

Committee: **Democratic Services Committee**

Date of meeting: **13th July 2023**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Engagement & Participation Strategy**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	29/06/23	12.06.23		03/07/23	22/06/23			

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide details in advance of Member and wider public involvement around the development of a new Engagement and Participation Strategy for Blaenau Gwent Council.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Our previous engagement strategy document, 'Our Approach to Engagement 2018 to 2022' has now concluded and a new approach needs to be developed and implemented. As well as this, we have a statutory requirement within the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, to publish our intentions regarding how we intend to participate with the people of Blaenau Gwent. (see section 4)

- 2.2 The intention is to combine the two elements into one strategy document, and to assist in the development of the strategy document there is an intention to involve members, staff and the public to ensure that we are 'engaging' appropriately and allowing sufficient 'participation'.

- 2.3 The document will set out why we need to engage, who with and how we will achieve this. We will use the same principle for the participation element, although this will be more specific to address the requirements detailed in section 4 of this report to ensure that local people are able to participate in the making of decisions by the council.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 Option 1 – That the Committee notes the planning and consultation process for a new Engagement & Participation Strategy and agrees to a joint Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny and Democratic Services Committees Workshop on 26th July 2023 to shape development of the initial Strategy.

Option 2 – That the Committee notes the planning and consultation process for a new Engagement & Participation Strategy and provides any further comment.

4. Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Statutory Responsibilities

4.1 The Corporate Plan 2022/27 sets out that the community of Blaenau Gwent is at the heart of everything the Council does. Engagement, participation and customer experience feature as a key theme which runs across the Council in order to shape services and make decisions.

4.2 We are committed to engage effectively and this is underpinned by a range of legislation including the:

- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Welsh Language Measure 2011
- Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – wherein we must 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.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

Whilst there are no direct costs associated with the adoption of an Engagement & Participation Strategy, the public consultation process will utilise existing staff resources to develop and deliver any engagement workshop events, whilst the commitments within the final Strategy may require consideration of the resources currently committed to corporate engagement.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

Failure to develop an Engagement and Participation Strategy would lead to the Council not complying with its' obligations under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

5.3 **Legal**

Failure to develop an Engagement and Participation Strategy would lead to the Council not complying with its' obligations under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

5.4 **Human Resources**

The Policy and Performance Division leads on the delivery of the Council's duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Ongoing training and development will also be required during the lift of the Strategy to successfully embed the engagement framework across all council services.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

To enable effective monitoring of the impact of the Engagement and Participation Strategy, monitoring of key metrics relating to increased engagement and participation will be considered during the development of the plan. Progress updates will be reported through the Joint Report and via a mid-term report to the Committee.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

It is anticipated that there will be an improvement in the public interest in the workings of the Council, especially concerning the decision-making process. There is an expectation that the public will have an improved understanding of council business, as well as a greater direct contribution to the democratic process.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

An Action Plan has been developed to show the necessary involvement from multiple parties in the development of the strategy as below.

WHAT	HOW
Engage Members	Joint Scrutiny Workshop Online survey/questionnaire All-member Workshop (to finalise)
Consult Staff	CLT WCLT Staff Workshops Online survey/questionnaire
Public Consultation	Online survey Engage with known community activity groups BGCBC Engagement Forums Workshop events (ensure geographical spread)
Participation Case Studies	Lived experiences from council and community members
Consider responses/ feedback and create draft	Officer working group Scrutiny
Publish final Strategy	CLT, Scrutiny Committee & Council approval
Engage / Inform staff & embed corporately (ongoing)	DMTs Staff training / Workshops

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The Strategy will take consideration of the data and future trend information in terms of increasing levels of engagement and participation in democratic processes. An enhanced, more coordinated engagement framework can enable richer public engagement on what local people consider would make the area a better place for the future and have most positive impact on their well-being. Increased levels of participation will help ensure future generations continue to participate in local government decision-making.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The Corporate Plan considers Prevention as one of the five ways of working under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The Engagement & Participation Strategy will outline a series of steps for enhancing local engagement and participation, taking preventative action to help achieve the objectives.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Strategy will support collaborative and partnership working. The Council's Engagement team are active members of several regional and national networks, designed to develop and share best practice and ensure that our engagement and participation activities focus on economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being outcomes.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The corporate engagement and participation framework needs to be shaped by members and must be integrated and embedded across all council service areas to ensure a consistent approach to engaging with our residents, community groups, and businesses. This will be an ongoing approach throughout the development and delivery of the final Strategy.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

Increasing participation in hybrid/virtual committee meetings for members of the public and building on opportunities to engage with residents, businesses and community groups virtually as well as in person, reducing the need to travel to a central location by car.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

An IIA will be undertaken during the development of the Strategy. It is anticipated that the Strategy, alongside the new Strategic Equalities Plan, will have a positive impact on people with protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Through the Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny and Democratic Services Committees.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

N/A