

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2021

PRESENT

County Councillor E Vaughan (Chair)

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

1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors M Barnes and County Councillors S C Davies and T J Van-Rees who were on other council business.

2.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING(S)
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The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 as a correct record.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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There were no declarations of interest.

4.	AUDIT WALES FOLLOW UP REVIEW OF SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS 2021
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The Committee considered the Audit Wales Review of Scrutiny in 2021 and the action plan to address the review findings. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that some aspects of the action plan had already been completed or others were underway. He advised that Audit Wales would present its report to the Governance and Audit Committee the next day. The Democratic Services Committee was being asked to consider and approve the action plan.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services responded to the following:

- The formal response to Cabinet of the scrutiny views was noted but it questioned whether the Cabinet should formally advise scrutiny if it accepted its views and if not the reasons for this, so assisting scrutiny in evaluating its contribution – a verbal response is usually made in Cabinet, but a formal response should be recorded and formally reported back to scrutiny within two months.
- Whether a minority report or individual member views could be made to Cabinet – discussion at a scrutiny committee would lead to its final collective report. However, it would not preclude a member with strong views from submitting these to the Portfolio Holder or Leader.
- Members need more support and the proposed actions from the 2018 report had not progressed – progress was disappointing and some progress had been slowed due to the pandemic. It had been acknowledged that progress had not been as required but this new action plan would be put in place with changes made and embedded prior to the next Council term.
- The role and legality of the Finance Panel had not been considered and was not considered at the County Council meeting on 23 September – the

role was considered by Council at its meeting in September. The issue regarding legality was in respect of the Portfolio Holder for Finance previously being included in the membership of the Panel. The Portfolio Holder was now not included in the membership. In response to the concerns raised the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised he would consider the points raised.

- Members are not getting the support they need to enable them to do their work, are not being involved in developing the work plan and member support is in decline – the Chief Executive and Head of Legal and Democratic Services would ensure that the action plan was followed through and the impact will be monitored.
- The Standing Orders only allows for start and finish working groups, whereas previously a working group for adult and one for children had been established and which worked well – this would be reviewed.

Comment was also made that the Audit Wales report was overcritical and changes and improvements had been made over the last five years and the impact of the pandemic had not been fully considered. There still seemed scope for improvement in understanding how scrutiny can contribute to better decisions as a council and investing in the training of scrutiny committee chairs and vice chairs was important.

It was moved and duly seconded to approve the action plan.

Resolved

that the draft action plan be approved for submission to Audit Wales as the Council's response to the review.

County Councillor E Vaughan (Chair)