



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council



NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

Chair's Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present the Annual Report of the Democratic Services Committee for the period June 2024 – May 2025.

This year, our committee has continued to work with purpose and commitment to support councillors in their roles, enhance democratic participation, and ensure that our governance structures remain both effective and inclusive.

Among our key areas of focus has been the development of the new Member Car Parking Scheme, ensuring both practicality for members and financial benefit for the authority. We have also made important progress in addressing the harassment, abuse, and intimidation faced by elected members. Through the establishment of a dedicated Task and Finish Group, and with input from members across the council, we have adopted a flexible and developing Action Plan that puts member safety and wellbeing at the forefront.

Equally important has been our continued commitment to Diversity in Democracy. We recognise that a representative council must reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Through new initiatives and engagement, we are working to break down barriers and promote inclusion at every level of our democratic processes.

The committee also played a key role in responding to the draft report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, supporting member development through the Annual Review Scheme, and contributing to the vision for the regeneration of the Princess Royal Theatre and associated member facilities.

Looking ahead, we are determined to build on this year's achievements. Our priorities for 2025–2026 will include a renewed focus on member training and development, ongoing work to ensure safety and support for councillors, further efforts to promote democratic engagement and diversity, and a review of how we encourage public participation in our council processes.

I would like to thank all members of the committee, our Democratic Services Officers, and everyone who has contributed to the work of the Democratic Services Committee over the past year. Your dedication, ideas, and collaboration have helped to shape a more resilient and responsive local democracy.

Councillor Saifur Rahaman

Chair of the Democratic Services Committee

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Members of the Democratic Services Committee

2024-2025

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

The Democratic Services Committee formally met four times during 2024/25 and meetings were held on a hybrid basis, in the Council Chamber and over the Microsoft Teams platform.

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 2024-2025

Member Car Parking Scheme Proposals

Members reviewed the proposal to separate the Staff and Member Car Parking Schemes. The revised Member Car Parking scheme offered two options for members: a permit scheme allowing members to park without charge in a limited number of car parks associated with Council Civic Buildings, or the option to purchase a permit for parking in additional car parks. Any additional revenue generated from the parking permits would generate income for the council. The Democratic Services Committee approved the Members Car Parking Scheme Proposal.

Handling Harassment Abuse and Intimidation

The Democratic Services Committee has established a Task and Finish Group dedicated to addressing harassment, abuse, and intimidation faced by Councillors, while also promoting their safety at a local level. In June 2024, the Task and Finish Group conducted workshops to identify issues faced by members and to determine actionable steps to address these concerns. The findings from these workshops were compiled into an Action Plan, which received approval from the committee and endorsement from the Council. This work is ongoing, with progress reports scheduled to be presented to the committee biannually. The Action Plan remains flexible, allowing for the inclusion of new issues as they arise.

Diversity in Democracy

The Democratic Services Committee is fully committed to advancing diversity in democracy and identifying effective strategies to achieve this goal. The Democratic Services Committee has established a Task and Finish Group to develop the next phase of Diversity in Democracy for the Council, considering national developments and local priorities. During the Task and Finish Group meeting held in November 2024, the Committee focused on gathering information to identify barriers and issues, with the aim of promoting inclusivity and increased diversity within our democratic processes. This important work is ongoing.

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 2025/2026 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.

Survey of Elected Member 2024/2025

The Democratic Services Committee endorsed the content and process of the annual survey of members, which was undertaken in January 2025. The findings of the survey help to determine focus, resource and training for the next Civic Year.

Levelling Up Fund Round 3 - Princess Royal Theatre

The Democratic Services Committee received an update from officers on the planned regeneration of the Princess Royal Theatre and members facilities at Port Talbot Civic Centre. The committee provided officers with feedback in relation to future requirements for member facilities.

Future Priorities

The Democratic Services Committee regularly reviews its forward work programme and has identified the following priority areas for consideration in 2025-2026, in addition to the standing items that the committee has a duty to consider:

- Member Training and Development and Seminar Programme
- 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)
- Continue to promote Local Democracy Week