

<b>MEETING OF</b>	Democratic Services Committee
<b>DATE</b>	10 September 2013
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Annual Reports by Elected Members
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To learn lessons from the members' experience of producing Annual Reports this year
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Geraint George, Head of Democratic Services

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The Democratic Services Committee is already aware that the Local Government Bill (Wales) 2011 notes that:

A local authority must make arrangements for:

- each person who is a member of the authority to make an annual report about the person's activities as a member of the authority during the year to which the report relates,
- each person who is a member of the authority's executive to make an annual report about the person's activities as a member of the executive during the year to which the report relates, and
- the authority to publish all annual reports produced by its members and by the members of its executive.

- 1.2 The purpose of the Annual Reports by Elected Members is to improve communication between Elected Members and the public. The Minister for Local Government said that the reports will be a means of improving the public's understanding of what local members do and the important role that they have and will enable the public to discover information about the activity of their local councillor.

## **2. ACTION TAKEN**

- 2.1 Following a discussion on the matter at the Democratic Services Committee on 19 March 2013, correspondence was sent to every member on 8 April 2013:
- reporting on the committee's decision to undertake a pilot of the arrangement for 2012/13
  - noting that any member is entitled to produce an annual report
  - asking members to state their intention to produce a report; and
  - notifying members that more detailed guidelines would follow.
- 2.2 In a meeting of this Committee it was agreed that there would be an opportunity for any member to produce a report, but for 2012/13 the Cabinet Member for Customer Care and the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee would produce an annual report in order to guide the remainder of the Council members to produce their report for 2013/14 onwards.

### **3. GWYNEDD ANNUAL REPORTS 2012/13**

3.1 In accordance with the arrangement noted above, annual reports were received by eight elected members in Gwynedd for 2012/13; one member of the executive and seven front line members, namely:

- Ioan Thomas
- Lesley Day
- Elwyn Edwards
- Selwyn Griffiths
- June Marshall
- Mair Rowlands
- Angella Russell
- Eirwyn Thomas

3.2 The annual reports of these members have been published on the Council's website, and up to now the annual reports' web page has received a total of 119 hits.

Data is also available for the number of people who have opened the pdf documents on the annual reports page, and on the individual page of every councillor. The data shows that the number that has been opened varies from 9 for one member to 50 for the member who has received the highest number of hits.

3.3 The Communication Unit would like to draw attention to the fact that changes to the cookies system mean that the figures appear to be slightly lower than they are in reality i.e. if the individual who visits the website does not accept cookies the visit is not recorded on the Council's systems.

3.4 In addition to this, detailed analysis of the figures noted above are not available, therefore it is difficult to interpret their value, particularly in terms of justifying the original intention of the annual report, namely to improve the public's understanding of what their local member is trying to achieve.

### **4. THE SITUATION ACROSS WALES**

4.1 Comparative data regarding the number of annual reports which have already been published is limited, and information about the situation of other local authorities across Wales that is available is presented below:

LOCAL AUTHORITY	NUMBER OF ANNUAL REPORTS	% OF ALL COUNCILLORS
Caerphilly	73	100%
Conwy	15	25%
Gwynedd	8	11%
Bridgend	27	50%

- 4.2 A number of Local Authorities are yet to publish their annual reports, therefore the data presented above is a small sample.
- 4.3 Due to the size of the sample noted above along with the lack of information on the data's context i.e. what type of expectations were set as well as what type of guidance and what level of support was given to elected members to publish their annual reports; nothing more can be done except present this data as it is not possible to consider this further and draw significant comparisons between the sample and Gwynedd.

## **5. LESSONS TO BE LEARNT**

- 5.1 Given that this is the first time elected members have been required to produce and publish annual reports, lessons need to be learnt from this initial experience.
- 5.2 A short questionnaire has already been distributed to eight elected members asking:
1. How easy was the process of producing the report?
  2. Did you feel that you had received enough guidance and support?
  3. Have you seen the value of producing such a report?
  4. Have you used the report or its contents in your ward work in any way?
  5. In the future do you think preparing a standard template for each councillor to follow would be useful?
- 5.3 Initial messages from these questionnaires generally suggest that:
1. the process of drawing up these reports has been relatively easy on the whole having received guidance before hand.
  2. the guidance and support that was given was sufficient on the whole.
  3. the process of producing the annual reports had highlighted the importance of retaining a record of events.
  4. no extensive use has been made of the reports thus far.
  5. a template would be useful but not necessary.
- 5.4 It is also suggested that there is a need to gain an understanding of the mindset of those members who decided not to draw up an annual report this year, and if they were to draw up annual reports in the future, what type of support would they need to achieve the aim.
- 5.5 The initial data of other Local Authorities across Wales relating to the number of annual reports that were published, possibly reflect the variation in terms of what the different counties expected of the elected members. In addition, it shows the variety in the level of support and guidance that was available to the elected members when producing and publishing their annual reports in different counties across Wales.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 It is recommended:

- to hold discussions with the elected members who did not publish annual reports this year to identify what support and guidance they would need to publish annual reports in 2013/14
  
- to submit a report in the next Democratic Services Committee following these discussions, including clear and definite recommendations that would facilitate the process of enabling elected members to draw up and publish annual reports in 2013/14.