

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Friday, 21 March 2025
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru - Research on the workload of County Councillors in Wales
Purpose of Report:	To provide an overview of National research findings to surrounding Councillor workload and consider this is a local context.
Report Owner:	James Langridge-Thomas, Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	James Langridge-Thomas, Head of Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	All Elected Members will be circulated a copy of this information only item.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive Decision.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to undertake research to explore the impact of variable factors on the workload experienced by Elected Members within County Councils. This was published as Research on the workload of County Councillors in Wales. This research identified a number of factors on Councillor workload, including the structure of wards, geography and demography and the impact of a fluctuating population, whilst also considering the support provided to undertake the role as effectively as possible. 	

Recommendations

1. T H A T the Committee notes the National research surrounding Councillor workload.
2. T H A T the Committee shares their experiences as Councillors in the Vale of Glamorgan in comparison to the wider research.
3. T H A T the Committee reflects upon the support offered in supporting Members in Vale of Glamorgan and consider any areas for potential improvement.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure appropriate consideration for National policy research.
2. To allow for any consideration to reflect the Council's local operating environment.
3. To consider any improvements in ways of working or support which would support Members in undertaking their roles.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to undertake research, [Research on the workload of County Councillors in Wales](#), to explore the impact of variable factors on the workload experienced by Elected Members within County Councils. A copy of this report was circulated to all Members.
- 1.2 The core purpose of the research is to inform the Commission's decision-making on electoral arrangements. The overarching objective is to explore the impact that different variable factors have on the workload of Elected Members and the extent to which these can be minimised.
- 1.3 Specific objectives included understanding:
 - What a Councillor's workload looks like;
 - How the democratic makeup of their ward impacts their workload;
 - How the geography and demography of their ward impacts their workload.
- 1.4 ORS proposed a mixed research design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. This included:
 - A scoping stage with key stakeholders – Two interviews with key stakeholders, forming a steering group;
 - An online survey of Elected Members – Online survey sent to all 1,233 Elected Members in Wales with a 20% response rate;
 - In-depth interviews with Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) – Eight EROs interviewed from a range of Local Authorities;
 - In-depth interviews with a range of Elected Members across Wales.
- 1.5 Of those surveyed, there were 10 Members from the Vale of Glamorgan involved within this research, with 2 Members undertaking an in-depth interview. Due to the nature of the research, it is not possible to identify or disclose which Members were involved.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** Councillors surveyed identified that they spent an average of 28 hours per week on work related to their role as an Elected Member, which is more than they anticipated prior to being elected.
- 2.2** Councillors largely agreed that their workload has a negative impact on their work/life balance. Councillors said that expectations from their electorate mean they struggle to 'shut off' from the role and that they often taken phone calls and respond to emails from residents during their evenings and holidays. It is said to be particularly difficult for those with young families, other caring responsibilities, and those trying to maintain other jobs while being a Councillor.
- 2.3** All Councillors were asked how, if at all, their workload is impacted by being in either a multi or single-member ward. In most cases, Councillors credited the format of their ward for making their workload more manageable, whether multi or single member.
- 2.4** A theme emerging from the survey and early discussions with Councillors was the impact of having Town and Community Councils within the ward on workload. Where there is a positive working relationship between the Local Authority and the Community Council, Councillors are able to share responsibilities, with the Community Council often taking responsibility for practical community upkeep. Where there is a less positive relationship, or even animosity, between the Town/Community Council and the Local Authority, Councillor workloads are impacted.
- 2.5** Many participants in the depth interviews mentioned the fact that they are required to be a school governor. While they generally feel it is an important role, which adds value to the ward, many said that it can add to their workload either somewhat, or significantly. A minority said that they are stretched so thinly, they do not feel they do their governor role justice.
- 2.6** Qualitative research participants gave detailed accounts of how the geographic and demographic make-up of their ward has an impact on their workload, with some elements leading to an increased workload and others reducing the burden. However, it should be said that myriad overlapping factors has made it difficult to draw a consensus on the key issues impacting on workload.
- 2.7** Several Councillors mentioned the practical challenges of representing a rural ward where the population is spread across a large geographical area. It is felt that it can make canvassing more difficult, and time consuming, and as a result, it can become more difficult to get to know the residents, and for the residents to come to know them.
- 2.8** More than any other ward or population-related factor, Councillors reported that deprivation and its impacts lead to an increased workload where it is prevalent in a ward. This is mostly seen in an increased caseload, where residents raise issues with the Councillor and expect a response. Many said that the cases they deal with are often not directly within the Council's power to resolve and therefore lead to a lot of cross-agency working. The issues generally include housing,

poverty, worklessness, homelessness, health and social care, antisocial behaviour, basic skills, and lack of access to legal aid.

- 2.9** The impact of tourism, second home ownership and the growth of the Airbnb economy was felt to have a significant impact on councillor workload. A handful mentioned that having a student population can impact their workload, although this seemed a smaller issue.
- 2.10** Less than a quarter (23%) of respondents to the online survey said that they had any measures in place to mitigate the impacts of their overall workload. In the main these measures relate to good planning and time management to help them manage the peak work periods. Utilising the help of party members/ community volunteers was also mentioned by more than one in ten (11%) Councillors. When asked in interviews what practices are in place to manage workload, councillors overwhelmingly mentioned informal things that they do as opposed to anything formal put in place by the Local Authority or others.
- 2.11** The results of the survey suggest that the most experienced Councillors tend to work the longest hours, largely because they are more likely to have additional responsibilities and have increased visibility in the community.
- 2.12** The issue that has the biggest impact on Councillor workload does not seem to relate to the nature of the ward – it relates to the various Cabinet and Committee responsibilities and the frequency and volume of meetings they are required to attend. This can fluctuate depending on their responsibilities.
- 2.13** However, there are a number of factors relating to the nature of a ward that do have a bearing on councillor workload. The most pronounced of these is deprivation – both rural and urban, and dealing with its impacts on the ward’s population. Some of the most common issues adding to workload relate to anti-social behaviour and violent crime, housing concerns, and the time needed to work with other key agencies, within and outside the Local Authority.

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

- 3.1** Members reflecting upon this research ensures that there is consideration of the longer-term role of Members, and that they are involved in considering ways of working to support them in undertaking their role.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no direct Climate Change and Nature implications to this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The update is a stimulus for conversation amongst Committee Members. Should any areas arise, they will need to be managed within any budget accordingly.

Employment

- 5.2 The main implication will be in terms of Officer time to facilitate any improvement related activity.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3 There are no specific legal requirements relating to this report. However, there should be consideration for how this interacts with legislation such as Local Government Act 2000, Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011 and Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

6. Background Papers

[Research on the workload of County Councillors in Wales | DBCC](#)