

GWYNEDD COUNCIL

Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council

Date of Meeting:	1 December 2022
Title of Item:	Support for Councillors – report on the findings of Councillor Survey.
Cabinet Member	Councillor Menna Jones
Contact Officer:	Ian Jones, Head of Democracy Services

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

The Council is asked to accept the information and ask the Head of Democracy Services to use the results as a basis to form the Committee's Calendar for 2023/24 in accordance with the relevant Statutory Guidance.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

2. SURVEY FOR COUNCILLORS

2.1 The purpose of today's report is to report back on the results of a survey sent to all Councillors in October 2022. There were three elements to the questionnaire, as follows:

- The timing of Council meetings
- Councillors' satisfaction with the Democracy Team Service
- Communication with Councillors

2.2 The report outlines the response to some of the matters raised, but the main purpose of today's report is to present the results of the questionnaire to you for information.

Timing of Council Meetings

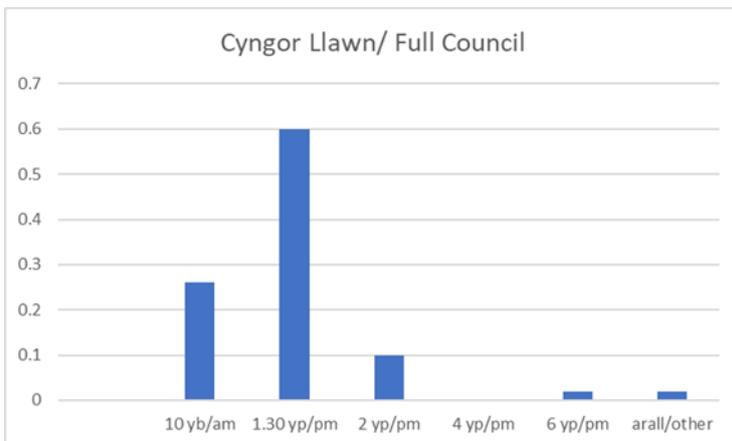
2.3 Statutory guidance (currently in draft form) have been published under section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 on the timing of Council meetings. Councils are required to conduct a survey at least once soon after every Election to assess the choices of Councillors and to commit to act on the

conclusions. The survey should be held no later than six months after the general elections. The guidance also places an emphasis on responding to the results of the survey.

2.4 In order to comply with the statutory guidance, we sent a questionnaire to all Councillors during October. One of the elements in question was to seek views on the timing of the Council's meetings.

2.5 42 members answered the questionnaire in full. See below an analysis of the responses received, along with an outline of the next steps.

2.6 Full Council

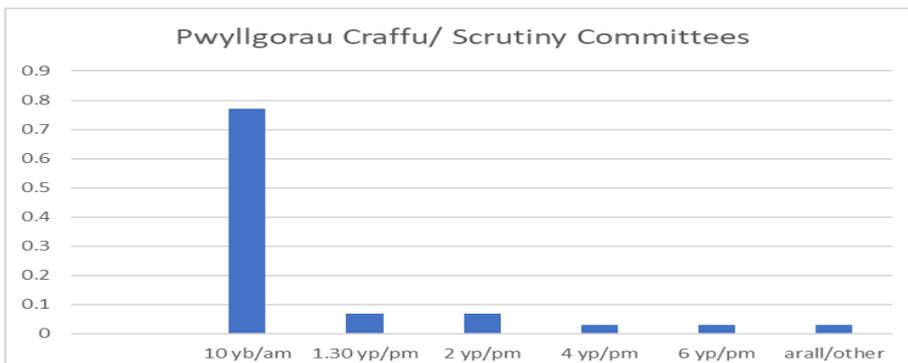


60% noted the desire for the meeting to be held at **1:30pm**, with 26% noting 10am, 10% noting 2pm and 2% noting 6pm or another time. Comments were received which outlined the need to start in the afternoon as the political groups needed to be able to meet during the morning and have an opportunity to discuss the agenda.

2.7 Cabinet

75% of the Cabinet members who submitted a response noted the desire for the meeting to commence at **1:30pm**, with 25% noting 10am. The timing of its meetings is a matter for the Cabinet itself; however, this is reported here for information.

2.8 Scrutiny



In terms of the timing of the Scrutiny committees, **77%** noted that they were eager for them to commence at **10am**, with 7% noting 1:30pm, 7% noting 2pm and 3% noting 4pm, 6pm or another time.

Comments were received noting that scrutiny committees should continue to be held in the morning as it was then possible to do ward work in the afternoon, or if it was a lengthy meeting, starting in the morning meant that it was possible to have a lunch break before reconvening for an afternoon session.

2.9 Planning

56% noted the desire for the Planning Committee to commence at **10am**, with 28% noting 1:30pm, 11% noting another time, and 5% noting 6pm. One individual noted that they had chosen 10am as the most favourable time, but that they realised that site visits were held on the morning of the meeting on occasions, and that this would work against this arrangement. Further consideration will be required to consider the result along with the practical implications of changing the time as the meetings calendar for next year is prepared.

2.10 Other Committees

In terms of the other committees being held, it was noted by **68%** that they wished for these committees to commence at **10am**, with 12% noting 1:30pm, 8% noting 2pm, and 3% noting either 4pm or 6pm or other.

2.11 The following selection of comments on the timing of committees represents the main messages presented:

“As a Councillor who also has a full-time job, it is not possible for me to attend every meeting that is held during the day. The meetings that are held at 16:00 work much better for me personally.”

“For other committees, if they are held in the morning then this provides flexibility to continue into the afternoon, if more time is needed. I prefer to avoid evening meetings as many meetings in the community are held at this time, e.g. school governors, community councils, voluntary groups, political groups”

“meetings during the day work better - many other demands during the evening”

"No specific reason to be honest, I just feel that it is important to commit to the Council's work in the morning (the Full Council is the exception due to the Group meetings)! I WOULD NOT like the meetings to be held in the evening, only as an exception."

“I would be glad if committees were held in the morning if possible; I would also be glad if committees, training and Council meetings would be held on specific days, such as Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, instead of

things being spread across the whole week. This would enable me to arrange and plan things better.”

- 2.12 In addition, comments were presented about the length of committees. There were clear messages about the need to ensure a break for a sensible length of time if any Committee meeting ran for a long time. This was required in order to allow individuals (both Councillors and staff) to have some time to eat, do some light exercise/move and take a break from the screen at a virtual meeting or when joining remotely during a multi-location meeting.
- 2.13 Obviously, it is not possible to meet everyone's needs, however in accordance to the statutory guidance under the provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 we must respond to the results, acting on the recommendations of the majority. The next step is to use the above information as a basis to discussions in order to create the Committees Calendar for 2023/24.

Councillor Satisfaction with the service from the Democracy Team

- 2.14 We are eager to improve our service on a continuous basis and to provide the support that is needed for Councillors. Therefore, following the Post-Election welcome period for Members, it was timely to ask for feedback on the service being offered by the democracy team specifically.
- 2.15 A range of questions were asked, including the satisfaction with the work of the team and any developments the team could make in the future. Again, 41 Councillors responded to the questionnaire in full and noted their views about the team's service.
- 2.16 **95%** noted that the service was **very good, or good**, with 2 councillors noting that the service was acceptable.
- 2.17 A number of additional responses were received, which included the following:
“The team has been welcoming since I commenced in the post and are very supportive to any enquiry”

“The team has been supportive, active and has always been there to help and enable me as a new councillor.”

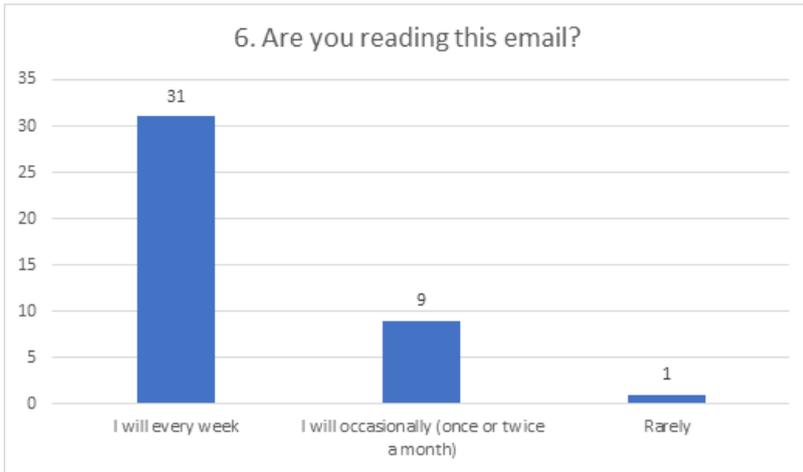
“Effective communication, courteous, conscientious and friendly.”

“In eighteen years, I don't think I've ever experienced any problems and have always found the team members to be very helpful.”
- 2.18 Members were asked if there were any developments or changes the team could implement to further support Councillors in their role. Amongst the observations, frustration was expressed regarding the democratic/ political actions in the Council. This was a political issue.

- 2.19 Amongst the other comments were the following. One member made a request for an informal 'mentor', and a weekly list of the training available. The request has already been forwarded to the Learning and Development Team so that direct discussions can be held with the individual.
- 2.20 An enquiry was made about which documents are available on the Members' Intranet. As a result of the comment, we will be sending information over the coming weeks to outline the content of the members' intranet so that everyone is aware of the very useful information contained.
- 2.21 One member expressed discontent at the way that attendance at meetings was currently noted, and we will arrange a meeting with the individual over the coming weeks to discuss the matter.
- 2.22 One member requested a confirmation email when the democracy team receive an apology from a member unable to attend a meeting. The team will move to act on sending a message of acknowledgement in the near future; however, this will only be actioned for apologies that are received in good time.
- 2.23 We are eager to improve our service and continuously state and try and respond to requirements. In addition to the electronic questionnaire that is sent to Councillors twice a year, we have reinstated our arrangements to hold a conversation with 2 or 3 Councillors per month to discuss the support being offered in order to gain a better understanding of the barriers.

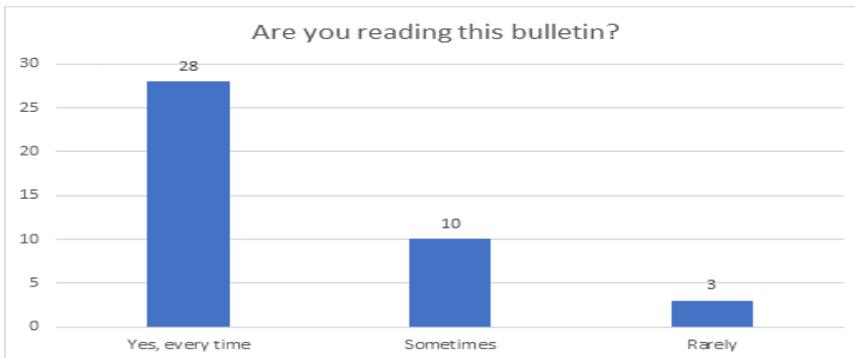
Communicating with Councillors

- 2.24 The exercise was also an opportunity to ask Members' opinions about the methods the Council's Communication and Engagement Service uses to share news / useful information with Councillors and how the service can be improved, so as to help Members with their work.
- 2.25 Questions were asked about four general areas – the Weekly Bulletin for Members; Council Leader and Deputy Leader Bulletin; Members' Intranet; the intention of organising briefing meetings and/or briefing notes on key issues.
- 2.26 There was positive and constructive feedback about these points, which will help the Service to continue to meet the needs of Elected Members. Here is an outline of the responses received:
- i) **Members' Bulletin**, which is sent weekly to all councillors via e-mail, containing links to news items on the intranet and some other relevant items:
- **76%** (31) said that they **read it every week**;
 - **22%** (9) said they read it **occasionally** (once or twice a month);
 - **2%** (1) said that they **rarely** read it.



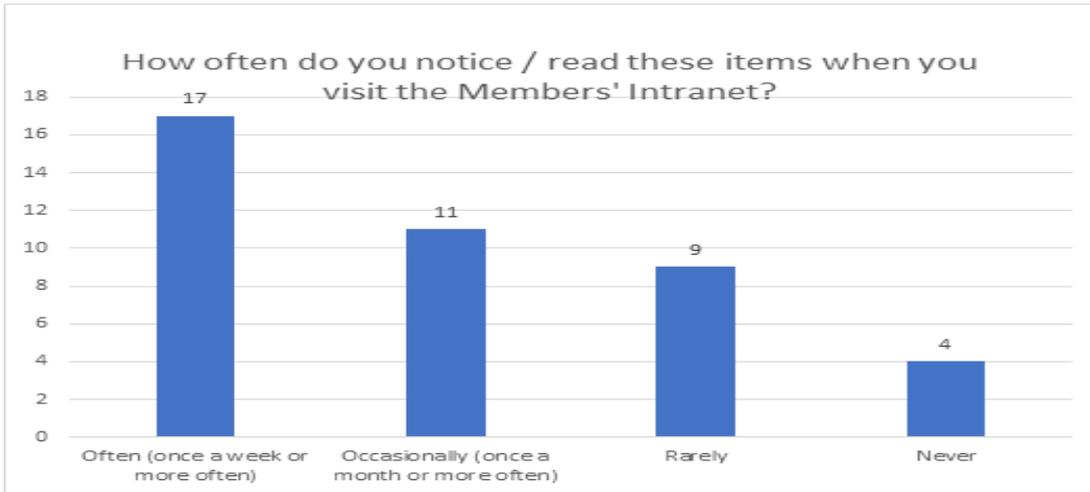
ii) **The Leader's and Deputy Leader's Bulletin**, which is sent to all councillors every other week – usually as part of the weekly Members' Bulletin:

- **68%** (28) said they **always** read it;
- **24%** (10) said they read it **occasionally**;
- **7%** (3) said that they **rarely** read it.



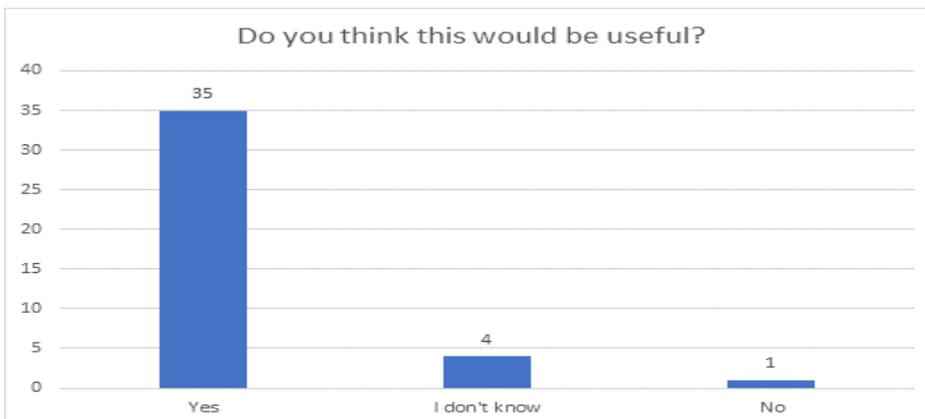
iii) **The news section on the Members' Intranet**, where news items and snippets of information are regularly published for councillors:

- **27%** (17) said they notice/read these items **often** (once a week or more often);
- **41%** (11) said they notice/read these items **occasionally** (once a month or more often);
- **22%** (9) said that they **rarely** notice/read these items;
- **10%** (4) said they **never** notice/read these items.



iv) **Briefing Sessions and Notes.** There are plans to start holding briefing sessions and providing briefing notes for members regarding key issues that are likely to attract the attention of constituents or in the press. The aim will be to provide background information on a specific subject so that Members have time to understand more about the context before being asked questions about it:

- **88% (35)** said they thought **this would be useful**;
- **10% (4)** said they **didn't know** if this would be useful;
- **3% (1)** said this **would not be useful**.



2.27 There was an opportunity for Members to give written comments and suggestions for each question. The Service is grateful to all who took advantage of the opportunity to share their ideas and experiences. Based on this feedback, improvements will be introduced which will include:

- Regular items in the Weekly Bulletin which will signpost readers to useful information available on the Members’ Intranet, for example:
 - Members' Training Calendar;
 - Directory of key officers in all service areas;
 - Council Committees calendar;
 - Details of the Council’s consultations and engagement exercises, and those of our partners;
- Feature articles about Council staff members and their work;
- Articles to highlight the work of committees and working groups other than the Cabinet;
 - Establish a system of holding Briefing Meetings and providing Briefing Notes for Members about key issues, similar to the virtual meeting held recently with the Chief Executive about the Council's budget and the financial situation

3 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

3.1 The results of the questionnaire have already been reported to the Democratic Services Committee on 15/11/2022 for information purposes.

3.2 THE STATUTORY OFFICERS’ OBSERVATIONS:

Monitoring Officer:

Reviewing the timing of the Councils meeting is subject to Statutory Guidance prepared under the provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. This Guidance has been the subject to a recent consultation although it is not anticipated that there will be wider ranging changes. However, they do place an emphasis on responding to the results. It is appropriate therefore that the Council considers these results as part of the process of establishing the meeting calendar and meeting arrangements accepting that there will be a need as well to weigh up the practical issues.

Statutory Finance Officer:

“Nothing to add from the perspective of financial propriety”