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## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held  
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 17th October, 2016 at 2.00 pm**

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

County Councillors: D. Edwards, J. Higginson, P. Jones, S. Jones,  
J. Prosser, V. Smith and A. Webb

### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise

### **APOLOGIES:**

County Councillors R. Harris

#### **1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

#### **2. Public open forum**

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

#### **3. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2016**

The minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2016 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

#### **4. To note the action list of the previous meeting**

We noted the action list of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

#### **5. Minister's Statement /Local Government Reform**

We welcomed Frank Cuthbert, Head of Democracy, Diversity and Remuneration Team, Welsh Government to the meeting who was in attendance to address the committee in reference to the recent statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.

Following presentation of the Statement, Members were invited to discuss and comment. In doing so we noted the following points:

- Members of Democratic Services Committee welcomed the statement.
- Members looked forward to engaging in the consultation process and suggested that a definite timeline would aide debate. It was expected that a timeline would appear in the consultation paper.

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- Members were interested in the constitution of the Independent Panel and asked that the information be shared when possible.
- A concern was raised regarding political uncertainty in terms of bring forward the new Bill, and the danger of it running over into the next assembly year.
- Members discussed the reorganisation of town and community councils, and referred to the merging community councils into one town council.
- The Chief Officer explained that the structure of the City Deal would be a joint cabinet committee, which would encourage joint working, and would see the establishment of regional delivery vehicles.
- A Member stressed that Monmouthshire should be a major part of the metro system.

The Chair thanked Mr. Cuthbert for attending and noted that members recognised that any changes must be about improving outcomes for our citizens.

#### **6. Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report**

The Local Democracy Manager presented the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' (IRP) Draft Annual Report. It was noted that the proposals include a small increase (£100) in the basic salary for County Councillors and no increase for senior salaries (other than the increase in basic salary). Feedback was invited and the following points were raised:

- Clarification was sought regarding the £150 for each member (£500 for special cases). It was explained that the £100 mentioned was the increase in a County Councillor's basic salary. The £150 may be awarded to town and community councillors in certain circumstances.
- It was suggested that the caring responsibilities allowance of up to £403 should be increased. Declaring an interest because of his caring responsibilities, County Councillor D. Edwards supported the view that £403 was an inadequate amount per month noting that carers, on average, are paid £12.00 p.h. and stated that this point should be brought to the attention of the IRP. It was suggested that concerns about the level of the Carer Allowance should be made as part of the consultation response to the Panel.
- Representation on the National Parks Authority was queried, noting that it was unclear if representatives should represent Monmouthshire generally or more specifically by living in and representing a ward that lies within the National Park. It was also queried if Monmouthshire should have more than the current two representatives, as it is the second largest area within the National Park. A response was provided that there is a conflict between local representation and political balance referring to the Environment Act that states that local authorities, when making nominations to the National Park Authority should appoint members who represent wards within the National Park. This does not override the ability for local authorities to appoint members to committees / joint bodies to reflect political balance. This can cause problems where members don't live in the National Park area. It was stated that it was likely that Monmouthshire CC's representation on the National Parks Authority will reduce to one member in future.
- Concern was expressed that it will be difficult to encourage people to become county councillors in future mentioning the varying workload in different councils. It was accepted that different councils have varying workloads, ward areas and population, and also confirmed that there are no town or community councils in

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Cardiff. The inability of some fulltime workers to consider the role in practical terms with a basic salary of £13,400, and the consequent likelihood of missing out on good quality candidates, was also commented upon. It was felt that this was an important point to raise. It was agreed that the need to attract suitable persons to the role of county councillor is an important point adding that there is conflict between the viability of becoming a councillor in practical terms and the public purse and in order to have a full time councillors, financial constraints would require fewer people to undertake the role.

- Regarding the Diversity campaign, the Welsh Government is working with employers to encourage, and release, employees to undertake councillor duties.
- It was noted that the Local Government Measure permits councils to set the times of their meetings. It was commented that evening meetings would be much easier for councillors in full time employment to attend.
- It was suggested that the Welsh Government and the IRP communicate with residents to educate them about the role of the county councillor, the allowances available and the time contributed individually by councillors to improve perceptions of the role.
- It was commented that Scrutiny Committee Chairs don't have enough support noting that in Monmouthshire, there is one scrutiny manager with an increasingly high workload due to the volume of scrutiny required (as acknowledged in the IRP report) and requested that this point is added to any feedback. It was acknowledged that there is an increased demand for scrutiny and whilst the function is working well, there was concern about the amount of support available. It was explained that the support referred to in the report was the tools to do jobs (laptop, phone etc.) as opposed to the staffing structures within an authority.
- It was suggested that councillors should have an attendance allowance, noting that a small number of members infrequently attend meetings. A Member supported the suggestion of publishing individual councillor's allowances and attendance. Live streamed meetings also allow electors to transparently see and hear the contribution of their representatives.
- It was agreed to seek the views of members regarding their support requirements, their awareness of allowances and any other comments to compile a formal response. Concern was expressed that members are not using the allowance for reimbursement for the costs of care, possibly due to negative perceptions.

#### **7. Community Governance Update**

The Chief Officer for Enterprise presented a report on Community Governance. It was reported that the comments arising from presentation of the paper, considered at the Democratic Services Workshop in September, will be considered by Council in December 2016 prior to further consultation and engagement with the existing Area Committees.

It was confirmed that three of the four Area Committees have considered the report and there have been differing, but mainly positive, comments so far. Whilst consistency is sought, there is recognition that there is no one size to fit all. All options will be presented to Council in December.

An independent consultant has been engaged to undertake more specific work to

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provide more detailed options to include terms of reference, voting rights and to include a review of the Whole Place Team, its engagement and work at community level.

The Head of Democracy, Engagement and Improvement will be meeting with the Member Working Party that identified Option 2 as the preferred model (with the addition of an additional single representative of the town or community councils) to ensure the proposals are agreed and ready for consideration by Council. It was confirmed that representation for the town or community council should be a Member not the Clerk.

It was agreed that a key issue is purpose, outcomes and progress with clear roles and lines of reporting for Clusters and Whole Place, and also how to work collectively to solve problems. It was agreed that Members will have the opportunity to see the draft document before consideration by Council.

It was agreed that clarity was important going forward and that cluster meetings need terms of reference to avoid duplication.

#### **8. Diversity in Democracy Update**

It was reported that Welsh Government is supporting promotion of Diversity in Democracy, encouraging people to be elected as county councillors. It was noted that this Council had informal mentees as part of the programme. An event last week launched the second phase of the programme. It was acknowledged that some people are deterred from standing for office sometimes by barriers and the challenge is how to get people of different backgrounds to come forward. The following points were made:

- It was commented that a lot more needs to be done in terms of education, led by Welsh Government. It was agreed that it was Diversity in Democracy was a good programme to be part of.
- Members who were involved were thanked for their participation. The ongoing drive to achieve diverse membership and nominees within parties was recognised.
- It was reported that an exit survey (for those not standing for office again) and a further survey of all candidates standing in community and county level elections will be conducted to identify who was and wasn't elected with a view to compiling a profile of Local Government post 2017 elections compared to post 2012 elections.
- It was suggested that consideration of an education and citizenship programme should be added to the forward work planner to increase understanding of a role in public life.
- It was commented that training for both Officers and Members on equalities was required to consider the changing culture over the next decade. It was suggested that main council meetings could be signed.

#### **9. Election 2017 Advertising**

Consideration was given to a proposed A4 leaflet to be circulated with the council tax demand to promote participation in the forthcoming election, a reminder people to register to vote and other information. Members were invited to make suggestions for inclusion to the Local Democracy Manager. The Communications Team will also review the leaflet to make it a more attractive document.

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Information was provided that there is a webpage dedicated to next year's election including an online nomination facility.

It was queried if there was any budget available to provide a further leaflet, not necessarily for distribution at the same time, to promote the role of a county councillor and to provide information on the average hours spent and the allowances available. It was discussed if the leaflet could be circulated with the registration letters sent to all household in February and explained that no budget has been announced by Welsh Government for letters next year. If a budget is available, a leaflet could easily be included.

#### **10. To discuss the future work plan**

The future work plan was received. The following items were added:

- Information leaflet on the role of a county councillor, time put in by individual councillors and allowances available.
- Schedule of activities to encourage people to vote– members were invited to participate and to register interest in doing so with the Chair.
- Formal Response to the draft Independent Remuneration Panel Report. (Members were reminded that they can also send individual responses).

#### **11. To note the date and time of next meeting as 2.00 pm, Monday 23rd January 2017**

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2016 at 2.00pm

**The meeting ended at 4.15 pm**

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