



CLILC • WLGA

# Exit Survey of Members Standing Down in May 2017

September 2017

## Welsh Local Government Association

The WLGA's primary purposes are to promote a better local government, its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public service and democracy.

It represents the 22 local authorities in Wales with the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities as associate members.

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## 1. Background

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the interests of local government and promotes local democracy in Wales. Its primary purposes are to promote better local government, to promote its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public services and democracy.

The Association is a politically led, cross party, membership organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. It represents all 22 local authorities in Wales. The 3 fire and rescue authorities and the 3 national park authorities are associate members.

The WLGA undertook its first survey of members who had decided to stand down at the local elections in May 2012. The purpose of this survey was to learn more about the experiences of councillors whilst in office and their reasons for leaving, to help the WLGA and authorities to make improvements in the support and advice available to members in the future. Responses were received from 31 members in 11 authorities (out of a total of 160 councillors standing down).

Although responses were limited in number, some interesting feedback was provided, showing that members had been able to make specific improvements to the lives of residents. They were largely content with the support provided to them by their authority but were less happy with the style of local party politics. The outcomes of the survey were used to develop the support offered to members in authorities and to support the research work of the Welsh Government in designing initiatives such as the Diversity in Democracy project.

In 2013, the then Minister for Local Government and Government Business Lesley Griffiths AM, established an expert group to set out a plan of action for the Welsh Government and political parties, to ensure that between 2013 and 2017 collective action would be taken to encourage greater diversity in local government. In its report *On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales*, the group recommended that local authorities conduct exit interviews with councillors standing down at an election to assess reasons for doing so and nominated the WLGA to gather the data.

In 2017, with Welsh Government funding, the WLGA and local authorities worked with the Local Government Data Unit ~ Wales (the Data Unit) and the Welsh Government to develop an online survey of councillors voluntarily leaving office. This report provides the results of the national survey. Each local authority has also been provided with anonymous data reflecting the responses from their former councillors.

## 2. Methodology

The survey was developed by the WLGA working with local authorities, the Independent Remuneration Panel, the Welsh Government and the Data Unit. It was based on the survey distributed in 2012 to allow comparative analysis and included additional questions to explore other issues. It was distributed electronically by democratic services officers in each authority to members from whom no nomination papers had been received after the closing date for submission.

Data from the online survey was collated by the Data Unit. Data for each authority was provided to those authorities anonymously. National data was supplied anonymously to the WLGA, this report is based on that information.

## 3. Information about the Councillors who Completed the Survey

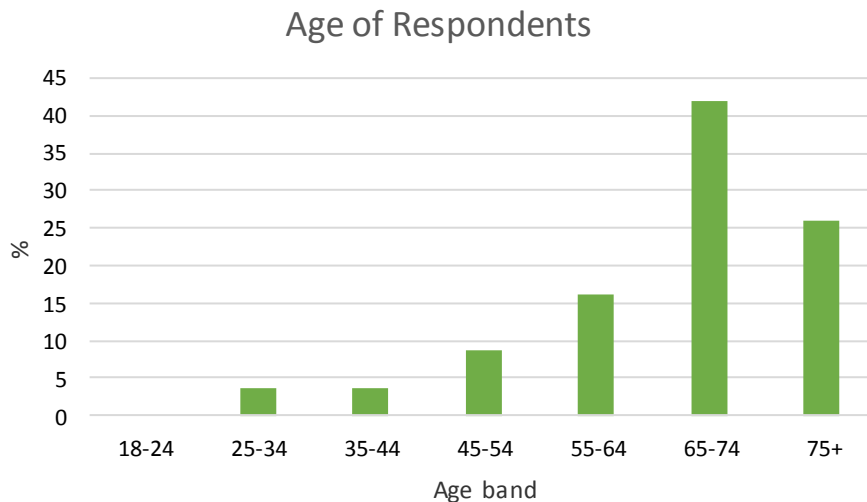
The survey was issued to the 269 members who stood down at the elections. This figure represented 22%<sup>1</sup> of all councillors, a significantly higher figure than in 2012, when only 160 or 13% of councillors stood down.

- 88 councillors completed the survey representing a 33% response rate. Responses were received from every local authority.
- Not every respondent answered every question. Therefore, the percentages quoted in this report are calculated as a rate of respondents answering that particular question.
- 80 members (91%) completed the survey in English and 8 (9%) in Welsh.
- 77 (87%) filled in the survey either fully or partially online and 11 (13%) on paper.
- 55 (68%) of the councillors who stated their age were over 65 years old. The median age was 68 years. Six members were under 44 years old, and 21 members were over 75 years old. The age profile of retiring councillors was higher than the age profile of the wider membership of council chambers (57% of councillors were aged over 60 years of age, according to the 2012 statutory Welsh Government survey of councillors)<sup>2</sup>.

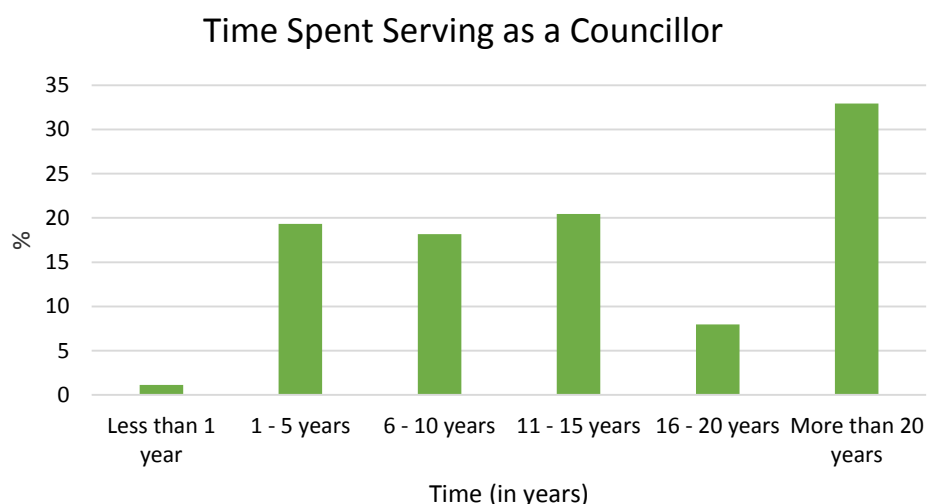
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<sup>1</sup> All percentages in this report have been rounded to the nearest whole number

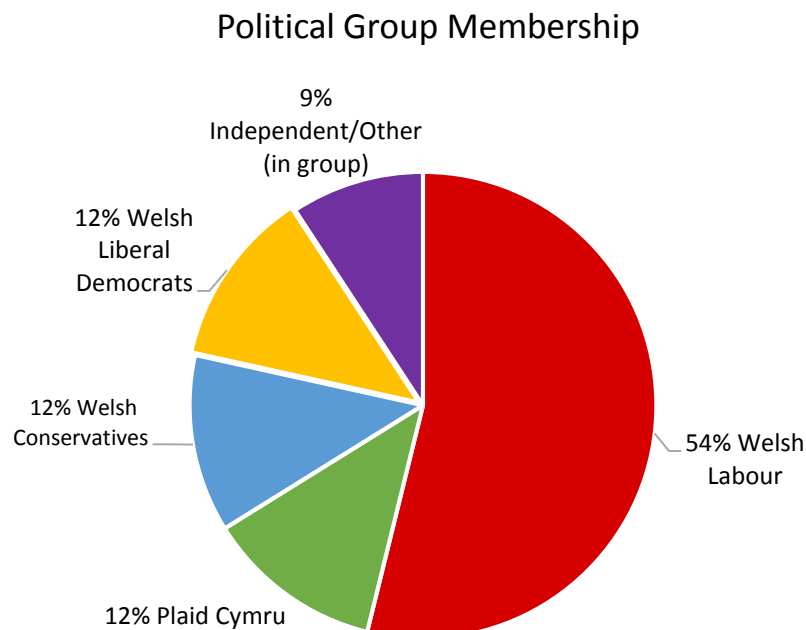
<sup>2</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/130503-local-government-candidates-survey-en.pdf>



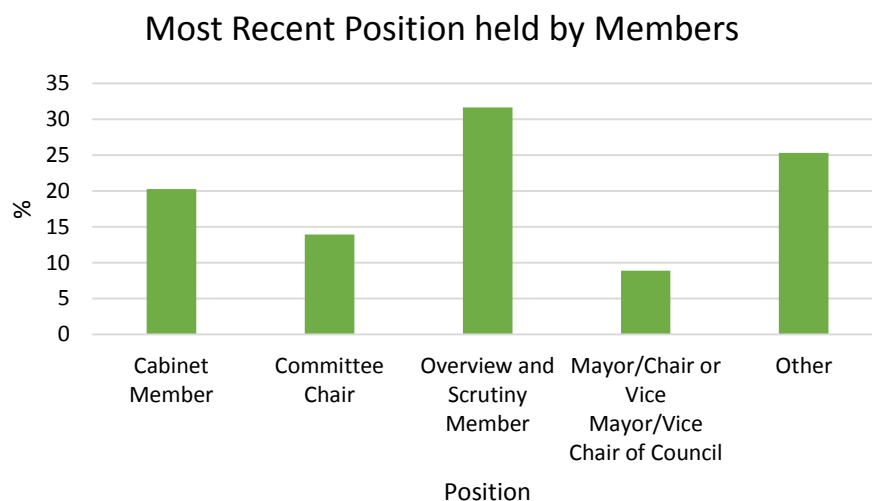
- Of the councillors who indicated their gender, 19 (23%) were female and 62 (77%) were male. A separate WLGA analysis of members who stood down showed that 26% of all members who stood down were women. This was in line with the percentage of all councillors who were women (also 26%) before the 2017 elections; this suggests that women councillors were neither more nor less likely to stand down than their male colleagues.
- Five councillors (6%) considered themselves to have a disability. Two (3%) identified as gay or lesbian. No Black or minority ethnic councillors completed the survey.
- 39 respondents (45%) were working either full or part time. 30 (35%) were retired.
- About a third of respondents (33%) had served as a councillor for more than 20 years.



- Of those who were employed (either full or part time), 13 (48%) were employed in the public sector, 14 (52%) in the private sector and 1 (4%) in the voluntary sector.<sup>3</sup>
- 65 (79%) were members of a political group (69% were in the ruling group). Of those who specified their group membership, the results were as follows:



Members were asked what position they had most recently held on the council. Most were either members of overview and scrutiny committees or “other”. Members in the “other” category often described themselves as “backbenchers”.

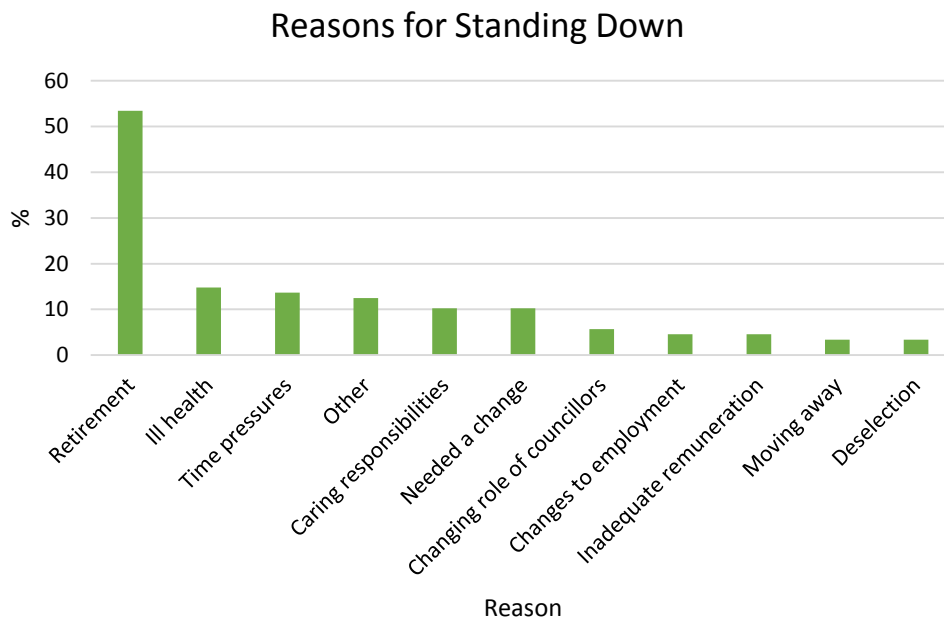


<sup>3</sup> This figure totals over 100% as some respondents worked in more than one sector either during or between their terms of office as a councillor.

# Survey Responses

## 4. Why Did Members Stand Down?

When asked to give their reason(s) for standing down as a councillor, over half of the respondents (53%) stated that "Retirement" was a reason.



The 11 councillors (13%) who cited "other" reasons for standing down gave the following reasons: Personal and family matters; having achieved what they had set out to achieve; progressing to higher political office; wanting to give others a chance in the role; being frustrated with the actions of the Welsh Government or with the behaviour of member colleagues; or due to a feeling of powerlessness in the system.

The reasons for standing down varied according to the age of the councillors:

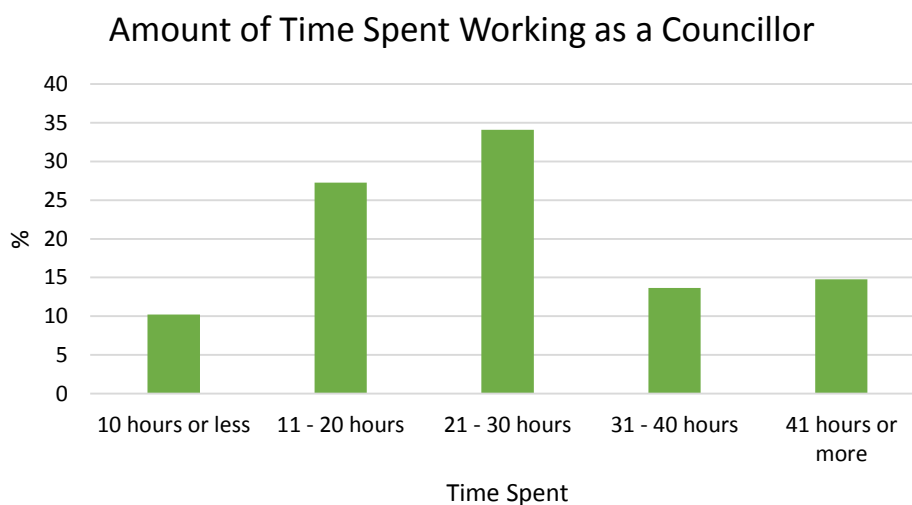
- **For those aged between 18 and 54 years**, the most common reasons given by councillors were changes to employment, followed by moving away or needing a change.
- **For those aged 55-64 years**, the most common reason was retirement, followed by needing a change and then caring responsibilities.
- **For the over 65's** the main reason was retirement, with a minority standing down due to ill health or caring responsibilities.

The top three reasons for standing down were the same in 2017 as they were in 2012, when 40% were 'retiring from the role', 15% were standing down due to time pressures and 15% due to ill health.



## 5. How Much Time did Members Spend in the Role of Councillor?

Respondents were asked to consider, on average, how many hours per week they spent in their most recent role as councillor. Most said that they spent at least 21-30 hours per week. This is a slight increase to the responses in 2012 where the greatest number of members said that they spent 11-20 hours per week in the role. In 2017, 34% spent 21-30 hours per week, a further 14% spent between 31-40 hours and a further 15% spent more than 41 hours per week. Of this, most time was spent either in, or preparing for meetings.

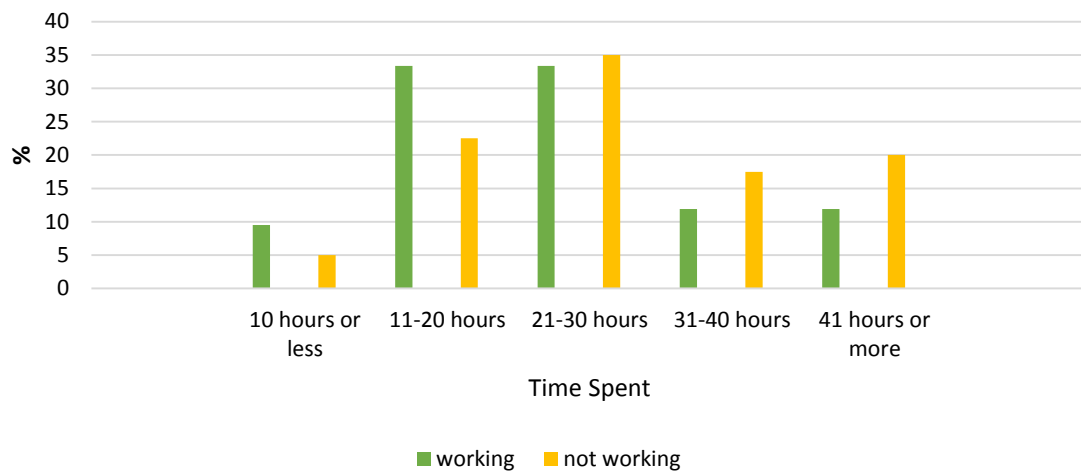


When respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of their time spent on different aspects of their role, median responses suggested that around 45% of their time was spent in/preparing for meetings, 30% on ward/case work, 15% on outside bodies and 10% on other tasks.

The most common “other” activities included: administration for the role; acting as a school governor; supporting voluntary groups such as village hall committees; visiting schools; undertaking party political work; acting as a company trustee; writing newsletters; running surgeries; working with residents and tenants’ groups; attending local events and attending community and town council meetings. About half of these activities could be interpreted as time spent on outside bodies or ward/case work.

Members in employment tended to spend less time in the role than those who were not working or retired. 57% of those in employment reported spending 21 or more hours a week on their role, compared to 73% of those that were unemployed or retired.

### Time Spent in the role of Councillor According to Employment Status



There was also a difference in the time spent in the role of councillor according to the position that the members held on the council. For example, cabinet members all reported spending more than 21 hours in their role, with the majority spending over 41 hours. Most non-executive members spent 11-30 hours in their role.

The type of activity undertaken also varied according to the members' role on the council. Generally, cabinet members spent more of their time in meetings and less time in ward/case work than councillors in other roles. "Back benchers" reported spending more time on ward and case work than in meetings.

## 6. Councillors' Remuneration

Members were asked if they knew that they would be paid a salary before they took up the position. Of the members who were elected in the last two terms only 3 were unaware that they would receive a salary.

56 respondents (65%) believed that the remuneration they received for their role was adequate. 30 (35%) did not think that it was adequate. Four respondents (5%) stated that inadequate remuneration was one of their reasons for standing down.

12 cabinet members (75%) (who will have received a senior salary) and 19 members of overview and scrutiny committees (73%) (who will not have received a senior salary but who typically spent less time in their role than cabinet members) believed that their remuneration was adequate.

8 committee chairs (57%) and 4 civic heads (57%) (all of whom will have received a senior salary but at a slightly lower rate than cabinet members) believed that their remuneration was adequate. However, only 6 backbenchers (50%) (who will not have received a senior salary) believed that their remuneration was adequate. Members in all three of these role categories reported spending less time in the role than cabinet members.

Members who were retired reported more than any other category (79%) that they believed their remuneration to be adequate. 55% of working members and 50% of unemployed members were believed their remuneration to be adequate.

There was some indication that more women (74%) than men (61%) felt that their remuneration was adequate.

**Comments made by members provided anecdotal evidence of general satisfaction with remuneration. Many members also suggested that the remuneration was sufficient where recipients were retired and in receipt of a pension, for example:**

- I did not feel worse off and it gave me time to give the job justice.
- I only became aware that there was a payment package associated with becoming a county councillor. I considered the remuneration received to be generous.
- As a cabinet member, the additional allowance more than compensated for the additional, albeit very time consuming role.
- Some weeks it didn't seem enough but on balance it was about right.
- I never in 1991 expected at that time to receive anything like the remuneration available today.
- It allowed me to give the time to the casework and meetings.
- Adequate for me as I am an OAP.
- As a senior member without other employment, the salary was adequate.
- Councillor's allowance is not intended to provide an income sufficient to live upon and the current level of recompense is a fair contribution.

- I did not undertake the role for remuneration. It is an act of public service. I am retired with a public-sector pension, I can afford to act pro bono.

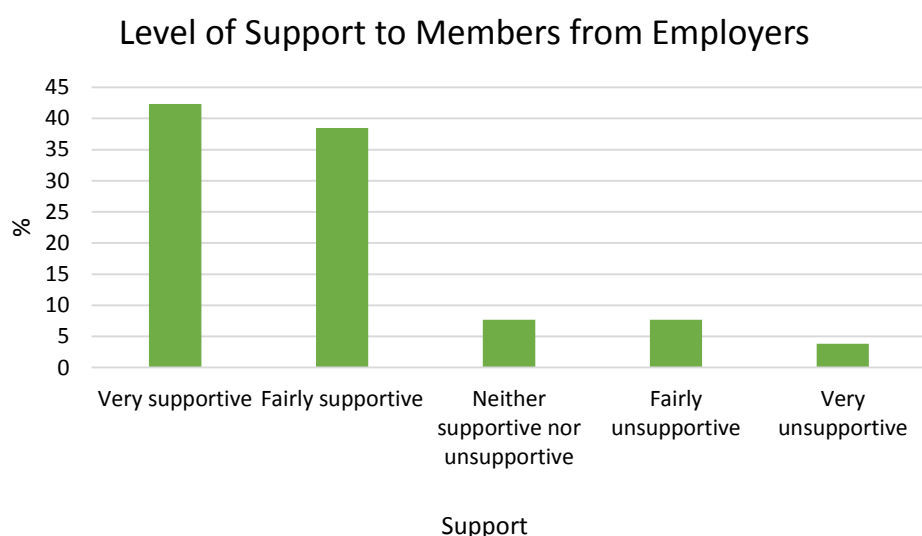
**Those comments that suggested remuneration was inadequate often described how that the role was 'under-rewarded' given the commitment required or because those members had no other or limited additional income, for example:**

- Because of the number of hours, payment was below the National Minimum Wage.
- The amount of time spent on councillor duties far outweighed the amount of remuneration. It is almost impossible to carry out an additional job effectively alongside council duties. One or the other must suffer.
- I served as a councillor full time for three years. This wasn't enough for me to live on and I got into considerable debt - relying on the bank of 'mum & dad'.
- If I had a mortgage and a young family, the remuneration would not have been adequate and therefore I would have had to look for another job and then not been able to give the council the time it deserved to perform the role 100%.
- It was almost a full-time job but only part time pay. Worse, paid expenses are not meeting real cost - I am out of pocket on that front.
- As a cabinet member, the amount of work far exceeds the remuneration provided.
- The only way I could be a councillor is by waiting until I had a works pension to supplement it.
- Does not allow for the day to day expenses, such as clothing, car and the wear and tear on both. Councillors are expected to donate to every voluntary organisation in their area. Very difficult on such a low wage.
- I actually didn't mind it being low paid as I didn't do it for the money and I had another job but I am now unemployed and it's insufficient money to live on. I have struggled to get a job and I firmly believe that is because I'm a councillor. I have also found that the commitment creeps up and overtakes your life.
- The hours I put in (and just about every councillor I know) makes our rate of pay below the minimum wage, and more than the European legislation for working hours.

## 7. Impact on Employment

As previously reported, 39 respondents were working either full or part time. Of those, 48.1% were employed in the public sector, 51.9% in the private sector and 3.7% in the voluntary sector.<sup>4</sup>

Of those that were in employment, 81% felt that their employers had been either fairly or very supportive of them in their role as a councillor. Members employed in the public sector reported a slightly higher level of support than those in the private sector.



**Members were asked about the impact that serving as a councillor had on their careers.**

35% said that it had a positive impact. 48% said it had no impact either positive or negative and 17% said that it had a negative impact.

**Some members commented further on the challenges associated with being a councillor and being employed, for example:**

- It was enough for someone like me with work and a pension, but to attract younger councillors, the job doesn't pay enough to live on without undertaking additional employment which hinders what you can offer as a councillor.
- I had to work part time in my "real job" and this has seriously damaged my "real job" pension.
- It cost me my job when my employer refused to give me any time off for council duties, but on the other hand I have some transferable skills I can now put to use elsewhere.

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<sup>4</sup> This figure totals over 100% as some respondents worked in more than one sector either during or between periods of office.

- After a year, I gave up my full-time position, because I was unable to combine full-time work of five days per week with council work. I had to freelance and earned considerably less.
- The amount of time required for council duties means that employers just will not, whatever the law says, give leave of absence for the onerous duties (time wise if nothing else) that council work demands.
- I could not have been a councillor when I worked in the private sector. This was because remuneration received as a councillor would have been deducted from pay and anyway I would not have been given adequate time off.
- I was effectively forced to give up my job with an employer who refused to give me any time off whatsoever to carry out any of my council duties, despite the advice he should do so. During the period between leaving that position and securing new work it was impossible for me to avoid going into significant debt, as the councillor's allowance is simply inadequate.
- I lost out by attending early meetings before 4pm and some daytime meetings which I wasn't compensated for by my employer who said I had to make up the time through flexible working.
- When I was first elected in 1981 there was no salary, only an attendance allowance of £8.71 per day. Between 1981 & 1996 I lost on average £3000 per annum, I was passed over for promotion and I lost 2 years' pensionable service. In 1996 when councillors were given a salary, I decided to take early retirement and voluntary redundancy to become a full time councillor, again this meant losing out on a wage and putting my job on the line every 4 or 5 years when standing for election.

### **Other suggestions and observations made included:**

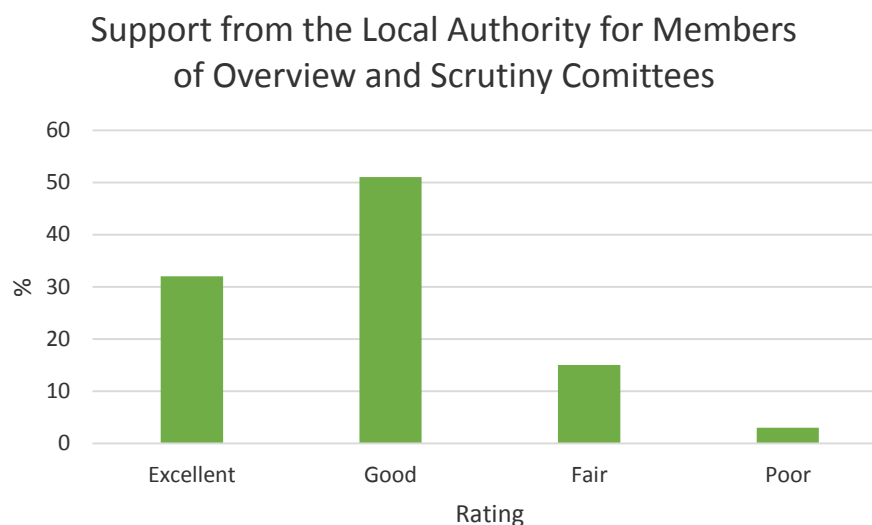
- There is also the issue around a pension, it was sold to me as a non-contributory pension which would be available from 2004 but that turned out to be false and I did not join the pension scheme as my previous 23 years as a member could not be considered, so I lost out and finished with no pension.
- I was expected to attend far more meetings than was explained to me before I was elected.
- The skills required to do the job properly are "professional". Most councillors however don't have these skills and most don't use them.
- I think if the wage was around £23K a year and we had less councillors, this would bring the young and bright into the council.
- The role has a big impact on your life and doesn't compensate for the late nights, the unsocial hours or the loss of hours from the work place, as well as trying to fit in annual leave around council meetings and your day job.
- I declined to receive an increase recommended by the independent advisors when we were making staff redundant. With other elected members, I agreed to a 2% cut in salary.

## 8. Support from the Local Authority

Members were asked about the range and quality of support that they received from their local authority. 7 (9%) of the councillors who responded required support from the council for longstanding illness or disability. 3 respondents (5%) took advantage of a care allowance (now called reimbursement of costs of care) but 15 (19%) of councillors said that they were unaware of this allowance.

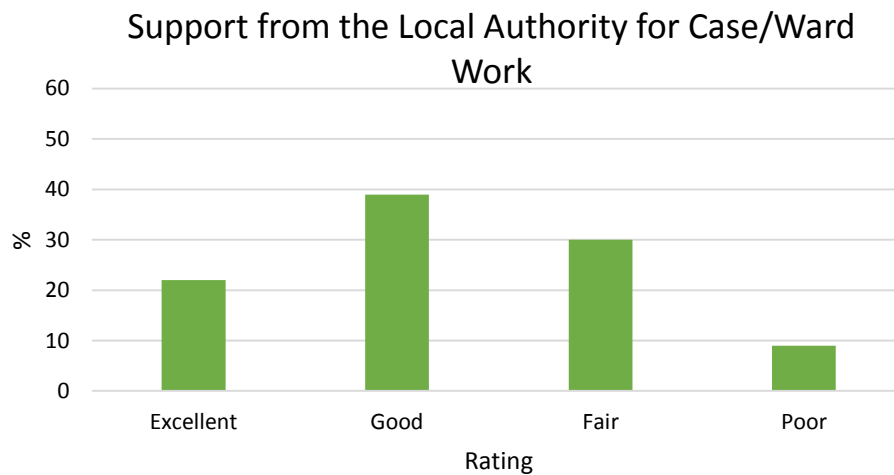
The following graphs show the ratings that members gave for different aspects of the support provided by the council to different member functions. Overall, as in 2012, most members rated the support provided as good or excellent. Since 2012, there has been a significant increase (14%<sup>5</sup>) of members reporting that support was good or excellent for overview and scrutiny; a drop of 9% for good or excellent ratings for case and ward work and a slight rise (2%) in good or excellent reports for support for the executive.

In 2012, 68% of members rated support for overview and scrutiny as good or excellent. In 2017 this had risen to 83%.



In 2012, 70% of members rated support for case/ward work as good or excellent, in 2017 this had fallen to 61%.

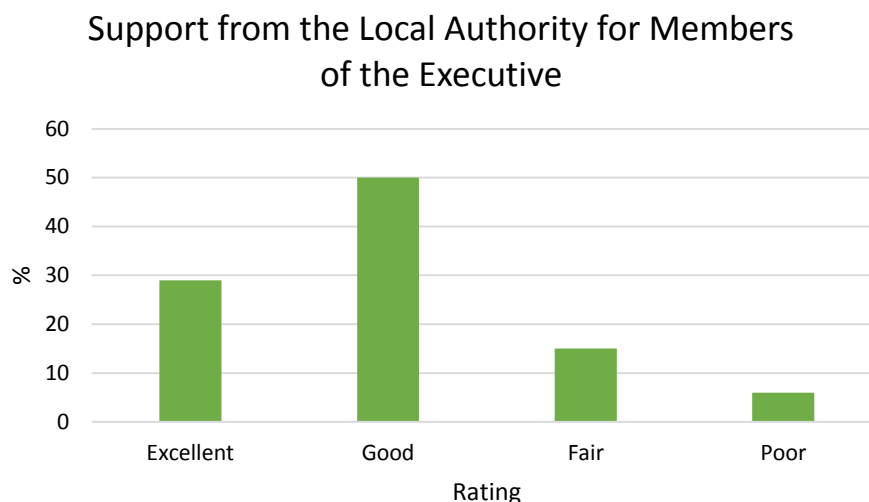
<sup>5</sup> Comparisons between 2012 and 2017 in these areas may not be entirely reliable as there was no “not applicable” category in 2012.



**Some members commented:**

- I believe that the level of support is adequate, I always like to write my own reports for case work and ward work. Having said that support is there should one need it.
- In terms of casework we would often need to ask questions of officers and responses could be slow. For example, a complaint about a missed rubbish bin would prompt a quick acknowledgement but often not generate an actual reply for over a week, by which time the complainant was disillusioned.

In 2012, 77% of members rated support for members of the executive as good or excellent, in 2017 this had risen to 79%.



In addition to scoring the quality of support, members also made the following comments:



## **Support from Officers**

**As noted above, members mostly rated officer support as good or excellent. Some comments included:**

- I'm very happy with the support, considering all the cuts and pressures placed on services.
- We receive excellent support from the democratic services department already. An increase in staffing in this department would enhance the service/support provided.
- The support received proved invaluable to carrying out the role of councillor both in the council - and the ward.
- I received every assistance from the officers and staff alike. I think that this works two ways, members need to show respect to officers and vice versa.

**Points were made about the impact of reducing resources affecting the level of support:**

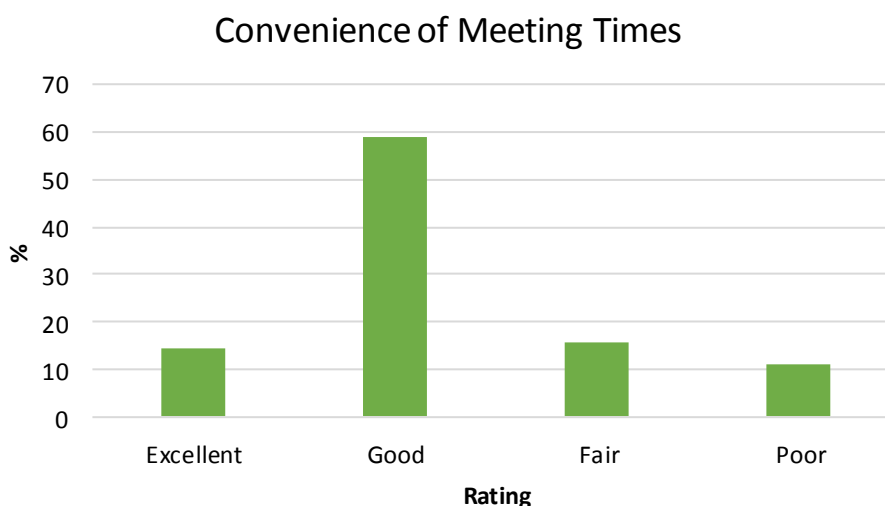
- When I first became a councillor, support was good with dedicated democratic service officers. Now there is very little support for ordinary members and support staff change frequently.
- Because of cuts, members' services within my council does not, I believe serve its purpose!

**Some members were however less satisfied with the support from officers generally:**

- Sometimes officers fail to understand residents' issues, more officer training is needed in key issues such as housing and other community focused services.
- Public servants need to act with more urgency because all things happen far too slowly. A public servant's first inclination should be to say "why not". At present, it is either "No" or "we will have to look into this" and the looking goes on and on and on.
- Member services should be in an office near the members' room so that members can get any information they need from a human being.
- As a ' backbencher ' and not part of the executive group running the council, support from officials is poor, they're there just to support members who are part of the administration.
- Some council officers are excellent and provide the support needed to satisfy constituents, others are plainly appalling.
- (We need) proper members' services officers dedicated to writing and preparing reports for councillors and not influenced by senior officers or cabinet members.

## Council Meeting Times

Overall most members were happy with the convenience of meeting times. However, 9 (11%) of members regarded the timing as poor. Of these, 7 (78%) were in employment. In 2012, 75% of members rated meeting times as good or excellent. In 2017 this had dropped slightly to 73%.



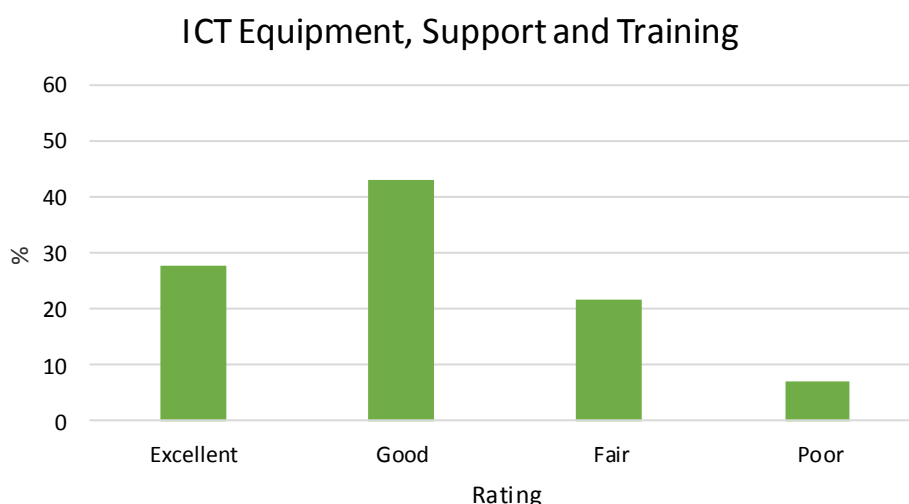
### **Comments made about meeting times suggested that they were less convenient for working people. For example:**

- There should be evening meetings, not daytime ones. At the very least, full council and one committee should be in the evening.
- Meeting times are totally inappropriate for working people. - If the Council wants to attract a variety of people from all walks of life this must be considered. - Meetings at 10 am are impossible.

## ICT Support

### **Most members had a positive view of ICT support.**

In 2012, 80% of members rated it as good or excellent. In 2017 this was 71%.



**There were also some specific concerns raised and suggestions for improvement. These included:**

- Greater IT support and better connectivity between phones and email is needed.
- Promotion of remote attendance via video conferencing (Skype) should be seriously considered.
- The laptops are slow and clunky. The printer didn't work properly since day one, and I resorted to buying my own.
- I think there should be an office with computer and printing facilities as I have used my own.
- ICT was abysmal, but this wasn't necessarily a reflection on the department but more on the lack of demand from the majority of councillors who didn't want to use IT or to have a casework management system. I think a casework management system is essential for effective working and had to create my own simple version.
- The IT has been a very idiosyncratic, to say the least. The security protocols were complicated and caused long delays on start up for as long as a quarter of an hour. Passwords needed to be changed frequently and screens asking ridiculous questions appeared too often. Officers were sent out at high cost to the authority to try and solve problems.
- I would like to say the introduction of Facebook and Twitter communications can put extreme pressures on the individual councillors and will affect the health of many if we cannot control what is written.

**Training and Development**

76 (94%) of councillors took advantage of some induction or training (including mandatory training) offered, and of these, 60 (81%) said that this made them more effective as a councillor.

**Comments about training suggested that members appreciated the need for training and were broadly happy with the content provided but that sometimes the quality of delivery was poor.**

**Members with positive views commented:**

- Very important, it should be statutory.
- In house and WLGA training was high quality, relevant and effective.
- Councillors need to know and understand their role and responsibilities at the start of a new council. To be an effective councillor. This was achieved in my case.
- Induction focused effectively on aspects of the councillor's role relating to the media, scrutiny membership, the Code of Conduct, public speaking, corporate responsibilities, school governance, whistle blowing, child protection to name a few.
- I would have appreciated more but it was helpful to feel supported from the beginning
- One needs to recognise and be aware of the law.
- Thorough training is extremely important and it is good to note that my council makes an excellent effort to offer this, but it should be mandatory not optional.
- The difference between a councillor who has been effectively trained and one that hasn't is obvious.
- I attended every training session possible which I feel helped me understand my role, what was expected & how the council worked.
- Very important that all councillors, never mind how long they have been a councillor, keep up to date and abreast of the times, you are never too old or too experienced to learn, training and information is a must.
- All the training received was excellent. However, the WLGA Leadership Academy training course was absolutely superb. Superb. End of.
- It covered very many areas of council business, and was always very effective. I have no complaints about the training provided.
- It did help, but it wasn't always professionally delivered, seemed to be an add on to the deliverers proper function.
- Sometimes the induction and training was more suitable for new councillors than established ones, but still a good refresher.

**Some members had less positive experiences of training and development:**

- Sometimes I feel some officers/departments are going through the motions.
- There was no real induction about what the role would be, as there are returning councillors it's taken for granted they'll help but they don't.
- Quality of induction/training was often poor with PowerPoint presentation slides being read out rather than presented and expanded on.
- I took up all the training offered and it was informative, though some was terribly badly delivered and it was a struggle to sit through- it has been improved since.

**At least one member felt that the training added little to his/her knowledge:**

- As I have an unbroken record of holding positions in public life in politics and trade unions and as a Justice of the Peace, I felt that much of the training we had I already had practical experience and knowledge of.

**Some members made suggestions for how training could be improved. They suggested that more mentoring would be helpful for new members and that more training is needed in the following subjects:**

Planning policies, representing people, how the Welsh Government influences local authorities, complicated legislation, serious financial issues, writing reports, public speaking, media training. time management, achieving a work/life balance, ICT, rights of ways, footpaths, bridle way and by ways, safeguarding and dementia awareness.

### **Members also said:**

- Training should be mandatory; ICT training should be compulsory so we can move away from using so much paper.
- I always found e learning a very effective way of familiarising myself with aspects of my role. E learning modules with tests of understanding built into them could be expanded, particularly for councillors holding down full time jobs who are unable to access some of the training offered.
- Training should be part of a councillor's role particularly in Corporate Parenting, Leadership, Planning, Education and Care.
- Greater support in how to log, address and resolve casework.
- Mentoring from a designated, experienced colleague for the first six months.
- Outside bodies provide compulsory training which is unhelpful and then the outside bodies look down on councillors who do not understand what they do.
- For induction, less on procedures and rules, and more on the issues and factors in the area and the directions and initiatives the council is pursuing.
- More one to one training, as group training can be overpowering for new members of the authority with some senior members being overpowering on occasions. -
- A more professional approach by using properly trained presenters and facilitators.

## **Personal Development Review**

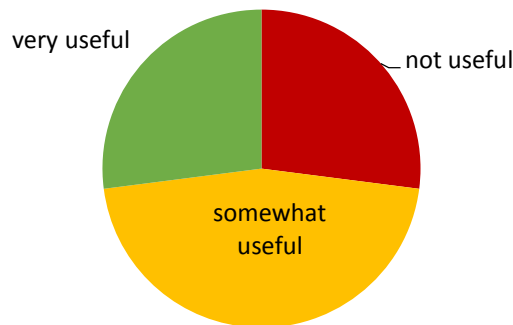
39 (48%) of respondents had received a personal development review (PDR)<sup>6</sup> during their most recent term of office. 56% of these were undertaken by members, 36% by officers, and 10% were undertaken by someone external to the council.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Section 7 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires local authorities to: "...secure the provision of reasonable training and development opportunities for its members. Each member should also have the opportunity to have a review of their training and development needs on an annual basis."

<sup>7</sup> This figure totals over 100% as some respondents had received a PDR from both an officer and member.

27% found PDRs very useful, 46% somewhat useful and 27% did not regard PDRs as useful. Personal development reviews were seen to be marginally more useful when undertaken by an officer rather than a member.

Usefulness of Personal Development Reviews



**Some of the members who made positive comments about the PDR process said:**

- The value was highlighting areas that I had not considered.
- Review completed by the officer was first class.
- Helps with focusing on the correct issues highlighting areas for your development.
- It made you focus on your role as a chair or member of a scrutiny committee.
- It highlighted some areas of training available.
- Self-evaluation is a useful personal tool and it initiates all PDR sessions or it ought to.
- Keep PDR going. It's very beneficial for councillors.
- It helped identify training needs but couldn't always lead to support being provided within the timescale I needed.
- While I'm of the opinion that we should promote it, this must be done carefully to avoid turning it into nothing more than custom which must be carried out. Having said that your constituents are the best test of your skill as a councillor every time there is an election. In local government, your ability to be a good councillor is often more important than your political persuasion.

**Other members, who commented on the shortcomings of the PDR process said:**

- It was completed by the Leader and was no more than a tick box exercise. Very poor really.
- It would have been nice to have some sort of follow up and a clearer plan of action from the PDR.
- There was no follow up on my PDR.
- Waste of time.
- The system is too flawed. If there was a realistic role, then I would try to answer that question.

- Waste of time as they don't appoint people to roles due to capability only political reasons.
- It only has value if PDR is followed up with adequate funding for training.
- It was not a proper review, more of a quick tick the box exercise. - A more professional approach is required, if it is to be meaningful.

## Support from the Local Authority for Councillors to Write their Annual Reports

Most members (53%), reported that the support that they received from the local authority in writing their annual reports<sup>8</sup> was good or excellent, (it should be noted that 20% of members reported that this was not applicable to them, presumably because they either did not write annual reports or because they did not ask for help).

### One member said:

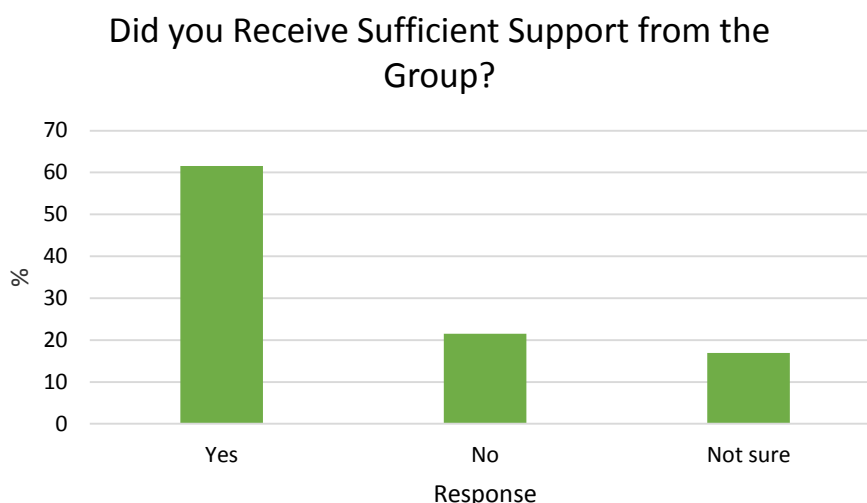
- Any reasonably competent councillor should be able to undertake ward duties including case work and write annual reports without support from the local authority.



<sup>8</sup>Section 5 of the local Government (Wales) measure requires local authorities to make arrangements for—  
 (a)each person who is a member of the authority to make an annual report about the person's activities as a member of the authority during the year to which the report relates,(b)each person who is a member of the authority's executive to make an annual report about the person's activities as a member of the executive during the year to which the report relates, and(c)the authority to publish all annual reports produced by its members and by the members of its executive.

## 9. Support from the Political Group

65 respondents (79%) were members of a political group (69% were in the ruling group and 31% the opposition). Of these 62% felt that their group provided them with sufficient support to effectively fulfil their role as a councillor. However, there were comments about inappropriate group behaviour.



### Members who commented about positive support from the group said:

- Received excellent support from the whole group.
- I had complete freedom to vote according to my conscience.
- The group mentoring scheme for new members was helpful.
- There was plenty of support, but I don't feel that the group made best use of my skills.
- I never had a problem when I needed support, I didn't always agree but nevertheless the support was there for all members from the party.

### One member suggested an improvement to how his/her group should work:

- The group should have been used a lot more to formulate, or at least contribute to, policies for the executive to pursue. However, this isn't the structure or remit of the executive and the pace of decisions by cabinet members is much faster than the cycle of group meetings.

### Those dissatisfied with support from their group identified a range of issues, some of which reflected emerging personal or political differences within the group. Two members made allegations of bullying within their group:

- The leader of the group was on his own track to get himself a name. He rarely consulted the rest of the group.
- For the first two years, I was bullied by our previous leader of the council and group because I represented the interests of my constituents over a controversial



and major issue. There needs to be a charter and a procedure for councillors to access protection in the same way that council employees get through their trade union.

- There should be a clear means to sort out bullying - I've seen it many times within my group, and it's very unpleasant.
- Some group members used ridicule and anger to stifle discussion, and some resorted to table thumping. There is a general lack of communication, respect and co-operation, to the detriment of our work generally.

**Other comments included the need for better group communication and a more effective contribution to the governance of the council:**

- After two terms, I left the group because I felt they were ineffective and just supported officers even though they may have disagreed with the policy the officers were putting forward. I was an Independent for the last five years.
- No one told me they held pre-meetings before my first scrutiny meeting! There was no lead on one of my scrutiny committees. Policies weren't discussed and we had to find out what the cabinet were thinking by reading the cabinet agendas and minutes.

**One member suggested that more political support would be helpful.**

- More help and advice required, and a political adviser/researcher.

## 10. Greatest Achievements as a Councillor

**Members were asked about what they considered to be their greatest achievements as a councillor. The responses mostly describe how councillors have been able to make a difference to the lives of people and communities, either through community work or by influencing council policies:**

- Seeing my portfolio initiatives being fully implemented.
- Financial position of the council.
- Locals telling me and my family I will be greatly missed and getting the most votes in the last election.
- Being able to help constituents in my ward over my period as their councillor.
- Providing leadership and ensuring delivery in challenging times.
- Enabling the local community to find their own solutions.
- Working positively with members of other groups, I had many achievements on behalf of my service and many on behalf of my electorate.
- Gaining Communities First status for the ward I represented.
- Getting funding from Welsh Government for a large coastal protection project.
- The building of a new medical centre, - approval for the building of a new multi-sports pavilion, approval for a disused quarry to be turned into a historic park with a boating lake, - a clampdown on mobile phone entitlement.
- Re-organising waste and recycling with an amazing team of officers and getting the North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project off the ground.
- Being able to reassure elderly and vulnerable people that they were being listened to.
- I helped to set up the recycling scheme, our recycling rate was around 4% -it is now over 60%.
- Redesigning one of our poorest areas.
- Increasing the budget for children's services. Providing effective scrutiny of unsound decisions.
- Helping a lot of people to address things in their lives that were frustrating, upsetting or annoying them. And getting a motion on public participation passed at full council and trialed.
- Development in the local village. A new area school, new sewage works, new children's play area. Closed a dangerous crossroads - opened a new link road instead funded by developers.
- Supporting the resident suffering from years of domestic abuse who had the council bailiffs ready to visit to re-claim for unpaid council tax that her husband had not paid before he left the home. With support from the council's finance department, I managed to halt the bailiffs and set-up a repayment schedule for her.

- I went through some very difficult personal things, break up of marriage, bad health, personal attacks on blog sites but I stuck with it because I believed in what I was doing.
- Having the honour of being chair of the authority and promoting the county far and wide. It also gave me the opportunity to meet many people from all walks of life and realise that there is so much going on that we are not aware of on a volunteer basis.
- Securing community resources to improve the quality of life of my constituents.
- Chairing the Foster Panel.
- Setting up a youth club for disadvantaged young LGBT+ people across the authority.
- Protect and improve Adult Social Care.
- My greatest achievement has been representing people robustly, fighting for them, standing up for them and being an advocate that has made a difference to their lives. I have represented the business community, pressure groups, children being bullied in schools in my ward.
- Recently stopping a significant planning application that officers had recommended approval of. It was not an action I took lightly.
- Helping to shift the perspective of officers and members to a more outcome focused one in planning and performance monitoring.
- Instigating traineeship scheme for Looked After Children.
- Being the Armed Forces Champion and implementing the Covenant Framework throughout Wales.
- Campaigning for a new health centre, organising a preschool group for under three year olds, organising a group to raise funds for a miners' monument to commemorate a mining disaster, securing funding to re-open a day centre.
- I am confident that even after retiring as a councillor people will still be coming to me for help because they know I am reliable and knowledgeable.
- Tolerating my fellow ward member and minimising the cuts we have experienced (even if I did have to go against the whip in order to campaign).
- To think that my ward wanted me to be their councillor for 41 years.
- Persuading sufficient of my colleagues that our 21st Century School replacement programme was the right thing despite the uproar at the closure of old schools.
- Being responsible for a new housing development in my ward. Changes made in the way that people on low income are supported. The greatest would have been I was lead councillor when we went out to tenants to consider and vote on stock transfer, a huge amount of time and effort went into this and I believe that the decision by the tenants to transfer given the authority were not in a financial position to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standards was the right one.
- Painting benches and clearing litter.
- Being part of a team that won an international award for decreasing youth crime in the area I represent by decreasing by two thirds. This was done through collaborative working.

- Obtaining funding for play parks and a community hall. Aiding the local church in funding and planning for community building. Leading the fight to decriminalise parking and start the process of parking control moving from police to unitary authority.
- 5 brand new schools, holding the seat for 36 years unbeaten, 3 new play areas.

## 11. What Did Members Enjoy Most About Being a Councillor?

**The most frequent response to this question was that councillors enjoyed serving their communities, being able to assist residents with their concerns and issues, finding solutions to local problems and improving the lives of local people. The most commonly used phrase was "helping people". There was also an appreciation of being able to influence or take council decisions and improve council policy and service delivery.**

### **Comments included:**

- Helping people in my ward. Getting to the end of problems. Being responsible for a bus stop for local people to visit the local hospital.
- Working with good officers and staff. Promoting and agreeing changes to ways of working in council offices.
- I enjoyed meetings, being able to influence and understand locally important decisions.
- Strategic work, planning and delivering locally, regionally and nationally.
- Contributing as a lead member to the improvement agenda at a time of ferocious cuts to local authority budgets.
- Success in ward work and occasional thanks.
- Helping young people to have the opportunity to build a new home. Supporting a young farming family to get a holding to set up a career in farming.
- Helping residents with their day-to-day concerns and in so doing improve their standard of living.
- I have enjoyed learning & expanding my knowledge, meeting people from all different walks of life, actually being able to get results for people who have asked for my help, being part of some amazing achievements.
- The camaraderie between councillors and officers.
- Helping people, seeing physical improvements made in the ward and seeing new services funded to meet my priorities.
- I played a key role in preventing Adult Social Care from being outsourced. This was a failing department and some of us, through scrutiny, could make this apparent.
- Being able to play an important part in providing the community with a vital link between my role as councillor and the council. Enjoyed being involved in helping making decisions in council meetings with my fellow councillors.
- Being a school governor, although this role is becoming more demanding all the time, not really a role for the layman.
- Being a member of the planning committee, a very interesting and important role. Being a member of the national park.

- Having the ability to try and improve the lives of constituents by seizing every opportunity available through strategic planning and working with other organisations to make change.
- Making a difference to people's lives when they need it the most - Influential in new housing development, appealing against closures in some cases when it impacts greatly on community life and well-being, being there when you are needed the most has to be a major factor.

## 12. What did Members Enjoy Least About Being a Councillor?

Overwhelmingly, the surveyed councillors (70.8%) would recommend the role to others, and the above achievements outlined the satisfaction experienced and the impact they achieved.

The survey however also asked members what they had enjoyed least about being a councillor. Some members who enjoyed the role less or experienced particular challenges, provided extensive detail and commentary about their personal experiences but most councillors reported some challenges or frustrations. All of the anonymised feedback will be provided to authorities in order to inform council improvements in the future.

Councillors' least enjoyable experiences can be summarised as follows. The top four subjects (which received broadly similar coverage) were:

- a. Council bureaucracy and the challenges associated with corporate governance in a political environment. the time taken to get things done and the processes and personalities that slow things down;
- b. Group politics and the behaviour of other councillors;
- c. Managing public expectations and the challenges of reduced funding and/or influence of councillors;
- d. Treatment by the press and some members of the community;

To a lesser extent, members also commented on:

- e. Work-life balance and being "on call"

### Council bureaucracy

**Many members described their frustration at the time taken to get things done, comments included:**

- How slow everything is compared to the private sector.
- Some of the rigmarole you have to go through to get the smallest things done seems mad.

**Time consuming meetings, for example:**

- Agendas are sometimes ridiculously long. Questions are an unnecessary side issue and most items should be dealt with in smaller sized committees where worthwhile debates can take place.

- Having to attend meetings of small bodies linked to the council, mainly pointless, time consuming and brain numbing, very frustrating.

#### **Frustration about influence in council decision making, for example:**

- The complete inability to have any effect on what the council does for the community. Even though I was part of the ruling group, the cabinet system puts all decisions in the hands of a very small group.
- My inability to change anything as decisions are made by the few for the many.

### **Group politics and the behaviour of other councillors**

#### **Some members described their frustration with political infighting, for example:**

- Promotion of councillors to cabinet level because of their support for the Leader, not their ability.
- Group politics has been obnoxious. Hideous.
- Political infighting has derailed the wider ambitions of my authority.

#### **Some also described inappropriate behaviour among members generally, for example:**

- I have seen a significant reduction in general good manners to officers, as well as an increase of bear baiting in meetings amongst elected members.
- Attitude of some fellow councillors, to the public, to officers and to colleagues!!

### **Managing public expectations and the challenges of reduced funding and/or the influence of councillors**

#### **Some members expressed frustration about the challenges of reduced funding, including:**

- Having to take difficult decisions regarding service reductions during a long period of budget reductions.
- Not being able to help despite best efforts - a prime example is the lack of housing vacancies in my area.
- Having to support proposals to make our loyal staff redundant brought on by central government cuts to funding.

### **Treatment by the press and some members of the community**



**Some members felt that press coverage of councillors and councils was critical or expressed disappointment at how they were treated by members of the community.**

**Comments about how members were viewed and treated unfairly by the press:**

- Unfair criticism by the press who use stories to sell papers rather than the truth.
- Facebook and media abuse, the number of times people make up stories and go to the ombudsman, the disrespect from some certain Councillors and members of the public who have an agenda.
- Some members of the public accusing me of "having my nose in the trough" etc. and thinking they can forget common politeness because I'm a politician.
- Being criticised for the austerity cuts for which I was not responsible.
- Unreasonable expectations from a few residents about what the council should do for them, and a widespread cynicism and antipathy to local councillors.
- The way certain individuals use local face book to denigrate elected members often when they are ill-informed.
- Facebook where there is no opportunity to respond and for people to see both sides of the situation.

**Comments about the impact on the lives of members through being constantly "on call"**

- The feeling of being on duty at all times.
- The unexpected member of the public knocking on the door when you are about to sit down to a meal.
- Being disturbed late at night to help with problems, especially when the offices were closed and only emergency numbers were available.

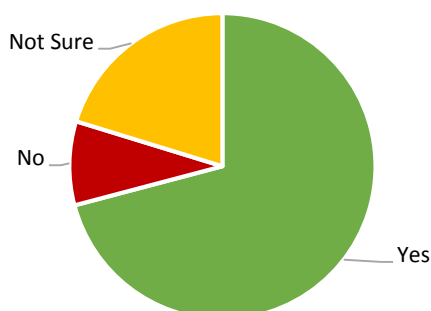
**Comments describing other aspects of the role that councillors least enjoyed included:**

- Some community council meetings.
- School governor duties.
- Welsh Government training sessions.
- The constant battle over the Welsh Language, the numbers of Welsh speakers fall when the council doesn't care about bilingualism.
- The slow pace of change in reorganising local government, we have a 19th century culture in the 21st century.
- Trying to deal with other statutory bodies was always a problem, they were often unwilling to co-operate.
- The amount of reading and research needed; spending my Sunday afternoons reading my papers.

### 13. Would Councillors Recommend the Role to Others?

In 2012, all councillors who responded said that they would recommend the role to others. In 2017, although the majority (56 or 71%) would recommend the role, 7 (9%) would not and 16 (20%) were not sure.

Would you Recommend Being a Councillor to Others?



**Members comments suggesting that they would recommend the role to others, generally described the opportunity to make a difference to communities and people's lives, as well as the opportunity to learn and develop as an individual:**

- It gives you a chance to give back to local people. It's a great feeling to have a big thank you when you have done a great job.
- It can make a difference to people's lives - especially the vulnerable.
- Being a councillor for a ward (a peoples' representative) is one of the greatest honours that can be bestowed upon any individual. Winning the election in 2012 and becoming one of the councillors for the ward was one of the greatest moments in my life. I just wish my father had been alive, he would have been so proud of me. An absolute honour.
- To have an input on decisions on the running of our county council to provide the best possible service for all our residents.
- I think for the right people it is a very rewarding and autonomous job and councillors can really make a difference.
- You learn a great deal about the way the council runs. You also learn a lot about yourself.
- I had been involved for many years with a particular issue and similar organisations and was told by a councillor that it would be easier to make change if I became involved in politics and the council.

**Some members' comments suggested that they would recommend the role to people with the 'right' attitudes, motivations and qualities. For example:**

- Only if I thought they would be doing it for the right reasons, that is to say, not primarily for party political reasons, or financial reasons.
- As long as one remembers that you're not there for anything other than make the constituency a better place, then it can be very rewarding.
- It's not for everybody, you need a thick skin and can't be downhearted when things don't always go right.
- There has to be a burning need for something in your ward. If there is, such as the desperate need for a new medical centre or a new sports pavilion, then go for it. Otherwise, don't bother.
- Depending on their temperament and my understanding of their ability to deal with the pressure of continuous availability to residents.
- Anyone entering representation needs to recognise the vagaries of the ballot box, especially if they are young with a family, gambling a good career needs careful consideration, hence that is why the statistics very rarely shift from retired, average age 59, male, and predominately white. £13,000 plus as a basic salary will not keep a standard family in today's environment.
- Yes, if you are retired and got the time like me, I was lucky, I retired at the age of 52 years.
- It is not for everyone. You have to have the ability to listen and to take positive decisions.
- If you really do care then yes, but if it's for personal gratification then no. There are already too many of those types of councillors there.
- The local authority needs a council of people from all walks of life and ages to have a good blend to look at the economy of the area and the future for next generations.
- The job is challenging and we should push the people who can do it to apply.
- If they're already working, then yes. If they're coming out of education and seeking work, then no.
- As it is, it will only satisfy people with completely the wrong motivation, qualities and skills and will drive those with the right qualities into the ground.
- This is a qualified "Yes". It suits some people, it wouldn't suit others.
- If someone has a lot of free time or is retired it may be worthwhile. Anybody with a career or family should forget it though, as you lose all of your free time to the detriment of your outside life.
- I would make sure they understand the level of commitment.
- Some persons who would like to be councillor can no longer afford it and employers are not very encouraging.
- As long as they realise it's not a job just when it suits, they have to like people if they want to achieve being a successful councillor.

- The future for local authorities looks bleak with continued interference from governments both local and national. Councillors responsibilities will become less and less in the future.

## 14. Advice to New Members?

**Members were asked about any advice that they would give to newly elected councillors, here are some examples of what they said:**

- Seek advice and support from officers. They are there to help.
- Aim high but be realistic in what you promise. Never guarantee something if there is a chance you can't deliver.
- Don't be too parochial in your outlook, local is important but so is the wider picture of the whole county.
- You are not going to change things overnight.
- Have another source of income and develop a thick skin.
- Accept all the support available, take your time to find your feet then give them hell!
- Ease yourself into the job. You are not going to change policies overnight. Take the time to study the pros and cons of each decision you make, in other words don't make rash decisions.
- If you're serious about making a difference, then it's harder than you think it will be.
- Remember our Code of Conduct.
- Communicate and listen to the people of your ward, always strive to provide them with quality service, learn as much as you can at training seminars, work with professional officers never be afraid to ask their advice.
- Never ignore any query whatever your personal opinion about the query, complaint or the person.
- Take any training offered, listen and build relationships with officers and fellow councillors.
- The best advice I got was: "Don't get to rely on your special responsibility allowances".
- Get your feet under the table first before seeking cabinet responsibility.
- Get a system in place to keep on top of case work.
- Learn how the council works, understand it is policy driven and budget led.
- Read the papers. Do your research. Listen to residents but balance that with the needs of the whole authority.
- Don't take on too many commitments at the outset.
- Re-election begins on your first day. Study the agendas, do your homework on the various subjects and don't be afraid to contribute at council if you have something positive to offer. Don't speak for the sake of it. Be as active as you can in your community.
- Learn the politics of your party and local authority.
- Learn your standing orders.

- Listen before speaking. If it was all that easy it would have been done years ago!
- Think before you act. Be certain of your facts and be willing to compromise in certain circumstances, in others be prepared to dig your heels in.
- Do your homework and don't be embarrassed to ask questions.
- Be prepared to spend most of your time away from your home.
- Don't take anything for granted, if you feel passionate about something don't give up until all else fails, then be honest and report back to your constituents that you did your best.
- Residents don't care what you do in the council chamber, they only worry about what you do in the ward.
- Try to be organised, particularly with calendar commitments and work arising from meetings so that enough time can be spent with family, friends and sleeping.
- You may be a ward member but your first responsibility is to the region as a whole.
- Specialise. You cannot know everything about everything. Concentrate on what interests you.
- New prospective councillors would do well to attend council meetings as observers to see how things are done and should go to the roadshows available.
- There are a number of publications by the WLGA which would be of benefit.
- Listen to the voice of the electorate.

## 15. What Would Members Have Done Differently?

Members were asked what they would have done differently if they were embarking on the role now. Most responded that they would not make many changes to their approach. Where they would have liked to do things differently they said:

### About politics, people and relationships:

- I would have tried to disregard people's political alliances more in the early days. There are good and bad in all parties.
- I'd remember that the council chamber is full of co-councillors not friends and enemies.
- I'd give less power to chief officers, make them more accountable and pay them less.
- Look after my voters.
- Try to engage more with councillors from opposition parties.
- Learn more about my own political party's dynamics.
- I would recognize that you cannot please all the people all the time and it is important to let people know when you disagree with them or when you think they are making unreasonable demands.
- I would not stand in a two-member ward unless I could absolutely trust the other member.

### About the job:

- Keep better records.
- Ensure only one room in the house was my " office" not most of them plus my car plus...plus...
- Undertake more research in response to any problem or request for assistance.
- I'd have taken part in training in all subjects at the beginning.
- I would be less inhibited about speaking up and taking on more roles and responsibilities.
- I would get involved with the WLGA and other outside bodies.
- Get a system in place to keep on top of case work. Work more from group office than from home.
- Better time management.
- I would choose different scrutiny committees. I chose mine on the basis of fields I was familiar with in order to minimise time needed for committee work when I was still working.
- Adapt to modern technology.
- I would try to find the time to read the endless reports more thoroughly.

### **Before taking on the role:**

- Do more homework on what it entails beforehand. Even though I enjoyed it I had no understanding of the commitment required if taking the post seriously, rather than just taking the money!!
- I wish I'd been more confident from the start but I've learnt to be now.
- I would get a job first.
- Maybe consider my wife and family a lot more.
- I would change my mind and be a deep-sea diver.



## 16. Conclusion

This report provides a unique insight into councillors' experiences and perceptions about their role. This is the second survey of members who stood down at an election, the first was undertaken in 2012, but this survey provides more detail and had a higher response rate. This survey also provides a valuable qualitative perspective to complement the quantitative data from the statutory survey of Candidates and Councillors due for publication later this year.

The survey reveals that members overwhelmingly reported a broadly positive experience of their role as councillors, describing having felt as though they had made a difference to their communities and valuing the support and development provided to them by their local authority. Few members appear to have stood down due to disaffection or disillusionment, with the majority standing down to retire or due to changes in personal circumstances. The survey also confirmed that many members devote a significant amount of time and personal commitment to the role, which provided a particular challenge who were in employment.

Most members however described some frustrations with the role or where improvements could be made in the level of support or how councils or political groups operated. Some members reported some particularly negative experiences of aspects of the role. The WLGA will therefore work with authorities to identify where general or local improvements could be made to ensure that councillors are supported adequately in their varied and vital roles.

May 2017 saw a significant turnover in members, with over a fifth (269) standing down at the elections. The survey showed that there was a loss of some considerable experience too, with most respondents having served at least two terms prior to standing down.

Although the 2017 election has not seen a marked change in the gender balance of councillors (there has been a small rise in the proportion of women councillors to 28% according to a separate analysis), this survey suggests that there may have been an opportunity to change the age profile of council chambers, which have historically been dominated by retired people who were typically over the age of 60 years old<sup>9</sup>. This survey shows that the median age of those who stood down was 68 years old and 53% identified themselves as retired; the statutory survey results expected later in the year will show whether campaigns such as 'Diversity in Democracy' succeeded in encouraging more diverse candidates to stand in their place.

We are grateful to the Welsh Government for funding this survey and, in particular, to those members who stood down who took the time to provide the WLGA with their feedback. Individual authority responses have been collated and distributed to each authority for local reflection and action where necessary.

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<sup>9</sup> According to the 2012 survey of councillors, 57% of councillors were aged over 60 years old  
<http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/130503-local-government-candidates-survey-en.pdf>