

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Monday, 12th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)

County Councillors: P. Clarke, M. Feakins, M. Groucutt, G. Howard,
D. Jones, J. Treharne, J. Watkins, S. Woodhouse and A. Easson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matt Phillips	Chief Officer People and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

None.

3. Feedback from Working Group

The Committee received the notes from the recent meeting of the working group and were invited to comment.

The Chief Officer for People and Governance informed Members that the Strategic Leadership Team had held discussion with a group called New Local who were involved with promoting community engagement. It was agreed that the group be invited to present at the September meeting of Democratic Services Committee.

County Councillor Howard recommended looking to other local authorities to identify how they operate area committees or similar forums.

Action: Contact officers for dates for the additional engagement forums (NP)

4. Prayers at meetings

The Chair invited County Councillor Sheila Woodhouse to open the item. In doing so she explained that there had been some discussion amongst Members on the best way to conduct prayers at meetings of Full Council.

Members were invited to comment.

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Some thought that the best way forward would be to continue with the current arrangements of holding prayers ahead of the meeting, prior to live streaming the meeting. There was suggestion that a separate Teams meeting link be created specifically for prayers. We noted that this could be undertaken dependent on officer and technical availability.

It was agreed that any periods of silence should be conducted within the actual meeting, separate to prayers.

The Chief Officer explained that the agenda is the preserve of the Proper Officer and so if there was to be a change it would ultimately sit with the Chief Executive. However, it would be appropriate for Council to present their view through a debate on a Motion if it wished to do so.

It was agreed that further discussion would be appropriate following legislative changes in November 2021.

5. Response times to members

The Senior Democracy Officer presented the item in response to a matter raised at the previous meeting. A survey had been issued to all Members to identify areas of concern regarding officer response times. It was explained that of 43 Members, 16 had responded, 11 with issues, 5 without. Without going into detail, the survey clearly identified problem areas and the Chief Officer had agreed to highlight the findings to the relevant Chief Officers.

It was also noted that a quick reference contact sheet had been emailed to all members as requested.

6. Discussion on job sharing for Councillors

County Councillor Tony Eason raised the matter of job-sharing for Councillors for discussion. He suggested that this is something that should be considered for lifestyle balance in the future.

We recognised that there is a Family Policy within the constitution, but this circumstance would be separate to that.

Members welcomed the opportunity to open a discussion and the Chief Officer agreed to forward further information.

7. Induction 2022

The Senior Democracy Officer presented the report for the Committee to consider the draft timetable for the Induction of Councillors 2022 and recommend changes or additions considered suitable.

For meetings such as Planning / Licensing it was thought that a training session directly ahead of the meeting had worked well previously.

County Councillor Giles Howard raised concerns around IT equipment and asked that a larger laptop rather than the Surface Pro be considered going forward.

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It was asked that the timetable reflect the commitments of working people.

Members agreed that online and recorded sessions would be a great improvement on the 2017 induction.

A Council directory would be a very important tool for new Members.

New Members should receive training on the MyMonmouthshire App and MonMaps.

Prospective candidates should be provided with a copy of the induction timetable.

Action: The Chair recommended that a meeting with himself, the Vice-Chair and Democracy Officers be held to discuss further.

8. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th June 2021 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm