



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Participation Strategy

2023-2028



Introduction

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has a firm commitment to delivering high quality, sustainable services. Fundamental to the success of this is a strong relationship between the Council, its residents, and the communities across the whole of Merthyr Tydfil.

This Participation Strategy sets out our approach to encouraging two-way communications and making the process of influencing decision making more accessible. It considers elements of both the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) and the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) to cover two distinct but comparable areas:

- Consultation and Engagement Process
- Influencing the Democratic Process

What is Participation?

Participation is defined as **'the action of taking part in something'**.

What is the difference between consultation and engagement?

Engagement is a broad and ongoing process of sharing information and seeking its feedback.

Consultation can be more formal and generally seeks the views on a particular topic.



Approval and Review

This strategy will be approved by Full Council with a commitment to take on board the views of our audiences. It is a 'living' document, meaning that it will change as and when needed; and will be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that we are evolving with new legislation.



Part 1: Consultation and Engagement

What is engagement?

'Engagement means anything that we do that informs citizens about what we do, or involves citizens in the Council's decision-making process.'

Who do we engage with?

- Residents
- Businesses and investors
- Visitors
- Media
- Partners
- Community groups
- Staff
- Councillors
- Trades unions
- Local charities
- MPs and MSs
- Government

Why do we engage?

By meeting our statutory duty to engage with our audience we will help keep them informed and enable them to shape the decisions we make.

By listening and understanding we will empower our audience to have greater influence over the issues that affect them. It will also help us to be inclusive and act with purpose; understanding the needs of our communities to ensure that the services we deliver meet those needs, supporting them to take action and develop community-led solutions.

The Principles of Engagement

The Consultation Institute Charter states that the seven key aspects of good consultation are:



Integrity The consultor must be willing to listen to the views of consultees and be prepared to be influenced when making subsequent decisions.



Visibility All those who have a justifiable right to participate should be reasonably made aware of the exercise.



Accessibility Methods of informing and consulting must be 'appropriate for the intended audience'.



Transparency Stakeholder invitation lists, consultee responses (with consent) and consultation results should be published.



Disclosure Consultors are under a duty to disclose information, including financial details, which could materially influence the nature and extent of consultees' reports.



Fair interpretation Responses to the consultations must be collated and assessed objectively. If weighting methods were used, these must be disclosed.



Publication There is a 'proper expectation' that the output and outcome of the consultation will be published within a reasonable time.

These are implicit in all the authority's communication practices.



How do we engage?

At times, engagement may simply be about informing, while at other times engagement will involve a combination of providing and gathering information, consultation, feedback, and evaluation.

The Spectrum of Engagement according to the International Association of Public Participation outlines five levels of engagement:

Informing	Consulting	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Providing information to localities to enable them to understand problems, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions	Obtaining local feedback to inform decision-making Obtaining feedback on formal proposals	Working directly with local people to ensure that issues, concerns, and aspirations are understood and considered	Working in partnership with localities on all aspects of decision-making including development of options and identifying preferred solutions	Placing final decisions in the hands of the locality
So that we will...				
keep everyone informed	keep you informed, hasten to acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	implement what you decide

The Legal Context

Essentially, where people have come to legitimately expect a process of consultation, for example, with local authority budget cuts, there are grounds for a judicial review should a public consultation not take place. Similarly, a consultation must be conducted properly should the choice be taken to embark on one, whether a legal requirement exists for it or not. This is part of ensuring that the consultation process remains a fair one.

The legitimate expectation applies:

- when there has been a clear promise of consultation
- where official guidance or policies imply a promise to act in a particular way
- where there is a withdrawal of a benefit with significant impacts to be considered
- where the nature of the relationship would create unfairness if there were to be inadequate consultation.

Gunning Principles

If it has been determined that consultation is required, it is important that the following principles are adhered to, to ensure legal compliance.

- **Proposals are still at a formative stage** – a final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers.
- **There is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'** - the information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easy to interpret for consultees to provide an informed response.
- **There is adequate time for consideration and response** - there must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate. There is no set timeframe for consultation, despite the widely accepted twelve-week consultation period, as the length of time given to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation.
- **'Conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made** - decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account.

Part 2: Influencing the Democratic Process

Residents can directly influence decisions that are made in the Council Chamber. This section of the strategy will provide an understanding of how local government works, how decisions are made, what information is available and how members of the public can become involved.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council operates under the executive model, where the majority of decisions are taken either by Full Council or Cabinet.

Full Council is made up of 30 elected members across 11 Wards, who appoint the Leader of the Council. The Leader then creates a Cabinet which includes themselves and five additional members, each of whom takes the lead in a specific service area.

What do the different committees do?

There are a number of meetings that regularly take place. Click on the links below for further information on each one:

[Full Council](#)

[Cabinet](#)

[Scrutiny](#)

[Planning And Licensing](#)

[Governance and Audit](#)

[Democratic Services Committee](#)

[Standards](#)

How can I see what is being discussed?

At the Annual General Meeting each May the Council agrees a full committee cycle for the coming year. Agendas are published for these meetings at least three working days before they take place.

Can I attend meetings?

All committee meetings are open to the public, although some agendas may include exempt items which are required to be considered in private. Members of the public cannot speak at meetings without prior arrangement.

How can I find out what happened if I can't attend?

Minutes are published for every meeting. They act as a record of the meeting and resolutions made.

Most Council meetings are recorded, streamed and stored in an archive to be watched online. These are available on the Council's website, either through the [news and events stream](#) or directly via the meeting.

How can I influence decisions?

Voting

When voting, you are having your say on who represents you within the Council and who the spokesperson is for the area you live in. Next time there is an election, think about who you believe will best represent your beliefs and values and make that point by using your vote.

Local elections are usually held every five years. To vote you simply need to be age 16 or over and registered on the electoral roll with the Council.

You can register online at www.gov.uk/registertovote

Contact your local councillor

You can contact your local Councillor to discuss issues within your Ward. A list of all Councillors and their contact details is available on our website.

[If you are not sure which Ward you live in you can search here.](#)



Stand as a councillor

If you feel strongly about not voting because you do not believe that any of the candidates represent you, there is always the option to stand for election yourself.

To stand for election you must be at least 18 years old; be a British, Commonwealth, European or qualifying foreign citizen; and meet at least one of the following four criteria:

- You are, and will continue to be, registered as a local government elector within the local authority area;
- You have occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the local authority area 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.

Become a co-opted member of a Scrutiny Committee

All five of the Council's scrutiny committees have public appointment positions for co-opted members. As a co-opted member of a committee you would take part in meetings alongside Councillors. There is no salary or allowance for the role, but reimbursements are made for reasonable travel expenses. For information on current vacancies, contact Democratic Services.

- If you are aged between 11-25, you can also become a member of the Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF), whose members are also represented on each of the scrutiny committees.



Attend a public meeting

Anyone can attend any meeting of the Council and observe the proceedings and debates taking place. Most meetings take place in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8AN. Remote attendance has also been introduced in recent years, so even if you are unable to attend the meeting in person you can contact [Democratic Services](#) to request to join remotely.

Any person attending may be excluded from items if sensitive or confidential information is expected to be discussed. These are classed as exempt items and they are clearly marked on the agenda.

Ask a question at Committee or add an item to a Forward Work Plan

The Constitution allows for the public to ask questions or request that items be added to forward work plans for all committees.

Requests should always be submitted in writing or by electronic mail. The deadline for submission is midday five clear working days before the date of the meeting, not including the day of submission or the day of the meeting.

—● for Scrutiny committees, send your enquiries to: scrutiny@merthyr.gov.uk

—● for all other committees, send your enquiries to: democratic@merthyr.gov.uk

Submit a Comment or Complaint

A member of the public may comment or complain about a service received by the Council by:

- using the Council's [complaints procedure](#)
- contacting their [local Councillor](#)
- contacting the responsible [Cabinet member](#) responsible for the service area
- contacting the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Comments or complaints regarding the conduct of a Councillor should be directed to the [Council's Monitoring Officer via Democratic Services](#) or the [Complaints Department](#).

Submit a petition

The [petitions process](#) allows members of the public to have direct influence on the political process and to raise concerns that are important to them.

Anyone who lives, works or studies in Merthyr Tydfil, including under 18's, can organise a petition. The minimum age of a person who can sign the petition is 10.


Members of the public can submit petitions on the following:

- Issues relating to the Council's responsibilities.
- Issues which affect the County Borough or communities in Merthyr Tydfil, as long as the Council is in a position to exercise some degree of influence.
- Anything relating to an improvement in the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area to which any of the Council's partners could contribute.


All petitions sent or presented to the council will receive an acknowledgement from the council within 14 days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition.

Paper petitions must include the detail that the petition wants to address on the top of every page so that is clear that everyone signing knows what they are signing for.

Send completed petitions to:

 Democratic Services, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Civic Centre, Castle Street, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8AN.

For more detail about how you can influence the democratic process:

 democratic@merthyr.gov.uk