

Committee: **Democratic Services**  
Date of Meeting: **16<sup>th</sup> March, 2020**  
Report Subject: **Annual Report of Head of Democratic Services**  
Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member Corporate / Leader of the Council**  
Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, Head of Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
w/c 17/02/20	25/2/20			16/03/20			26/03/10	

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 To present the 2019/20 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 support them to fulfil their roles.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

That the Democratic Services Committee:

3.1 **Option One**

Considers the report and recommends it to Council for approval.

3.2 **Option Two**

Considers the report and makes specific recommendations to Council for consideration prior to approval.

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

The role of HDS is set out in the Council's Constitution.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

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 The Member Development budget is £5,880.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are potential risks if the levels of support arrangements for Members are deemed by Council not to be sufficient. The Democratic Services Committee receives regular monitoring reports on democratic arrangements and is able to make recommendations to Council.

5.3 ***Legal***

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 Head of Governance and Partnerships is the appointed Head of Democratic Services.

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.

6. ***Supporting Evidence***

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

6.2 The Council has been successful in achieving **level 1 of the Welsh Local Government (WLGA) Charter award for Member development and support**, the WLGA presented the award at full Council in November 2018. The feedback on the submission was very positive, and the Council was encouraged to work towards applying for the advanced level charter in future. Initial work to consider the areas for development required to submit an application for the advanced level charter has recently started.

6.3 Council has agreed a **Personal Development Review (PDR)/ Competency Framework**. The PDRs have been undertaken with all senior responsibility salary holders. The sessions are held with an external facilitator and the HDS, and there continues to be very positive feedback from the Members involved in the externally facilitated sessions. The HDS also undertakes a one to one follow up session with each Member to discuss their personal

action plan and discuss any other support that they feel would be of value to them.

- 6.4 As part of the arrangements agreed by Council, Members who are not in receipt of a SRA are offered the opportunity for a PDR meeting, facilitated via Group. Members who have expressed an interest will participate in a session during 2020.
- 6.5 **Councillor Skills: E-Learning for Members in Wales** Work is currently being undertaken in conjunction with the NHS, 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.
- 6.6 As part of this process each local authority has agreed to create one learning module suitable for use by all Members in Wales – Blaenau Gwent had chosen to develop the 'Managing Stress and Coping with Bullying and Harassment Module'. The deadline for completion of all modules is September 2020 and the project will result in 22 high quality accessible e-learning modules being available for Members across Wales to share.
- 6.7 **A Member training and development programme** is in place. The programme reflects key areas for support, including those identified by Members (e.g. through the PDR process), 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.
- 6.8 The Constitution includes **role descriptions** for Members. A Member **Constitutional Working Group** has been established supported by relevant officers.
- 6.9 **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 HDS is planning to gain feedback from Members who have participated during 2020 to inform any review or proposed amendments to the scheme.
- 6.9.1 **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 Council. The support arrangements also include the identification of a link officer for Members aligned to their role on outside bodies.
- 6.9.2 The Council has undertaken a review of its **Member Champion** roles. Lead support officers have been identified to support each of the Champions and

arrangements are in place to provide support when working within these roles.

- 6.10 The Member Champions are identified at the Annual General Meeting. For 2019/20 they were:
- Community Safety
  - Children & Young People
  - Older Persons
  - Equalities & Diversity
  - Armed Forces
  - Natural Environment & Biodiversity
  - Digital Champion
- 6.11 There is also an identified lead member for safeguarding:
- Executive Member - Social Services
- 6.12 **An electronic Member library** has been established. This dedicated resource is available on the intranet, and Members have been notified that the site is now 'live'. The database includes key documentation and information which is regularly updated to include resources from the Member Development and Training sessions.
- 6.13 A review of the **supporting guidance available for Scrutiny Members, the Executive and Officers** is undertaken on an annual basis.
- 6.14 The HDS role includes responsibility for the **scrutiny function**. Development. Support arrangements for the scrutiny function include:
- Specific training for Chairs and Vice Chairs and Scrutiny Members, including externally facilitated sessions;
  - Arrangements to promote scrutiny committee meetings via social media to raise awareness of the work of scrutiny;
  - Ongoing discussions to further engage the Youth Forum in scrutiny,
  - Exploring ways to raise awareness of the scrutiny function with other forums, e.g. the Citizens Panel;
  - Procedures to support the function including forward work programme development, agenda setting meetings, pre meetings and ongoing evaluation. Some elements of these arrangements have been noted as areas of good practice and used in other local authorities;
  - Meetings of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny; and
  - An action plan monitored via Democratic Services Committee.
- 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. The Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee is the Blaenau Gwent representative on the Joint Committee.

- 6.16 An '**Essential Skills**' ICT short programme has been delivered. The programme focussed on the use of Microsoft Outlook and introductory level Word. The sessions were offered to the Members who had requested some additional support. 3 sessions were delivered in-house in February 2019 by the Council's Digital Inclusion Officer supported by Democratic Services. 14 Members attended and the sessions and there was some positive feedback provided. Further sessions will now need to be arranged during 2020/21 to support the roll out of windows 10. The Chief Officer Commercial also provided three 'drop in' sessions for Members regarding ICT arrangements during September in order to record the specific concerns and issues being experienced by members with regards to ICT.
- 6.17 As part of the modernising agenda, a new electronic agenda management system has been procured and went live in October 2019. The **Modern.gov System** is used by 21 Local Authorities and other organisations such Brecon Beacon National Park. It offers broader functionality and user friendly on-line access to information such as minutes and agendas. An 'app' has also been procured for Member and officers that will enable agendas to be viewed and annotated on tablets/I Pads. A training session for Members was held prior to the 'go live' date and ongoing support has been provided by Democratic Services as and when required.
- 6.18 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.
- 6.19 Work to support the production of the **Annual Reports of Members** continues to be provided. In 2019, 14 reports were produced by Members and published on the Council Website.
- 6.20 Additional information and data is provided in the Democratic and Scrutiny Arrangements Action Plan report presented to the committee as part of the work programme.
- 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. PDR's are offered to all Members.

#### 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.

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 CCRCD.

#### 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 ***EqIA (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**

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