



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL**

**25<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2023**

### **DRAFT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

#### **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH THE DEPUTY LEADER, CLLR WEBBER.**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf's draft Public Participation Strategy, following a public consultation as required by the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 1.2 The Draft Public Participation Strategy was presented and discussed at the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 24th May 2023.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Following Members consideration of the draft strategy and public consultation responses to agree the draft Public Participation Strategy attached as Appendix 1 of the report.
- 2.2 Subject to 2.1, the Strategy and relevant guides are made available in the public domain, following appropriate formatting of the documentation.
- 2.3 Monitoring and reviewing of the Strategy is taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee.

#### **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Section 40 of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a duty on each Principal Council to prepare and publish a Public Participation Strategy.
- 3.2 In preparing the Strategy, the Council must consult with local people and such other persons as it considers appropriate.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Local authorities in Wales must, under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, publish a Participation Strategy that sets out the ways in which local people are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process of the council.
- 4.2 In developing its public participation strategy a council must consult people who live, work or study in the council's area and anyone else it thinks appropriate.
- 4.3 The Act places a number of duties on local authorities regarding participation. These are to:
- Promote awareness of the functions the council carries out to local residents, businesses and visitors.
  - Share information about how to go about becoming an Elected Member and what the role of a Councillor involves.
  - Provide greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the Council.
  - Provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the Council, including comments, complaints and other types of representations.
  - Arrangements made to bring the views of the public to the attention of Overview & Scrutiny Committees
  - Promote awareness of the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents to councillors.
- 4.4 In contrast to the broad areas of approaches and interventions which can support public participation, this strategy is confined for the purposes of meeting the statutory requirements of the Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021 to six areas listed above.
- 4.5 Broader areas of public engagement are included within the Council's Involvement & Engagement Framework (2020-2024). This framework will be revised as part of the development and implementation of the new Corporate Plan in 2024.

#### **5 CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT WITHIN RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

- 5.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council have well established engagement processes and are committed to involving residents and other stakeholders in the democratic process.
- 5.2 The Participation Strategy, in reaffirming these commitments in line with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, seeks to

build further on this work, ensuring the Council is open and responsive to the needs of its communities in respect of the democratic process.

- 5.3 The Draft Strategy, appended as Appendix 1 complements the RCT Involvement & Engagement Framework (2020-2024) and associated guidance. The Strategy aims to enable residents to better understand the democratic process and the role they can play in local democracy.
- 5.4 Through May - June 2023, the Council undertook a 4 week consultation on the proposed draft strategy through the Council's Consultation arrangements via the Council Website. In addition to this other engagement opportunities were taken forward which are outlined in section 6 of the report.
- 5.5 At its meeting on the [24<sup>th</sup> May, 2023](#) the Overview & Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the draft strategy and Members feedback is contained within the consultation responses report.

## 6. **CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

- 6.1 The Council undertook a 4 week public consultation in respect of the draft strategy the results of which are attached as Appendix 2 of this report.
- 6.2 The consultation included;
  - An online SNAP survey
  - A staff email promoting the consultation.
  - An email to a wide range of key stakeholders;
  - Inclusion of the draft strategy in the Member daily updates and open consultation links
  - The option of a dedicated email address and freepost.
  - A telephone consultation option, through the Council's contact centre.
- 6.3 The proposals were presented and discussed at the [Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023..](#)
- 6.4 Of the 70 responses received the majority agreed that each of the themes would encourage local people to participate in the Council's decision making.
  - 88% agreed with promoting awareness of the functions the council carries out to local residents, businesses and visitors.
  - 75% agreed with sharing information about how to go about becoming an elected member – or Councillor – and what the role of a Councillor involves.
  - 88% agreed with providing greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the Council.

- 94% agreed with providing and promoting opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the Council, including comments, complaints and other types of representations.
  - 84% agreed with arrangements made to bring the views of the public to the attention of Overview & Scrutiny Committees.
  - 72% agreed with promoting awareness of the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents to Councillors.
- 6.5 Respondents were asked if there was anything else that they thought should be included in the Draft Public Strategy. The comments suggested that the Strategy could be more accessible and more clearly communicated. There were concerns that the use of social media for engagement may exclude certain sections of the community and there must be a range of methods used, in addition to online.
- 6.6 42% of respondents said that the draft Public Participation Strategy assisted in their understanding of the local democratic process and encouraged them to get involved, with 26% unsure. A number of comments were made about the need to make the Strategy easier to read, with suggestions to improve the presentation, including case studies and graphics.

## **7 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – PRE-SCRUTINY**

- 7.1 During the consultation period the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook pre-scrutiny of the draft strategy and highlighted the following areas to further improve the strategy:
- I. The need to compliment the strategy with a strategy guide allowing the document to be presented in a way that is very easy to understand and in its simplest form.
  - II. For the Council’s customer services contact details in the “contact us” section in the Strategy to be included within the strategy and for this to also be reflected in the guide when developed.
- 7.2 Members also discussed aspects of the strategy and the proposals within to promote public engagement within the democratic process

## **8 DRAFT STRATEGY GOING FORWARD**

- 8.1 Following the feedback obtained the draft strategy has been strengthened to incorporate the following:
- i. Easy Read version of the document has been developed and a link to which now sits within the overarching document.

- ii. Improved signposting of information in respect of the provision of printed copies of documents / information to be available upon request.
  - iii. Glossary of terminology
  - iv. Redrafting in part to provide further clarity of information and strengthening of the message that the strategy relates specifically to engagement in the democratic process rather than overall Council engagement.
  - v. The improved addition of 'Impact goals', outlining how specific aims will have a positive impact on the public and or Council rather than the use of generic measures.
- 8.2 The strategy will be a living document, continuously evolving to ensure it remains fit for purpose, providing the public with the most up to date information in respect of the democratic process and engagement in the process.
- 8.3 The strategy will reside on the Council Business pages of its website, along with each of the engagement guides to public speaking at Committee meetings. Although the Council has taken forward a Commitment to become a paperless Council due to environmental impact and associated printing costs, this will not be to the disadvantage or detriment of those who cannot access the information in this manner and printed versions of the documents can be made available.
- 8.4 It is proposed that the Strategy is monitored and reviewed by the Democratic Services Committee to ensure it remains fit for purpose and that the aims identified are delivered upon.
- 8.5 Once the strategy content has been agreed, colleagues in design will be asked to review the document to assist in making it more engaging for the public.

## **9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The draft strategy looks to improve the equality and diversity of participation across all areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf, ensuring all those that live, work or study within the Authority have the opportunity to engage in the Democratic Process. Equality Impact assessments and Welsh language impact assessments have been drafted and have been considered by the Council's Review Panel prior to its presentation to Council.

## **10 CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 A formal Consultation was undertaken as outlined within section 6 of the report.

## **11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

11.1 All costs associated with the Strategy will be contained within existing budgets.

## **12 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

12.1 Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

## **13 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

13.1 The Plan encompasses all of the Council's corporate plan priorities as well as the duties and goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act.

- A public body must take account of the importance of involving other persons with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensure those persons reflect the diversity of the population;
- Effective involvement of people and communities in decisions that affect them is at the heart of improving well-being currently and in the future; and,
- It is vital to factor people's needs; ensuring engagement is meaningful and effective.

## **14 CONCLUSION**

14.1 The draft Participation Strategy reaffirms the council's commitment to listening, conversing with and responding to the needs of our communities within the democratic process- building clear, shared expectations and two-way engagement, and clearly demonstrates how the participation duty is being fulfilled.

### **Other Information:-**

**Relevant Scrutiny Committee** – Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**Background Papers**

None.