Democratic Services in Local Government

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A Review of the Reforms made through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

April 2015

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 Review
Workshops organised by Welsh Government and facilitated by
Participation Cymru

Contents

Introduction

This review of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (*hereafter the Measure*) has been undertaken by the Democracy, Diversity and Remuneration branch of the Local Government Democracy division, with the assistance of Participation Cymru. It was comprised of 3 elements;

1. Three regional workshops commissioned by Welsh Government and delivered by Participation Cymru, targeted at Elected Members, Heads of Democratic Services, and other support staff.

2. One to one interviews with randomly selected Heads of Democratic Services; where possible the visits included observing the Democratic Services Committee (DSC) in action. Case studies of these visits can be found at *Annexe 1*

3. A questionnaire to all 22 councils, the results of which can be found in *Annexe 2*

The workshops were held on:

Friday 10 November 2014 – Cardiff
Friday 17 November 2014 – Llandudno
Friday 24 November 2014 – Swansea

The following councils were represented:

1. Blaenau Gwent
2. Bridgend
3. Caerphilly
4. Cardiff
5. Carmarthenshire CC
6. Ceredigion
7. Conwy
8. Denbighshire
9. Flintshire
10. Gwynedd
11. Isle of Anglesey
12. Merthyr Tydfil
13. Monmouthshire
14. Neath Port Talbot
15. Pembrokeshire
16. Powys
17. Rhondda Cynon Taf
18. Swansea
19. Vale of Glamorgan
20. Wrexham

Unrepresented were Newport and Torfaen.

Overall there were 20 Elected Members, 14 Heads of Democratic Services, and 19 other support staff, such as monitoring & legal officers, scrutiny officers and committee services officers.

During each of these workshops, attendees were invited to discuss three main areas of the Measure and supporting policy:

1. **Structure**: including the Head of Democratic Services role; Democratic Services Committees, and Scrutiny.

2. **Supporting members:** including Remote attendance; Timing of meetings; Training and development and Family absence.
3. **Improving public accessibility**: including Broadcasting council meetings; council newspapers; Social Media and Annual Reports.

This report offers key findings from a summary of the above discussions, citing specific examples where appropriate and suggesting possible actions for Welsh Government that arose from those discussions.

Summary of Actions

Following the review there are a number of suggested actions for Welsh Government and local government to consider, summarised below. All are derived from the key findings (KF), which can be found on page 24.

- Consider revisiting the Measure's requirement that the Monitoring officer is not allowed to be the Head of Democratic Services.
(s*upported by KF1.1.1.)*

    o Review the skills base required to deliver effective democratic services and strong scrutiny and whether members can be better supported by merging functions under the Head of Democratic Services.*(supported by KF1.1.2, KF1.1.3)*

    o Validate/endorse/recognise the standing of the role by including the HDS role in the senior management team. *(supported by KF1.1.1)*

- As the DSC continues to embed within council structures evidence of its variable quality presents a good opportunity for Welsh Government to facilitate an exchange of good practice/peer review between councils, specifically on strengthening approaches to work programming.
(*supported by KF1.2.2*)

- Future policy instruction might consider *requiring* chairs of scrutiny to sit on the DSC to strengthen the standing and impact of both forms of democracy.
(*supported by KF1.3.3*)

- Consider publishing guidance on the relationship between Scrutiny Committees and the Democratic Services Committee.
(s*upported by KF1.3.3.)*

- Provide clarity on the Welsh Government's current position in respect of the Designated Persons Order.
(*supported by KF 1.3.6*)

- Clarify call in procedures, with a view to making simpler and less restrictive.
(*supported by KF1.3.5*)

- Consider making provision for the development of a national expert witness list to support council scrutiny functions.
(*supported by KF1.3.4*)

- Continue to promote the use of remote attendance, recognising its usefulness as a foundation tool to promote greater diversity amongst elected members, and in anticipation of increasing geographical areas covered under the reform agenda.
(*supported by KF2.1.2*)

- Continue encouraging councils to consult on the timing of meetings, both to accommodate the needs of a more diverse democratic membership in the future, and to promote placing the public at the heart of democratic decision making.
  (*supported by KF2.2.1, KF2.2.2*)

- Explore further the role of Welsh Government in mandatory training for members.
  (*supported by KF2.3.1*)

- Consider facilitating a national programme of e-learning for members.
  (*supported by KF2.3.2*)

- Develop local government capacity and capability to effectively support member mentoring programmes, member training needs analysis and member professional development plans.
  (*supported by KF2.3.2, KF2.3.3)*

- Explore how the family absence provisions within the Measure can be used to raise the profile of diversity in democracy, and support the diversity policy agenda.
  (*supported by KF2.4.2*)

- The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales to provide guidance to councils on the payment of temporary allowances during periods of family absence.
  (*supported by KF2.4.3*)

- Examine whether the broadcasting of specified meetings of public interest, such as full council, planning and licensing, should be mandatory.
  (*supported by KF3.1.1*)

- If the broadcasting of council meetings is made mandatory, put in place arrangements to procure and finance a national contract to ensure equitable coverage of local democracy in action across Wales.
  (*supported by KF3.1.3)*

- Promote the use of local democracy footage in schools and communities, to raise awareness of opportunities for community involvement in local decision making.
  (*supported by KF3.1.1 KF 3.1.3*)

- Encourage councils to support staff and elected members in embracing social media as an effective tool for promoting public engagement with the democratic process by making provision for member training in the use of social media.
  (*supported by KF3.3.1*)

- Review the usefulness of annual reports to inform identifiable target audiences, with a view to sharing good practice in their production across councils.
  (*supported by KF3.4.1; KF 3.4.3*)

- Consider producing guidance in the form of annual report templates to secure uniformity of approach that meets Welsh Government requirements whilst securing ease of production for councils and councillors.
(*supported by KF3.4.3*)

Summary of Workshop Discussions

NOTE: The following sections are reports based on views expressed by participants at the workshops.

Section 1: Structural

1.1 Head of Democratic Services (HDS)

Background

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 introduced the post of Head of Democratic Services (HDS), to support members in non-executive roles, including the administration of scrutiny, members' services, training and development.

Discussion

Many councils reported positive aspects to the introduction of the HDS post. Where democratic services were well resourced, the services offered were good and were making a difference. Officers considered that guidance for the role introduced by the Measure was very clear. There was a general feeling that its introduction had created greater consistency in the provision of democratic services across all councils; that it had legitimised the HDS role, and given it greater respect and standing within the council.

The HDS was a hands-on role supporting members in most councils, and most felt it was vital for the role to be statutory. It had helped to focus attention and increased the importance of member development, and in councils where the HDS was a member of the Senior Management Team this had made a real difference. Some HDS reported annually to full council, evidencing what the DSC had achieved. Some felt the HDS served as an effective link between elected members and council officers, where this might otherwise have been difficult. The HDS sometimes acted as a safety net alongside the DSC, to prevent all resources being used by the cabinet for its own purposes.

Councils expressed a view that support for members was a mainstream issue and should involve all departments. A good HDS could assist in breaking down silos by mobilising and facilitating other officers and departments within an authority to support the democratic function. Non-executive members received considerable support from the HDS, especially newly elected members. WLGA training and development had helped to improve the service in some cases.

Positive examples were cited by one Authority where the Measure had made little difference to the HDS role as mechanisms for supporting members were already in place and working well; and by another Authority where the HDS had been reporting to the DSC regarding the use of resources.

However, some councils reported issues with the post of HDS, depending on how the role, as a requirement of the Measure, had been implemented. In some councils it had been made an addition to another role, which could then be a challenge for the role holder to deliver. One authority reported having had 3 consecutive people in post. In some authorities the HDS was seen

as purely administrative, and the support element of the role was not always recognised by senior management.

In some councils there was a perception that the HDS existed for the ruling party, rather than for all members. However, other councils reported that executive members often felt they received insufficient support. In some smaller authorities it was not always possible to provide adequate support to non-executive members. In such cases there were good personal relationships but the requirements of the Measure were not always met due to capacity issues. Other authorities reported that there had been little impact on the role following the Measure, due to a lack of political buy in.

Many councils felt that resources needed to be protected for the HDS role in the current climate. In some Authorities, democratic services was well resourced, others reported insufficient resources to deliver efficient services to members. Some felt that the democratic services function was an easy target for budget cuts in difficult financial times, and that member support had already declined. Others commented that staff resources for the DSC and member support could be an issue, but this was mostly managed and resolved through flexible joint working between the Scrutiny and Democratic Services Committees.

Many councils requested Welsh Government revisit the Measure's requirement that the Monitoring officer could not be designated Head of Democratic Services. Strong links were required between the two posts as members frequently sought the assistance of the HDS to resolve issues. Some councils had seen a way around this requirement by appointing the deputy monitoring officer as HDS. However, a small number of councils agreed with the Measure as it stands.

More specifically, it was reported that it is taking time for the role to become embedded. Some councils reported that where there is lack of trust between the executive and non-executive then the role of the HDS can be difficult, and in some councils there was a general lack of understanding of the designation. Some felt this part of the Measure had been written in a different financial climate.

Proposed action:
- Consider revisiting the Measure's requirement that the Monitoring officer is not allowed to be the Head of Democratic Services. *(supported by KF1.1.1)*
- Review the skills base required to deliver strong scrutiny and effective democratic services and whether members can be better supported by merging functions under the Head of Democratic Services.
- Validate/endorse/recognise the standing of the role by including the HDS in the senior management team.

1.2 Democratic Services Committee (DSC)

Background

The Measure required Local Authorities to appoint Democratic Services Committees to carry out the council's role of appointing the HDS and, more generally, to oversee the work of the HDS and

to make representations to the council as to the resources required to support non –executive members.

Discussion

Feedback on the Measure's introduction of DSCs was overwhelmingly positive. Most councils reported that the Measure had made a difference. It had allowed provision to be made on a cross party basis, in a broadly non-political way and in a more cohesive and coherent way. A number of councils reported that they were already fulfilling the role of the DSC before the Measure, but that the Measure had placed it on a statutory footing. It was felt that the introduction of the DSC had provided credibility to members' roles and was a useful interface between executives and non-executives.

Some DSCs were taking time to establish, and it was felt they could continue to improve and become more effective over time. In one Authority, chairs of all committees met to share their news and best practice on a regular basis. They had seen improvements since the introduction of the scheme. However, there were still some issues with backbenchers feeling excluded by a lack of information circulated to them.

Mostly, the Terms of Reference of the DSC were considered adequate, however the committee required a resource to embed and release its potential. Some councils considered the Terms of Reference were too vague, but agreed they allowed for local decision-making.

Feedback from councils suggested there were differing aspirations for the role of the DSC. Some were keen to develop the role and standing of the committee. There was evidence of successful informal task group / project work of a cross party nature, such as the introduction of electronic meeting papers.

Generally, the DSC was considered equal in status to all other committees. All councils reported good attendance at the DSC, and holding the DSC in public meant the papers containing proposals for members' training and IT were accessible for public view, increasing the transparency of expenditure to support members.

With regard to the frequency of meetings, there was evidence of significant variation across Councils. One Authority's DSC met bi-monthly, the Chair would like to meet more often but there was insufficient officer capacity to support more frequent meetings; another Authority's DSC met every 2-3 months, or when necessary; one met when necessary; and another four times a year.

Some councils reported that the agenda of the DSC was growing as roles became clearer, however only two councils reported producing DSC forward work programmes.

One DSC had considered a member's role in increasing public engagement with local democracy. One was considering creating a sub group that visited schools to talk about voting and becoming a member of the Local Authority. Others reported the DSC had not undertaken an engagement programme. Some reported this role was currently undertaken by staff.

In terms of the remuneration of DSC chairs, practice was varied. One Authority didn't allocate a senior allowance to the chair of the DSC, but other Authorities did. One Authority chair had a

wider remit as it was also linked to the member's champion role of member development. Although the Independent Remuneration Panel decided the rate of payment, each council could decide which posts qualified for an allowance.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response to the establishment of the DSC a number of issues were highlighted: Some felt that the scrutiny function should sit under the HDS but the workshops revealed this was not currently the case in all councils. Others felt that because the DSC did not have decision-making powers and all decisions went to Council, the process was overly bureaucratic, and they therefore considered the Measure to be overly cautious.

Allocation of resources was sometimes an issue. Whilst Blaenau Gwent considered the DSC and scrutiny to be well supported, the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff felt that more support was given to scrutiny committees. In Wrexham the democratic services manager is responsible for scrutiny and committee services. Some feel that audit is not getting as much attention as scrutiny, which they feel, is an unbalance. Some feel that officers are leading the DSC agenda, rather than councillors.

Proposed action:

- As the DSC continues to embed within council structures, evidence of its variable quality presents a good opportunity for Welsh Government to facilitate an exchange of good practice/peer review between councils, specifically on strengthening approaches to forward work programming. (*Supported by KF 1.2.2*)
- Future policy direction might consider *requiring* chairs of scrutiny to sit on the DSC to strengthen the standing and impact of both forms of democracy. (*Supported by KF1.3.3*)

1.2 Scrutiny

Background

The Measure made provision for the appointment of joint scrutiny committees, scrutiny of designated persons, taking into account the views of the public, proportional allocation of scrutiny chairs, co-option to scrutiny committees, provision of information, and the prohibition of whipping. This review was not intended as an in-depth study of the scrutiny function however the workshop discussions were a good opportunity to explore whether scrutiny processes are sufficiently supported within the council, and the extent to which the scrutiny function engages with the public.

Discussion

Some councils felt that the Measure introduced significant change to the processes and protocols of the scrutiny function, and in some cases guidance was slow to appear and would benefit from revision.

Generally speaking councils felt scrutiny was inadequately resourced to do the job it needed to do, but there was recognition that it was difficult to justify the costs of scrutiny when front line services were being cut. Some felt that giving priority to scrutiny in terms of resources was important, and that there was currently insufficient resource available to scrutiny to make an impact. There was variation however, with one authority considering the scrutiny function to be sufficiently resourced to support a large number of scrutiny panels, and another reporting just two scrutiny officers/clerks. Some councils had difficulty securing members attendance at scrutiny working groups, and it was also felt that scrutiny was better resourced when not working in silos.

There was evidence that some councils were effectively integrating scrutiny and democratic services. For example, one authority had tried to integrate its scrutiny chairs group with its DSC; another DSC chair invited scrutiny chairs to attend all meetings; and a third reported a good working relationship between DSC and scrutiny committees. Some councils had scrutiny and DSC both supported under the Democratic Services function. One authority had intentions to move its scrutiny function from Democratic Services to its performance function, as it felt the skill set was better suited to this area. Some councils considered scrutiny being separate from democratic services allowed for greater focus on continuous improvement in scrutiny impact and outcomes.

Councils noted that member's contributions to, and understanding of, a scrutiny topic was critical to scrutiny outcomes. Ideally member's interests and skills set matched the Terms of Reference of the scrutiny committee of which they were a member.

Whilst many councils reported there was no whipping, officers and members were not convinced that it doesn't take place, and there was general agreement that the prohibition of whipping was impossible in practice. Councils felt there was a role for party whips to play in engaging members in scrutiny committees.

Practice varied across the country with regard to public involvement in scrutiny, though the potential to improve scrutiny's public engagement role in local democracy was unanimously recognised. Some councils held open public forums at every scrutiny committee, whilst others were looking at how they might increase public involvement. Councils identified an opportunity to involve the press more in promoting scrutiny issues. It was widely considered that the public needed a better understanding of scrutiny and how it worked before they would want to be involved. Some councils reported that they had made efforts to do this. For example, one Authority reported effective public engagement in scrutiny; Another Authority published its scrutiny forward work programme on a quarterly basis via Twitter and its website; Other Authorities had good examples of public engagement with scrutiny through housing and schools; One Authority issued press releases following scrutiny committees as a form of public engagement. Webcasting was reported to have had an impact in some places on the involvement of the public: One Authority, for example, noted a particular public interest in planning scrutiny committees. Many councils reported using blogs, Twitter, and Facebook to promote scrutiny.

Several councils identified the need to develop an expert witness list, and indicated they were considering public questions at the commencement of both Scrutiny and Democratic Services Committees.

Some councils felt that scrutiny engagement could be criticised for being too formal, highlighting that it was always the same community groups that engaged, rather than the 'average citizen'.

There was recognition that public engagement in scrutiny was challenging. People engaged on issues that were either directly relevant to them, or had a high media profile. Councils acknowledged the public wished to be informed of the outcome of their engagement in public meetings to avoid feeling it had been meaningless.

Some members aired concerns that call-ins were referred back to the same Cabinet that made the original decision. They felt scrutiny of these matters should be better, and that call-in referrals should be considered by full council, as a Cabinet that had passed a motion is unlikely to take a complete U-turn following a scrutiny call-in. Councils highlighted that scrutiny powers to challenge matters before they were timetabled for decision by the cabinet would avoid decisions slipping through the net and resulting in call-ins by scrutiny. One council felt call-in procedures should be less restrictive.

Councils were seeking clarification of the Welsh Government's intention in respect of bringing into force the Measure provision for designated persons. Guidance on designated persons is outstanding. The Well-being of Future Generations Bill introduced Public Services Boards and arrangements for their accountability. This would provide an opportunity to deliver clear and comprehensive guidance for the scrutiny of joint service delivery.

Proposed action:

- Provide clarity on the Welsh Governments current position in respect of the Designated Persons Order.(*supported by KF 1.3.6*)

- Consider publishing guidance on the relationship between Scrutiny Committees and the Democratic Services Committee. (*supported by KF1.3.3*)

- Clarify call- in procedures, with a view to making simpler and less restrictive .(*supported by KF1.3.5*)

- Consider making provision for the development of a national expert witness list to support council scrutiny functions. (*supported by KF1.3.4*)

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Section 2: Supporting members

2.1 Remote attendance

Background

The Measure introduced remote attendance at meetings in order to cater for members who might find it difficult to attend meetings at the council offices, possibly because of employment, caring or distance reasons. It was aimed at encouraging greater diversity. Members attending remotely must be seen and heard by those at the main meeting place, and also by any members of the public present in the public gallery at the meeting.

Discussion

Views on this subject range from there being no benefits to remote attendance to it being a potentially valuable equality mechanism. Councils felt it was unclear what need the provision of remote attendance was addressing; whether for the benefit of councillors, the public or both.

Councils highlighted the positive aspects of remote attendance as; helping councillors to balance domestic duties with council duties; useful if members were ill and unable to attend council meetings; and useful for member training as a distance learning option.

Most councils had considered remote attendance and decided against using it. The more rural councils had considered it more seriously. Councils generally agreed that remote attendance should not be mandatory, and offered a number of reasons for not pursuing it further.

It was felt that setting up remote attendance required intensive resources both in staff time and infrastructure, that the technology was not yet sophisticated enough to ensure continued secure connections ,and that the cost of set up and running could not be justified to the public when cuts were being made to frontline services across the board.

Training was needed for all members to be able to use remote attendance, so that they were familiar with the technology. Technology malfunction was an issue as this could happen at any time and be difficult to fix remotely. This was a particular concern when members were required to vote and the technology risks losing that right. One solution would be to use remote attendance for public scrutiny meetings rather than decision-making meetings. This would also address the concern raised by some that there were issues of confidentiality at stake with regards part 2 of meetings, and that remote attendance had the potential to make things less visible. It was impossible to guarantee confidentiality where members were attending remotely.

Some considered that the 'feel' of the meeting was lost if using remote attendance, and that it did not allow the informal networking and information exchange that happened between members, and with officers, before and after meetings. A number of councils felt strongly that when a person stood for election as a county councillor they did so understanding the commitment to attend meetings

The use of remote hubs, rather than using remote attendance in councillors' homes or work places, was certainly preferred. There were good examples in councils where remote attendance was being piloted, recognising the advantages of remote attendance more keenly than other councils. One council had set up three hubs across the county, and reported that the technology was not perfect, and that the issue of translation needed to be addressed, however it saved travel costs and time for many members. There was some debate whether the public should be allowed into a hub. One rural county had considered using remote attendance, but having investigated its implementation, abandoned plans due to issues with infrastructure and cost. Another rural council ran a pilot from a satellite office for a committee, but recognised that support staff were needed at the satellite office, which increased costs. They also encountered translation issues, and on this basis it was decided not to continue.

A number of councils highlighted that the forthcoming mergers under local government reform would create new councils with a larger geographical spread. Remote attendance would therefore become more useful, particularly for the public, who could be provided with the option of attending regional broadcast centres.

Proposed action:

- Continue to encourage the use of remote attendance, recognising its usefulness as a foundation tool to promote greater diversity amongst elected members, and in anticipation of increasing geographical areas covered under the reform agenda. *(supported by KF2.1.2)*

2.2 Timing of meetings

Background

The Measure made provision to ensure that councils took into account the needs/wishes of their members, particularly new ones, to try and accommodate the maximum number of members in determining the timing of meetings. The guidance the Welsh Government issued required all councils to survey their members after each election and act on the results. They were urged to take account of minority wishes as well as the majority.

Discussion

The majority of councils reported that the timing of their meetings had not changed as a result of conducting the survey. The majority of council meetings were still held during the day, though there was considerable flexibility with regards the timings of committee meetings and working groups. Some councils had introduced alternating daytime/ evening meetings, which had proved positive. Often members had ward and family commitments in the evening that could prevent them attending council meetings.

Several councils felt potential candidates should be made fully aware of the commitment expected, and the frequency and timings of meetings.

Decisions on the timing of meetings tended to be based on meeting the needs of members, rather than the public. However, an authority reported that the timing of council had changed to suit the

needs of the public, and the timing of the Cabinet meeting varied depending on the topic and who was likely to attend.

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Proposed action:

- Continue encouraging councils to consult on the timing of meetings, both to accommodate the needs of a more diverse democratic membership in the future, and to promote placing the public at the heart of democratic decision making. *(supported by KF2.2.1, KF2.2.2)*

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2.3 Training and development

Background

The Measure made the provision of a "reasonable level" of training and development of members of a local authority compulsory. The aim was to ensure that councillors, particularly new ones, were given the training needed to do their jobs.

Discussion

Many councils felt that the Measure had made a difference to the amount of mandatory training offered to members, but others report it was the WLGA members' charter that had driven improvements in training more than the Measure. Even though the offer of training had increased, most reported that low attendance at training was still an issue, particularly among long standing councillors. A heavy workload was often given as a reason for non-attendance.

Councils reported that attendance was improved when training was delivered in bite size chunks prior to council meetings. For example, E-learning was considered to increase the take up of training, and councils called for Welsh Government to explore the possibility of developing a national core scheme of training, possibly linked to the scheme of allowances. This could be delivered by an e-learning mechanism and easily made accessible to all councils.

Some councils suggested pooling resources to offer members training; others thought the savings generated would be offset by increased travel costs.

One to one mentoring between established and new councillors, and also between councillors and officers, was being used in a number of councils. For example, one Authority operated a mentoring scheme using independent councillors and had eight trained mentors through the WLGA programme.

Some councils felt there was a need to conduct a training needs analysis and professional development plans for councillors, whilst some councils reported already having done so.

In terms of content for training, the following topics were considered to be important:
- A common framework for scrutiny training with core topics for all councillors and options for more specific or local needs.

- Training for councillors and officers on 'how to be scrutinised' and help in preparing to stand before scrutiny committees.
- Code of conduct; member- officer protocols; conduct when using social media and during the broadcasting of meetings; rules of debate in a council chamber
- Declarations of interest; Freedom of Information; Finance and risk management
- Understanding procurement rules
- Equalities

The enforcement of mandatory training was considered a difficult issue. Given that councillors were not required to hold any formal qualifications prior to election, there was a call for future Welsh Government policy provision around the need for some mandatory training, particularly on key governance issues, code of conduct and equalities. Councils identified several mechanisms for improving attendance at training sessions. For example, standards committee could ask members for reasons of non-attendance at a training course. Others suggested that councillors should be accredited following training before being allowed to sit on a particular scrutiny committee. Including attendance information in annual reports would also encourage attendance. Some felt that Welsh Government had a role to play in ensuring or encouraging attendance at mandatory training.

> **Proposed action:**
>
> - Explore further the role of Welsh Government in mandatory training for members *(supported by KF 2.3.1)*
> - Consider facilitating a national programme of e-learning for members. *(supported by KF 2.3.2)*
> - Develop local government capacity and capability to effectively support member mentoring programmes, member training needs analysis and member professional development plans. *(supported by KF 2.3.2, KF2.3.3)*

2.4 Family absence

Background

Family absence was introduced by the Measure to give councillors a right to absence for reasons connected with child birth or adoption for a period. Councillors needing family absence are entitled to retain their remuneration for the period. They must inform the HDS when they need it.

Discussion

Only two councils reported having used the family absence provision. A significant number of Councils felt that the family absence provision was not needed due to the fact that section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 already allowed for the 6 month absence of any councillor and could be extended even further if the council agreed.

It was also felt that the family absence provision required greater publicity to convey to potential councillors the support mechanisms in place in public office. Importantly, family absence provision was not facilitating improvements in the diversity of membership in the way it might.

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Potential councillors were not aware of the support mechanisms available. The principles behind the provision were considered sensible, though narrow, and had the potential to cover different cultures in support of diverse representation.

Some felt family absence was impractical in that members were committed to their constituents and it would not always be in the members' interest to take time off.

One council observed that family absence had to be budgeted for and if there was no take up then this could cause difficulties in budget management.

Councils reported that at present there was no provision for senior allowance holders to take a period of leave and temporarily hand over the senior allowance to a colleague. It was unclear as to whether councils were allowed to pay a substitution allowance in this case.

Proposed action:

- Explore how the family absence provisions within the Measure can be used to raise the profile of diversity in democracy, and support the diversity policy agenda. (*supported by KF 2.4.2*)
- The IRP to provide guidance to councils on the payment of temporary allowances during periods of family absence. (*supported by KF 2.4.3*)

Section 3: Improving public accessibility

3.1 Broadcasting

Background

Each council received start up funding to enable them to broadcast their meetings. Most councils have experimented with, or are now permanently, webstreaming their meetings live on line.

The UK Government has passed legislation to make it an entitlement in England for public or journalists to film or record meetings. The Welsh Government has resisted this in favour of councils taking their own decisions, however encouraging them to allow it to happen.

Discussion

There was overwhelming support for the official broadcasting of council meetings and other committee meetings. It allowed for a complete and accurate recording of proceedings and should be a vital part of democracy moving forward. A number of councils reported a high number of 'hits' on the website to view broadcast council meetings, though many more people accessed coverage after the meeting than live. Evidence of usage of the facility was provided by Pembrokeshire and Anglesey with 3,500 and 4,000 hits on broadcast archives respectively.

Members and officers reported that the introduction of broadcasting had facilitated member development, and been an effective motivator for chairs and committee members to prepare well and conduct themselves appropriately at meetings.

If broadcasting was to be made mandatory in the future, councils would welcome a debate as to which meetings should be broadcast. Councils currently take varied approaches, with the range of meetings broadcast including full council meetings, committee meetings with a public interest, planning and licensing committees. As a minimum, councils would welcome guidance on standard minimum requirements, and reassurance that Welsh Government will meet the cost.

Many councils highlighted the practical and financial resource implications of introducing mandatory broadcasting, including factoring in the cost of simultaneous Welsh language translation.

The majority of councils felt there was no need to permit the public to film meetings that were already being broadcast; however there was recognition that covert filming could always be stopped.

Some councils expressed concern that editing is key and if a meeting is edited too much then it is not a true reflection of the whole meeting.

Councils suggested good additional uses for the broadcasted material, such as referring to footage to aid member development, and for use in school visits to increase education and awareness of local politics.

To date councils had used the Welsh Government grant for broadcasting in a variety of ways. Some had broadcast live meetings; others had recorded and broadcast them after the meeting had taken place. For example, an Authority had used the grant to purchase equipment. They did not broadcast live but made footage available the following day; Another Authority used the grant to record training sessions, which were then made available to members; One Authority had organised in-house broadcasting and were broadcasting full council meetings.

Proposed action:

- Examine whether the broadcasting of specified meetings of public interest, such as full council, planning and licensing, should be mandatory. *(supported by KF 3.1.1)*
- If the broadcasting of council meetings is made mandatory, put in place arrangements to procure and finance a national contract to ensure equitable coverage of local democracy in action across Wales. *(supported by KF 3.1.3)*
- Promote the use of local democracy footage in schools and communities, to raise awareness of opportunities for community involvement in local decision making. *(supported by KF 3.1.1,KF 3.1.3)*

3.2 Council Newsletters

Background

The production of council newsletters has been a controversial issue in England, with the suggestion that they take business away from local newspapers. The Welsh Government considers it is legitimate for councils to engage with the public about their activities and use their own papers to place planning notices and job advertisements, thereby making best use of shrinking budgets.

Discussion

The publication of council newspapers varied, with some stopped completely due to budget cuts, others had moved to an on-line version only, some still produced hard copies. A number of councils felt that current or past publications acted too much as the voice of the leadership, though a small number felt it was a useful tool for information sharing about services, and a few councils used the papers to publish statutory notices, which was a saving compared with having to pay for local press notices.

Cardiff, Caerphilly, Swansea, Conwy, Merthyr and Blaenau Gwent still published newspapers, though some less frequently than in the past. Carmarthenshire produced a newspaper jointly with Local Service Board partners. Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Powys and Ceredigion no longer published one.

The issue of digital exclusion was reported as an important equality consideration, with many people, particularly the elderly, in some parts of Wales unable to access on-line provision.

3.3 Social Media

Background

The use of Twitter and Facebook has now become commonplace and many local authorities have their own pages and feeds. However, in contrast to AMs and MPs, individual councillors are reluctant to use these tools. This may mean that councillors are missing out on contact with large numbers of their actual or potential future electorate.

Discussion

The majority of councils agreed that social media was an effective tool for public engagement, its use was increasing and so councils needed to embrace the change.

Councils reported it was a useful corporate communication tool and there were increasing opportunities to use this style of communication to engage directly with communities. Examples given were: recent storms in West Wales reported on Facebook for which the councils received a lot of positive feedback; schools texting information to parents; 'Tidy texts' where residents informed the council of rubbish in communities; informing residents of changes to rubbish collections over a holiday period; Swansea and Carmarthenshire running a joint campaign via Twitter around safety on bonfire night.

The use of social media by individual councillors was mixed. Some reported that it was on the increase, whilst others said it was very dependent on age and interest. One councillor suggested it was a very useful method of maintaining contact with ward members and in particular on issues of planning. Another councillor felt that the use of social media had become competitive amongst members keen to secure the most followers on Twitter.

However, there are some concerns around the safety of using social media. Many felt that training was essential for councillors so that they were able to use the tools effectively and without too many repercussions. It was generally agreed that the social media training provided by WLGA was very useful, but that more training was needed on implementation and use of social media, as well as on rules and regulations.

It was agreed it is important not to tweet in the heat of the moment and there is an important distinction to be made around professional and personal use of social media by councillors. Some councils had produced their own guidance. One Authority reported having strong protocols in place for the corporate use of Social Media, using guidance produced by WLGA.

Another concern is the use of social media during meetings. It was felt by some that observers of meetings are not allowed to intervene during the meeting so why should they be allowed to comment on social media. Others thought that perhaps a distinction should be made between decision-making meetings and others, where permission for the use of social media could be differentiated.

3.4 Annual Reports

Background

The Measure introduced the requirement that local authorities must make arrangements for annual reports by councillors. It was intended to be a way of increasing public awareness of individual councillor's activities, and that of councillors more generally. Councils are obliged to make arrangements for the publication of reports but councillors themselves are not obliged to produce them.

Discussion

Overall there was not a lot of support for the production of annual reports. Both officers and members felt that annual reports involved a lot of additional work for very little impact. There was a lack of clarity as to who uses them and whom they are produced for. It is questionable how much public interest there is in them, and therefore there is a challenge to make them more interesting.

Many officers felt that annual reports were useful but that members required support to produce them. Councils generally make electronic templates available, but a number of members still need support to populate the template. Welsh Government guidance and examples would be helpful. Officers felt it would be important to get group leaders on side if they were to achieve a good number of completed annual reports. The highest return of annual reports seemed to be when the group leaders took it upon themselves to ensure commitment from members. Officers also voiced concerns that over time there was the potential for annual reports to become bland and generic as members 'cut and paste' from previous years. They also felt that members would be more inclined to complete them if they were aware of the potential for use by the press. However one person commented that the press were more interested in reporting those who had not completed the reports.

There was considerable negativity from members about annual reports; They considered recording attendance and committee membership laborious, and that annual reports were not a true reflection of attendance as not all meetings were formally recorded, for example scrutiny task group meetings. This presented a distorted view if reported in the press. Some members felt that annual reports were unnecessary, as their performance would be judged at the ballot box. Others used alternative means to share information e.g. newsletters, surgeries etc. and therefore saw it as duplication.

Some members were reluctant to complete annual reports, as they felt dictated to by Welsh Government and / or officers. Others felt that they were being asked to oversell themselves,

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whilst others use them for political means. On the positive side some members saw annual reports as an opportunity for free publicity, which they were happy to take advantage of.

Whilst the effectiveness of annual reports was mixed across Wales, with some councils reporting high returns, and others decreasing year on year, no one felts that annual reports should be made compulsory. This was seen as difficult to enforce and would place added pressure on already stretched support staff.

Proposed action:

- Review the usefulness of annual reports to inform identifiable target audiences, with a view to sharing good practice in their production across councils. *(supported by KF 3.4.1, KF3.4.3)*

- Consider producing guidance in the form of templates to secure uniformity of approach that meets Welsh Government requirements whilst securing ease of production for councils and councillors. *(supported by KF 3.4.3)*

Key Findings

1: Structural

1.1 Head of Democratic Services Role

1.1.1   The Measure had resulted in greater standing, uniformity, and respect for the post of Head of Democratic Services (HDS) across most councils. The role was more likely to be a part of the senior management team, enabling a more effective link between members and senior officers, and therefore greater impact for the role. The requirement in the Measure that the Monitoring Officer could not be the HDS had caused some difficulties, which councils had overcome by appointing the Deputy Monitoring Officer as HDS. However not all senior management teams recognised the value of an effective HDS.

1.1.2   Where there was a lack of trust between executive and non-executive, the HDS role could be difficult, however where the HDS was effective, member training had become a mainstream issue in councils and had been well delivered, sometimes assisted by the WLGA.

1.1.3   A lack of staff capacity and capability to provide appropriate support to both executive and non-executive members could mean the intentions of the Measure were not always met. Where there were insufficient resources councils were merging democratic services and scrutiny functions, sometimes with little recognition of the different skills base required.

1.2 Democratic Services Committee

1.2.1   The introduction of a statutory Democratic Services Committee (DSC) had provided credibility to the role of a member, created a useful interface between executive and non-executive members, and was overwhelmingly considered positive.

1.2.2   There were mixed approaches to work programming for DSC's within their Terms of Reference. Some councils planned active agendas, encouraged informal cross party task group working, and constantly sought to grow the role and impact of the DSC. An opportunity to share good work programming practice was identified.

1.2.3   There were varied approaches to remunerating the role of Chair of the DSC. Where councils allocated a senior salary to the role there was evidence of proactive work planning, active agendas, and a desire to grow the role, impact and standing of the committee.

1.2.4   Resources to support the work and develop the potential of the DSC were sometimes an issue.

1.3 Scrutiny

1.3.1   The Measure introduced significant change to the processes and protocols of the scrutiny function; in some cases guidance was late to appear and would benefit from revision.

1.3.2   Scrutiny continued to be poorly resourced in some councils and, particularly in the current financial climate, competed with frontline services for resources.

1.3.3   The quality of member's contributions was acknowledged as critical to scrutiny's output. It was considered important to match an individual member's skill set to a scrutiny committee's terms of reference. Some councils were actively pooling resources, both of staff and member expertise, for example, by ensuring that scrutiny chairs were also members of the DSC.

1.3.4   The potential to improve scrutiny's public engagement role in local democracy was unanimously recognised. Many and varied attempts at improving engagement were underway, with general consensus that an expert witness list, accessible to all councils, would be useful, and that currently public engagement in scrutiny is too formal.

1.3.5   There was some concern that scrutiny call-in arrangements prevented a realistic challenge to decision-making, because when a scrutiny committee referred a decision back it was to the same decision-making executive body, rather than to full council.

1.3.6 Councils noted that the commencement of the designated persons Order is outstanding and sought clarification of the Welsh Governments intention in respect of accountability for joint services delivery.

2. Supporting Members

2.1 Remote attendance

2.1.1   Views on remote attendance ranged from there being no benefits, to considering it a potentially valuable equality mechanism, and particularly valuable for the purposes of member training. However, it was generally agreed that remote attendance should not be mandatory.

2.1.2   Most councils had considered remote attendance, and decided against using it; however more rural councils had considered its use more seriously. Many felt remote attendance would become more useful with the increasing geographical spread of authority boundaries under Local Government Reform.

2.1.3 Implementing remote attendance required intensive resources, both in staff time and infrastructure; however the technology had not yet proved sufficiently sophisticated to ensure continuity through secure connections.

2.1.4 The use of remote hubs, rather than individual links within councillors' homes or work places, was considered preferable.

2.2 Timing of Meetings

2.2.1. The majority of councils reported timings of their meetings had not changed as a result of conducting the survey introduced by the Measure. Most council meetings were still held during the day.

2.2.2. Decisions on the timing of meetings tended to be based on meeting the needs of members, rather than the public.

2.2.3 Several councils felt potential candidates should be made fully aware of meeting time commitments.

2.3 Training and Development

2.3.1 Many councils felt that the Measure had made a difference to the quantity of mandatory training offered to members, although some considered that it is the WLGA charter that has driven improvements in training, more than the Measure.

2.3.2 It was considered that attendance improved when training was delivered in bite size chunks prior to council meetings, and many councils agreed that a programme of e-learning developed nationally would be beneficial.

2.3.3 One to one mentoring of councillors was seen as a positive resource, and had been used effectively in some councils.

2.4 **Family Absence**

2.4.1 A significant number felt that the family absence provision within the Measure was not needed because section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 allowed for a 6 month absence by any councillor and could be extended even further if the council agreed.

2.4.2 There was an opportunity for family absence provision to support the diversity policy aspirations of Welsh Government, by using wider publicity to convey the support mechanisms in place and attract a more representative field of potential new councillors.

3. Improving public accessibility

3.1 Broadcasting

3.1.1 There was overwhelming support for the official broadcasting of council meetings and other committee meetings.

3.1.2. The majority felt there should be no public recording of meetings where arrangements are already in place for broadcasting proceedings.

3.1.3 Resources for the continuation of the broadcasting of meetings would need Welsh Government support to secure a nationally procured contract.

3.2 Council Newspapers

3.2.1   Some councils had stopped producing hard copies of newspapers, whilst others continued with less frequency.

3.2.2   Councils were aware of the risk of digital exclusion when reverting to electronic only versions of council newspapers.

3.3 Social Media

3.3.1   The majority of councils agreed that social media was an effective tool for public engagement. Its use continued to increase, and councils needed to embrace the change and offer support and training to staff and elected members in order to maximise its potential, to avoid professional and personal repercussions when used inappropriately.

3.4 Annual reports

3.4.1   Overall there was little support for the production of annual reports. Members and democratic services officers felt annual reports involved a lot of additional work for very little impact.

1.4.2   There was a lack of clarity about the audience they were produced for, and who actually uses them. There was little evidence of public interest in annual reports, and the challenge was to make them more interesting and available.

1.4.3   Councils would welcome an opportunity to share approaches to the production of annual reports; and would particularly welcome guidance in the form of templates.

1.4.4   There was a unanimous view that annual reports should not be made compulsory.

Annex 1: Case study visits, HDS interviews and DSC reviews

Case Study 1: Swansea Council.

Structure: Democratic Services in Swansea is exclusive of Scrutiny. Although both functions report to different line managers, they sit within the same Directorate, and the HDS is fastidious in briefing the Scrutiny Manager of DSC discussions that impact upon Scrutiny. Democratic Services record the proceedings of Swansea's one formal Scrutiny committee, whose role is to determine and direct the scrutiny work programme, the creation of Scrutiny Panels and the receiving of reports, prior to their presentation to the Executive.

Democratic Services Committee: The DSC is chaired by a member of the largest opposition group, who is not allocated a senior salary allowance. The 12 strong membership includes 8 Labour, 2 Liberal Democrat, 1 Independent and 1 Conservative councillor. The Deputy Leader is the Councillor Support and Development Member Champion and also the cabinet observer. The committee meets six weekly, though will move to twelve weekly from June 2015, and is well supported. The Chair, agenda, direction of discussion, and outcomes are strongly directed by the HDS.

Work programming/agendas: Work programming for the Committee is undertaken by the HDS in conjunction with the Chair of DSC and the Committee itself, and does not appear to involve other stakeholders. Agenda papers are available to download from the council's website, items are often passive briefings, rather than for active consideration. An opportunity exists for Authorities to share DSC creative work programming approaches.

Observation: The HDS is responsible for progress where actions are agreed by the DSC. All decisions of the DSC are fed into Full Council. No DSC Committee reports or recommendations are fed into the Executive, or into Scrutiny for consideration in future work programming. At the conclusion of each item there is an opportunity for stronger summing up, identification of tangible actions, and future committee agenda planning by the Chair. There is an opportunity for the development of formal processes and protocols for capturing matters referred by members to the DSC. In addition feedback to political groups by DSC members could be improved.

Annual Reports: Swansea Councillors have been slow in producing Councillors annual reports despite the endeavours of the HDS. They now produce 2 sides of A4 and 3 sides if the Councillor holds a senior post.

Member Development: the members training budget is around £6,000pa (£3,000 scrutiny, £3,000 democratic). Councillors' Personal Development Reviews, which include a training needs analysis, are underway, and a number of officers have been trained by WLGA to undertake them. There is potential for more joint training with neighbouring councils as an 'early adopter' merging opportunity.

Case Study 2: Blaenau Gwent Council

Structure: Democratic Services in Blaenau Gwent fall within the Policy and Performance Division as part of the Corporate Services and Strategy Directorate, which includes Democratic Services, Performance, Scrutiny, Strategic Policy, Research and Engagement, Corporate Communications and, the contact centre C2BG. The HDS considers the breadth of her division has proved useful in relation to the role of HDS as there are opportunities to align and maximise capacity.

Democratic Services Committee: The DSC is chaired by an Independent member. The 15 strong membership includes 12 Labour and 3 Independent councillors. The Vice Chair is a Labour member. The Committee meets quarterly. All Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny are invited, by the DSC Chair, to attend the Democratic Services Committee, and take part in the debate, although they do not take part in any vote the committee may take. The DSC monitors the Councils scrutiny development action plan on a quarterly basis as part of its forward work programme and recommends it to Council. This is considered good practice and worthy of sharing with other councils.

Work programming/agendas: Agenda papers for a DSC committee are available to download from the Councils website in advance of the meeting. Of 4 items on the agenda, two required monitoring by Members (e.g. the Councils scrutiny development action plan which is a standing item webcasting remote attendance and Town/Community Council website arrangements); and two items required 'active' input, seeking Members comments (e.g. Annual Reports evaluation and timeline, and Training needs analysis survey-engagement exercise).

The committee discussion focussed on areas for improvement within the scrutiny development action plan, identified from the council's annual scrutiny evaluation arrangements and external evaluation feedback.

The HDS considers the democratic services committee is well embedded in the Council, and recognises, whilst there is some good work programming practice in place for the committee, there is always an opportunity for improvement;. There is a sense that aspects of the robust approaches to scrutiny forward work programming could usefully be applied to the forward work planning of the Democratic Services committee moving forward.

Observations: The committee is well supported by the officers, the Chair being strongly supported by the HDS, who presents reports falling within their remit and confidently dealt with Member observations. The desired report outcomes were clearly articulated to Members. The committee undertook a good level of analytical discussion. Whilst the Chair lacked direction in summing up and agreeing next steps, he stressed to Members how important it is that the Committees uses its role appropriately.

Annual Reports: The Council adopted the format for Annual reports in 2013 following a desktop review of those in use by other LA's. An evaluation has been undertaken with Members to gain views on their experience of completing annual reports including the format and support provided to inform the process moving forward.

Member Development: The council benefits from effective support from the WLGA, in relation to specific assistance with democratic processes, equalities training, and councillor training. Training needs analysis for councillors will be linked to the Corporate Plan priorities.

Case Study 3: Pembrokeshire

Structure: The Head of Democratic Services has responsibility for legal services, committee services, democratic services and land charges.

Democratic Services Committee: The DSC is chaired by a Plaid Cymru member and has 7 members. Meetings have been irregular since July 2012, with the Committee having met just 5 times in over two years.   The HDS considered the DSC had bedded in to the structure of the council well and the Committee is keen to extend its remit. Matters are now being referred to the Committee by audit and standards committees. Scrutiny matters sit comfortably within the committee.

Work programming/agendas:

DSC committees are well attended and well organised. Members have diverse individual strengths, a good grasp of current national and local policies and prepare well, confidently discussing matters and challenging fellow members, officers and external attendees.

A good relationship exists between members and officers. Members consult the HDS to clarify legalities relating to subjects being discussed, are frequently referred to the Committees Terms of Reference. Excellent chairing skills mean all members are given the opportunity to speak and ask questions. The Chair successfully seeks clarification on points of interest, brings discussions to a clear conclusion, and matters to a vote where necessary.

Observations: Good chairing results in the Committee often referring matters to scrutiny committees. The DSC is positively integrated with scrutiny processes, and aware of the importance of outcome based policies.

Annual Reports: less have been published this year compared to last year. There is little consistency with a lack of attention to annual reports from members. The publication of annual reports is also a labour intensive exercise for officers.

Member Development: There has been low attendance at training events. It is difficult to find a time which suits the majority of members. E-learning is being considered and some courses run, but some older members are reluctant to participate.

Case Study 4: Conwy

Structure: As a result of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the designation of HDS was given to one of the existing posts of Democratic Services Manager. This officer was already responsible for the scrutiny and committee function (and electoral) and the only new component of the role was that of member support. The Scrutiny function has always been a part of Democratic Services so there wasn't a need for a restructure of service responsibility.

Democratic Services Committee: To date, the Democratic Services Committee has been chaired by a Conservative Member because, as is a requirement of the Measure, the Chair cannot be a member of a political group represented on the Executive. The Chair of DSC is allocated a senior salary allowance for the role they undertake, which includes taking on the role of Member Support Champion and chairing the monthly Member Development and Information Forum. The Committee has 12 Members, and meets quarterly.

Annual Reports: There has been some resistance to annual reports because Members feel they already keep the people they represent informed of the work they do through various other means of communication. The officer support is in place to assist Members; however, as they are not compulsory, there has been limited uptake.

Member Development: Conwy report they receive considerable assistance from the WLGA in respect of training and development. The Member Support Officer Network has also proved valuable.

Broadcasting[1]: In Conwy the press and public are not allowed to film meetings.

Town and Community Council Websites: From May 2015 community councils will be required to have websites. Due to its own limited resources, community councils in Conwy have developed their own websites on the proviso that sufficient information regarding the community council is provided (to meet the legal requirement) and the website is a valuable information tool for anyone who uses it. Twenty nine of Conwy's thirty three Community councils have accepted the £500 grant funding provided by the Welsh Government to assist them with the setting up of a website. Out of the four that refused the grant funding, two indicated that they already had websites and another two did not want to take advantage of the funding.

Social Media: The authority's corporate social media policy is under review. The Authority currently has a relaxed attitude to social media usage by Members, and the HDS confirmed that the authority as a whole needs to improve its use of social media and the review would go someway to changing that.

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[1] Discussion with the HDS in Conwy broadened beyond the standard interview structure.

Case Study 5: Vale of Glamorgan

Structure: The HDS has responsibility for 3 teams – Scrutiny and Committee Services, the Registration Service and Freedom of Information / Land Charges / Records Management. Scrutiny and Committee Services has a team of five staff, plus two administrative support staff. The team also provide Member induction training, and staff training on the role of the councillor. Colleagues across Council departments support the scrutiny research and information needs of scrutiny. Members have indicated they are very satisfied with the team, and are keen to support provision for the Public to speak at scrutiny meetings.

Democratic Services Committee: The DSC meets quarterly, and is chaired by the Leader of the Plaid Cymru Group.

Work programming/agendas: A broad range of Items have been considered by the Committee since its inception in July 2012, which include :Designation of the HDS; LG(W)M 2011: Guidance re DSC Arrangements for future meetings; member Development/ICT; LG(W)M 2011: Update/Action Plan (standing item on agenda); Draft guidance and regulations re Overview and Scrutiny arrangements; Draft guidance re members' Annual Reports; WAO Scrutiny Improvement Study; Member Personal Development Interviews; Revised Member Development Strategy; Remuneration for Chairs of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees; Citizens' Panel Consultation re Scrutiny Committees; Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Regulations; Democratic and Scrutiny Services Structure; Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Bill; Funding for Town and Community Council Websites; LG(W)M 2011: Part 7: Communities and Community Councils; Remote Attendance; Webcasting; Scrutiny of Designated Persons; Local Government Candidates' Survey; Members' ICT (standing item on agenda); Family Absence; Draft Work Programme.

Annual Reports: The council predicts the number of member annual reports published will increase this year. In previous years Conservative councillors have not completed annual reports, and the one UKIP councillor has refused, however had their own website.

Member Development: The WLGA has delivered a great deal of member training for the council, including the use of social media. All member training responsibility has moved from the council's training department to Democratic Services. Training provided in planning and licensing. All but two councillors regularly use e-mail. The HDS expressed a view that some training should be mandatory.

Personal Development Reviews for Councillors need to be re-launched in the Authority, and are more likely to be delivered if undertaken by the Head of Democratic Services, rather than by Group Leaders.

Head of Democratic Services: The post holder (whilst on an Operational Manager grade) reports direct to the Managing Director. He expressed the strong view that this arrangement was of great assistance in terms of raising the profile / identity of the Democratic Services function within the

Authority (particularly given the increasing importance placed on the function within legislation) and that it was an arrangement that was working well.

Annex 2 – Head of Democratic Services Baseline Survey

Question 1 - Length of time in post (as of January 2014)[2]

Length of time in Post

Months

Council	Months
Monmouthshire	30
Denbighshire	30
Conwy	20
Gwynedd	19
Newport	18
Pembrokeshire	18
RCT	18
Torfaen	18
Vale of Glam	18
Wrexham	18
Camarthenshire	14
Ynys Mon	14
Bridgend	13
Flintshire	12
Merthyr Tydfil	12
Powys	8
Swansea	6
NPT	5
B-Gwent	4
Ceredigion	2
Cardiff	1
Caerphilly	
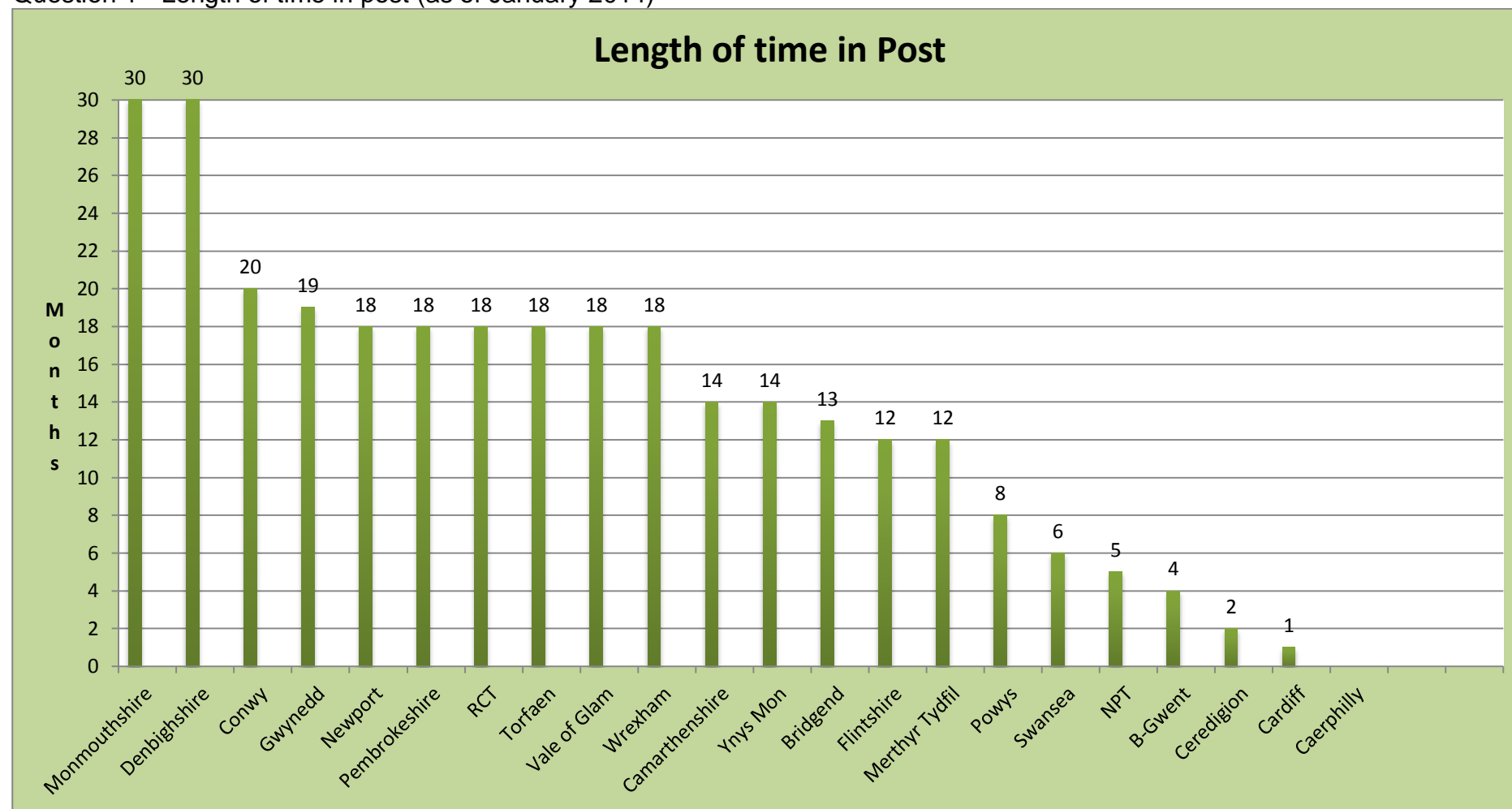
[2] At the time of survey, Caerphilly's HDS was the Head of Legal and Democratic Services who was expected to be confirmed in post at February's DSC meeting - Head of Legal and Democratic Services was charged with misconduct in public office in January 2014. A new appointment is now in place.

Question 2 - Numbers of Staff and Areas of Responsibility

Numbers of Staff (FTE)

| Authority	Number
Gwynedd	92
Torfaen	90.7
Monmouthshire	88.0
B-Gwent	68.0
NPT	66.0
Cardiff	36.0
Wrexham	25.0
Pembrokeshire	24.5
Ynys Mon	24.0
Swansea	21.8
Vale of Glam	19.7
Flintshire	17.0
Bridgend	15.1
Caephilly	13.0
Conwy	11.0
Camarthenshire	10.0
Ceredigion	10.0
Denbighshire	9.0
Newport	9.0
RCT	6.0
Powys	2.0
Merthyr Tydfil	
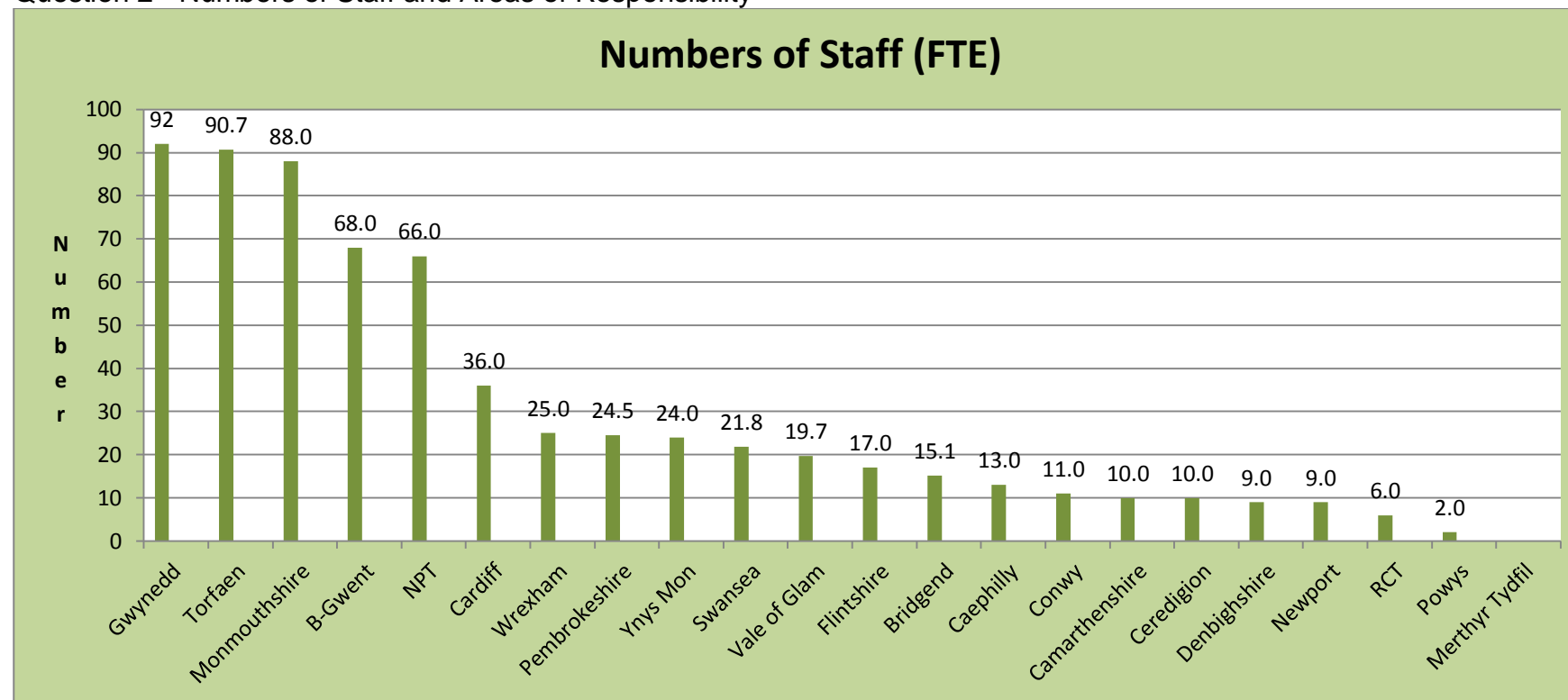
Comments - Typically, HDS's manage Scrutiny and Democratic Services but sometimes have responsibility also for the Civic Head's office, electoral services, translation service, legal services, corporate support services, registration services (births, deaths, marriages), often as a result of the responsibilities already carried by the officer designated as HDS. Occasionally the HDS has responsibility for unrelated services such as planning, public protection and emergency planning. In Merthyr Tydfil no staff report to the HDS, administrative services have been centralised, and committee support is commissioned from central corporate business services.

Question 3 – Level of Budget
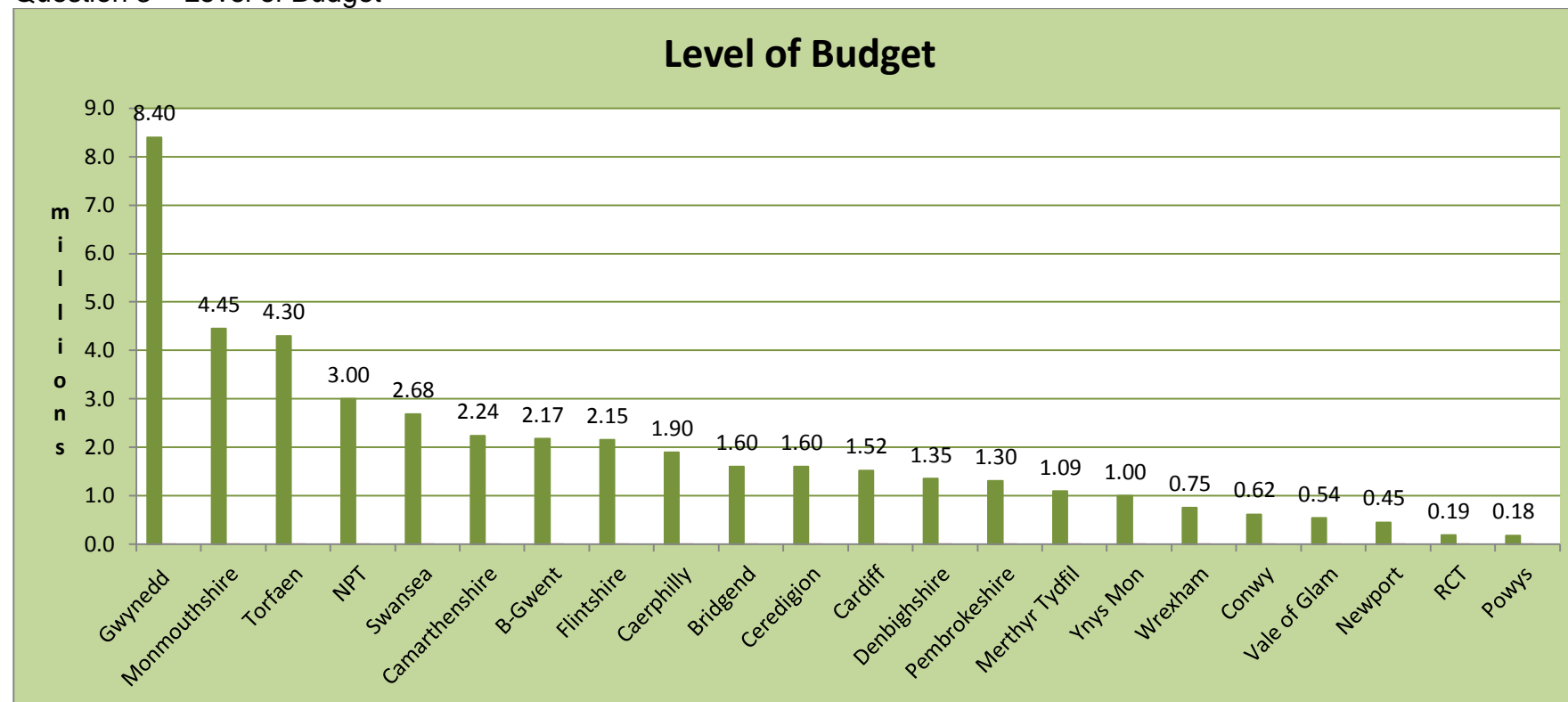
Level of Budget

Comment –The level of budget managed by the HDS varies widely and is directly related to the range of services for which they are responsible.

Question 4 - Reporting Line for Heads of Democratic Services

HDSs always report to a Chief Officer, most commonly the Head of Legal (also Monitoring Officer) though occasionally directly to the Chief Executive. They are evenly split between those who do and those who do not attend senior management board meetings.

Question 5

	Structure of Democratic Services Committee	Frequency of meetings
B-Gwent	15 members	Approx. quarterly
Bridgend	11 members	6 times to date: intention to met quarterly
Caerphilly	16 members	6 times per annum
Cardiff	12 members	5 times per annum
Carmarthenshire	5 members	Quarterly
Ceredigion	7 members	Quarterly
Conwy	12 members	Quarterly
Denbighshire	11 members	3 times to date
Flintshire	21 members	Every 10 weeks
Gwynedd	15 members	Quarterly
Merthyr Tydfil	The responsibilities of the DSC have been delegated to the Audit Committee(minus the lay person) – AC -10 members	Audit committees meets approx. monthly
Monmouthshire		6 weekly
NPT	12 members	3 times per annum
Newport	10 members	6 times to date (July 2012-Oct 2013)
Pembrokeshire	7 members	3 times in 2012-13, once in 2013/14.
Powys	15 members	Quarterly
RCT		4 times since July 2012
Swansea	12 members	6 weekly cycle
Torfaen	10 members	Quarterly
Vale of Glamorgan	10 members	Quarterly
Wrexham	13 members	5 times during 2012/13
Ynys Mon	10 members	Quarterly

Comment -. Typically DSC's meet quarterly or 6 times p.a; 4 DSC's meet less frequently. Membership of DSC's varies widely and ranges from 5-21.

Question 6 &7

Do you manage	Secretariat to Council Committees	Support to Scrutiny committees	Number of staff for Scrutiny	Members support function	Number of staff for Member support function
B-Gwent	Yes	Yes	2	Yes	1
Bridgend	Yes	Yes	3	Yes	10
Caerphilly	Yes	Yes	2	Yes	3[3]
Cardiff	Yes	No[4]	15 FTE	Yes	8 FTE
Carmarthenshire	Yes	No[5]	5	Yes	6
Ceredigion	Yes	Yes	2	Yes	Not supplied[6]
Conwy	Yes	Yes	1[7]	Yes	3
Denbighshire	Yes	Yes	1[8]	Partially[9]	Not supplied
Flintshire	Yes	Yes	4	Yes	4
Gwynedd	Yes	Yes	6	Yes	3
Merthyr Tydfil	Yes	Yes	2	Yes	3
Monmouthshire	Yes	Yes	4.5	Yes	2.5
NPT	Yes	Yes	3	Yes	6
Newport	Yes	Yes	4	n/a[10]	
Pembrokeshire	Yes	Yes	5	Yes	3
Powys	No	Yes	2	No[11]	6

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[3] Three officers are specified, plus "administrative staff"
[4] Scrutiny support managed by Head of Scrutiny Services
[5] Scrutiny and Consultancy Team managed by Head of People Management
[6] Democratic Services Unit supports members – number of staff not specified
[7] Scrutiny co-ordinators based in service area allocated on a need basis. Support is also available from one member support officer.
[8] Plus support from one Democratic Services Officer and HDS,
[9] Separate Member Training and Development Team has member support role.
[10] Members of both Democratic Administrative Team and Overview and Scrutiny Team provide support to all members, no separate member services team.
[11] Managed by Senior Communications Manager - three staff plus three ITC support staff for members (3 full time; 3 part time).

Do you manage	Secretariat to Council Committees	Support to Scrutiny committees	Number of staff for Scrutiny	Members support function	Number of staff for Member support function
RCT	Yes	Yes	2	Yes	1
Swansea	Yes	No	7 (5.6 FTE)	Yes	4 (3.6 FTE)
Torfaen	Yes	Yes	4.5 FTE	Yes	6.81 FTE
Vale of Glamorgan	Yes	Yes	5[12]	No	Not supplied
Wrexham	Yes	Yes	2	Yes	5[13]
Ynys Mon	Yes	Yes	2	Yes	2

Question 10 & 11

Do you manage the training and development of members?

Only two HDSs said they did not have this responsibility. In these cases, it appears that the council's training and development team (i.e. for staff) has responsibility for assessing and meeting members' requirements also.

What arrangements are in place to assess the training and development needs of members?

Training Needs Analyses are widely used. Training budgets for members vary between £2,000 and £21,000 per annum, though in one case there is no dedicated budget. There is a mix of training provided internally and externally, with the WLGA's "free" training programme used widely.

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[12] All staff have other duties, no staff dedicated solely to Scrutiny function
[13] Member support function incorporated into the Committee Administration Team

Question 11 – Annual Reports

Do you manage the production of Annual reports?		How many produced in 2012/13	Achieved in 2013/14
B-Gwent	Yes	21 (out of 42) 50%	19/42 45%
Bridgend	Yes	36 (out of 52) 69%	30/54 55%
Caerphilly	Yes	73 (out of 73) 100%	72/72 100%
Cardiff	Yes	13 (out of 75) 17%	5/75 6%
Carmarthenshire	Yes	34 (out of 74) 46%	33/74 45%
Ceredigion	Yes	26 (out of 42) 62%	21/42 50%
Conwy	Yes	15 (out of 59) 25%	11/59 19%
Denbighshire	Yes	14 (out of 47) 30%	3/47 6%
Flintshire	Yes		4/70 6%
Gwynedd	Yes	8 (out of 75) 11%	26/75 35%
Merthyr Tydfil	Yes	30 (out of 33) 91%	29/33 88%
Monmouthshire	Yes	25 (out of 43) 58%	11/43 26%
NPT	yes	25 (out of 64) 39%	7/64 11%
Newport	Yes	32 (out of 50) 64%	27/50 54%
Pembrokeshire	Yes	16 (out of 60) 27%	17/60 28%
Powys	Yes	32 (out of 73) 44%	25/73 34%
RCT	Yes		40/75 53%
Swansea			57/72 79%
Torfaen	Yes	19 (out of 44) 43%	6/44 14%
Vale of Glamorgan	Yes	28 (out of 47) 35%	21/47 45%
Wrexham	Yes	10 (out of 52) 19%	22/52 42%
Ynys Mon	Yes	None, owing to the 2013 elections	30/30 100%

Comments: In 2012/13 just 6 councils achieved over 50% production of member annual reports. In 2013/14 this increased to 13 councils achieving over 50% and 2 achieving 100%.

Questions 9 &13
What plans do you have for the development of Scrutiny?

References were made to the WAO report on Scrutiny (published May2014) providing a basis for focussing development of the scrutiny function. Other priorities included:
- Development of effective LSB scrutiny.
- Improving the extent of public engagement.
- Provision of member training in scrutiny skills.
- Webcasting of scrutiny meetings
- Scrutiny of collaborative projects.

What do you see as your main challenges in the year ahead?
Unsurprisingly, member development features highly in future priorities, meeting a perceived gap in skill levels of members. Also featuring is the need to improve usage of ICT, webcasting and social media. Understandably, managing the service under budgetary pressure is seen as a challenge in itself. Encouraging the take-up of training and production of Annual Reports was also raised.