

Meeting of:	<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Monday, 01 July 2024</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services
Purpose of Report:	To outline for Members work of the Committee and activities undertaken within the section throughout the year.
Report Owner:	Interim Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Interim Head of Democratic Services
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"> <li>The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the wide range of duties undertaken within the service area throughout the year, ongoing developments and plans for the future.</li> </ul>	

## **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 requirements 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 to provide that officer with sufficient resources to discharge these statutory functions.
- 1.2 This report, by its very nature and its linkage with the requirements of the Measure, covers the work undertaken by the Democratic, Scrutiny and Committee Services section.
- 1.3 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. For information, due to the Operational Manager / Head of Democratic Services being unavailable, under the use of the Chief Executive’s Emergency Powers the Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer has been appointed as Interim Head of Democratic Services in his absence.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1 The Democratic Services division as a whole comprises two distinct sections:
  - (i) Democratic, Scrutiny and Committee Services together with Records Management and Land Charges; and
  - (ii) the Registration Service.
- 2.2 The following paragraphs set out the various elements within the service area Democratic, Scrutiny and Committee Services which form the remit of this Committee and the activities undertaken to date for the Committee’s information.

## **Staff Structure**

**2.3** In addition to the position of Operational Manager/ Head of Democratic Services the team comprises the following officers:

- x 1 - Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer; ( currently Interim Head of Democratic Services)
- x 3- Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers;
- x 1 - Cabinet and Committee Services Officer;
- x 1 - Assistant Democratic Services Officer;
- x 1 - Members' and Committee Services Assistant;
- x 2 - WP / Administrative Support officers
- x 3 - Administrative Assistants (N.B. These three officers are not entirely dedicated to Members' support as indicated towards the end of paragraph 2.9 below).
- 1 relief chauffeur.

**2.4** The team therefore consists of 13 staff members with 5 working in the office on a regular basis, 7 working from home and coming into the office as and when required together with the relief chauffeur who supports the Mayor's office.

**2.5** The team deal 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 for all Council meetings;
- Managing and providing support to the Council's Executive;
- 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 the Council's website relating to Members, Committees and the Scrutiny Function including the processes for Public Participation at meetings.
- Member research support is provided throughout the year with support from the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team and officers from each department, as required.
- Developing and updating information for Members on MemberNet, an internal Council site for Members including reference to all Training provided;
- Managing the Land Charges Register and the Records Management Unit:

- 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 Employee Services, Council Tax, Housing Benefits and C1V.
  - Providing support to Members in accessing information, data and analysis by signposting to relevant areas of the Council and working with other departments, such as the Corporate Strategy and Sight Group.
- 2.6** The following paragraphs also provide a summary of work undertaken in the last twelve months and ongoing work / initiatives in which the section is actively engaged with. The Democratic Services Committee will continue to be kept fully informed on progress of these, and other initiatives going forward.

**Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“LG&E (Wales) Act”)**

- 2.7** The LG&E (Wales) Act received Royal Assent on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2021. The Act is substantial and covers a range of topics from electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance through to regional working. An Action Plan and a working group of officers was established to progress the action plan, with regard to the provisions in the Act and the timescales for implementation. Reports have been presented on a regular basis to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. The document was also reported to the Community Liaison Committee in view of the implications for Town and Community Councils (TCCs), and shared and discussed with TCC Clerks at meetings with the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.8** On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2022 and on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2022 Cabinet and CPR Scrutiny Committee considered the Council's response to the latest consultation regarding Statutory Guidance and Directions made under the Local Government Act 2000, the Measure and the LG&E (Wales) Act. The responses covered a number of areas including for example, Timing of Council Meetings, Training, Development and support for Elected Members, Research Support and Services for Elected Members, Petition Schemes, Participation Strategies, Constitutions, Constitution Guide, Exercise of Functions by Councillors, Council Executives and Securing Effective Overview and Scrutiny.
- 2.9** Following consultation on the interim guidance in June 2023 the Authority received the publication of the Welsh Government Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales document which can be found at <https://www.gov.wales/statutory-and-non-statutory-guidance-democracy-within-principal-councils>
- 2.10** The LG&E (Wales) Act working group was re-established having regard to this guidance and a further action plan prepared. For the Committee’s information, in the main the Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance issued in June 2023 remains the same as the Interim Guidance issued in 2021, but with some additional aspects, in particular in relation to the role of the Standards Committee.
- 2.11** The Standards Committee at a meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2023 received an update report in relation to the areas within the Guidance pertaining to the role

of the Standards Committee and the link to that report for Committees' information can be found here - [https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/ Committee%20Reports/Standards/2023/23-09-28/Statutory-and-Non-Statutory-Guidance.pdf](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Standards/2023/23-09-28/Statutory-and-Non-Statutory-Guidance.pdf) . Having regard to the Group Leader duty introduced under the Act a proforma was developed and following receipt of the revised Guidance was amended slightly. The Standards Committee in relation to its duty also developed a threshold criteria to be used to consider compliance with the duty, which was considered and agreed by the Standards Committee also met with Group Leaders at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2023. The Standards Committee, having regard to the Guidance, will continue to meet with Group Leaders at the first meeting of the Standards Committee following the Council's Annual Meeting and will assess the Group Leaders compliance with the duty in line with the agreed threshold criteria and following consideration of the completed proformas by Group Leaders. With regard to the Independent Members on the Council although not members of a group the Monitoring Officer will continue to update them any advice and guidance having regard to the duty as considered appropriate.

- 2.12** Furthermore, having regard to the Statutory and Non Statutory-Guidance, changes in legislation and any proposed / suggested amendments by the Monitoring Officer the Council's Constitution remains under review with reports to Council submitted when changes are deemed necessary, with the Constitution being updated as and when required. The latest version at the time is then emailed to Members and made available on the Council's website.
- 2.13 Council Meetings and Live Streaming:** Prior to 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2021 all Council virtual meetings, were recorded and uploaded to the Council's website for the public to view following the meetings (save for where confidential / exempt matters were reported).
- 2.14** In May 2021 it was agreed that all Council meetings would not only be held on a virtual basis but also **live streamed** (i.e. meetings are able to be viewed on the website as they take place) and recorded for archive purposes on the Council's website, having regard to Welsh Government restrictions.
- 2.15** It is important to note that following the introduction of virtual meetings, members of the public have been, and continue to be, able to speak at and receive a link to attend Council meetings, where public participation is in place, following the completion of an online registration process.
- 2.16** The LG&E (Wales) Act also provided that from May 2022 a Principal Council must make and publish its arrangements for the broadcasting of meetings so that members of the public not in attendance can see and hear the proceedings. As a result, on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 the Council agreed its [Multi-Location Meetings Policy](#) (MLM Policy) in line with Welsh Government's Statutory Interim Guidance on Multi-Location Meetings May 2021.
- 2.17** Since the receipt of the final Guidance issued in June 2023 the MLM Policy has also been reviewed, considered by this Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2023 and subsequently approved by Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2023 which can be found [here](#). Following the Cabinet decision of 7<sup>th</sup> September and the recommendation

to review the provision of the hybrid solution for Scrutiny Committees a further report is to be brought to this Committee for consideration in due course.

- 2.18** The Council has purchased a new Hybrid solution platform that is used to undertake Council meetings as determined under the MLM Policy. Rigorous testing of the new system has been undertaken and a training programme for use rolled out to Elected / Co-opted Members and officers. Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers together with ICT officers have supported the rigorous testing over the months. Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers have also facilitated the training with Members and officers in respect of the use of the system. An officer from the Democratic team has also developed an iDEV online training module with the support of an officer from the Organisational and Development team. Members of the public who have registered to speak under the Council's public participation process are also afforded opportunities in respect of the use of the system should they wish to attend such meetings remotely. As mentioned in paragraph 2.17 above a further report is to be brought to this Committee in respect of the MLM Policy which will also include further details on the use of the hybrid platform.
- 2.19** For Committee's information the WLGA have also recently asked following a request from Welsh Government officials if representatives from the Monitoring Officers Group would like to be involved in a meeting to look at potential changes to the guidance on multi-location meetings. An officer from the Vale will therefore be taking part in such meetings.

#### **Public Speaking at Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.20** The arrangements for public speaking at meetings of the Council's Planning Committee have been in place since February 2015, with public involvement at the majority of meetings. The process provides an opportunity for increased public engagement in the planning application process. On 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2021, Full Council approved a revised version of the Guide to Public Speaking at Planning Committee.
- 2.21** Following a recent review of the Public Speaking Guides for Planning Committee and Public Rights of Way the guides were approved by Full Council at its meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024 for inclusion within the Council's Constitution.
- 2.22** The arrangements for public speaking at Scrutiny Committees was introduced in 2016 and reviewed on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2021. The Guide has also been amended in line with the Council's revised MLM Policy and was approved by Council on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2023 for inclusion within the Council's Constitution.
- 2.23** The Council is committed to continuing to undertake a review of its public speaking arrangements as appropriate.
- 2.24** For the Committee's information during the period April 2022 to March 2023 three people registered to speak at Scrutiny Committee meetings, with one response to the satisfaction questionnaire being received. Below are the analytics relating to the single satisfaction response:

The information available regarding public speaking at scrutiny committee meetings	Satisfied
The registration process	Satisfied
The support provided by staff on the day of the meeting	Satisfied
The time you were allowed to speak at the meeting	Satisfied
How well the committee listened to your comments	Very dissatisfied
The overall process for public speaking at Scrutiny Committee	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Do you have any suggestions on how the public speaking process could be improved?	The process was fine, thank you to the staff and the Chair for their support.

## Member Development

- 2.25** Following the Local Government Elections in May 2022 All Elected and Co-opted Members took part in a comprehensive Induction Programme and further training as and when required will continue to be provided. Members receive regular briefing updates throughout the year, which are also made available on MemberNet for future viewing. iDEV training modules are also available on MemberNet together with mandatory training modules. The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team together with ICT officers also continue to support and assist Members in the use of the new Hybrid solution platform for Council meetings. Some Council meetings had taken place on the Hybrid solution in December 2023 in line with the revised MLM Policy and Welsh Translation services as appropriate. The first Full Council meeting on the Hybrid solution took place on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 and this also included Welsh Language Translation services.
- 2.26** The operation of virtual, hybrid and livestreaming of meeting has presented a challenge in terms of resourcing for Democratic and Scrutiny Services and ICT Services teams. As in previous Annual Reports, it is important to place on record thanks to colleagues in both teams who have, in my view, gone above and beyond what can be reasonably expected to ask officers to get the necessary and various facets of virtual / Hybrid meetings established, including rigorous testing.

## Scrutiny Activities During the Year and Effective Scrutiny

- 2.27** The Council's five Scrutiny Committees develop their own Forward Work Programmes for the Municipal year having regard to the Cabinet's Forward Work Programme. A number of items are monitored on a quarterly basis e.g. performance, financial management, Committee recommendations together with consideration of any call-in requests and Requests for Consideration of a Matter either put forward by Members of the Council or members of the public. Ad hoc reports are also requested as appropriate as well as the consideration of referrals from Cabinet and / or any other Committees. The link to the work programmes of the Scrutiny Committees agreed can also be found at [https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our\\_council/Council-Structure/scrutiny/scrutiny\\_committees.aspx](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/Council-Structure/scrutiny/scrutiny_committees.aspx).

- 2.28** To promote and raise further awareness of the work of Scrutiny in May 2023 all Committees considered a report which outlined the various opportunities / tools that were available to Members in undertaking their Scrutiny role. 13 principles for effective Scrutiny were developed together with an action plan. The principles included a relaunch of the Scrutiny Topic Suggestion Form for Members of the Public, awareness raising of the protocol between Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees, work programme items to feature on every agenda conference agenda to aid discussion and develop the Committee's work programme and that a workshop on the role of scrutiny be arranged. Committee is advised that three workshops were held facilitated by Democratic Services Officers with feedback received being extremely positive. The Chairs and Vice Group have considered a report on this matter and have also referred the report to this Committee for consideration and information.
- 2.29** All actions outlined in the action plan have been addressed with Committees and the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs group receiving updates on progress. One action however remains outstanding which is to complement the work undertaken by Democratic Services it was suggested that Members undertake visits to other Local Authorities (remotely) to view Scrutiny elsewhere. Although the experience of Democratic Services officers is that in the main the approach in other LAs is similar to the Vale, visits could be arranged to observe techniques / Scrutiny in other LAs this action is to be progressed in due course.

#### **Key Issues of Interest During the Year for Each Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.30** Scrutiny Committees must submit an Annual Report of their work to Full Council and the report for 2022/23 was submitted to Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2023. The link to the report can be found [here](#). The promotion and awareness raising of the Scrutiny process has been further enhanced this year with information regarding the meetings and matters to be considered being made available on social media.
- 2.31** For the Committee's information the below sets out some examples of the key interests for each Committee during the current year together with details of some public engagement that took place at various meetings. -

#### **Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.32** The Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee considered a Cabinet reference regarding Recycling and Waste Management Service Changes 2023/24 which included proposals for an annual subscription charge for fortnightly green waste collections between March and November for the use of a ring and request service for subscribers between December and February. Additionally, it was proposed that black bags be collected every 3 weeks to reduce service costs as well as positively contributing to Project Zero by reducing the Vale of Glamorgan's carbon footprint. Having analysed and assessed the report, the Scrutiny Committee accepted the proposals, requesting for an update report to be provided in order to assess any impacts.
- 2.33** During 2022/23, the Scrutiny Committee continued to closely consider the Council's Project Zero – Delivering the Climate Change Challenge Plan and was asked to review progress of actions around the reduction of carbon emissions



across the Council. The Committee noted ongoing progress as well as highlighting the significant challenges facing the Council in reaching its targets for 2030.

### **Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.34** The Homes and Safe Communities considered a number of key issues in 2022/23 including:
- 2.35** An update on the impact following the implementation of the One Stop Shop support service, in order to assess the impact of the investment in Housing Support Grant to deliver housing related support to residents in the Vale of Glamorgan, by providing a holistic package of services and advice across a wide range of issues, which were being experienced by residents, which was subsequently analysed and endorsed by the Committee..
- 2.36** The Committee also undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the draft Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) Business Plan for 2022/23 prior to submission to the SRS Joint Committee. SRS encompassed various areas and services, including Environmental Health, Licensing, Trading Standards, Health and Safety and Illegal Money Lending within larger groupings such as Neighbourhood, Commercial and Enterprise and Specialist Services. SRS delivered the statutory requirements placed upon each Council involved (Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils) and the Plan set out to ensure the resilience of the regulatory services across those three Council areas, to run their services more efficiently, to make cost savings, and for allowing areas of specialism.
- 2.37** The Committee also considered and scrutinised other key strategies the Council wished to undertake within their remit, i.e. the Draft Older Persons Housing Strategy which had been produced to ensure that the Council was responding to the housing challenges faced specifically by older people in the Vale Glamorgan. This was presented by Council officers in conjunction with representatives of Housing LIN, who had provided consultancy support in drafting this Strategy. A number of comments and recommendations were referred to Cabinet for their consideration prior to the final Strategy being agreed i.e. the Council needed to look to engage with all age groups around this Strategy in order to account for the aspirations of future generations, that it was fit for purpose and to demystify or to remove the ‘fear factor’ of what housing an older person meant going forward.

### **Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.38** The Committee continues to monitor the Council’s vital Social Care and Leisure Services that have a direct impact on the lives of all Vale of Glamorgan residents and have been significantly affected by the Covid-19 National pandemic.
- 2.39** The **Adult Services** Division has provided services for people with a learning disability, autism, mental health problems, frailty because of aging, a physical disability or sensory impairment and adults who need protecting from abuse. **Children and Young People Services** provide help to children and young people who are eligible for care and support. These include children requiring support, who are looked after by the Council, who have left care, who have additional

needs and /or disabilities or who need to be safeguarded. The **Resource Management and Safeguarding Service** provides support to the Directorate in the key areas of leadership and culture, financial stability and resources, planning and partnerships, commissioning and contracting, residential services, workforce development, performance management, and protecting children and adults at risk. **Leisure Services** has maintained and improved the levels of participation and physical activity in the Vale of Glamorgan to encourage and promote active and healthy lifestyles as well as provide quality public urban parks, public open space, recreation fields and play facilities throughout the Vale of Glamorgan.

- 2.40** Through detailed Officer reports, the Committee has witnessed the critical way in which Council Staff responded to challenges as a result of the national pandemic as well as meeting the requirements of the Council's Covid-19 recovery strategy by evolving and adapting services and communicating effectively with partners, communities and service users. The Committee has scrutinised how services have been delivered to meet statutory roles and functions and how resources have been directed to where they are most needed.

#### **Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.41** Through detailed officer reports and guest speakers, the Committee continues to monitor progress on Schools (Pupil Support, School Improvement and School Support), Post 16 Education and Training, Libraries, Community Education and Youth Service, Equalities, Welsh Language, and Arts Development.
- 2.42** The Committee has scrutinised the findings of discussions held between improvement partners from Central South Consortium (CSC) and school leaders in the Vale of Glamorgan regarding the use of the **Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: Accelerating Learning Programme Grant (the RRRS Grant)** in schools. This grant is to support learners who have been impacted most by the pandemic. Discussions have involved scrutiny of school development plans and plans relating to the deployment of the RRRS Grant as well as its impact in schools across the Local Authority.
- 2.43** The Committee has monitored the development of the **Curriculum for Wales Framework** as a result of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 becoming law after receiving Royal Assent in April 2021. The Act states the new curriculum requirements for all learners aged 3 to 16 in maintained or funded non-maintained nursery education in Wales over four purposes. To realise the requirements of the Act, schools must design, adopt and implement a curriculum by September 2022 which must fulfil the Welsh Curriculum requirements set out in legislation and provide the learning it defines.

## **Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.44** The Committee continued to review and monitor the work on Project Zero undertaken by the Council (around decarbonisation, etc.), sickness absence figures for Council staff and the Welsh Language Standards Annual Monitoring Report 2021-22.
- 2.45** For the latter report, following scrutiny by the Committee, the following comment / suggestion was referred back to Cabinet: that the reference to social media accounts in the Annual Welsh Language Report 2021 – 2022 be amended to reflect that, wherever relevant, the Council’s social media accounts (i.e. Twitter (now X)) were operated under separate English and Welsh formats, rather than a single bilingual one. This would help to better reflect what the Council was actually trying to achieve and which provided a better user experience to the public.
- 2.46** The Committee scrutinised the Draft Response to Welsh Government's Consultation Statutory Guidance and Directions made under the Local Government Act 2000, the Measure and the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021. This covered key areas such as the Council’s Constitution and associated guide, as well as other wide-ranging areas as part of the consultation, due to this being a significant cornerstone piece of legislation. The Committee raised a number of queries and referred comments back to Cabinet, including sufficient resources for the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team in order to address areas such as additional information, research and support services for all Elected Members, ensuring that the Welsh language was not treated any differently or any less favourably than English i.e. the use of an interpreter at Hybrid meetings and the importance of bilingual participation, and the importance of reviewing the timings of meetings, work life balance, diversity, feedback, training and development for Members.
- 2.47** In terms of direct public engagement and participation, the Committee welcomed a public speaker from the Holton Road Traders Association in February 2023. This was in relation to the impact of the increases on fees and charges for Café Style Licences to trade on the highway on small independent businesses, as part of the Proposed Fees and Charges report for 2023/2024 and from where she raised her concerns and these were subsequently addressed.
- 2.48** The Committee have also established a Task and Finish Group in relation to Procurement with a final report of the groups findings to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in 24/25.

## **Collaborative Working and Networks**

- 2.49 Officer and Member Network (MSO)** – The Network is facilitated by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) with the intention to improve the services and Member development opportunities provided to Councillors. The meetings are also attended by Heads of Democratic Services and / or a Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer.

- 2.50 South East Wales Scrutiny Officer Network** – The Network provides opportunities for Local Authorities to share information, develop good practices, raise and discuss issues of mutual concern and make suggestions for improvements.
- 2.51 Heads of Democratic Services Network** supported by the WLGA – This Network also provides opportunities for Local Authorities to share information, develop good practice, raise and discuss matters of mutual concern and make suggestions for improvements. Recent meetings have included opportunities to discuss matters directly with Welsh Government representatives having regard to the provisions of the LG&E (Wales) Act and related consultations regarding guidance developed in respect of various provisions of that Act e.g., Corporate Joint Committees (CJCS) and multi-location meetings.
- 2.52** Attendances at the above Networks offer opportunities for the Team Members in Democratic and Scrutiny Services to also facilitate the effective provision of support to Elected Members.

### **Independent Bodies**

- 2.53 Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW)** – The IRPW is responsible for determining the level of payments to elected Members of Councils, National Park Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales. The current report for the year 2024/25 can be found here - <https://www.gov.wales/independent-remuneration-panel-wales-annual-report-2024-2025>
- 2.54** The report references the IRPW’s consistently expressed view that maintaining the democratic values of local government could not be cost free. Payments to Members and Co-opted Members are made available to encourage a diversity of willing and able people to undertake local governance through their elected, appointed or co-opted roles. The report also includes reference to Reimbursement of Costs of Care and the promotion of awareness raising of the scheme so that Members with caring responsibilities for other dependents, such as the elderly, are encouraged to claim.
- 2.55** This year the IRPW have also introduced an hourly rate for Co-opted Members to be with the Panel determining that there should be local flexibility for the relevant officer in the Authority to decide when it will be appropriate to apply a day or a half day rate or to use an hourly rate where it is sensible to aggregate a number of short meetings. Within the Vale the relevant officer for determinations for Co-opted Members of the Standards Committee is the Monitoring Officer and for Co-opted Members of the Governance and Audit Committee and Scrutiny Committee Learning and Culture the Head of Democratic Services. The IRPW have advised they will provide guidance in relation to this aspect and the Heads of Democratic Services network is awaiting such information with the aim to provide a consistent approach across Wales.
- 2.56 Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)** – The PSOW has legal powers to look into complaints about public services and independent care providers in Wales. The Ombudsman also investigates complaints that members of local government bodies have breached their Authority’s Code of Conduct. Following

a request from the PSOW, the Council has also introduced a Local Dispute Resolution Procedure to deal with low level allegations by a Member against a fellow Member. The current PSOW Code of Conduct guidance for Members of Local Authorities has been forwarded to all Members for their information. The Monitoring Officer and officers within the Democratic and Scrutiny Services section also continue to provide guidance to elected Members in this regard. A copy of the guidance can also be found at <https://www.ombudsman.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Code-of-Conduct-Guidance-CC-CBC-NPA-PCP-31-10-2022.pdf>

**2.57** A similar guide was also issued by the PSOW for TCCs.

The Ombudsman also produces an Annual Report of its activities which can be found here <https://www.ombudsman.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2022-23-19-07-2023-Auditor-signed.pdf>

### **The Year Ahead**

**2.58** The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team have regard to a number of activities that will be undertaken during 2024/2025 within the Committees' remits, as follows:

- Appoint a new Operational Manager – Democratic Services (Statutory Head of Democratic) following notice of the retirement of the current postholder.
- Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – Continue to manage / address the provisions of the Act.
- Continue to address the provisions of the Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance issued by Welsh Government in respect of the LGE Act 21 in June 2023.
- Continue to address and review any further statutory and / or other guidance received and the sharing of good practice and to make arrangements in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer for amendments to the Council's Constitution where necessary.
- Work in partnership with Corporate Communications, Participation, Equalities and Directorate Development Strategic Advisory Group to deliver aspects of the Public Participation Strategy.
- Work with colleagues in HR and OD to further develop succession planning arrangements in Democratic and Scrutiny Services in order to retain expertise and skills especially in business-critical areas for the long term.
- Continue to monitor the provision of Hybrid and Remote meetings including the use of the Welsh Language Translation service.
- Work alongside HM Land Registry to standardise and migrate the Local Land Charges Register information (LLC1) to one accessible place.
- Work with five Scrutiny Committees, Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group and officers in the Authority to promote public participation and engagement in the scrutiny process.

- Develop initiatives for Effective Scrutiny, including a review of arrangements in line with the development of the Council’s new Corporate Plan.
- Continue to work with the Communications Team in the development of pursuing ways of raising awareness of the work of Committees and the decision making process having considered the outcomes of the “Let’s Talk About Life in the Vale” Survey.
- Develop digital processes to assist with the work of Democratic and Scrutiny Services as deemed appropriate.

**2.59** In conclusion, this report highlights that the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team have had an extremely challenging year where the priorities and workloads of the Team, as a result of the provisions of the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021 and the coronavirus pandemic have impacted significantly. However, the Team have adapted and continued to develop to meet the needs of the service and to comply with the provisions of new legislation. The Team have been successful in service resilience and through creativity have delivered the desired outcomes that have supported Elected Members and the Council’s governance arrangements.

**2.60** An internal review of the work of the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team is currently taking place in relation to the use of digital technology to support the work of the team. Discussions are also to be held internally regarding the provision of the hybrid meetings for the Council having regard to capacity and wellbeing issues of the relevant service areas involved.

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

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act sets out effective transparency as a key part of improving the delivery of public bodies.
- 3.2** 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.
- 3.3** 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".
- 3.4** The Measure makes arrangements for changes to the political structure of local government in Wales and the way in which local government operates.

### **4. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 4.1** None as a direct result of this report.

## **5. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

5.1 As set out above.

### **Employment**

5.2 As set out above.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

5.3 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.

5.4 Comply with other legislation and Statutory Guidance e.g., Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

## **6. Background Papers**

[Local Government \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#)