



Annual Report of the Head of Democracy Services

2025/2026





FOREWORD

I have now been in my role as Head of Democracy Services in Gwynedd for 4 years. During this time, I have learned a lot and have appreciated your comments to help improve the service for you. The world is constantly changing, and we are trying our best to adapt the support available in line with the new challenges.

I am pleased to present my annual report briefly outlining the support available for Gwynedd Councillors.

My special thanks to Councillor Anne Lloyd-Jones, Chair of the Democracy Services Committee, along with the members of that committee for their input and insightful comments. Thanks also to all the officers working in the background.

I look forward to working with you over the coming year in preparation for the May 2027 election.

Thanks, and regards,
Ian



Ian Jones,
Head of Democracy Services

SUPPORT FOR YOU AS COUNCILLORS

Several teams across the Council provide support for you as Councillors. However, the main provision comes from the Democracy and Language Service. There have been some changes during 2025/26, so here's an overview of the latest changes:

Eirian's Retirement

Eirian Roberts retired in July 2025, after almost 40 years of service to the Council.



Sian has been responsible for civic work, supporting the Lord Lieutenant and Chairperson, as well as undertaking various other duties. Sian's flexible retirement period will come to an end in July 2026. Best wishes to you Sian and thank you.

Sian's Retirement



Courtney's Appointment

Courtney Jones is a Democracy and Civic Officer and has taken up the role since June 2025. Courtney will be undertaking civic duties in the future.



Gwen Roberts has been welcomed as a Democracy Services Officer during the summer of 2025. Gwen is now responsible for supporting Cabinet meetings.

Gwen's Appointment



Sera's Appointment

Sera Whitley has also joined the team taking responsibility for supporting the committees of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee.



Catrin Meirion Owen has been appointed to the role of Member Development Officer in the Learning and Development Team during the year. We wish Cara Williams well in her new role.

Catrin's Appointment



Support for Political Groups

We welcomed and said goodbye to an officer who assisted the Plaid Cymru group during the year. We look forward to having full support for the groups over the coming year.



Congratulations to Lowri Elin Evans who has qualified as a translator with the translation team. You may not see her often, but many of you will have heard her providing simultaneous translation in various meetings. Congratulations Lowri!

Lowri's Qualification



There have been a few changes again this year, and I wish to congratulate the service on continuing to provide a service to the highest standard alongside the induction of new staff in their roles

SUPPORT FOR ELECTED MEMBERS



SUCSESSES 2025/26

The Democracy and Language Service serves you in your role as Councillors throughout the year.

The service has two performance measures.

Members' satisfaction with the service of the Democracy Team.

88% of Gwynedd Councillors have reported that the service from the Democracy Team is very good, with 12% stating 'good'. This is an increase from the 97% who reported very good or good in 2024/25, and the 91% in 2023/24

Publishing Decision Notices within 5 working days.

The service is legally required to publish decision notices for all committee meetings, to obtain a clear statement of the decision for transparency to the public. 98% of decision notices were published within 5 working days in 2025/26, up from 94% in 2024/25. The minor slippages were due to the system not working and waiting for comments from certain officers.

See below other successes involving the day-to-day work of the service:

- Maintaining the committee programme for the year, over 150 meetings in total – virtual and hybrid meetings ensuring the webcasting of all relevant meetings
→ *The webcasts had over 22 thousand views over the year.*
- Holding an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council and two extraordinary meetings of scrutiny committees to ensure that all members had the opportunity to give input to the Council's response to the Our Bravery Brought Justice Report.
→ *Over 14 hours of scrutiny of the plan in its entirety before being considered by the Cabinet.*
- Providing a simultaneous translation service at all Council committees and informal meetings and providing a written translation service to all Council departments.
→ *In 2025/26, the team translated 4.5million words in writing. In addition, a simultaneous translation service was provided at 55 meetings a month on average.*

- Providing specific support for the Council's Chair and Vice-chair as well as Chairs and Vice-chairs of the Council's committees via specific training, answering enquiries during committees and preparing briefing sheets for them.
- Specific support is offered for the Scrutiny Chairs through the Scrutiny Forum, in addition to the day-to-day support for them at each committee meeting.
 - ➔ Holding four meetings of the Scrutiny Forum over the course of the year to allow the Chairs to discuss scrutiny developments and challenge one another.
- Welcoming two new Councillors during the year, ensuring that they had access to IT provision and the latest information.
- Administration of Councillors' salaries and expenses and publishing the information in accordance with statutory requirements.
- Conducting a full training programme for Councillors and consulting Councillors on the content of the training programme.
 - ➔ 17 sessions were held during the year.
- Prioritising and holding briefings on matters of importance to all members and recording and uploading these onto the members' intranet to assist those who work.
 - ➔ 8 briefing sessions were held and recorded during the year.
- Administration of regional committees, particularly the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee and its sub-committees. Contributing vastly towards the developmental work of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee.
- Running training sessions on the Council's democracy arrangements for members of staff to ensure their understanding of the arrangements.
 - ➔ *A pilot has been conducted and a series of sessions scheduled for 2026/27.*



DELIVERY AGAINST PRIORITIES

2025/26

I set out specific priorities for 2025/26 in addition to the day-to-day work. This is an update against what I had promised.

What did we promise?

Start preparations for the Election in May 2027 looking at :

- **Pre-election arrangements**
- **Election day arrangements**
- **Welcome and induction arrangements**
- **Arrangements for the first 6-12 months and an outline of arrangements for the second year**
- **General support for Councillors**

Update

Work has begun in the background to identify all the different steps that need to be accomplished against each of the above titles.

In addition, it was decided that members needed to be consulted so a small group of councillors from each party have volunteered to take part in specific discussions on an area-by-area basis to share their experiences. The group consists of four members from each group with half joining before 2022 and the rest after 2022. The work is ongoing and progress will be formally reported to the Democracy Services Committee over the next few months.



What did we promise?

We will review the provision in the Chambers with regards to the equipment and the quality of the experience. We will aim to develop a feasibility study and improvement plan during the autumn, 2025.

Update

We have assessed our provision in the chambers with regards to the sustainability of the current equipment, as well as the quality of the user experience (whether chamber user or system user).

It became clear that the current provision in our chambers is very volatile and poses a high risk to the Council as regards being able to continue to provide hybrid meetings and maintain the Council's democratic arrangements. We have consistently experienced a few failures but have succeeded despite the system.

Many members have also shared frustrations with their experience of hybrid meetings, and the officers who conduct the whole process work hard to resolve various problems in every meeting.

A bid for money was submitted through the usual arrangements; however, a more detailed report has now been submitted to proceed with going out to the market in search of an appropriate provider. A project board will be set up to drive the work forward in the best possible way.



What did we promise?

To make better use of both the time and support of the political group assistants. To rationalise the training programme and briefing programme for Councillors to ensure the best use of Councillors' time and the best use of Council resources.

Update

It has been an unstable year in terms of support from the assistants of the political groups with periods without officers in the roles. My thanks go out to the rest of the service for taking on some of the tasks carried out by these officers over the past year. Hopefully, it will be possible to move forward and deliver more against this element during 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Major steps have been taken to rationalise the training programme and briefing programme - with high praise for the briefing sessions which are short and purposeful.

What did we promise?

Raising Councillors' awareness of the need to report any incident or threat by completing and returning the relevant forms (HS11).

Update

Unfortunately, the safety of Elected Members is still a matter that needs constant attention. Specific support is provided from a designated officer in North Wales Police, and they have offered several virtual sessions for members in consideration of their safety. The officer has also assisted and advised some individual members when issues have arisen.

Support has been offered to several individual members when safety or well-being issues have arisen, signposting them to the guidance available on the members' intranet, and assisting others in a practical manner. We are aware that many Councillors face threats in their communities and urge everyone to report this.

We have not promoted the completion of the HS11 forms which collect information about threats and incidents as an electronic system has been developed over the past year. We have recently trialled the new arrangements with one member and will be conducting training on the reporting arrangements for all members in 2026/27.



What did we promise?

An 8th area of core training for Councillors has been adopted, namely Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and sexual violence.

Update

The core training areas have been identified to equip Councillors to successfully and safely carry out their role. At the Full Council meeting on the 3rd of July 2025, the 8th core area was adopted in line with the recommendation of the Democracy Services Committee.

Since then, the Democracy Services Committee has been monitoring the number of members completing each area of the core training. A discussion was had around the disappointment of committee members that so many members have not completed the eight core training areas, although members can now do so on-line in their own time. There is an increased risk for the Council at the non-completion of key areas e.g. the code of conduct and safeguarding.

Following a request from Committee members, the Learning and Development Manager is reviewing the training areas and developing a Training Strategy for Elected Members for 2027/28 onwards. The Strategy will set out the expectations on members clearly, with the emphasis on enabling Members to successfully and safely undertake their role.





PRIORITIES FOR 2026/27

I am comfortable that robust arrangements are in place for supporting Elected Members in Gwynedd, and we will continue to build on these firm foundations over the coming years. It is time to start looking at and thinking about arrangements for May 2027 and onwards, and the following priorities are all linked to timely preparations:

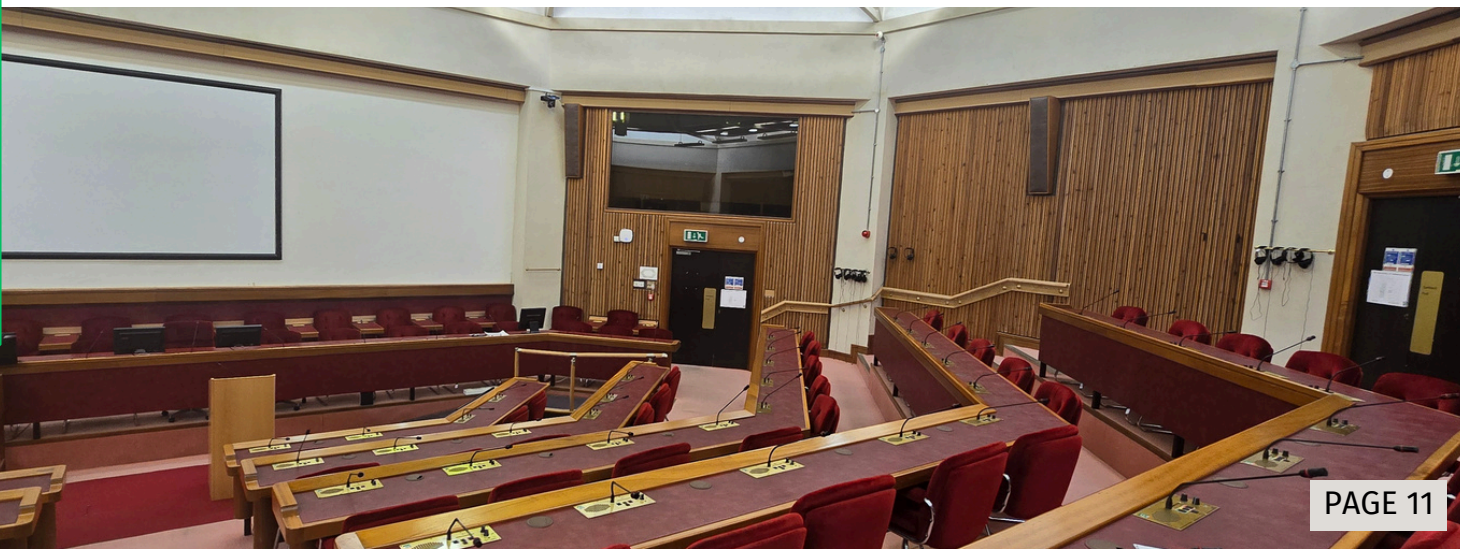
Preparing for the Election in May 2027.

We will continue with the work that has already begun looking at

- Pre-election arrangements
- Election day arrangements
- Welcome and induction arrangements
- Arrangements for the first 6-12 months and an outline of arrangements for the second year
- General support for Councillors.

Replacing the resources in the chambers

The project will follow the necessary procurement arrangements to replace the equipment in the chambers to enable simultaneous translation, remote access, voting and webcasting of Council meetings from the chambers. We want to ensure that the experience for the users of the chambers, for the people of Gwynedd who view the webcasts and for the Council staff responsible for using the system is user-friendly and effective. The work will have to be carefully scheduled, and committees will be somewhat affected if everything is to be in place ready to welcome Councillors for the 2027 term and onwards. However, we have no guarantee that we will be able to complete within this timescale.





TO CONCLUDE

All of you as Elected Members will probably be considering your wishes for the 2027 term. I want to thank all of you for your input over the years, and best wishes to all who will be standing in the next election or deciding to step down.

