

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council

26th April 2023

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. The draft Strategy was presented to Cabinet on 25th April where it was approved and referred to Council for formal adoption.

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.
3. 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.
4. This will be the first Public Participation Strategy for Neath Port Talbot Council.

Background

5. 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.

6. 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 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 council;
 - iv. ways of promoting and facilitating processes by which local people may make representations to the 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 council of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people.

Consultation and Engagement

7. 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.

8. Prior to formal consultation

The initial scoping, mapping of existing participation 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.

9. 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.

10. 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
 - what the council could do to improve public involvement in our decision-making processes. The feedback from this informed the action plan for the draft strategy.
11. There were 71 responses from the Citizens' Panel to this initial questionnaire. The feedback from this was used in the preparation of the Draft Participation Strategy prior to consultation, so does not form part of the consultation data in this report.
12. Consultation
13. Following approval by Cabinet on Wednesday 30 November 2022, the public consultation ran from 5th December 2022 until Friday 10th March 2023.
14. 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.

15. 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

Public Consultation Responses - Summary:

16. Fifty people responded to the public consultation.

- 49 respondents gave an opinion on the overarching objective. Of these 42 strongly agreed / agreed with the overarching objective (this represents 86% of those who answered the question or 84% of all the people who responded to the survey). 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.”
- 37 respondents (74%) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote awareness among local people of the council's functions (6 or 12% didn't know)
- 33 respondents (66%) 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 (8 or 16% didn't know)
- 40 respondents (82%) strongly agreed / agreed the strategy will help the council to promote access for local people to information about council decisions (4 or 8%) didn't know)
- 37 respondents (74%) 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 (6 or 12% didn't know)
- 37 respondents (74%) 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 (5 or 10% didn't know)

- 39 respondents (78%) 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 (5 or 10% didn't know)

17. We asked respondents a set of questions on how far they agreed that each of the actions in the draft action plan is the right thing to focus on to achieve the six requirements set out in section 4 of this report.

18. There was a high level of agreement from respondents that the activities are the right things to focus on. More than 65% of all those who responded to the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed with every action, with the exception of the following:

Actions to share information about how to go about becoming an elected member, or councillor, and what the role of the council involves

| Action | No of respondents who agree / strongly agree | % of those who answered the question | % of all who responded to survey |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Ongoing review of the effectiveness of the voting awareness raising campaigns for elections and to build upon these campaigns ahead of the Local Government Elections 2022, ensuring wider partnerships arrangements are taken forward to allow engagement with wider audiences | 36 | 75% | 62% |
| Liaise with Group Leaders to suggest they appoint Diversity Champions for each political group | 31 | 65% | 58% |
| Promote the remunerations that are available to Members on the Council website and to candidates standing for Election | 32 | 68% | 64% |
| Support the Welsh Government's and Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) | 18 | 38% | 36% |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| commitment to explore Resettlement grants or 'parachute payments' payments for Members who lose their seats at election | | | |
|---|--|--|--|

Actions to provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the council, including comments, complaints and other types of representations

| Action | No of respondents who agree / strongly agree | % of those who answered the question | % of all who respondents to survey |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Consider how we develop these as a more formal mechanism for the online community to participate in consultations and engagement campaigns | 32 | 76% | 64% |
| Review and update the Scrutiny Public Engagement Strategy particularly with respect to hybrid meetings | 30 | 71% | 60% |
| Review and update the council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy | 31 | 74% | 62% |

Actions to provide arrangements to bring views of the public to the attention of overview and scrutiny committees

| Action | No of respondents who agree / strongly agree | % of those who answered the question | % of all who respondents to survey |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Continue the webcasting of meetings as specified under the 2021 Act, develop a hybrid meeting policy and ensure availability of translation facilities for Full Council meetings to be conducted bilingually and any other meetings required in legislation | 31 | 76% | 62% |
| Provide detailed training to chairs of scrutiny committee on ways in which they can engage | 29 | 71% | 58% |

| | | | |
|--|----|-----|-----|
| the community in the scrutiny process | | | |
| Promote the use of scrutiny on social media channels | 26 | 66% | 52% |

Actions to promote awareness of the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents to councillors

| Action | No of respondents who agree / strongly agree | % of those who answered the question | % of all who responded to survey |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Member Seminars | 31 | 76% | 62% |

19. 39 people responded to the question ‘Could NPT Council do more to improve public involvement in our decision-making?’ Of these:
- 27 (69% of those who answered this question or 54% of all those who took part in the questionnaire) said yes,
 - 2 (5% of those who answered this question or 4% of all those who took part in the questionnaire) said no; and
 - 10 (26% of those who answered this question or 20% of all those who took part in the questionnaire) didn’t know.
20. 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
21. All of the above points have been addressed in the action plan of the strategy.
22. 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.*

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

Financial Appraisal

24. The cost of developing and implementing the Strategy will be met from existing service budgets and resources.
25. An enhanced approach may require the commitment of resources and officer time from other service areas in future.
26. 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

27. 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.”
28. 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.
29. 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:

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

Workforce Impact

31. 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.

32. 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

33. 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

34. 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

35. Having had due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessment it is recommended that:

- i. Council adopt the Public Participation Strategy for the period 2023-2028.

Reason for Proposed Decision

36. 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

37. The decision is proposed for immediate implementation.

Appendices

38. Appendix 1 – Neath Port Talbot Council Draft Public Participation Strategy 2023-28
39. Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment
40. Appendix 3 – Consultation Report

List of Background Papers

41. Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act)
42. The Equalities Act 2010
43. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act
44. The Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act (2014)
45. The Welsh Language Standards
46. 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:

Sheenagh Rees, Head of People and Organisational Development, Tel no: 01639 763315, Email: s.rees5@npt.gov.uk

Anita James, Corporate Policy, Performance and Engagement Manager. Tel: 01639 763842, Email a.james6@npt.gov.uk