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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held at Remote Meeting on Monday, 7th September, 2020 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Watkins (Chairman)
County Councillor D. Evans (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: M.Groucutt, J.Treharne, S. Woodhouse and
S. Howarth

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors D. Batrouni, S. Jones

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No matters for discussion.

3. Discussion Item - Remote Meetings

Members were invited to partake in an open discussion to see how they felt remote meetings were working, and to identify any issues.

The Local Democracy Manager explained that now we are a couple of months into running remote meetings it was thought now would be a good time to receive feedback from Members.

It was thought that meetings have gone smoothly however sometimes there have been problems with the vote function. We agreed that a verbal vote can always be used, especially where the online vote is close.

Officers were commended on the work in setting up the remote meeting process.

It was recognised that some meetings were well suited to the online format, particularly smaller, shorter meetings.

Remote meetings were considered challenging in terms of democracy and the opportunity to hold hybrid meetings was welcomed. We noted that the technology is ready but this would not necessarily change the dynamic of the meeting as the process would be the same.

Discussions were held around how best to fill the small number of seats in the Council Chamber at a hybrid meeting.

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We recognised there were some issues around meeting invitees but this related to controlling who has access to meeting 'chat' and votes.

The Chair added that she is pleased to see the positive effect remote meetings have on climate emissions, and thanked the team.

4. Hybrid Council Meeting Protocol

The Local Democracy Manager presented a report for Members to review and approve a protocol for the holding of hybrid council meetings.

Members discussed options and agreed that seats within the chamber should be allocated on a politically balanced basis. It was agreed that a Chair should be reserved for the committee Chair but not the Vice-Chair.

It was suggested that each group decide who would attend County Hall for each meeting. Where a Member is allocated a seat, they would be responsible for notifying officers if they would not be using it.

By agreeing and adopting the protocol for hybrid council meetings, preparations will be made to slowly introduce councillors back into the physical meeting environment whilst allowing those members who wish to participate remotely to continue to do so. Adoption of a hybrid meeting will also prepare councillors for the implementation of the future requirements regarding remote attendance.

5. Members Sharepoint Site

The Local Democracy Manager presented the report for Members to consider and suggest key components of the new Members' SharePoint site.

The new Sharepoint site will offer the ability to reconsider what is required for members of their own workspace and what content they wish to move over from the existing site to the new and what additional areas they would like to see included.

Areas for consideration were highlighted as:

- Online training / e-learning
- Telephone/Contact directory
- Workshops/Seminars/Presentations

Members were advised to consider areas they may have difficulty accessing at present, for example, plans for Planning Committee.

To be brought back to a future meeting.

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6. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th February 2020 were confirmed as an accurate record.

7. Date of next meeting - Monday 9th November 2020 at 14:00pm

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm

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