

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at Conference Room - Usk, NP15 1AD on Wednesday, 5th June, 2019 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Watkins (Chairman)
County Councillor D. Evans (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: M.Groucutt, J.Treharne and S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors G. Howard

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Councillor Watkins thanked Members for the opportunity to Chair the Committee, and asked for nominations for Vice-Chair.

Councillor Davies nominated Councillor D. Evans, which was seconded by Councillor Woodhouse. Upon being put to the vote, Councillor Evans was appointed as Vice Chair.

2. Staffing Changes: Committee, Scrutiny and Member Support

The Head of Policy and Governance presented a report to provide an overview of proposed staffing changes in the local democracy and scrutiny functions to increase scrutiny capacity, provide more direct support for members and improve the robustness of forward planners which will enable the council to involve more people in local democracy.

Members considered the report ahead of a single member decision on 12th June 2019.

During discussion the following points were raised:

Members agreed with the importance of additional support for the scrutiny function, and questioned if there would be any training implications. It was confirmed this would be an open recruitment process, with what would be hoped to be an attractive salary.

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Members requested positive assurance that this structure was not being used as a way to remove staff. There were concerns around possible hidden budget cuts around the removal of staff.

There were concerns around the idea of looking to move 3 posts to create 2 and a question was asked if staff have been told they, or the post is being made redundant. The Officer explained that there are HR issues and sensitivity around the matter. There is no specific individual involved but there will be a human element. The structure means 2.5 posts will become 2, and those involved would be placed at risk and asked to register an interest for the new positions.

Concerns were raised that this was being discussed today yet the report is currently on the agenda for Individual Cabinet Member Decision. Members questioned the democratic process, and highlighted that this restructure will affect the services provided to councillors yet Members have not been consulted.

It was explained that the Senior Democracy Officer will take responsibility for Business Support and the intention would be that those officers would take on roles within the Democratic Services area. Members questioned this as Business Support Officers already have their own workload and this would increase pressures.

Members felt the process had been mishandled.

The Head of Policy and Government explained that in terms of process structural changes, under the responsibility of departmental budgets are ICMDs. This report was brought to Democratic Services Committee as it relates to the Committee. However this level of change could be made under the delegated responsibility of officers.

The Chair questioned the intention to make Select minutes shorter and concise, relying on the live stream, with no minutes being taken in the meeting. She questioned the intention that Committee Officers would be watching the live stream following the meeting to record the minutes. She highlighted the possibility of live stream issues and the need for officer action within the meeting. In response we heard that the Democratic Services team will continue to set up the live stream technology and be on hand via skype to resolve issues.

Members urged that the model is reconsidered and brought back with no reduction to staff. Also that the suggestion to create notes rather than minutes at Select Committee meetings is reconsidered.

On being asked, the Head of Policy and Governance stated that he believed that the proposal would improve democratic accountability.

In terms of the minutes, it was suggested that a trial be undertaken in the new format. It was agreed that the legal department should be consulted with regards to legal requirements around minutes of meetings.

A Member questioned the robustness of the live streaming system, as this would be relied upon to provide an accurate record of a meeting.

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To conclude, the Chair confirmed that:

- The Committee were in favour of more provision within Scrutiny,
- The Committee were not in support of a reduction within the Democratic Services function.
- The Committee requested that the new minute format be trialled for a six month period, subject to confirmation on the legal aspect of minute/note taking.
- The Committee would be more comfortable with the decision going to Cabinet rather than ICMD, and suggested the decision may be called-in.

3. Member Training and Development: Verbal Update - Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and Governance

The Head of Policy and Governance referred to an emerging issue last year regarding the diversity of councillors and transferable skills. Also reference was made to ensuring resources are clearly signposted on the Hub. The matter was added to the agenda to ensure this remains in people's minds and that Members feedback on any gaps identified.

The Scrutiny Manager highlighted some challenges around arrangements of training, explaining that dates are being identified for shared training with other authorities.

A bespoke scrutiny training session is to be arranged, as well as future generations training to help all members regarding implications of decisions.

In terms of conferences and training events, the Local Democracy Manager agreed to look at the training budget, and would provide information at the following meeting.

4. Change of Terms of Reference of the Public Services Board Select Committee ~ to consider the report and to identify any governance implications.

The Head of Policy and Governance presented a report suggesting a change to the title and the terms of reference of the Public Service Board Select Committee, in order to broaden its remit which will provide enhanced governance arrangements for services delivered to Monmouthshire citizens.

Members welcomed the proposals given the requirement for scrutiny on some of the partnership organisations.

The proposal would bring forward a broader remit and could encourage improved attendance.

Members discussed the opportunities to co-opt members.

Upon voting, Members resolved to agree the recommendations:

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- That the Democratic Services Committee consider the changes proposed below, which will require an alteration to the Council's Constitution and make any appropriate recommendations on governance implications.
- The recommendations for the Public Service Board Select Committee and for Council are:

i. To change the title of the existing "Public Service Board Select Committee" to "Public Services Select Committee" for reasons outlined in this report.

ii. To revise the existing Terms of Reference to extend the Select Committee's remit as follows:

- **Scrutinise and constructively challenge (where powers allow) the work and effectiveness of strategic partnerships (including the Public Service Board) and other public service providers to ensure public accountability of collaborative services and improved outcomes for people in Monmouthshire, through:**

a) considering evidence and different views and perspectives on public service provision in order to make recommendations on improving services delivered to residents

b) influencing the decisions, policy and practice of public service providers by providing a platform for greater accountability and democratic involvement

5. Member Briefings: Verbal Update - Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and Governance

The Head of Policy and Governance asked for a Members perspective on the circulated Members briefing.

Members considered the information useful and were happy for the process to continue.

Councillor Woodhouse added that a hard directory of staff would be useful.

The Scrutiny Manager advised that there would be a series of scrutiny briefings taking place in the upcoming months.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm