

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

5th April 2022

Report of the Head of People and Organisational Development

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Draft Public Participation Strategy 2023-2028

Purpose of Report

1. To present the draft Public Participation Strategy 2023-2028 for consideration and approval prior to the strategy being referred to Council for formal adoption on the 26th April 2023.

Executive Summary

2. The draft Public Participation Strategy for 2023-2028 (attached at Appendix 1) outlines the council's objectives, approach and mechanisms for encouraging and enabling public participation, together with information on how local people can influence decision-making.

It has been developed following the Statutory Guidance on Public Participation Strategies, made under section 44 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and informed by the NPT Citizens' Panel, the NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement and public consultation.

Background

3. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires councils to encourage local people to participate in their decision making. This includes where councils are making decisions in partnership with another principal council or in conjunction with another individual or body such as a local health board.
4. The Act requires local authorities to publish, consult on, and regularly review a public participation strategy. These strategies are required to set out:
 - i. ways of promoting awareness among local people of the principal council's functions;
 - ii. ways of promoting awareness among local people of how to become a member of the principal council, and what membership entails;
 - iii. ways of facilitating access for local people to information about decisions made, or to be made, by the principal council;

- iv. 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;
- v. 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);
- vi. ways of promoting awareness among members of the principal council of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people.

Consultation and Engagement

5. In line with the Statutory Guidance on Public Participation Strategies, made under section 44 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the draft Strategy has been informed by stakeholder groups including residents, employees and elected members.

6. Prior to formal consultation

The initial scoping, mapping of existing participation pathways and drafting of key information for the strategy was undertaken by an officer working group, including representation from Legal Services, Corporate Policy, Communications, Democratic Services, Digital Services and Electoral Services.

The working group worked with the NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement (NPT CoP) to further develop the baseline of what is already in place, what works well and where the gaps are and identify potential gaps and aspirations for 'what we could do better'. The NPT CoP also contributed to the overarching objective and approach for the strategy.

In October 2022, the NPT Citizens' Panel were asked to complete a questionnaire to provide an indication of how much residents currently participate in the council's decision-making process; which mechanisms for participation they are aware of; the level of interest in participation opportunities; to what extent those who have participated feel their involvement allowed them to have a genuine impact on the decision(s) made; and provide on what the council could do more to improve public involvement in our decision-making processes. The feedback from this informed the action plan for the draft strategy.

7. Consultation

Following approval by Cabinet on Wednesday 30 November 2022, the public consultation ran from 5th December 2022 until Friday 10th March 2023.

Activities included:

- Online questionnaire - a self-completion questionnaire was published online.
- Offline – paper questionnaires, and reference copies of the Draft Public Participation Strategy, together with feedback boxes for completed questionnaires were made available in public buildings across the

county borough. These included Civic Centres, council run and community libraries, and Celtic Leisure venues amongst others. The questionnaire was a replica of the online version and responses were entered into the survey software for analysis.

- The Draft Public Participation Strategy was also discussed at Democratic Services Committee on Monday 13th February 2022 and NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement on 15th February.

The consultation was promoted via:

- the council's website on the consultation pages www.npt.gov.uk/consultations
- posters and at libraries, Celtic Leisure venues, civic centres and other public buildings across the county borough
- the council's corporate social media accounts
- press coverage generated by cabinet reports and press releases

Consultation Responses - Summary:

8. Fifty one people responded to the consultation, in addition to the 71 responses from the Citizens' Panel to the initial questionnaire in October 2022.

- Most of the respondents (86%/42) strongly agreed / agreed with the overarching objective
"to encourage and support people to participate in the council's decision-making by undertaking our activities in ways that are inclusive and accessible, reflect the diversity of our communities, are responsive and meet the requirements of the relevant legislation and guidance (The Equalities Act 2010; The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act; The Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act (2014); The Welsh Language Standards; The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021."
- 74%(36) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote awareness among local people of the council's functions (12%/6 didn't know)
- 65% (32) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote awareness among local people of how to become a member of the council, and what membership entails (16%/8 didn't know)
- 82% (40) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote access for local people to information about council decision (8%/4 didn't know)
- 74% (36) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote processes so that local people can make representations to the council about a decision before, and after, it is made (12%/6 didn't know)
- 74% (36) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote arrangements to bring views of the public to the attention of overview and scrutiny committees (10%/5 didn't know)
- 77% (38) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote awareness among the benefits of councillors using social media to communicate with local people (10%/5 didn't know)

There was a high level of agreement from respondents that the activities set out in the action plan were the right things to focus on to achieve the six requirements set out in section 4 of this report. The only area where less than 60% agreed or strongly agreed was in relation to support the Welsh Government's and Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) commitment to explore Resettlement grants or 'parachute payments' payments for Members who lose their seats at election (38% agreed or strongly agreed).

68% (26) of respondents think the council could do more to improve public involvement in our decision-making processes.

Recurring themes in the open text responses included:

- the need for information to be accessible (both in terms of being easy to understand and accessible formats)
- the need to close the loop in terms of letting people know how their feedback has influenced decisions
- the need to make provision for people who are not online
- the need to review the Citizens' Panel and the effectiveness of this
- the need to avoid jargon
- suggestions that the council should consider setting up people's assemblies
- the need to include some face-to-face engagement

All of the above points have been addressed in the action plan of the strategy.

The discussion with the NPT CoP highlighted that some stakeholder groups with protected characteristics would be interested in becoming more involved in decision-making, e.g. as members of the Citizens' Panel, and specific arrangements would need to be put in place to enable them to do this. In response, the action plan has been amended under requirement 3 to include an action to *review and further develop the Neath Port Talbot Citizens' Panel, and in conjunction with the relevant stakeholder groups, identify appropriate arrangements to enable members of stakeholder groups with protected characteristics to participate.*

A consultation report outlining the findings from the consultation is attached at Appendix 3.

Financial Appraisal

9. The cost of developing and implementing the Strategy will be met from existing service budgets and resources.
10. An enhanced approach may require the commitment of resources and officer time from other service areas in future.
11. 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

Integrated Impact Assessment

12. The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to “pay due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a
 - relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; *and*
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it.”

Section 1 of the Equality Act requires that public bodies when making strategic decisions, have due regard to the need to reduce the inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage.

An in-depth Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) was undertaken to accompany the draft Public Participation Strategy when Cabinet was asked for permission to consult. This has been updated in light of responses to the consultation. It is essential that Members read the IIA which is appended to this report (Appendix 2).

Valleys Communities Impact:

13. There are no impacts in respect of this item.

Workforce Impact

14. The Public Participation Strategy will support officers involved in the decision-making process by ensuring a corporate and coordinated approach to participation, involvement and engagement.

By working towards shared objectives and embedding a consistent approach, we aim to ensure our public participation activities are of a consistently high standard, leading to more robust decisions that have considered the needs and interests of stakeholders.

Legal Impact

15. The publication of the final strategy will meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 by setting out how the council encourages local people to participate in its decision making, the steps we will take to improve public participation, and how we will measure progress.

Risk Management

16. The council’s Corporate Risk Register will be updated with any risks associated with the delivery of the work outlined in the Strategy following its approval and adoption by council.

Recommendations

17. Having had due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessment it is recommended that:
 - i. Cabinet approve the Public Participation Strategy for the period 2023-2028.
 - ii. Members refer this Strategy to Council for formal adoption at its meeting on the 26th April 2023.

Reason for Proposed Decision

18. To ensure the Council meets legal duties set out in The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021) as they relate to council participation activities.

Implementation of Decision

19. The decision is proposed for implementation after the three-day call in period.

Appendices

20. Appendix 1 – Neath Port Talbot Council Draft Public Participation Strategy 2023-28
21. Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment
22. Appendix 3 – Consultation Report

List of Background Papers

23. Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act)
24. The Equalities Act 2010
25. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act
26. The Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act (2014)
27. The Welsh Language Standards
28. Report of the Head of People and Organisational Development to Neath Port Talbot Cabinet - Wednesday 30 November 2022 - Draft Public Participation Strategy 2023-2028

Officer Reporting:

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