

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held at
Council Chamber, County Hall, Usk on 16th March 2015 at 2.00 p.m.**

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Blakebrough (Chairman)

County Councillors: D.L. Edwards, J. Higginson, P.Jones, J.L. Prosser,
V.E. Smith and A. Webb.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors R. Harris, S.G.M. Howarth and S. Jones.

2. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There were no questions raised during the public open forum.

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 9th February 2015 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

During discussion of the minutes we noted action points as follows:

- Cabinet support – ongoing discussions were held with members
- SRS Support – survey circulated to all staff and meeting held with the Organisational Development Lead, issues raised by members were similar to those being raised by staff. A small report would be compiled with checklist which would identify issues and possible resolutions. We agreed that the officer would be invited to attend the next meeting with summary of issues and check list of how these could be resolved.
- We requested that a technical officer could also be invited to attend the next meeting.
- Members highlighted that the Democratic Services Committee needed to ensure that members were able to access systems when required and that solutions were quick and effectively dealt with.

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- An item would be included on the next agenda, the Organisational Development Lead and technical officers would be invited to attend. Information would be provided regarding detail of associated costs for 24/7 support.
- Casework manager – we agreed that a demonstration of a casework management system would be arranged for a future meeting.
- Meeting information – following a committee request, meeting information was displayed on a board in Usk reception. Some members welcomed the information whereas some others preferred details to be displayed via a television screen. Cost options would be considered and alternatives would be investigated.
- The committee were informed that meeting information was static and the TV screen in reception was utilised for promoting the message of Monmouthshire.
- Building and chamber issues – we noted that these were ongoing and would be monitored.
- Telephone directory – a small phone directory was being progressed. We noted that detailed contact information was available via the Hub.
- Promoting local democracy – a number of councillors had visited towns with the events trailer to promote democracy.
- Training The Hub – a number of drop in sessions had been arranged which would provide members with an opportunity to attend training.
- Communications – the Communication and Engagement Manager had attended the previous meeting. Members were advised that considerable work had been undertaken on the website and members were encouraged to contact Democratic Services with any additional details that were required on web pages.

5. WLGA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We received the WLGA Continuing Professional Development for Councillors 2015, the competency framework described the range of skills and knowledge required by elected members and a set of associated effective behaviours.

We discussed the document and noted the following points:

- We noted that there was still opportunity for a response to be submitted.
- Members agreed that the competency framework was clear and concise.
- The committee recognised that the document provided guidance and framework for the ideal councillor and role.
- Council had endorsed the annual review and development for members, it provided an opportunity for assessment of training and development needs.
- General refresher training was provided for members in relation to performance, scrutiny, health and safety. This was supplemented with briefings and seminars on specific issues.

6. DISCUSSIONS ON TIME CHANGE OF FULL COUNCIL TO 5PM INSTEAD OF 2PM

We discussed the effects of changing the start time of Council meetings from 2pm to 5pm. This followed a proposal agreed at full Council meeting on 26th February 2015.

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We noted that the purpose was for times to be considered, in order for increased diversity and accessibility for public and residents.

A survey had been distributed to members, which consisted of the following questions:

- **Do you support changing the start time of Council from 2pm to 5pm?**
- **What do you believe are the benefits of changing the start time to 5pm?**
- **What do you believe are the benefits of retaining a 2pm start?**
- **Would a 5pm start clash with existing commitments?**
- **Would you want a trial period and for how many meetings?**

In general, responses highlighted that most members preferred meetings to remain at 2pm and that 5pm meetings would clash with existing commitments. Members welcomed a trial period and additional comments were included.

Information was provided in relation to meeting times of other authorities and there appeared to be no conclusive evidence between increased diversity and meetings being held later in the day.

During discussion we noted:

- The committee highlighted that there were positive and negative aspects to time changes.
- We discussed the possibility of a trial of one meeting with alternative time.
- A member noted that some employers provided time off for elected members to undertake council duties. We noted that this was guidance.
- The Head of Democracy and Regulatory services advised that officers worked on an agile basis and would be flexible in meeting requirements. The time of meetings would need to be decided by members.
- We thanked officers for evidence and comparisons against other authorities that had been provided. The information informed the committee and were minded to remain at 2pm start times. However, we considered whether further work was required.
- We agreed that there was no conclusive evidence to show that a change of times affected increased diversity.
- Some members were totally opposed to the change of time and some members supported the proposal.
- We recognised that 5pm meeting times may clash with some school governor meetings.
- The committee agreed that a recommendation would be submitted to Council for debate.

We recommended that on the evidence presented, the Committee could not find any substantial reason to change the time at this stage but open to further debate as and when.

We resolved to agree the recommendation and that it would be presented to full Council on 26th March 2015.

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7. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL WALES REPORT

We received the Independent Remuneration Panel Wales, seventh annual report since it was established in 2008 and the fourth annual report since the approval of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

We discussed the care and child care allowance payments that were available to members, however, the committee were concerned that many members do not claim because of the requirements to make the payment known publically.

The committee requested that this issue should be considered by the panel, and members should be encouraged to claim the allowance.

We noted that the type of information to be published was prescribed, however, the authority could write to the panel to explain that there was a perceived stigma to this type of claim and there seemed to be a reluctance to claim amongst members.

We resolved that a letter would be sent to the panel, outlining concerns raised and highlighting that members should be encouraged to claim for care and childcare allowance.

We received and noted the report.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Engagement with Welsh Government

At the last meeting an issue had been raised regarding being proactive and further engagement with the Welsh Assembly, in influence and communication on future bills.

We agreed that this issue would be discussed at the coordinating board, so that member input from could be maximised.

Members were frustrated that that Welsh Government had arranged events without local members being consulted. Concerns were expressed that consultation was not being undertaking regarding events which affected local wards.

The issue would be considered on a future agenda.

Youth engagement

The Democratic Services Committee Chair highlighted that a youth forum existed in Monmouthshire and suggested that communication and engagement was developed with them.

We noted that the Chairman's cadet was introduced for the term of office and this contributed to engagement. It would be useful to look at what process was operated by other authorities.

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We agreed that engagement with youth representatives and examples of best practice would be included on a future agenda.

The committee would be presented with a report which identified achievements throughout the year.

9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

We noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 11th May 2015 at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 3.20pm

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