

**BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

<b>Report to</b>	<b>The Chair and Members of the Democratic Services Committee</b>
<b>Report Subject</b>	<b>Annual report of the Head of Democratic Services</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Bernadette Elias Head of Policy and Performance</b>
<b>Report date</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup> November 2015</b>
<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Corporate Services and Strategy</b>
<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Corporate Services</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>16<sup>th</sup> December 2015</b>
<b>Date signed off by Monitoring Officer</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Date signed off by Section 151 Officer</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Date signed off by Chair</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015</b>
<b>Key words</b>	<b>Elected Member support, assessment.</b>

## Report Information Summary

<b>1.</b>	<b>Purpose of Report*</b>
1.1	To present the annual report of the Head of Democratic Services to the Democratic Services Committee prior to it being presented to Council for approval.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Scope of the Report*</b>
2.1	The Head Democratic Services is required under the Local Government (Wales) Measure to produce an annual report which includes an assessment of the arrangements in place to support Elected Members. The report sets out the current services and support provided to Members.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Recommendation/s for Consideration*</b>
3.1	That the Democratic Services Committee provides comment on the annual report of the Head of Democratic Services and then recommends the preferred option , to Council for approval.

### **Why this topic is a priority for the Council?\***

*Report author to identify links to the main corporate strategies.*

Single Integrated Plan (SIP)	Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP)	Performance Management Improvement Framework (PMIF)	Operating Model	Transforming Blaenau Gwent (TBG Programme)	Other (please state)
		X		X	

### **Reporting Pathway\***

*Report author to identify proposed reporting pathway. (To include dates where possible)*

Directorate Management Team (DMT)	Corporate Management Team (CMT)	Audit	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny	Executive	Council	Other (please state)
26/11/15	1/12/15		16/12/15			Jan 2016	

**\*Denotes mandatory section**

## Main Report

<b>1.</b>	<b>Background and Context*</b>
1.1	The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to designate an officer to the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services (HDS).
1.2	The Democratic Services Committee appointed the Head for Policy and Performance to the role of HDS. The scope of the role is set out in the Council's Constitution.
1.3	The Council must provide the HDS with resources that, in its opinion, are sufficient to allow the functions of the role set out in the Measure to be discharged. The HDS is required to produce an annual report which includes an assessment of current arrangements.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Options for Consideration (to be completed in every case where relevant to the report topic and information)</b>
2.1	<p>Option 1</p> <p>The Democratic services committee recommends the report to Council for approval on the basis that it is satisfied there is an adequate level of support for Elected Members.</p> <p>Option 2</p> <p>The Democratic services committee recommends to Council that the HDS undertakes a survey of all members to identify additional support requested, identifies the associated implications and costs and reports back to the DSC and Council for further consideration.</p>

3.	<b>Performance Evidence and Information*</b>
3.1	Summary of current service and support for elected members;  <b>Member Development and Training;</b>
3.2	An agreed <b>Member development strategy</b> is in place and the associated action plan is monitored via Democratic Services Committee who recommend to Council. Overall, significant progress has been made to date against the nine priority areas set out in the action plan. Summarised below is the performance using BRAG status covering the period January – September 2015; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 priority area actions rated BLUE</li> <li>• 1 priority area action rated GREEN</li> <li>• 2 priority area actions rated AMBER</li> </ul>
3.3	The Council has achieved <b>level 1 of the Welsh Local Government ( WLGA) Charter award for Member development and support</b> . The WLGA feedback concluded that the support provided to councillors in Blaenau Gwent continues to be of a very high standard.
3.4	The feedback from the assessment panel was very positive with elements identified to share as good practice with other Local Authorities. Comments of the review panel included reference to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both the quality of the submission and the practice described</li> <li>• Being particularly impressed with the Councils suite of role descriptions which they felt were both comprehensive and written in very accessible language</li> <li>• Being impressed with the Councils Member Training and Development strategy and action plan, which was felt when linked to the Member training and Development programme will provide excellent opportunities for members.</li> </ul>
3.5	<b>The Member training and development programme</b> is in place and includes for the first time during 2015 a number of mandatory sessions as part of the programme. These were introduced following feedback from Members as part of the training needs analysis survey.

3.6	<p><b>Personal Development Review (PDR) procedures for Members</b> were established and endorsed by Council in 2014 and undertaken during January to March 2015. The information gained on the individual and collective needs of Members is used to inform and shape the programme of support.</p>
3.7	<p>During the first year of implementation 30 Members (including all those with senior salary responsibility) undertook PDR's. Training to support the process was delivered via the WLGA prior the reviews being undertaken. Planning for the next cycle of PDR's to be undertaken in 2016 is underway.</p>
3.8	<p>In October 2015, the Council agreed the proposals to introduce a <b>Mentoring framework for Members</b>, as recommended by the Democratic Services Committee. Training via the WLGA to support the implementation of the framework is currently being planned.</p>
	<p><b>Supporting the democratic process;</b></p>
3.9	<p>As part of the Transforming Blaenau Gwent programme the business support model was implemented in November 2015. Capacity to provide support for the democratic processes including committee agenda administration, constituency work and civic duties has been established within the model. A level of continuity and stability in staff has been achieved with a key contact in place for Members in addition to the support available via HDS.</p>
3.10	<p>Training and development support for Members in relation to agile working and ICT has been recognised as a need from the PDR and the training needs analysis process. A Member session on the agile working environment is planned as part of the Member training and development programme, and practical sessions on ICT are being facilitated by the Resources Directorate commencing 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at the General Offices. In addition, a cross scrutiny task and finish group set up by the Corporate Overview scrutiny committee will provide input into the review of the current IT for Members scheme and the overall paperless environment.</p>

<p>3.11</p> <p>3.12</p> <p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p> <p>3.15</p>	<p>The HDS role includes responsibilities for the scrutiny function. <b>Development and support arrangements for the scrutiny function</b> include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An established scrutiny action plan monitored via Democratic services committee who recommend to the plan to Council for approval</li> <li>• Chairs and vice chairs of scrutiny meetings; and</li> <li>• Internal evaluation opportunities in each cycle.</li> </ul> <p>The <b>arrangements to support the Executive committee</b> were endorsed in 2014. A review of the arrangements and revisions to the Executive support handbook has been undertaken and presented to Executive committee in November 2015.</p> <p>Support for members continues to be provided in relation to the schedule of committee meetings to be <b>Webcast</b> (current schedule agreed until 1 April 2016.)</p> <p>In accordance with requirements under the Local Government Measure, a survey of <b>timings of meetings</b> to establish Members preference has been undertaken which informed the timings of the current cycle of meetings.</p> <p>Work to support the production of the <b>Annual Reports of Members</b> continues to be provided. The annual report format was endorsed by Democratic Services Committee in 2013 who recommended it to Council for approval. During 2015, 18 Members produced an annual report.</p>
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>Impact Assessment Against Proposals / Options*</b></p>
<p>4.1</p>	<p>The Member support arrangements look to the longer term and the increasing complexity of the roles Members undertake. The PDR procedures in place and engagement on them are offered to all Members.</p> <p>Relevant benchmarking information will be identified if option two is recommended.</p> <p>The Member development programme was subject to an Equality impact assessment screening with no adverse impact on protected characteristics identified.</p>

<b>5.</b>	<b>Financial Implications*</b>
5.1	There are potential financial implications in respect of option two that will need to be identified.
5.2	There are financial implications in relation to the continuation of webcasting committees that will need to be considered by Council.
5.3	Reduced funding to the WLGA from Welsh Government has a potential impact on the type and cost of training and support they can offer local authorities. This is being mitigated by considering alternative sources and expertise including delivery of the member programme in house and via national networks which share opportunities to access external support.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Risk Implications*</b>
6.1	There are potential risks if the level of support arrangements for Members are deemed by Council not to be adequate, including in relation to public perception of additional resource allocation.
<b>7.</b>	<b>Staffing/Workforce Development Implications*</b>
7.1	The HDS is able to make recommendations including with regard to the appointment, organisation and management of staff discharging democratic services functions.
7.2	The HDS may arrange for the discharge of democratic services functions by staff provided, and can delegate functions to staff as they feel appropriate. The final decision on resources provided rests with Council.
7.3	As part of the implementation of the business support model, regular engagement between the HDS and officers within the business support model is scheduled.
<b>8.</b>	<b>Conclusion*</b>
8.1	In the opinion of the HDS the range of support provided to Elected Members, as set out in section 3, indicates that Council can be assured provision is adequate. However there are always opportunities to extend and enhance support should Council determine that is desired.

**\*Denotes mandatory section**