

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Usk on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015 at 2.00 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)

County Councillors: D.L. Edwards, R.J. Higginson, R.G. Harris, P. Jones, J.L. Prosser, V.E. Smith and F. Taylor.

Also in attendance, County Councillor A. Easson

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mrs T. Harry	-	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Mr J. Pearson	-	Local Democracy Manager
Mrs S. King	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors P. Clarke and S. Jones.

#### **2. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

None

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

We resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

#### **5. MODERN.GOV DEMONSTRATION**

The Local Democracy Manager explained that the Democratic Services team had started to use the new agenda management system, Modern.Gov. An email had been sent to members outlining progress and that the new website would be developed.

During the presentation, main features of the system were highlighted:

- Traditional appearance of website (same branding/banners etc)
- Control of updating the website, responsibility with Democratic Services, not web team
- Link to documents since January 2013
- Full agenda sitting within the website, individual reports or whole agenda can be selected.
- Exempt reports/information accessed through secure intranet log on
- Late items identified and circulated as separate item.

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee  
Dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015 - continued**

- Committee agendas circulated via a link, no longer necessary to send bulky PDFs through email system
- Forward plans and decisions included as part of the system. Searchable and history of the item will be provided.
- Link to meeting, via calendar or individual committee, as well as live streaming and forward plans.
- Individual Councillor pages have been updated and contain a variety of options. Information can be uploaded, as requested by members.

During discussion we noted the following points:

- Members welcomed the step forward in improving the efficiency of the Council.
- We invited members to provide feedback regarding use of the system.
- Email links would retrieve a PDF document which could be downloaded. The programme was supported by an application which could be used on tablets.
- Elected members would be able to publish as much information on their own individual pages.
- The committee thanked officers for work undertaken and welcomed the introduction of the new efficient system.

## **6. REFERRAL FROM ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT SELECT COMMITTEE**

We received a referral from the Economy and Development Select Committee 29<sup>th</sup> July 2015:

*‘With regards to people who felt they influenced decisions affecting local areas, performance indicators from the National Survey for Wales had decreased to 21%, ranking Monmouthshire County Council as 9<sup>th</sup> amongst local authorities. Services needed to understand where improvements should be made’*

The committee agreed that further information was required in relation to the background of the item.

We resolved that a report and relevant information would be presented at a future meeting.

## **7. DRAFT DIRECTIONS TO THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES**

The Local Democracy Manager advised that feedback was required from members regarding the Welsh Government consultation document, ‘Draft Directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales’.

The paper highlighted that ‘in recognising the increase in size of local authorities when merged together, the Minister for Public Services has announced that the cap of the maximum number of 75 elected members per local authority will be removed. The Directions do not specify a maximum or minimum number of elected members but they specify that the number of councillors for a local authority should be no smaller than the

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee  
Dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015 - continued**

number produced by a councillor to elector ratio of one councillor to every 4,000 electors.'

The committee were invited to consider questions posed within the report:

- **Question 1: Do you think the suggested ratio provides for effective and convenient local government?**
- **Question 2: Do you think there is a minimum number of councillors required to ensure the effective and democratic working of a local authority? If so, what is it and why?**
- **Question 3: Do you think a minimum number of elected members per local authority should be specified in the Draft Directions?**
- **Question 4: Do you think that there should be a cap on the maximum number of elected members per local authority? If so what do you think the maximum number should be and why?**
- **Question 5: Do you agree that each ward within a local authority area should have roughly the same number of electors per elected member?**

We discussed the paper and noted the following:

- It was suggested that an all members seminar would be held for issues to be considered by the Council.
- We thanked the Local Democracy Manager for the initial response submitted to the Welsh Government.
- We agreed that a member seminar would be organised, for a full Council response to be submitted and separate responses could also be provided by political groups.

It was proposed and duly seconded, that a seminar was held which would be followed by a full Council meeting, for the paper to be considered.

## **8. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services presented the WLGA charter and advised that the work programme for the Democratic Services committee should be created.

- We agreed that a draft induction pack for new members would be considered by the committee.
- It was requested that further options for a members room could be investigated.
- The committee were informed that meetings were livestreamed and a link had been set up so that they were displayed in reception of County Hall, Usk.
- We discussed the telephone directory, a member confirmed that this was being progressed with officers.
- A member suggested that a newsletter should be publicised. However, the committee were reminded that a publication used to be produced but had ceased as part of budget cuts. We were informed that information and articles were presented on the Hub.

**Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee  
Dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015 - continued**

- The communications team were responsible for information that was publicised. We requested information regarding department budget spends on communication and publicity.
- The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services confirmed that the authority was paperless and paper copies of agendas would not be printed, but members would be assisted in printing their own papers.
- The committee appreciated assistance that was provided by Democratic Services team.

We agreed that the Head of Communication would be invited to the next meeting, so that communication with members could be discussed.

## **11. REFERRAL FROM FULL COUNCIL**

We were advised that a referral had been received from Council 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015, this had followed an issue discussed at Democratic Services Committee regarding 24/7 ICT support.

The Democratic Services committee had agreed that this level of support was not financially viable and questions were raised whether there was a possibility of any helpdesk out of hours availability and support.

We recognised that it was difficult for staff to be available on weekends or out of hours. Digital Champions had been launched across the authority. The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services would enquire regarding whether staff were available for out of hours support to be provided.

Some members of the committee recognised that in the current financial climate, the additional service would bring unnecessary financial pressure and that most ICT issues were not urgent and could be dealt with after the weekend.

The Local Democracy Manager advised that Democratic Services had supported members with some issues.

We agreed that issues would be investigated further and the committee would be advised of the outcome at a future meeting.

Members were encouraged to make a note of issues raised with SRS and notify the Democratic Services team so that issues and demand could be monitored.

We resolved that items for the next meeting would include:

- Head of Communications
- Head of Partnerships and Engagement

**The meeting ended at 15:35**