

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2019

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2019 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor DG Howells – Chairperson

S Aspey	RM Granville	DG Howells	RM James
B Sedgebeer	SG Smith		

Apologies for Absence

KL Rowlands, G Thomas, E Venables, SR Vidal and A Williams

Officers:

Michael Pitman	Business Administrative Apprentice
Andrew Rees	Democratic Services Manager

168. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

RESOLVED: That in the absence of Cllr E Venables, the committee elected Cllr G Howells as the Chairperson for this meeting.

(Cllr DG Howells in the Chair)

169. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

170. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the 06/06/2019 be approved as a true and accurate record.

171. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Democratic Services Manager requested that with the permission of the Chairperson that this item be considered lastly as the Monitoring Officer was required at another meeting but endeavoured to attend. The Chairperson agreed to consider the item lastly.

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which outlined the findings of the Constitution Working Group which had reviewed elements of the Constitution.

He explained that the Monitoring Officer received a request from an Elected Member for a review of the Constitution. In accordance with Article 15 of the constitution the Monitoring Officer will monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure that the aims and principles of the Constitution are given full effect. Any changes will need the approval of Council based on the recommendations of the Monitoring Officer.

The review of the Constitution specifically requested the following to be considered:

- 1) The time period for questions and motions be re-instated at 5 days, now that suitable resources are in place to allow timely translation to Welsh;

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- 2) That following the presentations and announcements by Cabinet members, the Leader, and Chief Executive, Members be allowed to ask non tabled questions for a period of 15 minutes;
- 3) That the three largest opposition groups, be given 3 minutes (taken from Development Control Committee 3-minute rule) to make announcements or presentations to Council;
- 4) The timing of Council meetings

The following topics were discussed at the meetings at the Constitution Working Group:

- Time period for questions and motions
- Announcements at Meetings of Council
- Replies to Written Questions
- Announcements by the 3 Largest Opposition Group Leaders
- Timing of Council Meetings
- Call-in Process
- Period of Notice for the Publication of the Cabinet Decision Notice and Call-in
- Time Period for Holding an Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Members Calling in a Decision

The Committee considered the following recommendations made by the Constitution Working Group.

That the time period for the submission of questions and motions remain at 10 clear working days. That announcements made at Council, recommended that an amendment be made to the Constitution to re-title the Leader's Report to that of Leader's Announcements and that the current announcements made by the Cabinet be shortened. That all Members of Council receive replies to written questions 24 hours prior to the meeting of Council where practicable. The reply will be recorded in the minutes of that meeting of Council. That announcements by Opposition Group Leaders could give rise to political statements being made and did not wish to pursue announcements being made by the Leaders of the 3 largest Opposition Groups. That as the electronic vote taken on the conclusion of the meeting of Council on 24 July 2019 was lost, the holding of evening meetings be not explored further until the next administration. The period of notice after publication of a decision be extended from the current 3 clear working days to 5 clear working days in order to have greater transparency and for backbench Members to have a greater opportunity to call-in a decision. The time period for holding an Overview and Scrutiny Committee remains at within 5 clear working days. That any Member including a Chairperson who calls-in a decision is excluded from the decision making at that Committee meeting, but would be invited to give evidence to the Committee in support of the Call-in request.

A Member of the Committee considered that supplementary questions were often lengthy and occasionally did not relate to the original question. The Democratic Services Manager explained that if a question was deemed inappropriate and not relating to the original question, the Monitoring Officer and Mayor would rule the question out of order.

A Member asked if the above could be reinforced to Members to ensure that questions and supplementary questions are short and concise and related to the subject matter. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed he would feed this back to the Monitoring Officer.

The Committee requested that in relation to paragraph 4.7.2 of the report that a request be made to Council that future meetings of the Democratic Services Committee be held at 4.00pm.

- RESOLVED:
1. Noted the research and work undertaken by the Working Group and thanked the Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Manager and Business Apprentice for their work in conducting research and providing support to the Constitution Working Group;
 2. Noted the recommendations of the Working Group;
 3. That the Committee approved the recommendations of the Constitution Working Group for recommendation to Council with the addition of the following:
 - (i) in relation to paragraph 4.3.9 of the report, added that there be clearer policing of supplementary questions to ensure they are relevant to the original question and that they short and concise;
 - (ii) in relation to paragraph 4.7.2 of the report, that a request be made to hold future meetings of the Democratic Services Committee at 4.00pm.

172. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which updated the Democratic Services Committee on the delivery of the Council's Member Training and Development Programme and related activities. He requested the Committee to identify topics for inclusion on the Member Development Programme and Pre Council Briefings.

The Democratic Services Manager explained the member development training, Development Control Committee Training and Pre Council Briefing Sessions that had been provided since 6th June 2019 which were listed at 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 of the report.

He provided the future schedule of Pre Council Briefing Sessions to date, these included:

- 23 October 2019: Strategic Development Plan
- 20 November 2019: Local Area Energy Strategy and Smart Energy Plan
- 18 December 2019: New Curriculum Changes
- 11 March 2020: Education Outcomes
- Welfare & Benefits System – TBC

He advised that January/February had been intentionally left free as this was the time of the year that the budget was considered. He explained that there had been some ambiguity with the schedule of this so had not planned any briefing sessions for the time being.

The Democratic Services Managed outlined the scheduled Development Control Committee Training Sessions which were detailed at section 4.5 of the report.

He also outlined the future proposed Member Training sessions which included:

- 31 October 2019 – Managing Abusive and Aggressive Telephone Calls, Conflict Management & Personal Safety Awareness
- Using Bridgemaps
- Scrutiny Questioning Skills – TBC

- Scrutiny Charing Skills – TBC

The Democratic Services Manager advised that the scheduled training for the 31st October would be delivered twice for that day, with one session being delivered in the morning and a repeat session in the afternoon. This was to ensure that Members who may have struggled to make a morning session could attend an afternoon session, and vice-versa.

The Democratic Services Manager informed the committee of the E-Learning service that had been made available to them via the Learning Pool. He advised that work had been undertaken through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Heads of Democratic Services / Member Support Officer Network to develop national E-learning modules to be available on the All Wales Academy. Further details were provided at section 4.7 of the report.

A Member asked for clarification regarding the proposed Welfare & Benefits System training on the content of this training and what Councillors would be expected to do as a result of it. The Democratic Services Manager explained that the training would be purely for knowledge to be able to signpost a constituent in the right direction. He stressed that Councillors would not be expected to give advice on benefits but should have greater knowledge in the services available so that constituents could be advised on where to seek further information.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that he had been in contact with the Benefits and Financial Assessments Manager who agreed that a fact sheet and list of agencies would be beneficial and could be provided at a later date.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee:

1. Noted the contents of the report
2. Agreed to wait for recommendations from Development Control Committee on further Pre Council Briefings and Member Development Training Sessions
3. That members identify any additional topics for pre-Council briefings to the Head of Democratic Services;
4. That members identify any additional Member Development topics for inclusion in the Member Development Programme to the Head of Democratic Services;
5. That members identify any additional e-learning topics for inclusion in the Member Development Programme to the Head of Democratic Services;
6. That the proposed pre-Council Briefing on the Welfare & Benefits System be instead taken forward with Members receiving a factsheet on the types of benefit that are available.

173. WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL, CABINET AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which provided the committee with an update on arrangements for the webcasting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings and asked the Democratic Services Committee to provide their views on which meetings should be webcast.

He advised the Committee on the current webcasting arrangements set out in section 4.2 of the report.

The Democratic Services Manager advised Members that Officers would look at the feasibility during the next contract period for exploring alternative solutions for webcasting, namely through Skype and YouTube. Officers from Democratic and the ICT Department had visited Monmouthshire Council to view their solutions for webcasting

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meetings. He advised that this option was being considered as there could be a cost saving associated with it.

He provided the statistics of the webcasted meetings for 2018/19 which were listed below:

	Date	Meeting Name	Live Views	On Demand Views	Total Views
1	30-Aug-18	Development Control Committee	38	51	99
2	17-Sep-18	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	11	131	142
3	16-Oct-18	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1	0	42	42
4	18-Oct-18	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2	22	47	69
5	18-Dec-18	Cabinet	27	31	58
6	03-Jan-19	Development Control Committee	10	28	38
7	14-Feb-19	Development Control Committee	70	72	142
8	25-Feb-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	6	10	16
9	18-Mar-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	10	32	42
10	19-Mar-19	Development Control Committee	55	120	175
Average Views			25	56	82
Total Views			249	564	823

The Democratic Services Manager listed the following meetings that had been webcast for the year 2019/20 so far, which also included the breakdown of views:

	Date	Meeting Name	Live Views	On Demand Views	Total Views
1	29-Apr-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1	3	49	52
2	09-May-19	Development Control Committee	6	29	35
3	04-Jun-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1	42	64	106
4	03-Jul-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2	4	31	35
5	05-Sep-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	15	52	62
Average Views			14	45	57
Total Views			74	225	309

The Democratic Services Manager advised the committee of the proposed meetings for webcasting until March 2020:

- Development Control Committee – 5 December 2019
- Cabinet – 17 December 2019
- Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee TBC - (Budget)

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He advised that October 2019 and November 2019 were intentionally left free as new HD cameras were scheduled to be installed early November to replace the current cameras that were in place in the Council Chamber.

A Member asked who decides what meetings are webcast. The Democratic Services Manager explained that meetings are primarily chosen by the Democratic Services Team on the basis that the item or items on that meeting's agenda are of possible interest to the public.

He explained that Members were always welcomed to put their views in to the Democratic Services Team on meetings they wish to be webcasted and these would be considered.

A Member stated that a change in the term used to describe webcasting may make it easier for members of the public to locate the link for recorded meetings on the website. She explained that 'webcasting' does not really explain what it is we do, or may not be understood to an older audience. She added that changing the name to 'view a Council meeting' or something similar may help the general public understand more easily. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to progress this issue.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee:

1. Noted the update on arrangements for the webcasting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings as detailed in section 4 of the report.
2. Commented on the list of meetings that are proposed as detailed in section 4.4.4 of the report and provided its views on what future meetings should be webcast.
3. Requested that the Head of Democratic Services explore alternative solutions for the webcasting of meetings which are most cost effective and to make them more accessible to the public.

174. URGENT ITEMS

None