

Committee: **Democratic Services Committee**

Date of meeting: **27th March 2023**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Petitions Protocol 2023-27**

Portfolio Holder: **Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member Corporate and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	02/03/23			24/03/23			30/03/23	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 For Democratic Services Committee to consider the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Petitions Protocol 2023-27 before consideration and approval at Council.
 - 1.2 The Petitions Protocol outlines the methodology to be applied when submitting a petition, who can submit a petition, the restrictions for what can be included in a petition, as well as how the Council will respond.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a duty on a Principal Council to make and publish a Petitions Scheme setting out how the Council intends to handle and respond to Petitions.
 - 2.2 Rule 42 of the Act 2021 states that the Council must publish a petition scheme that includes:
 - How a petition may be submitted to the Council;
 - How and by when the Council will acknowledge receipt of a petition;
 - The steps the Council may take in response to a petition received by it;
 - The circumstances (if any) in which the Council may take no further action in response to a petition;
 - How and by when the Council will make available its response to a petition to the person who submitted the petition and to the public.
 - 2.3 This Petitions Scheme will form a part of the Council's Public Participation Strategy.
 - 2.4 Petitions are documents (whether electronic or physical) that contain details of issues that are important to communities and the Blaenau Gwent area as a whole, signed by local electors who are in support of the proposed action.

- 2.5 The Council last approved its Petition Protocol in 2018, therefore, alongside the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and the establishment of a new Council in May 2022, it felt timely to undertake a review of the Protocol.
- 2.6 This iteration of the Petitions Protocol includes the establishment of electronic petitions, known as e-petitions.
- 2.7 The Petitions Protocol will be included on the Council's website bilingually once approved.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 CLT considered the Petitions Protocol at their meeting on 2nd March 2023.

Option 1

Consider and agree to the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Petitions Protocol 2023-2027 (found at appendix 1) before approval at Council.

Option 2

Consider the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Petitions Protocol 2023-2027 (found at appendix 1) and make recommendations for amendment before approval at Council.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 The Council is working to embed the requirements as outlined under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
 - 4.1.1 The Council is fully committed to supporting the community to engage in Council activity. This is supported by the Council's Corporate Plan priority: *An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place*
 - 4.1.2 At the heart of everything the Council does is the community of Blaenau Gwent. Engagement, participation and customer experience feature as a key theme which runs across the Council in order to shape services and make decisions.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The Petitions Protocol itself has no budgetary requirements, however, the Protocol does include detail of Petitions which will not be considered by the Council, and this includes if it would require the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of time, money or effort to prepare the answer.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a risk of follow up intervention if the Council does not implement the statutory requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales)

Act 2021 and this includes the provision of having a Petitions Protocol in place and for this to include the provision of e-petitions.

5.3 ***Legal***

There is a statutory requirement for the Council to have a Petitions Protocol in place and for this to include the provision of e-petitions.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 In receipt of a Petition there will be a requirement for staff involvement in order to consider the number of signatures and appropriateness of the Petition. Staff may also be involved should the Petition relate to a specific service area.

5.4.2 Elected members will be informed of a Petition if it relates to their Ward or if the subject matter relates to their lead role. Depending on the number of signatures received, there may be a requirement for the Petition to be considered at Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet or Council.

5.4.3 As outlined in 5.1 a Protocol will not be considered if it would require the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of time, money or effort to prepare the answer.

6. ***Supporting Evidence***

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The petitions protocol arrangements have been operating since 2018. Since that time:

- 27 petitions have been received – all received an officer response.
- 6 of these petitions were aligned to the service review of School Crossing Patrollers – so these were considered as part of that review.
- 1 petition was considered as part of the Planning protocol
- No petition has required consideration by a Committee or Council.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Petitions are one way in which individuals, community groups and organisations can express their views and concerns about something for which the Council is responsible, providing an opportunity for change.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The Petitions Protocol has been developed in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and also considering the Protocols from a number of Local Authorities across Wales.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The submission of a Petition enables the community to bring about a change in Council policy which will impact over the long term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The submission of a Petition enables the community to bring about a change in Council policy, raise an issue or propose a different way of working which will prevent issues from getting greater.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Petitions Protocol is specifically for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council but does include provision should the topic area fall within the remit of another Local Authority or partner agency.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

Depending on the subject area of a Petition all Council services can be involved in responding to a Petition.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The Petitions Protocol will have no direct impact on decarbonisation or the reduction of carbon emissions unless the Petition specifically calls for action in this area.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)***

An integrated impact assessment is not required for the Petitions Protocol.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Head of Democratic Services has responsibility for the Petitions Protocol.

7.1.1 The Petitions Protocol will be reviewed every five years in line with Council elections.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Petitions Protocol 2023-27*