Date of meeting:	18 February 2025
Subject	Support for Councillors
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked to note the observations and accept the report.
Contact Officer:	Sioned Mai Jones, Democracy Team Leader (temporary)

What is the background and relevant considerations?

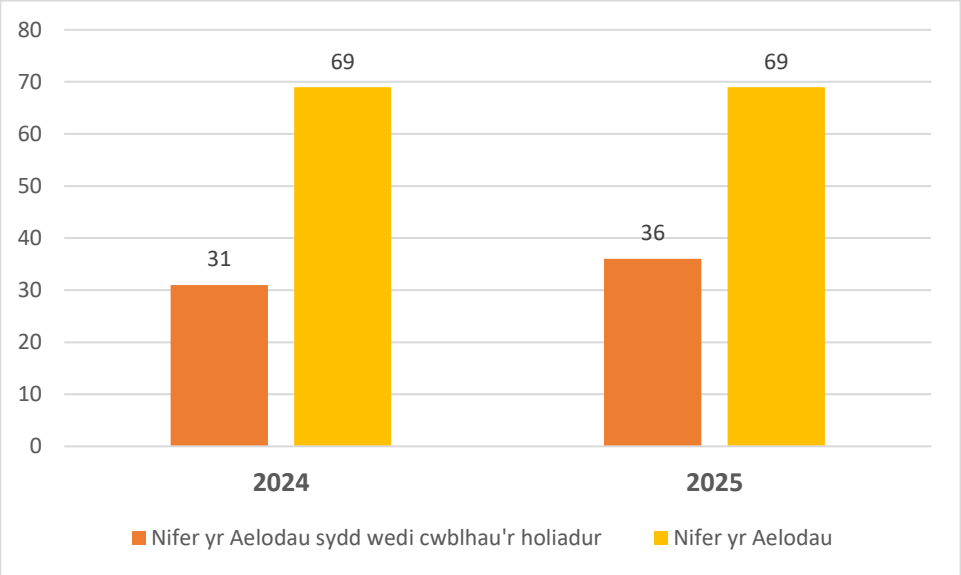
1. The purpose of the Democracy Team is to provide full support to Councillors, by supporting the committee system and being available to assist County Councillors. To ensure that the support provided meets the needs of Councillors we are constantly seeking opinions.

2. We report our performance to the Cabinet Member as part of the performance challenge arrangements of the Corporate Services Department; but we believe there is a role for members of this Committee to receive a performance update and have an opportunity to voice their opinion on the team's work.

3. The Democracy Team is keen to be improving the service being delivered, therefore, a satisfaction questionnaire was sent to Councillors in early December 2024. The questionnaire sought feedback on the service being offered by the Democracy Team within the Democracy and Language Service.

4. Councillors were asked about their satisfaction with the work of the Democracy Team as well as three further questions:
   - *Please comment on your satisfaction with the service provided by the Democracy Team*
   - *Are there any developments or changes the Democracy Team could make to further support you in your role?*
   - *Are there any further comments you would like to make?*

5. 36 responses were received, which was an increase on the 31 responses received last year, with various comments from Councillors about their views on the service of the Democracy Team.



6. 97% rated the service as "very good" or "good" with one stating it was "acceptable". No further comment was provided by the person who had rated the service as "acceptable". By comparison, 91% rated the service as 'very good' or 'good' last year, with 1 indicating it was 'acceptable' and 2 not answering the question.

7. Some of the comments received included:

"We are fortunate as councillors in Gwynedd as the service from the democracy team is very efficient and friendly."

"Always very willing to help with any query"

"The team is great at providing committee documentation on time"

"Nice crew, all friendly"

"All Democracy staff are always on the other end of the phone and respond to e-mails promptly. Zoom and Teams meeting arrangements by the team are extremely effective. IT arrangements and translation are also easy. Thank you so much again this year."

8. In response to the question asking if there were any developments or changes the team could make to further support Councillors in their role, the majority noted that no development or changes were needed. A wish to receive a paper copy of each Committee agenda was accepted but unfortunately this is contrary to the decision to go paperless (except for exceptions). This followed the decision by the Full Council to realise financial savings by reducing printing and postage costs.

9. We take the opportunity to remind you that Councillors with sight problems receive paper copies of Committee Agendas or any other relevant documents if the Head of Democracy Services has received and authorised an appropriate request.

10. Thanks and acknowledgements were received for the good work of the team staff in providing support to Councillors with sight problems. It was highlighted that the team is open to helping Advisors who have any needs and are flexible in making adjustments. Anyone needing further assistance is advised to contact the team.

11. Among the responses, one Councillor noted that "*it would be advantageous to have a list of what you can do to help us*". Consideration was given to design a poster or guide to respond to the request, however, it is difficult to create a complete list of the service that we as a team and the Political Assistants offer. It is suggested for anyone to get in touch for a chat about the support available. We will send a note to the Councillors confirming the names of the Democracy team officers as there have been quite a few staffing changes recently.

12. Comments were received from Councillors stating that they wished to receive information before they read about it in the newspapers. Councillors are reminded that a great deal of information per area is shared through the weekly information bulletin and is available on the Members' Intranet. In addition, we will be attempting to address this observation during the year by developing our briefing arrangements and trying to ensure that a date has been set every month for Councillors' briefing sessions. The dates will be noted in the Committees Calendar for 2025/26 so that Councillors are aware of them. In addition, we will be sharing the observation with the Corporate Director so that he can share the concern with the Heads of Department reminding them to try and ensure that Councillors, specifically local members, are updated in a timely manner in the event of a matter being addressed by the press in their ward.

13. It was noted that it was taking time for new Councillors to understand the arrangements; however, the service was a very supportive one at Cyngor Gwynedd. We would like to remind you that the team is available to assist you in any way, recognising that it takes time for new Councillors to settle into their role. We are also grateful for the guidance and support being provided to new Councillors within the political groups, with the Democracy and Language Service Manager holding regular conversations with Political Assistants to ensure the appropriate support is in place.

14. Not many negative comments or further suggestions were received.

15. However, we recognise that the role of Councillors is a challenging one and I would like to remind Councillors of the support available within the Council for mental health and well-being issues. A lot of information on what is available can be found on the Members' Intranet, under the tile "Looking after yourself."

16. The Democracy team works closely with the Learning and Development unit and held joint sessions in January to promote the use of the Members'

Intranet for Councillors and to highlight the recent changes that have been made to the site. This work is continually developing with your support.

17. We are also trying to reduce the demand on Councillors through the work of the filtering group, with an attempt here to manage the number of training requests, briefings or information that reach Councillors.

18. In addition to the electronic satisfaction questionnaire being sent to Councillors once a year, we will try to restart our arrangements to hold a one-to-one conversation with 2 or 3 Councillors each month to discuss the support being offered and gain a better understanding of the barriers for Councillors.

19. Whilst the above reports on the comments received by you as Elected Members, it is also important to remember that we as a team also provide a service for the public and external bodies. Members of the public take part in some of our committees e.g. Licensing Committee, and a number view the webcasting of meetings or request access to listen to our virtual meetings. The team regularly receive comments to thank them for their work in providing clear instructions and ensuring thorough preparation to ensure the smooth running of committee meetings.

Recommendation

20. The Democracy Services Committee is asked to note the observations and accept the report.