

CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: 20th October 2022

Title: Democratic Services Committee Annual Report, 2021/22.

Purpose of the report: To present the Annual Report of the Democratic Services to Council.

For: Information

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 published on the Council website.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.

No. This report is not related to a new Policy or change in service

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Summary:

Long term: N/A

Integration: N/A

Collaboration: N/A

Involvement: N/A

Prevention: N/A

Recommendation(s): To note the Democratic Services Annual Report, 2021/22.

Reasons for decision: To inform Council of the work being undertaken by the Democratic Services Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny: Not applicable.

Policy Framework: Not applicable.

Strategic Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ceredigion Council is an organisation that is fit-for-purpose to deliver improving services to meet the needs of our citizens.
Financial implications:	None.
Statutory Powers:	Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
Background Papers:	None.
Appendices:	Appendix A – Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2021/22.
Corporate Lead Officer:	Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services (Head of Democratic Services)
Date:	1st October 2022.

Democratic Services Committee



Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council

Annual Report 2021/22



Gwynedd
Council

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Terms of Reference of the Committee

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.



Terms of Reference of the Committee (continued)

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

The Committee is made up of 6 Members and is politically balanced. In 2021/22 it was chaired by Councillor Ceredig Davies. The Members have worked together to progress the work of the Democratic Services Committee:

Chairman



Councillor Ceredig Davies
Liberal Democrats
Attendance: 3/3



Councillor Clive Davies
Plaid Cymru
Attendance 2/3



Councillor Lloyd Edwards
Ungrouped
Attendance 2/3



Councillor Gwyn James
Independent
Attendance 3/3



Councillor Dai Mason
Independent
Attendance 3/3



Councillor Wyn Thomas
Plaid Cymru
Attendance 3/3



The Activities of the Committee

2021/22

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:

A review of the size of all Committees

Following a review by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, it was noted that the number of Councillors representing Ceredigion County Council would reduce from 42 to 38 from May 2022. The Democratic Services Committee agreed to establish a Cross-Party Task and Finish Group to consider recommendations regarding a reduction to the number of Members on several of its committees. The recommendations of the Cross-Party Task and Finish Group were then presented to Council and approved.

Diversity in Democracy Action Plan

The Democratic Services Committee considered an action plan relating to the Diversity in Democracy statement which had been endorsed by the Council. The action plan contains 6 aims and a timetable for implementation which will be reviewed by the Democratic Services Committee in due course. Members noted that there is a role for the political groups to promote diversity whilst encouraging individuals to stand for the election in May 2022 with an aim to improve diversity in democracy.

Elected Members Role Descriptors

The Democratic Services Committee considered proposed revisions to the WLGA role descriptors reflecting the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which are designed to be used alongside the Welsh Member Development (Competency Framework). It was noted that Ceredigion County Council Officers had been involved in the development of these revisions alongside Officers and Members representing all Councils in Wales. The Committee resolved to recommend the amendments for approval by Council. Council subsequently approved the Members' Role Descriptors.

The Development Framework for Councillors in Wales 2021

The Democratic Services Committee considered the framework developed by the WLGA as a guide to identify priorities for training and development. Members noted the duty for political parties to take a lead on a number of the items, and noted the importance of training in order to ensure that Members can provide a high level of support to their residents. It was also noted that Members would be able to self-evaluate their development needs in accordance with the development framework and that training would be tailored to meet those needs.



The Activities of the Committee 2021/22 (continued)

A review of the impact of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

Members were advised of the main aspects of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 relevant to the Democratic Services Committee, including:

- A requirement to publish a strategy encouraging participation by local people
It was noted that a draft strategy was presented to Cabinet for consideration.
- Electronic broadcasts of meetings
It was noted that installation of new equipment at the Council Chambers in Penmorfa was underway in order to facilitate the requirement of this legislation, and that this would be accommodated by the publication of protocols, subject to the outcome of the Welsh Government consultation taking place in July 2022 and resulting guidance. Members asked whether the number of attendees had increased as a result of holding remote meetings, and it was confirmed that the numbers have increased significantly.
- A requirement to develop an e-petition scheme
It was noted that Ceredigion are leading on an e-petition scheme for the whole of Wales and that a report would be presented subject to the outcome of the Welsh Government consultation in July 2022 and resulting guidance.
- A duty to publish official addresses
It was noted that Ceredigion County Council currently publish official addresses for all Members, and that from May 2022, a generic address would be published.
- The enabling of job sharing and family absences
It was noted that the above requirements are contained within the Annual Report and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.
- Duties relevant to Leaders of Political Groups in relation to standards of conduct
It was noted that the legislation requires political group leaders to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of the group in cooperation with the Ethics and Standards Committee.
- A review of the size of the Governance and Audit Committee
The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 stipulates that from 5 May 2022 one third of the members of the Governance and Audit Committee must be lay members. The Democratic Services Committee noted the recommendations of the Governance and Audit Committee, and resolved to recommend to Council that the number of lay members increase from 1 to 3 and that the number of County Councillor members remains at 6.



The Activities of the Committee 2021/22 (continued)

Changes to the Council's Constitution

The Democratic Services Committee reviewed recommendation to the Council's procedure rules relating to Motions on Notice, Call-in procedures and the principles of the voting mechanism relating to simple majority and the Chairperson's casting vote. The aims of the amendments were to simplify and clarify the procedures in relation to the deadline for submitting a Motion, making amendments both prior to the meeting and during the meeting, and clarifying what can and cannot be called in, the criteria for referral to Council and consent in relation to urgent decisions. With regards to the voting mechanisms, it was recommended that the overarching Council rules are duplicated for all Committees within the Constitution. The Democratic Services Committee recommended to Council that all the above are implemented. Council approved the recommendations.

Member ICT Provision post elections 2022

The Democratic Services Committee considered a report which proposed that Members are given the same ICT provisions as staff, namely a *Windows* laptop, a 24" screen with internal docking capability or separate docking station allowing the laptop to be connected with a single cable, a keyboard, mouse, headset and a basic carry case. Ceredigion email address and Office 365 account would be installed, and an ability to install Office applications on up to 5 personal devices. Printing and scanning facilities would be provided in the Members' Room, with access to Wi-Fi in all council offices. Members would be able to access email and Office files from personal devices and mobile phones and appropriate training would be provided on issued devices and data protection, whilst ICT support from corporate ICT service desks would continue to be provided. It was agreed that following the election, Members would be issued with the same equipment that was provided to current Members in January when the i-pads were decommissioned and that the matter be considered again during the next administration.

High Speed Broadband / Fibre Contract

A request was received from a Councillor that consideration be given to investigating the possibility of providing a group high speed broadband / fibre contract for all Councillors and Senior Officers of the Council. Members of the Committee noted that over a 1000 staff connect daily from home via broadband and are able to carry out most of their duties. If the Authority was to approve high speed broadband to certain individuals, a policy would need to be agreed on who would be eligible to receive this service, why they are entitled and how it would be funded. Members also noted that regular communication has taken place with Openreach and the Welsh Government regarding the advancement of broadband in Ceredigion and that improvements are happening all the time. During the following meeting it was noted that this would not be financially viable due to the high cost of installation, and that Ceredigion is currently ahead of the rest of Wales with 26% of its population on fibre. Openreach was also due to launch a website providing information about the service, technology and broadband across the County.



The Activities of the Committee 2021/22 (continued)

Members' Induction Programme 2022

The Democratic Services Committee considered the draft induction programme, noting that an additional training session had been included specifically for Cabinet Members. It was noted that the timetable was manageable, and that it would be preferable if training could be provided in a piecemeal manner.

Self-Evaluation of Scrutiny

The Democratic Services Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny Officers relating to the Self-Evaluation of Scrutiny. It was noted that the survey is conducted annually and that the number of questions had been reduced as proposed by the Democratic Services Committee in the previous year, however responses had reduced to 15 compared to 25 for the previous year. The majority of Members agreed that Partnerships and partners organisations have been the subject of effective Scrutiny, that they have a worthwhile and fulfilling role, that Scrutiny have ownership of its own work programme, that changes have been brought about as a result of scrutiny activity and that members of the public are able to contribute. They agreed that there is sufficient support arrangements for scrutiny and that there is a constructive working partnerships with officers. The self-evaluation was undertaken when all meeting were only held remotely and there was a mixed response as to whether remote Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings were as effective as face to face meetings, with some agreeing that they were as effective and others disagreeing with the statement.

Amendments to the Dispensation application form

The Democratic Services Committee asked that the Ethics and Standards Committee consider amending the Dispensation application form to stipulate that the information contained within the document is made available to the public. The form has since been amended to note this.

Regular Monthly Meetings

The Democratic Service Committee requested that monthly meetings take place remotely between the Leadership Group and all Councillors during the lockdown in order to provide an update on Covid-19. At a later meeting, it was confirmed that the monthly meetings were now taking place.

Forward Work Programme

The Democratic Services Committee noted that all Members are able to propose additions to the Forward Work Programme as matters arise. This item is included on all meeting agendas for



The Year Ahead

The key areas the Democratic Services Committee will consider during 2022/23 are as follows:

- ◆ To monitor the emerging issues which arise from the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021;
- ◆ To review the annual self-evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny survey to reflect amendments to legislation;
- ◆ To review annual Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales consultations and outcomes;
- ◆ To undertake a survey in relation to the timings of meetings;
- ◆ To undertake a diversity and inclusion survey with Members which will provide a benchmark for future elections and provide opportunities to address any barriers;
- ◆ To review the induction programme for all Members;
- ◆ To arrange a workshop for all Members on protocols for attending hybrid meetings;
- ◆ To arrange a workshop for all Members on the use of the 'Clic' system;
- ◆ To ensure 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, with members of the public able to attend meetings remotely or in person. 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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