the authorities themselves to self-evaluate, to recognise their own improvement priorities, and aim towards the changes that will bring the most benefit to the individual authorities. We welcome that this will give freedom to authorities to work step-by-step through the self-evaluation, rather than the emphasis on completing it all at once.

However, we have a certain amount of concern regarding the content and scope of the Framework itself. It is a long list that reflects an ideal world and there is a worry that it could be misinterpreted as specific requirements or rights of Members. Some of the requirements are beyond the responsibility boundaries of local Councils and abuts on political groups' responsibilities (e.g. in the context of prospective applicants, the role of political group leaders to maintain standards) or the Corporate Joint Committee (to support Councillors on the joint committee), other partnerships such as Welsh Local Government Association (supposed to explain the role and responsibilities of Members of Parliament, Councillors and town and community councillors) or the Councillors themselves in terms of their work in the wards. WLGA are asked to take into consider if there is a way to differentiate between the minimum requirement within local authority responsibilities and other requirements.

In addition, we must ensure a correct translation of the document as there are differences in meaning and/or vagueness between the Welsh and English in some places (e.g. an appropriate level of support to officers in the Welsh version, an appropriate level of support from officers in the English version).

Overall, we welcome this movement if it's possible to ensure in detail that the self-assessment is voluntary, and that it is not possible for every authority to fully attain each of the success criteria.