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## DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE 16 JUNE 2026

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### **PRESENT:**

#### **Councillors:**

Dewi Owen (Chair), Annwen Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Anne Lloyd Jones, Ioan Thomas, Edgar Wyn Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Cai Larsen, Sian Williams, Stephen Churchman, Anwen Jane Davies

#### **Officers present:**

Ian Jones (Head of Democracy Services), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader), Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Services), Mari Edwards (Learning and Development Manager), Catrin Meirion Owen (Member Development Officer), and Courtney Leigh Jones (Democracy and Civic Services Officer).

### **1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones was elected as Vice-Chair of the Committee for 2026/27.

### **2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Elin Hywel, Arwyn Herald Roberts and Beca Roberts.

### **3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received.

### **4. URGENT ITEMS**

A Member referred to the matter which had recently arisen in the press. It was agreed that this Committee was not the appropriate place to hold the discussion.

### **5. MINUTES**

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 24 February, as a true record.

## **6. DRAFT OF THE ANNUAL REPORT BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRACY SERVICES**

Submitted - the draft annual report of the Head of Democracy Service. Members were reminded that this was a draft report and that it would be submitted to the Full Council for adoption. The Democracy Team was thanked for its work in supporting members and holding Council Committees. Attention was drawn to the staffing changes that had taken place within the team, welcoming several officers who had just joined the team and wishing well to those who were retiring. The work of the Democracy Team, the Translation Team and the Learning and Development officers was praised, noting appreciation for the work that went on behind the scenes to host and administrate virtual and hybrid committees and meetings. It was noted that Council Members' satisfaction with the Democracy Team's service remained high, and that several positive comments had been received during the year.

Reference was made to the service's priorities for the coming year, noting that preparations for the 2027 election had already begun, and would intensify over the coming months. It was noted that planning work for the election was progressing, by learning lessons from the last election, receiving members' input and welcoming new arrangements as part of the induction period.

An update was provided on the Chambers Upgrade project. It was explained that the technology used in the chambers was now outdated and needed to be updated to ensure the provision of hybrid meetings and maintain the Council's democratic arrangements, as well as raising the standard of the chambers and improving Members' experience. It was noted that work was being carried out in the background to create a brief of the Council's needs to communicate and engage with the market shortly to identify the company that could provide the best support. It was explained that this would include visual screens, voting systems, mics and sound systems.

An update was provided on the ongoing work taking place in relation to the Members' Training Programme. Reference was made to the eighth core subject that had been added to the Core Programme during the year, namely Violence against Women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

It was highlighted that members' Health and Safety remained a priority for the department and that work continued as needs changed. It was ensured that threats to members were taken seriously through security risks, and that support was always available to members, as part of the health and safety plans.

Any questions or observations from Members were welcomed:

- The two recently retired officers from the Democracy Team were thanked after many years of service and they were wished well on behalf of the members of the Democracy Services Committee. The new officers who had joined the team were welcomed and were wished well. The Democracy and Language Service was thanked for their work, noting that the work often took place behind the

scenes. It was noted that they carried out valuable work in assisting and maintaining the Council's democracy work. The praise was also extended to all electoral staff noting that a lot of detailed work was happening to maintain democracy in Gwynedd.

- The report was commended. A Member noted that at times more clarity was needed when referring to the data of Members' satisfaction with the Democracy Team's service. It was noted that the statistics could be complex to understand due to the style they were presented in the report and it was confirmed that the officers would address this. Some observations were made regarding the accuracy of facts regarding staffing issues, and observations were made about a few typos in the report. It was assured that this would be corrected before the report was adopted at the Full Council.
- The translation service was praised noting that their simultaneous translation work at meetings was of particular importance. A Member stated that he was very grateful to the translation team because they assisted him in attending committees and fulfilling his role as a Councillor. Frustration was expressed with the translation equipment in Siambr Dafydd Orwig noting that the headphones were not very comfortable. The upgrades for the chamber outlined in the report were welcomed and the effort to improve the equipment for Members was praised. Further frustration was expressed with the audio in Siambr Dafydd Orwig during hybrid meetings, noting that discussions were difficult to follow.
- It was asked if there was a timetable for the developments of the Chambers. It was confirmed that much of the planning work by the project team had progressed to identify a specification of the specific needs in the Chambers. It was noted that members of the Team had engaged with the market to see what was possible in terms of new technology, and this would feed into the specification, which was scheduled for publication in late summer, hopefully. It was highlighted that procurement arrangements would need to be followed, and as soon as a provider was identified, the department would work with the supplier to confirm a timetable. It was noted that the department aimed to ensure that the new equipment was up and running for May 2027, so that the new Councillors could use the new equipment and systems.
- In referring to the data on the number of people viewing the committee and meeting webcasts, it was asked whether there was a breakdown of the committees that were viewed most often by the public. In response, it was confirmed that Committees discussing the most contentious topics or topics of public interest attracted the highest number of viewings. For the year 2025/26, it was confirmed that the Council Tax Premium and Budget had attracted the highest number of viewers. It was explained that they were continuing to adapt, as it was possible to catch up with Committee meetings on the Council website. It was noted that the number of viewers seemed to rise annually as interest in politics and democracy increased.

- A discussion was held about threats to Members. It was asked how common this was and whether there was a specific system in place to deal with threats, should they arise. In response, the department confirmed that there was a procedure in place. It was explained that officers planned ahead when considering the forward agendas of meetings and committees assessing the topics that would arise and how contentious they were. It was confirmed that a risk assessment would then be completed and measures would be put in place to reduce risks where possible. It was explained that Members were encouraged to contact officers if they were worried about anything and that a form was available to log any incidents. It was noted that matters were referred to the police if necessary. It was expressed that there was specific training for Members' health and safety. It was confirmed that the matter received ongoing attention, referring to the remembrance event for the politician Jo Cox which was taking place next week.

## **DECISION**

**To accept the report and agree to make minor amendments before being recommended for adoption by the Full Council.**

## **7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS MAY 2027**

Submitted - the report of the Democracy Team Leader. The work programme for the May 2027 Local Government Election was outlined, noting that there was a considerable amount of preparatory work to be done over the coming months. It was explained that three key themes had been identified as part of the preparatory work, namely; pre-Election preparation, Election Day and results and induction period and training programme. It was noted that a programme of work was available for each theme with details included in the report.

It was explained that a discussion group had been set up to obtain Members' input, which included several representatives from the political groups. It was noted that the group had met twice so far and that discussions had already begun to take place, with the next meeting scheduled in two weeks' time. Some of the issues covered at the meetings were addressed, including the Members' Intranet and the Members' Bulletin. It was anticipated that the next meetings would include discussions on training and information technology provision for members. Committee members were welcome to join the discussion groups to discuss the work programme and offer observations.

It was suggested that members of the discussion group could cascade information to all Council members through the political group meetings. A Member suggested members could offer observations and have an input to the work programme through the discussion groups by asking the representatives to pass the observations forward at the meetings. In response, it was agreed that it would be a good idea to get wider input from Members.

It was emphasised that future candidates should be fully aware of the required responsibilities which were a key part of a Councillor's role. It was expressed that the importance of taking the role seriously needed to be reinforced, ensuring that all mandatory training was completed, with regular attendance at meetings and committees, and active ward work. It was emphasised that it was necessary to ensure that the candidates were ready to fully commit to working for the benefit of the residents in their ward and to work the equivalent of three days a week to earn their pay fairly. It was acknowledged that some members had other commitments in addition to being Councillors, such as working part-time and raising a family, but emphasised the need to commit to the role and take it seriously.

There was surprise that not many residents understood the responsibilities and expectations of the role, and the work that needed to be done. It was noted that it was important for Members to join several different committees in the Council to understand how the Council worked for the people of Gwynedd. In response to this, it was highlighted that work was underway to highlight the role and expectations of Councillors as part of the diversity in democracy project. It was noted that this would be shared on the website and social media so that more information about the work was available to prospective Members.

There was a discussion about restructuring the Members' Intranet and it was confirmed that developments were underway to make the Intranet more accessible to enable Members to use the resource more effectively.

All democracy service staff were thanked for being very supportive of Members. A member stated that he greatly appreciated the support, and that he would not be able to carry out his work as a councillor without the support of staff due to his disability. It was noted that it was important for prospective candidates to realise that there was full support available to them and should be open to those applying to become a County Councillor.

A member expressed frustration about her travel limitations and problems joining remote meetings. She complained that she had experienced difficulty in arranging rooms in local Council offices and there was no adequate system in place to assist with arrangements. Special thanks were given to the staff of Galw Gwynedd in Pwllheli for their assistance in answering calls promptly and assisting with arrangements.

All Members were thanked for their observations and their input to the work programme to improve service provision and make arrangements for the 2027 Election was appreciated.

## **DECISION**

**To accept the report.**

## **8. CYNGOR GWYNEDD'S STATEMENT REGARDING PROMOTING DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY**

Submitted - the report of the Democracy Team Leader. It was confirmed that the Council had adopted the Diversity in Democracy Statement at the Full Council Meeting in October 2021, in accordance with the Local Government Act which came into force the same year. It was reported that the Council was declaring its commitment in the wake of the upcoming local Government Election in May 2027. It was clarified that there had only been a few changes to the statement since 2021, but the support of Committee Members was sought to submit the statement to the Full Council in July.

The members expressed their thanks for the report and the importance of diversity in democracy was emphasised to improve representation of the county's residents. It was reinforced that there was a need to seek to attract a wide range of potential candidates and ensure that the role was accessible and flexible enough for people to fulfil the role through practical arrangements. It was noted that there was a need to consider the challenges and barriers for people and seek to overcome them. The draft work programme was welcomed.

## **DECISION**

**To accept the report.**

**It was agreed to recommend that the Full Council adopts the Diversity in Democracy Statement (the new version) along with the work programme to support action on the statement.**

## **9. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS**

Submitted – the report of the Learning and Organisational Development Manager. An overview was provided of the number of Members who had completed the core training titles. It was noted that the numbers that had not completed the titles remained high. It was ensured that the Learning and Development department continued to encourage Members to complete the training, by sending reminders, offering support and providing accessible resources for Members to complete the training at a time convenient for them. It was noted that officers were contacting Members individually to try to encourage them and motivate Members to attend the training and complete the titles. It was noted that the training was available on the Intranet to Members and Members were encouraged to contact officers for assistance.

Reference was made to the ongoing work to incorporate the LGBTQ+ training as part of Equality training, and it was assured that work to identify actions to achieve this would be completed before May 2027.

It was reported that the process of identifying mentors for new Members starting in May 2027 had begun. It was explained that the mentors would be experienced Elected Members and could act as a point of contact for new Elected Members settling into their new role. It was noted that Members could take Coaching and Mentoring sessions, as part of the more specialist and self-development work, and Members were welcome to contact the Learning and Development Department to arrange this.

Members were invited to arrange a Personal Development conversation with the Learning and Development Manager or another appropriate Officer. Sessions were offered for Members to reflect on their role, consider areas of development and formulate a personal development programme to meet their needs and wishes. It was noted that a Member Training Strategy was in the process of being created and would be introduced soon. It was assured that this would be part of the Learning and Development handbook for new members in May 2027.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and make observations.

Frustration was once again expressed at so few Members who attended training, particularly the mandatory training despite the numerous efforts of officers to encourage them. It was noted that several Councillors had not completed the mandatory training on the Code of Conduct, and Safeguarding Children and Adults, which was crucial to Members' role as a corporate parent. Frustration was further expressed that three Members had not completed any of the mandatory training titles at all. It was considered whether the Members could be identified and their names made public. In response, it was confirmed that this information was now publicly available on the Council website.

It was highlighted that some Members were struggling to access their learning programme and were struggling to confirm which training courses they had completed. It was assured that the Learning and Development service would send an email to the Members individually with a link to the relevant training which had not yet been completed. The training courses provided by the Learning and Development service were praised and they were thanked for their support.

## **DECISION**

### **To accept the report.**

The meeting started at 10:00am and ended at 11:20am.