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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY



2023-2028

This document is also available in Welsh and Easy Read.



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

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Part A - Context

1. Introduction

Democracy is something to be valued and nurtured. At a local government level this means a commitment to listen to all voices, for those voices to be heard and to work together with our communities to explore and resolve issues of concern, promote and recognise achievements and face new challenges together.

Our council is strongly committed to fostering a culture of partnership with local people and communities, encouraging and supporting them to participate in our decision making, and keeping them informed about how their participation has influenced decisions.

We already have a strong record of working in partnership, often in challenging circumstances, demonstrating the benefits of close collaboration, and focusing on achieving long-term improvements in the well-being of our communities.

In 2021 we ran a campaign to help us understand how the pandemic has impacted on different parts of our county borough and what matters most to local people as we take forward our recovery work.

Almost 1,800 people from all backgrounds and ages engaged with the campaign, with a mix of on-line and off-line surveys, supplemented by focus groups in our five valleys.

Capturing stakeholders' views and opinions at a very early stage in our planning enabled us to shape our well-being objectives and associated actions on what matters locally. It is our firm intention to continue to engage with people as we implement, review and refine the plan over the coming years.

Public Participation is, however, much wider reaching than engagement and consultations activities alone. There are many ways for individuals, groups and organisations to participate in decision-making, for example formal consultations, public meetings, petitions, standing for council and citizens panels etc.

No single mechanism is the key to developing a partnership approach between communities and the council that serves them. This strategy sets out how we will encourage and support people to participate in our decision-making.

We appreciate that participation is a voluntary activity and not everyone will want to be involved, but we hope you find this strategy informative in terms of the processes behind our decision-making, where to find information, how you can get involved and the benefits of doing so, enabling you to have a say in what we do and how we do it.



Cllr Steve Hunt
Leader of Council



Mrs K Jones
Chief Executive

2. What is the Public Participation Strategy?

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the Act”) requires local authorities to publish, consult on, and regularly review a public participation strategy to encourage local people to participate in their decision making. This includes where councils make decisions in partnership with another council or in conjunction with another individual or body such as a local health board.



This Public Participation Strategy supports the priorities in our Corporate Plan 2022-2027 and reflects our values by setting out how we will encourage and enable local people and communities in Neath Port Talbot to be actively involved in decisions that affect them.

It is a four year strategy, from 2023 to 2027, that outlines the council's objectives, approach and mechanisms for encouraging and enabling public participation, together with information on how local people can influence decision-making. These are set in the context of six requirements identified in the Statutory Guidance on Public Participation Strategies, to demonstrate how we currently or plan to:

1. promote awareness among local people of the council's functions;
2. promote awareness among local people of how to become a member of the council, and what membership entails;
3. facilitate access for local people to information about council decisions;
4. promote and facilitate processes so that local people can make representations to the council about a decision before, and after, it is made;
5. provide arrangements to bring views of the public to the attention of overview and scrutiny committees;
6. promote awareness among councillors of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people

3. Why is Participation important

Informed decision-making comes about when we engage with people and communities, rather than making assumptions about what people think, want and feel.

Therefore, whilst the council has a legal duty to encourage and facilitate participation, our commitment goes beyond this as we recognise that effective public participation plays a key role in providing better outcomes - both for the council and the people we serve.

Benefits of participation for people and our communities:

- an opportunity to influence and shape policy and services
- making a contribution to better decisions because decision-makers have more complete information
- being heard and valued as citizens
- better awareness and understanding of the decision-making process, decisions and outcomes
- supports people to be actively involved with policy making and service planning from an early stage

Benefits of participation for the council:

- Learning from people and communities about their attitudes, needs, and what matters to them
- Fulfilling our 'connected', 'caring', 'collaborative', and 'confident' values
- Services and policies informed by actual need and/or demand
- Different ideas and perspectives
- More robust decisions that have considered the needs and interests of stakeholders
- Stakeholders have a better awareness and understanding of the decision-making process, decisions and outcomes
- Opportunity to build trust between the council and local communities
- Demonstrating a commitment to public participation in line with the relevant legislation and guidance

Achieving the above relies on participation being an integral part of our work across the council. By working towards shared objectives and embedding a consistent approach we aim to ensure our public participation activities are of a consistently high standard.

4. How we developed the strategy?

Following the Statutory Guidance on Public Participation Strategies, made under section 44 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, we involved a number of stakeholders in developing the draft strategy.

Officer working group

The initial scoping, mapping of existing participation pathways and drafting of key information for the strategy was undertaken by an officer working group, including representation from Legal Services, Corporate Policy, Communications, Democratic Services, Digital Services and Electoral Services.

NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement

We worked with the NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement (NPT CoP) to further develop the baseline of what is already in place, what works well and where the gaps are and identify potential gaps and aspirations for 'what we could do better'. The CoP also contributed to the overarching objective and approach for the strategy.

The NPT CoP was established in 2019 and membership has grown to 60+ council officers and representatives from partner organisations who regularly engage with specific stakeholder groups as part of their work. The purpose of the CoP is to provide a vehicle for members to work more smartly and in a more collaborative way to ensure that everyone in our communities can have the opportunity to have their say on the decisions that affect them. It is intended to provide a professional and respectful forum for members to share experiences and knowledge on involvement and engagement issues in a spirit of mutual learning and peer support.

NPT Citizens' Panel

We circulated a questionnaire to the NPT Citizens' Panel. Launched in January 2020, the panel is made up of more than 500 residents from across the county borough and actively involves them in decision making at a very early stage, so they help shape proposals before these go out to wider public consultation.

The aim of the questionnaire was to get an indication of how much residents currently participate in the council's decision-making process; which mechanisms for participation they are aware of; the level of interest in participation opportunities; to what extent those who have participated feel their involvement allowed them to have a genuine impact on the decision(s) made; and listen to any suggestions as to what the council could do more to improve public involvement in our decision-making processes.

There were 71 people responses and the themes from these have helped to inform the Action Plan for this strategy. Themes included:

- Most respondents don't know that they can get involved in decision making (or that we want them to), not all of those who do know that they can get involved know how to go about doing this
- Some feel that council engagement is just box ticking/lip service and we're not really interested in engaging (there is a perception that decisions have already been made)
- We don't 'close the loop', so for those who have completed surveys/engaged previously they don't see the outcomes of that engagement (there is a mixed response with regards to this, some think that if we don't do what they want/suggest then we haven't listened - perhaps because we aren't explaining why we make certain decisions; others seem keen to see survey reports, but don't know where to find them)
- There are a number of comments to indicate that respondents don't feel that our decision making is transparent
- Some people don't know who their councillor is, or where to find out – the same goes for council meetings, respondents aren't aware that papers are public and/or that members of the public are able to attend meetings
- Most are aware of the website, but there are a few comments that mention we don't do enough for people who are not online.

Part B - Draft Public Participation Strategy

5. Our Objectives and Approach

We aim to be open and responsive to the needs of local people and communities. This includes engaging them in participative processes by which they can influence and help shape policy and services. That said, all decision making is subject to constraints, so it is important to manage expectations. To help achieve this we will aim to **inform** people about how our decision-making process works, **engage** them to participate and provide **feedback** on how their participation influences our decision(s).

Overarching Objective

Our Overarching Objective is to encourage and support people to participate in the council's decision-making by undertaking our activities in ways that are inclusive and accessible, reflect the diversity of our communities, are responsive and meet the requirements of the relevant legislation and guidance (The Equalities Act 2010; The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act; The Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act (2014); The Welsh Language Standards; The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021).

Our Approach

In keeping with the council's commitment to a rights-based approach to participation, involvement and engagement, we will follow the principles of:

- **Accessibility** – we will adapt what we do for different audiences, ensuring that our activities are made available in the formats and language(s) that people need. In addition, we will make the most of the opportunities that digital technology presents to enable our communities to participate in decision making, but equally, we are aware that digital technology is not available to or the preference of everyone and we will make provision for this.
- **Inclusivity and Non-discrimination** - We will be sensitive to the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 - age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.
- **Empowerment** – we will endeavour to make sure our communities can be part of our decision making process, enable them to influence meaningful change, and demonstrate back to them that their voices have been heard.

In line with the National Principles for Engagement produced by Participation Cymru, our participation, involvement and engagement activities will also be:

- **Sustainable** – not just based on 'one-off' meetings
- **Practical** – not too bureaucratic
- **Honest** – so people can give their feedback about their experiences and share ideas
- **Responsive** – so people will know they have been listened to and taken seriously
- **Creative** – so people can help design improvements to services our participation, involvement and engagement activities will be:
- **Transparent and well communicated** – to help build a trusting environment

To ensure our consultation and engagement activities are fair and lawful, they will be designed to reflect the four Gunning Principles:

- Consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage
- Sufficient reasons must be put forward for any proposal to permit "intelligent consideration" and response
- Adequate time is given for consideration and response
- The product of consultation is conscientiously taken into account by the decision maker(s)

6. How the Council Operates

The council delivers a wide range of services to a population of 144,386. It has 60 Councillors (or Members) elected every five years. Councillors are democratically accountable to residents of their electoral divisions. The overriding duty of councillors is to the whole community, but they have a special duty to their constituents, including those who did not vote for them.

Councillors follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. Their key roles are:

- **Cabinet decision-making:** councillors attend full meetings of the council, and some may have specific roles in relation to policy making, delivery of services and use of resources
- **Scrutiny of decisions:** councillors may serve on scrutiny panels, or committees which scrutinise existing policies and service delivery
- **Regulatory functions:** some council committees, such as those that deal with planning and licensing applications, have a quasi-judicial role
- **Representing their ward:** representing and meeting with the residents and interest groups within their ward and dealing with issues that they raise. In addition, councillors may attend community council meetings and serve on forums through which local issues can be discussed between elected members, council officers and the wider community

Councillors may also be involved in other areas, such as the development of new policies for the council

The council has officers working for it to give advice, implement decisions and manage the day-to-day delivery of its services. Some officers have a specific duty to ensure that the council acts within the law and uses its resources wisely. A code of practice governs the relationships between officers and members of the council.

Meetings Overview

The Council operates under the executive council system. This is where fellow councillors elect a Leader of the Council at every annual general meeting (AGM) and up to 9 fellow County Borough Councillors to sit on the Cabinet. The majority of the decisions of the Council will be taken by either Full Council, Cabinet or at a Cabinet Board which will have decision making responsibility in a number of specific areas.

More information on the committee structure can be found at www.npt.gov.uk/cabinetboards

Council or “Full Council”

Council is a meeting of all 60 elected members, chaired by the Mayor with the Deputy Mayor as Vice Chair. It has responsibility for the council’s functions which are not covered by the Cabinet. The Council decides upon the political management framework and how councillors should be allocated to other committees both internally and externally.

It is also the role of Council to agree the council budget for the forthcoming year and agree policy framework, appoint the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive and agree any changes to the constitution which the council must abide by.

The Executive or Cabinet

The Executive is another name for the 10 Cabinet Members of Neath Port Talbot Council. It includes the Leader and 9 other councillors, all appointed annually by Council. The Cabinet meet as a whole to make decisions as well each Cabinet Member having their own portfolio of services.

Cabinet make the main, overarching decisions for the council. In addition to Cabinet, there are 3 Cabinet Boards:

- Education, Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board
- Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Cabinet Board
- Social Care, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board

Cabinet has to make decisions which are in line with the council’s overall policies and budget. Any decision which is outside the budget or policy framework must usually be referred to Full Council.

Scrutiny Committees

Scrutiny Committees were introduced to ensure a greater number of Councillors were involved in influencing Council policy and service improvements, and provided checks and balances on the decisions taken by the Cabinet. In Neath Port Talbot there are four Scrutiny Committees – one for each Cabinet Board above. Their role is to scrutinise decisions or to present new ideas to the Cabinet and Cabinet Boards for them to make decisions on.

Each Scrutiny Committee is made up of up to 16 councillors from political parties within the council membership, which mirrors the overall political composition of the council. The Education, Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee also includes Co-opted Parent Governors and two Co-opted Representatives of the Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Dioceses.

Scrutiny Committees work together to ensure accountability, openness and transparency – their main roles are:

- Pre Scrutiny (this involves considering decisions to be taken by Cabinet and Cabinet Boards before they are made)
- Performance (this involves monitoring how services are performing)
- Policy and Partnership (this involves considering the impact of policies and holding partners of the Council to account)
- Post Scrutiny (this involves considering the impact of decisions after they have been made)

There is also currently 1 Scrutiny Sub Committee:

- Cabinet (Policy and Resources) Sub Committee which has been established to scrutinise our policy and resources functions.

Scrutiny Committees usually hold their meetings on a 4 or 6 weekly basis. The meetings are open to the public except when private items are being discussed (e.g. where individual personal or financial information is being considered).

Regulatory Committees

There are a number of Regulatory Committees which are decision making forums that the council has to have by law. These include:

- Appeals Panel
- Democratic Services Committee
- Governance and Audit Committee
- Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee
- Licensing and Gambling Acts Sub Committee
- Personnel Committee
- Planning Committee
- Registration and Licensing Committee
- Special Appointments Committee
- Standards Committee

How do committees decide what issues to consider?

The majority of committees have a forward work programme, which is publicly available [www.npt.gov.uk/26159]. The forward work programmes are developed in a number of ways:

- Officers of the council will populate them with issues that arise, are scheduled for completion or because there is a legislative requirement to review the current policy.

- The chair of the committee will also include items that they consider important to the committee or have been brought to their attention, e.g. items that members of the public have asked the committee to consider.

How can you see what is to be debated at a meeting?

Meeting papers are published on the council website [www.npt.gov.uk/democraticprocess] at least three clear working days before every meeting of the Council, Cabinet or Scrutiny. A small number of paper copies of the agenda and reports will be made available at the meeting for members of the public. These include:

- An agenda with the location, date and time of the meeting as well as a list of items that the committee is to debate.
- Reports giving details as to why each decision needs to be made, background information relating to the issues of the topic and a recommendation as to what decision should be taken.

For every meeting of the Council a set of minutes will be prepared and agreed at the next meeting of that particular committee. The minutes will act as a true record of the proceedings at a particular meeting. The council will make available for inspection for a period of 6 years any agendas, minutes and reports of a committee of the council.

Most Council meetings are also recorded and published in an archive for residents to watch at a later date on the Council's YouTube page. More information and recording of meetings is available on our website [www.npt.gov.uk/24746].

7. How can you influence decision-making?

Voting

Voting in elections is an important way to make your voice heard. Local Government Elections take place every five years and by voting you can effect change on a local level and have your say on who represents you and the area in which you live on the council.

The relationship between a councillor and their electorate is two way – in return for your vote, they must try to represent you in the best way possible.

To vote in elections you need to be over the age of 16 and your name must be on the Electoral Register. You can register online at www.gov.uk/register tovot e

Stand as a councillor

There are many reasons why you might decide to stand as a councillor – you may already be active in your community, be committed to a particular political party or want to influence change in your community and the county borough.

To stand for election to the county borough council you must be over 18, be a British, Commonwealth or European citizen and meet one of the following four criteria:

- You are, and will continue to be, registered as a local government elector within the local authority area.
- Occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises within the local authority for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.
- Your main or only place of work has been within the local authority area for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.
- You have lived within the local authority area for the whole 12 months previous to the day of nomination and election.

You can also stand for election to community and town councils in Neath Port Talbot.

The full elections to the County Borough Council and Community and Town Councils took place in May 2022. Vacancies can arise during the term of office for all councils and these are promoted on the NPT Council website www.npt.gov.uk/elections as well as in the local area.

Attend a meeting

Most of the meetings of Council, together with the Cabinet, Cabinet Boards and other Committee meetings, are open to members of the public to attend and observe the proceedings and debate taking place, except where personal or confidential matters are being discussed.

Most meetings are held in Port Talbot Civic Centre, but you can also observe meetings live via Microsoft Teams. You will need to pre-register to be part of the virtual public gallery and can do this by emailing democratic.services@npt.gov.uk by 12 noon the day before the meeting. Committee dates and times of forthcoming meetings can be found on our website www.npt.gov.uk/democraticprocess.

Add an item to an agenda for discussion

There are two ways that a member of the public can encourage a committee to consider an item and have it added to the agenda of a future meeting.

- Any member of the public can contact the chair of a committee and request that they add an item to the forward work programme for future discussion
- Attend a meeting of the relevant committee and request at the meeting under the item forward work programmes that an item is added for future consideration.

Submit a question to Council

Under the council's Protocol for Speaking at Council Meetings [<https://www.npt.gov.uk/constitution>], a period of up to 15 minutes in each meeting is allowed for public questions.

Any person (other than Members or employees of the Council) who lives or works in Neath Port Talbot may ask questions of Cabinet Members or of the chairs of committees of the Council.

To ask a question, notice must be given in writing or via email [Democratic.Services@npt.gov.uk] no later than 5pm, two working days before the day of the meeting. Each question must give the name and address of the questioner and must specify the person to whom it is to be put (by name or title).

Where the questioner indicates that they wish to ask their questions in Welsh, Welsh translation will be sought for that particular question and answer. In the event that Welsh language translation is not available, this will be discussed with the questioner and alternative arrangements will be considered/sought.

The number of questions an individual can ask in a municipal year is limited to two (to ensure that all individuals have an opportunity to attend such meetings). In the event though that a person wishes to attend a meeting to ask a question over and above these two occasions, they are entitled to request it.

An answer may take the form of:

- a verbal answer given by the person to whom the question is addressed or another person nominated by them;
- where the desired information is in a publication of the council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or
- where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to Members of the Council.

Submit views to scrutiny committees

Members of the public are welcome to attend any of the five Scrutiny Committees. If you have a particular interest in a topic, you can contact your local councillor or the Scrutiny Team on 01639 763194 or democratic.services@npt.gov.uk

Members of the public may also be invited to inform and provide information to specific inquiry groups. More information can be found at www.npt.gov.uk/scrutiny

Contact your local councillor

You can contact your local councillor to discuss issues within your ward. If you are not sure who your councillor is, a list of the county borough councillors and their contact details is available on the council's website www.npt.gov.uk/councillors, alternatively you can get this information by contacting the council on 01639 686868.

Submit a comment or complaint

Neath Port Talbot Council considers all comments, compliments and complaints as an invaluable source of information about the services we provide. If you want to tell us about something we have done well, if there's something you want to feedback about or if you would like to make a complaint we are always glad to hear from you.

You can make a complaint in any of the following ways:

- On our website www.npt.gov.uk/complaints

- Email: contactus@npt.gov.uk
- By letter - Neath Port Talbot Council, Civic Centre, Port Talbot SA12 1PJ
- Phone: 01639 686868 - ask to be transferred to the service your feedback

You can give us feedback in whatever format (large print, Braille, on tape or disc) or language you wish.

Petitions

Creating or taking part in a petition is one way individuals, community groups and organisations can influence the council's decision making. We welcome petitions as a way in which our residents can make their views known and request that action be taken. The Council has a petition scheme which sets out the procedures in respect of petitions and how they will be considered. This is available online at www.npt.gov.uk/constitution.

Petitions are documents (digital or physical) that contain details of issues of importance to communities and/or the county borough as a whole, outline for a proposed course of action and are signed by people who are in support of this.

A petition has the ability to:

- Raise awareness of an issue;
- Bring about a change in Council Policy or a different way of delivering services
- Prompt members of the Council to take further action, for example asking questions at Full Council
- Lead to, or influence, a debate at a meeting of the Council

Before submitting a petition you should first check with you local councillor to see if the council is already acting on your concerns and whether the council is the most appropriate body to receive your petition.

The Council's response may also depend on the number of people who have signed the petition. The table below sets out the thresholds:

Number of Signatories	Response
20-100	Response from the relevant director/head of service (treated as standard correspondence)
101-500	Response from the relevant Cabinet Member

Number of Signatories	Response
500+	Referred for debate at a meeting of Full Council or the relevant Cabinet/Cabinet Board/Committee

Public Consultation and Engagement

The council has always consulted with local people on a wide range of policies and proposals, but our ‘Let’s Talk’ campaign in 2021 represented a fundamental shift from our traditional approach to engagement.

Instead of presenting a draft proposal for comments, we posed a series of questions designed to help us properly understand the impact of Covid-19 on our communities, what matters to people today and for the future, and how we can continue the spirit of collaboration that developed through the pandemic.

We developed a draft recovery plan based on the responses, then consulted on this to ensure that we had properly understood and reflected what people told us. Capturing the views and opinions of local businesses and residents at a very early stage in our planning enabled us to shape our well-being objectives and associated actions on what matters locally.

We will further develop ‘Let’s Talk’, so that we have continuous feedback from our residents, our staff, our businesses and partners and increase participation in the council’s work.

Information on current and future consultations is available on our website at www.npt.gov.uk/consultations

NPT Citizens’ Panel

The Council values the views of all residents in the county borough and wants them to be able to contribute to policy and service development. The Citizens’ panel will make it easier for our residents to give us feedback on our work and contribute in our decision making at a very early stage.

You can join the Citizens' Panel if you are over 16 years old and live in Neath Port Talbot County Borough.

As a member of the Citizens' Panel you will receive emails where you will be invited to participate in online surveys. There will be no more than 12 surveys per year on a range of issues affecting people and services in Neath Port Talbot County Borough. If you are interested in joining we'd love to hear from you. More information can be found at www.npt.gov.uk/citizenspanel.

NPT Council Employees and Trade Unions

Neath Port Talbot Council Employees and Trade Unions are key stakeholders in terms of how we deliver services. Our work in social partnership with the Trade Unions is a reflection of our fair working practices, inclusivity and diversity.

A high percentage of our employees live in the county borough (around 70%) and our front line employees are our closest link with members of the public, so their participation in decision making is important.

We regularly engage with employees, through both employee focussed consultation and engagement campaigns and by encouraging them to participating in our public consultation and engagement exercises (which always include provision for them to indicate their status as an employee of the council).

A new Employee Communications and Engagement Strategy is being developed. This will provide a framework for employee participation, involvement and engagement, ensuring a corporate and coordinated approach.

Public Services Board

The Welsh Government passed a law in 2015 called the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The Act requires a Public Services Board to be set up in each local authority area in Wales.

The Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board (PSB) was established in May 2016 to bring together local organisations and strengthen the way they work together to improve the well-being of the people who live in our county borough.

The PSB is a partnership of local public and voluntary organisations from across the area, including:

- **Statutory partners:** Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council; Swansea Bay University Health Board; Mid and West Wales Fire; Natural Resources Wales

- **Invited participants:** NPT Council for Voluntary Service; Higher Education Funding Council for Wales; South Wales Police; University of Wales Trinity St David; Tai Tarian; Welsh Government; National Probation Service; Public Health Wales; Wales Community Rehabilitation Company; Community Councils and Town Councils; Job Centre Plus; Police and Crime Commissioner; NPT Group of Colleges

In line with the Act, the Board assessed the social, economic, environmental and cultural state of well-being across the area. To understand how well-being could be affected, the PSB collects a large amount of information about the strengths of people and communities and described the challenges and opportunities Neath Port Talbot faces now and in the future. This information was used in the Well-being Assessment, which was published in May 2017.

The Board is committed to actively seeking the views and opinions of residents about all policies and decisions made, and about how we can make improvements in the future.

The Board wants to create a Neath Port Talbot where people will have the best chance to get on in life. There many things we can be proud of in Neath Port Talbot, but they recognise there are big challenges too. The Board has explored where they can make the biggest difference and have consulted local people and have now settled on six priorities that they will work on over the next couple of years. The local Well-being Plan explains what these priorities are, how work will start on these priorities and how local people and organisations can get involved with this work.

More information can be found at www.npt.gov.uk/psb.

Youth Council

NPT Youth Council is a group of young people from the county borough aged between 11 and 25 who go that extra mile to champion Children's Rights by empowering young people to have a say and influence change in decisions affecting their lives.

The Youth Council meets with decision-makers at a local level to amplify their voices, enrich decision-making processes, share perspectives and participate as active citizens, volunteers, campaigners, and facilitators of change. As part of its work, the Youth Council meets with elected members every three months and petitions councillors effectively on behalf of young people living in Neath Port Talbot.

Youth Council members also get involved in their communities and in democratic processes regionally and nationally. They have representation on BAYouth (Swansea Bay University Health Board Youth Advisory Panel), the UK Youth Parliament and are Young Ambassadors with Public Health Wales and the British Youth Council.

They have made a measurable impact over the years as passionate advocates for those who are vulnerable or less able to speak for themselves through creating opportunities for young people to participate as elected members and have a voice e.g. LGBTQ+, BAME, Looked after Children and Young Carers.

Democratic Youth Council Elections are held every two years. Creating opportunities for special interest groups to participate is key, and the 2019 - 2021 youth council maintains a vibrant, inclusive and representative body within NPTCBC.

If you are interested in joining then please contact NPT Youth Service on 01639 763030 or youth.service@npt.gov.uk

Social Media

Social media has become a mainstream tool for councils and councillors to inform and engage with the communities they serve.

The council has a number of corporate and service specific social media accounts. These provide valuable insight from our communities, but going forward, we need to consider how we develop these as a participation mechanism for the online community to participate in consultations and engagement campaigns.

You can follow the council on:

- Twitter - @NPTCouncil; @CyngorCnPT
- Facebook - @NPTCouncil; @CyngorCnPT
- Instagram - NPT Council
- LinkedIn - Neath Port Talbot CBC
- YouTube - Neath Port Talbot CBC

The number of councillors with a presence on social media is growing. As a councillor, there are additional things to consider when using it, including the Code of Conduct, managing expectations and workload. The council provides training and guidance to councillors in how to use social media to their advantage when councillors are first elected and provide ongoing update to various issues throughout the year.

8. Mechanisms to encourage and support local people to participate in our decision making?

There are already a number of mechanisms the council currently has in place to encourage and support local people to participate in its decision making. These have been set out under each of the six requirements listed on page 5:

Requirement 1:

Promote awareness of the functions the council carries out to local residents, businesses and visitors

Purpose - to share information about the council's functions and services so that residents are informed about how the council works so that when they participate, they can give informed opinions

What we already have in place to fulfil this:

- Corporate Plan and associated strategies that are publicly available www.npt.gov.uk/corporateplan
- Council Website www.npt.gov.uk
- [Modern.Gov](#) – Democracy Section of website where residents can access the agenda and minutes of meetings or look up decisions
- Live streaming of some meetings and access to recorded footage of meetings that can be viewed by the public online
- Social Media
- Meetings of the Council, Cabinet and the various committees.
- Utilising the opportunities for engagement and awareness raising and the educating of a 'role of a Councillor' through Key Stage 3, the Welsh Baccalaureate and citizenship lessons within schools and linking in with any new curriculum provided
- NPTCBC Social Services' Co-production Statement of Intent – links to the West Glamorgan Co-production Strategy

Requirement 2:

Share information about how to go about becoming an elected member, or councillor, and what the role of the council involves

Purpose - to enable and encourage people to stand for council, representing the people in their own communities and across the county borough.

What we already have in place to fulfil this:

- Website, [Council and Democracy Pages](#)
- Become a Councillor Page
- Full training and induction programme to support members and ongoing training and support
- Regular member seminars to ensure members are updated and engaged on developments
- Allowance for members posted on Council website
- Strategic Equality Plan and Well Being Objectives – Neath Port Talbot Council has strong leadership and clear governance around equality, ensuring robust monitoring processes and regular meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- NPT Youth Mayor
- NPT Youth Council

Requirement 3:

Provide greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the council

Purpose - to help build on the culture of partnership by ensuring people are aware of forthcoming decisions, opportunities to participate in these and how their participation influences our decision-making

What we already have in place to fulfil this:

- Website www.npt.gov.uk
- [Modern.Gov](#) - democracy section of website where residents can access the agendas and minutes of meetings, or look up decisions
- Consultation and surveys
- The Council uses data to inform proposals, including data from external sources and partners where appropriate.
- The Council works closely with partners to share information about decisions and engage with residents more effectively.
- The Council works with community groups to ensure that information about decisions is shared, and a range of viewpoints are heard.
- The Council uses mechanisms to engage with disadvantaged groups and equalities interests e.g. Youth Council, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic forums, disability groups etc.

- The Council routinely engages with citizens on key corporate decisions e.g. the budget and medium term financial plan
- The Council has regular mechanisms to engage with the public including the citizens panel
- NPTCBC Social Services' Co-production Statement of Intent – links to the West Glamorgan Co-production Strategy

Requirement 4:

Provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the Council, including comments, complaints and other types of representations

Purpose - to encourage people to participate by making sure they are aware of the different ways they can provide their views, so that they can choose the mechanism which most suits them.

What we already have in place to fulfil this

- Website www.npt.gov.uk
- Digital forms
- Comments, Compliments and Complaints policy and regular reporting of comments received
- Consultation and surveys
- [Modern.Gov](#) - democracy section of website where residents can access the agendas and minutes of meetings, or look up decisions
- The Council works with community groups to ensure that information about decisions is shared, and a range of viewpoints are heard.
- Petition Scheme
- Public Speaking at Council Meetings
- Scrutiny Public Engagement opportunities
- NPTCBC Social Services' Co-production Statement of Intent – links to the West Glamorgan Co-production Strategy

Requirement 5:

Arrangements made, or to be made, for the purpose of the council's duty of bringing views of the public to attention of overview and scrutiny committees

Purpose - to inform people about the role of scrutiny and how they can get involved

What we already have in place to fulfil this:

- Members of the public are welcome to attend Scrutiny Committees.
- If members of the public have a particular interest in a topic, they can contact their local councillor or contact the Scrutiny Team
- Members of the public may also be invited to inform and provide information to specific inquiry groups.
- The Scrutiny committees set a forward work programme as to when they meet and what they will be considering

Requirement 6:**Promote awareness of the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents to Councillors**

Purpose - to encourage councillors to use social media to inform and engage with their communities by making them aware of the benefits of using, whilst supporting them to use it as effectively as possible, and in a way that does not leave them open to legal challenge, personal risk or reputational risk

What we already have in place to fulfil this:

- Social Media channels (corporate and service specific)
- Welsh Local Government Association - Guidance for New Councillors - 'Improving Digital Citizenship – Research and Best Practice'
- Social Media Training for elected members

9. The NPT Council Public Participation Strategy Action Plan Building on our existing mechanisms for public participation

Requirement 1:**Promote awareness of the functions the council carries out to local residents, businesses and visitors****Actions:**

- Publish a final version of the Public Participation Strategy
- Publish a Guide to the Democratic Process and how the Council makes decisions
- Ensuring the Council's forward plan supports public engagement by being accessible, timely and user friendly

- Promote Welsh Government's Guidance / materials for 16 and 17 year olds regarding Democracy in Wales. Explore Web-based platforms.
- Elections and Education Directorate to explore other potential avenues through school forums / youth councils / career fairs.
- Continue to engage with schools (subject to pandemic), including links with school councils and youth councils
- Liaise with local community groups, school governors and other such organisations to ensure links with 'Becoming a Councillor page' are promoted.
- Meet with stakeholders face to face within their own communities and groups so we can better get to know them and the issues that matter to them.
- Continue webcasting of meetings as specified under the 2021 Act and develop a hybrid meeting policy and ensure availability of translation facilities for Full Council meetings to be conducted bilingually and any other meetings required in legislation.
- Further promote the development of members' annual reports under section 5 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 as a means of promoting awareness of the council's functions and the role of elected members

Requirement 2:

Share information about how to go about becoming an elected member, or councillor, and what the role of the council involves

Actions:

- Continue with hybrid meetings that allow Councillors to attend and participate in meetings from any location with an internet connection
- Ensure that information for potential councillors is available and fit for purpose
- Ongoing review of the effectiveness of the voting awareness raising campaigns elections and to build upon these campaigns ahead of the Local Government Elections 2022, ensuring wider partnerships arrangements are taken forward to allow engagement with wider audiences
- Liaise with Group Leaders to suggest they appoint Diversity Champions for each political group
- Review areas of training and development which can be made available online, core set of training materials which can be used for all Members
- Promote job-sharing by executive leaders and other office holders
- Ensure that members undertake health and safety training, lone working training and other personal safety measures
- Promote the remunerations that are available to Members on the Council website and to candidates standing for Election

- Support the Welsh Government's and IRPW's commitment to explore Resettlement grants or 'parachute payments' payments for Members who lose their seats at election
- Reviewing meeting times to have more flexibility to suit the committee Members
- Undertake a diversity and inclusion survey with Members which will provide a benchmark for future elections and allow the feedback to be reviewed to support / barriers that may have been experienced by a Member during their term of office. The survey feedback will help to deliver a positive and diverse environment for future Members to undertake their roles
- Explore feasibility of workshops in schools on this to raise aspirations and educate on the role of elected members
- Explore feasibility of 'Member for a day' experience (like work experience) and/or some case studies on the role of elected members and what the impact they can have – perhaps linked to Local Democracy Week

Requirement 3:

Provide greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the council

Actions:

- Continue to move towards participative approaches to engagement which empower citizens and place decision making in the hands of communities and individuals
- Build on the use of technology to increase the reach of engagement activity
- Have due regard for Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board Citizen Engagement Scheme in all of our consultation and engagement activities
- Campaign to raise awareness of the mechanisms in place for local people to get involved in decision making (including how to where to find out who your local councillor is, how to view papers for council meetings, how to attend council meetings etc.)
- Develop effective and inclusive consultation and engagement exercises that set reasonable expectations about what can and cannot be changed as a result
- Review and further develop the Neath Port Talbot Citizens' Panel
- Let people know how their feedback helped influence decisions e.g. 'You said...we did'
- Identify opportunities to increase our reach into communities through partnership working
- Ensure that when important decisions are made, robust and reliable information and stakeholders' feedback is made available to decision makers
- Explore the views of the public about which of the council's committees they consider should be broadcast live
- Further develop the NPT Community of Practice on involvement and Engagement to ensure a coordinated approach to consultation and engagement

- Ensure officers are adequately equipped with the necessary skills and tools to design consultations, collect feedback in a timely way and accurately interpret the results
- Develop a Consultation and Engagement Toolkit to ensure a corporate and consistent approach to all activities
- Develop systems and processes for collating all consultation and engagement feedback from across the Council in a central resource, to form a reliable, robust and more comprehensive picture of what people in Neath Port Talbot think, need and want
- Develop a forward planning process/consultation calendar
- Improve analysis, interpretation and sharing of information to inform decision making, utilising the agreed technology (i.e. Snap Software)
- Keep up-to-date with any relevant changes in legislation and exploring examples of innovation and good practice
- A Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy is being developed. The strategy will provide a clear framework for participation with children and young people and will include an engagement model
- Ensure that information is accessible to all Children and Young People – e.g. friendly tone, easy read etc.

Requirement 4:

Provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the council, including comments, complaints and other types of representations

Action:

- Further develop 'Let's Talk' so that we have continuous feedback from our residents, our staff, our businesses and partners and increase participation in the council's work
- Develop a better understanding of the demographics of residents who regularly provide feedback, so that any gaps in representation can be identified.
- Consider how we develop these as a more formal mechanism for the online community to participate in consultations and engagement campaigns
- Embrace the use of digital discussions
- Meet with stakeholders face-to-face within their own communities and groups so we can better get to know them and issues that matter to them
- Review and update the Scrutiny Public Engagement Strategy particularly with respect to hybrid meetings
- Review and update the council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy
- Implement the council's duty under section 90 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to consult local people on performance

- A Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy is being developed. The strategy will provide a clear framework for participation with children and young people and will include an engagement model
- Continue to develop more meaningful and innovative forms of engagement to allow residents to participate and be involved in co-production.
- Provide training for staff so that they understand what effective participation looks like. Provide a framework or model - e.g. Lundy and raise awareness of the Gunning Principles.
- Develop a framework for how we monitor participation opportunities to ensure quality, consistency and measure the impact they have.

Requirement 5:

Arrangements made, or to be made, for the purpose of the council's duty of bringing views of the public to attention of overview and scrutiny committees

Actions:

- Publish a Guide to the Democratic Process and how the council makes decisions
- Ensure information on the council website is accessible
- Ensure the council's forward plan supports public engagement by being accessible, timely and user friendly
- Continue the webcasting of meetings as specified under the 2021 Act and develop a hybrid meeting policy and ensure availability of translation facilities for Full Council meetings to be conducted bilingually and any other meetings required in legislation
- Provide detailed training to chairs of scrutiny committee on ways in which they can engage the community in the scrutiny process
- Promote the use of scrutiny on social media channels
- A Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy is being developed. The strategy will provide a clear framework for participation with children and young people and will include an engagement model

Requirement 6:

Promote awareness of the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents to councillors

Actions:

- Member Induction and Training
- Social media safety training to be delivered to members through the Member Induction Programme and built upon during their term of office

- Develop our social media channels as a platform to ask questions and share views
- Embrace the use of digital discussions
- Member Seminars
- The Education Participation and Engagement Strategy will include information and processes for digital engagement

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

We will continually monitor our progress against the actions in the strategy against the following measures:

Requirement 1:

Promote awareness of the functions the council carries out to local residents, businesses and visitors

- Number of views of meetings
- Website traffic data
- Satisfaction surveys on the Council website

Requirement 2:

Share information about how to go about becoming an elected member, or councillor, and what the role of the council involves

- Equality and diversity data for elected members

Requirement 3:

Provide greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the council

- The number of people on the Citizens' Panel
- The number of responses per consultation
- The number of hits to the 'have your say' webpage
- Percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area (National Survey for Wales and local data)

Requirement 4:

Provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the council, including comments, complaints and other types of representations

- Number of comments, compliments and complaints received
- Participation rates in consultations and surveys
- Number of viewers of online meetings
- Monitor equalities and diversity data concerning residents who have provided feedback
- Level of participation and engagement in the scrutiny process;
- Levels of responses to consultation
- Number of views of meetings including live and YouTube

Requirement 5:

Arrangements made, or to be made, for the purpose of the council's duty of bringing views of the public to attention of overview and scrutiny committees

- Records of the number of the public attending scrutiny committees
- Records of the members of the public invited to attend and make representations to scrutiny committees
- Number gaining access to scrutiny papers and online recordings

Requirement 6:

Promote awareness of the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents to councillors

- % completion of training modules
- % attendance at Members Seminars

Progress against the Strategy will be reported through our Annual Self-Assessment Report.

This strategy will be reviewed and subject to formal consultation by the council following local government ordinary elections, however this document is a living document and will be reviewed by council officers on a regular basis to establish how the council can further enhance its participation programme.