



## **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH (SIRHOWY ROOM) ON WEDNESDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER 2014 AT 5:00 PM**

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PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies Vice-Chair

Councillors:

Mrs G. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, H.W. David, W. David, R.T. Davies, Mrs C. Forehead,  
Ms J.G. Jones, G. Kirby, Mrs M.E. Sargent, Mrs E. Stenner and J. Taylor.

Together with:

J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), A. Price (Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer).

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Bevan, Mrs P. Griffiths, C.P. Mann (Chair), Mrs D. Price and A. Rees.

Having received apologies from Councillor C.P. Mann (Chair), Councillor D.T. Davies (Vice Chair) presided as Chair for the meeting.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

#### **3. MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 28th May 2014 (minute nos. 1-7) be approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

## REPORTS OF OFFICERS

### 4. PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE STANDARD SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

The Scrutiny Research Officer introduced the report which outlined proposals to amend scrutiny committee agendas in order to make them consistent with the new consultation arrangements for scrutiny committee forward work programmes as well as changes to the printing of scrutiny committee information reports.

It was noted that since the introduction of the new forward work programme arrangements it had become apparent that the format of scrutiny committee agendas needed to be reconsidered. The standard request for report agenda item was not consistent with the new arrangements for developing forward work programmes on a rolling 12 week cycle. In order to ensure clarity and consistency with the management of the forward work programmes the report suggested that this item be removed from scrutiny committee agendas.

In terms of information reports it was noted that these were currently printed and included in the committee agenda pack. Members were advised of the costs associated with the printing of committee documents and the need to make savings in this area. It was noted that of the 105 information reports presented to scrutiny committees over the last 6 months only 4 were called in for discussion.

The Officer confirmed that information items would continue to be included on the committee agenda but would not be printed. Instead Councillors and members of the public would be advised on the agenda that these reports would be made available electronically and should the report be called forward for discussion printed copies would be made available at the meeting.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and full discussion ensued.

Members were mindful that the number of information reports being brought forward for discussion was low and the need to make savings against printing costs. However it was felt that the information contained within these reports was important to Members, irrespective of whether it warranted calling forward. The difficulties some people experienced reading a particularly large report or high volume of documents on screen was referenced and concerns were also expressed that any loss of internet connectivity or server failure could prohibit access to reports.

Officers confirmed that printed copies could still be made available on request and advised that the proposed changes could be revisited should the transition proved impractical.

It was moved and seconded that an additional recommendation be referred to Council in that the provision of only electronic 'for information' reports be implemented for a trial period with the transition reviewed at the end of the financial year and by a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained in the Officer's report and the additional recommendation of the Democratic Services Committee be recommended to Council for approval and by a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations be approved by Council: -

1. To remove the 'requests for reports agenda item' from the standard scrutiny committee agenda.
2. To discontinue the printing of information reports and include advice on the agenda that copies of the reports are available electronically on the Council's website and Members Portal.

3. The Monitoring Officer be given delegated powers to make the necessary amendments to the Council's Constitution.
4. That the provision of only electronic information reports be implemented for a trial period with the transition reviewed at the end of the financial year.

**5. DEVOLUTION, DEMOCRACY AND DELIVERY WHITE PAPER - REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the report which informed Members of the Welsh Government White Paper 'Devolution, Democracy and Delivery - Reforming Local Government' as part of the consultation process.

The White Paper contained a number of very significant potential issues for local government and the key proposals were highlighted for Members information. The proposals for the further strengthening of scrutiny arrangements to ensure greater openness, transparency and accountability were outlined. These were noted to include a requirement for auditors and regulators to report directly to scrutiny committees; putting Local Service Boards on a statutory footing and a greater emphasis on providing effective challenge on performance.

Members were referred to page 37 of Appendix 1, which contained a series of questions for response as part of the consultation process. The Officer confirmed that Chris Burns (Interim Chief Executive) would be submitting a report to Council on the 29th September 2014 and had requested Members comments on the 26 questions to assist him in his response to the consultation. It was noted that should Members wish more time to consider their response they could be made following the meeting to the Democratic Services Manager or at Council. Members wanting to respond individually could do so directly to Welsh Government.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and Members comments were welcomed.

Proposals to strengthen scrutiny were welcomed but concerns were expressed as to how this could be achieved considering the depth of the cuts facing local authorities. Concerns were also expressed in terms of the increase workload facing Councillors as a result of the changes and the need to ensure that the role was appropriate remunerated going forward in order to attract younger people.

In terms of funding for scrutiny the Officer confirmed that grant funding was available from Welsh Government for specific scrutiny development activities as was the case with the recent Gwent Scrutiny Challenge event. However, bids were quite competitive and must have achievable outcomes.

Members discussed scrutinising performance management and how this could be accommodated within an already extremely busy meeting cycle. The Officer confirmed that a report would be coming forward to the next meeting on how scrutiny could become more involved in performance management and how this could be more easily presented to Members on a regular basis.

Members requested that the Democratic Services Manager re-circulate the White Paper to all Councillors.

Having fully considered the report the Democratic Services Committee noted the consultation requirements on the White Paper 'Devolution, Democracy and Delivery - Reforming Local Government'.

## **6. SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL FOR ELECTED MEMBERS.**

The Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which presented a draft Social Media Protocol for Members consideration and endorsement prior to its presentation at Council.

Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report and the draft protocol which set out how Elected Members should interact with social media both as Councillors and private individuals. The Officer confirmed that Section 2.1 of the protocol referred to the use of Social Media by Elected Members. It was noted that the protocol sought to provide examples of good social media use as well as the risks and where possible breaches of the code of conduct could arise.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and full discussion ensued.

Concern was raised on paragraphs 2.1.5 and 2.1.6 which stated that Members should not use social media during meetings and should use mobile devices sparingly and discreetly during meetings.

A difference of opinion arose in this regard with some Members in favour of the prohibition of social media use during meetings and other Members in favour of its use. The main concern expressed by the majority of those present was that updating social media during a meeting would divert Members attention from the matter under debate which should be their primary focus.

The Officer noted the points raised and referenced the WLGA Guidance on Social Media and a recent statement by the then Local Government and Government Business Manager, Lesley Griffiths on the use of Social Media. Members were asked to consider carefully the use of social media at meetings and how this could be perceived.

Concerns were also raised in regard to paragraph 2.1.8.5 which stated that members should be aware that any person they include as a contact on a social media site should be regarded, for the purposes of the Code of Conduct, as a close personal associate. A Member expressed the concern that they might not have had actual contact with a particular 'facebook friend' or 'twitter follower' and due to the potential volume of contacts involved Members may not even be aware that they would have a declaration to declare. Clarification was sought as to whether this lack of awareness would be a suitable defence should this become an issue for the Standards Committee.

The Officer noted the concerns raised and confirmed that it would not be possible to give Members a definitive list of examples as to when a relationship should be declared, but what the protocol sought to do was highlight the possibility that a conflict could arise. Members were referred to guidance from the Public Ombudsman for Wales on the definition of a 'close personal associate' and were advised that this had to be translated into the associations that were made using social media. Therefore contacts on a social media site should be regarded as close personal associates. The Officer agreed that there were clear benefits to using social media to communicate with members of the public but as described in the protocol different professional and personal sites could be used to differentiate between friends and constituents.

The Officer reminded Members that the public perception of the connection could be different to that of the Member and this should be kept in mind.

It was moved and seconded that for the reasons given in the Officer's report the recommendation contained therein be approved and Council be informed of the endorsement of the Democratic Service Committee and by a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Social Media Protocol set out in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report be adopted by Council.

## **7. PROTOCOL FOR THE WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the draft report which sought the views of the Democratic Services Committee on the protocol for the webcasting of Council meetings prior to its consideration at Council on the 7th October 2014.

The Officer summarised the progress made with regard to the implementation of webcasting and electronic voting and confirmed that the company 'Public-i' had been awarded a 3 year contract to facilitate webcasting and provide electronic storage of the webcast recordings.

The Officer confirmed that webcasting provided an unedited audio and visual recording of a meeting which would be available via the Council's website to view either live or in an archive format. It was noted that there were exceptions where editing would be allowed but this would require approval from the Monitoring Officer and viewers informed that they would be watching an edited version at the start of the webcast. Webcasts would be archived and available on the website for 18th months. Storage after which that period would be on a digital disk. The number of individual hits for both live and recorded meetings would be logged and analysed in order to gauge the level of interest generated. It was noted that Councils' already webcasting were experiencing a steady increase in the number of hits experienced.

In relation to electronic voting, it was noted that the system in the Chamber had been replaced and was now fully functioning and would link into the webcasting software. This allowed the vote to be displayed on the screens in the Chamber and be included in the webcast. The vote would then be printed ready for publication on the Council website.

Members were advised that meetings of Council over the next 3 months would be recorded, as if live but would not be publicly available. This would enable Members to become accustomed to the cameras position and operation and allow them to reflect on the process.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

Concerns were expressed with regard to the proposed change to the minute style of webcast meetings. Members felt it important that the minute style remain unchanged in order to properly reflect the discourse of the meeting. Concern was also expressed that should there be an equipment failure a full set of minutes would be a vital back-up.

It was noted that the reduction in minutes to reflect decisions rather than debate was to ensure consistency with the webcast. A written minute being subjective to the minute taker and the webcast being objective. A Member expressed his confidence in the experience of the Council Committee Clerk to accurately summarise the main topics of debate and expressed his preference that the written minute style remain in detail and unchanged going forward with webcasting.

The archiving of minutes and digital recordings and the role of the Glamorgan Archive was discussed. Members requested that the Democratic Services Manager contract the Archivist with regard to the inclusion of digital webcasts.

Members noted the 3 month trial period for webcast meetings and expressed concern that this did not provide many meetings of Council. Clarification was sought as to whether webcasting would be rolled out to any other committees and the Officer confirmed that at the moment only Council would be webcast. He advised that the cost involved in kitting out another meeting room such as the Sirhowy Room were prohibitive but other meetings/events held within the Chamber had the potential to be webcast.

It was moved and seconded that the minute style for webcast meetings of Council remain unchanged and the view of the Democratic Services Committee be reflected in the report presented to Council on the 7th October 2014 and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minute style for webcast meetings of Council continue to be a full record and this be reflected in the report presented to Council on the 7th October 2014.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2014 they were signed by the Chair.

The meeting closed at 6:30 pm.

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CHAIR