

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Usk on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2015 at 2.00 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor D. Blakebrough (Chairman)

County Councillors: R.J. Higginson, D. Evans, R.G. Harris, S.G.M. Howarth, P. Jones, J.L. Prosser, V.E. Smith and A. Webb.

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mrs T. Harry	-	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Mr P. Davies	-	Head of Commercial and People Development
Ms E. Jackson	-	Digital Projects Manager
Miss H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mr R. Williams	-	Democratic Services Officer

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors D.L. Edwards and S. Jones.

#### **2. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

County Councillor Howarth thanked the Chairman for raising the profile of the Democratic Services Committee during her time as Chair of the Committee.

#### **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 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record subject to the minutes being amended to include County Councillor D. Evans as being in attendance at this meeting.

#### **5. ACTION PLAN FEEDBACK**

We considered the report regarding action plan feedback. In doing so, the following points were noted:

- A demonstration of database management software will be provided at the next meeting.
- Meeting display board in Reception at County Hall, Usk – Investigate costing options for alternative methods to display information.
- Provide a hard copy of officer contact details to Members.
- Send the Council Diary to all Town / Community Councils.

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- Update at the next meeting regarding the Democratic Services Officer appointment.
- The Chair to provide a summary of achievements of the Committee for the next meeting.
- Investigate the installation of USB points in the Council Chamber.
- Investigate the installation of sockets in the public gallery of the Council Chamber.
- Report back to the next Democratic Services Committee meeting regarding the outcome of the meeting with the designer, contractor and Council officers regarding the heating system, air conditioning and general building issues relating to County Hall.
- Paint the wall at the rear of the Council Chamber to reduce glare.
- Youth engagement - Councillor Blakebrough, having met with representatives of the Welsh Government, would investigate a toolkit to allow Members to explain the democratic process in Wales to children in schools. This matter would be discussed further at a future meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

We resolved to receive the update report and noted its content.

## **6. OPERATIONAL ICT**

We received a report regarding operational ICT issues with Members and employees.

It was noted that Members had requested that a 24/7 helpdesk service be provided. This would cost £25,000 for on-call and overtime for existing employees. Existing employees were not contractually obliged to work outside their normal hours, and if they were unable to provide the service, the SRS would be required to employ two people to provide cover at a cost of £55,000, including on-costs.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- A 'quick reference guide' to aid Members with their ICT issues was provided which could be laminated and put onto Member's laptops.
- A simple 'first aid responder' checklist was available on The Hub.
- Some Members were not receiving reminders to change their passwords. Also, concern was expressed that, on occasions, some inappropriate emails were coming through to Members which were not being blocked by the firewall. The Digital Projects Manager stated that she would raise these issues with SRS.
- Members considered that it would be inappropriate for SRS to employ two additional members of staff at a cost of £55,000 to provide a 24/7 helpdesk service.

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- Some Members have their council email account linked to their personal email account. Officers stated that this should not be encouraged as security issues would need to be investigated if this were to be rolled out to all Members.
- In response to a Member's question regarding arrangements for home visits by SRS, the Digital Projects Manager would liaise with SRS regarding this matter.
- In response to a Member's question, the Digital Projects Manager stated that Outlook Profiles had been increased to receive more data. However, she would liaise with SRS to ensure that all Members' profiles had been increased to receive additional data. It was noted that regular housekeeping of inboxes should be undertaken to help alleviate this issue.
- Agendas – a link to the website rather than receiving large PDF agendas would help to minimise Members' inboxes from exceeding their capacity limits.
- In the next three to four months the iCounty Digital Strategy will be assessed and a business case will be brought to Members in due course regarding how this will be delivered in future.
- SRS capacity regarding service provision needs to be assessed. However, a robust network was in place and it was acknowledged that there was a need to maintain the level of support and investment with regard to the SRS.
- Staff work / life balance needed to be maintained, which would be looked at via the People Development Strategy. The Member / Officer Protocol could be amended accordingly.
- Apprenticeships could be considered providing a low cost service instead of providing a 24/7 helpdesk service.

We resolved:

- (i) to receive the report and noted its content;
- (ii) that a further update report regarding ICT provision be presented to the next Democratic Services Committee in which feedback on the issues raised might be received.

## **7. SCRUTINY – END OF YEAR REFLECTIONS**

We received a report by the Scrutiny Manager regarding the key highlights achieved during the previous 12 months. A self-evaluation process had been undertaken with support from the Wales Audit Office and an action plan had been produced to improve the scrutiny process. In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Members noted the excellent progress being made and thanked the Scrutiny Manager for her support.

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- Select Committee pre-meetings were an important part of the Scrutiny process and group leaders should endorse the benefits of pre-meetings to their groups.
- In response to a Member's question regarding the Strong Communities Select Committee holding meetings outside of County Hall, Usk in order to engage with the public, the Scrutiny Manager stated that formal meetings of all of the Select Committees were held within the Council Chamber, County Hall, Usk, as the meetings were live streamed and available to be viewed on line. There was also a Public Open Forum item on the agenda allowing members of the public to attend the meetings and raise issues. However, consideration could be given to holding a non-statutory meeting in which Select Committees might go out and meet the public via a 'road show' event once a year.
- Lack of attendance at Select Committee meetings was raised and it was suggested that the Select Committees might consider increasing the number of Members serving on these committees. However, it was noted that it would be a matter for Council to decide whether to increase the membership of the Select Committees. Political leaders should consider addressing the poor attendance with their respective groups.
- Concern was expressed that the Democratic Services Section had not been at full strength for some time and that this might be having a detrimental effect on the support being provided to Members. The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services stated that the post of Democratic Services had been advertised internally and that there had been only one response. The post would likely be advertised externally with a view to filling the post as quickly as possible. It was noted that the Select Committees were Member led and were receiving good support from the Scrutiny Manager and Democratic Services Section.

We resolved:

- (i) to receive the report and noted its content;
- (ii) to receive an update at the next meeting regarding progress in appointing a Democratic Services Officer;
- (iii) that Select Committees should decide whether to hold an annual non-statutory Select Committee meeting in which the Select Committees would go out and meet the public via a 'road show' event.
- (iv) a decision was required by political groups regarding appointment of the chairs for the Select Committees.
- (v) the Chair would write a summary of the Committee's achievements during the previous 12 months to be presented to the next Committee.

**The meeting ended at 4.07pm**

**Agenda Item: 5**

**Democratic Services Actions  
May 2015**

Minute Item:	Subject	Officer	Outcome
<p><b>5. Action Plan Feedback</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT Update Report</li> <li>• Investigate database management software for members</li> <li>• Meeting display board and touch screen in Usk Reception. Investigate costing options for alternative methods to display information</li> <li>• Building and chamber issues:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investigate installation of USB points in the Council Chamber.</li> <li>- Investigate installation of sockets in the public gallery of the Council Chamber.</li> <li>- Report back to the next Democratic Services meeting regarding the outcome of the meeting with the designer, contractor and MCC Officers re: heating system / air conditioning / general building issues.</li> <li>- Paint the wall at the rear of the Council Chamber to reduce the glare.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>E. Jackson</p> <p>T. Harry</p> <p>T. Harry</p> <p>M. Long / R. O'Dwyer</p>	<p><b>Update report for next meeting</b></p> <p><b>Demo required at next meeting</b></p> <p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p><b>Committee to continually monitor</b></p>

**Agenda Item: 5**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact details</li> <li>• Council Diary</li> <li>• Appointment of Democratic Services Officer</li> <li>• Summary of Achievements</li> </ul>	<p>J. Pearson</p> <p>J. Pearson</p> <p>T. Harry</p> <p>Cllr. Blakebrough</p>	<p><b>Provide a hard copy of contact details for Members</b></p> <p><b>Send Council Diary to all Town / Community Councils</b></p> <p><b>Update at next meeting</b></p> <p><b>Prepare a summary of the Committee's achievements for the next Chair</b></p>
<p><b>Additional items from March 2015 meeting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with Welsh Government</li> <li>• Youth Engagement – investigate toolkit to allow Members to explain the democratic process in Wales to children in schools.</li> </ul>	<p>Democratic Services / Chair</p> <p>Cllr. Blakebrough</p>	<p><b>To be discussed on future agenda.</b></p> <p><b>To be discussed on future agenda.</b></p>