

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD BY TEAMS ON MONDAY, 5 JULY 2021

PRESENT

County Councillor E Vaughan (Chair)

County Councillors J Charlton, L V Corfield, S C Davies, D O Evans, S M Hayes,
D Jones-Poston, K S Silk, R Williams and S L Williams

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors M Barnes, G Breeze and D Rowlands.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED that Councillor J Charlton be elected as Vice Chair for the ensuing year.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2021 as a correct record.

In response to a question regarding Item 2 – Minutes of previous meetings, the Head of Democratic Services advised that the Committee's recommendation regarding Speaking at Council meetings from its meeting of 19 October 2020, which the County Council had been referred back to the Committee for further consideration, would be added to the Committee's work programme.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. CONSTITUTION

The Committee considered the report regarding proposed changes to the Constitution.

Section 7 – Scrutiny Committees

The Committee noted that the removal of the Co-ordinating Committee had been supported by the Chairs of Scrutiny, the Cabinet and the Executive Management Team and would be replaced by ad-hoc meetings of the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

In response to comments that financial scrutiny was not embedded in scrutiny committees the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that a training programme on this was being developed. He also advised that requests for scrutiny should be forwarded to scrutiny chairs and agreed to highlight this in the report to Council if the Committee was minded to approve the proposed changes. Comment was made that one scrutiny chair wished to establish an ongoing working group but it was noted that this was not allowed under the

Constitution and the member considered that this should be reviewed. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that in accordance with Welsh Government guidance working groups should be time limited or task and finish groups. He advised he would discuss this issue with the scrutiny chair.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services in response to questions advised that the quorum for Council meetings is set under the Local Government Act 1972. He agreed to review sections 7.23.2 and 7.26.1 in respect of the time limits referred to in each and make any minor changes if the Committee is content with this.

It was moved and duly seconded to change Section 7 – Scrutiny Committees as detailed in the report.

Recommendation to the County Council:	Reason for recommendation
<p>1. That the amendments to Section 7 of the Constitution (Scrutiny Committees) are approved as set out in the draft Section 7 in Appendix A of the report.</p> <p>2. That the Monitoring Officer is authorised to make such other changes to the Constitution as may be required to reflect the change set out in recommendation 1 above.</p>	<p>To review and amend the Constitution so that it aligns with the current requirements of the Council.</p>

Section 9 – Regulatory Committees

The Committee noted that a national easy guide to constitutions was due for publication in the autumn. It was moved and duly seconded to change Section 9 – Regulatory Committees as detailed in the report.

Recommendation to the County Council:	Reason for Recommendation:
<p>3. That the amendments to Section 9 of the Constitution (Regulatory Committees) are approved as set out in the draft Section 9 in Appendix B of the report.</p> <p>4. That the Monitoring Officer is authorised to make such changes to the Constitution as may be required to reflect the change set out in Recommendation 3 above.</p>	<p>To review and amend the Constitution so that it aligns with the current requirements of the Council.</p>

Section 2 – Purpose, Definition, Interpretation and Amendment to the Constitution

It was moved and duly seconded to change Section 2 – Purpose, Definition, Interpretation and Amendment to the Constitution as detailed in the report.

Recommendation to the County Council:	Reason for Recommendation:
<p>5. That the amendments to Section 2 of the Constitution (Purpose, Definition, Interpretation) are approved as set out in the draft Section 2 in Appendix C of the report.</p> <p>6. That the Monitoring Officer is authorised to make such changes to the Constitution as may be required to reflect the changes set out in Recommendation 5 above.</p>	<p>To review and amend the Constitution so that it aligns with the current requirements of the Council.</p>

6.	MEMBER CHAMPIONS REVIEW
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The Committee considered the report regarding Member Champions.

The following comments were made:

- councillors should be able to put themselves forward for consideration as a champion, explaining their skills and experience which they could bring to the role, with a recommendation from the Leader to Council on the appointment, so that it is a Council appointment
- the proposed process and template for reporting would make champions more accountable
- as scrutiny was now more mature, it was questioned whether there was a need for member champions
- what is the added value of member champions
- neither appointments process is satisfactory as any appointment process can become political
- member champions could bring knowledge and evidence to scrutiny committees to ensure issues are integral to scrutiny work
- member champions have no support staff or resources, so their impact would be limited.

The process for assessing the need for and establishment of a member champion role was questioned. It was also considered that the views of existing member champions should be sought.

Resolved	Reason for decision
<p>To review the need for Member Champions and seek views of current champions.</p>	

7.	DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY DECLARATION
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The Committee considered the report regarding the Diversity in Democracy Declaration and the draft Declaration based on the outline provided by the Welsh Local Government Association [WLGA], amended to reflect the local context.

The following comments were made:

- the new ways of working using online meetings rather than the need to travel across Powys was beneficial and should be emphasised
- anyone who wants to be a councillor should be supported to do so and by specifically encouraging some groups should not, inadvertently, be seen as a discouragement to others
- knowing the days during a week a councillor would be expected to be available to undertake their councillor role could encourage more people to consider the role. It was noted that the Senedd specifies the days on which members need to be available
- statistical information regarding the profile of Powys residents would be useful so that the councillor's role could be promoted to specific groups
- time to engage fully in council work and wards is an issue
- although the council is unable to be involved in recruiting candidates, it can have a proactive role in promoting the role of a councillor and the council's role in this should not be watered down. The Council can ensure the information on its website for prospective candidates provides information about a councillor's role and how they are supported within the council, via other organisations and the allowances available
- need to ensure that the school curriculum includes information about democracy and the roles of the various tiers of government. Without this young people will not be encouraged to become involved in politics or local democracy.

In response to comments the Head of Democratic Services advised that if the declaration is recommended by the Committee to Council and the latter supports this, an action plan will be developed and that would be where the ambition of any targets can be challenged.

It was moved and duly seconded to agree the officer's recommendation.

Recommendation to Council	Reason for recommendation
<p>1. That the draft Diversity in Democracy Declaration as amended and attached to the report be approved;</p> <p>2. That if approved an action plan be prepared setting out the measures to deliver the declaration by May 2022, for approval by the Council.</p>	<p>To agree a Diversity in Democracy Declaration and the preparation of an action plan.</p>

8.	COUNCIL ELECTIONS MAY 2022 - PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE NEW COUNCIL
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The Committee received the report regarding the preparatory work for the May 2022 council election.

The following comments were made:

- the information should be made available for potential candidates via the Council website and on social media

- young people need to be encouraged to be involved in politics and officers would look into how this can be done through the Education Service
- the Council's website should promote and encourage prospective candidates' involvement in local politics. This would help individuals who are not associated with political groups. The previous videos made by a number of female councillors regarding their involvement in politics and the Council should be made available on the website again. Links to other useful information should also be included.

9. RADNORSHIRE CHAIN OF OFFICE

The Committee noted the request received from Presteigne and Norton Town Council to use the Radnorshire Committee chain of office as this was no longer being used. It was noted that Presteigne and Norton Town Council was seeking a replacement for its current chain for its Mayor. Comment was made that other councils in the Radnorshire area could also be in the same position as the Town Council. It was noted that the Radnorshire Committee chain was donated in 1974 to Radnorshire District Council.

It was agreed that it was more appropriate that the Radnorshire councillors should consider the request.

County Councillor E Vaughan (Chair)