



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Democratic Services Committee

12 September 2019

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER –K JONES

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Report Title:

Engagement of the Public in the Democratic Processes of the Council

Purpose of the Report:

To outline a proposed project plan for the above work.

Background:

On 17 July 2019, Council received a report on 'Engagement of the Public in the Democratic Processes of the Council' and it was resolved that the Democratic Services Committee be tasked with preparing advice for Council, by 31 March 2020 in respect of the following:

- a) Options available to the Council to webcast some or all of the Council's meetings and the cost-benefits of each of the options considered;
- b) Options available to the Council to increase public participation in the Council's democratic processes, including but not limited to the ways in which digital technologies may assist the Council in this regard;
- c) Proposals as to how the public can be involved in testing support for any of the options recommended;
- d) Proposals as to how the set up and recurring costs associated with any options presented might be funded; and
- e) An analysis of the risks and impacts of progressing/not progressing options considered

At the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on 11 July 2019, the committee had an initial discussion on how best to start the above work and requested a proposed project plan be developed for discussion at the committee's additional meeting scheduled on the 12 September 2019.

Proposed Project Plan:

To enable the preparation of the advice for Council, by 31 March 2020, it is proposed to establish a task and finish group. Three workshop style meetings of the Group will be arranged.

The establishment of a task and finish group will enable the committee to progress the work on an informal basis outside of the main committee meetings and will enable the committee's forward work programme to remain focused on other business the committee is scheduled to consider.

It is proposed for the two strands of work, webcasting and increasing public participation in the Council's democratic processes, be progressed in parallel.

The proposed project plan is attached at Appendix 1.

Financial Impacts:

There will be minimal financial impacts from undertaking any of the research / review work proposed in this report. However, there will likely be costs associated with the introduction of webcasting and in widening arrangements for public participation in the democratic process.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

An Integrated Impact Assessment will be completed as the options for introducing webcasting of meetings and increasing public participation in the democratic process are being developed to ensure the Council's legal obligations in respect of the Welsh language; equalities legislation; Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Biodiversity Duty have been fully considered.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

Options for webcasting of meetings and widening public participation in the democratic process for valley communities will be explicitly considered by the task and finish group.

Workforce Impacts:

The introduction of additional ways of enabling public participation in the Council's work will have impacts on the Council's workforce which will need to be assessed as part of the options appraisal process.

Legal Powers:

The Democratic Services Committee has been commissioned to undertake this work using powers contained in s11A of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013.

Risk Management Impacts:

There are no risks associated with this report, however future proposals of the task and finish group will likely require amendment to the Constitution of Neath Port Talbot Council. The Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer and the Head of Legal Service will provide advice to the Committee in this regard.

Consultation:

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item at this stage. However, it is proposed to involve the public in the development of the options for both strands of work.

Recommendations:

That Members agree:

1. The establishment of a task and finish group to undertake the proposed work outlined within this report to enable the preparation of advice to Council by 31 March 2020;
2. The membership of the task and finish group; and
3. The proposed project plan outlined within this report.

Reason for the Proposed Decision:

To fulfil the commitment given to Council.

List of Background Papers:

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Welsh Government White Paper: Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed 2017

Council Papers 17 July 2019

<http://modern.gov.neath-porttalbot.gov.uk/documents/g8461/Printed%20minutes%2017th-Jul-2019%2014.00%20Council.pdf?T=1>

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Task and Finish Group - Webcasting / Increasing Public Participation in the Council's Democratic Processes

Proposed Project Plan

Date of meeting	Objective	Action	Output (where identifiable)
October (date tbc)	<p><u>Webcasting:</u></p> <p>To consider other local authorities approaches to and experiences of web-casting to inform the development of options available to the Council</p>	<p>The following information will be collated by the Democratic Services Team to inform the discussion:</p> <p>Which meetings other local authorities are webcasting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The issues / problems other local authorities have encountered;• The training needs identified for both members and staff and how those needs were addressed;	<p>Identification of the options where more information is required for further discussion at next workshop</p>

	<p><u>Public Participation in Democratic Processes</u></p> <p>To define the scope of the work to increasing public participation in the Council's democratic processes</p> <p><u>To consider how to involve the public in the above two strands of work</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How Welsh language requirements have been met; • Implications for the minuting of those meetings that are web-casted; • Accommodation issues i.e. lighting, sound etc; • The costs incurred (set-up and ongoing); and • To view examples of meetings webcasted by other local authorities/ site visits <p>Information will be collated by the Democratic Services Team to inform the definition of the scope</p> <p>Discussion at workshop</p>	<p>Scope of work determined</p>
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Date of meeting	Objective	Action	Output (where identifiable)
<p>November (date tbc)</p>	<p><u>Webcasting</u> To further discuss the options available to the Council to webcast some or all of the Council's meetings and the cost-benefits of each of the options considered</p> <p><u>Public Participation in Democratic Processes</u> To undertake a review of the mechanisms already in place to encourage and assist members of the public to participate in the democratic process</p> <p>To consider other local authorities approaches to increasing public participation in their democratic processes</p> <p>Any other work identified following agreement of scope</p>	<p>The Democratic Services Team will collate further information on the options identified in workshop 1</p> <p>The Democratic Services Team will prepare an inventory of those mechanisms already in place to encourage and assist members of the public to participate in the democratic process and an indication of the use / take-up of those mechanisms</p> <p>The Democratic Services Team will collate information on other local authorities approaches to increasing public participation in their democratic processes</p>	<p>Set of options identified to be costed and discussed at next workshop</p> <p>Review of mechanisms already in place completed</p> <p>Consideration of other local authorities approaches completed</p>

Date of meeting	Objective	Action	Output (where identifiable)
<p>January Date tbc</p>	<p><u>Webcasting</u> To prepare proposals as to how the set up and recurring costs associated with the options presented might be funded.</p> <p>To prepare an analysis of the risks and impacts of progressing/not progressing the options considered</p> <p><u>Public Participation in Democratic Processes</u></p>	<p>The Democratic Services Team will collate information to inform the discussion on costs/risks/impacts to inform the discussion</p> <p>To be agreed pending progress to date</p>	<p>Preparation of advice to Council on options available</p>