

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

4th September 2023

JOINT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Local Democracy Week 2023.

Purpose of Report

To update the Democratic Services Committee on the Council's plans to mark Local Democracy Week 2023, and to seek input from the committee on other actions that could be included.

Background

Local Democracy Week is held every year in October with the purpose of:

- Strengthening links between elected representatives and their communities;
- Increasing participation in the democratic process;
- Involving citizens in community affairs; and
- Increasing knowledge of local democratic institutions and processes.

Additionally, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 ("the Act") placed a duty on Councils to encourage local people to participate in decision-making and to produce a Public Participation Strategy (section 40 of the Act). This Council ratified its Public Participation

Strategy in April 2023 and it includes detail of how the Council intends to promote awareness of:

- The functions of the Council among local people,
- How local residents can become a member of the Council and
- The roles and responsibilities of an Elected Member

In order to discharge its responsibilities under the Act and to promote Local Democracy Week 2023 it is proposed that the below activities be undertaken:

Promotion of Voter ID for some elections

Voters in Wales now need to show photo ID at the polling station to vote in certain elections.

Currently this applies to:

- Police and Crime Commissioner elections
- UK Parliamentary by-elections
- Recall petitions

From October 2023 it will also apply to UK Parliamentary general elections.

Crucially, it is also important to highlight that electors will not need to show photo ID to vote at Senedd elections or local council elections.

Due to this change to the current voting arrangements we are aware that certain groups are more likely to experience barriers created by the voter ID requirement and may need further advice and support to access photo ID.

As such, the electoral services team are looking to work with local groups and organisations to help aid in raising awareness of the reforms and widen understanding of the new voter ID service, allowing any individual who does not possess an eligible form of ID to obtain a Voter Authority Certificate.

Review Citizen's Panel

Launched in January 2020, the NPT Citizens' Panel is made up of more than 400 residents from across the county borough. The aim is to involve Panel members in decision making at a very early stage, so they help shape proposals before these go out to wider public consultation.

The purpose of the Panel is to:

- make it easier for Neath Port Talbot residents to give feedback to the council on its work and to contribute to policy and service change.
- actively involve residents in decision making at a very early stage, so they help shape proposals before these go out to wider public consultation.
- provide a mechanism for obtaining quick and reliable feedback from residents about proposals and new ideas.
- help the council understand residents' perspectives and to inform decision making.

It is standard practice to review and renew a citizens' panel during its lifespan to ensure it remains active and representative of the population and to offer other residents the opportunity to give their views.

With the NPT Citizens' Panel now in its fourth year, a review of membership is due. This will involve contacting and removing members who are no longer active/no longer wish to be part of the Panel and recruiting new members. Local Democracy Week provides an excellent opportunity to launch a new recruitment drive as part of this review.

Promotion and Publicity

Local Democracy Week activities in Neath Port Talbot will be supported by a communications campaign with a focus on highlighting the political processes within the county borough.

This will include:

- Social media posts advertising upcoming Committee Meetings
- Social media posts and communication around how the public can be involved in decision making
- Videos of current Councillors discussing 'why they became a councillor' and 'day in the life.'

- Video of Youth Mayor/Youth Council about their roles and responsibilities

In addition, the campaign will promote the specific activities taking place throughout the week and highlight the many ways that individuals, groups and organisations can participate in council's decision-making.

We will make use of both owned and earned channels (internal and external) and tactics will include press releases, social media, video, posters, displays, staff newsletters, NPT News, the intranet and internet.

Financial Impact

The activities to mark Local Democracy Week will be delivered through existing budgets.

Workforce Impact

The activities to mark Local Democracy Week will need to be delivered through existing staff resources in the Democratic Services, Elections and Communications and Marketing Teams.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement, as this report is in relation to administrative matters only.

Legal Powers

The Act placed a duty on Councils to encourage local people to participate in decision-making and to produce a Public Participation Strategy.

Risk Management

The Council could be seen as not fulfilling its duties as set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and there could be reputational issues for not participating in Local Democracy Week.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item; however members of the Democratic Services Committee are invited to comment and consider any additions to the proposals.

Recommendation

It is recommended that members note the current work programme to mark Local Democracy Week, and to consider any further activities as the Democratic Services Committee see fit.

Reason for Decision

To agree the Council approach to Local Democracy Week 2023.

Implementation of Decision

This decision is proposed for immediate implementation

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