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## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2023.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#)

The Meeting recording is available [here](#)

Present: Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson (Chair); Councillor S.J. Haines (Vice-Chair); Councillors G.D.D. Carroll, E. Goodjohn, H.C. Hamilton, S.M. Hanks, K.P. Mahoney, S.D. Perkes, J. Protheroe and N.C. Thomas.

Also present: Councillors G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

### 713 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

### 714 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2022 be approved as a correct record.

### 715 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

### 716 SECTION 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (WALES) MEASURE 2011 – TIMING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS (HDS) –

In presenting the report the Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer in referring to the Statutory Guidance under Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (The Measure) advised that Local Authorities must have regard to the guidance in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings of a Local Authority are held. A copy of the statutory guidance was reproduced at Appendix 1 to the report.

At its meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2022 the Committee had agreed the questions within a draft survey to be circulated to Elected Members of the Council. The survey was undertaken between 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2022 and 14<sup>th</sup> January,

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2023. A copy of the findings of the survey was attached at Appendix 2 to the report, it being noted that 22 of the Authority's 54 Councillors (41%) had completed the survey.

Paragraphs 2.4 to 2.7 of the covering report provided a précis of the analysis of some of the responses to the questions. Out of the 22 responses, as set out in paragraph 2.4, 91% (20) of the responses to the question 'Do you find the arrangements for the current timetable of meetings satisfactory?' responded yes, with 9% (2) stating no.

With regard to question 3, 'Is there a day of the week that you would find it difficult to attend meeting?' the majority of the 19 responses received indicated that they considered the current timetable worked well. In regard to question 6 on timing of meetings, it was accepted that the majority of responses indicated preference for the status quo.

Question 8 covered the possibility of varying or rotating the start time of meetings with 82% of respondents stating they did not consider that varying or rotating the start times would be advantageous. Again, the responses to the question 10 'Do you consider that meetings should have a set meeting length?', the response varied, but in the main, the majority of responses preferring 2 or 3 hours.

In considering the responses to question 13, 'Please could you indicate your preference in relation to which format meetings of the Council should be held being either by hybrid or remote means?' it was noted that the majority of respondents expressed a preference for hybrid meetings. The Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer further advised the Committee that the findings of the survey would also inform the planned 12 month review of the Council's Multi Location Meetings Policy which would be undertaken in the near future.

During consideration of the report, although some Members considered that 22 out of 54 responses was disappointing it was accepted that a 41% response rate to a survey was accepted to be a satisfactory response rate. Councillor Hanks expressed her opinion that with regard to those Members who had not responded to the survey it could be interpreted that they were, in the main, content with the current arrangements for holding meetings of the Council. It was also acknowledged that it would be difficult to satisfy Members' needs given individual circumstances. However, the consensus of the Committee recognised that meetings commencing at 6.00 p.m. would most likely be a suitable time for the majority of Members, it being noted that Cabinet was due to consider a proposed Calendar of Meetings for the next Municipal Year 2023/2024 at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2023.

Given the survey results the Committee accepted that the majority of responses preferred the status quo in that the that the current arrangements for timetabling Council meetings worked well.

Councillor Carroll acknowledged that some meetings may require in-person attendance as referred to in the report and by way of an example drew attention

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to the Senior Management Appointment Committee. Councillor Thomas commented that on occasions some meetings were also very short in nature e.g. the Early Retirement / Redundancy Committee with it being accepted that for such short meetings, remote only attendance would be preferred by Members of that Committee.

Councillor Carroll in referring to the Full Council hybrid meeting that took place in September 2022, on the Civico software platform which had not been as successful as anticipated, hoped that the Council meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 would be able to be held successfully as a hybrid meeting. The Operational Manager for Democratic Services, in response stated that following the meeting held in September 2022 Cabinet had approved undertaking a programme of regression testing of the Civico hybrid solution as reported to the Cabinet in the latter part of 2022. He was aware that a report was currently being prepared for Cabinet's consideration having regard to the outcome of the regression testing that had taken place. Councillor Hanks also requested that she too would wish to see hybrid meetings taking place as soon as possible with the majority of the Committee also commenting that meetings held on a hybrid basis would be most advantageous as it would allow for those Members unable to attend physically in the Civic Offices to be able to attend on a remote basis.

In commenting on the responses received to question 10 regarding the length of time meetings should take, it was acknowledged that a meeting should take as long as required. However, it was noted that there was also the responsibility on the Chairs of Committees generally to manage the meeting and each had the discretion to plan agenda business to be transacted in the most appropriate manner, which included managing committee reports in advance on meetings taking place at Chairs agenda conferences with officers.

All the Members of the Committee concurred with the suggestion that the length of time for development sessions for Members should be limited to a 2-hour maximum period .

In summing up, the Chair concluded that having regard to the discussions at the meeting and the responses to the survey it was apparent that the current arrangements were accepted with it subsequently being

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T Cabinet be advised of the contents of the survey and the recommendations of the Democratic Services Committee that:-

- the current existing arrangements for the cycle / timetable of meetings and times remain unchanged,
- the length of time for training for Members be no more than of 2 hours in duration,
- no single time length for a meeting be recommended, it being accepted that that would be the Chair of a Committee's prerogative

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- having regard to the responses to Question 13, where appropriate all Council meetings be undertaken on a hybrid basis be recommended to the review of the Multi-Locations Policy
- all Members of the Council be informed of the reasons when Council Committee meeting dates and times change

(2) T H A T the report and appendices be forwarded to the Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group for their information and consideration.

Reasons for decisions

(1&2) Having regard to the results of the survey, the discussions at the meeting and in recognising that a review of the Council's Multi Locations Meetings Policy was due to take place.