

CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Democratic Services Committee

Date: 15th October 2021

Title: Democratic Services Committee Annual Report, 2020/21.

Purpose of report: To present the draft Democratic Services Committee Annual Report for consideration, prior to presenting to Council.

Introduction

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires each County Council to establish a Democratic Services Committee. The Measure prescribes the functions of the Democratic Services Committee and states that the Committee must make a report at least annually to the Council.

The Democratic Services Annual Report is used to:

- a) Highlight the work carried out by the Democratic Services Committee;
- b) Show how the Democratic Services Committee has made a difference;
- c) Support continuous improvement for Councillors.

The Annual Report will be presented to Council by the Chair of the Committee and subsequently be published on the Council website, in order to meet the requirements of the Measure.

Recommendations: The Committee approves the draft Democratic Services Committee Annual Report, for presenting to Council on 21th October 2021.

Appendices: Appendix A – Draft Democratic Services Committee Annual Report, 2020/21.

Background documents: Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011; Papers and minutes of Democratic Service Committee meetings.

Lowri Edwards
Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services

27th September 2021

Democratic Services Committee



Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council

Annual Report 2020/21

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Foreword from the Chair of the Committee

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 required each County and County Borough Council to establish a Democratic Services Committee and it has been a privilege to return to the role of the chair of the Democratic Services Committee following the Local Election in 2017.

The Committee has focussed its work on ensuring that the needs and requirements of Members are addressed and that appropriate arrangements are made to support Members in their duties. During the year we reviewed developments in relation to the 'Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act' including a duty to encourage participation in decision-making, duty to make a petition scheme, duty to publish official addresses, electronic broadcasting of meetings, enabling job sharing for Leader and Cabinet Member positions as well as non-executive offices, family absence for Members, standards of conduct, and making information available to Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Many of these changes will come into force from May 2022, however due to the pandemic, several have already been implemented. It was agreed to review these following the publication of guidance documents by the Welsh Government which is anticipated post November 2021. The Committee also reviewed the size of the Governance and Audit Committee, revisions to the 'Motions on Notice', 'Call In' procedures, and voting procedures,

The last 12 months have been extremely challenging, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with both Members and Officers working from home. Members have adapted extremely well to the new arrangements, thanks to all the support and training provided by the Democratic Services Officers. I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Committee for their time, dedication and support, and Officers who have supported the work of the Committee and all Members and I thank them all for their willingness, commitment and continued support.

There are several matters that the Committee will be considering during the remainder of 2020/21, including continuing to ensure that the needs

and requirements of Members are addressed in relation to new facilities in the Council Chamber as well as ICT solutions for Members.

Councillor Ceredig Davies
Chairman of the Democratic Services Committee, Ceredigion County
Council
2020/21

Terms of Reference of the Committee

Democratic Services Committee Terms of Reference

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure) requires the local authority to appoint a Democratic Services Committee. At its first meeting in July 2012, the Terms of Reference were agreed as follows:

The functions of the Democratic Services Committee are to:

- Carry out the local authority's function of designating the Head of Democratic Services (HDS)
- Keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the HDS, in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post
- Make reports, at least annually, to the full council in relation to these matters
- To consider, and make recommendations to the Council, concerning the timing of meetings
- To oversee the training and development of Members.

Membership

The Committee will comprise 6 Members as appointed by the Council.

Chairman

The Chairman will be appointed by the Council and will serve for a term of two consecutive municipal years (in accordance with Article 5.2 of Part 2 of the Constitution).

Co-option

The Measure does not provide the Committee with powers to co-opt persons onto the Committee.

Sub-committees

The Committee may appoint sub-committees as and when required and delegate functions to them.

The Committee will appoint the Chairman of any sub-committee.

Attendance to answer questions

The Committee (and any sub-committee) has the power to require the attendance of any Members or Officers of the Council to answer questions and can invite anyone else it likes to do so also. If a member or officer is required to attend they must answer any questions unless the question is one which they would be entitled to refuse in a court.

Access to information

The Committee's proceedings are subject to the Council Access to Information Rules as found in Document B Part 4 of the Constitution.

Frequency of meetings

The Committee will meet at least three times in any municipal year.

A meeting of the Committee can also be convened if the full Council so decides or at least a third of the members of the Committee demands a meeting.

The onus lies on the Chairman to ensure that meetings are held when required.

Welsh Government Guidance

The Committee must have regard to guidance from Welsh Ministers when exercising its functions.

Reports of the Head of Democratic Services

Any report presented to the Committee by the HDS must be considered by the Committee within three months. Similarly, any report made by the Committee must be considered by the full Council within three months.

Membership of the Committee

Members of the Democratic Services Committee 2020/21

The Committee is made up of 6 Members and is politically balanced. In 2020/21 it was chaired by Councillor Ceredig Davies. The Members have worked together to progress the work of the Democratic Services Committee:

Councillor	Possible	Actual
Councillor Ceredig Davies (Chair) Liberal Democrats	1	1
Councillor Clive Davies Plaid Cymru	1	1
Councillor Lloyd Edwards Liberal Democrats	1	1
Councillor Gwyn James Independent	1	1
Councillor Dai Mason Independent Voice	1	1
Councillor Wyn Thomas Plaid Cymru	1	1

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020, it was not possible to convene the meeting in May 2020, as scheduled.

The activities of the Committee

2020/21

In the past year, the Democratic Services Committee has undertaken a range of activities. The information below highlights the issues discussed and the views expressed by the Committee:

Remote Meetings

It was noted that Council's Annual General Meeting had been held prior to lock-down in March. Following an extensive review of the various systems and mechanisms for holding remote meetings, it was decided that 'zoom' would be the most appropriate mechanism as it provided for simultaneous translation. At that time, Microsoft were developing a platform for translation via 'Teams', however this facility has yet to be launched.

One-to-one training was offered to every Member, and since meetings resumed over the summer, all Councillors have been able to attend via 'zoom' with one Councillor joining the meeting by telephone.

Guidance notes and a good practice guide for attending and participating at remote meetings were agreed and published on the website.

Self-Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny Survey

Consideration was given to the findings of the self-evaluation survey which considered the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It was noted that the number of respondents was twenty-five, an increase of five from the previous year. The Committee was pleased to note that overall, the response to the survey were reassuring. It was noted that on the recommendation of this committee, the number of questions had been reduced to 9 with an aim to increase participation, which had been successful.

The committee noted that each time the review is held in relation to the timing of the meetings, the majority have asked that the current pattern continue. It was noted that attending remote meetings is less demanding on the time of those who work during the day and that there would be additional challenges to holding remote meetings outside of office hours.

The Committee agreed that the self-evaluation should be undertaken annually, that the number of questions should be reduced with an aim to increase participation and to review the format of the report presented to the Committee

Webcast system for the Council Chamber

It was noted that during a previous meeting, the Committee decided to postpone the purchase of a webcast system for the Council Chamber until further information becomes available, and to monitor and review developments in relation to the 'Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill'. In December 2020, the Welsh Government Announced a support package to support the implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act with £500,000 of that allocated to support the digital transformation of democracy to underpin many of the provisions contained within the Act. Ceredigion County Council submitted an application, and were notified on 31 March 2021, that we had been successful in obtaining funding in order to upgrade the equipment within the Council Chamber which would enable us to host hybrid meetings, where Councillors and Members of the public are able to attend in person or remotely from May 2022 in accordance with the requirement of the Act.

A tender process followed and the successful bidder will commence the work from November of this year. Training will be provided to all Members, as well as guidance to members of the public who may wish to attend.

Implementation of the 'Modern.gov' Meeting Management System.

During the lock-down, the 'Modern.gov' meeting management system was also implemented and 3 workshops were held to provide training to Members.

Members' Training and Development

The following training / briefing sessions have been available remotely to Members during 2020/21:

- Development Control Committee Workshops 28.09.2020 / 09.11.2020 / 08.12.2020
- Census 16.12.2020
- Porth Ceredigion 16.12.2020
- Budget Workshop 19.01.2021
- Overview and Scrutiny – Learning Communities workshop 01.02.2021
- CYSGA (Language Committee) 08.02.2021
- Cyber Fraud 30.04.2021
- Modern.gov 29.04.2021 / 30.04.2021 / 04.05.2021

The Year Ahead

The key areas the Democratic Services Committee will consider during 2021/22 are as follows:

- Consideration to the results of the annual self-evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny survey;
- To review participation in relation to the Members' Annual Reports;
- Monitoring implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act in relation to:
 - Candidate guide for the 2022 election
 - Revised job-descriptions for Members
 - Training for new and returning Members following the election in 2022
 - IT provision for Members post the election in 2022
 - E-Petition
 - Facilitating hybrid meetings
- Review the size of all Committees in relation to reduction in overall Members from 2022, following the Local Elections;
- Developing an action Plan following approval of the Diversity in Democracy Declaration;
- Ensuring adequate support is provided to Members;
- Any matters that are raised by Members that requires the Committee's consideration.

Attending the Democratic Services Committee / Contact us

Attending meetings of the Democratic Services Committee

The Council is keen to see members of the public attend Democratic Services Committee meetings and all other Council meetings, including Council itself, Cabinet, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, Development Control Committee and the Licensing Committee.

With the exception of confidential items, all business is held in public. All of the public papers are published online 3 working days in advance of the meeting

<http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/your-council/councillors-committees/committees/>

Contact us

If you wish to find out more about the Democratic Services Committee or make a comment or suggestion, please contact us:

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