

Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held at County Hall, Usk on 3rd February 2014 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough, D.L. Edwards, R.G. Harris, A. Easson, S.G.M. Howarth, P. Jones, J.L. Prosser and V.E. Smith.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs. T. Harry - Head of Improvement and Democracy
Mrs S. King - Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors P.R. Clarke, S. Jones and S. White.

2. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

We resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16th December 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

It was agreed that action points would be highlighted in **bold** print.

5. WALES CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

We received a report, prepared by the Democratic Services Manager, which informed the Committee of the WLGA's Wales Charter for Member Support and Development and to benchmark Monmouthshire against the Charter criteria.

The report recommended that the Democratic Services Committee draw up proposals for member development and support in line with the "Wales Charter for Member Support and Development".

Information was appended to the report, which identified the position of Monmouthshire County Council in relation to recommendations within the charter

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee
dated 3rd February 2014 - continued**

and members were invited to discuss further progress, in terms of taking forward the charter in areas that are not currently addressed.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Training and Development scheme for members. Some role descriptions in place i.e. executive/chairs of scrutiny – need to develop roles for audit and licensing, all members should have a role description and personal development/training plan.
- Discussions were required among members for how training would be undertaken.
- Recognised the charter was a benchmark for achievement. Issues raised in relation to resource implications, members courses/conferences budget. The charter would have increased training demand, possible increased charges, challenge whether it can be accommodated. **Requested information on the members training budget. How much is the budget? How much used to date and what is it used for? Information would be circulated to members.**
- Personal development, usually undertaken by line manager, needs to be someone competent of what's required in a councillor. It was suggested that the Head of Improvement and Democracy would be the appropriate person, as recommended within the Measure.
- Training had been provided, such as code of conduct, licensing, planning etc. and seminars/briefings had been held throughout the year. Subscriptions are available Can subscribe to WLGA and training provided as overall subscription.
- It was suggested that as well as chairs, training was provided for vice chairs. Personal profiles were welcomed and attendance at training needed to be addressed. However, it was recognised that members could not be forced to attend training, but would assist in undertaking roles to the best of their ability. Group leaders could assist in identifying training requirements.
- The Charter would assist in raising awareness amongst members and officers were thanked for assistance in getting required information to members. It was noted that a paper telephone directory did not exist.
- It was highlighted that the charter was an example of good practice and there was a requirement to keep up to date with annual reports and member development, to ensure robustness on a democratic basis.
- There was a requirement for new councillors to be aware of duties that are involved in the role and this could be included within the application package. Councillor roles and job descriptions needed further detail and information.
- Concerns were expressed in relation to available support for undertaking duties.
- Discussions were held regarding printing facilities and a member's library. It was agreed that the shelves outside the Council Chamber could be used as a member library.
- **It was agreed that it would be proposed at full Council that meetings were not held within school half term holidays.**

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee
dated 3rd February 2014 - continued**

We resolved to agree the recommendations and to aspire to Charter status. The Democratic Services committee would debate and decide the priorities (at the next meeting), in order to draw up proposals to be submitted to a future meeting of full Council.

We resolved that the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development would be added to the work programme.

6. ICT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS

We received the revised ICT scheme for members which had been approved at the Democratic Services Committee meeting in September 2013.

The committee were advised that the Democratic Services Team were the first point of contact in relation to ICT issues.

Discussions were held regarding provision of printers for members, in preparation for paperless meetings and some views were that tablets would be beneficial for electronic meetings.

7. PAPERLES MEETINGS

We received an update that the Political Leadership Group had committed to paperless meetings from April 2014. Each member would be contacted by the Democratic Services Team regarding equipment requirements and navigating around electronic agendas.

The budget for electronic tablets would be dependent on the withdrawal of printing paper copies of agendas. We were advised that training for the members involved in the ipad trial would be held imminently.

It was highlighted that members should be equipped, however, the Democratic Services team would not post agendas. It was suggested that members needed to be equipped and trained in order to progress with paperless meetings.

We resolved that members would be notified of the intention to go paperless in April 2014, and in the meantime Select Committees would aspire to become paperless and undertake trials between now and April 2014.

8. FEEDBACK FROM COUNCILS ON TABLET USE

The Scrutiny Manager had provided the committee with a document, which identified how other authorities elected members had used tablets for Council business.

We noted to receive the responses.

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee
dated 3rd February 2014 - continued**

9. UPDATE ON THE REVIEW OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

The Head of Democracy and Improvement provided feedback on the restructure of Democratic Services and Elections, we noted the following points:

- Report completed and would be sent to the Trade Unions and staff for consultation.
- Consequence would be no redundancies.
- Utilising vacant posts to achieve savings.
- Posts for current staff would remain.
- Elections and Chairman's Secretary would be included in the restructure to increase flexibility.

Members highlighted that capacity may be an issue, however, it was noted that this could be continually reviewed.

10. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members reviewed the work programme of the committee and the following points were noted:

- Addition of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development. To consider priorities at the next meeting.
- Any comments regarding the review of the Monmouthshire County Council constitution could be sent directly to the Monitoring Officer.

11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held at County Hall, Usk on **Monday 17th March 2014 at 2.00pm.**

The meeting ended at 4.20 p.m.