

MEETING	Full Council
DATE	3 May 2018
SUBJECT	Annual report by the Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee with regards to support for Members
PURPOSE	Report to the Full Council outlining the support that has been developed and is being developed on behalf of Members.
AUTHOR	Geraint Owen, Head of Democratic Services

1. The Annual report for 2017/18 is presented below, outlining the support for members that has been delivered so far over the term of this Council along with the elements that are still being developed for elected members.
2. Under the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for specific matters (under Section 11), as follows:
  - Appoint a Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the local authority
  - Review the available support for the Head of the Democratic Services in relation to staff, buildings and other available resources, ensuring they are sufficient for carrying out the requirements of the role
  - Produce a report, at least once a year, to present to the Full Council in relation to support for members.
3. I wish to thank all Members, especially the Chair and members of the Democratic Services Committee, for their support over the past few months.





# THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

## - Support for Gwynedd Elected Members

(May 2017 – April 2018)



RHOI POBL GWYNEDD YN GANOLOG I BOPETH RYDYM YN EI WNEUD • PUTTING THE  
PEOPLE OF GWYNEDD AT THE CENTRE OF EVERYTHING WE DO

## FOREWORD

As a result of Local Government elections in May 2017 it has been a busy year, and the past 12 months has been a period of change, adapting and learning for Members and officers. The Democratic Services Committee has expressed an ambition to continue to develop the support available for Members to fulfil in their role. We are faced with an exciting and difficult period while attempting to develop the support required within continuous financial challenges.

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Reviewing the available support for elected Members in order that they can fulfil their role is a fundamental part of my work and that of the Committee. My sincere thanks to everyone for their past and future input to this important work.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'E. Owen', written in a cursive style.

**Head of Democratic Services,  
Head of Corporate Support Department**

## BACKGROUND

Following the May 2017 Local Government elections, 75 members were welcomed to the new Council, with 51 members returning and 24 members joining anew. Reviewing and developing the support available for you as members to be able to fulfil your role successfully is continuous work.

The work to support members in their roles and the provision available have been independently assessed by a Local Government Association this year, and I'm pleased to report that Gwynedd Council has been awarded "The Wales Charter for Member Support and Development", known as 'The Charter'.

## **What support is offered to members?**

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2017



- ❖ Considerable work was undertaken to prepare for the 2017 Local Government elections held in May 2017. Members of the Democratic Services Committee gave an input into preparatory arrangements, which included preparatory sessions for prospective applicants, development of a website to share information with prospective members, as well as the creation of a short video to attempt to explain the role of a Councillor in simple terms.
- ❖ On Thursday, 4 May, election results from both count centres were announced in a timely fashion so that the public could follow developments as they happened.
- ❖ Also this year, "Welcome days" were held in a slightly different format to what had taken place in the past, the changes based on the feedback of Councillors who were new in 2012. Attempting to strike the balance between presenting sufficient information to enable members to proceed with the work against swamping members with too much information is very difficult. Feedback from the sessions was extremely positive.
- ❖ However, discussions have been held with Councillors and staff to identify good elements, and also to identify matters that could be improved for the period following the Local Government elections in 2022!
- ❖ Thank you to everyone for their hard work during this period.

## GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS



- A new Cabinet was established in Gwynedd Council under the leadership of the new Leader, Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn. The Leader has been very supportive of developing a training programme to further develop the skills of Cabinet Members to enable them to be effective in their roles.
- Scrutiny arrangements were reviewed in 2016/17, and the Council made its decision about the new scrutiny arrangements at its meeting on 3 March 2017, to be operational from May 2017 onwards. The new arrangements have been established, but as with any new arrangement, there is a need to adapt slightly as we proceed.
- The role of the Scrutiny Forum prioritises the right matters to thoroughly scrutinise, along with the relationship between Cabinet Members and the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-chairs. A development has been made in terms of more pre-scrutiny, and there is room to build further on this development to the future.
- I wish to take this opportunity to remind all members that they can raise a matter to be considered as a scrutiny matter by contacting the Chair of the relevant scrutiny committee or one of the scrutiny support officers. The possible item will then be included on the “*gwyntyllu*” log, and a decision can be made on how to proceed – a scrutiny committee item, an investigation, or whether there is a different solution to address the matter.
- In looking forward, we are eager to address the messages that have been received regarding the need to hold informal sessions to enable all members to meet and receive information about a specific subject. A recent example was the informal session held to provide an opportunity to learn more about North Wales Economic GROWTH developments.

## ELECTRONIC PROVISION



- Since 2012, the Council has encouraged electronic communication with Councillors to ensure that information is received swiftly and to reduce the Council's carbon footprint by reducing the use of paper.
- The majority of Members now have electronic devices which enable them to receive information and to support their work as a Councillor. The new devices can do much more than the previous i-pads, which were only used to read committee documents, receive e-mails and manage the calendar. The new devices enable Councillors to undertake their work in their wards, store their documents etc, as well as emails and committee documents.
- However, there have been some issues with the new provision. I corresponded with all members asking for examples of the problems they faced. I have reported on the issues to the Democratic Services Committee in April 2018 noting that issues vary from issues with the device or software, the need for more training or tips to use it better, and specific frustrations with the e-mail “app”.
- We have worked with the TI service, and as a result, the Committee Members have received a report on a possible solution to the frustrations arising from the e-mail “app”. A short pilot was held to trial the solution, and initial responses have been positive. We will now offer the solution in a rolling programme to all Council members.

## COMMUNICATION / INFORMATION

- One of the main issues raised by elected members before May 2017 was the need to be able to receive timely information from one source, and to be able to search for information themselves. To this end, the Porth was developed.
- The Porth offers a number of various elements to assist Members in their work.
  - A 'news' page includes the latest information,
  - e-learning material along with copies of any slides from training sessions to enable distance learning
  - claiming travelling expenses
  - information library

- frequently asked questions
- However, a sub-group of the Democratic Services Committee has already identified that use of the porth in general is quite limited. This is due to various reasons, including the two main reasons, namely a lack of awareness of the porth's content and that it is not as easy to use as other websites.
- Members' awareness of the Porth's content was raised through informal sessions in Area Forums/Committee sessions in March. Constructive observations were received on how to improve the provision and hopefully there will be more use of the resource in future.
- The Democratic Services Committee will monitor this element and attempt to identify areas to further develop if required. This work continues to develop.
- On the other hand, as noted above, there are also opportunities to communicate on specific matters in different ways. We are now considering the way forward to hold informal sessions that will enable members to have a conversation about a specific subject outside committee boundaries. This work will be driven forward in 2018/19.
- The Porth also includes current information about officers within services who can be contacted with enquiries. Responses were received to enquiries regarding difficulties to ensure a response in some areas, and work has been undertaken to try to rectify the situation. Council arrangements are clear that a response to an enquiry should be sought by informally contacting the relevant officer in the first instance, and a discussion could also be held with the relevant Cabinet Member. The Member/Officer contact protocol has been reviewed during the year to ensure clarity on the matter.

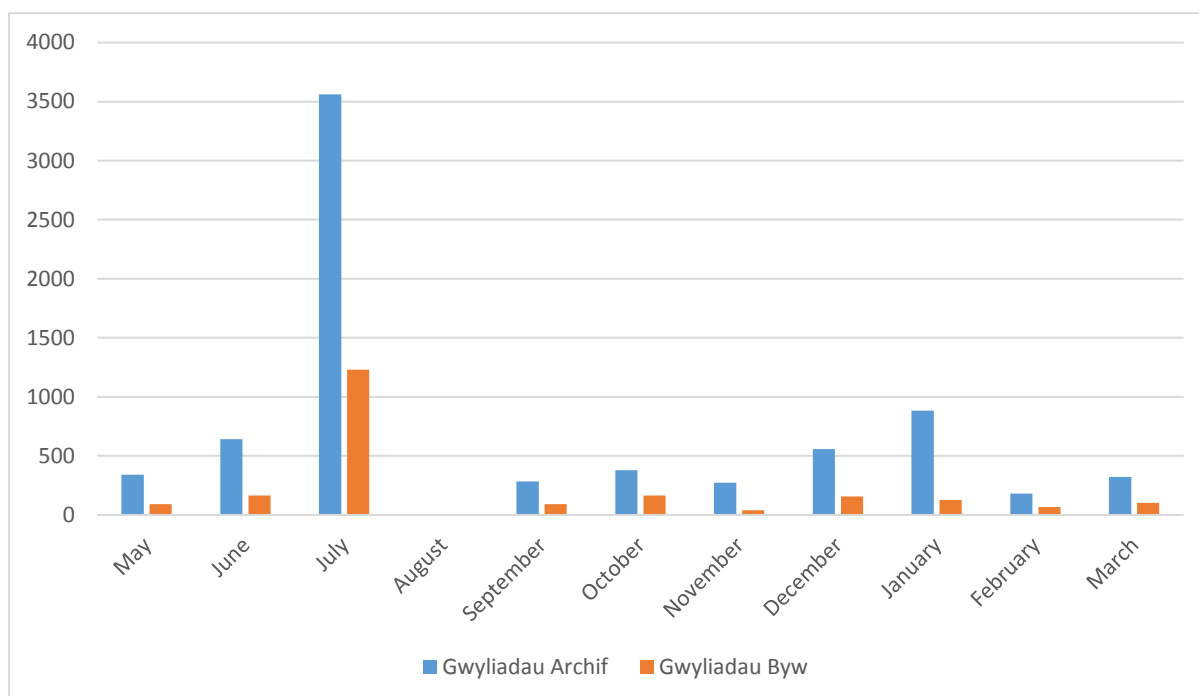
#### LOCATION OF MEETINGS AND ENSURING A MORE OPEN DEMOCRACY



- To ensure a more open Democracy, it is essentially important that the public are aware of what will be discussed at different Council committee meetings, and this within reasonable time. It is managed to ensure that 96% of committee papers are distributed six clear working days before the date of the Committee meeting. Papers are available bilingually on the Council website and on Modern.gov.
- Another element of ensuring public access and a more open Democracy is the Council's plan to webcast the meetings of some specific committees. Many have reported that the ability



to view events via this medium assists them from having to travel to attend a committee meeting.



Again, Gwynedd Council is seen to be at the forefront by ensuring bilingual webcasting provision is available.

- The Council also acknowledges that it is challenging for some members to attend some meetings. A number of informal sessions (such as consultation on the contents of the Council plan, an informal finance seminar for members) have been held on different dates and in different locations across the county in order to try to be more flexible and convenient for Members.
- Additionally, a number of training sessions have been held in different ways. The area forums/committee have been used for training, along with offering on-line training sessions, webinars and recording some training sessions.
- As a large county geographically, we need to develop our practice of using the live video conferencing provision. Also, Skype provision is available on Members' devices, and therefore, it is sensible that we explore how we can make further use of this resource to contact members for shorter meetings. We will undertake further work on this development during 2018/19.

## TRAINING

- An extensive training programme is offered based on suggestions from:
  - Individual members
  - The Democratic Committee (sub-group)
  - Officers and Departments (specialist fields)
- The content of the programme for 2018/19 is still growing and evolving
- The Leadership development programme runs alongside this. It includes opportunities for leaders and prospective leaders to take advantage of Regional and National programmes (through the WLGA). In addition to this, workshops tailored for Gwynedd Council will be arranged, e.g. a '5 Behaviours of a Cohesive Team' workshop commissioned for the Cabinet.
- A range of development opportunities are offered that include 'traditional' training, and alternative learning methods such as workshops, coaching, mentoring, visits and e-learning.
  - There are development titles in specialist fields, e.g. *Planning*, and also personal development titles e.g. *Presentation Skills*.
  - In addition to sessions for the entire Council, other events include training for smaller groups and one-to-one session e.g. coaching. This gives Members more options to be able to attend, and smaller numbers in sessions gives everyone an opportunity to contribute and learn more effectively.
  - Learning sessions through technological methods are being developed, which will be available from anywhere with internet connection, at times that are convenient for individuals. This includes a series of e-learning modules and Webinars.
  - Confidential developmental sessions (one to one) are offered with Officers from the *Democratic Services*, to give Members the opportunity to reflect on their role and consider any fields they wish to develop, and draw up a *Personal Development Programme*.
- To assess the impact of the learning, Members are asked to respond to the question: "*Does the learning and development provision help you as a Member to fulfil your role effectively in order for you to be able to provide a better service for the people of Gwynedd?*" and "*How can we improve the provision?*"
  - Average score for 2016-17: 9.8/10
- All training attended by Members is recorded, and the information is available to them to create Annual Reports.

- The Learning and Development Team is collaborating with IT to create a resource where Members (in time) can see their development programme and personal training record.
- To develop the learning and development programme in future, all Members are invited to meet with a qualified officer to develop a customised learning and development programme to suit their individual needs. Many newly elected Members took advantage of the opportunity, and common development areas were fed into the learning and development programme that is available for all Members. If any Member wishes to discuss their individual development needs then contact myself, or Vera Jones - Democratic Services Manager.

#### OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- Publish members' salaries and costs in accordance with requirements, and manage to influence the Independent Remuneration Committee to adapt their guidelines.
- Develop simpler arrangements to enable members who wish to produce an annual report to do so, and making a provision to publish them on the website so that Gwynedd citizens can see what their local Member has been doing.