



Annual Report by the Head of Democracy Services

2024/2025





FOREWORD

I am pleased to present my annual report briefly outlining the support available for Gwynedd Councillors. It is hard to believe that I am reporting on what has been achieved during the third year of this Council. Once again, this year, the report focuses on the core work and improvements achieved over the year in an effort to support you.

I am eager to continue to support you in the most effective way – this would not be possible without your support as Councillors and the support of the various officers working in the background.

I look forward to working with you over the coming years. Thank you.

Regards,
Ian



Ian Jones,
Head of Democracy Services

SUPPORT FOR YOU AS COUNCILLORS

A number of teams across the Council provide support for you as Councillors. However, the main provision comes from the Democratic and Language Service. I am aware that there have been a number of changes during this last year, therefore, I have noted the updates below for your convenience. Hopefully the structure also provides you with an overview of the latest situation.

Team Leader

Congratulations to Annes Siôn, Democracy Team Leader, on the birth of her son, and welcome back from her maternity leave.



Thanks to Sioned Mai Jones, who was acting Team Leader during Annes's maternity leave. Best wishes to Sioned, who has moved to another post at the Council since May 2025.

Interim Team Leader



2024/25 Officers

Jasmine Jones was appointed as Democratic Services Officer in September 2024 and Iwan Edwards as temporary Democratic Services Officer until the end of July 2025.



We will welcome a new Democratic Services Officer, Gwen Roberts, to the team over the summer period.

2025 Officer



Retirement

You will be aware that Eirian Roberts has retired after almost 40 years of service to the Council. Thank you, Eirian, for all your hard, skilled and quiet work. There will be a void after you.



Sian Ellis-Williams has also taken flexible retirement since January 2025, continuing to work two days a week supporting the Chair and civic duties for a period up until the end of July 2026.

Flexible Retirement



Democratic and Civic Officer

Courtney Jones will be starting as Democratic and Civic Officer with the team, leaving her current job as Plaid Cymru Group Assistant, a post to which she was appointed in July 2024.



Meleri Roberts joined the translation team in April 2025 as a professional translator able to provide simultaneous translation and written translation services.

Translation Officer



North Wales Corporate Joint Committee Officer

In addition, the Council provides a service to support the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee, and we will be recruiting to the role of Democratic Team Leader (CJC) over the coming months, and Sera Whitley will start as a Democratic Officer (CJC) over the coming weeks.



You are also supported by the Learning and Development Team, and Mari Edwards was appointed as Manager of the Learning and Development Service in September 2024. Mari leads on all the team's work, and is the line manager for Cara Williams, who is responsible for training for Councillors.

Learning and Development Team



The latest structure of the service has been included at the end of the report.

You will see that there have been many changes recently, and I wish to congratulate the service on continuing to provide a service to the highest standard alongside ensuring the induction of new staff in their roles. As shown, there will be further changes during 2025/26 and I am confident that the service can continue to deliver, and I thank everybody for their commitment throughout all the changes.

REPORTING PROGRESS ON THE PRIORITIES FOR 2024/25

I identified four main priorities for 2024/25 which built on the existing firm foundations. The following shows the progress made against the four areas.

What did we promise?

To continue to build on our safety and support arrangements for Councillors, within our ability.

What has been achieved?

We have:

- Provided ongoing support for Councillors – conducting a number of one-to-one talks with Councillors over the year.
- Been liaising with a specific police officer leading on the safeguarding of MPs, and who is eager to work with the Council to provide support for Gwynedd Councillors.
- Followed Health and Safety guidelines when reporting on matters of violence or threats to a councillor by using the appropriate HS11 form.
- Continued to monitor safety issues when reviewing our arrangements for holding virtual meetings over the year to ensure that we take every step to avoid disruption in meetings.
- Raise awareness and the responsibility of Councillors with regards to fire safety procedures when visiting Council buildings, particularly for political group meetings.

What will be done in 2025/26?

- Promote the need for Councillors to report matters of violence or threat by following the appropriate procedure and completing and returning a HS11 form so that there is a record of the incident.
- Promote the briefing session with the designated police officer so that all Councillors are aware of the direct support available to them from the police. The Police will be running a briefing session on the 5th and 16th of June 2025. Any members who have missed these sessions can join the regional sessions for North Wales Councillors.

SAFETY AND SUPPORT



What did we promise?

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.

What has been achieved?

We have:

- Focused on delivering the core training. The last 'live' sessions of the core training areas were held over the year, with Councillors being asked to watch a recording of the sessions from now onwards. It is no longer possible to run sessions for a small number of attendees as this is a waste of resource.
- Established the principle of not running training if there are fewer than 5 present, in order to ensure the best use of resources (unless it is 1:1 training).
- Progressed to a more developmental programme for Councillors over the year.
- Established 'briefing session' arrangements for matters involving all Councillors, prioritising which sessions are held. Some matters have been directed for discussion in the Area Committees and other matters have been presented for information in the weekly Members' Bulletin.
- In trying to reduce the burden on Councillors, this has created more work in the background having to prioritise matters for the various sources and recording the various briefing sessions.
- Started publishing details for every Member regarding which core training has been completed and when, publicly on the website.
- Received a recommendation from the Democratic Services Committee to establish an 8th core training area for Elected Members, i.e. Violence against Women (which also includes violence against men). I recommend that this area be established as an 8th core area, pending the decision of the Full Council.

What will be done in 2025/26?

- We will be trialling a 'training day' and a 'briefing session day' over 25/26 to try and streamline Councillor's work programmes. The annual calendar has already been adopted by the Full Council with the above dates identified for each month. A pre-warning was given that the dates may change due to the availability of key officers to deliver on specific dates.
- Continue to develop the new arrangements, giving consideration to reviewing the changes at the end of 26/27, after 12 months of implementing the new calendar and 18 months of implementing the briefing sessions.
- It is recommended that 'Violence Against Women' training (also including violence against men) be added as an 8th core training area for Elected Members.

**RATIONALIZE THE
TRAINING/BRIEFING
PROGRAM**



CHANGES TO SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS

THE CHAIRMAN'S NEWSLETTER

What did we promise?

To proceed with changes to Scrutiny arrangements to ensure that Scrutiny makes a difference.

To work with the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to highlight the support available to Councillors – starting with the 'Chair's newsletter' as part of the Members' bulletin following every meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

What has been achieved?

We have:

- Delivered against all the recommendations of the Audit Wales report, driving improvements when forming recommendations, considering the impact of scrutiny etc.
- Emphasised the role of the Chair and Vice-chair, especially when forming clear recommendations for the Cabinet and acting as scrutiny champions in Gwynedd.
- A full report on all the matters and improvements delivered regarding scrutiny during 24/25 will be presented to the Full Council in October 2025.

We have:

- Reconsidered the above priority and decided, with the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee, not to reinstate the 'Chair's newsletter' following every meeting of the committee. This was in light of comments from Members that they are very busy and receive too many e-mails. It was felt that creating an additional e-mail would go against the Members' wishes.
- Continued to use the weekly Members' Bulletin to highlight important matters affecting you. Matters such as salaries for 25/26, information about training sessions and other support etc.

What will be done in 2025/26?

- Implement the arrangements to present performance challenge reports to the scrutiny committees from June 2025 onwards.



OTHER SUCCESSES IN 2024/25

- ✓ 97% of Gwynedd Councillors have reported that the service from the Democratic Team is good/very good, which is an increase from the 91% in 2023/24.
- ✓ 94% of decision notices were published within 5 working days. A reduction in performance level since 2024/25 following increasing pressure on the democratic team and other officers in the authority and beyond.
- ✓ Maintaining the committee programme for the year, over 150 meetings in total – virtual and hybrid meetings, ensuring webcasting in all relevant meetings.
- ✓ Holding an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council to ensure a decision on the Single Transferable Vote system.
- ✓ Providing a simultaneous translation service at all Council committees and informal meetings and providing a written translation service to all Council departments.
- ✓ 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 notes for them.
- ✓ Specific support is offered for the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs through the Scrutiny Forum, in addition to the ongoing daily support for each committee meeting.
- ✓ Welcoming two new Councillors during the year, ensuring they had access to IT provision and the latest information.
- ✓ Providing support, training and briefing to the Council's new Leader as well as the Deputy Leader and new Cabinet Members appointed during the year.
- ✓ Administration of Councillors' salaries and expenses and publishing the information in accordance with statutory requirements.
- ✓ Made arrangements to welcome a number of children and young people to visit Siambr Dafydd Orwig and understand more about the Council's democratic arrangements in three specific sessions over the past 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. This has taken up a great deal of certain officers' time and will continue to take up the time of some officers over the coming years.





PRIORITIES FOR 2025/26

I am comfortable that there are robust arrangements in place to support Elected Members in Gwynedd, and we will continue to build on these firm foundations over the next two 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:

- Start preparations for the Elections in May 2027. We will use the WLGA Framework as we continue to review the current support for Councillors and attempting to identify improvements and changes in preparation for the May 2027 elections.
- We will review the provision in the Chambers with regards to the equipment and the user experience. We will aim to develop a feasibility study and an improvement plan during the Autumn, 2025.
- We will look 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.

We will also continue to take forward some matters that have arisen over the past year, including:

- Making better use of both the time and support of the political group assistants, particularly so to ensure that Councillors receive key messages.
- Raising Councillors' awareness of the need to report any incident or threat by completing and returning the relevant forms (HS11).
- Asking the Full Council to adopt an 8th core training area for councillors, namely Violence against Women. The core training areas have been identified to equip Councillors to successfully and safely carry out their role.



