



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH (SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY 13TH JUNE 2013 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor C.P. Mann - Chairman
Councillor D.T. Davies Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs G. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, D.G. Carter, W. David, R.T. Davies, Mrs C. Forehead,
Ms J.G. Jones, G. Kirby, Mrs D. Price and Mrs E. Stenner

Together with:

G. Williams (Monitoring Officer), D. Perkins (Head of Legal and Democratic Services),
J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer)

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

It was with great sadness that the Chairman acknowledged the recent passing of Councillor Mrs. A. Collins, Members and Officers stood for a minute silence as a mark of respect and remembrance.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from H.W. David, Mrs P. Griffiths, Mrs M.E. Sargent and J. Taylor

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 27th March 2013 minute nos. 1-7 on page nos. 1-4) be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES REPORT 'ELECTORAL REVIEWS: COUNCIL SIZE POLICY CONSULTATION PAPER'**

The report outlined the proposals contained within the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales report 'Electoral Reviews: Council Size Policy Consultation Paper' and sought Members comments as part of the consultation process.

The background to the consultation paper was summarised and the different categories used were defined, Members noted that Caerphilly had been included in Category 3 having a population density of less than 4.5 people per hectare and an urban nature of less than 50% of the population living outside settlements with a population over 10,000. The proposed councillors to population ratios were detailed and Members noted the recommendation of a council size of 66 councillors for Caerphilly.

Officers confirmed that the Boundary Commissions report proposals were subject to consultation until the 19th June 2013 before making its final proposals to Welsh Government and Members views were sought in relation to the questions listed in Appendix A of their report.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and Members views were sought as part of the consultation process.

Members expressed their frustration at the timing of the proposals given that a similar investigation was already underway that would explore the same themes. Members also felt Caerphilly categorisation did not accurately reflect the areas demographic and felt that Category 2 would be more appropriate.

The impact on wards was discussed at length and concerns were expressed that this had not been fully considered by the Boundary Commission.

In response to Question 1 Members felt that the matrix had not considered the typography or rural nature of wards and the impact this had on workload of the local councillor. As far as the parameters detail in Question 2, Members made no comment

In terms of councillor to population ratios and the response to Question 3, Members expressed concern that no consideration had been given to areas of social deprivation that existed within a ward and felt that the Boundary Commission had little understanding of the work involved at ground level when producing the ratios figures. Consideration also needed to be given to those Councils that had retained their housing stock and the added responsibility this gave a ward member. The impact of the Local Government Measure and the broadening of the councillor role also needed to be considered when calculating the ratio of councillors to population.

With regard to the maximum and minimum Council sizes Members fully discussed the implications and expressed concern with regard to the position of other Councils within the categories detailed. In response to Question 4 Members felt it would be inappropriate to comment on the minimum size of a Council, given the make up of some existing Welsh Councils but agreed that 75 as a maximum number was acceptable.

Members had no comment in relation to Questions 6, 7 and 8 and requested that the Democratic Services Manager forward their comments and concerns onto the Boundary Commission as part of the consultation process.

5. WALES AUDIT OFFICE SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT STUDY

The report informed Members of the outcome of the Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study which commenced in November 2012.

The different phases of the study were outlined and the role Members played during each phase was detailed. Officers confirmed that each Council would be provided with a final self-evaluation study which would be followed a national summary report and a National Scrutiny Conference would be held during the autumn of 2013. The resulting study and summary report would be used to inform good practice and improve the effectiveness of scrutiny going forward.

Members thanked Cath Forbes-Thompson, Scrutiny Research Officer for all her hard work during the study and commended her for all her efforts.

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

Members felt that the Peer Learning Exchange Fieldwork had been particularly useful and would like to see some of the good practice observed during the visit to Monmouthshire Council introduced into scrutiny practice at this authority.

Officers agreed that further visits to other authorities in order to observe other working practices would be useful and confirmed that arrangements would be made to do this in the autumn.

Having fully considered its content the Democratic Services Committee noted the report and its recommendations.

The recommendations as detailed in section 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3 of the report were moved and seconded and by a show of hands unanimously agreed.

6. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT 'FAMILY ABSENCE FOR MEMBERS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES (WALES) REGULATIONS 2013 AND STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON FAMILY ABSENCE'

The report sought Members views on the Welsh Government's consultation on the draft Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 and the associated draft Statutory Guidance.

Members noted the range of family absence entitlements and the efforts made to establish a successful work/life balance for councillors and fully discussed the implications of each.

Members agreed that in order to attract a younger demographic to the councillor role the entitlements detailed would be an excellent starting point.

Having fully considered its content the Democratic Services Committee noted the report and fully endorsed the proposed family absences for Members and requested that their endorsement be forwarded to Welsh Government as part of the consultation process.

7. GOVERNANCE REVIEW - UPDATE INFORMATION ITEM

The report provided Members with an update in relation to the progress of the Action Plan prepared to strengthen and improve the Council's governance processes and procedures to address the weaknesses highlighted by the Wales Audit Office.

Officers confirmed that the Programme Board had been established to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan and strengthen and improve governance arrangements. The projects identified through the Action Plan were detailed and included improvements to Forward Work Programme processes, the development of a procedure manual for Democratic Services, the establishment of a Constitution Working Party, a review of Member training and the implementation of an electronic voting system.

In terms of the electronic voting system, full training would be given to Members prior to its implementation in September 2013. Officers explained the link between the electronic voting system and webcasting and how the systems would work once fully operational. It was noted that voting procedures would be quicker and would be automatically recorded by the system giving greater transparency to the process.

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

Clarification was sought in relation to the implementation of electronic voting and Officers confirmed that they were currently in the early stage of procurement. Members fully discussed the cost implications of introducing the system and noted that the staffing required to run the system would be provided from the current Democratic Services staff levels.

Having fully considered its content the Democratic Services Committee noted the report.

The meeting closed at 18:17pm

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October 2013 there were signed by the Chairman

CHAIRMAN