

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 27 November 2023
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Section 8 (1A) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 – Research Support for Councillors
Purpose of Report:	To remind Members of the current support available to Elected Members and to review the Council’s current support in the light of new Statutory and Non Statutory guidance Welsh Government in June 2023.
Report Owner:	J. Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	J. Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Director of Corporate Resources Head of Legal and Democratic Services / Monitoring Officer Principal Democratic Services Officer
Policy Framework:	Matters relating to Member support are a matter for the Democratic Services Committee and Full Council. Any decision to generally alter arrangements in regard to Member support is a matter for Full Council.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Government issued new consolidated Statutory and Non Statutory Guidance intended to support Councils to meet their obligations in July 2023, relating to the Local Government Act 2000, the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. • Part 2 of the above guidance refers to Research Support for Councillors under Section 8 (1A) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (“the Measure”). • The Guidance states that “all elected members should be able to access a range of information and support” in order to undertake their roles effectively. • The Guidance recommends that Councils undertake an internal review / audit of the existing research support provided to Councillors and evaluate against the examples given within guidance. • The Guidance recommends that the review is undertaken through the Democratic Services Committee. 	

- The Committee is requested to consider the current level of support available to Elected Members, as set out in Appendix A of the report, and whether this is sufficient in supporting Members to undertake their roles on behalf of the Council.
- The Committee's approval is sought to undertake a survey of Elected Members to identify what additional support is required and how this support could be developed over time. A draft survey is attached at Appendix B.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee consider the current level of support available to Members, as set out in Appendix A of the report, and whether this is sufficient in supporting Members to undertake their roles on behalf of the Council.
2. That the draft Members Research Support survey attached at Appendix B to the report be considered and, subject to the Committee's comments, approve the circulation of the survey to all Elected Members to identify what additional support is required and how this support could be developed over time.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. In order to comply with the requirements of Section 8 (1A) the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the recently published new consolidated statutory guidance 2023.
2. To identify if there is a case for the provision of additional resources to support the promotion of the Member Research Support facility to all Elected Members of the Council.

1. Background

- 1.1 Welsh Government in July 2023 issued new consolidated Statutory Guidance at Part 2, section 3 of the document under section 8(1A) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. The link to the document can be found here <https://www.gov.wales/statutory-and-non-statutory-guidance-democracy-within-principal-councils>
- 1.2 This broadly relates to areas where a local authority must have regard to when exercising its functions in respect of providing support to the Head of Democratic Services (HDS) which are, in its opinion, sufficient for the HDS to discharge their functions.
- 1.3 Section 3 of the Guidance also states that "all elected members should be able to access a range of information and support" in order to undertake their roles effectively.
- 1.4 The Council as do other Councils across Wales undertake to support Members when undertaking research activity as part of carrying out their elected role.
- 1.5 Research provided to councillors through this section of the guidance it further should states should not be politically motivated or compromise officers' political neutrality.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The new statutory guidance recommends that Councils undertake an internal review / audit of the existing research support provided to Councillors and evaluate against the examples set out within the guidance.

- 2.2 It is suggested that a review of the provision of information to Members will allow the Democratic Services Committee, and the Council, to establish whether support services and sources of information could be better coordinated, better promoted, and access to information improved.
- 2.3 The Statutory Guidance sets out examples of best practice of research and support services which are listed below for the Committee's attention:
- collating and distributing background papers to assist Councillors to better understand forthcoming key decisions including analysis of complex data and information which may be provided as background papers for Council meetings such as the budget discussion;
 - preparing and sharing regularly management information, including performance management shared as a part of formal assessments either by performance panels or Audit Wales;
 - preparing and sharing demographic information, and information on the use of services by local people;
 - responding to Councillors' requests for research on specific topics to be undertaken either by Council officers or an external source. Councils should set out clear processes and procedures to ensure Councillors have access to this kind of research but also that they understand the requirement for its judicious use within the budget and other resourcing parameters set by the Council;
 - signposting of Members to useful sources of information they can access on the issue in which they have an interest;
 - circulation of calendars of events held by local and national organisations which may be of interest to Members and help inform their knowledge of particular issues.
- 2.4 Appendix A includes information relating to support currently available. This will form the base line of a survey proposed to be undertaken of elected members in relation to the current support available to them and to identify what additional support maybe required and how this support could be developed over time and to identify if there is a case for the provision of additional resources to Members.
- 2.5 In order to understand the demand for additional support above what is already available to Members, a draft survey is attached at Appendix B for the Committee's comment and approval. The Guidance suggests that Councils should take the opportunity to work with its Councillors to identify any gaps or issues with the existing processes, reviewing how this support and its parameters could be developed over time.
- 2.6 On completion of this survey, a report will be presented to the Democratic Services Committee to review the findings of the survey.

- 2.7 Having established the existing research support and sources of information available, this should be clearly set out to Councillors with guidance on how they can access the information available to them.

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

- 3.1 The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Annual Delivery Plan, as Councillors are a voice for their communities that they serve.
- 3.2 Identifying and overcoming potential barriers that may prevent Members from fully participating in democratic processes is crucial to ensure that the Council achieves a diverse culture. Failure to address potential barriers may dissuade the public standing as a candidate at future elections.
- 3.3 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for a more diverse democracy across the Vale of Glamorgan links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1 There are no specific implications associated with this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report at this stage. However, if Members decide that the current range of support available to them is insufficient there may be additional costs associated with resourcing support.

Employment

- 5.2 There are no specific implications associated with this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3 There are no specific implications associated with this report.

6. Background Papers

Statutory and non – statutory guidance on democracy within Principal Councils 2023.

Baseline support currently available to Members

In order to understand how it fits into the wider context from legislation and Welsh Government Guidance documents, there needs to be a thorough review of the existing support available which will then ensure that any new work programme is relevant and complements existing support available.

Below is a list of current provision for consideration by Councillors in completing the survey:

Support provided to the Democratic Services Committee

The Terms of Reference for the Democratic Services Committee outlines its functions in relation to Members' support.

This includes

- (1) To designate the Head of Democratic Services.
- (2) To keep under review the provision by the Authority of adequate resources to discharge Democratic Services functions.
- (3) To make reports and recommendations in respect of (2) above to Full Council at least annually.
- (4) To have regard to Welsh Ministerial guidance when exercising its functions.
- (5) To be responsible for overseeing the Council's approach to Member Development.

Frequency of Meetings

The Committee must meet at least once a year.

- Keeping under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the HDS, in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post;
- To consider, and make recommendations to the Council, concerning the timing of meetings;
- To oversee the training and development of Members.

Officers also provide information and data relevant to the committee such as:

- A survey of preferred meeting times, and dates
- A survey of Members' ICT requirements and training
- A learning and development survey
- An Scrutiny Self-Assessment Survey.

Data and analysis resulting from these surveys are shared with Members of the Democratic Services Committee.

Other Support and Information provided to Elected Members

- Chair Briefings In addition to providing training to Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees, all Chairs are briefed in advance of the meeting on procedural matters such as:
- Details of persons that will be presenting reports, including Chairs of Scrutiny, and support officers.
- Attendance and apologies
- Notification of declarations of interest and personal matters received prior to the meeting • Procedures in relation to voting, recorded votes etc Identifying areas for investigation by Scrutiny Committees.

The Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Committee is responsible for deciding the content of the agenda, however in deciding items for the Forward Work Programme, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers provide guidance which includes topics taken from:

- The Corporate Plan and Self-Assessment
- Business Plans
- The Corporate Risk Register
- Budget savings and financial monitoring– proposals and impact
- Quarterly Corporate Performance Monitoring
- Future service level activities and performance targets
- Update and progress reports from regulators and Audit Wales.
- Decision tracking linked to continuing work.

The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers provide support to Members by coordinating the requests of the committee with the relevant Officers, and external organisations. This includes the coordination of Requests for Consideration of a matter submitted by individual members for consideration by a scrutiny committee.

Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers also draft reports on behalf of scrutiny committees in conjunction with the Chair for consideration by Cabinet or Council. Support for Scrutiny Task and Finish investigations DSS Officers provide support to Members by arranging task and finish investigations and coordinating with relevant Officers within the Council or external organisations to collate the required information and to present reports to the relevant Committee.

Preparation of reports for committees

Officers from all services across the Council play a role in providing information, data and reports to committees upon their request which include the sharing of demographic information. Signposting Members to useful sources of information on issues.

Members are provided with a useful contacts list on MemberNet as well as access to the StaffNet phone book to contact officers of the council directly with queries and questions.

Democratic Services Team also maintains an information only register of reports by Officers from all Departments which are sent to Members for their information and or consideration. . Members are then able to request such matters to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee if they wish to do so o seek further information on the matters as necessary.

Site Visits

Site Visits are undertaken to provide awareness raising of services, to see new developments and also enhance Members knowledge and provide opportunities for the identification and sharing of good practice which are supported by Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers.

Training, Workshops and Briefings

The Democratic Services Committee oversees the induction and training programme for all Members. This includes a wide range of training from Code of Conduct to training specific to Committees such as Planning/Development Control management and Licensing; Charing committees; the role and responsibilities of political Group Leaders; Scrutiny; Equalities; Welsh Language Standards; Safeguarding; Health and Safety and Lone working; Communication and Social Media; and Wellbeing of Future Generations etc.

In addition to training activities, Members are provided with internal workshops on themes such as the School Transport Policy, Housing matters and policy, Budgets, as well as workshops arranged in conjunction with external providers such e.g. PSB / University Health Board in order to get a better understanding of the role of external partners.

Briefings are also provided to Members on emerging issues such as the developments linked to Cardiff Capital Regional Deal; the Chief Executive also provides weekly round ups on service achievements etc and also provides periodic briefings to the political groups and separately to Group Leaders for dissemination to their respective groups.

Records are maintained by Democratic Services Team of training undertaken with Training presentation slides and video recordings also being made available on Membernet and the Member's hub.

- Member iDev Learning Accounts

ICT Support

ICT support is provided directly from ICT services on all matters relating to ICT and the devices provided to them. Support from Democratic Services is also provided to Members.

- Offline HowToGuides desktop folder
- Halo Self-Service Portal Knowledge Hub

Information available on the Council's website and Council reports

A substantial amount of information is available on the Council's web-pages and provided in the form of reports to committees such as:

- The Statutory Director of Social services annual report;
- The Local Well-being Plan Annual reports;
- The Corporate Plan;

Annual Delivery Plan

- Annual Self-Assessment;
- Safeguarding reports;
- Project Zero and Carbon Management reports
- Consultations, Engagement and Participation.
- Standards Committee Annual Report
- Scrutiny Committee Annual Report

Prior to requesting information or research, Members should consider whether the information that they require is already available in the public domain.

Performance and Improvement Services

The Performance, Improvement Team and Participation Team provide analytics on the performance of the Council, as well as external data such as the Census and its implications for the county. This is a useful resource, and first point of contact for potential research activity.

The social media pages also provide information which Members can share to promote activities and information to their residents including Press releases relating to Council services and initiatives.

External data providers –

Data Cymru There are several providers of external data that Members can access, such as the Ward Profile Data provided by Data Cymru:

<https://www.data.cymru/dashboards/localareaprofiles?q=lap23>

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – (DRAFT) SURVEY OF RESEARCH SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR COUNCILLORS

In accordance with the Welsh Government Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales, Part 2 Section 3, the Democratic Services Committee should consider the provision of research support and services to elected members by identifying the baseline of support which is already available to Members, then work with Members to identify how this support and its parameters could be developed over time, in order to identify if there is a case for the provision of additional resources.

Question	Comments
1. Having considered the currently identified base-line support to Members, as set out in Appendix A of the Democratic Services Committee report, are there any other areas of support that you believe should be included in this list?	
2. What support has been useful in your role as Councillor?	
3. What could be improved?	
4. What information / data do you require that is not currently available on the Council's website or reports provided to committees?	
5. What information / data do you require that is not currently available via external providers such as Data Cymru, WLGA etc?	
6. Please list any areas of research that you may find useful to your role as Councillor, where this information is not already available in the public domain?	