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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Monday, 27th June, 2016 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor F. Taylor (Chairman)
County Councillor D. Evans (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: R. Harris, P. Clarke, J. Higginson, P. Jones,
J. Prosser, V. Smith and S. Howarth

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Will McLean	Head of Democracy, Engagement and Improvement

APOLOGIES:

Councillors D. Edwards, S. Jones and A. Webb

1. To note the appointment of the Chair

We noted the appointment of County Councillor F. Taylor as Chair of Democratic Services Committee.

2. To appoint a Vice Chair

We appointed County Councillor D. Evans as Vice Chair of Democratic Services Committee.

3. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public present.

It was hoped that this civic year would see an increase in public open forum items.

It was agreed that, in order to encourage engagement with younger people, a future meeting should be held within a school. A further suggestion was made to invite sixth form children to County Hall to attend a meeting.

It was resolved that discussions with officers from CYP directorate would be held to canvass our schools and to identify opportunities to hold engagement workshops with young people. It was agreed a school would only be used as a venue where there was a definite benefit to young people.

4. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

5. To confirm and sign the minutes of the previous meeting.

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The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting held on 21st March 2016. We noted the minutes had been approved at Full Council on 12th May 2016.

6. Designation of the Head of Democracy

We received a report in order to comply with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 with regards to the requirement to designate an officer to undertake the statutory role of Head of Democratic Services following the recent senior leadership restructure.

The report recommended that the Head of Governance, Improvement and Engagement be designated as Head of Democratic Services for the purposes of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

Members requested formal notification of the recent restructure.

It was agreed that following approval at full Council, Town and Community Councils would be notified of the restructure and officer responsibilities. We were advised that the Chief Executive had recently addressed Town and Community Councils setting out changes to communication routes. It was thought 20 Town and Community Councils had been represented at the meeting.

We were advised that confirmation had been received that the 2017 elections would be for a full 5 year term, and had also been set out that there would be no further boundary review. The Local Democracy Manager explained that a review of boundaries had been put on hold due to local government re-organisation. As those electoral arrangements are now not being implemented the community review does not need to be completed by 2017. The review will be undertaken when Welsh Government provide a clearer view on what Town and Community Councils are expected to look like.

A Member added that in terms of boundaries within Monmouthshire there were a large number of developments in certain places which should be taken into consideration.

The Head of Governance agreed to share the written statement by the Minister for clarification.

Members resolved to accept the recommendation in the report.

7. To discuss the future work programme of the Democratic Services Committee:

We agreed to develop a robust programme of activity to increase participation in local democracy. We agreed to hold a workshop in September, possibly 12th, to further develop ideas.

Other items raised included:

- We agreed that an Action Sheet and Draft Minutes should be circulated in a timely manner so that all actions could be followed up.
- Staffing levels to be discussed at the next meeting. **(ACTION – NP)**
- The Diversity and Democracy Team from Welsh Government had been invited to the meeting, this would be followed up. **(ACTION – NP)**
- Follow up a previous discussion regarding training for report writing for officers, with Member involvement. **(ACTION – HI)**

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- The Public Services Minister should be invited to a future meeting. **(ACTION)**
- It was recommended that minutes of outside bodies be looked at as an example of clear and concise minutes.
- The Modern.Gov system would soon be introduced to officers, who would then be trained to upload reports for agendas.
- A Future Monmouthshire session to be held this week would address questions regarding maintaining services.
- There would be a significant range of activities throughout the summer and autumn looking at the upcoming challenges.
- We would work closely with Whole Place and Engagement teams in terms of Local Democracy Week.
- Members suggested there were contact problems and suggested ideas for improvements e.g. holding stall in the towns on a market day, ticket system at County Hall, engaging with school children, issuing a magazine/newspaper to all residents of Monmouthshire.
- It was thought that the removal of the One Stop Shops had hindered public engagement, and more use should be made of Town Teams.
- A Member requested that we should look at accommodation / building issues in terms of how best to look after colleagues.
- The identity of Monmouthshire should be improved and made more high profile.
- Town and Community Councils were a key area for focus and a 5 cluster model was being developed, each with a representative from the Senior Leadership Team.
- In terms of developing a bespoke induction programme, it was requested that we circulate the programme developed by WLGA.
- A sign-in book on reception for items being delivered to County Hall, to provide detail of intended destination. **(ACTION –WM).**
- Members welcomed a sensible, well thought out programme of engagement events.

8. To consider current scrutiny arrangements and make recommendations for the next term

We welcomed the Scrutiny Manager who provided the Committee with an update on the current scrutiny arrangements. In doing the following points were highlighted:

- The scrutiny function is held to account by the Wales Audit Office, and a presentation of the service plan is made to the Audit Committee once a year. Also held to account by the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Group and the Scrutiny Champion.
- A self-evaluation had been undertaken prior to the corporate assessment, which had positively reflected the scrutiny process.

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- A new Select Committee, the Public Service Board Select Committee had been developed to specifically scrutinise the PSB.
- Current objectives included engaging the public in areas of the work programme.
- There were some areas for improvement, specifically picking up actions, and sharper communication.

A Member questioned what arrangements were in place should the Scrutiny Manager not be available at any time. In response we heard that the Head of Democracy would step in and provide support where necessary, but the nature of the job meant that the work programmes were planned well in advance of meetings.

Member attendance at Select Committees was proving successful, and detail was available via the website.

Bespoke scrutiny training was carried out in-house by the Scrutiny Manager.

Members suggested that portfolios of committees could be an area for attention, and stressed that it was important that scrutiny remained effective and value for money.

We requested a verbal update later in the year to advise the committee of the outcomes of the self-evaluation and the development of the PSB Select Committee.

Members added that the Scrutiny Manager had received excellent feedback from WAO and Estyn, and congratulated the Scrutiny Manager, who was recognised as one of the main strengths of Democratic Services.

9. To receive an update on technical issues

Members requested reassurance that technical issues were being addressed.

Members were made aware of a dedicated area on the P:Drive available for storage. We noted that Members may require support and information to be able to access the P:Drive.

The Local Democracy Manager advised that officers were aware of the issues surrounding access of exempt papers, but a lack of resources had been an ongoing problem. Democratic Services were expected to be fully staffed in August and problems would be addressed.

It was suggested that prior to meetings Members are reminded to speak directly into the microphones in the Council Chamber. A Member added that Members should be reminded not to use a microphone before another person had finished making their point.

10. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Monday 17th October 2016 at 2.00pm

We noted that date and time of next meeting as 2.00pm on Monday 17th October 2016.

The Chair suggested that a workshop be arranged on Monday 12th September 2016, to discuss Local Democracy Week.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm

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