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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
Monday, 23rd October, 2017 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

Councillors T.Thomas and L.Dymock

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Open Forum

There were no matters for the public open forum.

4. To consider the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales: Annual Report (draft)

The Head of Policy and Governance presented the committee with the latest draft report for 2018-19 of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW). Members were invited to consider the draft report and decide whether they wished to make any representation to the panel ahead of its consultation deadline on 29th November 2017.

The Committee were able to make recommendations for any amendments to the number of those roles who should receive senior salaries, ahead of a decision by Council at its annual meeting in May 2018.

Members resolved to accept the report with no recommendations.

5. Remote attendance at Council meetings

The Monitoring Officer presented a report regarding remote attendance at Council meetings, and asked Members to consider changes to the constitution that would allow members to take part in meetings remotely.

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Rule 9 in Part 4 of the council's constitution – its "Standing Orders", currently do not allow meetings to take place remotely and the use of facilities to enable compliance with the requirements of section 4 of the Local Government Measure 2011 is prohibited.

We heard that the Local Government Measure 2011 introduced the power for councils to allow remote attendance at council meetings, and sets a number of conditions that must be met to allow a member to attend remotely:

We understood that a trial had been undertaken at a recent meeting of Cabinet, and Council have the power to make changes to the constitution to allow remote access.

Members were to consider which meetings would allow remote access, and as stated in the measure, if 30% physical attendance, would be acceptable.

During discussion we noted the following:

- There were concerns regarding the reliability of the technology
- Some felt that debate should be held in the room, not via a screen.
- The system had no financial implications, being cost neutral.
- Members participating remotely will be able to vote, via indication. Technology not in place for electronic voting.
- The facility would benefit seminars and training sessions.

The Committee resolved to note the contents of the report and refer to Council for debate, to include the views expressed.

6. Developing Participatory Democracy - Monmouthshire Made Open

The Head of Policy and Governance gave a presentation to provide Members with an overview of Monmouthshire Made Open platform.

At the previous meeting, the committee agreed to identify a single issue, perhaps drawn from a range of evidence including the well-being assessment, surveys and previous engagement work and use this as a pilot to test how we can engage in more effective ways.

Members were invited to consider which issues they wish to take forward and how the platform can contribute to their desire to re-invigorate the local democratic process and whether it can play a role in taking forward a single issue.

Further information was requested in terms of opportunities and bringing people together, specifically around what officers were proposing.

A Member suggested that officers hold an index of all volunteers in each community, and if Made Open could be a platform to recognise what those people are doing.

In response to how Members could best 'sell', or take this forward, the Committee were advised to recognise the challenges that can't necessarily be solved by people within the organisation, and to find the right topics to engage people on.

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7. Proposal for engagement pilot

It was agreed at the previous meeting that a group of Members meet to identify issues to work on as a Committee.

County Councillors J. Watkins, S. Woodhouse and D. Evans agreed to form a sub group to work on the engagement pilot. Any developments to be reported back to Committee.

8. Members IT equipment

In response to Members concerns around IT equipment, the Local Democracy Manager agreed to log any issues to identify common problems.

9. County Hall, Usk Car Park Barrier

Members raised concerns regarding the access barrier in County Hall car park, specifically the cost, and who had authorised the installation. A Member referred the problems for disability access. The Deputy Chief Officer agreed to look into a formal response, and Members could then look into alternatives, or how to progress.

Members also mentioned the need for pool cars, and questioned if they are used optimally.

10. Coordination and Direction

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that since the Coordinating Board had ceased, it now falls to Democratic Services Committee to provide the link between Select Committees, Area Committees, the Executive, and Audit Committee. It would be good practice to, periodically, invite these Chairs to meetings for discussion and update.

The Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Policy and Engagement and Local Democracy Manager would meet to outline responsibilities and accountabilities of the Committee, and report back to the next meeting.

11. To confirm the dates of the future meetings.

We noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm

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