

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Monday, 11th September, 2017 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)
County Councillor T.Thomas (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, L.Dymock, M.Groucutt, G. Howard,
J.Treharne, F. Taylor and J.Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

Councillors L.Jones and S. Woodhouse

1. Declarations of Interest

None received

2. Public Open Forum

There were no public open forum items.

3. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on 5th June 2017 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. Cabinet Member Priorities and Work Programme

The Cabinet member for Governance addressed the committee and informed them that one of his principal priorities within his portfolio is performance data. The cabinet member informed the committee that there is a need to present the information to members in a more digestible format to allow clear understanding of the information being presented to them.

Members of the committee requested that the data that is being used and presented is comparable in order to provide a true picture of the issue. The cabinet member informed the committee that there is a commitment to having 'open data' so that anyone interested can take the information they need and use it for their own analysis.

Another of his priorities is the integration of back office functions within the authority, that will be a priority for the Welsh Government for local authorities to implement, and will be working with cabinet members from other authorities to ensure its delivery. Back office functions can be considered as payroll, HR and legal services.

5. Member Support Services

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The committee discussed the digital and technology support that members received. It was raised that online training modules would be useful as it could record progress and allow members to complete the training at their leisure. The local democracy manager informed the committee that the WLGA had been looking at online training modules through learning pool but were not available easily for members to undertake.

Members also questioned when remote attendance for training and meetings might become a possibility to allow members to participate without physically attending the meeting. Members were informed that equipment is being installed in the Conference Room at County Hall, Usk which may enable remote attendance and further testing will be completed following its installation.

A discussion also took place around whether mobile phones should be provided to all elected members. It was agreed that at the next meeting of the committee an IT report will be presented with costings and options as well as an update on the remote attendance.

6. Report of Head of Paid Service - Designation of Statutory Head of Democracy

The Chief Officer for Enterprise left the meeting for this item and it was presented by the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive presented his report to the committee recommending that the Chief Officer for Enterprise be appointed to the role of Head of Democracy, a statutory position that has to be appointed to an officer of the Council.

The committee accepted the recommendation and resolved to appoint the Chief Officer for Enterprise as the Head of Democracy for the authority.

7. Flat Pack Democracy - Monmouth Example

The Head of Policy and Governance presented an update on participatory democracy or 'Flatpack Democracy' to the Committee, with a view to representatives from Monmouth Town Council attending a future meeting to provide further detail.

During discussion the Committee expressed an interest in holding meetings away from the Council Chamber, feeling that this would encourage public participation, however it was recognised this had not been effective in the past. Members suggested examples of sustainable participation in democracy would be helpful.

The committee referred to a previous idea of inviting businesses to a breakfast meeting and suggested that this could have been more widely publicised.

We recognised the importance of items for engagement, rather than asking general questions. We should focus on what is most important and understand the need to continue with that. It was suggested there could be a place beyond the committee where members meet with officers to discuss ideas and priorities.

To conclude the committee resolved to meet as a small group and assess information in order to support the cabinet member on a particular theme or issue that the committee wishes to progress over the next 12 months.

8. Timing of Council Meetings

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The Local Democracy Manager informed the committee that under the Local Government Wales Act 2011, local authorities have a duty to review the timing of its Council meetings and requested that the committee put forward a recommendation to the next meeting of Full Council as to the most suitable timing for all Councillors.

Members debated various options and concluded that the start time of Full Council meetings should alternate between 14:00 and 17:00 throughout the year with the next council meeting due to start at 14:00 and the following from 17:00 to ensure that councillors who work are not disadvantaged by holding meetings solely at a time that they would not be able to attend.

9. Local Government White Paper - Moving Forward Proposals

The Deputy Chief Executive advised the committee she had attended a Local Government Reform Task and Finish Group, with Chief Executives across Wales, to agree terms of reference and purpose for the steering group. The outcome of the meeting was that task and finish groups will report to the steering group, who then report to the Cabinet Secretary, including a finance group, governance and accountability group, and a group to consider the role of local government in the future.

Information, issues or matters arising would be shared with Committee Members.

10. Welsh Government Consultation - Electoral Reform

The Local Democracy Manager presented the consultation document to the committee and providing an overview to members.

Members of the committee were in support of the legislative change to allow 16 year olds the right to vote. Members also requested a member seminar on the consultation but accepted that with the tight deadline for responses it may be difficult to arrange.

It was agreed that if possible a members seminar will be co-ordinated to allow all members to contribute to the consultation and that members provide the Local Democracy Manager with their views independently, to draft a response that will be agreed with the Chair and submitted on behalf of the committee. Members were also reminded that they are entitled to submit their own individual responses to the consultation.

11. Work Programme and Frequency of Meetings

Members of the committee queried whether the current cycle of meetings for the committee was frequent enough to ensure a full debate could be had to cover the work programme for the committee. It was agreed that the committee should meet more frequently and meetings diarised with those dates distributed to members.

The meeting ended at 4.40 pm