

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on Monday, 23rd April, 2018 at 2.00 pm

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

County Councillors: D. Dovey, L. Dymock, L. Jones, 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
Kyle Brown	Digital Programme Coordinator
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors G. Howard

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public Open Forum

County Councillor A. Eason was in attendance and addressed the Committee with concerns regarding the conduct of Members at the SACRE Committee, particularly following the meeting held on 9th June 2017.

Councillor Woodhouse referred to GDPR and advised that there had been enquiries from voluntary organisations. She asked if there was some way to provide these organisations with access to information. The Local Democracy Manager agreed to look into this further.

Councillor Dymock requested clarity on dealing with unpleasant or aggressive behaviours from certain members of the public. Members agreed this to be a significant matter, and were advised that WLGA have issued safety documents which would be distributed. Personal safety training sessions are to be arranged.

3. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2018

The minutes were approved and signed by the chair.

4. Demonstration of Remote Working Security / Members IT issues

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The Digital Programme Coordinator presented members with a demonstration on the next steps in remote working. Further changes will take place week commencing 14th May 2018, and further guidance will be issued closer to the time.

5. Process of democratic oversight of Evaluation

The Head of Policy and Governance explained that Democratic Services Committee have a remit to review the adequacy of the arrangements in place to discharge democratic services functions.

In September 2017 the Council report template was amended to include a section on evaluation, in response to feedback received from Wales Audit Office. It was explained that presently Democratic Services colleagues, alongside Business Support Officers have started to keep a log of the decisions going through and those decisions when the evaluation is to come through. It was proposed that those reports should be made available to the meeting that made the initial decision, and that Democratic Services Committee Members have access to a log of the decisions made that require an evaluation. This would enable us to keep an overview of that log in terms of forming a view of the effectiveness of decision making arrangements. Before a firm proposal was to be put in place Members' opinions were welcome.

Members commented on what was considered a sensible proposal, recognising the importance of being able to reflect on whether decisions made have been effective.

6. Summary reports and Future Generations Evaluation

Following a discussion at Full Council the Head of Policy and Governance presented a verbal report on Future Generation Evaluations, and the suggested introduction of summary reports. He questioned if officers are providing Members enough information to get a sense of what is going on around the organisation?

Members recognised that a brief upfront summary would be useful, and lead to greater clarity.

An officer panel is in place to look at after the event quality assurance, and to ensure mitigating proposals are in place rather than being an afterthought.

Training for officers around report writing, and for members around challenging is necessary.

The Head of Policy and Governance welcomed comments from Members away from the meeting environment.

7. Scrutiny Forward Work Plan

We received the Scrutiny Forward Workplan for information.

Members were made aware of an initial officer meeting around City Deal which proposed to establish a formal joint overview and scrutiny committee of City Deal which would require a representative of this Council to sit on the committee. This will be taken through the scrutiny process via Economy and Development Select, and then to Council.

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8. Scrutiny Self-Evaluation

The Scrutiny Manager presented the Scrutiny Self-Evaluation completed in November 2017 to ensure Members have an awareness of the findings of the report, specifically any issues identified which may relate to the responsibilities of this committee.

Following the presentation comments were welcomed.

A Member suggested an area of focus in relation to this Committee was public engagement in scrutiny and democracy, recognising we had previously discussed ways of getting the public involved. There was enthusiasm to find more ways to involve public engagement. The Scrutiny Manager did not necessarily think that scrutiny meetings were the best forum for public engagement, but other ways of engagement should be considered.

The Council Chamber in Usk, was not considered a good environment to encourage public engagement.

The Head of Policy and Democracy referred to the setting up of a working group, as previously discussed.

9. Engagement of the Democratic Services Committee around ADM Management Agreement

Item deferred.

10. Coordinating Role

We understood coordination had been covered through previous items.

Automation is a future focus, we agreed to invite the Chair of Economy and Development Select to the next meeting.

11. Council and Cabinet Work Plan

We noted the Council and Cabinet Workplan.

12. To note the date of next meeting as 4th June 2018 at 14:00pm

We noted the date of the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 4:20pm