

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on Monday, 12th March, 2018 at 2.00 pm

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

County Councillors: D. Dovey, G. Howard, J. Treharne,
S. Woodhouse, F. Taylor and J. Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance
Sarah Jones	Principal Planning Policy Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. Public open forum

There were no matters for the public open forum.

3. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 15th January 2018

The minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on 15th January 2018 were approved and signed by the Chair.

4. To receive for information the final Independent Remuneration Panel report for 2018/19

The Local Democracy Manager presented, for information, the Independent Remuneration Panel report for 2018/19.

It was clarified that Chairs of committees would no longer be paid under two separate bands.

The Committee accepted the report, which will be presented to May 2018 Council.

5. Council Diary 2018/19

The Local Democracy Manager presented the draft diary of meetings for 2018/19.

It was recognised that the inclusion of certain meetings of outside bodies was helpful but this was not a legal requirement and subject to change.

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Members raised the issue of meetings being held outside of school term times. Meetings were held during term time where possible but occasionally meetings did fall in a school holiday period.

Frustrations were expressed around meetings being called at short notice and change of dates. It was asked that this be avoided.

The Committee resolved to agree the report and recommend to Council.

6. Governance and decision making

The Head of Policy and Governance presented a report to provide the committee with an update on arrangements to improve the transparency of decision-making and ensure that arrangements for making decisions are robust and fit for the future.

During discussion it was asked if a summary report could be provided at the beginning of more lengthy reports. The Head of Governance responded that it is important to be mindful of who would summarise the reports, but if reports are not worded effectively then there is a problem with the quality of reports.

Councillor Howard highlighted the difficulties for working Members to attend Member workshops, given the usual start times.

Frustrations were expressed around the use of acronyms.

The Committee resolved to accept the report.

7. Involvement and Local Democracy

The Head of Policy and Governance presented a report to provide the Committee with an update on issues of involvement in local democracy.

It had been agreed at a previous meeting that a small working group would be established who would look at a couple of topics and use those as a pilot plan to involve communities.

The Chair suggested that those Members interested let him know following the meeting.

The Committee resolved to accept the report.

8. Members IT Issues

The Local Democracy Manager advised of a survey issued to all members to identify IT issues. There had not been a great response but overall feedback:

- Generally happy with equipment but would appreciate further training in certain areas.
- Split decision on the provision of mobile phones.
- Happy with the support from Democratic Services and SRS.
- Contact information would be provided by Democratic Services.

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Members discussed the provision of mobile phones. It was understood there were issues around locations and consideration could be given to other options via the tablet. Training would be arranged for the soft phone option.

9. Coordinating Role

Members were asked to consider if they wished to be sighted on Audit reports. It was decided that reports could be received for information.

10. MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SCHEME

The Head of Planning, Housing and Place Shaping presented a report the purpose being to seek comment from the Democratic Services Committee on the draft LDP Community Involvement Scheme.

The Chair recognised the importance of the document and commended officers on the report layout in comparison to previous years.

In response to a question regarding community engagement officers explained that in terms of engaging with Councillors an idea is to have a Members steering group. There may be some bespoke pieces of work divided between committees. Other areas of engagement include Engage2Change, Social Media and Cluster Groups.

Members suggested going into schools and talking to young people directly. It was agreed this could tie in with geography curriculum.

There were concerns regarding the lack of activity on the Monmouthshire Made Open platform, and that this may not be an appropriate tool for engagement. A separate planning twitter account would also be used.

It was questioned if we could pilot a Neighbourhood Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Social Justice welcomed the report and recognised the plan as comprehensive, demonstrating a willingness and desire to want to engage as far and widely as possible. She added that all Elected Members and community representatives have a role to play going forward.

The Committee resolved to accept the report.

11. Council and Cabinet Forward Work Plan

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Noted.

12. Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

Noted.

13. To note the date and time of next meeting as 23rd April 2018 at 2pm

Noted.

The meeting ended at 11.05am