

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 19th October,
2015 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)
County Councillor R. Harris (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Edwards, J. Higginson, P. Jones, S. Jones,
J. Prosser, V. Smith, F. Taylor and A. Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Tracey Harry	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Abigail Barton	Communication and Engagement Manager
Will McLean	Head of Policy & Engagement

APOLOGIES:

None received.

1. Public Open Forum

None

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations received.

3. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee dated 7th September 2015

We resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th September 2015 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

4. Communications Strategy

The committee received a presentation from the Communications Manager in relation to roles and responsibilities of the communication team as well as activities already undertaken by the department and those planned for the future.

The presentation included details on internal communications with staff as well as external communication with residents and the public.

Members raised questions around actual activities that are to be undertaken by the communications team. The committee were informed that an electronic newsletter will be created and distributed as well as the use of social media and evaluation methods to monitor its success.

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The Communication Manager informed members that digital channels will be looked to be used as a cheaper alternative to communicate with residents and utilise marketing channels to generate income for the authority.

This year there will be interactive Monmouthshire Engages meetings to engagement residents in the budget proposals for 2016/17. One engagement session will be live streamed and include the option for residents to submit issues/questions remotely for the meeting to consider. This will be in addition to regional meetings around the County. Members requested that areas of large population outside the main 'towns' are also included in the engagement sessions as well as ensuring that the detail is presented in a clear and simple format for residents to understand the impact of the proposals.

The communication manager welcomed proposals for communication events and recommendations for wider engagement from members.

Members thanked the communication manager for presenting the information.

5. Community Engagement - Town and Community Charter

Members received a presentation from the Head of Policy and Engagement in relation to how the County Council intends to engage and communicate with Community and Town Councils within the County.

Members were informed that a number of issues will impact on how the council engages with communities including the cutting of local government budgets from central government and the knock on effect this will have on town and community councils, the future generations bill and a will to localise services to ensure service delivery and resilience.

A discussion took place around the charter that currently exists between the Council and community and town councils which is designed to ensure engagement between the two parties. The Head of Policy and Engagement informed members that the charter that is in place between County Council and Town and Community Councils was a document of its time and wouldn't necessarily be drawn up as is now due to its focus on customer service rather than engagement. There is a charter liaison group which has members and officers of the County Council as well as Town and Community Councils but hasn't been effective.

Members were informed that the budget mandates proposes a local fund of £500,000 from Town and Community Councils to look at continuing to provide services that the County Council will not be able to provide in the future. Consultation already undertaken with Town Councils and will be looking to engage with rural community councils next and how they can contribute without the emphasis being placed on Town Councils financially support services outside their areas. Members raised concerns around the town councils supporting smaller communities in terms of the precept it raises and the work that it does to contribute to the local area and ensure that town councils do not financially support services outside its area.

The Future Generations Act is potentially a big change to local government and particularly the four largest town councils who the Act will apply. The Act sets out that any decisions taken must ideas must look to improve the economic, social environmental and cultural well being of the area.

The County Council want a healthy relationship with Town & Community Councils so that relationships can be built on with Whole Place being the mechanism to help build relationships and engage on a local basis which better reflects current practices and situations than the

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current charter. The Head of Policy and Communications provided an example to the committee where a community council is to locally determine the services they want and work with the County Council to provide that service but accept cuts in areas where its not needed and its close engagement that supports this delivery.

Members raised concerns that Town and Community Councils haven't been engaged enough on the potential changes to the Charter and communicating the effect it has on them as well as informing them how it will operate in the future.

6. National Survey for Wales

Members received a report from the Data Analyst as a result of a recommendation from the Economy & Development Select Committee of 29th July 2015 outlining a decrease in the number of residents within Monmouthshire who feel that they can affect the democratic process of the Council and local decision making. The decrease is not specific to Monmouthshire and has decreased across Wales as a whole.

Members queried whether the survey was completed on a pro-rotta basis across local authorities and what statistics were used to formulate the proposals. The data analyst informed that 14,000 people participated in the review with potentially not all questions being answered but no information available on separate authorities.

Members were informed that details contained in the report are reported to the Welsh Assembly and considered in the settlement agreement. Members raised concerns that with little information relating to the statistics used to formulate the report and 14,000 participants being less than 1% of the population of Wales that it cannot provide an accurate picture and evaluation of the current situation.

Members agreed that the information contained in the report did not present enough of an issue for the committee to be concerned but did request that they received further information on the statistics in the report for future.

Members thanked the Data Analyst for their work in presenting the report.

7. Independent Remuneration Panel Wales Annual Report

The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services briefly presented the draft Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report in relation to councillor's salaries and members accepted the report. Members were informed that if they wish to make representations in relation to the proposals contained in the report they can do so to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.

Members queried the proposals around taxable mileage with the report stating that it should not have been taxed from 5th April 2015. Members were informed by the Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services that they no longer need to separate the taxable element when submitting their expenses and that we are awaiting a response from the Head of People Services as to how we should review any tax that has been deducted since that date.

Members also raised concerns that the report doesn't contain any information relating diversity and inclusion and helping councillors from all walks of life to become a councillor.

8. To note the date and time of next meeting as Monday 23rd November 2015 at 2.00pm

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The meeting ended at 4.03 pm