



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council



NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024

Chair's Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present this Annual Report for the Democratic Services Committee covering the period from June 2023 to May 2024.

Recent by-elections have welcomed three newly elected members to the Council and the role of this Democratic Services Committee is important in ensuring that new members are fully supported to undertake their role.

The publication of the report is an attempt to provide an element of good practice for members in addition to the production of an appropriate yardstick with which to approach the generation of future reports.

The Democratic Services Committee's forward work programme is agreed by members on a rolling basis. Whilst the Democratic Services Committee takes decisions and provides direction for the Council on several key matters relating to member support and associated issues, members remain mindful that it is the cabinet and ultimately Council that has overall responsibility for all strategic and far reaching decision making on behalf of Neath Port Talbot Council.

However, members are also mindful that they are charged with the duty of carrying out all of the statutory requirements provided for this committee under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. In this respect, I am delighted to report on the success of the Democratic Services Committee during this period.

We have embraced a dynamic approach as a Democratic Services Committee, being fortunate to build upon the strong foundations of the previous Committee and its former Chairs. We will continue to champion areas previously progressed, in particular the diversity in democracy agenda that the former Democratic Services Committee passionately highlighted through its working group arrangements, but also focus on areas of addressing member intimidation and harassment to ensure all members feel safe in their roles and are supported in various forums. The public perception of the role of the elected member also needs to be built on to encourage anyone in the community to put their name forward as a candidate should they wish to contribute to their communities.

As a Democratic Services Committee, there are many areas and opportunities we have committed to take forward over the next civic year to ensure that every member is given the best opportunity to deliver for their residents. We will produce a robust forward work programme in the new civic year to achieve this aim.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my Vice Chair, Councillor Nathan Goldup-John for his support and advice to me as Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and to each of the members for their attendance, input and positive challenge brought to each and every meeting.

I would also like to place on record my thanks for the continued hard work and dedication of the Democratic Services Team who provide members with advice and support to carry out their roles.

Cllr Saifur Rahaman (Chair of the Democratic Services Committee)

Members of the Democratic Services Committee

2023-2024

Cllr. Saifur Rahaman	Chair
Cllr. Nathan Goldup-John	Vice Chair
Cllr. Wayne Carpenter	
Cllr. Jo Hale	
Cllr. Mike Harvey	
Cllr. James Henton	
Cllr. Alan Lockyer	
Cllr. Andy Lodwig	
Cllr. Peter Rees	
Cllr. Sonia Reynolds	
Cllr. Phil Rogers	
Cllr. Chris Williams	

The Democratic Services Committee formally met three times during 2023/24 and meetings were held on a hybrid basis, in the Council Chamber and over the Microsoft Teams platform.

The Chair is a member of and attends regular meetings of the All Wales Network for Member Support and Development where best practice is discussed and useful relationships are formed.

The remit of the Democratic Services Committee

The functions of the Democratic Services Committee are:-

- To exercise the functions of the Council under Section 8(1) (a) Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (designation of Head of Democratic Services) (as more particularly described in Section 9(1) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011);
- To review the adequacy of provision by the Council of staff, accommodation and other resources to discharge democratic services functions (including but not limited to councillor training, improvements and innovations to Council democratic practices)
- To make reports and recommendations to the Council in relation to such provision;
- To determine whether or not the Councillors period of family absence should be cancelled in accordance with Regulation 34 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.
- To determine whether or not to withhold a Councillor's remuneration should they fail to return following a period of family absence on the date specified in the notice provided
- It is for the Democratic Services Committee to determine how to exercise these functions however the Democratic Services Committee may not exercise any functions other than the functions set out above unless approved by Full Council

The work of the Democratic Services Committee in 2023-2024

Member Training and Development and Seminar Programme

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires local authorities to ensure the provision of relevant training and development opportunities for its members.

The Democratic Services Committee approved the draft Members' Development and Training Programme (and Members Seminar Schedule) for 2023/24 which had been revised following feedback from the most recent Members Survey. The Members Seminar Schedule is flexible to allow for the inclusion of any topical issues throughout the year, as required.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) also offers a full programme of support and development, which the Council will utilise to complement our Member Development and Training Programme.

Local Democracy Week

Local Democracy Week is held annually in October and the Democratic Services Committee were updated on the Council's plans to mark the event and achieve the following aims:

- Strengthen links between elected representatives and their communities;
- Increase participation in the democratic process;
- Involve citizens in community affairs; and
- Increase knowledge of local democratic institutions and processes.

The council has produced a Public Participation Strategy (required under section 40 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021) which details how the Council intends to promote awareness of the functions of the Council among local people, the roles and responsibilities of an Elected Member and the process for how residents can become elected members of the Council.

In order to discharge the council's responsibilities under the Act and to promote Local Democracy Week 2023 the following activities were undertaken:

- Promotion of the requirement for Voter ID for certain elections;
- Reviewed the Citizen's Panel to ensure it remains active and representative of the population and to offer other residents the opportunity to give their views; and
- Promotion of the political processes within the county borough.

Independent Remuneration Panel Wales Draft Annual Report

The Democratic Services Committee considered the draft report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The committee discussed the proposed changes to be implemented in 2023/2024 and agreed to make a response to the consultation, reflecting the decision and comments made at the meeting.

Members' Annual Report Scheme

Members were reminded of the current policy to support the production of annual reports by members of the Council. Members received and noted the Members' Annual Report Scheme.

Members Personal Development Review Scheme

Members were reminded of the Members Personal Development Review Scheme and were invited to complete a Personal Development Review should they so wish. The committee approved communications taking place with the WLGA and political groups to explore a cohort of current members to undertake the training to conduct Personal Development Reviews.

Handling Harassment Abuse and Intimidation

The role of an Elected Member is integral to the running of the Council and as such, it is important that they keep in touch with their residents and

communities, which includes communication via telephone, email, social media, virtual meetings and face to face contact with constituents.

The Democratic Services Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish group to focus on handling harassment, abuse and intimidation for Councillors while promoting Councillor safety at a local level. This work is ongoing.

Diversity in Democracy

Members of the Democratic Services Committee are fully supportive of the drive to promote diversity in democracy and in identifying ways in which this can be achieved. The Democratic Services Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to develop the next phase of Diversity in Democracy for the Council, considering national developments and local priorities. This work is ongoing.

Future Priorities

The Democratic Services Committee regularly reviews its forward work programme and has identified the following priority areas for consideration in 2024-2025, in addition to the standing items that the committee has a duty to consider:

- Continuing to undertake work to look at harassment, intimidation and the support that can be provided to elected members in this regard
- Diversity in Democracy and how we can do more as a Committee and Council to encourage greater diversity in our candidates for future elections
- Reviewing of participation work such as our E-Petition Schemes and Public Speaking at Council meetings
- Consider the development of a protocol for member support through the work undertaken by the Welsh Local Government Association.
- Further implementation of the Welsh Local Government Association Democracy Handbook
- Draft Charter (WLGA)