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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Conference Room - Usk, NP15 1AD on Monday, 1st July, 2019 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor (Chairman)
County Councillor (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Dymock, A. Easson, R. Harris and J.Treharne

Also in attendance County Councillor(s):

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors P. Clarke, D. Dovey, L. Guppy, V. Smith and A. Webb

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. To consider a Call-In relating to the Individual Cabinet Member Decision dated 12th June 2019 regarding the Staffing Structure - Local Democracy and Business Support. The following papers are attached for consideration.

The Chair opened the meeting, advising that the Committee were meeting to consider a Call-in request of the Individual Cabinet Member Decision taken on 12th June 2019 regarding the Staffing Structure for Local Democracy and Business Support.

The Scrutiny Member confirmed the process of the Call-in and explained that Members could decide upon one of the following outcomes:

1. Accept the Cabinet Member's decision
2. Refer the matter back to the Cabinet Member for re-consideration with reasons.
3. Refer the matter to Council.

The Members who had requested the decision to be called in addressed the committee and highlighted concerns.

There was particular concern that the process had not been carried out appropriately, with a lack of consultation among staff / unions and Members.

Concerns were raised around the duty of care to staff involved, and there had been a lack of coherent response to concerns raised at Democratic Services Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Governance responded to the following:

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- In terms of consultation the report had been on the Council and Cabinet Forward Workplan for some time. Some staffing issues meant that there were restrictions on timescales. Proposals were due to the meeting of Democratic Services Committee on 20th May 2019, but the meeting had been cancelled. In terms of consultees this had been discussed at the Scrutiny Chairs meeting with no objections.
- The Monitoring Officer had confirmed that the proposed changes to minutes taking were legal and appropriate.
- Staffing matters are not an issue for Committees, and it was considered that the proposed restructure would provide an appropriate number of staff.
- Unions had expressed no concerns around the proposals.

The Head of Policy and Governance was invited to respond.

He added that there has been staff engagement, and he had offered to meet with staff. HR have been involved in the process. There had been no comments from unions.

He explained that there is, on average, 14 meetings a month and under the new arrangements these will be covered by 2 Committee Officers and the Senior DS Officer. This averages 22 hours per month.

Select Committee members were invited to comment.

Clarity was sought on the reason for cancelling the May meeting of DS Committee. It was understood that this was due to staff commitments at the European Elections, hence the current lack of capacity within the team.

The Officer responded that as an organisation we are not funded to have staff for every eventuality and it was recognised that the Elections team undertake unseen work.

The Cabinet Member added that the proposals will improve the service, and the addition of a Scrutiny Officer will lead to improved governance.

When asked, the Scrutiny Manager explained that the remit of the Democratic Services Committee is to ensure support for scrutiny.

The Head of Service expressed that there would be a compromise in terms of shorter and more concise minute taking.

A Committee Member raised concerns around the possibility of IT problems, and the effect of having no support for this during the meetings.

There was suggestion that the proposals should not be rushed through, and wider discussions should be undertaken.

To conclude the meeting Members were asked to vote. 2 Members voted to accept the recommendation. 2 Members voted to refer the matter to Council. The Chairman, with the casting vote, resolved that the Cabinet Member decision be accepted.

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm