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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Monday, 15th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

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

County Councillors: D. Dovey, M.Groucutt and J.Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors L.Dymock, G. Howard, J.Treharne, S. Woodhouse and F. Taylor

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no matters for the public open forum.

3. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

4. Members IT - Issues and resolutions

The Local Democracy Manager presented a list of IT issues reported by elected members. He added that the record would continue to be developed to identify any common themes, and welcomed comments from the Committee.

The Chief Officer added that this remain an agenda item to ensure that we stay on top of the needs and requirements of IT.

With regards to mobile phones we heard that the Surface Pro has the capability but if mobile phones are needed we would need to develop a business case. It was suggested that Members be surveyed regarding communication devices and processes.

ACTION – Survey all Members and report back to April Committee.

5. Report writing, training and standards

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The Chief Officer opened a broad discussion on key aspects of governance, and to identify any issues.

- The Council and Cabinet Forward Work Plan was explained and improvements highlighted.
- A space on the Hub has been created to provide key reporting dates.
- Quality of reports was discussed and feedback welcomed.
- Officer contacts
- Coordination – views of Select Committees.
- The role of Members Secretaries, and what support is needed by Members.

The following Members responses were received:

- A flow chart detailing officer roles would be helpful. The Local Democracy Manager added that if Members provide a list of their most frequent contacts, Democratic Services would provide detail.
- More information about the services of the Members Secretaries would be useful.
- Lack of officer feedback on issues reported was a concern.
- With regards to meeting spaces, the Chamber could be seen as confrontational, so other areas should be considered. In terms of skyping meetings, this is only available in the conference room, and consideration needs to be given to whether investment is needed to move to skype in further areas.

The Committee agreed to follow these items up on at the next meeting.

6. Members' training

The Scrutiny Manager provided an overview of recent training, which included safeguarding and equalities.

A recent training event 'The Role of the Modern Councillor' had been a useful session, conducted by an experienced outside trainer. Members had found this very effective.

A scrutiny training event with Torfaen Council had been cancelled but would look to reschedule a new date later in the year.

A Scrutiny Member Development Programme specifically for scrutiny members had been completed, and this would be reported back to Democratic Services Committee.

The committee discussed lack of attendance at meetings. It was agreed that the Chair should contact Group Leaders to express the concerns of the Committee regarding the levels of attendance at training events. It was also mentioned that the Constitution could be amended to reflect the introduction of penalties for continued lack of attendance.

7. Remote attendance - priorities and work programme

We were advised that at present the facility is only available in the conference room. In terms of committees using remote attendance, that would be for the Chair to decide. Up to date only Cabinet has trialled remote attendance. The Local Democracy Manager welcomed any further questions in due course.

8. Co-ordinating and alignment - issues falling from Co-ordinating Board

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The Scrutiny Manager advised that several updates have been made since the disbanding of Coordinating Board. Particularly noting the inclusion of the Chair of Audit Committee, Mr. Phillip White, of council business such as planner updates and members seminars.

The Chair agreed that the Coordinating Board had become a talking shop and noted that Mr. White had been given an open invitation to meetings of Democratic Services Committee. He also agreed that the committee could pick up Coordinating Board issues and be updated for the next meeting, maybe forming small workshops.

We recognised the need to align with the Public Service Board Select Committee.

9. Select updates and reports to council

Members were updated on the forward work programmes.

Concerns were raised regarding Cabinet requesting 5 days notice for questions for Cabinet Members. We agreed to invite the Leader to a future meeting to discuss.

10. Future Monmouthshire workshops

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that under Future Monmouthshire lots of different pieces of work have started such as an asset base, how to get best out of staff, how to use data differently and different ways to deliver services in the future. One theme has been procurement and Economy and Development Select Committee have decided to fully utilise their attributes as locally elected members. Rather than Task and Finish Groups, officers were now offering a workshop format to enable engagement. Significant progress has been made and priorities and cost saving benefits have been identified.

The Scrutiny Manager added that a regular Cabinet item for scrutiny reports should be reconsidered. We agreed to discuss this at the next meeting.

11. Members' diary 2018/19

It was requested that detail of Elected Members be added as an insert to the printed diaries, as it had been done so in the past.

12. To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Monday 5th February 2018 at 14.00

We noted the date of next meeting as 5th February 2018.

We noted the following:

Special Council meeting 15th February 2018 at 2pm.
Council meeting 1st March 2018 at 2pm.

The meeting ended at 15:40pm

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