

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY: SUMMARY

SECTION 1

The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 is a piece of law from Welsh Government that tells all Councils in Wales how they must work. One section of it (Section 40) says that each Council must write and publish a Public Participation Strategy – that is what this document is about.

The Public Participation Strategy must help the people living and working in RCT to be aware of and understand:

1. What the Council does
2. How to become a Councillor and what work you will have to do in that job
3. How to find out about Council decisions
4. How to talk to the Council about decisions
5. How the Council makes sure the views of the public are given attention by Councillors and Committees
6. Why it is helpful for Councillors to use social media to talk to local people.

DUTY 1: What the Council does

- The Council is sometimes called the Principal Council.
- The Council has 75 elected members, called Councillors. The Council normally meets once a month to talk about and decide on a list of things, like:
 - the Constitution
 - the Budget (how much money RCT has, and how to spend it)
 - the Policy Framework (which explains how RCT will work)
 - who will lead the Council (and be called the Leader of the Council)
 - who will be on Committees (which make decisions about specific things) and how these Committees will work?
- The Cabinet has up to 10 members, including the Leader of the Council. The Cabinet makes decisions and does work on specific named things. Each Cabinet member has an area of work called their portfolio.
- Scrutiny Committees work alongside Cabinet members to help them make better decisions and to make sure the decisions are fair and follow the Council policies.
- Planning Committee makes decisions about planning applications from people and businesses across RCT.
- Licensing Committees make decisions about licences for taxis, pubs, clubs and other businesses in RCT.
- Governance & Audit Committee checks and makes decisions about the Council's money and finances.
- Democratic Services Committee makes sure that RCT is working democratically and is able to deliver the services it is responsible for.
- Standards Committee makes sure that Councillors are following the Code of Conduct (which are the rules about how they do their work in the Council).

DUTY 2: How to become a Councillor and what work you will have to do in that job

- How to become a Councillor
 - Councillors are elected by the people who live in RCT at Local Government Elections.
 - The next Local Government Elections will be held in May of 2027.
 - There are some helpful websites that will explain to you how to become a Councillor if you want to. The Welsh Local Government Association has this one - www.beacouncillor.wales – and RCT has its own which includes videos of current and past Councillors talking about their experiences - <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/BecomingaCllr/BecomingaCouncillor.aspx>
- How much time does it take up to be a Councillor?
 - Most Councillors spend 3 or 4 days a week on their Council work.
 - Some Councillors spend more or less time than this on their Council work.
 - If you have a job you will need to check with your employer that you will be able to have time to work on Council business.
- Standing as a Candidate in an election
 - You will need to fill in some forms to stand in an election. These forms will be available in early 2027.
 - If you would like to be added to a list of interested people please email electoralservices@rctcbc.gov.uk
 - If you want to be a candidate linked to a political party you will need to contact that political party first for information and help.
 - If you want to stand as an independent candidate (with no link to a political party) please contact electoralservices@rctcbc.gov.uk
- Salary and Costs
 - Councillors are paid a salary which is decided by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.
 - Councillors can also claim some costs back, like travel or accommodation outside of RCT when needed, or the costs of personal assistance and care services that they need to do their work as a Councillor.
 - You can read more information about this at <https://www.gov.wales/independent-remuneration-panel-wales>

- Support for Disabled Candidates
 - The Welsh Government has given money to a scheme that helps pay for support to anyone who is disabled and who wants to stand as a Candidate in Local Government Elections. You can read about this at <https://www.disabilitywales.org/projects/access-to-elected-office-fund-wales/>

- What work do Councillors have to do?
 - Councillors have to work on behalf of all the people who live in their area.
 - Councillors must go to training and development sessions during their time in the role, especially in the first 3 months after starting.
 - Councillors must go to monthly Council meetings and other meetings of Committees that they work with. In RCT these meetings are held in person and online, so Councillors can take part from home or another place if they need to.
 - Councillors must always follow the Councillor's Code of Conduct. You can read more information about this at <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/SocialMediaUseandServiceStandards/MemberCodeofConduct.aspx>
 - Councillors are representatives of their local area and are expected to take part in local activities and events. These can include:
 - going to meetings at or about local schools
 - taking part in local Tenant Association meetings or other groups about local issues
 - holding open surgeries, which means having a time and place where local people can come and speak to the Councillor.
 - meeting with local people in their own homes if they need to talk about something.
 - speaking to the other Councillors and in Council meetings about the thoughts and issues facing the people they represent

- What facilities and support do Councillors get?
 - The Democratic Services Team helps Councillors do their work. They arrange the meetings of Council and Committees and give advice to Councillors when needed. They help with paperwork and any training that Councillors need.
 - Councillors are given any phone or computer equipment they need to do their work. The RCT ICT Team are also able to help Councillors use this equipment properly.

DUTY 3: How to find out about Council Decisions

- The dates and times of Council meetings will be put on the Council website at least 5 days beforehand. This information is also available at libraries and One4All centres in RCT.
- If an emergency meeting is needed this will be added to the website as soon as possible.
- The agenda (a list of what is planned to be talked about in the meeting) and any reports for the meeting will be available to the public at <https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1&LLL=0>
- The minutes (a record of everything that happens in a meeting) and the agenda of each meeting will be available on the website for six years after the meeting.
- If a member of the public wants paper copies of the minutes, these can be asked for from Democratic Services (at the Council Headquarters).
- From 2023 the Council will also add Decision Notices to the website. A Decision Notice tells you what was discussed, who was in the meeting and what was decided. They will be added to the website within 7 days of the meeting.
- Some Council meetings are not public – this happens when confidential things are being talked about.
- Most Council meetings are open for the public to attend. This can be done in person (by going to the meeting yourself) or online (by watching the video live on the Council website).
- If members of the public are asking questions or taking part in the talks they will be able to do this online or in person.
- Videos of Council meetings are on the Council website for six months after a meeting. If you need to see a video more than six months after a meeting you can ask for a copy of it from the Democratic Services Team.

DUTY 4: How to talk to the Council about decisions

- The Council has created some guides to help you understand how to ask a question or address a Committee. These can be found in Section 2 of this document.
- The Council thinks it is very important to listen to everything that the people who live in RCT tell us, whether it is good or bad. The Council has a Comments, Compliments and Complaints policy which describes how we do this. You can see the policy at <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/GetInvolved/CommentsandCompliments/relateddocuments/COMMENTSANDCOMPLIMENTSANDCOMPLAINTSPOLICY.pdf>
- If a member of the public wants to talk to the Council about a service they have had from RCT they can:
 - contact one of the Councillors.
 - contact the Cabinet member in charge of that service.
 - contact the member of Council staff in charge of that service.
 - use the Council Comments, Complaints and Compliments procedure (you can see this at <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/GetInvolved/CommentsandCompliments/Commentscomplimentsandcomplaints.aspx>)
 - contact the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales at 1 Ffordd Yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, CF35 5LJ. Telephone: 0845 601 0987 or via the website www.ombudsmanwales.org.uk
 - If a member of the public has a complaint or comment about a Councillor they should contact the Council's Monitoring Officer (you can email them at director.legal@rctcbc.gov.uk) or the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

DUTY 5: How the Council makes sure the views of the public are given attention by Councillors and Committees

- The process called Scrutiny is the way for members of the public in RCT to be involved in Council activities.
- If you live in RCT you can ask questions at Scrutiny meetings.
- Taking part in Scrutiny is one of the best ways to influence Council Decisions. Scrutiny meetings allow Councillors to hear your thoughts and comments in person. You can get involved by:
 - attending a Scrutiny meeting
 - send your comments or experiences to Scrutiny meetings to be listened to and discussed.
 - keep up to date with what's happening in Scrutiny meetings.
- All Scrutiny meetings are open to the public unless they will be talking about confidential things. A list of these meetings and information about what they will be talking about can be read at <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/Scrutiny/Scrutiny.aspx>. There are instructions there on how to attend a Scrutiny meeting.
- The Council plans to use the results of public consultations to plan what the Scrutiny Committee will be talking about.

DUTY 6: Why it is helpful for Councillors to use social media to talk to local people

- Social media (like Facebook and Instagram) is a very helpful way for the Council and the Councillors to talk to people who live in RCT.
- Social media lets people share their thoughts more easily and helps people find out about events, decisions and information.
- By using social media Councillors can:
 - find out about local issues and worries in their area.
 - find the latest news from the Council, from Welsh Government and from other organisations.
 - tell people about what they are doing and what their work in the Council is like
 - share information quickly and see what people think about it.
- Councillors must follow the Code of Conduct when they are online as much as when they are talking to people in person.
- Councillors are given training in how to use social media properly.
- Councillors should not share personal information on social media.
- The Welsh Government Association has made some websites to help Councillors use social media and to help them deal with online abuse. You can read these at:
 - <http://www.wlga.wales/social-media-and-online-abuse>
 - <https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/-L9yCMQA3H5Ep2qfWt8Tz>
 - <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/images/43.5%20Online%20abuse.png>

SECTION 2: How to take part in Council discussions

These useful links will give you more information about taking part in Council discussions. Some advice and details are also shown below.

- The Council's Involvement & Engagement Framework 2020-2024– can be found here:
<https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g50000825/Public%20reports%20pack%2020th-Jan-2020%2016.30%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=10&LLL=0>
- Council Participation Guide for Residents – can be found here:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/RelatedDocuments/PUBLICSPEAKINGATCouncil.pdf>
- Scrutiny Participation Guide for Residents – can be found here:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/RelatedDocuments/PUBLICSPEAKINGATSCRUTINYCOMMITTEEMEETING.pdf>
- Cabinet Participation Guide for Residents – can be found here:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/RelatedDocuments/PUBLICSPEAKINGATCABINET.pdf>
- Regulatory Committees Participation Guide for residents – can be found here:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/RelatedDocuments/PUBLICSPEAKINGATAPLANNINGANDDEVELOPMENTCOMMITTEEMEETING.pdf>

If you can't see the documents through these website links you can ask for paper versions from the Council.

Taking part in meetings of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council

- Full Council meets once a month. The dates of future meetings can be seen at
<https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1&LLL=0>
- Anyone who lives in RCT or who pays Council Tax in RCT is allowed to ask one question in a Council meeting.
- If you want to ask a question you must write it down and send it to the Proper Officer by post or by email before 5pm at least 8 working days before a meeting (working days are Monday to Friday).
- Your written question must also have your full name and address and say which Member of Council should answer the question.
- At the meeting you will have 5 minutes to ask your question. You are allowed to ask one extra question if it is on the same subject, and as long as it is asked in the same 5 minute time.
- There are rules about the type of question that can be asked, which you can read in the links listed above.

Taking part in meetings of Rhondda Cynon Taf Scrutiny Committees

- The dates of all the Scrutiny Committee meetings for the current year can be seen at <https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1&LLL=0>
- Anyone who lives or works in RCT can speak at Scrutiny Committee meetings as long as they register in advance. To register you must speak to Democratic Services at least two working days before the meeting and tell them which agenda item you want to speak about.
- Only two people are allowed to speak on each agenda item unless the meeting Chair chooses to allow more questions.
- Each speaker is allowed 5 minutes to speak in the meeting.
- Full guidance can be read in the links above.

Taking part in meetings of Rhondda Cynon Taf Cabinet Committee

- The dates of the Cabinet Committee meeting for the current year can be seen at <https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=132&Year=0&LLL=0>
- Anyone who lives or works in RCT is allowed to speak to the Cabinet at a meeting as long as they have registered in advance and the Chair of the meeting has agreed.
- If you want to ask to be allowed to speak you must email the Executive and Regulatory team at least two working days before the meeting. You must state which agenda item you want to speak about. You will be told by email or telephone (if you have given a telephone number) whether or not you are able to speak at the meeting.
- The Chair decides who can speak, and how many people can speak on each agenda item. If lots of people want to speak about an item on the agenda the Chair might ask for just one person to speak on behalf of the group.
- Each speaker will usually be given 5 minutes to speak. If there are a lot of speakers, however, the Chair might shorten the amount of time that each person is given.
- Full guidance can be read in the links above.

Taking part in meetings of Rhondda Cynon Taf Planning and Development Committee

- The dates of the Planning and Development Committee meetings for the current year can be seen at <https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=166&Year=0&LLL=0>
- The easiest way to have your say on a planning application in RCT is to send it in writing. Guidance on how to do this can be found at <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/PlanningandBuildingControl/PlanningApplications/SupportObjectorCommentonaPlanningApplication.aspx>
- If the application needs to be discussed by the committee, you are able to take part in the meeting if you are the person submitting the planning application, a professional advisor to that person, or a member of the public.

- To be able to speak at the meeting you must register in advance. You can email planningservices@rctcbc.gov.uk or use the Council website at <https://customerportal.rctcbc.gov.uk/PublicSpeakerRegistration> to do this. You must register at least two full working days before the date of the meeting.
- Speakers are given 5 minutes to speak to the meeting. The person who has submitted the planning application (or their professional advisor) is also given 5 minutes to respond to the question asked.
- Full guidance can be found in the links above.

General Information about these meetings

- If you prefer to take part in meetings in Welsh you can ask for simultaneous translation to be provided for you.
- If you have any disability or other access needs to be able to take part in meetings these can be arranged for you.
- If a person under the age of 16 wishes to take part in one of these meetings they will need to have an adult with them and complete paperwork about data protection (GDPR).
- To take part in any meeting please read the full guidance in the links at the top of this section. If you have any questions or need any help, you can contact the Democratic Services department:

Council Business Unit
Democratic Services
2 Llys Cadwyn, Taff Street
Pontypridd
CF37 4TH

Telephone: 07385 401845

Email: councilbusiness@rctcbc.gov.uk

SECTION 3: How we will know we are doing well?

For each of the duties we talked about in Section 1, we have a list of the things we will be doing. We will measure some things to check if it is working and ask people if the impacts we hope to have are happening.

Duty	What we do now	What we will do in future	How we will know it is working
Explain what the Principal Council does	The Council website lets people read about meetings and what is being talked about by the Principal Council	Check all the web pages to make sure they are up to date and helpful. Make sure important meetings are shown on the front page on the Council website so that more people know about them.	People feel they understand what Council is doing and can access information when they want to
	We put important strategies and the Corporate Plan (which describes how the Council will work) online for the public to view.	The new Corporate Plan for 2024 will be put on the website. This is being written to include the views of the people who live in RCT.	We will make sure the new Corporate Plan is put on the website as soon as it is ready.
	Council meetings are shown on live video on the website	We will keep making sure videos of Council meetings are on the website	We will count how many people watch these videos
	We have a website called Let's Talk RCT where people can tell us what they think about different things the Council is doing	We will report every year on how the website is being used. We will do more to tell people about the website and get more people to use it	We will count how many Council projects are added to the website and how many people are taking part in them

Duty	What we do now	What we will do in future	How we will know it is working
How to become a Councillor and what work you will have to do in that job	Share information about how to become a Councillor on social media during Local Democracy Week. Taking part in Job Fairs and face-to-face events.	We will continue to do this	People have more information about being a Councillor
	Have information about how to become a Councillor on the Council website, including videos about what being a Councillor is like and information about pay and other details.	We will check all the web pages on how to become a Councillor to make sure they are easy to understand. We will talk to new Councillors to find out if the web pages were helpful to them and what we could do to make them better	People have more information about being a Councillor
	Tell people about the training and support that Councillors can have to help them in their work	We will make sure the website has this information and that it is easy to find	People who are interested in being a Councillor have the information they need to make a decision
	Let people use Welsh or English to talk to the Council or do Council work	We will keep on providing translation services so that Councillors can do their work in either Welsh or English We will continue to encourage members of the public to use either Welsh or English when they talk to us	We will ask Councillors whether they are happy with the language support they receive

Duty	What we do now	What we will do in future	How we will know it is working
How to find out about Council decisions	The Council Website will have Decision Notices, meeting information and other decision information	We will make sure that this information is easy to find and easy to understand	We will check that Decision Notices are put on the website after every Council and Committee meeting
	Council meetings are shown on live video on the website	We will keep making sure videos of Council meetings are on the website	We will count how many people watch these videos
	Forward Work Programmes	We will make sure that Forward Work Programmes make Scrutiny better	We will count how many items from work programme are taken in to Scrutiny meetings
	Annual Reports	We will make sure that Committees are given annual reports when they need them to understand the work that is happening	We will count how many reports are being produced and used

Duty	What we do now	What we will do in future	How we will know it is working
How to talk to the Council about decisions	The Council consults on all decisions about changes to services on policies	We will continue to do this through the website and events. We will try to make sure that people who can't take part online and other hard to reach groups are included	We will count how many consultations there are and how many people take part
	The Council website lets people send in their comments	We will check the ways to send in feedback are easy to find and easy to use	We will count the number of comments, complaints and compliments received through the website
	Petition Scheme	We are checking that our current Petitions Scheme is working and make any changes that are needed to keep it fair and open	We will count how many people use the scheme
	Attending and speaking at a Committee meeting, Council meeting or other meeting that is open to the public	We will keep on making sure meetings are shown on our website as videos and that people know how to take part	We will count how many local people are taking part in meetings

Duty	What we do now	What we will do in future	How we will know it is working
How the Council makes sure the views of the public are given attention by Councillors and Committees	Going to and taking part in Scrutiny Committee	We will keep on helping people take part through guides like the Scrutiny Participation Guide for Residents (LINK)	We will count how many residents of RCT are taking part in meetings
	Send in your ideas for Scrutiny to add to the Forward Work Programme	We will carry on putting information about scrutiny work on our website	We will make sure that people are taking part
	Using social media to tell people about Scrutiny Committee and encourage them to take part	We will carry on telling people about Scrutiny meetings through social media. We will find out about new and better ways to tell people about things like Scrutiny	We will count how many people see and respond to our social media posts
	Make sure scrutiny committee meetings are available to watch on our website at https://rctcbc.public-i.tv/core/portal/home	We will make sure that the link to watch the video is published with all scrutiny committee meeting agendas	We will check how often people are watching online

Duty	What we do now	What we will do in future	How we will know it is working
Why it is helpful for Councillors to use social media to talk to local people	Training for new Councillors, and all Councillors	We will update the regular training that Councillors have	We will check how many members are taking part in the training
	Giving Councillors access to pictures and information that they can use in their social media posts	Make sure Councillors have the type of information and pictures they want to use	We will count how many Councillors are using these things
	Add social media contact details to each Councillor's profile on our website	We will ask all members to give us this information with their contact details	People will find it easier to connect with Councillors online

GLOSSARY

Attest	To be a witness to something
Ballot Box	A sealed box that votes are put into on an election day
Budget	The Budget is an amount of money that the Council can spend on delivering services (schools, social care, collecting rubbish etc) each year. The budget comes from money raised from Council tax and from Government funding
Budget and Policy Framework	A name for all the Council policies that must be used when making any decisions
Cabinet	The Cabinet is a smaller group of Councillors chosen by the Council Leader to lead Council work and decisions. They each have a set area of responsibility.
Candidate	Anyone who is standing for election is called a candidate
Chief Executive & Directors	The Chief Executive is in charge of all RCT staff (not elected Councillors). The Directors are in charge of specific parts of RCT County Borough Council.
Code of Conduct	A set of rules that describe how Councillors are expected to behave in different parts of their job as a Councillor
Committees	Smaller groups of Councillors who meet regularly to discuss specific issues
Constituents	People who live in the area and vote for Councillors.
Constitution	A written legal document that guides the council on its decision making processes
Council	The full group of elected Councillors who make decisions.
Councillor Induction Programme	The training that all Councillors take part in to learn how to be a Councillor.
Councillors	Elected representatives from each part of the Rhondda, Cynon and Taf area
Critical Friend	A person or group of people who help make sure that work is being done properly and within the rules
Democratic Services	A group of staff who work to make sure that Councillors have the support they need, and who help carry out meetings and training of Councillors
Democratically accountable	Being held responsible for your work by the people who can vote for you in elections
Digital devices and telephony provision	The computers, internet and phones that are needed for Council work
Discretion and decision	This means it is only the Leader's choice, not a group decision
Duties	The responsibilities and work that a person must do
Elected Members	Another name for Councillors
Electoral Wards	The smaller local areas and communities in RCT that vote for local Councillors
Executive Functions	Decisions that can be made by individuals or groups such as Cabinet, Committees or officers
Fluid work programme	A list of topics that need to be considered by Committees and that can change over time
Functions	The different types of work being done
Hybrid meetings	Meetings that people can take part in online and in person
In confidence	Privately
Infographics	Pictures and graphs that explain information

Initiatives	New ideas and plans
Job Share	Two or more people share the work of one full-time job
Key Decisions	High-level or very important decisions that affect a lot of other decisions
Making representations	Speaking to and giving information or opinion to the Council
Municipal year	This runs from the date following the Councils Annual General Meeting until the next Annual General meeting. The Annual General Meetings are usually held in May
Officer Delegated Decisions	Decisions that are made by RCT staff rather than by Councillors
Officers	People who work for RCT/Members of staff
Portfolio	The list of work areas that a group is responsible for
Pre-decision scrutiny	Examination of information and evidence by the Scrutiny Committee before a decision is made by an officer or Cabinet
Reasonable adjustments	Changes that can be made to make sure everyone can access and do a job, attend a meeting and so on, taking into account any disability or other needs they have
Remuneration	Money that is paid in return for work or to cover costs
Returning Councillors	Councillors who have been re-elected
Salary	An annual sum which is usually paid monthly in exchange for doing a job
Scheme of Delegation	A plan for who is responsible for different parts of work given to them
Senior Leadership Team	The Chief Executive and Directors of RCT who are in charge of different parts of Council work and services
Subsistence	Money paid for food, drinks, travel and other essential costs whilst working
Surgeries	Times when members of the public can visit their Councillor in a public place to discuss issues in their communities
Terms of reference	The agreed plan of what the group is for and how they will do their work