

**MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held at  
Caldicot Comprehensive School, on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 at 2.00 p.m.**

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

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

Also in attendance County Councillors A. Easson and P.A. Fox.

Representatives of Caldicot Comprehensive School.

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mrs T. Harry	-	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Mr M. Gatehouse	-	Policy and Performance Manager
Mrs A. Barton	-	Communication and Engagement Manager
Mr J. Pearson	-	Local Democracy Manager
Mrs S. King	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors P. Clarke, D. Evans and S. Howarth.

The Chairman welcomed all in attendance and introductions were provided.

**2. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

There were no questions raised during the public open forum.

**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 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

We noted that actions would be discussed within an item at the end of the meeting.

**5. LEADER OF MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

We welcomed the Leader of Monmouthshire County Council and we discussed various issues, which included challenge by Councillors, the recent government white paper and scrutiny.

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee  
Dated 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 - continued**

We were provided with an overview of the Council, Cabinet structure and political representation. The Leader highlighted that the Council had changed and there was a need to deliver services with reduced resource base.

During discussion we noted the following points:

- A member asked whether any developments could be made in the area of scrutiny. In response, there had been a consistency of strength across the organisation and governance required a strong scrutiny function. The checks and balances were in place, the strong and credible scrutiny aspect added value. The maturity of the relationship had developed and improved. Policies had been developed through effective scrutiny, however, it was recognised that time and resource was an issue.
- The Scrutiny Champion outlined that scrutiny was the challenge and ensuring value for money in making the right decisions. Scrutiny inquiries would be undertaken through effective challenge, appropriate witnesses, training and end results.
- The Democratic Services Committee were responsible for ensuring that appropriate democratic process was in place and that there was openness and transparency in decision making.
- Scrutiny members would undertake their roles in an impartial and non-political manner. We recognised the importance of scrutiny and the process was enhanced through recommendations made by committees to Cabinet.
- We discussed the white paper and noted that the authority would be affected by reduced funding and cuts to the WLGA. Training had been provided by the WLGA and the grant would no longer be available. However, we were reminded that there were still opportunities for development for members.
- We discussed opportunities for new members and increased diversity amongst the Council.
- The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services informed the committee that a training programme could be developed and information would need to be submitted by members by the end of the financial year. It was suggested that role descriptions could be considered as part of the development.
- We recognised the Hub as a key tool for information to be obtained.
- The committee reaffirmed that full Council debate was required in relation to the white paper. We agreed that a seminar would be arranged and the issue would be discussed at full Council.

**6. ACTION PLAN FEEDBACK**

We noted updates on actions from the last meeting, as follows:

- We discussed SRS 7 day support, which would be at a cost of £30,000 and agreed that the Chair would contact members with preliminary questions regarding problems that had occurred with IT.
- The name would be obtained of a database management software system used.
- We requested that details of meetings could be displayed in reception at County Hall, Usk.

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee  
Dated 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 - continued**

- Updates had been provided on issues within the chamber and we recognised that issues relating to heating were ongoing.
- Development of the telephone directory was ongoing.
- Dates for members promoting democracy had been agreed.

**7. Q & A – COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER**

We welcomed the Communications and Engagement Manager who advised that there were three key objectives to the communication and engagement role, which consisted of:

- Target audiences – driving advocacy and celebrating Monmouthshire County Council as a whole.
- Income generation – challenges through budget pressures.
- Making colleagues feel part of it – Members and Officers

The website had been updated and a study had been commissioned to compare current and previous websites of the authority. Focus groups would be held and officers welcomed member feedback.

Member pages had been updated and members were invited to advise Democratic Services, to add/update further details. A template for member details would be compiled by the Communications and Democratic Services team.

We recognised that there was a protocol required when press releases were issued on behalf of Monmouthshire County Council.

Members requested that training sessions were provided in relation to use of the Hub.

We requested further information and updates on the Royal Welsh Show and Eisteddfod plans.

**8. DEMONSTRATION OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION (THE HUB)**

We welcomed the Policy and Performance Manager and received a presentation on policy and performance data on the Hub.

The demonstration provided guidance for members to access the data hub, performance information, service plans, pyramid of plans and risk assessments. Each key service area would have its own dashboard, indicators and strategic documents would be displayed.

During discussion we noted the following points:

- We recognised that the Hub would be a useful tool in enabling access to information for members.
- It was suggested that training sessions or a seminar was held regarding the Hub.

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee  
Dated 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 - continued**

**9. WLGA CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

We received the WLGA Continuing Professional Development for Councillors 2015.

It was noted that the report was draft for consultation and we agreed that the item would be deferred to the next meeting, where responses would be presented by members.

**10. VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

We agreed that the next meeting would be held in County Hall, Usk.

**11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held at County Hall, Usk on **Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015 at 2.00pm.**

**The meeting ended at 4.25 p.m.**