

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 24 January 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Draft Public Participation Strategy
Purpose of Report:	To seek Cabinet endorsement of the draft Public Participation Strategy for public consultation.
Report Owner:	Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Responsible Officer:	Tom Bowring – Head of Policy and Business Transformation
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This will involve public consultation, staff consultation, consultation with Scrutiny Committees and with partners.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet. The Council is required to publish a Public Participation Strategy by May 2022.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <p>The Vale of Glamorgan Council is committed to engaging residents and other key stakeholders in decision making. ‘Working with and for our communities’ is one of the four objectives set out in the Corporate Plan 2020-25. The Council has previously published a Public Engagement Framework.</p> <p>Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 focuses on promoting access to local government. The Act establishes a duty to encourage local people to participate in decision-making and a requirement that local authorities publish, consult on, and regularly review a public participation strategy.</p> <p>The Act stipulates the strategy must address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting awareness of Council’s functions • Promoting awareness of how to become a Councillor • Facilitating access to decisions made or to be made • Promoting and facilitating processes for local people to make representations to the Council about a decision <p>In order to set out clearly to the Vale of Glamorgan citizens how the organisation is working to improve public participation, and to ensure the Council meets the requirements of the Act, a draft Public Participation Strategy 2022-25 has been produced.</p>	

This report seeks Cabinet endorsement of the draft strategy in order to begin a period of public and key stakeholder consultation.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet considers and approves the draft Public Promotion Strategy 2022-25 (Appendix A) as the basis for consultation as described in this report.
2. That Cabinet approves the consultation approach and timetable as set out in this report.
3. That Cabinet refers this report and appendices to Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee as part of the programme of consultation.
4. That Cabinet receives a further report setting out the results of the consultation, a draft final version of the strategy, and accompanying action plan in due course.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To enable Cabinet to consider the draft Public Participation Strategy (2022-25).
2. To ensure that effective consultation is undertaken within the necessary timeframes for publishing the Public Participation Strategy.
3. To ensure that all relevant Scrutiny Committees have the opportunity to consider the draft Public Participation Strategy and provide feedback as part of the programme of consultation.
4. To ensure that a revised Public Participation Strategy can be published in line with the statutory deadline set by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

1. Background

- 1.1 Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act) focuses on promoting access to local government.
- 1.2 The Act establishes a duty to encourage local people to participate in decision-making and requirements that local authorities publish, consult on, and regularly review a public participation strategy.
- 1.3 The Act sets out a number of areas that a Council's Public Participation Strategy must address. These are:
 - Promoting awareness of council's functions
 - Promoting awareness of how to become a councillor
 - Facilitating access to decisions made or to be made
 - Promoting and facilitating processes for local people to make representations to the council about a decision
- 1.4 It must also cover arrangements for bringing views of the public to attention of overview and Scrutiny Committees and promoting awareness among Councillors of benefits of using social media.

- 1.5 There are a number of other requirements of the Act relating to public participation that are related to but not included in the draft Strategy. For example, the duty to publish a petition scheme and duty to publish electronic and postal address for each councillor.
- 1.6 The Council must publish a Public Participation Strategy by June 2022.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

The Draft Public Participation Strategy

- 2.1 The Council has produced a draft Public Participation Strategy. This is contained in Appendix A to this report.
- 2.2 The draft Strategy covers the period 2022 – 2025 to bring its future review date in line with the Corporate Plan.
- 2.3 The draft Strategy establishes a definition for public participation as *“any process that directly engages the public in how decisions are made and gives consideration to how the public inputs into making that decision”*. It states that *“Public participation is a process, not a single event. It consists of a series of activities and actions taken over the lifespan of a project to both inform the public and obtain input from them. Public participation affords stakeholders (those that have an interest or stake in an issue, such as individuals, interest groups, communities) the opportunity to influence how decisions are made that affect their lives and community.”*
- 2.4 The draft Strategy considers who the Council is seeking to engage in decision making, how it currently does this, and the desired outcomes of this work.
- 2.5 Most importantly the draft Strategy proposes a series of actions that will enable the Council to build upon its current approach. These actions have been framed within the Council’s four organisational values of open, ambitious, together and proud. For ease of reference, in addition to being contained in the Strategy, these are also collated in a separate action plan (Appendix B).
- 2.6 In order to comply with the duty in section 39 of the Act a public participation strategy must, in particular, address:
 - (a) ways of promoting awareness among local people of the principal council's functions;
 - (b) ways of promoting awareness among local people of how to become a member of the principal council, and what membership entails;
 - (c) ways of facilitating access for local people to information about decisions made, or to be made, by the principal council;
 - (d) ways of promoting and facilitating processes by which local people may make representations to the principal council about a decision before, and after, it is made;

- (e) arrangements made, or to be made, for the purpose of the council's duty in section 62 of the 2011 Measure (bringing views of the public to attention of overview and Scrutiny Committees);
- (f) ways of promoting awareness among members of the principal council of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people.
- 2.7 For ease of reference during the consultation process, the actions within the draft Strategy have been cross referenced against these requirements.
- 2.8 The draft Strategy also considers these actions in the context of the five ways of working set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Consultation Process

- 2.9 Subject to approval of the draft strategy, a public consultation on the draft strategy will run for a period of six weeks, as outlined in the indicative timetable below.

24 January 2022	Cabinet approves the draft Public Participation Strategy for consultation
25 January 2022	Public consultation on the draft Strategy begins.
17 February 2022	Draft Strategy considered by Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
08 March 2022	Consultation closes
14 March 2022	Updated draft reported to Cabinet for approval
17 March 2022	Updated draft referred to Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee for consideration
29 April 2022	Final Public Participation Strategy published.

- 2.10 It is proposed that alongside a general public consultation process on the draft strategy, feedback from identified key stakeholders be sought directly. This group will include community groups as well as the Council's strategic partners.
- 2.11 Following the consultation period an updated draft Strategy will be reported to Cabinet with a recommendation to refer to Corporate Resources and Performance Scrutiny Committee. This will be done ahead of the publication of the notice of election for the local elections to ensure there is no conflict with the pre-election period.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2020-25 contains a series of commitments to improving public engagement.
- 3.2 By developing this strategy now, and being ambitious in our approach, the Council is **looking to the long-term** in developing a strategy that is fit for the future and can adapt at the pace and in the direction of the modern world, reflecting changes in technology and ways of working.
- 3.3 By being diverse in our engagement methods, using social media platforms, community connectors and face-to-face engagement, the Council is **taking an integrated approach** to public participation.
- 3.4 By providing as many stakeholders as possible the opportunity to participate, the Council is involving people in the decision-making process, enabling people to shape what we do and how we do it. By considering the opinions, values and needs of stakeholders, the organisation will maximise our contribution to the community.
- 3.5 By committing to linking up with third sector organisations, partners and community connectors, the Council is **collaborating with others** to achieve its outcomes.
- 3.6 By taking steps to involve and be transparent with stakeholders in the decision-making process, the Council will ensure early **prevention** of potential roadblocks in the decision-making process and development of projects.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1 The cost of the developing and implementing the Strategy will met from the existing Policy & Business Transformation service budget.
- 4.2 An enhanced approach may require the commitment of resources and officer time from other service areas in future.
- 4.3 The Strategy will ensure that the Council complies with legislation avoiding a potential adverse cost implication for non-compliance or retrospective challenges to Council decisions.

Employment

- 4.4 There are no direct employment implications associated with this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.5 The Strategy will ensure compliance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 as described in the body of this report.

5. Background Papers

[Corporate Plan 2020-25](#)

Vale of Glamorgan Council Public Participation Strategy 2022 - 2025

Introduction

> About the Vale of Glamorgan Council?

> What is public participation?

> Why is it important for the Council?

1.1. The Vale of Glamorgan Council is a public sector organisation. The organisation serves residents of the county by providing a wealth of statutory and non-statutory services, ranging from education and social care, to housing, waste collections and community investment.

The organisation's Corporate Plan 2020-25, *Working Together for a Brighter Future*, sets out what steps the Council will take to deliver on its four wellbeing objectives:

- To work with and for our communities
- To support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth
- To support people at home and in their community
- To respect, enhance and enjoy our environment

As part of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the Council has committed to embedding the Five Ways of Working (5WOW) to ensure that the organisation is working in a sustainable way. Both Well-being Objective 1 and the 5WOW have been used to inform the Council's Public Participation Strategy, as well as being guided by the legislation set out by the Welsh Government.

By developing this strategy now, and being ambitious in our approach, we are **looking to the long-term** in developing a strategy that is fit for the future and can adapt at the pace and in the direction of the modern world, reflecting changes in technology and ways of working.

The strategy sets out how the Council will be diverse in our engagement methods, using social media platforms, community connectors and face-to-face engagement, to **take an integrated approach** to public participation.

Our strategy seeks to provide as many stakeholders as possible the opportunity to participate and become involved in the decision-making process, enabling people to shape what we do and how we do it. By considering the opinions, values and needs of stakeholders, we will maximise our contribution to the community.

The Council recognises that public participation is improved by linking up with third sector organisations, partners and community connectors, and we will deliver better outcomes by **collaborating with others**.

The steps included in our strategy to involve and be transparent with stakeholders in the decision-making process, will ensure early **prevention** of potential issues in the decision-making process and development of projects.

This Public Participation Strategy outlines the Council's current position, as well as our short and long-term goals and how these will contribute to delivering our wellbeing objectives.

1.2. Public participation can be any process that directly engages the public in how decisions are made and gives consideration to how the public inputs into making that decision.

Public participation is a process, not a single event. It consists of a series of activities and actions taken over the lifespan of a project to both inform the public and obtain input from them. Public participation affords stakeholders (those that have an interest or stake in an issue, such as individuals, interest groups, communities) the opportunity to influence how decisions are made that affect their lives and community.

1.3. Public participation plays a key role in providing better outcomes for both the Council and stakeholders.

When done in a meaningful way, public participation results in greater understanding of additional facts, values, and perspectives obtained through public input – to bring to bear on the decision process and to shape how the organisation works.

Decisions are more implementable and sustainable because the decision considers the needs and interests of all stakeholders including vulnerable/marginalised populations, and stakeholders better understand and are more invested in the outcomes. This in turn improves relationships and trust between decision-makers and the public.

Public participation

> Who are we trying to reach?

> What is the Council already doing?

> What are the Council's outcomes?

2.1 The Vale of Glamorgan Council wishes to encourage all stakeholders to take part in the decision-making process by helping determine what the decisions are about, understanding the issues and developing solutions in a co-designed and co-productive way.

The Council's stakeholders include citizens, businesses, visitors and others. The Council wants to take steps to ensure all voices are heard, particularly those from seldom-heard groups and young people are also given the opportunity to participate.

The Council recognises that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to engaging such a broad range of stakeholders. As part of our commitment, we will be diverse in the way that we engage and connect with different groups.

2.2 Previously the Council has sought to develop the methods used to engage with stakeholders in a way that is accessible and convenient.

This includes using Zoom webinars as means to consult, in which stakeholders were invited to meet and discuss with Council officers in a constructive way. Feedback from these sessions showed that they were well-received and that they could be developed further.

The Council has also expanded its use of social media to include social media polls and encouraging residents to leave 'comments' expressing their views. Data from both the polls and comment section have then been used in reports. We have also used social media to promote consultations, alongside bespoke videos to promote greater understanding of the issues in question.

We still undertake to host face-to-face engagement sessions where possible and to provide consultation documents online.

2.3 The Public Participation Strategy contributes to the delivery of the Council's wellbeing objectives and specifically pursues actions contained in the commitments of Well-being Objective 1 - "To work with and for our communities."

The outcomes of our public participation work that we want to achieve are to:

Inform : We want to be transparent about how decisions are made and the role of stakeholders in the process.

Engage : We want to encourage, and make it easy for stakeholders to take part in the decision-making process.

Feedback : We want to improve the way we feed back to stakeholders, so they understand the outcome of their participation.

To ensure these outcomes are achieved, the Council has developed a series of actions. Reflecting our organisation's values of being Ambitious, Open, Together and Proud our Public Participation Strategy reflects the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and pursue our duties to comply with section 39 and 40 of the Act..

Our values and actions

> Ambitious

> Open

> Together

> Proud

3.1. We want to be **ambitious** with how we engage with the public, build relationships and explore new ways of reaching our communities.

We will:

Action 1: Develop our social media channels as a platform to ask questions and share views and support Councillors' awareness of the benefits of social media. (WG 2d, f)

Action 2: Develop our methodology for sharing consultations and engagement exercises on social media and other platforms. (WG 2d, f)

Action 3: Embrace the use of digital discussions, for example forums, Facebook Live stream and webinars. (WG 2c, d, f)

Action 4: Meet with stakeholders face-to-face within their own communities and groups so that we can better get to know them and the issues that matter to them.

3.2 We want to be **open** and transparent about how we make decisions and help citizens understand and fulfil their role in the decision making process.

We will:

Action 1: Inform people about cabinet meetings and how they can get involved. (WG 2a, b)

Action 2: Inform and promote the role of the public in our consultation exercises. (WG 2d)

Action 3: Promote greater understanding of the role and work of the Council in issues that affect residents. (WG 2a)

3.3. We want residents to feel that decisions have been made **together**, taking on board public opinion when making Council policy.

We will:

Action 1: Set up and promote the ePetitions process. (WG 2c)

Action 2: Identify and show where residents' opinions have affected the outcome of a consultation/survey.

Action 3: Find ways to link in with town and community councils, third sector organisations and other community leaders (community connectors) to reach more people. (WG 2c)

Action 4: Adopt a 'no voice left behind' approach by finding ways to encourage and facilitate participation from all groups, including the seldom-heard, through things such as face-to-face and discussion-based outreach. (WG 2c)

3.4 We want to be **proud** of our decisions and share and follow up on them.

We will:

Action 1: Be better at sharing what happens in council meetings. (WG 2a)

Action 2: Improve how we highlight where people have helped us make a decision.

Action 3: Deliver a campaign to enhance understanding of what councillors do and how the Council functions. As part of this, we'll update our existing web pages. (WG 2a, b)

Action 4: Develop a series of case studies to showcase where effective public participation has resulted in positive outcomes for stakeholders and the community.

Action 5: Make sure that the participation process is accessible to all. This includes the language we use, which should be in plain language and translated where needed. It also includes the way we engage, for example addressing digital exclusion or transport limitations.

Action 6: Engage with people on their own terms for example by meeting with them in environments where they feel comfortable and giving sufficient time for people to respond.

Monitoring & Delivery

The Council will monitor progress against the actions in this strategy every year and include details of the progress made and any challenges in the Council's Annual Self-Assessment Report to be published in the autumn each year. This will enable any areas of development to be reflected in the forthcoming year's Annual Delivery Plan and/or the Council's Service Plans.

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Vale of Glamorgan Council Public Participation Strategy 2022 - 2025

Action Plan

Ref	Action	Notes	Deadline	Owner	Status
	Develop our social media channels as a platform to ask questions and share views.				
	Develop our methodology for sharing consultations and engagement exercises on social media and other platforms.				
	Embrace the use of digital discussions, for example forums, Facebook Live stream and webinars.				
	Inform people about cabinet meetings and how they can get involved.				
	Promote greater understanding of the role and work of the Council in issues that affect residents.				
	Set up and promote the ePetitions process.				
	Identify and show where residents' opinions have affected the outcome of a consultation/survey.				
	Find ways to link in with town and community councils, third sector organisations and other community leaders (community connectors) to reach more people.				
	'No voice left behind' approach - finding ways to encourage and facilitate participation from all groups, including the seldom-heard through things such as face-to-face and discussion-based outreach.				

	<p>Make sure that the participation process is accessible to all, considering our language, digital and transport exclusion.</p>				
	<p>Be better at sharing what happens in council meetings.</p>				
	<p>Get better at highlighting where people have helped us make a decision.</p>				
	<p>Full campaign to enhance understanding of what councillors do and how the Council functions. As part of this, we'll update our existing web pages.</p>				
	<p>Develop a series of case studies to showcase where effective public participation has resulted in positive outcomes for stakeholders and the community.</p>				
	<p>Meet with people on their own terms – in their communities, groups and giving them sufficient time to respond.</p>				
	<p>Continually monitor our progress against the actions in the strategy.</p>				