

Minutes



Democratic Services Committee

Date: 18 January 2022

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors C Ferris (Chair), M Whitcutt, P Hourahine, J Clarke, T Watkins, K Thomas, M Evans and C Townsend, Gareth Price (Head of Law and Regulation), Leanne Rowlands (Democratic Services Manager), Felicity Collins (Governance Officer), Anne Jenkins (Democratic Services Team Leader)

Apologies: Councillor G Giles

1 Apologies

Councillor Giles.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of Meeting held on 13 December 2021

The Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 13 December 2021 approved and **accepted** as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

- Councillor M. Evans referred to page 6 of the minutes; the Committee discussed at length with regard to the submission of petitions. As it was agreed that the officers would provide more options on that in January and asked if there would be an update.

The Head of Service confirmed that the January date is solely for the participation strategy draft but recognised it needs further work to see how they report on petitions and advised they are looking at options such as a report structure of the outcomes for the petitions. It was confirmed that the officers would put forward their findings when in receipt of further information.

- Councillor K. Thomas asked if feedback could be given to the elected Members on ward issues as a mechanism in place so Members can be aware of petitions being circulated in their ward area. It was suggested that those who have champion roles, perhaps they could extend the work to update the champions.

The Head of Law and Regulation stated that is more about the consultation than the petitions. If the petition required a decision, then consultation with ward members would be part of the decision-making process. It was noted they could look at that but at the moment are more concerned about reporting to a committee to monitor how

and when petitions are responded to. The Member was also assured that the team could pick up the point on communication with the Councillors on the response process.

4 **Participation Strategy Draft**

Invitees:

Leanne Rowlands – Democratic Services Manager

Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulation

Key points:

The Democratic Services Manager outlined the key dates for the process of the Participation Strategy. The final format and design on public consultation will be in February, where the strategy should reflect individual Local Authorities but also meet the standards of the Local Government and Elections Act. There is an expectation for the councils to build on what they already have in place as the council has a duty to get members of the public engaged with the decision making processes. After the consultation, the results will be brought back towards end of March then will be taken to full council for adoption, in time for publishing in May 2022. It was noted that the council could make small tweaks to the plan, but any changes may have an impact on the timeline at this stage.

Members were informed that there will be a 30 day statutory consultation period which will be primarily online, with public Wi-Fi in the city and QR codes in public spaces so residents can complete the survey on their smart phones. The team are looking into how to get to the harder to reach groups through partnership links.

The Democratic Services Manager explained to the Members that seven pages of the strategy have been finalised, the full consultation document still has five more pages. As the date required from the work for Public Relations team had been brought forward; they still have to finalise the document but have completed seven pages to show how it aligns with the other strategies. The strategy linked to the corporate plan with the citizen role in tailoring the council's approach, with diverse needs and designing ways of participation to include everyone and connect people to where they live with the decisions that affect them.

The Lead Officer welcomed comments and questioning from the Committee.

Committee made the following comments:

- Cllr. M. Evans confirmed he was happy for the strategy to go forward for the consultation and would like to know what questions the public are going to be asked. It was mentioned that members of the public could be put off with lots of questioning. The Member recalled the Public Space Protection Order not having many public responses to it.
- Councillor Hourahine mentioned he would like the minutes to reflect that the committee does have reservations on the methods of consultation. But it is noted that Members accept why the officers cannot do certain types of consultation at this moment in time and therefore confirmed he was content with it going ahead.
- Councillor Clarke made a comment that the content of the draft is very good and, if members of the public do have a look at the strategy, they will see it has good content and hoped that people will look at it.
- Councillor T. Watkins added that it is up to the Councillors to promote it, but asked what would happen if the Welsh Government would want to amend or alter what has been put forward after the consultation.

- The Member asked the officers to confirm if the strategy would come back to the Democratic Services Committee or if the Committee would have to leave it.

In response, the Head of Service explained that it would have to come back to the Democratic Services Committee. The format of the document complies with the current legislation; so if there should be any change in the legislation, then it would be brought back to the Committee to ensure it complies with any up to date legislation.

The Committee was advised that the strategy draft is a dynamic document open to the Committee for review at any time and at least once every 5 year Council term. It was recognised that work needs to be done on the petition schemes, for example. As it is noted that the council needs to look at petitions, it can be linked to the participation strategies.

The dynamic part of the document would be the measures and what actions the committee would put in place to improve participation. For instance, concerns expressed around how effective the public consultation method is and that will be part of the review.

Members were reminded that the current stage is to have the benchmark document in place by May and use it as a forward work plan and is not the finished article. It is more about if they like the format and look of the document and if the council has included the right actions and measures in there for a starting point.

- Councillor T. Watkins expressed his concern if Welsh Government advised the council to have some form of public participation in scrutiny committees, then it would have to return to the committee.

The Head of Service clarified that if the Welsh Government prescribe any changes or regulations, then the council would have to change what is within the document. However, the current legislation and guidance allowed the council's flexibility to put whatever they want within the strategy as long as it complies with the minimum statutory requirements. If regulations do change, it would be brought back to the committee.

The Chair concluded that the Committee were content with the strategy as it has been presented and look forward to seeing further work on the draft.

Agreed:

Committee agreed to go to public consultation on the draft. Therefore the Participation Strategy Draft will come back to Committee for the end of March.

5 **Guide to the Constitution**

Invitee:

Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulation

Key points

The Head of Law and Regulation informed the Committee that the guide document has been included just for information and to update the Members on it. The Local Government & Elections Act has a requirement to publish a guide on the constitution.

It will be a signpost to help those find what they need for decisions made and decision making. The team will look to format it and the guide is an indication of the model that has been suggested to the whole of Wales.

Members were informed that there will be more work on that in order for it to come back in a future meeting.

Committee made the following comments:

- The Chair acknowledged that the constitution is a lengthy document, a framework would make it more understandable and hoped that the guide would do that.

The Lead Officer stated that it would be difficult to shorten the constitution, as the idea of a guide would be to make sure the information is easier to find. It was recognised that the constitution format is not fit purpose due to how things have changed.

For example, it will include from Cabinet Meetings, the rules of delegation in one section and the guide would direct them to that part to find out more about the Cabinet Member decisions. The document being more accessible would offer more understanding to the public.

- Councillor T. Watkins complimented the guide and noted that it looked far simpler than the council website version.
- Councillor M. Evans referred to the Members' roles noted within the guide and advised that they needed amendments, as a point of accuracy.

The Head of Law and Regulation confirmed that the guide provided is a generic document from the WLGA. Therefore, there has not been any changes or amendments to the same. The officer reassured the Members that they will adapt the document to reflect the roles in Newport City Council.

6 **Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 28 February 10am – 12pm

Wednesday 30 March 10am – 12pm

7 **Live Event**

[Democratic Services Committee, 18 January 2022 - YouTube](#)

Meeting terminated at 10:32am