

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
14TH APRIL, 2022

REFERENCE FROM CABINET: 11TH APRIL, 2022

“C905. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY (EL/PR) (SCRUTINY – ALL) –

The report, as outlined by the Leader, sought endorsement of the updated Public Participation Strategy following public consultation and the publication of draft Welsh Government (WG) guidance.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council was committed to engaging residents and other key stakeholders in decision making. ‘Working with and for our communities’ was one of the four well-being objectives set out in the Corporate Plan 2020-25. The Council had previously published a Public Engagement Framework.

Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 focused on promoting access to local government. The Act established 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.

The Act stipulated the strategy must address:

- 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

In order to set out clearly to Vale of Glamorgan citizens how the organisation was working to improve public participation, and to ensure the Council met the requirements of the Act, a draft Public Participation Strategy 2022-25 had been produced. A consultation exercise was undertaken between January and March 2022. In March 2022 draft Statutory Guidance on Public Participation Strategies was published by Welsh Government. The draft Strategy had been amended to reflect responses to the consultation, the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment, and the draft statutory guidance. It was now being presented to Cabinet for endorsement.

The Leader however, pointed out that the prescribed deadline for the Council to publish this was after the local elections in May. Upon endorsement by Cabinet, it was intended to publish the final version of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Public Participation Strategy as appended to this report as soon as practicable after this date.

The Leader highlighted key amendments to the Strategy, following consultation, such as:

- A greater emphasis on the importance of communicating how and when people could influence decisions particularly regarding Council meetings.
- There would always be a non-digital route for people to participate through.
- Full accessibility to all groups with protected characteristics in participation activities, including the development of independent advocacy for them and developing better guidance on how to produce documents that were accessible to those with protected characteristics and generally easier for stakeholders to understand.
- An additional action to bring all of the Council's consultation, engagement and participation activities together into a single, easily accessible online hub and a reference to the long-term objective of developing a portal that joined together all pathways for participation in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- To develop a communication plan template for reports.
- To strengthen the link between the Council's customer contact platforms with public participation activities so that all ad-hoc feedback and pertinent questions could be captured and responded to.

This strategy would remain a live, working document, subject to the relevant finalised guidance and legislation being provided by WG, although there was no set timescale for this as yet.

This was a matter for Executive decision.

Cabinet, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

RESOLVED -

(1) T H AT the results of the public consultation as described in the body of the report and attached at Appendix A to the report be noted.

(2) T H A T the draft statutory guidance published by Welsh Government in March 2022 as set out in the content of the report and attached at Appendix B to the report and the Equality Impact Assessment attached at Appendix D to the report be noted.

(3) T H AT the amended Public Participation Strategy (attached at Appendix C to the report) be endorsed subject to it being referred to Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 14th April, 2022.

(4) T H A T, if necessary, Cabinet on 25th April, 2022 consider the comments of the Scrutiny Committee but that in the absence of any such comments the Strategy be endorsed and published in line with the timescale set out in the report.

Reasons for decisions

(1) To provide Cabinet with an overview of the views received from citizens and stakeholders during the consultation process.

- (2) To provide Cabinet with an update on the emerging guidance from Welsh Government and resulting additional considerations for the Council's Public Participation Strategy.
- (3) To enable Cabinet to consider the views of the Scrutiny Committee prior to final endorsement.
- (4) To enable the Council to publish its Public Participation Strategy in line with the timescale set out by the legislative framework.