

Committee: **Democratic Services Committee**
 Date of Meeting: **22nd March 2021**
 Report Subject: **Annual Report of Head of Democratic Services**
 Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member Corporate / Leader of the Council**
 Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, interim Chief Officer Commercial**

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 03/21	04/03/21	w/c 8 th March		22/03/21			25/03/21	

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present the 2020/21 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

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

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

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 The Member Development budget 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 interim Chief Officer Commercial is the appointed Head of Democratic Services.

5.4.2 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.

5.4.3 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.

5.4.4 Following a review of the Democratic Services team functions, additional support for Committees and a dedicated support for Members has been established, informed by feedback received from members.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

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

6.2 Members have been supported in the move to more **agile working** as the Council responded to the pandemic.

6.3 On 23 March 2020, the UK Government announced an unprecedented UK-wide 'lockdown' in order to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Along with other Local Authorities, the decision was taken to suspend the full schedule of formal Council Committees at the end of March 2020. The AGM was held, virtually, on 2nd April and Executive, Planning and Full Council met virtually before the Summer Recess. The full committee cycle was re-established from September 2020.

6.4 Along with other Local Authorities across Wales, Elected Members have responded to the need to move to more agile working, and have done this at a pace. During the

initial implementation phases there were inevitably some ‘teething’ problems experienced.

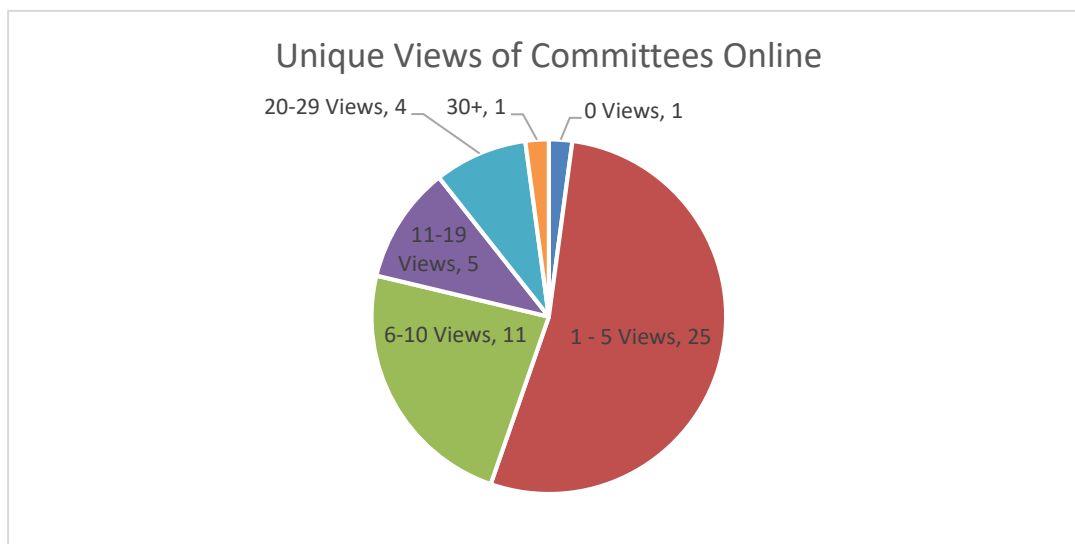
- 6.5 To support Members to move to more agile working a number of activities were undertaken, including:
- Sourcing, distribution and set up of laptops for all members;
 - Council implementation of Microsoft Teams;
 - Specific guidance on how to set up laptops to enable the use of Microsoft Teams;
 - Test session held prior to the formal Planning Committee which was the pilot for the use of Teams;
 - Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny meeting held where, ‘how to run a virtual meeting’ was included on the agenda;
 - Specific guidance and support on using emails, diary management and accessing documents;
 - Offers for ‘buddying’ with officers of the Democratic Services Team to support members who felt this would be of value;
 - Ongoing support to check in with members on any issues they were experiencing to access committee meetings; and
 - Specific on guidance on using Teams in the committee environment.
- 6.6 The council will continue to maximise the use of Teams to support the committee arrangements.
- 6.7 Requirements of the **Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act** will continue to see agile and blended committee arrangements being established.
- 6.7.1 The table below shows a comparison of the number of meetings held and member attendance from 1st September 2020 to 28th February 2021 compared to the same period in the year 2019/20.

Member Attendance at Scrutiny Committees							
	Agreed Committee Membership	Total Members Due to Attend Sep 20 to Feb 21	Actual Members in Attendance Sep 20 – Feb 21	% of Members in attendance Sept 20- Feb 21	% of Members in attendance Sept 19 - Feb 20	Number of Meetings Held Sep 20 to Feb 21	Number of Meetings Held Sep 19 to Feb 20
Community Services	15	75	57	76	64	5	5
Corporate Overview	15	45	29	64	55	3	5
Education and Learning	15	60	51	85	82	4	6
Regeneration	15	90	69	77	70	6	4
Social Services	15	60	50	83	85	4	4
Total	75	330	256	78	71	22	24

Joint Safeguarding	23	23	15	65	61	1	1
Joint Finance	32	96	72	75	53	3	2
PSB	15	15	10	67	33	1	2
Total	70	134	92	69	50	5	5
Overall	145	464	348	75	66	27	29

6.8 The Council has been recording all of the virtual committee meetings held and these have been uploaded onto the internet. This process is due to continue as it reflects the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act for the broadcasting of meetings. It also promotes openness and transparency as well as engagement with the Council's democratic processes. The graph below provides the number of unique views* for the committee meetings held from June 2020 to the end of January 2021.

***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.



6.8.1 The top most viewed committees to date are:

BGCBC Committee Name and Meeting Date	Unique Viewers
Ordinary Meeting of the Council - 26 November 2020	32
Ordinary Meeting of the Council - 23 July 2020	28
Planning, Regulatory and General Licensing Committee - 25 June 2020	27
Executive Committee Meeting - 24 June 2020	26
Planning Regulatory and General Licensing Committee - 03 September 2020	26

6.9 Council has agreed a **Personal Development Review (PDR)/ Competency Framework**. The commitment to the PDR process remains strong and PDRs have been undertaken with all senior responsibility salary holders for 2020/21 despite the

challenges faced by the Council in response to the pandemic. The sessions were 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 has also undertaken 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. Any new training needs identified as part of this process will be incorporated as part of the Member Development Programme going forward.

- 6.10 **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. Each Local Authority area has agreed to progress one module each. In Blaenau Gwent the module has been developed by Democratic Services and OD on, 'managing stress and coping with bullying and harassment'. The module will be sent to the WLGA to be included in the overall programme which will be taken forward nationally.
- 6.11 **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 Development and Training sessions. In quarter 4 a review of the library to ensure the main corporate strategies are included is to be undertaken.
- 6.12 **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. The briefing sessions for Members were re-established from September 2020 after a pause during the initial response to the pandemic.
- 6.13 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 was considered in early 2020 but has been paused due to the emergency response to the Covid 19 pandemic. Work to review areas for development to submit an application for the advanced level charter will restart in 2021 which will need to take account of any changes and developments to the award criteria.
- 6.14 The Constitution includes **role descriptions** for Members. A Member **Constitutional Working Group** has been established supported by relevant officers.
- 6.15 **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. HDS is planning to gain feedback from Members who

have participated during 2020/21 to inform any review or proposed amendments to the scheme.

- 6.16 **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. The pause to the full committee cycle has had an impact and reporting arrangements are to be re established post AGM.
- 6.17 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.
- 6.18 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

There is also an identified lead member for safeguarding:

- Executive Member - Social Services

- 6.19 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.

- 6.20 Work to develop the **Forward Work Programmes for 2020/21** began during February / March 2020, however, owing to the COVID 19 pandemic and officers being redeployed to support emergency work, the FWP development stopped and recommenced in June / July to support the restarting the Committee meeting cycle in September 2020. Work included:
- Meetings with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Officers using Microsoft Teams to further develop the FWPs. The Executive Members were also invited to observe these meetings.
 - Informal Scrutiny Member Briefing Sessions were held via MS Teams with each Scrutiny Committee during July 2020, to discuss and finalise the Draft FWPs with individual scrutiny committees.
 - The FWPs were formally signed off by each of the Scrutiny Committees during September 2020, then translated and made available for public view on the BG website.

6.21 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 2020/21 and Blaenau Gwent Council is now represented by the Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee being the Primary member and the Vice-Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee the deputy member. Two formal meetings have been held to date during September and December 2020, and an informal meeting held in November 2020. A further meeting is planned for February 2021.

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 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**

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