



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**18<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2018**

### **CONSULTATION ON VOTES AT 16**

#### **REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNCILLOR C LEYSHON**

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#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Cabinet Members of the outcomes of the Votes at 16 Consultation as requested by Cabinet Member, Councillor Leyshon, in response to the UK Youth Parliament National Make Your Mark Campaign.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Support the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Youth Forum with its Votes at 16 campaign activities by promoting them via the Council's formal communication channels including the corporate website and social media platforms.
- 2.2 Support the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Youth Forum to conduct further research into the type of information members of the public would like to see available to improve their knowledge and understanding of voting in response to the consultation findings.
- 2.3 Make a commitment to improve the information and communication available to residents of all ages on politics, local government and voting within Rhondda Cynon Taf prior to the next election period.

#### **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Make Your Mark National Campaign, through the British Youth Council, has made Votes at 16 their Annual Campaign following 101,041 young people in the UK stating this as their top issue for change. Following this campaign in Wales, Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Cardiff City Council, and Carmarthenshire CBC have already passed a motion of support to Welsh Government on this issue.

- 3.2 Welsh Government has since made a commitment to ensuring votes at 16 are in place in time for the 2022 local elections. Rhondda Cynon Taf publically stating their support for the campaign will show its residents and voting population that the Council is behind this change in voting laws, which could have a positive impact upon voter engagement within Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 3.3 Votes at 16 has had a wide spread of support on a national level. Consultations carried out on a local level, with both young people and current voters, have identified strong support for Votes at 16 within Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 3.4 A large concern from residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf regarding the Votes at 16 campaign relates to their belief that there is a lack of education and information available to everyone, not just young people. A commitment to improve education and more readily available information could have a significant positive impact on voter engagement including the 5,253 potential additional voters within Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 3.5 Rhondda Cynon Taf has already, in a Cabinet paper relating to electoral reform (September 2017), shown their support for Votes at 16, subject to 16 year olds also being able to vote at all Welsh Local Government elections including the Welsh Assembly elections and Town/Community Councils.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The 2017 UK Youth Parliament, Make Your Mark Campaign, saw 954,766 young people across the UK vote on the issue most important to them. 9.4% of the votes equating to 101,041 young people voted that Votes at 16 was the most important issue to them. Votes at 16 subsequently became the National Campaign of the UK Youth Parliament. In Rhondda Cynon Taf 4,687 young people voted in the Make Your Mark Campaign with 469 (10%) of young people stating Votes at 16 being their most important issue.
- 4.2 Within the National Votes at 16 Campaign, Carmarthenshire County Borough Council, Merthyr County Borough Council and Cardiff City Council have passed a motion of support to the campaign.
- 4.3 In May 2018 Rhondda Cynon Taf's current Members of UK Youth Parliament met with Councillor Christina Leyshon, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to discuss the Votes at 16 Campaign. Councillor Leyshon invited the young people to undertake a consultation in order to gain further information on views surrounding

Votes at 16 in Rhondda Cynon Taf and to present the findings to the Council's Cabinet.

- 4.4 In October 2018 the National Assembly for Wales gave its approval to the Assembly Commission's decision to introduce legislation to lower the voting age for Assembly elections to 16 by 2021.

## **5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child requires the Council to demonstrate that decision making has paid due regard to the rights of children and young people.

## **6. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT**

- 6.1 The aim of the 8 week consultation was to gain the views of RCTs residents; including young people under 16, young people 16-18 years old, and the adult residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf. The young person consultation was delivered for a 4 week period between 5<sup>th</sup> September and the 26<sup>th</sup> September. Similarly the adult consultation was delivered for a 4 week period from the 19<sup>th</sup> September to the 17<sup>th</sup> October.

- 6.2 The methodology adopted for the young person consultation was an online questionnaire and a paper questionnaire. Locations for paper consultation questionnaires included:

- Nantgarw College
- Aberdare College
- Rhondda College
- Ferndale Youth Club
- Pontypridd Youth Club
- Gwenifor Park Youth Club

- 6.3 The methodology adopted for the adult consultation was an online questionnaire and a paper questionnaire. Locations for paper consultation questionnaires included:

- Ty Trevithick
- Ty Elai
- Aberdare Library
- Treorchy Library
- Rhydyfelin Library

- 6.4 The link to the online questionnaire was posted on the Youth Engagement and Participation Service social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

- 6.5 A total of 452 young people completed the consultation in both online and paper format. A total of 161 residents completed the adult questionnaire. Paper questionnaires were input into the online survey in order to enable effective analysis.
- 6.6 Out of the 452 responses from young people 40% (180 young people) stated that they currently take an interest in politics. However, 76% (344 young people) stated that they do not feel there is enough education on politics and voting to support young people to vote once they reach voting age.
- 6.7 Furthermore 77% (349 young people) stated that they are in support of the Votes at 16 campaign with 67% (304 young people) stating that if able to they would engage in voting processes in the future.
- 6.8 Out of the 161 responses from RCT residents, 152 (95%) responded stating that they currently vote in local elections. However, 100 (63%) of respondents stated that they do not feel there is currently enough information available to enable residents to know how to vote, and 155 (98%) of respondents stated they feel young people should be provided with improved education and information in order to empower them to vote. 99 (62%) of respondents stated they would also like additional information regarding voting for themselves.
- 6.9 Complimentary to the young people survey 111 (69%) of adult respondents stated that they support the Votes at 16 campaign.
- 6.10 Comments received regarding what would encourage more people to vote included:
- Voting online in a quick and accessible format.
  - There needs to be more education about politics and how it affects young people. Young people need to be able to relate to politics and voting otherwise they will not see the need to vote. We also need to talk about issues that face young people and how the vote can improve current issues.
  - Information to be simplified so that young people can understand.
  - Relevant information, not just at election time, starting from secondary school. Many adults are also not sure about the process either, therefore more information in the community too.
  - Education in schools covering how local government works, and what local councillors are responsible for. Along with this general information on politics and how it has affect on everyone.
- 6.11 A debate held in the RCT County Youth Forum on 3<sup>rd</sup> October co-chaired by Councillor Leyshon and a young person, Oliver Hopkins, gave the opportunity for young people to share their views. Out of 35 young people present 32 young people (92%) stated that they

supported the Votes at 16 campaign. 3 young people (8%), however, stated that they did not feel votes at 16 should be approved. Through the debate the young people presented a valid argument that their lack of support in the campaign came from their belief that young people are not adequately educated. All 3 young people stated they would support the campaign if it included better education for all.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 7.1 There would be no financial implications of the proposed recommendations.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 There are no legal implications aligned with this report.

## **9. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 9.1 This proposal links to the corporate priority of promoting independence and positive lives for everyone by making a commitment to better education on politics, local government and voting within Rhondda Cynon Taf and support to submit a motion to Welsh Government with regards to the Votes at 16 Campaign.
- 9.2 The proposal will appropriately support the Council's strategic plans and priorities in order to deliver **long term** improvements on voter engagement across RCT. The proposal offers **early intervention** by offering improved education to young people prior to them reaching voting age and **preventing** the further decline of voter engagement. By **integrating** multi-agency support to improve education and information available will empower residents to vote in local elections. The proposal will support **collaboration** with communities, including young people, involving them in the consultation process for the Votes at 16 Campaign.
- 9.3 The new priorities and delivery model will contribute to the following wellbeing goals:
- **A prosperous Wales** – The proposal will seek to empower young people to vote at local elections and raise their aspirations in living and working in RCT building the prosperity of the communities in which they live.
  - **A resilient Wales** – The proposal supports the improving of resilience of young people, the wider family and the community as a whole across RCT.

- **A healthier Wales** – The proposal will support young people to have access to the full range of entitlements as well as opportunities to grow and develop socially and educationally.
- **A more equal Wales** – Through enabling voting at the age of 16 we bring equal rights to young people who are able to contribute to their society by working and paying tax compared to those aged 18 and older. This will create a more equal Rhondda Cynon Taf and an equal Wales.
- **Wales of cohesive communities** – By supporting the proposal young people will have the opportunity to become more visible members of their communities. It also serves to break down perceived barriers between young people and adults leading to a more supportive and cohesive community environment.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** – Existing working relationships with Welsh language partners will be maintained to ensure that access to information and education will be provided through the medium of Welsh.
- **A globally responsible Wales** – Supporting the proposal within existing resources provides the opportunity for the Council to ensure resources are being used efficiently.

## **10 CONCLUSION**

- 10.1 This report has provided Cabinet Members with details of the outcomes of the public consultation in relation to the Votes at 16 campaign.
- 10.2 Upon consideration of the consultation findings within this report, Cabinet Members are in a position to make a fully informed decision in relation to the suggested recommendations.

### **Other Information:-**

#### ***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**Background Papers**

None

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