

Committee: **Council**
 Date of Meeting: **21st July, 2022**
 Report Subject: **Annual Report of Head of Democratic Services 2021/22**
 Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas – Leader of the Council/Executive Member Corporate Overview and Performance**
 Report Submitted by: **Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	30/06/22						21/07/22	

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present the 2021/22 annual report of the Head of Democratic Services.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The annual report of the Head of Democratic Services (HDS) outlines the comprehensive range of arrangements in place to support Elected Members to enable them to fulfil their roles.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option One

The Council approves the report on the basis that it is satisfied there is a sufficient level of support for Elected Members.

3.2 Option Two

The Council provides comment and amendments to the report of the HDS prior to approval.

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

4.1 The role of HDS is set out in the Council's Constitution and Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

5. Implications Against Each Option

Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

5.1 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.

5.1.2 Various budgets are allocated to support Elected Members, including support from a dedicated Democratic Services Team, with support from the Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships and the Service Manager Performance and Democratic.

Each Member is allocated an allowance to support them to undertake their role effectively.

The amount allocated to support Member Development is £5,880.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.2.1 There are potential risks associated with option two if the levels of support arrangements for Members are deemed by Council not to be sufficient. The Democratic Services Committee is able to recommend to Council a review of resources and/ or support if felt necessary.

5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to designate an officer to the post of Head of Democratic Services (HDS). The role is set out in the Council's Constitution as a statutory function.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 The role of the HDS is to:

- carry out the Local Authority's function of designated Head of Democratic Services;
- keep under review the adequacy of provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to discharge the democratic services functions of the Authority; and
- make reports, at least annually, to the full Council in relation to these matters.

5.4.2 The HDS is able to make recommendations including with regard to the appointment, organisation and management of staff discharging democratic functions. The HDS may arrange for the discharge of democratic functions by staff and can delegate functions to staff as they feel appropriate.

5.4.3 Throughout the majority of 2021/22 the Chief Officer Commercial (formally the Head of Democratic Services) maintained the Head of Democratic Services role until a new Head of Service came into post in January 2022.

6. ***Supporting Evidence***

6.1 A summary of current service and support for Elected Members is provided below.

6.2 A Democratic Hub has been established at the General Offices in Ebbw Vale.

6.3 Linked to the requirements of the **Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021** the Council has implemented hybrid meeting arrangements. Each meeting is recorded and included on the Council website. Arrangements are being made for live recordings to be broadcast in the 2022 cycle. This approach promotes openness and transparency as well as engagement with the Council's democratic processes.

6.4 The table below shows a comparison of the number of meetings held and member attendance throughout the year.

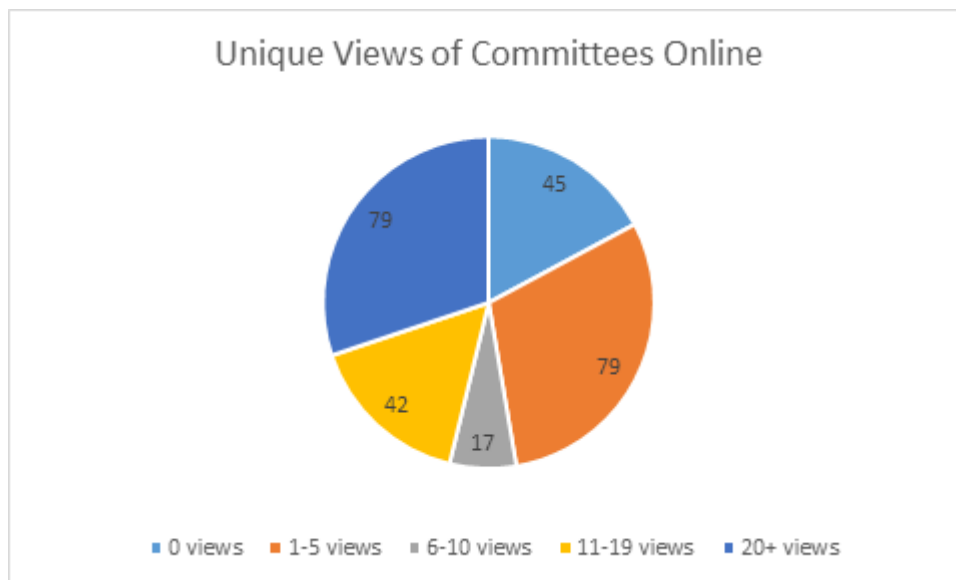
Member Attendance at Scrutiny Committees							
	Agreed Committee Membership	Total Members Due to Attend June 21 to Mar 22	Actual Members in Attendance June 21 to Mar 22	% of Members in attendance June 21– Mar 22	% of Members in attendance Sept 20- Apr 21	Number of Meetings Held June 21 to Mar 22	Number of Meetings Held Sep 20 to Apr 21**
Community Services	15	90	80	89	79	6	7
Corporate Overview	15	105	85	81	75	7	5
Education and Learning	15	105	99	94	83	7	7
Regeneration	15	105	95	90	80	7	8
Social Services	15	60	49	82	79	4	6
Total	75	465	408	87	79	31	33
Joint Safeguarding	23	69	48	70	67	2	2
Joint Budget	32	160	123	77	75	5	4
PSB	15	45	32	71	77	3	2
Total	70	250	203	81	75	10	8
Overall	145	715	611	85	78	41	41

* 8 meetings were scheduled to be held during late March / April 2022, however, these meetings were cancelled owing to the Pre-Election period.

**Committees were stopped at the beginning of 2020 owing to the COVID 19 Pandemic therefore meetings were only held between September 2020 to April 2021.

6.5 The graph below provides the number of unique views* for the committee meetings held throughout the 2021/22 democratic cycle.

**Unique views - the number of the unique users that click on a video. If a single user views 5 times on a link, the server will 1 unique view.*



6.6 The top most viewed committees to date are:

BGCBC Committee Name and Meeting Date	Unique Viewers
Special Meeting of the Council - 07 February 2022	79
Special Meeting of the Council - 17 February 2022	14
Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee - 1 February 2022	15
Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 09 February 2022	13
Ordinary Meeting of the Council - 27 January 2022	10

6.7 Council agreed to pause the **Personal Development Review (PDR)/ Competency Framework** until the new Head of Service was in post and for the newly Elected Members in May 2022. As part of this, the Head of Democratic Services will undertake a review of the current process and will work with the Leader to get the process operational by the end of 2022.

6.8 An extensive **Member Induction and Refresher Programme** has been prepared to support both new and returning members following the local election in May 2022. The programme has been split by induction sessions and then development sessions. All will be recorded and uploaded into the Member electronic library, including any supporting documentation.

6.9 **Councillor Skills: E-Learning for Members in Wales** work has been ongoing with the Welsh Local Government Association and all local authorities across Wales to upgrade the All Wales Academy e-learning platform in order that it continues to be fit for purpose with particular

emphasis on improving accessibility and content. These modules have been included in the Member Induction and Development Programme.

- 6.10 **An electronic Member library** has been established. This dedicated resource is available on the intranet for Members. This research function includes key documentation and information including resources from the Member Induction and Development Programme.
 - 6.11 **A Member training and development programme** was in place throughout the year. The programme reflected the key areas for support, including those identified by Members topics identified from the forward work programmes of the Scrutiny committees and support related to training required for specific roles on committee e.g. Planning.
 - 6.12 **A Mentoring Scheme for Members** is established. Members self-select and participate in the scheme, and a number of Members have taken the opportunity to be involved. On-going advice and guidance from the HDS has been provided to support the Mentoring scheme. The new HDS will undertake a review of the mentoring scheme moving forward.
 - 6.13 **Support arrangements for Members appointed who sit on outside bodies** have been established and implemented. This area of support had been identified by Members. Reports from Members who sit on outside bodies now form part of the Council agenda on a periodic basis. Feedback from Members who have participated in the arrangement suggests that they feel there is value in giving Members the opportunity to report back to the Council. The support arrangements also include the identification of a link officer for Members aligned to their role on outside bodies.
 - 6.14 The arrangements to support **the agenda management of committees** is in place. In accordance with requirements under the Local Government Measure, each committee has considered the **timings of meetings** to establish Members preference, and this has informed the timings of the current cycle of meetings.
 - 6.15 The Council is actively involved in the **Joint Scrutiny Committee of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD)**. Each of the 10 local authorities is represented on the Committee. Activity has continued during 2021/22 and Blaenau Gwent Council was represented by the Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee being the Primary member and the Vice-Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee the deputy member.
- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
- 6.2.1 By providing a democratic function that has been identified as having sufficient support and resources means that Elected Members are provided with the support that they need to operate effectively, which in turn should support them in their role with the community.
- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
- 6.3.1 Opportunities to maximise engagement in the range of training and support arrangements by Members will assist them in meeting future demands of their roles.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
- 6.4.1 The Member support arrangements look to the longer term and in recognition of the increasing complexity of the roles Members undertake.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

- 6.5.1 The content of the member development programme is aimed to give Members a solid grounding and prepare them to meet their roles and responsibilities for the future.
- 6.5.2 The role of HDS is to undertake a review of the support provided to members and identify if further support is required in order to prevent ineffective delivery of the democratic function.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

- 6.6.1 The training and development programme for Members includes elements of both internal and external support. Training is offered on a regional basis in some instances e.g. Education Achievement Service, Joint Scrutiny Committee of the CCRC.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

- 6.7.1 All Council services are involved with the democratic functions of the Council. Forward Work Programmes and agendas are developed jointly with Members and Officers.

6.8 ***EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

- 6.8.1 The Member development programme has been subject to an Equality impact assessment screening with no adverse impact on the protected characteristics identified.
- 6.8.2 Language preference for Members has been established.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The HDS presents an annual report to Democratic services and Council. Regular monitoring reports on the democratic arrangements are also presented as part of the committee forward work programme.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- None