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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 8th November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)

County Councillors: C.Edwards, M.Groucutt, J.Treharne, J.Watkins
and A. Easson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Kyle Brown	Digital Service Designer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors P. Clarke, M.Feakins, G. Howard, D. Jones and S. Woodhouse

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. For information - Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Report 2022/23

The Committee received the IRPW Draft Report 2022/23.

The Local Democracy Manager explained that he and the Chair were to attend a session with the Remuneration Panel the following day and highlighted a few key changes within the report.

The main change related to the increase in members salary. The argument for the uplift was that members pay had not been increased with inflation for a number of years and given the local elections next year, aims to entice new candidates.

Members were welcomed to provide comments to be relayed to the Remuneration Panel.

County Councillor Easson noted that it was not appropriate for officers to comment on the draft report.

It was noted that member's salaries are paid through the Council budget.

It was agreed that the increase would encourage people to stand for Council and that paying people appropriately should attract competent people.

The Local Democracy Manager would provide any further information and feedback following the session with the Remuneration Panel.

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3. Members ICT Options & Survey Response

The Local Democracy Manager presented the report to consider the responses to the members ICT survey distributed following the last Democratic Services Committee meeting and consider the options available for councillors for the next term.

In considering the responses to the survey and in discussion with the digital team, the below two devices were considered the most suitable devices for members for the next term.

1. Microsoft Surface Pro 8 Surface Pro 8 – The current surface pro 4 has a 12” screen. The new model has a larger 13” screen and less unused space around the screen so it maximises its screen space in relation to its size. The weight of the device is 891 grams. Downside of this device is that it is still a tablet and some members prefer a laptop. A positive with the surface pro model is that, in the majority of cases, the tablet has remained effective and suitable for the whole term of Council with very few replacements needed. Cost – approx. £950
2. Microsoft Surface Go Laptop New Lightweight Surface Laptop Go – This is the laptop equivalent of the surface pro and is a laptop version of the tablet. It still has a touchscreen but is built into a laptop case, that pushes the weight of the device to 1,110 grams. The screen size is 12.4” so smaller than the latest surface pro device but slightly bigger than the current surface pro model. The performance of the surface go laptop is not as good as the surface pro 8 and may not be sufficient to last the term of Council. It does however have more connections and similar connections to the surface. Cost – approx. £826.79.

Members agreed that the device that would last the term of Council would be better.

It was agreed that members could request a separate monitor should they wish to do so.

There were concerns around current restrictions placed on some user access.

Members were disappointed with the low number of responses to the digital survey.

Members understood the global shortage and recognised the importance of ordering the equipment as soon as possible.

The Local Democracy Manager summarised that we would purchase Microsoft Surface Pro 8 tablets, not mix and match devices, with a possibility for second screens and extra devices as required.

4. Council Chamber - Verbal Update

The Local Democracy Manager provided a progress update on the refurbishment of the Council Chamber.

The work has started on refurbishment of the microphones, integrating Teams into the room and improving on previous problems with sound around the chamber. We will be catering for three more Councillors from 2022, so refurbishments around seating had been undertaken. It was hoped that the work would be completed by the end of the week. The Democratic Services team will then receive training on the new equipment.

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The team plan to run some 'dummy sessions' to test the equipment prior to phasing meetings back into the chamber. The intention is to start using the chamber, with full hybrid meetings, from 15th December 2021, at the Cabinet meeting. If the Covid situation remains as it is at present, the aim is to have a certain number, to be confirmed, of members present in the chamber for Council on 16th December 2021.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 6th September 2021

Before approving the minutes, the Chair wished to discuss the voting at the meeting of Council on 4th November 2021, following a number of conversations with Members.

We heard that the Monitoring Officer and Local Democracy Manager had conducted investigations through Office365 to identify the detail behind the votes. Democratic Services Officers can obtain information such as when people join and leave the meeting, and how votes are cast.

The Local Democracy Manager explained that the Committee need to be clear that they are happy with the checks and balances, and processes in place to allow voting in remote and hybrid meetings. He explained that legally you need to 'hear and be heard' within a meeting, but from May 2022 this will be 'seen and be heard'. During Council meetings the Democratic Services Officer and Monitoring Officer keep track of the number of attendees and the number present throughout the meeting, constantly tracking the number of expected votes.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the law recognises that where people are joining meetings remotely technical glitches may occur, people may miss a short part of a debate, and this would not make their vote unreliable.

The Committee resolved to accept the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. Date of next meeting - 17th January 2022 14:00pm

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm

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