

<b>MEETING</b>	Full Council
<b>DATE</b>	17 July 2014
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Annual Report from the Head of Democratic Services on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee with regards to support for members
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To submit an update to members regarding the support available and developments realised and those in progress.
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Councillor Lesley Day Chair – Democratic Services Committee
<b>RELEVANT OFFICER</b>	Geraint George Head of Democratic Services

1. Under the new 2011 Local Government (Wales) Measure, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for specific matters (Under Section 11), as follows:
  - Fulfil the local authority's role to appoint a Head of Democratic Services
  - Review the support available with regards to staff, buildings and other resources available to the Head of Democratic Services, in order to ensure they are sufficient for the requirements of the role
  - Produce a report, at least annually, to be presented to the full council in relation to the above.
  
2. As you are aware, Geraint George, Head of the Strategic and Improvement Department was appointed to the role of Head of Democratic Services on 29 May 2012.
  
3. On 2 May 2013, a report was submitted to the full Council outlining the support available for the Head of Democratic Services and elected members, including the support which was being developed.
  
4. The following provides an update of the current situation with regards to support for members.
  - A. Supporting effective communication?**
    1. **Information / Workshops/ Consultation** - Several workshops were held for Elected Members in 2013/14, including workshops on the preparation of the Strategic Plan, the Waste Strategy, engagement workshops and savings workshops. The informal feedback from members who attended the workshops was favourable and we will be seeking further similar opportunities over the coming year.

2. **Champions** – A generic job description for the “champions role” is in place and several have been appointed although some of these appointments need to be reviewed, and others to be confirmed:

• Older People	Gareth Thomas
• Carers	Eryl Jones Williams
• Autism	Elin Walker Jones
• Member Development	Lesley Day
• Scrutiny	Peter Read
• Disability	Peter Read
• Poverty Prevention	Brian Jones
• The Welsh Language	Craig ab Iago
• Voice of Children and You People	Mair Rowlands
• Homelessness	(To be confirmed)
• Equality	(To be confirmed)
• Fairtrade	(To be confirmed)
• Health and Safety	(To be confirmed)
• Biodiversity	(To be confirmed)
• Armed Forces	(To be confirmed)

3. **Area Forums** – During 2013/14, the Council piloted a system of Area Forums. The four Area Forums (Bangor / Ogwen, Gwyrfai, Dwyfor (Area Committee) and Meirionnydd) have been operational during 2013/14. A review was undertaken of the Forums at the end of 2013/14. Overall, they were seen as a success and the consensus was that they should continue in the same form in 2014/15.

4. **Electronic Information and Communication** - Every elected member has received the offer and the opportunity to receive an i-pad and basic training on how to use it and a further session on how to make better use of the i-pad. During 2013/14, there were further training sessions and 1:1 sessions for those elected members who wished to receive further support in using the i-pad.

By now, nearly 70 of the 75 members have received an i-pad to assist them with their work as elected members and a substantial number use them as their main method of communication and they report that they receive information far more easily and in a timely manner through the i-pad.

Some elected members have no i-pad provision and others have made specific requests to receive paper copies of the documentation for some committees. Since implementing the system we have seen a gradual increase in the number of members who request paper copies despite the fact that they have an i-pad and we are keeping an eye on the situation. However, since introducing the i-pad for members, savings of over £17,000 per annum have been made in the Democratic Services budget alone with further savings made in individual departmental budgets. There is a possibility of a further £5,000 annual saving if members continue to make use of the i-pad instead of paper copies. In total, this saving

could contribute nearly £90,000 to the Councils deficit during the term of the Council.

During this time, there have been some difficulties with a few i-pad accounts and it is crucial for members to contact the IT Help Desk on 01286 679 114 for assistance. Work is in the pipe line to enable members to make more use of the i-pad and in the autumn, it is intended to trial some apps that would enable members to create short word processing documents

5. **Information Bulletins** – The *Rhaeadr* Information Bulletin is distributed usually every fortnight to update all members, covering Information about what the Cabinet or individual members of the Cabinet are doing, member support issues, what is happening more widely within the Council (latest news / press releases) and matters within wards (road works / disposal of properties etc.)

During 2013/14 a review was undertaken of *Rhaeadr* including gathering the opinion of members about their use of it. As a result of the review it was decided to continue to publish *Rhaeadr* every fortnight for an additional year and to fund it from a one-off budget for that year. It will be necessary to consider bidding for the resource if there is a desire to continue beyond that.

6. **Cabinet Members' Reports to the Council** – The system of having an individual Cabinet member reporting on an element of his / her work at every Council meeting, with an opportunity for questions has been in operation. The Cabinet Members for Resources, Environment and Healthy Gwynedd and Council Leader have all presented to the Council.
7. **Meetings between Scrutiny Chairs and the Cabinet** - A protocol has been established on the relationship between Scrutiny and the Cabinet to ensure respect and collaboration in order to achieve the best for the residents of Gwynedd. There are usually two meetings a year with the discussions being open and constructive to assess progress to date and share lessons learnt by the Scrutinisers and Cabinet. The direction of scrutiny was also agreed as members of the Scrutiny Forum and the Cabinet agreed on a Scrutiny Strategy for the next three years. There will also be a discussion on the Scrutiny Programme for the year to come.
8. **Social Media** – The full Council has, of course adopted a protocol on the use of social media by councillors to give members guidance on the opportunities and potential pitfalls in such use. Councillors have now been invited to express an interest in further training on this issue and arrangements to organise this are in hand.
9. **Web-casting and Community Council websites** – The Democratic Services Committee has agreed to the introduction of web-casting of some key council meetings. Work is underway to introduce this over the coming months in order to increase democratic accountability and public awareness of the work of the

Council. Specific training will be provided to members prior to the system going live. At the same time the Council has been promoting the development of Community Council web-sites, using a Welsh Government grant to do so. Approximately 29 community councils are keen to take advantage of the grant individually with 20 councils also expressing an interest in working with neighbouring councils to procure web-provision jointly. The Information Technology Department has recently prepared a specification to help with that.

## **B. Support for elected members to undertake their specific duties**

10. **Personal Development Interviews** – In the last week or so, members outside the Cabinet have been contacted to offer the possibility of a Personal Development Interview to provide an opportunity to assess their development needs. The aim is for those interviews to have been completed by the end of September. Currently, we are awaiting replies from individual councillors as to whether they wish to take advantage of this opportunity.
11. **Developments in the local area** - Some such information is included in *Rhaeadr* but this is an area requiring further attention. A joint Task Group of elected members and officers will be looking at this over the coming months and bringing forward proposals for improvement.
12. **Responding to enquiries or complaints by Local Members** - A procedure is already in place to ensure that a local member contacts the specific service first to seek an answer to an enquiry. If the answer provided is not adequate, the specific matter should be referred to the attention of the relevant Cabinet Member to ensure a response is received. Members have been urged to use the appropriate systems as it is more likely to lead to a resolution to the enquiry.
13. **Individual Member's Right in Cabinet meetings** - The local member is invited to be present if a local matter arises. It is the Cabinet Team's responsibility to identify local members for local items and the local member's responsibility to ensure that he / she is aware of the content of the Cabinet's agenda.
14. **Promoting the role of the Councillor** – The Welsh Government commissioned a survey of Local Government Candidates for 2012 and published its findings during 2013/14. The main findings of the survey was that there is a lack of diversity amongst Local Government Candidates, in terms of young people, ethnic minorities and women. For example, only 32 per cent of elected councillors were female, 57% of councillors were over the age of 60 and 99.4% of elected councillors were white. As a result a national task group has been set up looking at widening participation. In Gwynedd, discussions have started on developing a forward plan in preparation for the 2017 Local Government elections that could include visiting schools - and speaking to primary classes about debates, speaking to secondary schools for 5th and 6th form pupils and contacts with other key groups.

15. **Disabled Access** – During the year, Councillor Peter Read, the Disability Champion and Geraint George, the Head of Democratic Services commissioned a report on accessibility to the Council Offices. The Democratic Services Committee has approved a sensible programme of adaptations to improve this.

**C. Support for scrutiny members and other committees**

16. **Independent advice and guidance for the Chairs and members of the Scrutiny Committees** – The Head of Democratic Services, Senior Manager (Corporate Commissioning) and the team within the Strategic and Improvement Department advise the committees on their work programme, hold preparatory meetings and advise on the live work programme to ensure that scrutiny adds value.

The three Scrutiny Committees have received training on their role and receive independent advice and guidance. Additionally, the Scrutiny Forum, which now includes the Chairs and Vice-chairs of the Audit Committee and Democratic Services Committee, considers the work programme and priority fields across all committees. At present it also considers performance issues and refers any issues of concern to the relevant Preparatory Meeting.

17. **Administer and record minutes of meetings and publish the minutes** (scrutiny and others) – The Support Team arrange and minute in brief the work of the scrutiny and other committees. The style of committee minutes are under review currently following observations in the governance review of the Audit Committee to make them more concise and clear.

It should be noted that there has been work undertaken to modernise Dafydd Orwig Chamber and Hywel Dda Chamber. The sound and translation systems have improved greatly at Dafydd Orwig Chamber, and the new voting system is easier to use although there have been some teething problems in its use.

The modernisation work prepares us further for the future requirements in the context of webcasting and remote attendance. Specific training on this issue will be offered as the system is introduced.

18. **Scrutiny Investigations** – The Investigations undertake work to examine the effect of policies on the ground. During 2013/14, members of the Scrutiny Committees supported by the Democratic Service Unit and the Senior Officers of the Strategic and Improvement Department undertook several 'start and finish' scrutiny investigations. Four have already reported to the Scrutiny Committees and the recommendations submitted to the relevant Cabinet Member whilst three other scrutiny investigations are ongoing.

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

- Sustainable Procurement
- The Rural Agenda

#### Services Scrutiny Committee

- Quality of Education
- Care (continuing)
- Welsh Language Education (continuing)

#### Communities Scrutiny Committee

- Bangor Pride
- Post 16 Education Transport (continuing)

### **Ch. Support for all members – administrative, practical and developmental**

**19. Administrative support for the political groups** - Administrative support for political groups is implemented in accordance with the Council's decision in May 2012 with the three largest groups receiving administrative support according to their size.

**20. Administrating, processing and paying wages and travelling costs** - Administrating, processing and paying wages and travelling costs in line with the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales's guidelines. The claiming guidelines are on the website.

A report from Internal Audit in 2012/13 confirmed that the arrangements are correct but that there was room to remind members to submit their application on a monthly basis in accordance with the guidance. As a result, in 2013/14 *Rhaeadr* was used to remind members of the guidelines and the need for them to submit their applications on a monthly basis.

There are developments ongoing regarding the possible taxation of members travelling allowances when attending meetings of the Council. Members were informed of this in *Rhaeadr* and we will be sharing further guidance when the position becomes clearer

**21. Annual reports from elected members** – The Council must make arrangements to enable elected members to produce and publish annual reports but it is not compulsory for any member to prepare such a report. A pilot of the procedure was implemented in 2012/13 and as a result, eight annual reports for 2012/13 were published. As a result, this year, we have produced a standard template to assist members in producing annual reports in 2013/14 with data on the number of committees attended and the number of training sessions attended by each individual member already included. Members have been asked to return their reports by 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2014. These reports will be published on the Council's website.

**22. A comprehensive programme of training** - A cross-party sub-group (a combination of new and more experienced members) gave advice on the areas of training that members wished to see and the Learning and Development

Service continued with plans and adapted the training programme for members based on the work of the group.

During 2013/14, a varied programme was offered to members including sessions on Schools Performance Data, Housing Allocation and Homelessness, Propriety and Planning Matters, Corporate Parenting and Chairing Skills. The better attended course have had 20 – 30 members attending but some have seen as few as 5-10 members in attendance. This is a matter of concern and the content and delivery of sessions are regularly reviewed in order to make them as useful and attractive as possible for members.

Further work is ongoing at the moment to respond to the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and to try to ensure that Gwynedd Council progresses to achieve the Welsh Local Government Association's Member Support and Development Charter.