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County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Friday, 17 June 2022

Notice of meeting

Democratic Services Committee

Monday, 27th June, 2022 at 2.00 pm,
Council Chamber, County Hall, Usk

AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	To note the appointment of County Councillor David Jones as Chair	
2.	To appoint a Vice Chair	
3.	Apologies for absence	
4.	Declarations of interest	
5.	Induction Feedback	Verbal Report
6.	Timing of Council Meetings	1 - 8
7.	Public Participation Strategy	Verbal Report
8.	To discuss the development of the Forward Work Plan	Verbal Report
9.	To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2021	9 - 12
10.	Date of next meeting - 26th September 2022 at 14:00pm	

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive / Prif Weithredwr

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

County Councillor Louise Brown	Shirenewton;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Tomos Dafydd Davies	Llanfoist & Govilon;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Meirion Howells	Llanbadoc & Usk;	Independent Group
County Councillor David Jones	Crucorney;	Independent Group
County Councillor Penny Jones	Raglan;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Tony Kear	Llanbadoc & Usk;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Su McConnel	Croesonen;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Angela Sandles	Magor East with Undy;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Maria Stevens	Severn;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Peter Strong	Rogiet;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Armand Watts	Bulwark and Thornwell;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Laura Wright	Grofield;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru

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Welsh Language

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public through the medium of Welsh or English. We respectfully ask that you provide us with adequate notice to accommodate your needs.

Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Our purpose

Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities

Objectives we are working towards

- Giving people the best possible start in life
- A thriving and connected county
- Maximise the Potential of the natural and built environment
- Lifelong well-being
- A future focused council

Our Values

Openness. We are open and honest. People have the chance to get involved in decisions that affect them, tell us what matters and do things for themselves/their communities. If we cannot do something to help, we'll say so; if it will take a while to get the answer we'll explain why; if we can't answer immediately we'll try to connect you to the people who can help – building trust and engagement is a key foundation.

Fairness. We provide fair chances, to help people and communities thrive. If something does not seem fair, we will listen and help explain why. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently. We cannot always make everyone happy, but will commit to listening and explaining why we did what we did.

Flexibility. We will continue to change and be flexible to enable delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

Teamwork. We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved so we can achieve great things together. We don't see ourselves as the 'fixers' or problem-solvers, but we will make the best of the ideas, assets and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

Kindness: We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

REPORT

SUBJECT:	TIMING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS
MEETING:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
DATE:	27th June 2022
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	N/A

1. PURPOSE:

To put forward recommendations to Council on suitable timings of future Council meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Democratic Services Committee agree a set of options on the timing of future Council meetings.

That those options are put forward to the next Full Council meeting for debate and to agree the most suitable option for future meetings.

That the Democratic Services Committee recommend to Council that it remains the discretion of each committee as to the time of the meetings that best suits the members of that committee.

3. REASONS:

Each local authority is required to review the times at which council meetings are held at least once in every term of the Council.

Guidance from the Welsh Government state that as a rule of thumb meetings will be held at times, intervals and locations that are convenient to the majority of members and that the Council should be willing to make changes to their pattern of working in order to retain new councillors with outside responsibility. Councils should also consider rotating meeting times due to the impossibility of pleasing all of their members all of the time.

4. KEY ISSUES:

The requirement to review the timing of council meetings was introduced as part of the Local Government Wales Measure in 2011 and a review of these arrangements was carried out under the previous Council. All councillors last term were surveyed as to their preferences at that time and details of the responses to that survey can be found at appendix A.

Much of the issues that members raised in that survey are still relevant today and have been included in this report to help give members of the committee and understanding of the issues members face. The responses also show that no matter the outcome, the decision will never appease all members.

Under the previous survey members were given the options of a start time of 10:00, 14:00, 16:00 and 19:00 with any other recommendations/comments welcome.

Whilst no time preference stood out from the responses, the main themes in the responses were meeting times clashing with full time employment, the difficulty in obtaining childcare outside normal working hours and the need for members to attend other meetings of external bodies including community/town councils in the evening as well as meet with residents who would otherwise be in work. Additionally, during the last term, group meetings were held prior to Council which if held at 10:00 may require members to convene twice on separate days rather than hold these meetings prior to Council.

There are three main considerations that should be given to the timing of the meetings; the ability for members to attend the meeting whether in person or remotely, the ability for members of the public to participate in the meeting and engage in local democracy and the desirability of meeting times to potential new councillors.

It should also be noted that under previous reviews, the ability for councillors and members of the public to participate in meetings remotely was not an option and this method of interacting with council meetings may have a bearing on the time meetings are held going forward.

At the request of Council in 2016, it was trialled that three Council meetings in the summer months (May AGM, June and July) would be held at 5pm. Following those meetings it would revert back to 2pm for the winter period. There was little impact at those meetings in terms of attendance with levels similar at the meetings prior to and following the summer months. Additionally, during those meetings only 1 question was put to Council from a member of the public.

It should also be noted that meetings of the Council are not held in August nor arranged during school holidays unless there is exceptional circumstances in which they need to be held.

The committee should also consider whether to offer a recommendation for the start time of just full council and leave individual committees with flexibility to determine its own start time based on the membership of each committee.

5. PROPOSALS

Given the reasoning above, it is proposed that this committee considers the timings and evidence below and put forward a

recommendation to Council as to the preferred timing of Full Council meetings. The committee does not need to use the below times exactly but the periods offer a reflection on the issues members face during the day.

10:00am

Positives

Early start for members meaning meetings will not go on in to evenings and potentially clash with personal life and other commitments.

Potential for members who have children in school to attend meetings without impacting on childcare.

Members potentially more alert at meetings during the day than longer meetings which may drag on into the evening.

Easier to allow for breaks during long meetings as time is available to finish the agenda.

Negatives

Members in full time employment required to take full day annual leave to attend meetings.

Difficult for members of the public in full time employment to attend meetings and contribute to the proceedings.

Group meetings may need to be arranged at another time as there will not be time to hold these prior to the meeting meaning members need to make themselves available twice.

14:00

Positives

Familiarity for members and the public that Council meetings always have started at 14:00

Meetings that start at 14:00 can allow for members to travel directly to another meeting of an external body.

Group meetings can be accommodated on the same day as Council.

Negatives

Longer meetings of Council can go on in to the evening.

Still requires members working full time to take annual leave to attend meetings.

16:00

Positives

Meetings can go on late in to the evening with members potentially reluctant to have a break to finish the meeting as soon as possible.

Members of the public could attend, particularly where public forum items could be moved to later on the agenda.

- Negatives
- Members still required to take leave if group meetings are held prior to the Council meeting.
 - Childcare can be difficult to arrange for members outside normal working hours.
 - Traffic issues at that time of day getting to County Hall particularly around schools.

19:00

- Positives
- Meetings at this time would not impact on those members in full time work.
 - Potentially more engagement with members of the public with meetings held outside normal working hours.

- Negatives
- Members who sit on outside bodies and community/town councils may have clashes in their diaries that other times would less likely impact upon.

Longer meetings of the Council could go on late into the night impacting on members and officers abilities to fully concentrate on the proceedings.

Meetings held in the winter months mean members travelling in the dark and sometimes dangerous weather conditions.

Difficulty for members with childcare needs to arrange this into the evening where they are unable to rely on family.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

No resource implications

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

There are no sustainability implications of the timing of meetings. However working members may be adversely affected by a council meeting start time between the normal office working hours of 9 am to 5 pm.

8. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

Where members have governor responsibilities meetings which start at 5pm or later may interfere with their ability to attend meetings of their governing body.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Local Government Wales Measure 2011 and supplementary Welsh Government statutory guidance.

10. CONSULTEES:

All members surveyed during the last term of the Council.

11. AUTHOR:

John Pearson, Local Democracy Manager
Email: johnpearson@monmouthshire.gov.uk
Telephone: 01633 644978

Appendix A – Survey responses.

Extracts from comments received:

- “I am a full-time mother and have a full time job. The current timings of the Council meetings are, from a personal perspective, incredibly difficult to manage...I do not believe we will ever have inclusive democracy if we do not change the times of meetings to encourage greater participation – both in terms of those wishing to become Councillors and the public who wish to attend meetings. The majority of people of non-retired age have to work, the timings of the current meetings means that there is always a financial penalty involved.... I strongly believe that we need to change the times of our meetings to ensure that we have diversity across our Councillors and thus ensuring we have a participative Council which represents all interests.”
- “The timing of local government meetings must take into account parental responsibilities if the Monmouthshire County Council is serious about overcoming the demographic deficit.” Change is absolutely necessary if we want younger parents to take an active part in local government.”
- “When newly elected, a Councillor may have a fulltime job. Most Induction sessions have been during the day which means that Councillors have to take days off or rely on lenient employers. Committee meetings etc throughout the day may be off- putting to potential candidates, especially younger people who may also have young families.” My concern is that the majority of candidates will be older and retired thus preventing diversity within the Council”
- “I have voluntary, outside body meetings in the evenings. Also all town council projects, full and planning are held in the evenings. I believe that if members are taking their allowance that they should treat it as a real job and attend meetings during the daytime.”
- “I believe that County Council meetings should be held during the daytime, because members have to attend other meetings i.e. Governors, Town & Community Council, outside interest meetings also ward business, which needs to be dealt with when their constituents are themselves at home from work, in the evenings. I know this might deter those who are in full time employment from becoming Councillors, but if their work time is so full during the daytime, they would not be able to give enough time to being a County Councillor successfully, anyway. Also I feel it is unfair on Council officers to have to work evenings when they may need to spend time with their families.”
- “Many meetings called by local organisations in the area one represents are evening meetings, these give you an opportunity to listen and take part in local issues. Most residents are in employment and to meet them the preferred time is in the evening.”

- “I need to fit my council work hours around my 9-5 employment. Although I have reduced my working hours to accommodate my council role and give flexibility, regular day time meetings has meant I have needed to take annual leave to attend meetings and training. I do not mean to have all meetings at 4.00 but if they could at least be varied as I am aware other councillors prefer other times due to differing commitments. 4.00pm allows me to attend work and get back in time to any meetings without needing to take regular annual leave.”
- “I think the committees themselves should evaluate their membership and if required should try to facilitate the needs of individuals if possible.”
- “I work full-time, which makes it extremely difficult for me to attend council meetings in the day. As a newly elected councillor, I am also excluded from every training session, because they are also all held in the day. I feel the current timings discourage people in full-time employment from becoming a councillor.”
- “I would prefer meetings to be either early or late in the day, since that minimises the disruption to the working day.... However I think the question is wrongly directed. Surely, if we want our residents to engage with the Council, we should be asking about the best time for them, not us.”
- “Evening meetings take place with the Community Councils in the area that I represent.”
- Where a meeting starts at 4.00pm there are difficulties with arranging childcare due to the uncertainty about the time the meeting will end.
- “Main choice 1000hrs. Meetings starting at 4pm means you have to leave your employment at least an hour prior to meeting in view of many schools finishing at 3pm. Traffic around town villages increased if you want to arrive earlier again more school traffic in the area and time wasted. Some training briefings need to be completed these could be done later in the afternoon; after 4.30pm this cuts out school traffic.”
- “I have opted for 10am, as if as I do you have primary caring responsibility for a child then being able to drop them to school, attend a meeting and be home in time to pick them up is very important. Whilst I understand the need to try an operate so that members of the public can attend area committees for example, 7pm is bedtime and if you have to travel to get to a meeting then whilst on an occasional basis this is fine it would be tricky all the time.... In addition to childcare responsibilities I also work 21hrs a week and fitting it all in is a juggling act.”

Timing of Full Council Meetings - Wales

Authority	Time of County Council Meeting
Blaenau Gwent	10:00:00
Carmarthenshire CC	10:00:00
Denbighshire	10:00:00
Pembrokeshire	10:00:00
Torfaen CBC	10:00:00
Conwy CBC	10:00:00
Ceredigion CC	10:00:00
Powys CC	10:30:00
Gwynedd CC	13:00:00
Anglesey	14:00:00
Flintshire	14:00:00
Neath Port Talbot	14:30:00
Cardiff City Council	14:30:00
Bridgend CC	15:00:00
Wrexham CBC	16:00:00
Caerphilly CBC	17:00:00
Newport Council	17:00:00
Rhondda Cynon Taf	17:00:00
Swansea City Council	17:00:00
Merthyr Tydfil	17:30:00
Vale of Glamorgan	18:00:00

Public Document Pack **Agenda Item 9**

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 8th November, 2021 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)

County Councillors: C.Edwards, M.Groucutt, J.Treharne, J.Watkins
and A. Easson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Kyle Brown	Digital Service Designer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors P. Clarke, M.Feakins, G. Howard, D. Jones and S. Woodhouse

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. For information - Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Report 2022/23

The Committee received the IRPW Draft Report 2022/23.

The Local Democracy Manager explained that he and the Chair were to attend a session with the Remuneration Panel the following day and highlighted a few key changes within the report.

The main change related to the increase in members salary. The argument for the uplift was that members pay had not been increased with inflation for a number of years and given the local elections next year, aims to entice new candidates.

Members were welcomed to provide comments to be relayed to the Remuneration Panel.

County Councillor Easson noted that it was not appropriate for officers to comment on the draft report.

It was noted that member's salaries are paid through the Council budget.

It was agreed that the increase would encourage people to stand for Council and that paying people appropriately should attract competent people.

The Local Democracy Manager would provide any further information and feedback following the session with the Remuneration Panel.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 8th November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

3. Members ICT Options & Survey Response

The Local Democracy Manager presented the report to consider the responses to the members ICT survey distributed following the last Democratic Services Committee meeting and consider the options available for councillors for the next term.

In considering the responses to the survey and in discussion with the digital team, the below two devices were considered the most suitable devices for members for the next term.

1. Microsoft Surface Pro 8 Surface Pro 8 – The current surface pro 4 has a 12” screen. The new model has a larger 13” screen and less unused space around the screen so it maximises its screen space in relation to its size. The weight of the device is 891 grams. Downside of this device is that it is still a tablet and some members prefer a laptop. A positive with the surface pro model is that, in the majority of cases, the tablet has remained effective and suitable for the whole term of Council with very few replacements needed. Cost – approx. £950
2. Microsoft Surface Go Laptop New Lightweight Surface Laptop Go – This is the laptop equivalent of the surface pro and is a laptop version of the tablet. It still has a touchscreen but is built into a laptop case, that pushes the weight of the device to 1,110 grams. The screen size is 12.4” so smaller than the latest surface pro device but slightly bigger than the current surface pro model. The performance of the surface go laptop is not as good as the surface pro 8 and may not be sufficient to last the term of Council. It does however have more connections and similar connections to the surface. Cost – approx. £826.79.

Members agreed that the device that would last the term of Council would be better.

It was agreed that members could request a separate monitor should they wish to do so.

There were concerns around current restrictions placed on some user access.

Members were disappointed with the low number of responses to the digital survey.

Members understood the global shortage and recognised the importance of ordering the equipment as soon as possible.

The Local Democracy Manager summarised that we would purchase Microsoft Surface Pro 8 tablets, not mix and match devices, with a possibility for second screens and extra devices as required.

4. Council Chamber - Verbal Update

The Local Democracy Manager provided a progress update on the refurbishment of the Council Chamber.

The work has started on refurbishment of the microphones, integrating Teams into the room and improving on previous problems with sound around the chamber. We will be catering for three more Councillors from 2022, so refurbishments around seating had been undertaken. It was hoped that the work would be completed by the end of the week. The Democratic Services team will then receive training on the new equipment.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 8th November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

The team plan to run some 'dummy sessions' to test the equipment prior to phasing meetings back into the chamber. The intention is to start using the chamber, with full hybrid meetings, from 15th December 2021, at the Cabinet meeting. If the Covid situation remains as it is at present, the aim is to have a certain number, to be confirmed, of members present in the chamber for Council on 16th December 2021.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 6th September 2021

Before approving the minutes, the Chair wished to discuss the voting at the meeting of Council on 4th November 2021, following a number of conversations with Members.

We heard that the Monitoring Officer and Local Democracy Manager had conducted investigations through Office365 to identify the detail behind the votes. Democratic Services Officers can obtain information such as when people join and leave the meeting, and how votes are cast.

The Local Democracy Manager explained that the Committee need to be clear that they are happy with the checks and balances, and processes in place to allow voting in remote and hybrid meetings. He explained that legally you need to 'hear and be heard' within a meeting, but from May 2022 this will be 'seen and be heard'. During Council meetings the Democratic Services Officer and Monitoring Officer keep track of the number of attendees and the number present throughout the meeting, constantly tracking the number of expected votes.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the law recognises that where people are joining meetings remotely technical glitches may occur, people may miss a short part of a debate, and this would not make their vote unreliable.

The Committee resolved to accept the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. Date of next meeting - 17th January 2022 14:00pm

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm

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