

**Report To:** Democratic Services Committee  
**Date of Meeting:** 1 July 2016  
**Lead Member Officer:** Democratic Service Manager  
**Report Author:** Steve Price, Democratic Services Manager  
**Title:** Denbighshire's Style of Minutes

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**1. What is the report about?**

This report covers the Council's 'house style' of minutes for the recording of its formal committee business and suggestions made by a number of councillors to change the style and contents.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

The Democratic Services Committee had included this item on its forward work programme.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Democratic Services Committee considers the report and comments on the appropriate style and contents for minuting formal Council and committee meetings.

**4. Report details**

4.1 The Council has an agreed 'house style' for minutes which was reviewed in 2010 by a Democratic Arrangements Review Programme Board (comprised of the Leader and Group Leaders or their substitutes) which considered the recommendations on minute-writing styles put forward by a joint Member / Officer working group. The conclusions were subsequently circulated to all the Groups, who returned no comments. The style of minutes was agreed to follow these principles:

- Minutes are to be written in a clear and concise way, without using overly complex terminology and using plain English / Welsh
- Minutes will focus on the main points raised at the meeting that are relevant to the item under discussion, and to the decision or recommendation being made.
- The minutes will not generally contain any incidental issues raised and this is expected to lead to a reduction in the length of the minutes. The benefits expected are minutes that are easier to read and less costly to produce. (Minutes of the Adoption and Fostering Panel and Licensing applications and reviews will continue to be recorded comprehensively).
- Members will be able to ensure a comment is minuted and attributed to them on request at any meeting.

- 4.2 The review of minuting style and contents was partly to ensure a high standard of minutes, but also to match the workload from producing minutes with the resources available as a number of committee administrator posts were deleted in 2010. This is still the position and house style today.
- 4.3 On a number of occasions councillors have challenged the contents of the minutes of public meetings in terms of their contributions either not being recorded or not being attributed to them. It is clear that at least some of the Council's membership would like to see the minute record extended with individual members' contributions recorded and attributed to them.
- 4.4 To balance that viewpoint there are also reasons for minutes of Council and committee meetings being concise. An authority in this field is *Knowles on Local Authority Meetings: A Manual of law and practice* which states:
- "Minutes can be kept brief by being selective: a minute is not a verbatim record but a summary of the proceedings that includes only the essence of the discussion - not always that - and the decision. It is rarely necessary to reproduce, however summarily, what a particular speaker said; but it is helpful, as a rule, to pick up the main threads of the discussion that led to the conclusion: indeed, there is danger in recording individual contributions since all members are likely to want the same treatment."*
- 4.5 Recording individual contributions also risks creating challenges to correct minutes, as an individual seeks to improve upon or distance themselves from a comment accurately recorded.
- 4.6 With webcasting of Council and Planning Committee meetings members and the public can now view meetings and individual contributions in full for themselves on the Council's website and this may be extended to other meetings of the Council in due course.

**5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

No direct contribution.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

The extent and complexity of the minute-taking style will directly impact on the time required to produce them and potentially the number of committee administrators that would be necessary to support the committee system.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report**

No equality impact identified.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

Discussions on the style of minutes have been held at meetings of full Council, the Planning Committee, with Group Leaders and information on the current house style has been circulated to all members.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

Not required for this report.

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

The minutes are an important statutory requirement and the style and contents need to be appropriate legally and acceptable to members.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

Local Government Act 1972.