

<b>MEETING OF</b>	<b>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>11 December 2013</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MEMBERS' WORK</b>
<b>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>Update the Committee on the resources in place and consider the main issues in order to plan resources for the future.</b>
<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>Geraint George Head of Democratic Services - Strategic and Improvement Department</b>

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 One of the basic responsibilities of this Committee is to consider and make recommendations regarding the adequacy of the provision of staff, buildings and other resources to allow me to support members to fulfil their roles.
- 1.2 As I reported last year when establishing the Democratic Services, many steps were taken to try to address the requirements of the Local Government Measure 2011 within the resources available with the exact staffing structure being the result of general restructuring within the Department to cope with many changes and release savings.

## **2. THE CURRENT SUPPORT**

See a summary of the support for members in Appendix A.

- 2.1 The main emphasis of the Democratic Services is to support non executive councillors in order to ensure that they can fulfil their duties and contribute fully to the work of the Council. The core support is provided through a combination of the Democratic Services Team and other resources in the Strategic and Improvement Department, specifically the Performance Team. In addition, we commission some elements from other Department within the Council. There has been no change in the structure since last year's report.

2.2 The main activities and support are as follows:-

2.2.1 Organise and support the Authority's committees

The Member Support and Scrutiny core team is responsible for providing guidance, organising, supporting and keeping minutes of some 179 meetings annually.

In addition there are some other meetings outside the formal Committee system which require support, including the Business Group and the Chairs Forum.

2.2.2 Promote the Authority's overview and scrutiny role

The main emphasis is to provide independent advice and guidance to the Scrutiny Committees. This support is delivered via the core team and with support from the Performance Efficiency team and also by prioritising the time of other members of the Strategic and Improvement team. The main elements include the Scrutiny Committees, preparatory meetings and the Scrutiny Investigations.

2.2.3 Members' Salaries and Expenses

These responsibilities include providing general guidance and specifically on national guidance from the 'Independent Remuneration Panel' with the administration provided by the Support Unit.

2.2.4 Training and Development

The role is mainly linked with planning and commissioning a development programme and also providing some seminars jointly with Human Resources.

2.2.5 Information for Members

As well as providing guidance, information and responding to occasional enquiries, this support includes 'Rhaeadr' which is supported by a specific officer in the Customer Care Department.

2.2.6 Support for political parties

This support involves organising group meetings, taking minutes and assisting members as required with internal and external correspondence.

### 3. **MAIN ISSUES**

3.1 Members will be fully aware that the financial situation will be extremely challenging in the coming years and the Council will be required to reduce its costs substantially. To this end, it is intended for the full Council on 6.3.14 to adopt a savings strategy and agree on the split of savings targets to every Department for the period of 2015-2017/18.

3.2 There are some specific developments which arise from the requirements of the Local Government Measure and which are already being addressed by the Committee, which require capacity including

- webcasting
- remote attendance of meetings
- annual reviews of development needs
- preparing annual reports

We are planning to cope with these requirements within the current resources but an element of risk must be noted as we will not be entirely sure of the demand for services until such time as we have installed and run the developments in full.

3.3 The implications of our strategy and current arrangements are also vital in the resources equation.

3.3.1 In terms of our priority to scrutiny investigations I am now attempting to support four scrutiny investigations at a time across the Scrutiny Committees. This is an increase of one scrutiny investigation from the original number following agreement that there was a need to respond to the breadth of responsibility of the Services Committee by holding Education and Social Services investigations.

3.3.2 The decision to establish the Area Forums has increased work, namely four Forums meeting six times a year. Again, we are seeking to cope with this within current resources.

### 3.4 **Designated Persons Order**

In this regard, the Welsh Government is placing a new duty on Local Authorities to scrutinise providers of other public services in their areas.

The Government intends to do this in stages, and in the first stage, the suggestion is that it should focus on the following organisations:-

- Local Health Boards
- NHS Trusts
- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- National Park Authorities

Clearly, scrutinising these establishments will increase the pressure on the scrutiny members and officers and careful planning and prioritisation will be required to meet the expectations with the current resources.

#### 4. **OTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

As well as staff support, other reports such as technology and buildings are important to enable members to fulfil their roles effectively. One of the issues being addressed at present is the accessibility of our buildings and specifically fair access for all. I have commissioned work by the property unit in the Customer Care Department to assess what needs to be addressed to improve the situation. I will report to the next Committee with an update on this.

#### 5. **CONCLUSIONS**

In general, I am of the opinion that to date, we have successfully met with the challenges of the Local Government Measure 2011 by establishing the Democratic Service without additional cost and providing good quality support but with room for improvement. It must be acknowledged that there is some frustration regarding capacity to assist members to tackle more issues e.g. scrutiny investigations. However, given the financial climate facing the Council and the need for substantial savings over the coming years, continued consideration will need to be given to opportunities to be more efficient and deliver services with less resource.