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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
on Monday, 24th September, 2018 at 2.00 pm**

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

County Councillors: L.Dymock, M.Groucutt, J.Treharne,
S. Woodhouse and J.Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

Councillors L.Jones and F. Taylor

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

We welcomed Mr. David Farnsworth to the meeting who was in attendance to speak in relation to Item 6 - Increasing Involvement in Local Democracy. It was agreed Mr. Farnsworth would address the Committee at that time.

3. Position of minutes

Noted.

4. Councillor Mobile Phones

The Local Democracy Manager presented a report in order for the Committee to consider the most suitable telephony solution to be offered to councillors during this term of office.

Members expressed surprise at the cost of procuring mobile phone contracts for Members.

There were varying opinions on the use of the use of personal mobile devices.

A Members suggested training on communication applications such as Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp.

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A Member expressed frustration that Councillors were under-provided in terms of technology. However, we did hear that there had been just 2 responses to a recent survey issued to Members asking opinions on all areas of support provided.

To conclude, it was agreed that the Local Democracy Manager agreed to further look at costs of separate handsets and sim contracts. Members would receive an update at the next meeting.

5. Increasing Involvement in Local Democracy: Sub-Group Update

The Committee welcomed Mr. Farnsworth who was in attendance to provide support to officers and Councillors in terms of increasing engagement.

Mr Farnsworth highlighted the following points, from a community point of view:

To be effective the committee will need to provide the community with two basic things:

1. A clear administrative process for involvement:
 - Knowing when projects are initiated;
 - Clear which projects you want us to be involved in e.g. big impact, added value;
 - Being clear whom you want to be involved;
 - Giving an opportunity to discuss ideas and options at an early stage before a preferred option is chosen.

2. A minimum quality of information - this is key to enabling the public to examine and discuss the evidence for a project or a policy rather than give knee jerked, preconceived or polarised views:
 - Exactly what the proposal is and what you are aiming to achieve;
 - What options are available and which are not feasible;
 - What criteria should be used to choose between options;
 - Actually using the criteria to choose the preferred option;
 - Informing participants of the decision and how views have had an effect, or if not, why not.

The Head of Policy and Governance thanked Mr. Farnsworth and agreed with the points made, acknowledging this is being addressed through the sub-group. The sub-group recognise this is an issue that has been discussed at Democratic Services. Forward Planners have not been sufficiently forward, and need to be so if you are to identify contentious issues at an early enough stage.

The Committee received a report to provide an update on proposed changes to the way in which the council involves people in decision-making by prioritising issues of most interest to communities and making some minor changes to the report template and accompanying guidance to ensure concise and transparent reports.

A member questioned the effectiveness of the Made Open app and it was suggested this be added to the work programme, in order to find ways to improve the platform.

The effectiveness and importance of the Area Committees was recognised in terms of engagement and communication.

The Committee resolved to agree the recommendations set out in the report:

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That the committee endorse the criteria that will be used to prioritise engagement activity, subject to any amendments agreed at the meeting, and keep this under continuous review.

That the committee agree to a future agenda item prioritising potential topics requiring more extensive public involvement using the criteria.

That the committee approve some minor changes to the report template for Council and Cabinet decisions.

6. Evaluation of decisions

The Head of Policy and Governance presented a report to provide an overview of the proposed process for the evaluation of decisions made by Council and Cabinet ensuring that the effectiveness and impact of changes to policies and services can be monitored.

Members thought it sensible that Chairs of Selects and Audit get an overview of reports.

The Committee resolved to agree the recommendations in the report:

That the committee identify any unresolved issues or questions that they require officers to explore prior to implementation of the process.

That the committee endorses the proposed approach, subject to any amendments resulting from 2.1, to ensure political oversight of the evaluation of decisions.

7. Democracy Week

The Local Democracy Manager updated Members on upcoming Democracy Week. We heard that democracy events were to be held which would involve County Councillors attending their local primary schools for a day on 19th October 2018, to work with school councils. In terms of secondary schools, they are being asked to produce a short five minute video on votes at 16 to try and change the Council's policy position, as well as how best we can engage them in the democratic process.

Members were encouraged to get involved and to contact Democratic Services.

8. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2018 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

In doing so we noted that Councillor Treharne had presented apologies for the meeting.

9. To note the date and time of next meeting as Monday 3rd December 2018 at 2pm

Noted.

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The meeting ended at Time Not Specified