

# Minutes

## **Liaison Meeting with Community Councillors**

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Date: 19 September 2019

Time: 6:00pm

Venue: Committee Room 1 Civic Centre

Present: G. Price (Head of Law and Regulation) (Chair), Joseph Lewis (Equalities Officer), Pamela Tasker (Governance Officer).

Together with the following representatives from Community Councils:

M. Weekes (Penhow), R. Southall (Bishton), N. Tarr (Graig), P. Gregory (Graig), T. Appleton (Graig), A. Whitfield (Graig), H. Brown (Langstone), B. Miles (Wentlooge), N. Hallett (Michaelston-y-Fedw), T. Ducroq (Nash), J. Ford (Langstone).

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### **1. Apologies for Absence**

J. Evans (Bishton), Councillor V. Dudley, Councillor D. Williams, J. Foster (Wentlooge), S. Davies (Graig), M. George (Llanwern), H. Jones (Langstone)

### **2. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

A representative stated that Waterloo Inn was mentioned instead of the Farmers Inn that was documented in the minutes in relation to the Newport Marathon.

On page 8 it was noted that the correct Junctions were 30, 32, and 33.

#### **Agreed:**

That it was a true record of the minutes.

### **3. Matters Arising**

#### **Newport City Council Contact Centre**

A representative asked whether the clerks would be allowed to have their own email address to send in issues to the Contact centre as city councillors have their own email address.

The Chair confirmed that the Members email address for Streetscene was internal only and was secure and was for the 50 elected members but those members could not use it to bypass issues, for example, issues like potholes would still be directed to the contact centre.

A Clerks only email address was something that could be looked at but it could not be given out to members of the public.

Another representative mentioned that 'Fix my Street' app was useful and is updated. It was stated that Streetscene would encourage 'Fix my Street' etc as it pinpoints issues accurately e.g. location. Newport City Council also has a smartphone app for reporting issues.

It was again reiterated by the Chair that the email address for members was just for Councillors and was just for Councillor Information, and if there was a need for the same for clerks then this could be looked at but not in a wider capacity.

A representative enquired as to whether there was any update on the Boundary Commission. The Chair confirmed that the process takes about 6-8 months with the results being published in October and November time but nothing had been heard since.

#### **4. Strategic Equality Plan Consultation**

The Equalities Officer Joseph Lewis explained his role to the representatives and stated that their role was to help the authority to develop strategic objectives and to observe how these were monitored. The current plan was in place until April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 and so a new plan was needed. The Equality act ensured that these plans were developed over the lifecycle.

In 6 month's time a new plan for the authority was needed which was still in process. The plan was to go to public consultation and the Equalities Officer then went through the plan to explain to the representatives what it would look like, some of these would be issues relating to Equalities in Community Councils:

##### **Main Points:**

- Strategic plan- This contained broad criteria over the effectiveness of the equality plans. Welsh Government were looking at how plans could be more effective.
- Key themes- the draft objectives included;
  - Leadership and Governance,
  - A better promotion of;
    1. Representatives of the workforce,
    2. Demographic of the workforce and whether it reflected diversity,
    3. Council services and how people accessed the Council buildings e.g. the Information Station,
    4. How British Sign Language (BSL) was represented,
    5. Community Cohesion,
    6. Community tensions related to Brexit,
    7. Provisions related to young and older people,
    8. Education and Social Services relationships.

The plan was to span these areas and touch on each protected characteristic in the act such as race, sex, sexual orientation, disability etc.

Specific comments that were criticism specific stated that the plan was not outcome focused and not very user friendly.

The consultation involved working with specific groups talking to specific organisations that dealt with race or disability in detail as to what they thought Newport was doing in relation to the characteristics of the Act. The consultation in

November involved ironing out the practicalities as it was still at the developing stage, the structure was quite lengthy which would be looked at.

A representative asked how the plan would be made available to Community Councils and members with a disability.

It was confirmed that the Newport Council Equality plan would be available to all members of the public to comment on and would be available in different formats to make it accessible.

In November the full public consultation would take place with different key organisations such as the Ethnic Support Team, the Newport Access Forum, and the Women's Equality Network.

A representative stated that if past plans were weak on outcomes how could this be evaluated, and it was discussed that the current plan had quite broad terms so it was not clear on what the outcomes would be. For example there was a commitment to diversify the workforce but what would this look like e.g. an apprenticeship scheme brings young people into the organisation and data can show that we were not as representative as we should be. It was discussed that in the current plan there were some draft actions where Welsh Government wanted a smaller pay gap for example, so a specific amount could be planned but this was not known yet. It was thought that there would be a restructure of the current plan and the direction would be clearer for 2024.

There was a question as to whether there would be a financial impact on Community Councils, but it was confirmed that it was not thought this would occur as it was a Newport Council plan there was no cost to Community Councils. Any outcomes that occurred then Newport City Council would be charged for this.

It was also discussed how equality could be improved within Community Councils, but it was confirmed that this was not possible but Welsh Government wanted the diversity of Councillors for Newport City Council to be improved. This was quite a difficult thing to do and it depended on how parties put forward their members for election. If political parties wanted to have a 50/50 list of men and women then they could do this, and the Equalities team could also look at targeting underrepresented groups across the workforce and the plan will also cover this.

It was questioned that in relation to Community Councils work which was not meant to be political, some Councillors go to Election as independent so this will not apply to some Community Councils as the representative was not political and would just work for their area. The Chair commented that this was not part of this plan.

The Chair commented that what was most important for the Consultation was the service delivery and how we make our services available to the public and that rural areas etc were not a protected characteristic. The Chair stated that what was relevant was whether there were groups in the Community Council Area who were disabled etc who were suffering if Newport City Council were not delivering council services.

A representative stated that a decline in bus services etc would be an issue and it was discussed how the Human Rights Commission often flag up the suitability of bus stops, dropped kerbs etc and these issues were relevant to the plan.

It was noted that the Council does not work bus routes and so if Stagecoach does not put on enough bus routes the Council could subsidise certain non-commercial routes.

## **5. Declaration of Interest**

It was discussed that since the previous meeting, guidance on the Declaration of Interest had been circulated to all of the Community Clerks and it was asked whether training was wanted for Clerks and whether there was enough interest for a short session.

Discussion took place in relation to whether forms needed to be filled in at all as it was not a legal requirement for Community Councils. The Chair commented that if a form was filled in then it needed to be published on the website and that it was good practice and ONE Wales recommended the practice.

It was discussed that some people were willing to do it voluntarily but they could not be forced to do it. It was noted by the Chair that once the Wales Audit Office took over Audit duties then this could be statutory. The Code of Conduct was revised a few years ago and the register is held by the clerk.

A representative asked about the process if a Councillor had a register of interest.

The Chair confirmed that if there was no public register Form C was filled in if the register of interest came up in a meeting. This may or may not be prejudicial. The person then signs the form to say they did not participate in the meeting which is then published online and in the minutes. The person would still need to put their hand up for example if it affected their employer, it would be then recorded in the minutes and is then published as part of the Members register.

It was noted that Clerks were more interested in process issues and the Chair stated that this was mentioned in a previous Standards Committee meeting and so this issue would be presented as a more extensive presentation in the future.

### **Action:**

For a comprehensive refresher course on the Declaration of Interest and the Code of Conduct for Community Councillors to be arranged.

Training for clerks also to be arranged.

### **Other Business**

Jacqui Ford a representative from Langstone would be attending a meeting on 11 October 2019 for the Newport Public Services Board (PSB) and there were no issues raised by any representatives.

The NDF consultation would be running until the 1 November 2019. There were still more drop in sessions to go in Cardiff, Swansea etc.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) sent through information on the Independent Review of Town and Community Councils to ONE Voice Wales which was sent through to the working group. This looked at how councils extended their roles within the voluntary sector.

It would be a joint submission where the extended roles for town councils to deliver public services would be looked at.  
Some councils were able to deliver services as they were large enough and some could not.

**6. Date of next meeting**

5 December 2019