



# The Vale of Glamorgan Council Public Engagement Framework



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**The Vale of Glamorgan Council is committed to improving the way in which we engage our residents and key stakeholders in decision making. The aim of this framework is to set out how this will be achieved and offer guidance to staff.**

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Public engagement is one of the Core Values set out in the Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan. The plan gives a commitment that “before making significant decisions we will engage with the individuals, groups and communities who are affected by them”.
- 1.2 The Council is committed to improving the way in which we engage our residents and other key stakeholders in decision making. In order to do this we are changing the way we approach consultation and engagement. In the current climate we must remember that public engagement is not just a tool to help us plan new services and expand the ones that we already deliver. It is also a vital tool in enabling us to rationalise some of our services in a way that lessens the potential impact on service users.
- 1.3 Our aim is not only to increase the number of residents who are offered an opportunity to help us shape our services but also to enhance the role that they play. This means undertaking meaningful consultation where stakeholders’ views play a genuine role in influencing decisions. While it is not practical or desirable to ask people about every decision that we take, where possible, we must enable our residents and service users to play a meaningful role in shaping the services that we deliver.
- 1.4 The Vale of Glamorgan Council already undertakes some very good engagement and consultation work. The aim of this document is to build upon this existing work by providing a framework which will ensure that all consultation and engagement undertaken by the Council is of a high standard.



## 2. What is Public Engagement?

- 2.1 Public engagement is the process by which organisations invite citizens to participate in deliberation, dialogue and action in relation to issues that they care about. When done well, it allows our residents to have a meaningful say in the decisions that affect them and provides us with a wealth of information that enables us to take important decisions.

**Engagement:** An active and participative process, that includes a wide range of different methods and techniques, by which people can influence and shape policy and services.

**Consultation:** A formal process by which policy makers and service providers ask for the views of interested groups and individuals.

**Participation:** People being actively involved with policy makers and service planners from an early stage of policy and service planning and review.



### 3. Why must we do it correctly?

- 2.1 The primary reason is to gather robust information that enables us to make informed decisions. However, in addition to this there are a number of other drivers for improved public engagement.

The **Local Government Measure (2011)** established the principle that service improvement must now be monitored by a number of indicators including residents' views. This makes capturing meaningful feedback from residents vital.

In May 2012 the **Wales Audit Office** published a report, Public Engagement in Local Government. The report concluded that "public engagement activity frequently lacks strategic direction and co-ordination; feedback is rarely provided to the public; and monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the public engagement are weak". Following this, it is expected that there will be greatly increased scrutiny of the manner in which local authorities in Wales undertake consultation and engagement work.

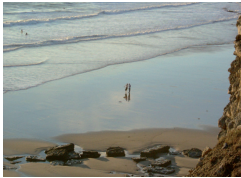
The specific Welsh regulations under the Equality Act (2010) require that consultation is undertaken by services in order to fulfil the specific duties relating to the requirement to collate and publish 'Equality information'. There is therefore a legal obligation placed upon public sector bodies to build the collection of equality-related data and evidence into its service provision. Consultation should be one of the specific methods used to collect this information.

In some circumstances the Council is also under a **legal obligation** to undertake public consultation. There are three instances when decisions could potentially be subject to legal challenge if consultation is not undertaken, or not done so correctly:

1. **Statutory consultation** - where there is an express duty to consult;
2. A **promise of consultation** - where a local authority has promised it will engage in consultation before making a specific decision or a specific type of decision; or
3. An **implied duty to consult** - where there is no express duty to consult but the courts imply an obligation to consult, as part of a public authority's responsibility to act fairly.

Where consultation is undertaken poorly, any decisions relating to the delivery of services taken as a result may be subject to legal challenge.

- 3.2 To ensure that all of the information gathered is robust and that all engagement work undertaken is of a high standard, all projects should be conducted in line with the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, developed by Participation Cymru, and the Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Standards.



## 4. The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales

- 4.1 The **National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales** have been endorsed by the Vale of Glamorgan Council and are as follows.
  1. Engagement is effectively designed to make a difference
  2. Encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved, if they so choose
  3. Engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way.
  4. Work with relevant partner organisations
  5. The information provided will be jargon free, appropriate and understandable

6. Make it easier for people to take part
7. Enable people to take part effectively
8. Engagement is given the right resources and support to be effective
9. People are told the impact of their contribution
10. Learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement

4.2 Undertaking engagement projects in line with these principles will require us to use a range of tools and techniques. It is important that we engage stakeholders in an appropriate manner, using a method with which they are comfortable.



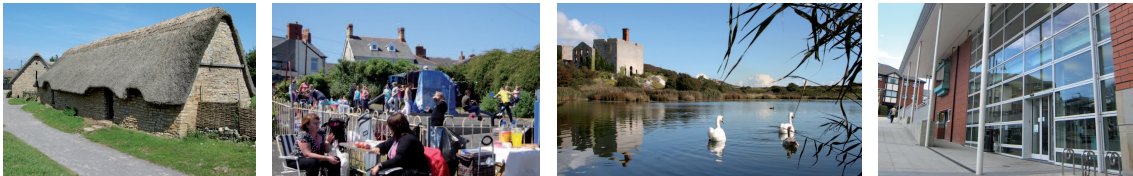
## 5. The Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Standards

5.1 The **Principles** set out what good quality public engagement work should look like. The Corporate Standards represent best practice and so set out the basic parameters within which meaningful engagement can be achieved. All engagement and consultation projects undertaken by the Council must conform to these standards.

All consultation or public engagement projects must:

1. Have clearly defined aims and objectives – these make clear to participants exactly what they can change. If nothing can be changed then there is no need to engage
2. Be promoted to a range of identified stakeholders. It is important that the right people are aware of the consultation and given the opportunity to reply, so effective stakeholder analysis is needed
3. Be written in plain English. All the information presented to residents must be easily understandable and free of jargon
4. Provide stakeholders with a realistic timeframe within which to respond. The nature of the exercise and the identified stakeholders will determine an appropriate consultation period. In some cases there may be a statutory process and/or official guidance prescribing the length of an appropriate consultation period and this should be observed.

5. Be advertised on the website and to the local press prior to the start of the consultation period and promoted via social media during the consultation period
6. Allow responses to be made through a variety of methods, specifically including online, in writing and via the contact centre
7. Have a clearly defined feedback process. Both those who participated in the process and the public in general must be made aware of what has happened as a result
8. Finish with a process of evaluation



## 6. Corporate Support

- 6.1 To ensure that all service areas are able to deliver consultation and engagement projects that meet the corporate guidelines, support is provided in a number of ways:

The Corporate Consultation Officer is available to offer advice on issues relating to public engagement and consultation in the Vale and to provide support to departments that are undertaking any form of public engagement work.

There are a wide range of guidance documents available on the consultation pages of Staff Net. These provide a great deal of information and advice on how to undertake consultation and engagement projects.

The shared Vale LSB citizens panel Vale Viewpoint provides a tool through which the Council can gather an understanding of residents' views about a variety of issues and at no cost.

The directory of voluntary and equalities groups operating in the Vale provides access to the views of hard to reach groups.

The consultation pages of the Council website and our social media channels provide excellent methods to promote public engagement activities and provide feedback at no cost.

- 6.2 In addition to the support mechanisms that are already in place, The Vale of Glamorgan Council Public Engagement Framework Action Plan (Appendix A) sets out the work that will be undertaken in the near future to further enhance the level of corporate support that is available for all service areas.



## 7. Shared Responsibility

- 7.1 The Vale of Glamorgan Council is committed to public engagement. This commitment is now being developed into a new way of working. Public engagement must now be embedded across the organisation.

Corporate standards will ensure that all service areas are making decisions that affect their service users in a way that meets our corporate obligations. However, while the corporate centre of the organisation can lead on major public engagement projects and provide support and oversight, the responsibility for ensuring that these standards are met must sit with every member of staff.



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