



Date of meeting :	12 November 2024
Subject	Information for Councillors
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked for observations on the efforts to rationalise arrangements for providing information to Councillors.
Contact Officer:	Vera Jones, Democracy and Language Services Manager

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. In his annual report, the Head of Democracy Services identified the following as a priority for 2024/25:

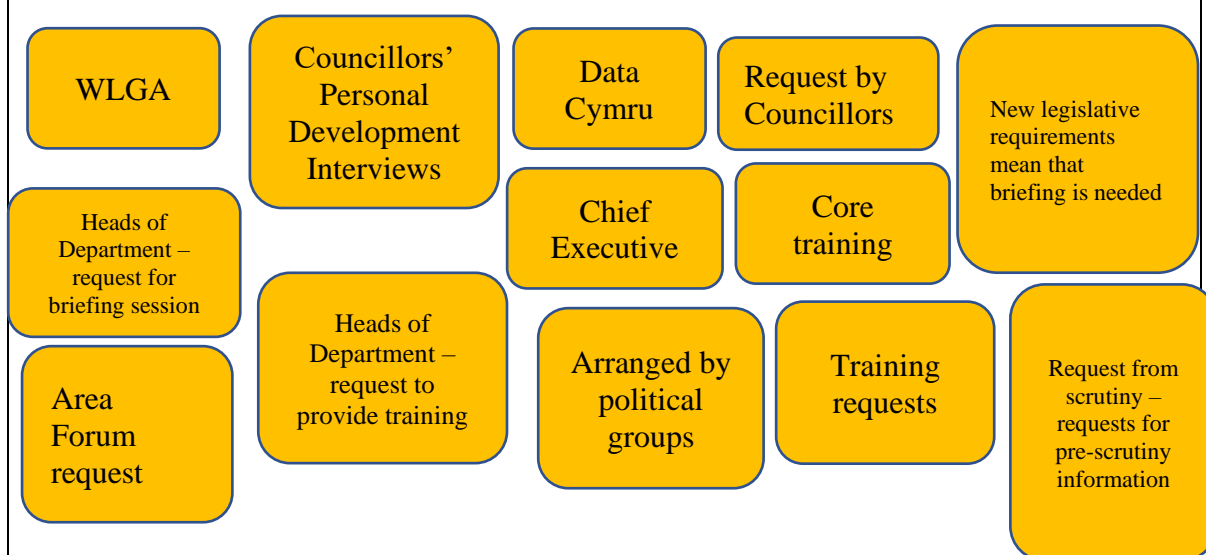
"Rationalise the training programme and briefing programme for Councillors in order to ensure the best use of Councillors' time and the best use of Council resources."
2. There is specific item on the agenda which addresses the developments in relation to training. Alongside this, there have been developments as part of the effort to rationalise information and the briefing programme for Councillors.

What is the current situation?

3. Councillors note that they are 'drowning' with all the demands/offers of briefing, training, information sessions. They are unsure which sessions are the most important (which ones to prioritise), and they also note the need to maintain a balance with official meetings/ward work/paid employment (and life in general).
4. Currently events are organised "ad-hoc" when a date is available. There is no system to organise and provide an overview of the whole 'information delivery' on offer to Councillors. Generally, if a request arrives to hold a briefing session (whether the request is made to the Democratic Services Team, the Chief Executive's Team, the Learning and Development Team) a session is organised. A number of sessions are also directly organised by the services.
5. Additionally, invitations are also received by external bodies e.g. data information sessions from the Data Unit.

6. This can lead to sessions being duplicated and low attendance levels, which is a waste of staff and Councillor resources. There is also no full understanding of the various issues being presented 'for information' to the Area Forums, as the agenda of these forums is currently mainly in the hands of elected Members.
7. Information about events are supposed to be in the electronic "Member meetings" calendar in order to avoid clashes – but this doesn't always happen.

8. Where do requests for information, briefing and training come from?




9. What improvements are already happening?

10. Work has already begun on rationalising the Member Learning and Development programme, the training programme. There is a clear definition of

- core training – an expectation for each Councillor to complete the seven priority areas, along with necessary training prior to being permitted to sit on specific committees (e.g. Planning Committee, licensing committee etc),
- 'additional training' – training outside the seven core areas
- 'developmental training' – for personal development of Elected Members.

11. In addition, all Heads of Department and the Democracy Services Committee will be consulted before the start of each year to identify training issues for the upcoming year. It is inevitable that additional



requests will arise during the year (from Heads of Department and from Councillors) for sessions on additional topics.

12. During the year a number of sessions (whether training or briefing sessions) have been offered to Councillors, but some sessions have had to be cancelled due to low numbers. We are currently trying to address the situation with the core training due to its importance to safeguard Councillors in their role. These areas of training are considered key areas, and are therefore not being considered within the arrangements below that focus on 'additional' and 'developmental' training.

13. There are already arrangements in place for maintaining a register of the matters submitted to the leadership team, Cabinet, Council and Scrutiny Committees. It is proposed to add matters submitted to the Area Forums to the above register in order to avoid duplication.

What are the possible solutions?

14. It is intended to continue with arrangements to rationalise the Member Learning and Development programme.


15. In addition, it is intended to use the register set out in 13 above as a basis for filtering applications from Departments to share information with Councillors. A filtering team will meet each month to identify the right track for handling requests for members' "briefing/ information/ training session" requests that arise during the year.

16. There is also an element of responsibility in the hands of the Departments. It will be necessary to inform the Departments about these efforts to rationalise the information presented to Councillors, and that any requests will be considered as part of the bigger picture and can potentially be refused. There will need to be an element of forward planning for what is to be delivered.

17. Internal arrangements have been established to facilitate the arrangements. Departments are asked to provide 2-3 bullet points to explain the item and why they consider that the information needs to be presented, and also noting the ideal timeframe (although there is no guarantee that this can be met).

18. In addition, more use needs to be made of the Members Intranet and the Members Bulletin. Internal usage is generally good, however its use needs to be promoted among Elected Members.

19. In taking this step to rationalise the information presented to Councillors, the draft guidance below aims to identify the correct location for any topic.



The focus must remain on rationalising the programme rather than which route the solution follows as there are blurred lines between the below.

- BRIEFING SESSIONS – an update on a specific operational topic relevant to all members/ cross-county issues. Scope to consider rationalising the numbers/dates e.g. one day per month.
- AREA FORUMS – The agenda is currently owned by elected members. It is suggested to use the Area Forums to present relevant information/issues to specific areas, where the conversation/discussion would vary from area to area.
- MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – Information to enable Councillors to fulfil their role. The 'core' training is considered to be essential and is therefore not under consideration here. Applications for 'additional' and 'developmental' training will be considered.
- Act as a 'postman' for matters related to training raised by other outside bodies e.g. Data Unit, WLGA i.e. only send the information on to Councillors.
- MEMBERS INTRANET AND MEMBERS BULLETIN –better use of the resource needs to be developed along with promoting its use among members. Consideration should be given to creating an information note only without the need for a briefing session.

20. Potential Impact:

- ✓ Prioritise issues presented to Councillors
- ✓ Fewer complaints from Councillors that they are being overwhelmed
- ✓ Better use of staff resources (avoid 'empty' sessions, duplication, having to reschedule)
- ✓ An opportunity for staff to engage with the political arena as part of their personal development by attending the Area Forums
- ✓ SCRUTINY - freeing up committees to scrutinise strategic matters (without straying into ward matters).
- ✓ POLITICAL GROUPS - remove the need for political group briefing sessions

21. See a design of the recommended procedure in **Appendix 1**.

Recommendation

22. The Democracy Services Committee is asked for observations on the efforts to rationalise arrangements for providing information to Councillors.