

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held at Remote Meeting on Monday, 15th March, 2021 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: P. Clarke, D. Evans, M.Groucutt, G. Howard,
J.Treharne, J.Watkins and S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson
Nicola Perry
Matthew Gatehouse

Local Democracy Manager
Senior Democracy Officer
Head of Policy and Governance

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No matters for the public open forum.

3. Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales – Annual Report 2021/2022

The Local Democracy Manager presented the report to the Committee. In doing so it was noted that there were no changes between the draft report and final version. The biggest change to note is that the cap on care allowance has been removed, and changes in how Members can apply for the allowance.

The Committee resolved to accept the report.

4. Hybrid Meetings and Area Committees

The Head of Policy and Governance presented a report to provide the committee with an opportunity to debate the timescales and approach for hybrid meetings, re-starting Area Committees and the most effective format for these.

A discussion had been held with the Chairs of Area Committees and there remains a strong appetite for the meetings to restart.

The paper proposed a sub-group of Democratic Services Committee is established to look at the issue of Area Committees and whether the North Monmouthshire approach should be rolled out to the other committees, or we continue with different arrangements in each area.

The Local Democracy Manager explained that requirement to live stream Area Committees has been removed, which would hopefully reduce some of the issues with external participants involved.

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Results of a survey to Members on their wishes regarding the status of meetings seemed to state that Members should be able to decide how they wish to attend a meeting, be that in person or remotely.

Members were invited to comment.

- It was suggested that Area Committees begin following the AGM in May 2021.
- Suggestion that some smaller committees take place face to face in County Hall, and this should be phased in after May 2021
- The Chair of North Monmouthshire Area Committee was in attendance for the item and expressed her desire to keep the area committee, as one place for local people to interact with Councillors.
- Encouragement of virtual attendance at Area Committees might better serve the purpose of the meetings.
- Timings of meetings – maybe look at evening meetings?
- A sub-group should include Area Committee Chairs.
- Planning Committee should be held in Chamber as soon as possible.
- Remote meetings are effective in terms of the Climate Emergency.

The Head of Policy and Governance confirmed that the sub-group should consist of the current Area Committee Chairs, Cllrs Evans, Webb, Treharne and Powell. Members of the Committee welcomed the opportunity. Cllrs Jones, Howard, Groucutt and Watkins were happy to join.

The Committee resolved to accept the recommendation:

That members consider the meetings that should continue fully remotely and those which should operate as hybrid meetings, in the event that stay at home restrictions are lifted in the coming months.

To form a sub-group of this committee to explore the most effective approach for Area Committees in future.

5. Elections 2022 Discussion

The Local Democracy Manager opened a discussion on 2022 Election. This will remain as a standing agenda item going forward

Ideas were sought on how to advertise to potential candidates and how best to highlight that timings of meetings are not fixed.

It was noted that feedback on the 2017 induction programme showed it to be too heavy a programme, too soon following the election. We could now consider how best to factor in remote training sessions.

Other areas for consideration include how best to interact with potential candidates.

A comment was made that interaction with potential candidates in terms of explaining processes and what to expect would be beneficial.

Suggestion was made that we consider providing IT equipment that meets specific needs.

In terms of timings of induction sessions, suggestion was made that new members receive separate sessions.

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6. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2021

The minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on 18th January 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

7. To note next meeting date as Monday 7th June 2021 at 14:00pm

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm