

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON MONDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT

County Councillor E Vaughan (Chair)

County Councillors G Breeze, L Brighthouse, I Harrison, K Healy, P Lewington,
P E Lewis and DW Meredith

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor D Bebb and County Councillor S Williams who was on other Council business.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Resolved that County Councillor G Breeze be elected Vice Chair for the ensuing year.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 21 February, 2022 as a correct record.

It was noted that the scheduled meeting on 18 July did not go ahead as the meeting was not quorate. The Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services advised that the draft response to the Local Government: Guidance for Principal Councils - Consultation on Statutory Guidance and Directions was circulated to the Committee members for comment and the final response was sent to the Welsh Government by the due date.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

The Chair welcomed Catherine James, Head of Transformation and Democratic Services and Lowri Shepstone, Communications & Engagement Officer.

The Committee noted that the draft had been updated to include reference to the Council's ePetition scheme and the consultation dates had been amended. A twelve week consultation would take place, with the aim of publishing the strategy in early 2023.

Comment was made that not all residents had access to information online. It was questioned how they would access information about the Council and also be involved. The officers agreed to look into this issue and reflect this in the draft document.

Resolved that any comments on the draft would be forwarded to officers within 14 days and then the draft would be subject to 12 weeks consultation.

6.	CONSTITUTION – SECTION 4 - SPEAKING ON MOTIONS
-----------	---

The Committee considered the report regarding speaking to motions. It was noted that the revised speaking times were agreed in November 2020 but had not been subject to a review. In addition to this review, the Committee was also being asked to consider the times for Portfolio Holders and speakers in respect of the Closure of Motions, to ensure consistency in timings.

In response to a question the Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer advised that the trial period for the changes in the times for speakers was introduced as it was felt that Council meetings were being lengthened due to repetition by speakers. Returning councillors commented that the trial times had worked well. It was considered that the Portfolio Holders should have a response time of 2 minutes.

It was moved and duly seconded to recommend to Council the officer's recommendations and also that Portfolio Holders should have a response time of 2 minutes.

Recommendation to Council:	Reason for Recommendation:
1. That the speaking times in relation to motions be amended on a permanent basis to 5 minutes and 2 minutes. 2. That the speaking time allowed for Portfolio Holders is 2 minutes.	To revise the speaking time for motions in Section 4 of the constitution following the trial agreed by Council in November 2020.

Resolved that:	Reason for Decision:
That the Head of Legal Service and the Monitoring Officer prepares a draft revision of Section 4 of the Constitution to reflect the decisions in 1 and 2 above for consideration by the Council.	To revise the speaking time for motions in Section 4 of the constitution following the trial agreed by Council in November 2020.

7.	REPRESENTATION ON COMMITTEES
-----------	-------------------------------------

The Committee considered the report regarding Representation on Committees.

It was noted that the Group Leaders had asked for a review due to the fact that the number of councillors had reduced from 73 to 68 at the last election and some Groups were finding it difficult to fill vacancies on Committees. However, it was noted that where Groups have vacant seats on a committee they can and do offer these to other Groups and non-affiliated members, where appropriate. Comment was made that a reduction of 7% in councillors would only equate to a one less member of a committee of 21. It was noted that many newly appointment councillors work. In response to a comment the Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer advised that the scope of the review could be widened to look at the participation of councillors, as some non-affiliated members may not be a member of any committee and receive the same salary as other councillors who participate in committees.

It was moved and duly seconded to agree the officer's recommendation and to widen the review to consider participation of councillors in committees.

Resolved that:	Reason for decision
<p>1. A review of the numbers of seats on Committees (with the exception of Finance Panel, the Governance and Audit Committee and the Pensions and Investment Committee) be undertaken.</p> <p>2. the review also includes the councillors' participation in committees and</p> <p>3. officers (a) commence discussions with Chairs and Members of the Committees; (b) obtain benchmarking information if possible and (c) report back to the Committee at its next meeting.</p>	<p>To consider revising the numbers of seats on the Council's Committees following the reduction in the size of the Council from 73 to 68 Members.</p>

With the agreement of the Chair the following item was considered.

Broadcasting of committee meetings.

Concerns were raised regarding the changes to the broadcasting of committee meetings and the responses provided by the Leader to questions raised by councillors. It was considered that not having access to "live" meetings was in contradiction to the Leader being Cabinet Member for an Open and Transparent Powys.

It was moved and duly seconded that a recommendation from the Democratic Services Committee to Full Council for an immediate return of press and public access to live broadcasts of planning, scrutiny, employment, democratic services and any other meetings which were previously accessible.

The Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer advised that prior to the pandemic only Council and Cabinet meetings were broadcast live. Members of the public and press could however attend in person other committee meetings. During Covid all committee meetings were streamed "live" using Teams, at no extra cost to the Council but Welsh translation was not available. Since May 2022 the new equipment in the Chamber, County Hall had allowed hybrid meetings with Welsh translation. This system was being used for Council and Cabinet meetings as budget was available for these. The Committee noted that officers were testing various systems to enable all meetings to be broadcast "live", with Welsh translation. The Committee was advised that, if the same system as used for broadcasting Council meetings was used, the extra cost for webcasting all committee meetings could be between £80k - £90k per annum.

The Chair noted the issues regarding systems and costs raised by officers but there was a principle of accessibility and openness. He suggested that in light of

the work being undertaken by officers to find a solution that a timescale is set at three months or 60 days from the Council meeting for this to be resolved. The proposer and seconder agreed to the addition of 60 days from the Council meeting on 6 October for this to be resolved to be added to the motion.

Resolved that the Democratic Services Committee recommends to Full Council on October 6 for an immediate return of press and public access to live broadcasts of planning, scrutiny, employment, democratic services and any other meetings which were previously accessible and that the issue of “live” broadcasts is resolved within 60 days of this Full Council meeting.

County Councillor E Vaughan (Chair)