

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held at Usk, NP15 1AD on Monday, 3rd December, 2018 at 2.00 pm

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

County Councillors: M. Groucutt, G. Howard, J. Treharne,
S. Woodhouse and J. Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

APOLOGIES:

Councillors L. Dymock

1. Declarations of interest

None received.

2. Public Open Forum

None

3. Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales - Draft Remuneration Report - 2019-20

The committee received the draft report from the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) regarding remuneration for councillors for the year 2019-20.

It was noted that the basic salary for all members will increase for the year by £268 increasing the overall basic salary to £13,868. Additionally, members of the executive would receive an increase of £800 inclusive of the additional basic salary as well as the various banding levels for removed for the civic heads who will receive one level of salary across all authorities. It was noted that the removal of the banding option for the civic head role now removes any options for Council to vote in relation to posts that are set by the IRPW.

Members raised concerns regarding the lack of review of the level of remuneration regarding the total cost of care that councillors could claim. It was felt that this level needs to be increased if the Council was to attract councillors from a more diverse background with particular concern regarding the cost of childcare for councillors with young children and that this level should be increased.

Members also commented that to increase diversity, the council should consider the timings of its meeting again to help councillors with young children and in employment attend meetings outside of the normal working/school day. The committee were informed by one member during the debate that whilst their employer allows them a level of civic days to attend meetings, it is not sufficient to fulfil the duties required of a councillor and requires using annual leave or flexi leave on top of that as well as balanced the workload the job requires.

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It was agreed that members should be surveyed on preferred timings of meetings and various options to inform the debate at future meeting of the committee and, if required, inform a recommendation from the committee to full council on the timing of meetings.

It was also agreed to submit a response to the IRPW encouraging them to review and increase the maximum level of cost of care.

4. Mobile Phones

Following on from the previous meeting of Democratic Services Committee where members considered the provision of mobile phones, the Local Democracy Manager provided an update in relation to the provision of refurbished mobile phones.

The committee were informed that there is no provider of refurbished mobile phones with the procurement framework for the authority to access and purchase mobile phones on behalf of members. Additionally, old mobile phones that are out of contract are sent to be recycled and are on the whole not functioning correctly for members to use anyway. The Local Democracy Manager asked how the committee wanted to proceed given that at the previous meeting it was agreed that the procured contracts were too expensive for the authority to pursue and refurbished handsets could not be made available to members.

A discussion took place with members offering various views on the outcome with some members considering their work can be carried out effectively with a single mobile phone or landline whilst others argued against due to the need to keep their personal life separate from councillor work.

The committee agreed that should members need a second sim card that the authority should reimburse members for these. It was also agreed that democratic services would offer support to members to find the most suitable solution for themselves and that it would be up to members to provide the relevant handset themselves.

5. Allowing public filming at all Council Meetings

The Local Democracy Manager introduced the item to the committee stating that there may be proposals contained within the Wales Bill, that requires all authorities to amend their constitutions, to allow members of the public to film at any council meeting that is open to the public or the potential for a voluntary all Wales agreement to allow recording and what members of the committees views were.

The proposal may be contained in the Bill to ensure that all authorities proceedings are transparent and open to the public. It was noted however that Monmouthshire stream any meeting where the technology is available in the room to do so and that members of the public can access recordings of all meetings on Youtube. Some authorities in Wales do not stream any meetings, or only stream a certain committee due to the costs associated with their streaming supplier.

The committee agreed that they were against the proposal due to the potential for other equipment to interfere with the streaming equipment, as well as the potential for the impact of the public recording to be intimidating or damage the debate when the council provide the provision already. The committee were of the view that should a meeting not be streamed for any reason, for example an area committee not held in Council Offices, then it should be at the discretion of the chair as to whether public filming of the meeting should be allowed or not. Members also raised concern regarding the potential for exempt information to be released where recording equipment is left behind, even when the public have left the room.

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6. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2018 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

7. To note the date of the next meeting as Monday 4th February 2019 at 2:00pm

It was agreed that this meeting be brought forward to a suitable date in mid January for the committee to consider the responses from members to the timing of council meetings in order for the diary for next year to be agreed at Council at a suitable time. Confirmation of the new date will sent to all members following the meeting.

The meeting ended at 3.00pm