

**SUBJECT: Forward Work Programme Engagement**

**MEETING: Democratic Services Committee**

**DATE: 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

**DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To identify the implications of the pandemic for the work of the committee in seeking to broaden involvement in local democracy and ensure that the committee remains sighted on recent additions to the Cabinet and Council forward planner to identify those topics of most interest to communities where early and effective engagement can add most value.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the committee begin to prioritising potential topics requiring more extensive public involvement and consider how this can most effectively be done in the context of a global pandemic which places limits on social interactions and physical meetings.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill seeks to reform public participation in local government and creates a duty to encourage local people to participate.
- 3.2 This is aligned with the previously endorsed aspirations of this committee to increase involvement in local democracy by helping communities define the futures to which they aspire, increasing understanding of how decisions are made and how people can participate in the democratic process. It also re-enforces the focus on involvement as one of the ways of working enshrined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 3.3 A working group of the committee had previously been meeting with officers to take these issues forward. The work had been paused but there remained a desire to deliver on the committees aspirations. It had agreed to take ownership of a forward plan of topics that will be which are likely to be of interest to the public. The committee developed a set of criteria to inform the issues that should be prioritised for public engagement:
- There is evidence of significant public interest in the proposed change or decision
  - It is an area where we anticipate a large number of complaints or negative press as a result of a service change or policy being implemented
  - Changes are proposed which could be significantly enhanced by public involvement
  - The authority is facing a challenge and would benefit from developing a broader range of options

- The proposal would have a major impact on one or more sections of the community
- We would expect public involvement to add value and be able to shape and influence the final recommendation made to cabinet or council

3.4 The passing of the Local Government and Elections Bill on 18<sup>th</sup> November is a timely moment for the committee to return to this agenda. Alongside this, work is underway to refresh and update the Cabinet and Council Forward Planner as the result of the pandemic impacting on capacity and requiring new areas of work to be prioritised. The latest copy of the forward work programme is attached as appendix 1.

3.5 The council has already made significant steps in opening up democracy through public open forums, area committees and the live streaming of meetings. Challenging budgets settlements in the years to come will inevitably mean the Council will need to take harder and potentially more contentious decisions. Earlier involvement will increase the public's understanding and ownership of the proposals developed and the decisions made.

#### **4. REASONS:**

4.1 To create opportunities to work more collaboratively with communities to understand the issues that matter and work in new ways with people to develop solutions and promote engagement in local democratic processes.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

5.1 None at this stage

#### **6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)**

6.1 This report does not propose any change in policy or service. However, it proposes improving how we involve people and this is one of the five ways of working identified in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

#### **7. CONSULTEES:**

None

#### **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None

#### **9. AUTHOR:**

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