

**MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
REPORT**

<p>SUBJECT: Public Participation Strategy MEETING: Democratic Services Committee DATE: 6 September 2021 DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All</p>
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1. PURPOSE:

To review the draft public participation strategy and make recommendations for improvement as required.

2. KEY ISSUES:

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires local authorities to encourage residents to participate in the making of decisions by the Council and requires authorities to develop and publish a public participation strategy to inform residents of how to engage and to introduce e-petitions as a method of residents influencing local decisions.

Section 40(2) of the Act states a public participation strategy must address:

- (a) Ways of promoting awareness among local people of the principal council's functions;
- (b) Ways of promoting awareness among local people of how to become a member of the Council and what membership entails;
- (c) Ways of facilitating access for local people to information about decisions made, or to be made, by the Council.
- (d) Ways of promoting and facilitating processes by which local people may make representations to the Council about a decision before and after it is made
- (e) Arrangements made, or to be made, for the purpose of bringing views of the public to attention of overview and scrutiny committees
- (f) Ways of promoting awareness among members of the Council of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people

Similarly, rule 42 of the Act relating to petition scheme states that the Council must publish a petition scheme that includes:

- (a) How a petition may be submitted to the Council;
- (b) How and by when the Council will acknowledge receipt of a petition;
- (c) The steps the Council may take in response to a petition received by it;
- (d) The circumstances (if any) in which the Council may take no further action in response to a petition;
- (e) How and by when the Council will make available its response to a petition to the person who submitted the petition and to the public.

In drafting a public participation strategy the Council must consult local people and any other persons it considers appropriate and it must be

reviewed at least once during the term of the Council. The petition scheme may also be reviewed from time to time as appropriate.

The above elements of this Act take effect in May 2022 however we already have the capability to introduce e-petitions and there is a desire to review the deadline by which members of the public can submit questions to full Council meetings.

It has long been an issue that needs resolving that the deadline for members of the public to submit questions to a meeting of Full Council is before the deadline for publication of the agenda for the meeting. Therefore, a member of the public would be unable to ask a question relevant to an item being discussed at that meeting. This strategy seeks to move the deadline to three working days before a meeting for submission of questions from the current deadline of seven.

A formal petition scheme has also been included in the strategy. This scheme sets out what a petition can do, who can submit a petition and the restrictions for what can be included in a petition. A discussion point for the committee is to consider the parameters and actions that follow depending on the level of support and number of signatories each petition receives.

As the requirement to formally publish a public participation strategy takes effect next year, this document will form the basis of the strategy that will go out for consultation pending any statutory guidance that is to follow from Welsh Government. The interim adoption of this strategy will enable small changes to be implemented and adapted in the lead up to next years election.

3. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

None.

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

A clear and easy readable public engagement strategy can contribute to increased public involvement in decision making processes and contribute towards the requirements of the future generations act.

5. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

6. AUTHOR:

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