

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 16 November 2020
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	No Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Annual Report of Head of Democratic Services
Purpose of Report:	To outline for Members the resources available to support the Democratic Services function (as provided for under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011) following my last Annual Report to the Committee in July 2019.
Report Owner:	Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Jeff Rees
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	No consultation has been necessary.
Policy Framework:	The terms of reference of the Democratic Services Committee include "to have regard to Welsh Ministerial guidance when exercising its functions".
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an outline of the staff resources existing within Democratic Services and a summary of the wide range of duties undertaken, ongoing developments and plans for the future.

Recommendation

1. That the report be noted.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To keep Members informed.

1. Background

- 1.1 Members will be aware of the requirement under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure") for the Council to appoint a Democratic Services Committee. The Measure also requires the Council to designate one of its officers to the statutory post of "Head of Democratic Services" and provide that officer with sufficient resources to discharge these statutory functions.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Committee should have received my Annual Report earlier this year however, due to the Global pandemic created by the Covid 19 virus it was not possible to report sooner.
- 2.2 The Democratic Services division as a whole comprises three distinct sections:
 - Scrutiny and Committee Services
 - Freedom of Information / Records Management / Land Charges
 - Registration Service.
- 2.3 This report, by its very nature and its linkage with the requirements of the Measure, covers the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Committee Services section.
- 2.4 The functions of the Head of Democratic Services are set out in the Measure and relate particularly (but not exclusively) to the provision of advice and support to non-executive Members. The Committee, at its first meeting in July 2012, agreed that the Operational Manager for Democratic Services be designated as the Council's Statutory Head of Democratic Services. The Welsh Government Guidance associated with the Measure specifically provides for the Head of Democratic Services to perform other roles apart from the statutory functions. This recognises the fact that the creation of the position would have been an unacceptable burden on the budget of most, if not all, Councils at a time of economic pressures.

Staff Structure

- 2.5 For the reasons set out below and taking into account the extremely difficult (and ongoing) economic pressures facing the Council generally and the need for the Division to continue to identify / deliver / contribute to further savings, the staffing structure is considered to be sufficient for current service demands.

- 2.6** In addition to myself, as Head of Democratic Services, the section comprises a Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, three Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers, one Assistant Democratic Services Officer, one Members' and Committee Services Assistant and two WP / Administrative Support officers and two Administrative Assistants.
- 2.7** The above team deals with a wide range of activities, which include, but are not limited to: Maintaining and developing the Council's decision-making processes to include the preparation of agendas, reports and minutes, facilitating accountability and transparency; Managing and providing Scrutiny and Committee Services support to the Council and its various Committees; a range of support to Elected Members, including advice on the Council's Constitution and Members' Code of Conduct, Member Development and Members' Services, Maintaining the Register of Members' Interests; Overseeing appeals relating to school admissions and school permanent exclusions; Developing and updating the content of MemberNet; Managing the Council's committee room bookings; Corporate responsibility for all Council inbound and outward bound mail, the provision of administrative support for processing activities relating to TransAct, Council Tax, Housing Benefits and C1V.
- 2.8** As reported in my last Annual Report one of my first tasks was to implement previously agreed restructuring proposals approved by the Managing Director to reduce the level of administrative support within the Cabinet Office (including Town Twinning) and Mayor's Office. I can confirm that this work has been completed in terms of the recruitment to the establishment.
- 2.9** The following is a summary of work undertaken in the last twelve months and ongoing work / initiatives in which the section is actively engaged. The Democratic Services Committee will continue to be kept fully informed on progress of these, and other initiatives.

Wales Audit Office Review: "Overview and Scrutiny - Fit For the Future"

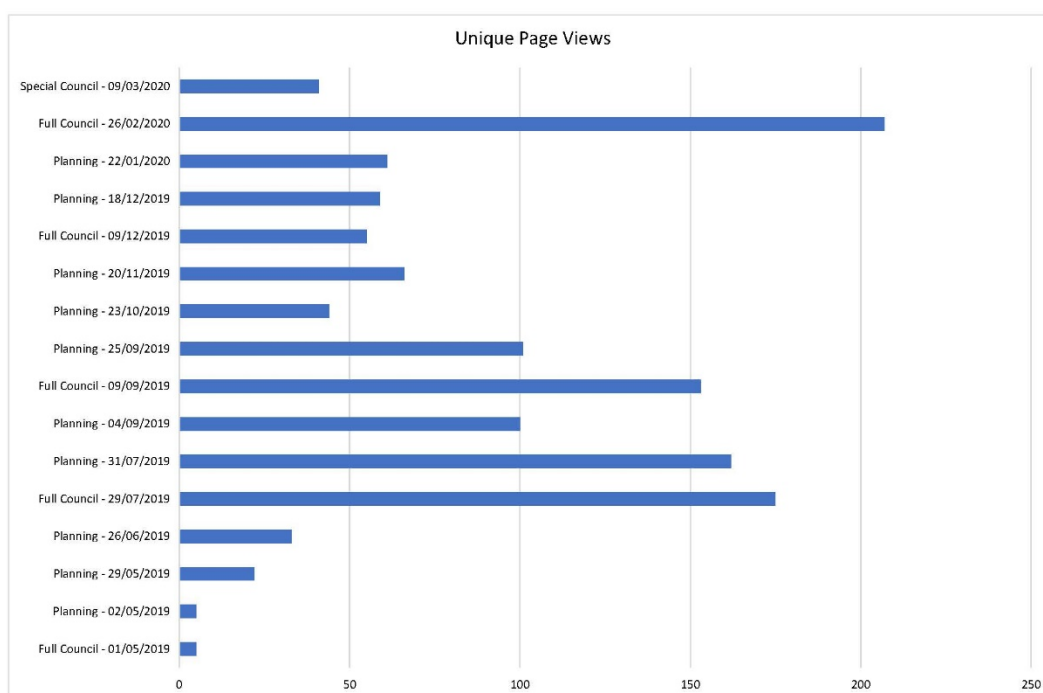
- 2.10** As reported in my last Annual Report, the WAO had undertaken a review designed to explore with Councils how 'fit for the future' their scrutiny functions are across Wales. This included considering how Councils were responding to current challenges, including the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG Act), in relation to their scrutiny activity, as well as how Councils are beginning to undertake scrutiny of Public Service Boards. The review examines how well-placed Councils are to respond to future challenges, including continued pressure on public finances and the possible move towards more regional working between Local Authorities. Progress on the Action Plan has been subject of reports the Scrutiny Committee Corporate Performance and Resources and the Scrutiny Chairman and Vice Chairmen's Group. The most recent update was considered by the above Group on 11th March 2020 shortly before the Global Pandemic took hold.

Council Constitution

- 2.11** The Council Constitution remains under review and reports to Council are submitted when changes are deemed necessary with the Constitution being updated as and when required.

Webcasting

- 2.12** The Council continues to provide live broadcasting of the Planning Committee, Full Council and Scrutiny Committee meetings in circumstances when a Scrutiny Committee will be considering Council proposals where it affects residents and the public on a County wide basis. A decision on whether to broadcast any meeting in the above circumstances is taken in consultation with the relevant Scrutiny Committee Chairman on a case by case basis.
- 2.13** Set out below are the analytics relating to “Unique Page Views” for Council and Planning Committee meetings.



- 2.14** The new Local Government and Elections Bill has been delayed and is not likely to receive Royal Assent until 2021. Current proposals include the potential requirement for all Council meetings to be webcast in the future. I have been involved in discussions as part of the all Wales Heads of Democratic Group assessing the exact implications of the Bill with counterparts within Welsh Government.

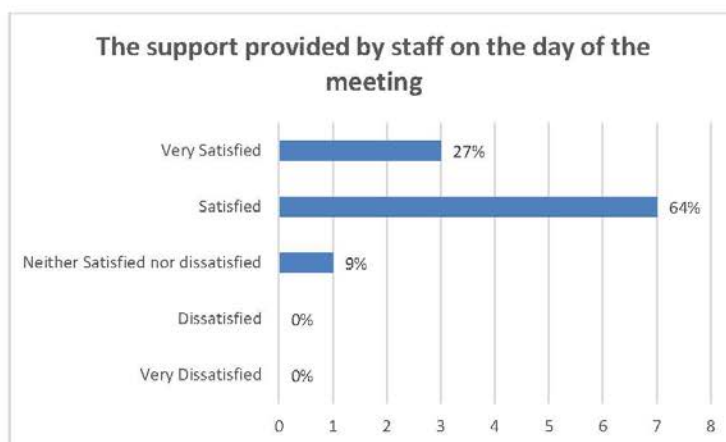
Public Speaking at Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committee

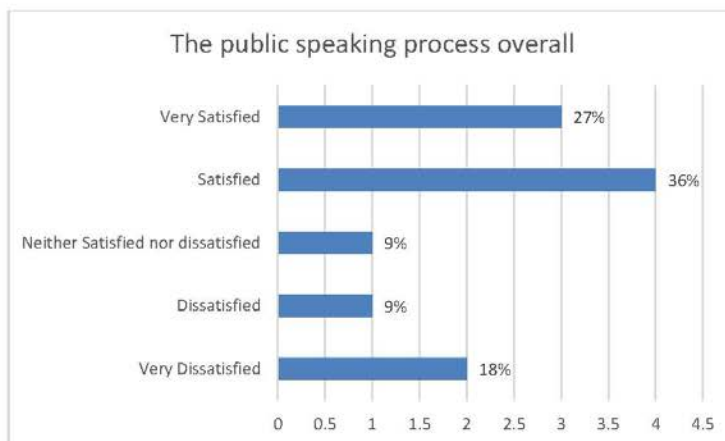
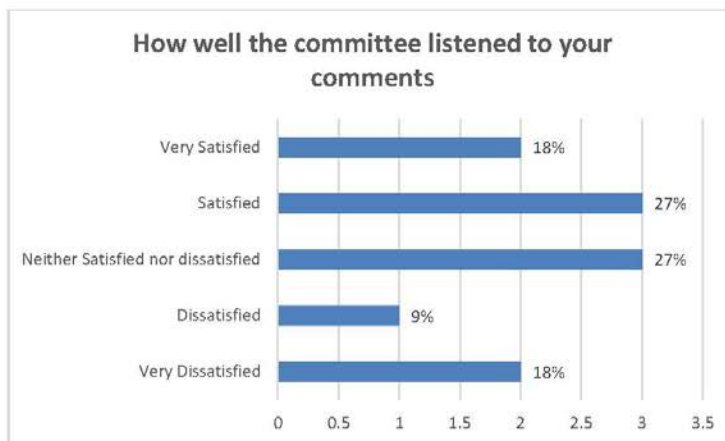
- 2.15** The arrangements for public speaking at meetings of the Council's Planning Committee have been in place since February 2015 and since that time these have worked, with public involvement at the majority of meetings. The process provides an opportunity for increased public engagement in the planning application process. During the Municipal Year 2019/20, 46 individual registrations to speak at Planning Committee meetings, this is up on the previous year's registrations of 28.

2.16 Attached below are analytics relating to satisfaction:

Public Speaking Review Summary – Planning 2019-2020

This report was generated on 19/10/20. Overall 11 respondents completed this questionnaire.



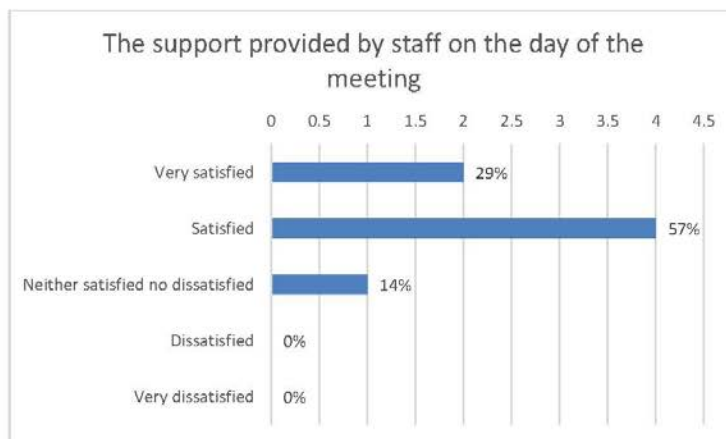
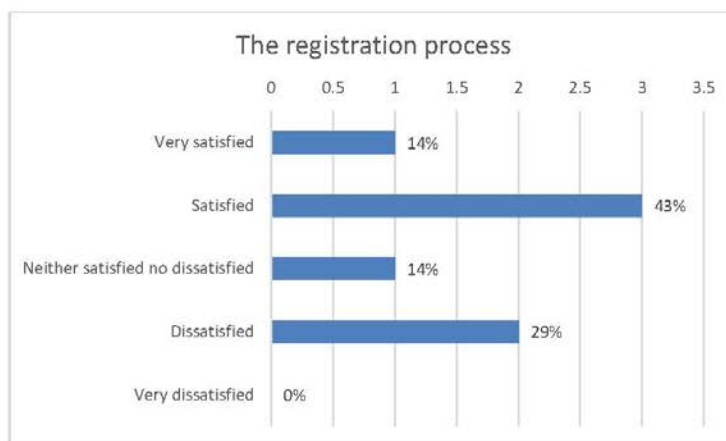
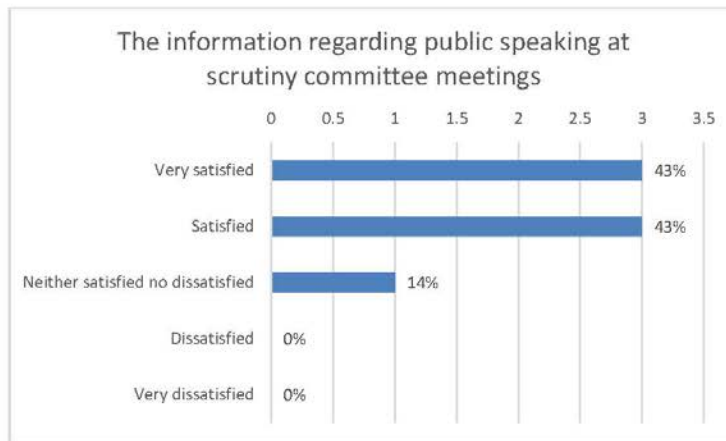


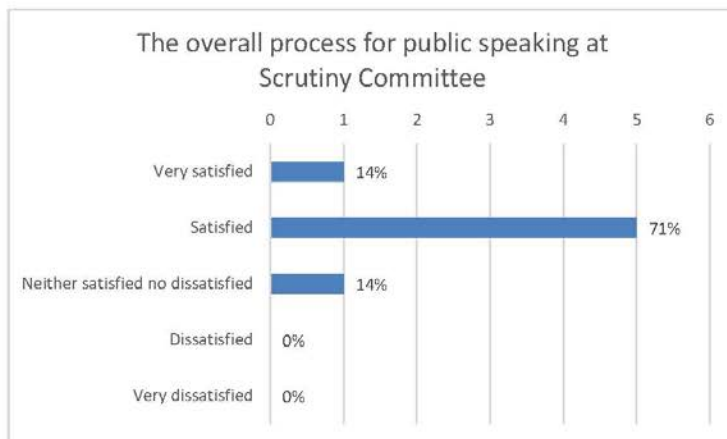
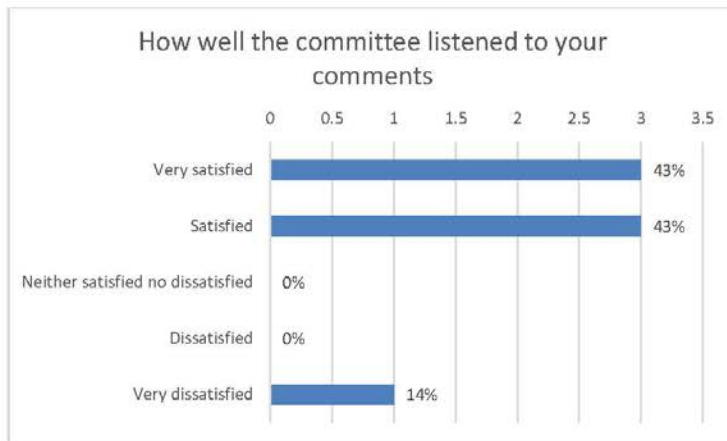
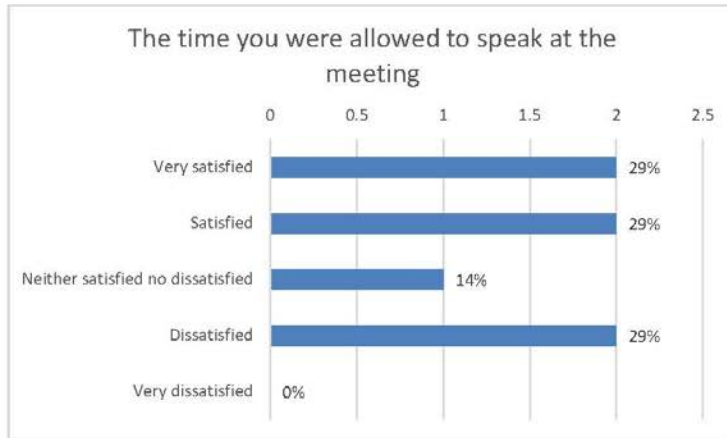
2.17 As far as Scrutiny Committees are concerned, the arrangements for public speaking were introduced in 2016. During the Municipal Year 2019/20, 25 individual registrations to speak at Scrutiny Committee meetings.

2.18 Attached below are analytics relating to satisfaction:

Public Speaking Review Summary – Scrutiny 2019-2020

This report was generated on 19/10/20. Overall 7 respondents completed this questionnaire of 25 registered speakers.





Member Development

- 2.19** During this reporting period the Democratic Services Team (supported by colleagues) were involved in a substantial amount of the ground work to prepare for the Member Expo events. Whilst the first event was a considerable success and well attended, the second was less so and due to the poor interest registered a decision was made by the Managing Director to cancel this second Expo. Clearly, this was disappointing especially given that Members had requested a move away from conventional class room styles Member Development sessions.
- 2.20** The Committee and all other Members are reminded that much of the development sessions already provided to date can still be accessed as an ongoing “refresher” learning resource via MemberNet.

The Year Ahead

- 2.21** Taking account of the impact of the Covid emergency and with a fair amount hindsight, much of the anticipated work planned for 2020/21 has been delayed. The Council's Member Development Programme in general is an ongoing process. Member Personal Development Interview process were undertaken during November 2019 to February 2020. As indicated in my other related report in the agenda this process will inform the content of the Programme going forward, but this has been affected due to public health restrictions.
- 2.22** The Team will continue to undertake Member Scrutiny satisfaction surveys and continue to consult with the public that have participated in our public speaking arrangements at Planning and Scrutiny Committee meetings.
- 2.23** Finally, my planned review of the Member Development Strategy will now be reported slightly later than planned and will be submitted to the Committee for consideration in 2021. This will allow me to factor in any changes brought about as a consequence of the introduction of the Local Government and Elections Bill and changes to Member induction arrangements for post Local Government Elections in May 2022.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act sets out effective transparency as a key part of improving the delivery of public bodies.

The Act requires public bodies to communicate and explain the processes of selecting its well-being objectives and how these objectives have been chosen, how decisions are taken in line with these objectives and what difference these objectives have made.

The importance of presenting the report is to ensure that transparency has taken place and to inform the Council and the public of the above arrangements which are required to be undertaken to comply with the terms of reference of the Democratic Services Committee include "to have regard to Welsh Ministerial guidance when exercising its functions".

- 3.1** The Measure makes arrangements for changes to the political structure of local government in Wales and the way in which local government operates.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** As set out above.

Employment

- 4.2** As set out above.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** The Council is required to comply with the relevant provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 with regard to the provision of Democratic Services and support for such.

5. Background Papers

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011