

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Usk on 29th June 2015 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Evans (Chairman)

County Councillors: R.J. Higginson, D.L. Edwards, R.G. Harris, F Taylor, J.L. Prosser, V.E. Smith and A. Webb.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs T. Harry	-	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Ms E. Jackson	-	Digital Projects Manager
Mr J. Pearson	-	Local Democracy Manager

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

2. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

None

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

We resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11th May 2015 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

5. ACTION PLAN FEEDBACK

The chair thanked Councillor Debbie Blakebrough for her contribution to the Democratic Services Committee through last year.

The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services provided an update in relation to the streaming of meetings within the reception area and that the technical issues are still ongoing and possible solutions being investigated.

The Local Democracy Manager confirmed that community and town councils are now included on the distribution list for meetings of the Council.

It was acknowledged that the requests for work in relation to the council chamber have now been completed with the exception of the heating which is still under review.

The committee received an organisation structure with officer responsibility and contact details. The committee discussed the level of content to be included and requested 20 key contact details for core services. A councillor requested that officers are informed to check their details held against the contact card in outlook to ensure the details are correct.

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Councillors discussed the recent trial of Full Council being held at 5pm instead of 2pm and what the next stage of the process is now the trial has finished. The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services informed the committee that a report will be presented to the next Full Council evaluating the trial with the feedback of members included.

Members also discussed the possibility of changing the microphone stem to longer or extendable options as sometimes members cannot be heard properly through the live streaming. The Local Democracy Manager will evaluate the options and report back to the committee.

6. Election of Vice Chair

Due to the vice chair no longer sitting on the committee, an election of a new vice chair was needed. Councillor R.J Higginson proposed Councillor R. Harris as Chair, seconded by Councillor J. Prosser. Councillor R. Harris was appointed as vice chair of the committee.

7. ICT UPDATE

Members received the report from the information management officer in relation to ICT issued raised at the previous meeting.

8. CONSTITUENCY MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

The committee received a video demonstration of a potential software solution to assist members in managing their case work. An update of this particular package is due in September when a free trial should be available for councillors to use and evaluate the usefulness of the package for them. Members sought clarification on solutions used by other local authorities, whether a nationwide solution is available or whether it is something our internal ICT section could develop. It was agreed to wait until the trial is available and revisit the issue following its release.

9. APPOINTMENT OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER – UPDATE

The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services confirmed an appointment had been made and will be commencing with the authority from the end of July 2015.

The Chair of the committee, who formed part of the interview panel, commented on the high calibre of candidates interviewed.

10. SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE'S ACHIEVEMENTS 2014/15

Item deferred to the next meeting of the committee as further information needed from the chair of the committee for that period.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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Councillor F. Taylor reinforced the work that herself, Councillor S. Jones and Councillor D. Blakebrough are undertaking with the Welsh Government in relation to promoting diversity in local government and encouraging candidates from diverse backgrounds to stand for election in 2017. She informed the committee that there is a mentoring scheme open to residents from diverse backgrounds and encouraged members to provide her with details of anyone within their area who would benefit from the scheme.

It was noted that Councillor P. Hobson is the authorities Diversity Champion and should be invited to future meetings of the committee where any issues around diversity are to be discussed.

Councillor J Prosser raised a query in relation to the Community Charter that both the County Council and Community and Town Councils signed up to and what progress has been made in relation to the charter. The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services confirmed that the committee will invite the Head of Policy and Performance to the next meeting to provide an update.

Councillor D.L Edwards queried whether a protocol existed between staff and councillors to ensure that officers respond to councillors in a reasonable period of time and highlighted a number of issues he currently has where there has been a significant delay in receiving a response from officers. Councillor F. Taylor agreed and confirmed that she attends authorities induction programme for new employees and highlights the issue when discussing the role of councillors. The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services confirmed that the authorities customer care standards apply from officers to members of the public as well as Councillors and that a reminder will be sent to all staff to highlight their responsibility.

Councillor D.L Edwards raised concerns around members health and safety, particularly with the use of ICT, with the Council moving to paperless meetings and members relying more on the use of ICT. The Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services confirmed that risk assessments are carried out for officers and free eye tests are provided by the authority and that information could be circulated to members.

The Chair raised a final point in relation to the alteration of dates for meetings and requested Chairs of other meetings to consult the council diary before confirming any changes in meetings to ensure that there isn't a clash of meetings that members should attend.

The meeting ended at 15:35