

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
THE FUTURE OF AREA COMMITTEES

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors David Evans, Maureen Powell, Jamie Treharne, Sheila Woodhouse, Chris Edwards, Martyn Groucutt

Officers: Matt Phillips, John Pearson, Cath Fallon, Sharran Lloyd, Nicola Perry.

Matt Phillips opened the meeting providing a background of the history of Area Committees. We recognise that there have been previous reviews which have not been effective and were trying to achieve similar outcomes for area committees that are being discussed today. He explained that Area Committees have not achieved the engagement they were intended to but were a good discussion arena for Members and ward issues.

The most recent review had created the North Mon Area Committee Pilot Scheme and separate Cluster Groups. The North Mon Pilot allowed Community Councils to vote on matters, but it was not thought that there had been any votes of significance other than the change of name.

Councillor Powell, Chair of North Mon Area Committee provided examples of occasions where the committee had influenced decisions, namely traffic issues and a local matter in Goytre.

John Pearson explained the issue of agenda duplication ie. Area – Select – Cabinet.

In terms of where meetings should be held, as places within the community, it was suggested that when a decision is made on how the meetings would go forward, we could then look to identify appropriate sites within the local areas.

Councillor Woodhouse appreciated the value of providing people with an opportunity to come and discuss issues with Members.

Matt Phillips asked if the functionality and formality of the way Area Committees are conducted could affect engagement and invited Cath Fallon and Sharran Lloyd to provide a different perspective. They highlighted the different approaches such as the Business Resilience Forum, which sees representatives from all Chambers of Commerce across the County, Environmental Health, Tourism and Licensing meeting monthly to consider and discuss issues. The meeting is minuted and recorded and is also used as a consultation platform.

We also heard of the four Cluster meetings across the County, not in Abergavenny currently which is a platform for solution-based conversations and addresses any disconnects. This platform is an informal, open dialogue.

Both meetings had seen an increase in attendance and improved engagement since moving to an online basis.

John Pearson asked how these forums engage the Town and Community Councils and we heard that the team allocates area leads who then engage with all stakeholders including local democracy. It was noted that that getting rid of the 'red tape' aspect seemed to improve engagement.

Matt Phillips suggested we leave the technical aspect aside and concentrate on how to get best engagement.

Action: He proposed that members of the working group are invited to the BRF and Cluster meetings to get a feel of how they work and feedback to next meeting. Cath and Sharran to arrange invitations to Members.