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County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Friday, 16 September 2022

Notice of meeting

Democratic Services Committee

Monday, 26th September, 2022 at 2.00 pm,

AGENDA

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4.	Code of Conduct/Standards of Practice - public/officers and public/members	Verbal Report
5.	Members Support/Information	Verbal Report
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8.	Next Meeting - 21st November 2022	

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive / Prif Weithredwr

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

County Councillor Louise Brown	Shirenewton;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Tomos Dafydd Davies	Llanfoist & Govilon;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Meirion Howells	Llanbadoc & Usk;	Independent Group
County Councillor David Jones	Crucorney;	Independent Group
County Councillor Penny Jones	Raglan;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Tony Kear	Llanbadoc & Usk;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Su McConnel	Croesonen;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Angela Sandles	Magor East with Undy;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Maria Stevens	Severn;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Peter Strong	Rogiet;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Armand Watts	Bulwark and Thornwell;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Laura Wright	Grofield;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru

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Public Information

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Watch this meeting online

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Welsh Language

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public through the medium of Welsh or English. We respectfully ask that you provide us with adequate notice to accommodate your needs.

Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Our purpose

Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities

Objectives we are working towards

- Giving people the best possible start in life
- A thriving and connected county
- Maximise the Potential of the natural and built environment
- Lifelong well-being
- A future focused council

Our Values

Openness. We are open and honest. People have the chance to get involved in decisions that affect them, tell us what matters and do things for themselves/their communities. If we cannot do something to help, we'll say so; if it will take a while to get the answer we'll explain why; if we can't answer immediately we'll try to connect you to the people who can help – building trust and engagement is a key foundation.

Fairness. We provide fair chances, to help people and communities thrive. If something does not seem fair, we will listen and help explain why. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently. We cannot always make everyone happy, but will commit to listening and explaining why we did what we did.

Flexibility. We will continue to change and be flexible to enable delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

Teamwork. We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved so we can achieve great things together. We don't see ourselves as the 'fixers' or problem-solvers, but we will make the best of the ideas, assets and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

Kindness: We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

Public Document Pack **Agenda Item 3**

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
on Monday, 27th June, 2022 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor David Jones (Chair)
County Councillor Peter Strong (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Penny Jones, Tony Kear,
Su McConnel, Angela Sandles, Armand Watts and Laura Wright

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

APOLOGIES:

Councillors Tomos Davies, Meirion Howells and Maria Stevens

1. To note the appointment of County Councillor David Jones as Chair

Noted.

2. To appoint a Vice Chair

County Councillor Peter Strong was appointed as Vice Chair.

3. Declarations of interest

None.

4. Induction Feedback

Members were invited to reflect on the recent induction process to allow officers to learn from their experiences.

Some points raised:

- Excellent overall process
- Some cases of officers 'planting seeds of terror' rather than focusing on what can be done
- Would be useful to draw on the experience of the returning councillors
- Experienced Members could help through a Q&A session
- Would be useful for co-opted members to receive training.

The Chief Officer for People and Governance and Monitoring Officer welcomed the comments and invited members to contact him with any further comments, or reflections of their groups.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on Monday, 27th June, 2022 at 2.00 pm

5. Timing of Council Meetings

Members were advised of a legal requirement to discuss and, recommend to Council, the timing of Council meetings for the Civic Year.

It was agreed that individual committees should agree their meeting times.

We recognised that the dates and times are set out in advance and presented through the Council Calendar. It was emphasised that the default position should be to adhere to these dates.

It was expressed that when considering timing of meetings, the attendance of officers and members of the public should be taken into consideration.

We heard that there have been previous trials of alternating Council meeting start times, between 10:00am, 14:00pm and 17:00pm. A later start time could be difficult for long meetings. This could result in less effective meetings, with reducing attendance, officers leaving the meeting, and falling concentration levels.

The importance of a work/life balance was recognised.

It was suggested that given the early stage of the new administration, times remain as they are and are reviewed in 12 months.

The Committee resolved to recommend that:

Democratic Services Committee recommend to Council that meetings of Full Council remain at a start time of 14:00pm and is reviewed in 12 months.

Democratic Services Committee recommend to Council that it remains the discretion of each committee as to the start time of the meetings, that best suits the members of that committee.

6. Public Participation Strategy

The Chief Officer explained that this item comes forward following on from portfolio discussions with Cabinet. The Local Government and Elections Act 2021 brings forward the requirement for all local authorities to create and then take to public consultation, a Public Participation Strategy. A report to the Democratic Services Committee in 2021 outlined an initial strategy which gained the support of the Committee.

County Councillor Catherine Fookes, Cabinet Member with responsibility for public engagement intends to start a Cabinet member Working Group, along with communications officers and representatives of MCC.

Members were asked to consider representation of the Democratic Services Committee for the working group. The first meeting is to take place week commencing 11th July 2022.

A question was raised asking if the working group would consider ongoing consultations, and it was thought that it could be problematic given that consultation is a single part of public participation. However, learning from current and recent consultations would be fundamental.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on Monday, 27th June, 2022 at 2.00 pm

It was expressed that encouraging the engagement of younger people is key to the future of MCC.

The following members volunteered to sit on the working group:

County Councillor Laura Wright
County Councillor Armand Watts
County Councillor Tony Kear
County Councillor Angela Sandles

7. To discuss the development of the Forward Work Plan

County Councillor Louise Brown asked that code of conduct and standards of practice between public and officers, public and members be added as an item for the next meeting.

County Councillor Penny Jones added the Timing of Meetings to July 2023.

County Councillor Peter Strong suggested an item to discuss a Social Media Policy.

8. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2021 were approved.

9. Date of next meeting - 26th September 2022 at 14:00pm

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.40 pm

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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

<p>SUBJECT: Elections Act 2022 – Voter ID MEETING: Democratic Services Committee DATE: 26 September 2022 DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All</p>

1. **PURPOSE:**

To provide members with an update on the introduction of the Elections Act 2022 and the impact of the introduction of voter ID in order to cast a vote.

2. **BACKGROUND:**

The Elections Act 2022 (the act) will introduce the need for voters to provide photo identification in order to vote in some elections with effect from May 2023.

The provisions within the act will require voters to provide ID to vote at UK Parliamentary elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. It will not apply to Senedd and local government elections in Wales as responsibility for the administration of those elections is devolved and has not been granted legislative consent to implement the rules in Wales.

Electors will have to show an approved form of photo identification before voting in a polling station. The list is extensive but includes passport, photo driving license, national ID card and immigration document. Student cards, railcards and photocopies of ID (including showing ID on a mobile phone) cannot be accepted. Expired identity documents may be used provided that the photo still resembles a likeness to the voter.

Voters who do not have photo ID available to present at the polling station can apply to the local authority for a free Voter Authority Certificate. Voters will need to complete an application either online or on paper, provide a photo of themselves that meets certain requirements and potentially provide documentary evidence to confirm their identity before the certificate is issued. The deadline to apply for this certificate will be set at 5pm 6 working days before polling day.

Should a voter find their ID lost, stolen, destroyed or damaged beyond use after this deadline then they may apply for an emergency proxy where someone with ID available to them may vote on their behalf.

All certificates will be issued from central government and local authorities will not be able to produce certificates directly to voters. The certificate will have in built security features to prevent reproduction and those templates will not be available to local authorities to issue directly to voters.

All polling stations will need to have a private area within them for electors to provide their identity in private if they wish to do so. This could be a separate room within the polling station or privacy screens will need to be used to cordon off a specific area for this purpose.

Only the presiding officer and poll clerk can inspect the identity document. A presiding officer must refuse to give an elector a ballot paper if they have reasonable doubt that the photographic identification does not look like the elector or if they suspect the document to be forged. The presiding officer's decision is final and may not be questioned in any way.

Other implications in the act include:

- Restricting political parties and campaigners from handling postal votes
- Limiting the number of postal votes that can be handed in at any one time. Number to be confirmed in secondary legislation but expected to be 5 plus the persons own postal vote.
- Electors will not be able to act as a proxy voter for more than four people, of which no more than two can be domestic voters (i.e not overseas or service voters).
- Introduce requirement for voter identity to be checked when applying for a postal vote. The ability to apply for a postal vote online will also be introduced though this method of application and identity check will not apply Senedd and local elections.
- Removal of the 15 year limit on voting rights for British citizens living overseas.

Secondary legislation which will confirm more of the detail of implementation is due to be laid by November 2022.

It is also worth noting that the UK Governments Infrastructure and Projects Authority have rated delivery of the act in their risk register as a high risk. They define the act as: *'Successful delivery of the project appears to be unachievable. There are major issues with the project definition, schedule, budget, quality and/or benefits delivery which at this stage do not appear to be manageable or resolvable. The project may need rescoping and/or its overall viability reassessed.'*

3. KEY ISSUES

The first election in Wales where voter ID will be required will be at the next UK Parliamentary election. The latest date for this election is January 2025 but could be held anytime between now and then. For most local authorities in England the requirement will commence at their local elections in May 2023 which will likely be ahead of the next UK Parliamentary election. The implementation of this requirement in Wales at a UK Parliamentary election will be significant. A parliamentary election has the highest turnout of all elections (approx. 75% compared to 45% at the recent local elections) in Monmouthshire. There is potential for a significant number of voters not being able to

vote for not having the required documentation, even where they may be registered to vote, and will result in accusations of disenfranchisement and potential negative publicity.

The divergence in administration between devolved polls and those legislated for by the UK Government will likely increase confusion amongst voters as to what the requirements are for various polls. This would be especially true if polls were to be combined. For example, if a local government by election was combined on the same day as a UK Parliamentary election, voters would need to show photographic ID in order to vote in the Parliamentary election, but would not need to do so for the local government election and could vote without providing the ID in that poll.

Communicating the requirements to voters will be key to the successful delivery of this project. The Electoral Commission will be responsible for conducting national campaigns to raise awareness to voters. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) who have responsibility in central government for the implementation of the act have confirmed that no funding will be provided to local authorities to communicate in writing with all voters in advance of the poll. The written communication that voters will receive to communicate the requirements will be the poll card that voters usually receive in advance of the poll. It is expected that the poll card will no longer be an A5 card due to the need to communicate the new requirements and provide a list of accepted identity as well as provide information bilingually. DLUHC have confirmed funding will be provided to cover an A4 poll card however this may not be sufficient for Welsh authorities. Any other communications will need to be funded by local authorities for a national election.

There are concerns around the impact of centrally provided identity documents and the potential for those items not to be delivered to electors in time for polling day, particularly where they apply for identity close to the deadline. In those instances the voter can apply for an emergency proxy to allow someone else to vote on their behalf even though the voter will have taken all the steps necessary to allow them to vote in person themselves. Where applications are made in person there would be an expectation that voters could take their certificate with them at that time but this will not be possible.

A review of the polling stations used at elections will be required to ensure that all polling stations have suitable space to allow for the checking of identity documents or construction of a private area within it. This may result in some polling stations closing and voters being redirected to their nearest suitable polling station.

There will be a significant administrative burden on the local authority due to the new requirements. Local authorities will be required to check all applications for identity that are received, follow up on any issues with applications and approve them for printing. This is on top of already administratively heavy processes, particularly at a UK Parliamentary election where turnout is higher, including processing

applications to register to vote, processing duplicate registration applications, processing postal/proxy voting applications that increase significantly once poll cards are delivered and answer general queries from voters on where to vote, confirmation of registration etc. Polling station staff will require extensive training on the new rules to ensure they are delivered accurately and additional workloads may also lead to increased levels of pay required to attract individuals to perform those duties.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

All costs associated with an election are normally met by the government with responsibility for setting the election. Some funding arrangements are in place to support the delivery of the act from DLUHC including additional costs for poll cards and purchase of equipment for polling stations. Crucially, any additional communications work that local authorities wish to undertake will not be funded centrally and will need to be met by local authorities.

Additionally, funding arrangements are on a blanket approach across the UK so whilst authorities in Wales do not have elections scheduled for 2023, claims for funds and purchase of equipment will need to be made towards the end of this financial year and early into next year for any justification led bids for funds outside the scope of items already accounted for.

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

None.

5. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

6. AUTHOR:

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DEMOCRATIC SERVICES FORWARD WORK PLAN

26TH SEPTEMBER 2022	
Code of Conduct/Standards of Practice – public/officers & public/members	Clr Brown
21ST NOVEMBER 2022	
20TH MARCH 2023	
JUNE 2023	
Timing of Council Meetings	John Pearson

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