

Minutes

Liaison Meeting with Community Councils

Date: 22 June 2023

Time: 6:00pm

Venue: Microsoft Teams Meeting/Committee Room 1 Civic Centre

Present: Cath Davies (Marshfield CC), Mandy George (Llanwern), Nathan Tarr (Graig), Judy Clatworthy (Wentlooge), Julie Foster (Wentlooge) John Davies (Bishton), John Wagstaff (Penhow) Councillor Yvonne Forsey (Rogerstone West), Councillor Bev Davies (Rogerstone East), Leanne Rowlands (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Taylor Strange (Governance Officer), Emily Mayger (Governance Officer), Superintendent Jason White (Gwent Police)

Apologies

Councillor John Reynolds (Rogerstone West)

Elizabeth Bryant (Head of Law and Standards)

Declarations of Interests

N/A

Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting.

The minutes were proposed as a true record.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted that a date was being arranged on personal safety between now and the following meeting. The Graig Community Councillor asked whether there could be multiple sessions with the first held on teams followed by an in-person session. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager stated that it was likely that the meeting will be on teams only.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained that the other items will be dealt with on the final item of the agenda, the Forward Work Programme.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed all members that the slides to the presentations will be sent out following the meeting.

Police Update

Superintendent Jason White attended to provide an update.

- A general update was provided on Newport east and west activity.
- The Superintendent provided context regarding the current focus of policing in the area, such as dealing with prolific offenders.
- The Superintendent confirmed that the police service has allocated more police officers working at night.
- A multi-agency approach has been taken to dealing with homelessness, reducing the number of people that become homeless as well as helping people already experiencing homelessness to access appropriate services.

The Bishton Community Councillor noted concerns to the Superintendent that police Community Councillors haven't attended their council meetings.

The Bishton Community Councillor noted that these meetings take place once a month and highlighted that they would like some of the meetings throughout the year to have a police presence.

- The Superintendent confirmed that he would take the action back and follow up this up.

The Marshfield Community Councillor stated that they had set up a chairs forum with other community councils such as Wentlooge, as well as recently meeting with the Councillor Allan Screen where issues that are common to many areas are discussed.

The Marshfield Community Councillor mentioned that issues relating to the area had been raised with Officer Wetly. It was also noted that assurances were made in relation to police attending community meetings in order to better exchange information between the police and community councils. The Marshfield Community Councillor stated that following this the meetings weren't attended by the police and as a result he felt that rural community councils were being inadequately served.

- The Superintendent informed the Community Councillor that Officer Wetley had moved on from their role and that he had noted the request for a police presence in the area.

The Marshfield Community Councillor highlighted that he felt collaborative work and a consistent dialogue were essential to the partnership approach.

- The Superintendent highlighted that there had been contact with people who had formerly served as Community Councillors regarding specific incidents.

The Marshfield Community Councillor felt that feedback wasn't always provided when issues were raised. .

- The Superintendent highlighted that he is aware of the issues they face and will speak to Officers in those wards as well as raising the issues with Community Councils directly.
- The Superintendent reinforced the importance of the police's relationship with Community Council's and the benefits of the collaborative approaches and positive relationships.

The Marshfield Community Councillor explained that they were aware the police surgeries were being reduced and the Community Council had highlighted this with their ward member to escalate. The Marshfield Community Councillor considered that strong working relationships with the Community Councils can be helpful to both the police and community in terms of sharing intelligence and relaying key information to the residents.

- The Superintendent noted he would speak with the relevant Officers in the following week to discuss steps that could be taken to strengthen the links with Community Councils and the communities they serve.
- The Superintendent noted that there was a pressure concerning the resources available and the current demand, and functions are being evaluated in order to allocate the available resource in the most effective way.
- The Superintendent also highlighted several areas that there is focus on including the time taken to answer non-emergency calls on the 101 number.

The Wentlooge Community Councillor informed the Superintendent that apologies weren't always given by police Community Councillors that were expected to attend Community meetings in Wentlooge.

- The Superintendent confirmed a written update could be provided if officers were unable to attend in person.

The Wentlooge Community Councillor asked if confirmation of police attendance could be provided before notices were promoted.

The Penhow Community Councillor asked how they are able to get in contact with Officer Childs who covers their community area.

The Superintendent provided the details of the officer.

The Graig Community Councillor noted that there hadn't been a police presence in a number of years, and highlighted concerns that Community Councils weren't being updated by the police. The Graig Community Councillor further commented that they would typically expected police to attend a meeting on a quarterly basis in order to allow two-way feedback and exchange of information.

- The Superintendent noted that work conducted in other local areas focused on engagement could be replicated for the community councillors, and he has asked neighbourhood officers to provide some feedback related to engagement.

The Graig Community Councillor asked about action taken by police to improve engagement and help reassure the community in relation to a recent local incident.

- The Superintendent noted that ancillary orders had been put in place regarding those involved in the incident, and the police had been working in partnership with the Registered Social Landlords and other organisations. The Superintendent went on to say that it is important to understand that the police can't deal with issues in isolation. The Superintendent further highlighted that a civic injunction was placed at the address.

The Graig Community Councillor asked whether some of the outcomes of this incident could be used to help prevent similar issues.

- The Superintendent confirmed that a multi-agency meeting regularly takes place, where police and partners review incidents and issues, and the police also have a central problem-solving hub that could be accessed by other officers.

The Rogerstone West Community Councillor informed the meeting that police reports are regularly provided to the Rogerstone Community Council.

The Llanwern Community Councillor asked if police Community Councillors could attend meetings remotely as an easier alternative to attendance in person.

- The Superintendent confirmed that this could be looked at.

The Marshfield Community Councillor felt that for her Community Council, a physical presence is preferred as it helps encourage respectful behaviour of those attending the meeting.

The Marshfield Community Councillor also requested an update on the current structure of the officers in the area.

- The Superintendent noted this could be sent out although several officers positions have recently been changed. The Superintendent highlighted that Newport has recruited recently, and whilst this means that the overall numbers of officers has increased, it will take some time for the inexperienced officers to develop their skills, knowledge and experience. The Superintendent noted that there would be a focus on patrols and ensuring a visible presence in Marshfield and other Community Councils.

Annual Report Requirements

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager covered the key points via the use of presentation slides which would be sent out to all members.

Community Councils must discharge their new duties including the requirement to prepare and publish an annual report which came into effect on 1st April 2022. Section 52 of the 2021 Act requires community councils, as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year, to prepare and publish an annual report about the council's priorities, activities and achievements over the previous year.

There is support across the sector and from the public for increasing the visibility of the work of community councils. This is to encourage communities to take an interest in what their councils do and to have easy access to information about the council's work.

An independent review panel of community and town councils cited a lack of visibility of community councils' activities. The panel found there was a significant need to increase awareness of the existence of community councils and their work within their communities, as well as a need for councils to engage with communities when making decisions.

Annual reports should provide information that strengthens the accountability of the council and increases transparency of the work undertaken. The annual report should be a proactive means of sharing information about the council's priorities, activities, and achievements.

The Community Councillors noted they had started to compile their report.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that a training plan could be shared in the report rather than a list of who had completed what training.

The Community Council Community Councillors queried whether they could include the lack of response by the police in their report.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted the reported should be factual and based on the Community Council rather than other organisations, but perhaps they could note positive steps taken forward to deal with any issues they have faced.
- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted It was important to work constructively as well as noting constructive criticism as a learning outcome. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted to the meeting that lessons learned should be concerned with the Community Council rather than other services.

The Marshfield Community Councillor questioned whether need to publish their report in Welsh. The Graig Community Councillor noted that the website states that on request a report can be provided in Welsh although this has never occurred.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted they will look specifically into this.

The Graig Community Councillor asked whether the report is produced by a single person and then approved by the Community Council. The Graig Community Councillor questioned whether Committees need to also publish paper reports as well as putting them on their website.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the member that this was correct, but the report is likely to be made up of a number of documents brought together that may have different authors.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted that the important part of the report is that it is approved by their respective Community Council as a documented item of business at a CC meeting. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed this was not the case, publishing on the website was sufficient to meet the legislative requirements.

The Bishton Community Councillor highlighted the finance reports aren't user friendly as they can be difficult to read.

Action:

Democratic and Electoral Services Manager to confirm duties regarding Welsh Language and the Annual Report.

All Community Councils to finalise their draft reports and consider them at a Council meeting. Final reports to be published on Community Council websites following CC meeting.

Community Councils Roles and Responsibilities.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager shared a presentation outlining the key roles and responsibilities for Community Councils to refresh and remind councillors.

There was a discussion following the presentation where it was clarified that;

- Roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined including the role of the Responsible Financial Officer, and for smaller Councils this role is often allocated to the clerk. However, absolute clarity on roles and responsibilities is key.

The Wentlooge Community Councillor asked how minutes should be published.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted the minutes are legal records of meetings and should include a summary of the discussion as well as a record of any decisions made.

The Bishton Community Councillor noted they refer any issues with the minutes to the clerk following the meeting.

The Graig Community Councillor asked whether supplementary documents should be published at least 3 days before the meeting.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed this was correct.

The Graig Community Councillor asked what is the recommended time to replace a Community Council Chair?

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted this would be as soon as possible while still following the correct procedure.

The Graig Community Councillor questioned how many Councillors are needed for a meeting to be quorum.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager will check this, but also confirmed the chair counts as a member for quorate purposes.

The Rogerstone East Community Councillor confirmed that a third of the whole CC needs to be present and must be no less than three members is needed to be quorate.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager reaffirmed that Registers of Interest need to be completed regularly and published on the CC websites.

The Bishton Community Councillor meant whether Community Councillors need to complete declaration of interest forms during meetings they have interests in.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed they that they would need to follow the guidance set out, such as declaring the interest and leaving the discussion.

The Wentlooge Community Councillor confirmed that Community Councillors do not need to publish their registers of interest online but must hold copies of them, as well as noting that an interest during a meeting is recorded and then must be noted on a form ready for any audit. This has been a recent change to legislation as the forms were required to be published online previously.

The Penhow Community Councillor asked what happened if Community Councils didn't do things such as publishing meeting information.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that this opened the Council up to challenge and potentially reputational issues. Further clarity would be sought from the Monitoring Officer.

Actions

Democratic and Electoral Services Manager to seek clarity on potential risks of CC's not meeting legislative requirements.

Complaint Process

Presented by Democratic and Electoral Services Manager.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted there should a process for handling complaints in each Community Council, and this should be published on their website. There is an all

Wales model process published on the Public Service Ombudsmans website which should be used as a model.

The Graig Community Councillor asked if this complaints process was needed for complaints against the Community Council as well as complaints against the Community Councillors?

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed this was correct, the process should consider both types of complaints that they may receive.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted that if the complaint is a Code of Conduct, then it should be referred to the Monitoring Officer for consideration.

The Graig Community Councillor noted that minor issues can be dealt with by the Community Council under their policy, however larger issues should be referred to the Monitoring Officer.

Actions

All CC's to ensure that they have an appropriate Complaint Policy in place and published on their website.

Notice for Casual Vacancies

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted that any vacancies must follow the correct procedures as well as the vacancies being notified to Newport City Council to ensure that a vacancy notice with correct periods of notice is produced in both English and Welsh.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager reaffirmed that its always worth conferring with Newport City Council to make sure all steps are followed correctly.

The Graig Community Councillor asked if some costs are incurred by the Community Council in case of an election.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that this was correct, costs of any elections are the responsibility of the Community Council.

The Bishton and Langstone Community Councillor asked if the seat is uncontested would costs still be incurred.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted that some print costs are dealt with by the Newport City Council for local elections, but ad-hoc Community Council print and mail costs are entirely picked by the Community Council.

Forward Work Program

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted that a forward work program had been created with the following items being scheduled.

- Personal safety training
- Health and safety training
- Gwent Wellbeing Plan and Newport Local Action Plan

The Bishton Community Councillor noted that Community Councils don't have alternative routes for dealing with issues concerning Newport City Council.

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted that the process is the same for Community Councils and City Councillors, there are no routes to bypass the policies and procedures in place.

The Penhow Community Councillor noted they funnel any issues to their City Councillors to deal with.

Rogerstone East Community Councillor confirmed that City Councillors don't get special treatment when contacting officers to deal with issues.

The Wentlooge Community Councillor noted the Community Council charter didn't have a set time to be updated, with the former Monitoring Officer bringing any changes to the charter as a standing item on the meeting agenda. This could be considered at a future meeting.

The Community Councillors would like an agenda item for best practices on statutory documents. The Bishton Community Councillor would like this "best format" for statutory documents to be there as a resource but not compulsory.

The Marshfield Community Councillor would like personal safety training to be given to Community Councillors, as this impacts on the number of people who want to stand.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted this would be covered in the personal safety training.

The Meeting was drawn to a close.

Date of Next Meeting: 5th October 2023

-