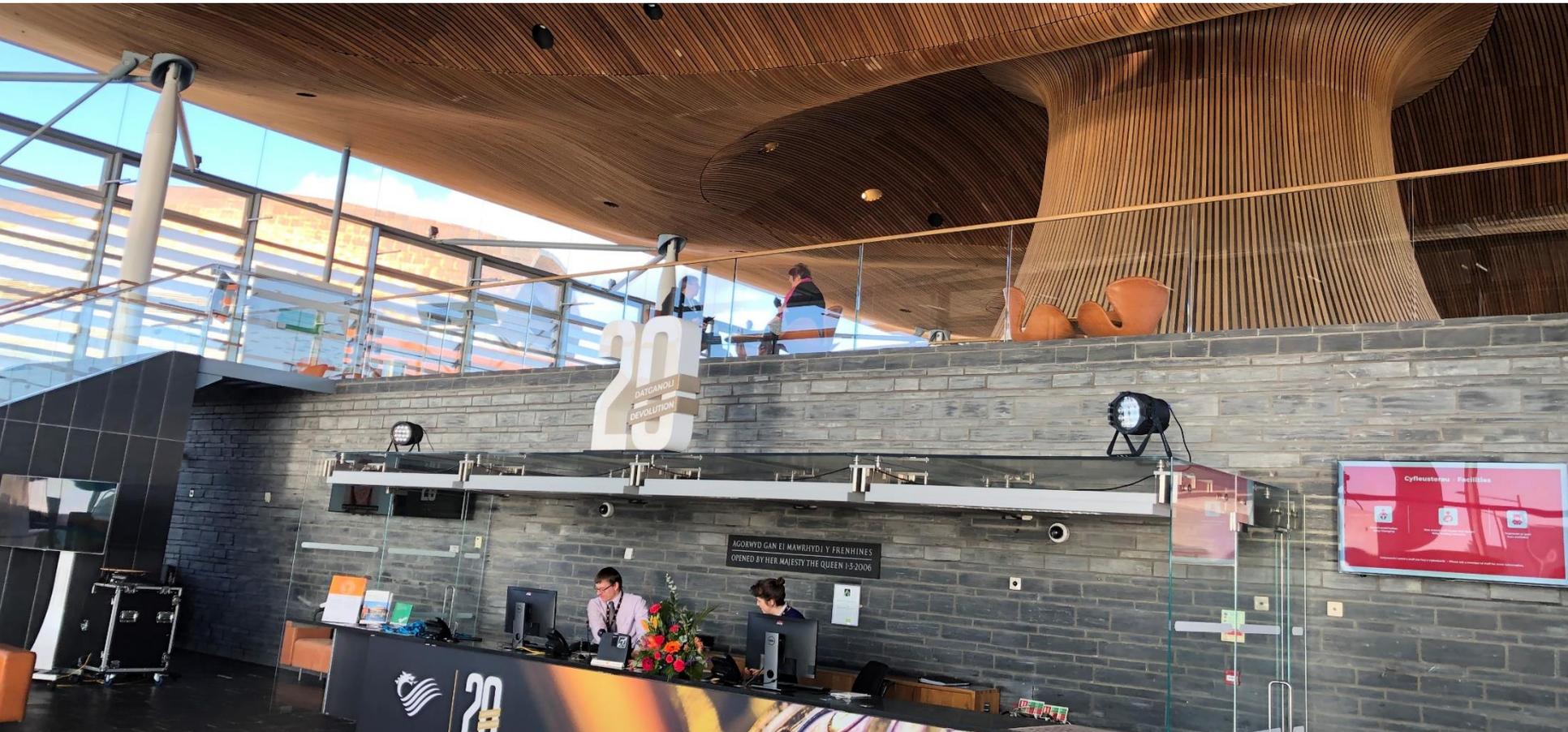


Breaking barriers to engagement with Parliament



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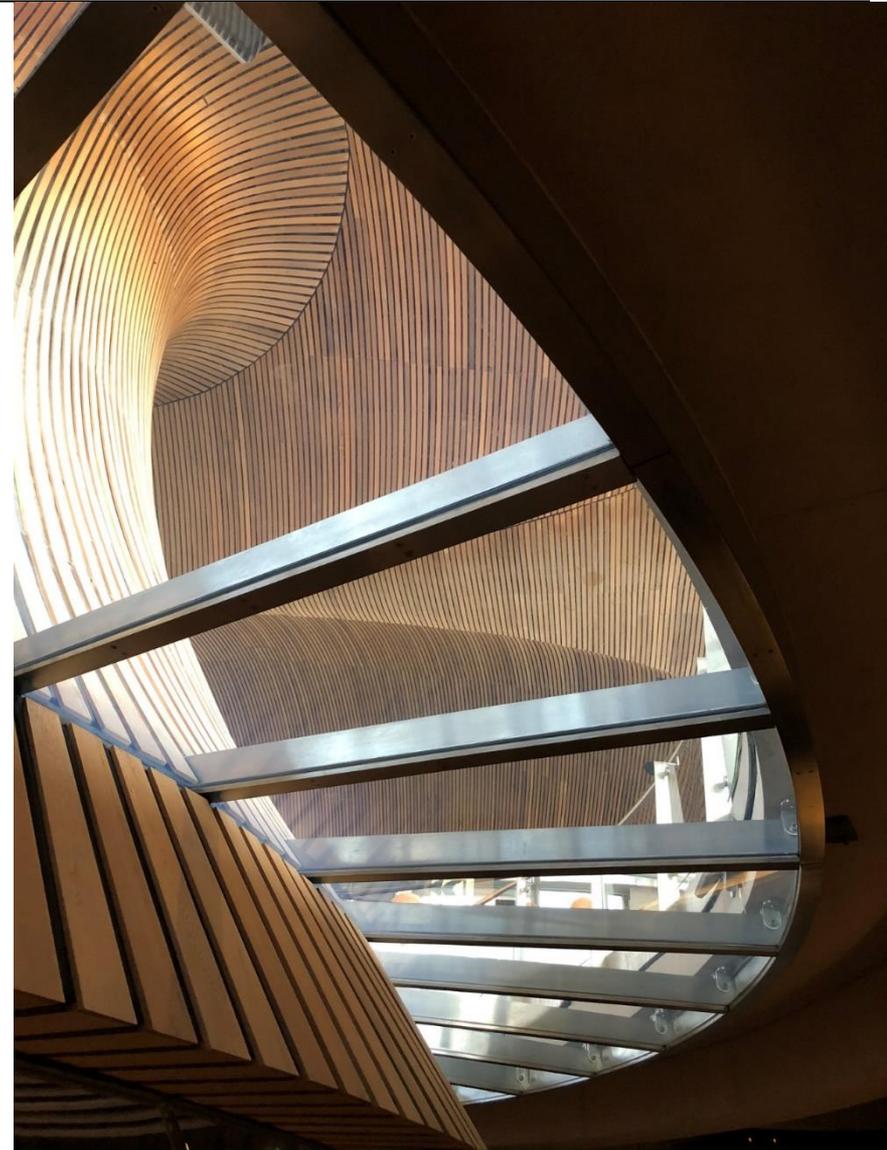
Professor Cristina Leston Bandeira
19 March 2024

What I'll cover



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- The research's aims
- Perceptions of politics and petitions
- Parliamentary structures and processes
- Recommendations
- Leaflet about petitioning the Senedd



→ The research

The research problem

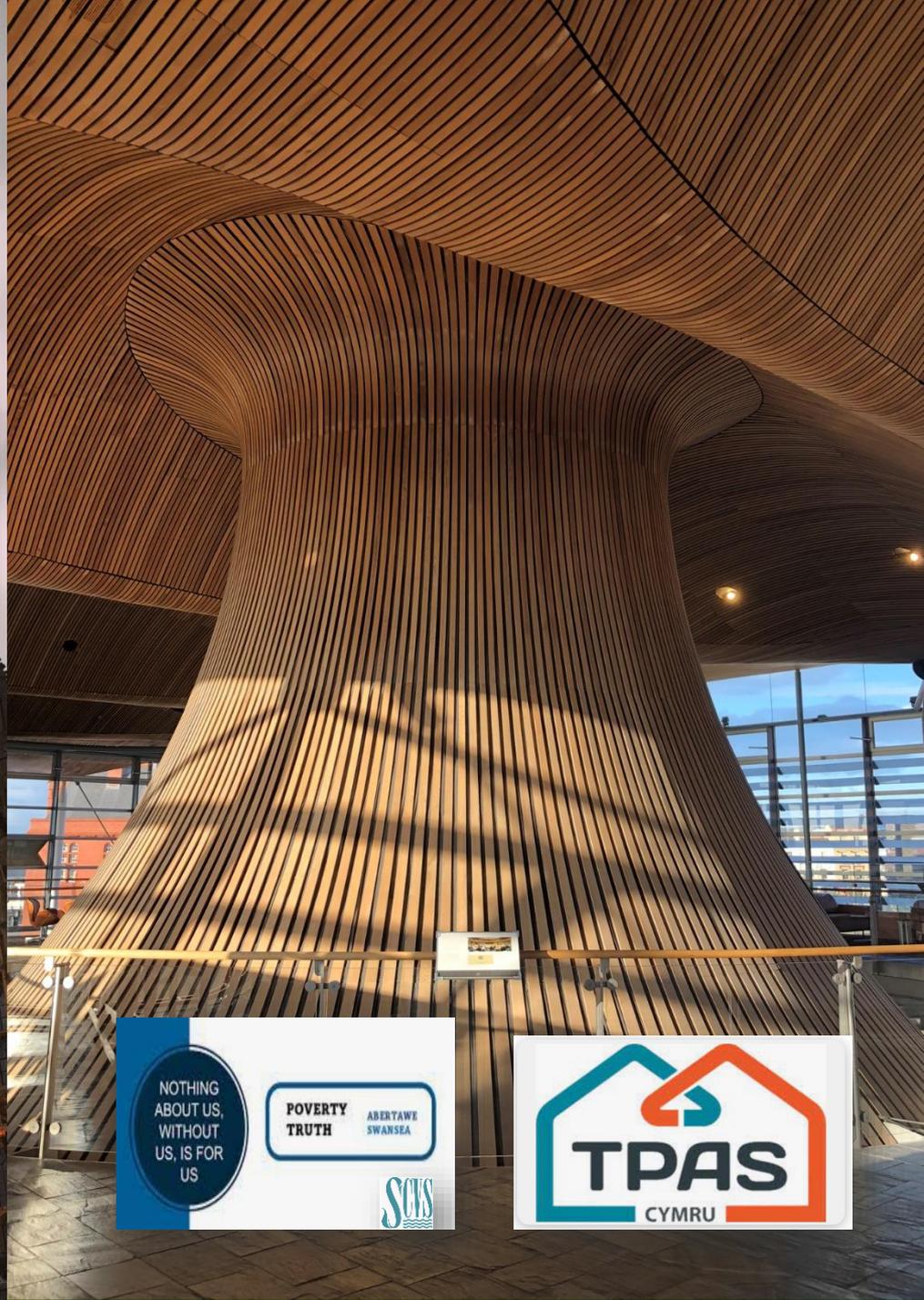


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Huge increase in opportunities for political engagement between elections

But:

- Used mainly by those who tend to be politically engaged: 'the usual suspects'
- New opportunities: potential amplification of those who already have a (effective) voice
- Wider effect: poor responsiveness of political systems
- Made worse by lack of research on the disengaged



Project Aims



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1. Identify how citizens from seldom-heard groups perceive political engagement and petitioning;
2. Identify barriers and potential enablers for further engagement from citizens of these groups;
3. Establish practices and processes making parliamentary petitioning more inclusive.

**Research
England**



→ Findings

Perceptions of Politics



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- Very negative perceptions
- Deep distrust of politics

A whiteboard with handwritten notes in green marker. The notes list various animals and their associated characteristics or behaviors, likely used as metaphors for political figures or groups. The text is as follows:

- Hiena → Out appearance
Hiearchical / Gang
- Snake → (Beast) Slippery, slimy, evasive
- Wolf → distant, powerful, not sharing
Solve their problem
- Owl → v. smart, sits on the fence
observes
- Big Cat → ferocious, sneaky, quiet
- Hiena → attack their own
- Meerkat → work together, but happy
to take one of their own
pack, individuals

Giraffe

Distant, not doing anything for the people. They're opportunistic and don't cater to the interests of the majority.

Owl

A smart, intelligent, calculating problem-solver. They sit on the fence (or branch), take it in, throw it about.

Chameleon

Always changing their colours and allegiances. They're divisive, trying to blend in and appear to be something they're not.

Lion

Ferocious, with a loud roar but can also be sneaky and quiet. They can suddenly come up with something unexpected.



Snake

Devious. They give false information and promises. Slithery, slippery and evasive.



Hyena

Hierarchical in structure, they act like a gang when attacking. There's a sharp contrast between their giggling appearance and how they operate.



Dog

Can be friendly but also nasty (have you ever seen a dog eat its own vomit??).



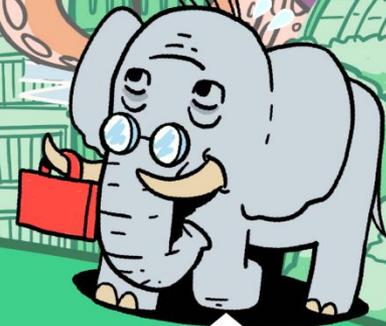
Octopus

Smart, strong and dangerous, although they might not look it. They look after themselves.



Elephant

Slow and lumbering. Although intelligent, they don't achieve as much as they want to.



If politics was an animal, what would it be?

Researchers from the University of Leeds asked participants of 4 focus groups what animal best represented politics, to understand attitudes towards democratic engagement in the UK. This was part of a wider research project that included further focus groups and interviews.

Find out more about this research and the team behind it by scanning the QR code

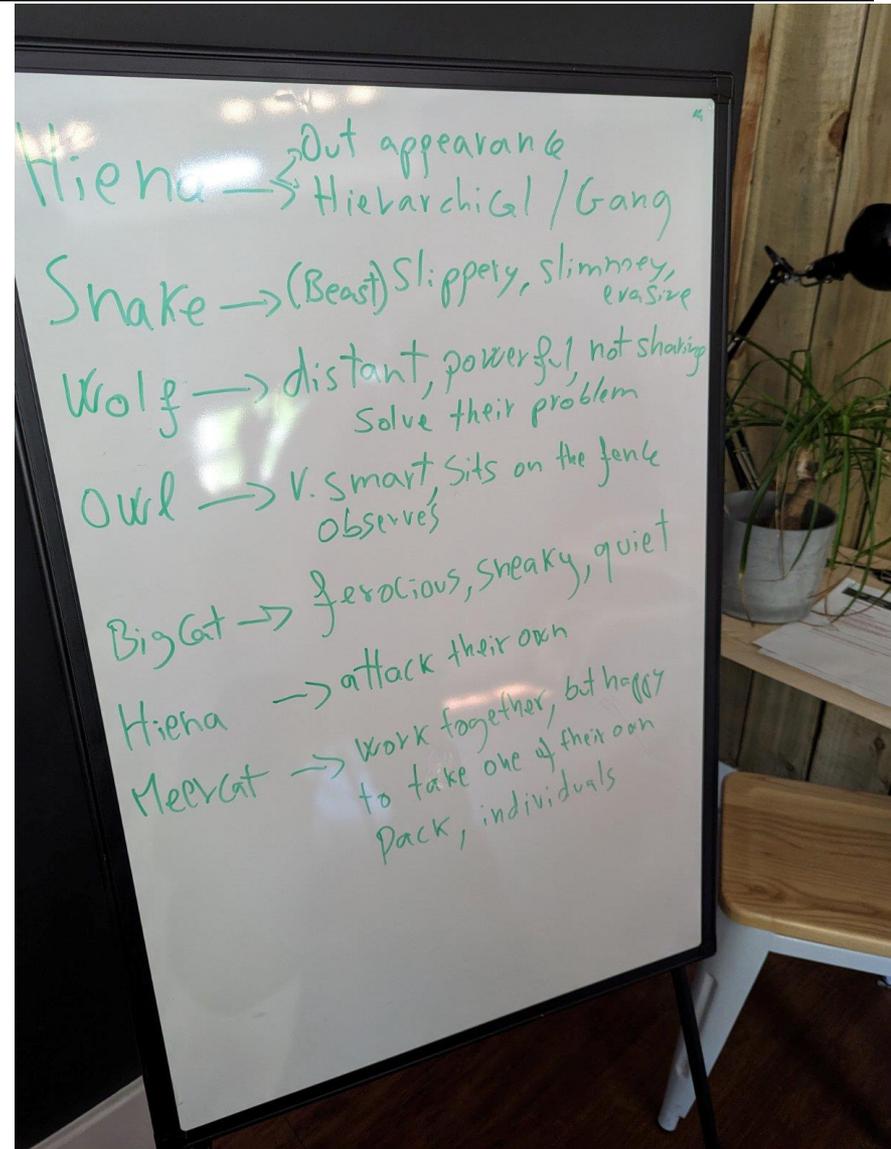


Perceptions of Politics and Petitioning



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- Very negative perceptions
- Deep distrust of politics
- Despite specific positive experiences of politics
- Slightly more positive about Senedd
- Lack of visibility of petitions to the Senedd
- Mixed experiences of petitioning
- Committee contact very positive
- Frustrating and disjointed
- **All would petition again**



Parliamentary structures and processes



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- Very strong commitment from staff and support from Members
- Weak integration between e-petitions site and committee's
- Procedure-led, rather than issue-led
- Clarity and information to manage expectations
- Collaboration with citizen focused services needed, for seldom heard
- Importance of mediators: community organisations

Increase awareness of petitioning (beyond ‘usual suspects’)

1. **Deepen and extend working with community organisations** to reach out to seldom-heard groups, disseminate the value of petitioning and better understand the needs of specific groups.
2. Produce **materials specifically aiming to disseminate the value of petitioning beyond usual suspects**, giving particular attention to explaining how the system works and how petitioners can build their campaigns.
3. Develop a **closer collaboration between the Petitions Committee and the education, citizen engagement and communications parliamentary services**, to raise awareness of petitioning and the Committee (new resources, story led, regular meetings).

Enhance the experience of petitioning parliament

4. Develop a **clear integration between the e-petitions website and the Petitions Committee's website**, so that petitioners can easily access support information which explains how the system works and what the Petitions Committee does.
5. Transform **current communications from parliament-led to citizen-focused**. This may include: review of the language currently used in channels of communication, the introduction of Easy Reads, infographics and other audio-visual content in communication material, introducing more regular communication between milestones in the petitioning process

Summing up



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- A deep well of mistrust
- Lack of understanding of petitions to parliament
- Seldom-heard groups experience significant barriers to political engagement
- Community organisations are important intermediaries
- Importance of clarity and explanation to manage expectations
- Collaboration between parliamentary citizen centred services and committees: key



Outputs from the research



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- Reports for each Petitions Committee including our recommendations
- A visual summary of the research
- Evidence to each Petitions Committee
- Leaflets on petitioning co-produced with partner community organisations



Make the Welsh Government **listen** to you

We want to save people from drowning and do something about water safety

Ban greyhound racing in Wales

Save our fflecsi bwcbabus service

Offer Welsh working parents the same financial support for childcare as England

Our road is a black spot for traffic accidents and we need safety measures

**Do you want to make things better where you live?
Are you angry about something that seems unfair?**

You can try to change things by sending a petition to the Senedd, the Welsh Parliament. Many of us don't think much about politics but the Senedd exists to make sure the Welsh Government represents you and listens to what you care about.

Members of the Senedd (MSs) look at petitions. Thanks to petitions, people have changed the law. One of the largest petitions ever in the UK was to give women the right to vote. More recently, a petition to improve water safety received more than 11,000 signatures and was debated in the Senedd. Thanks to the petition a Minister is now responsible for preventing drowning.

When a petition gets...

250 signatures

The petitions committee takes a close look to decide the best action. It can ask the government what they are doing about it.

10,000 signatures

The problem may be debated in the Senedd by MSs and a government minister who has to say what they're doing to help.

Staff may also contact petitioners to help MSs find out more about the petition.



How to start a petition and get it noticed



Good petitions say what they want parliament or government to do and explain why the petition matters.

Think of ONE action you want them to take. Then talk to other people about what your petition will say. This will help you describe the problem you care about and write your request as clearly as possible.

Find two people to support your petition. You'll need their emails.

Once your petition has been accepted, you will need to share it with as many people as possible and ask them to sign it.

Start your petition at:
petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/check.

To get your petition noticed:



Spread the word: tell people about your petition and explain why it's important - family, friends, community, church, social groups, local charities, businesses. Ask them to sign and ask people they know to sign.



Take photos: for social media and for sending to local media. Always ask permission first.



Contact your MS: you can find their details at senedd.wales/find-a-member-of-the-senedd/. Tell them about your petition. Ask to meet them to talk about how they can help.



Get others to help you: ask for help from good writers, speakers and social media users - all useful skills to help promote your petition.



Use social media: (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) to connect with supporters who will sign and share your petition.



Contact journalists: write to local newspapers and magazines and the nearest radio and TV stations. Tell them why you have started a petition, what you want the government to do, and about your events. They could tell the story behind your petition.



Run an event or activity: it could be a meeting, a sponsored walk or even a cake stall - anywhere where you can talk openly about your petition and why it matters.

Start a petition to raise awareness of a problem you care about. For support, contact your local community organisation.

This leaflet has been co-produced with community organisations Feel Good Factor, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service, TPAS Cymru (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) and Zanach. Based on research about breaking barriers to political engagement funded by Research England, led by Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira from the University of Leeds. Edit and design: [Research Batoid](#) (2024)





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Thank you

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