



Date of meeting:	18 February 2025
Subject	Update on the work of rationalising presentations of information to Councillors
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked • for observations on the developments to date. • to support the principle of allocating one specific day a month for training sessions and one day a month to conduct the training programme.
Contact Officer:	Vera Jones, Democracy and Language Services Manager

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. It was reported at the previous meeting of this committee on 11 November 2024 that the Head of Democracy Services had noted 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. We also reported on our intention to try to rationalise the requests received to present information to Councillors. They would include trying to make better use of the training programme, briefing sessions, area forums and the information bulletin to Members. This was in response to comments about the high demands on Councillors and observations from many that they were 'drowning' as a result of all the requirements and offers.
3. Appendix 1, which is in a diagram form, notes the new arrangements approved by the Committee on 11/11/2024. The table below explains the possible route for items:
 - 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. The Area Forums will be used to present relevant information or issues concerning 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.
- **MEMBERS INTRANET AND MEMBERS BULLETIN** – there is a need to make better use of the resource and promote its use among members. There is scope to try to consider creating an information note only, without the need to hold any briefing session.
- Act as a 'postman' for matters related to training raised by others e.g. Data Unit, WLGA i.e. only send the information on to Councillors. We are aware that Members receive several offers of training directly from outside bodies, however we are not able to control these emails.

What are the developments since the last meeting?

4. Specific arrangements - work has been undertaken internally to establish arrangements to present requests to hold sessions and/or present information to Members. All requests should now be presented to one internal email address and a small team meets each month to identify the best solution for these requests. This is a significant step forward from arranging events on an ad-hoc basis. Many requests have already reached us, but we are aware that some events have fallen through the net.
5. Training programme - Work is underway on rationalising the Member Learning and Development programme, the training programme. There is a clear definition for
 - core training – an expectation for each Councillor to complete the seven priority areas and 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 Elected Members' personal development
6. It was previously reported that many sessions had to be cancelled because of low numbers attending, highlighting the waste of resources from the officers who hold the sessions, the translators who attend the training and the officer who arranges them. By now, the final session has been held for the core training areas, with the training available via an online recording for those who still have not completed them (there is a separate report elaborating on this). In addition, the principle not to hold training when fewer than five have registered has been established to ensure the efficiency of our courses.

7. Information sessions - The new arrangements have led to better arrangements in terms of conducting information sessions. The principle to conduct sessions of up to one hour on subjects where there are important developments for all Members to be aware of and where relevant across the whole of Gwynedd has been established. As it happens, it has been a busy period in terms of matters arising, with several sessions having been arranged (see the list below). However, some have been refused, some have been referred to the Area Forums for a more relevant conversation and some have been asked to include a short briefing note in the information bulletin for Members.
8. We continue to develop our arrangements and learn lessons as the developments go ahead. It is noted however, whilst trying to rationalise the workload for Councillors, it has meant additional needs for officers as a result of the need to record the sessions, to identify a 'Chair' for some sessions, and the need to discuss and move dates with officers when planning the programme.
9. The table below notes the briefing sessions that have been held since October 2024:

SUBJECT	DATE
Items to be confirmed	19/03/2025
Briefing session - Financial Strategy	28/01/2025
Workshop for all Members - savings and financial strategy (no recording of the workshop)	09 & 10/01/2025
Council Tax Premium - the impact of the Council tax premium on second homes and long-term empty properties in Gwynedd	20/11/2024
Ambition North Wales - a presentation to the work of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee	13/11/2024
Financial Situation and the Single Transferrable Vote	16/10/2024

10. Area Forums - it was also noted that some matters would be referred to the Area Forums to allow better discussion on local matters in the Area Forums. The forums' programmes for the February/March cycle were



already quite full, however, the Highways Department will present the 'Highway Maintenance Service resurfacing work programme' at these meetings.

11. Further work is required in terms of ensuring better use of the Area Forums, but this will take time to permeate to the individual programmes.
12. Others – some other items have been refused, that would have been held under the past ad-hoc arrangements. An information sheet will be created to put on the Members' intranet, and attention is given to this in the Members bulletin.

What are the next steps?

13. We will continue to take steps to try to rationalise what is being presented as information to Members, trying to strike a balance of presenting the correct matters, in a timely manner, but without providing excessive information at the same time.
14. As a result of the work to date, one of the challenges that has been identified is our ability to respond flexibly when important matters arise unexpectedly (whether as part of the training programme or to present information). Finding a 'free date' where no other meeting or committee has already been arranged is proving to be challenging.
15. In response, we have considered identifying one date each month to hold briefing sessions (it could mean two briefing sessions on the same day) and one day a month to conduct the training programme. The intention is to note these dates as part of the committee calendar to ensure that they are known to everyone beforehand. However, it is noted that there is no guarantee that this arrangement will succeed at the officers' or external instructors' availability to resent on these days could be a challenge

Recommendation

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