



Date of meeting :	17 November 2022
Subject	Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
Recommendation	The Democratic Services Committee is asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accept the update of the actions in accordance with the requirements of the Act and to recommend the Petitions Scheme to the Cabinet• identify 2 or 3 members to assist with the work of developing a protocol 'Research Support and Services for Councillors'.
Contact Officer:	Annes Sion, Democracy Team Leader

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. As you are aware, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 received Royal Assent back at the beginning of 2021. The Act has 9 main sections which are relevant to Local Authorities.
2. The Act has been placed on the Corporate Risk Register due to its significance, and a work programme was imposed which showed the range of tasks that arise as a result of this Act. An operational team from the Democracy and Language Service and Legal Services was created in order to undertake this work and make these provisions operational.
3. The purpose of this report is to provide an update for you, the Democratic Services Committee, on those relevant actions and the work that has been done in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Participation Strategy

4. Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 - section 3, local authorities in Wales must publish a Participation Strategy which notes the ways that local people are encouraged to participate in the Council's decision-making process.
5. Developing a draft strategy has been a piece of work that the operational team has been undertaking over the past months. It is emphasised that the strategy will evolve and improve over time as good practice emerges. This strategy will outline Cyngor Gwynedd's aim of encouraging people to participate in the decision-making process.
6. The strategy will emphasise the Council's aim of being open and responsive to the needs of Gwynedd's residents and communities. This will give local people an opportunity to influence policies and services and to



shape them. Our objective is to create a culture of partnership with the public which encourages expressing views and contributions.

7. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a number of duties on local authorities in terms of participation. Namely:
 - I. Promoting awareness of the functions that the Council deliver for local residents and businesses and for visitors.
 - II. Sharing information on how to become an elected Member or a Councillor, and what the role of a Councillor includes.
 - III. Ensuring that information on decisions that have been made, or which are to be made by the Council, are more easily accessible
 - IV. Offering and promoting opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the Council, including observations, complaints and other types of observations.
 - V. Promoting awareness of the advantages of using social media to communicate with residents for Councillors.

8. It is required, in line with the guidance for the Participation Strategy to be the subject of a public consultation before it is adopted. Consequently, it is intended to submit a report to the Council's Cabinet in December, requesting permission to enter into a public consultation on the content of the strategy in January 2023. We will present the findings of the consultation, as well as any adaptations in the final version of the strategy to the Full Council in March.

Petitions Scheme

9. Again, in Section 3 of the Act, it is a requirement for the Council to create and publish a Petitions Scheme.

10. Petitions are one way for individuals, community groups and organisations to participate in the democratic process. It is a way for the public to raise matters of concern with the Council, and allow Elected Members to consider the need for change.

11. The Scheme (Appendix 1) sets out the steps the Council can take when receiving a petition from individuals, community groups and organisations. An outline is provided of the requirements in order to submit a valid petition, and it highlights who can sign the petition and how the Council will confirm a valid petition. Valid petitions that are received will be published on the Council's website, including the actions to be followed.

12. It must be re-emphasised that statutory arrangements exist in a few specific fields, such as Schools Restructuring and the Planning Field, and that a petition WILL NOT be accepted outside these arrangements.

13. After receiving your observations on the Petitions Scheme today, we will submit the Scheme to the Cabinet at the end of November, to be recommended for adoption by the Full Council in December.



Research Support and Services for Councillors

14. The document "Local Government: Guidance for Principal Councils", notes the latest guidance that local authorities must address. Although the guidance is currently in the form of a consultation document, no major changes are anticipated and therefore we have given them appropriate attention.
15. One of the specific fields in question is "Research Support and Services for Councillors". The document notes that every elected member should be able to obtain a variety of information and support. The document also notes that referring individual members to existing sources of information or training opportunities is what is in question in the 'support/research' pack.
16. Democratic Services Committees are required to establish a protocol or a set of rules that govern how councillors should expect to gain access to information, and a research Service that is fair and balanced, avoiding any duplication.
17. The draft protocol is currently being developed. Ensuring the input of a small team of councillors to assist with the draft before its submission to the Committee would be very valuable. The Committee is asked to identify 2 or 3 members to assist with this work. This will involve 1 meeting, probably at the beginning of 2023.

Recommendation

The Democratic Services Committee is asked to

- accept the update of the actions in accordance with the requirements of the Act and to recommend the Petitions Scheme to the Cabinet
- identify 2 or 3 members to assist with the work of developing a protocol 'Research Support and Services for Councillors'.