

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM A - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON MONDAY, 29 JULY 2019

PRESENT

County Councillor E Vaughan (Chair)

County Councillors L V Corfield, D Rowlands, J Charlton, D E Davies, D O Evans, D Jones-Poston, K Laurie-Parry, D R Price, K S Silk, R Williams and S L Williams

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor G Breeze who was on other Council business.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

The Committee agreed to defer the election of a Vice Chair to the next meeting as the nominated members withdrew their names.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April, 2019 as a correct record.

The Chair agreed to change the order of the Agenda.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. CHANGES TO THE FINANCIAL REGULATIONS FOR VIREMENTS

The Committee noted that the proposal in respect of the Financial Regulations for Virements regarding projects that span more than one year. It would mean that the re-profiling of Capital budgets between financial years would no longer be considered a virement (provided that the overall budget remains the same) under Rules 16.92 to 16.100 of the Constitution.

Recommendation to Council:	Reason for Recommendation:
That the changes to the Financial Regulations for Virements be approved.	To allow the roll forward of capital budgets and finding to a future year providing the overall budget remains the same.

6. MEMBERS' FACILITIES AT COUNTY HALL

The Committee noted the results of the Members' survey regarding Members' facilities at County Hall. The Committee noted that there was a clear indication that Members wanted to be co-located with their support and IT staff.

In response to questions the Property Manager assured the Committee that the comments from the survey would be taken into account when designs were

developed. He advised that a number of design options would be developed for the Committee's consideration. The Head of Democratic Services advised that although the need for large screens and a hearing loop received few responses in the survey, the new facilities would need to address future needs. Concerns were raised regarding the lift from Reception to the meeting rooms and Members area. The Property Manager advised that consideration would be given for improving disabled access to this area.

The Property Manager advised that the Welsh Government's move to the building had been delayed to April 2020 at the earliest. The Committee expressed concerns about the cost of the refurbishment of the Members' facilities and that the current furniture should be reused within the building. Members noted that the Welsh Government was part funding the refurbishment with the Council, but whoever was paying, it was still public money and therefore the Committee asked for details of costs. The Property Manager noted this and advised that there would be a net saving to the public purse when the Welsh Government moved from one public building into another.

The Property Manager advised that public access to Members areas would be considered in the scheme of works. Concerns were raised about staff parking in the Members and Visitors Car Park. The Committee asked that a polite email be sent to staff to remind them not to park in this area. The Property Manager advised that additional car parking would be created to accommodate the Welsh Government staff and its visitors. Traffic orders for all car parks were being sought so that inappropriate parking could be addressed.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that if required, the plans and costs could be presented to Council in October.

RESOLVED	REASON FOR DECISION:
<p>i. that the outcome of the survey be used to inform the design for the revised Members' area and</p> <p>ii. that the design options and costs for the revised Members' area be considered by the Committee in September.</p>	<p>To ensure that members' views are taken into account in the design of any revised Members' facility at County Hall.</p>

7.	QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS CONSIDERED AT COUNCIL AND SPEAKING AT COUNCIL MEETINGS
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Questions by Members considered at Council

The Committee noted the report regarding Questions by Members considered at Council and the length of Council meetings. The Head of Democratic Services highlighted the Members frustration with the length of meetings and their perception of not getting "proper" answers to questions.

The following comments were made:

- The Newport County Council system for Members asking "Formal Questions at Any Other Time" where the questions and answers are

recorded on the website, was considered as being of use and was also transparent

- Cabinet Member had a responsibility to actually answer the questions asked
- Cabinet Members were not always in Council meetings when Members questions to Council are considered and so are not available to answer supplementary questions
- The ability to ask questions in public at Council meetings was an important part of the democratic process
- Retaining the questions in Council was also about Members being able to hold Cabinet Members to account on specific ward issues.
- The time taken for Members questions was not considered as the main issue and that the time taken should be monitored at the next meeting.

It was confirmed that the current Constitution allowed a Member to ask a maximum of two questions to any Council meeting. The Committee also questioned the number of meetings, which dealt with issues other than the budget. The Head of Democratic Services advised that the number of Council meetings was being reviewed for 2020 to reduce the gaps between meetings. It was considered that the timing and format of meetings should be reviewed.

It was suggested that a Working Group should look at the meetings and how they are managed.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL	Reason for Recommendation:
That in addition to Members being able to ask questions to Council [as permitted under the Constitution] the Newport County Council system of "Formal Questions at Any Other Time" be trialled for a period of 12 months and that the trial be reviewed, with a report being made to Council.	Ongoing review of the Council.

RESOLVED THAT	Reason for Recommendation:
A Working Group reviews Council meetings and how they are managed.	Ongoing review of the Council.

Speaking to Council meetings

The Committee considered the report regarding Political Groups identifying speakers on specific issues to facilitate discussion at Council meetings. The Committee considered that this would improve Council meetings and that Group Leaders should be asked to discuss this. The Committee also indicated that such a process could support the Chair of Council.

Concern was raised about the process for dealing with amendments to recommendations at Council meetings. The Head of Democratic Services advised that Section 4 of the Constitution was currently being reviewed to address this.

It was noted that the broader issues around Council meetings and the suggestion of a presiding officer would be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED THAT	Reason for Recommendation:
a Group leaders meeting be held, to discuss the proposal of the having nominated speakers to items on Council agendas, before the next Council meeting.	Ongoing review of the Council.

8.	MEMBERSHIP OF THE MEMBER DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP [MDWG] AND DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP
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The Committee agreed the following membership:
 Member Development Working Group – County Councillors Breeze, Charlton, Evans, Jones-Poston, Silk and S. Williams
 Democracy Working Group: County Councillors Charlton, Durrant, Jones-Poston, Laurie-Parry and R Williams.

The Committee agreed that Working Groups would meet after DSC meetings, although it was noted that Working Groups meet more frequently and that skype would be used where possible.

9.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee asked that timescales are added to the Work Programme. It was agreed that the following would be added to the Work Programme:

- Review of the Employment and Appeals Committee – in light of how such Committees operate in other Councils
- Review of Council meetings – this would be considered by the Democracy Working Group

**County Councillor E Vaughan
Chair**