

CONSTITUTION & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 16 September 2024
Report Subject	Meetings: Minutes & Hosting Arrangements
Report Author	Democratic Services Manager
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no definitive guidance nor statutory definition in how to produce minutes: it is for a local authority to determine its own preferred method.

Minutes of council and committee meetings have evolved over time to seemingly record verbatim the events and discussion of the meetings, often running into several pages. They are time consuming to produce, taking up to 5 hours per set of minutes depending on the meeting.

There is an expectation that more (if not all) Council meetings will be offered as 'hybrid' which will add significant pressure on the already stretched resource available in Democratic Services.

The format of the minutes for the Planning Committee was changed six years ago to a 'simplified' version. It has worked effectively since, with no issues or concerns arising.

It is proposed to follow a similar format for all committee meetings to free up resource to deliver meetings in 'hybrid' format.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee accept the change to the format of minutes as per the template attached as Appendix 1.
2	That following the change to the format of minutes is implemented, all council and committee meetings to be delivered in 'hybrid' format.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE MEETINGS: MINUTES & HOSTING ARRANGEMENTS
1.01	Minutes of meetings (with the exception of Planning Committee) have evolved over time to effectively become a transcription of the entire meeting.
1.02	<p>There is no definitive guidance nor statutory definition in how to produce minutes: it is for each local authority to determine its own preferred method. It is recognised that the purpose of minutes is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide adequate information about the authority's business for the press and public.• To ensure the record is sufficiently self-explanatory to enable the council to make a decision.• To establish an accurate record of decisions taken. <p>They should be complete, with reference to every item of business dealt with at the meeting.</p>
1.03	<p>Minutes of council and committee meetings are produced by the Democratic Services team. They currently run into several pages and have evolved over time to seemingly record verbatim the events and discussion of the meetings.</p> <p>This worked well before meetings were recorded and made available on the council's website, but they are time consuming to produce, ranging from 2 to 5 hours per set of minutes. They then must be proofread and checked by Senior Officers, adding to the time before they can be put before the committee for agreement.</p> <p>Due to the level of detail and length of the minutes, spelling / typing errors occur; the style and phrasing also varies according to the member of the team producing the minutes – which in turn often results in additional queries.</p> <p>Due to the different writing styles, the more detail that is included in minutes invariably results in queries and requests for amendments when they are considered at a meeting, thereby adding additional time on to the meeting (and subsequent minutes).</p>
1.04	<p>The team have been placed under significant additional pressure to facilitate hybrid meetings, which are resource intensive to run.</p> <p>It is likely that all meetings will move to become 'hybrid', further stretching the limited resource within the team.</p>

1.05	<p>Before meetings were offered as 'hybrid' only 1 member of the team needed to be present at a meeting: i.e. the minute taker.</p> <p>With the introduction of 'hybrid' meetings this has increased to either 2 or 3 members of the team being present to operate the technology depending on the location used (2 in the Delyn Room versus 3 in the Lord Barry Jones Council Chamber).</p> <p>This has drained the resource and flexibility within the team, such that it is not physically possible to continue to offer 'hybrid' meetings <u>and</u> produce the same level of detail in minutes, as well as undertake the other duties across the team.</p>
1.06	<p>The format of the minutes for the Planning Committee was changed six years ago to a 'simplified' version. It has worked effectively since, with no issues or concerns arising.</p> <p>It is proposed to follow a similar format for all council and committee meetings. This will include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Name of committee meeting</i> ➤ <i>Date, time and location of meeting</i> ➤ <i>Attendees:</i> List the Members of the Committee who were present, including substitutes and non-committee members in attendance ➤ <i>Apologies:</i> List the Members of the Committee who had submitted apologies. ➤ <i>Contributors</i> ➤ <i>Declarations of Interest:</i> Note any Declarations of Interest that are declared at the meeting. ➤ <i>Minutes:</i> Note approval or otherwise of the previous minutes, including any typos. ➤ Start and end time of meeting. ➤ Link to the full webcast. ➤ <i>Title of item:</i> Use the title from the report being considered at the meeting. <p>A hyperlink to the relevant section of the recording where available could be included for ease of reference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Brief description of item for discussion.</i> ➤ <i>Action(s):</i> A brief note of the action agreed and the 'owner' of the action. ➤ <i>Decision(s):</i> Note the committee's decision(s). <p>It should also be recorded in the minutes if an officer provides advice that it is their duty to give, and the committee chooses to disregard it.</p> <p>An example of a template document that will be populated by the Officer recording the minutes is included as Appendix 1.</p>

	How this template then translates to an actual set of minutes of a Council meeting is included at Appendix 2. The original copy of the minutes of the same meeting are available for reference.
1.07	<p>The recording of each meeting is available on the council website. This gives a full and accurate record of the entire meeting, debate and discussion should there be a need to review proceedings.</p> <p>Recordings will be available online for as long as the council deems it necessary, currently indefinitely. If / When a recording is taken off-line it will be archived but can be retrieved if necessary.</p>
1.08	Links to the recording of the agenda points in the meeting to make it easier for the viewer to access the particular item of interest will be included in all minutes.
1.09	<p>There are a number of benefits that changing the format will deliver, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved accuracy • Quicker production of minutes • Standardised, professional format for all council and committee meetings • Release resource within the Democratic Services team to provide more meetings in 'hybrid' format.
1.10	<p>Once the change is implemented, it is proposed to move to deliver all council and committee meetings in hybrid format.</p> <p>The move to hybrid format would therefore be expected take effect from October 2024.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>There are not expected to be any resource implications (positive or negative) from changing the format of minutes.</p> <p>Producing minutes in the current way is resource intensive for the Committee Services team who are facing additional work pressures (e.g. hosting hybrid meetings and hosting more frequent meetings of some committees).</p> <p>By amending the format and reducing the content it will mitigate some of the additional workload that will be experienced by the team.</p> <p>Where hybrid meetings take place in the evening (beyond 7pm), there may be additional costs associated with caretakers staying later to close and secure the building.</p>

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	<p>Group Leaders have been consulted.</p> <p>Each committee meeting in September has / will have received copies of minutes in the proposed format for comment.</p>

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	<p>Appendix 1 – Minutes template document</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Example of Minutes of meeting in current and proposed format</p>

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>None.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Steven Goodrum, Democratic Services Manager Telephone: 01352 702320 E-mail: steven.goodrum@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Hybrid: where some participants join through remote means and some attend physically in the same place as others.