

# Vale of Glamorgan Council Public Participation Strategy 2022 - 2025

## Introduction

> About the Vale of Glamorgan Council?

> What is public participation?

> Why is it important for the Council?

1.1. The Vale of Glamorgan Council is a public sector organisation. The organisation serves residents of the county by providing a wealth of statutory and non-statutory services, ranging from education and social care, to housing, waste collections and community investment.

The organisation's Corporate Plan 2020-25, *Working Together for a Brighter Future*, sets out what steps the Council will take to deliver on its four wellbeing objectives:

- To work with and for our communities
- To support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth
- To support people at home and in their community
- To respect, enhance and enjoy our environment

As part of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the Council has committed to embedding the Five Ways of Working (5WOW) to ensure that the organisation is working in a sustainable way. Both Well-being Objective 1 and the 5WOW have been used to inform the Council's Public Participation Strategy, as well as being guided by the legislation set out by the Welsh Government.

By developing this strategy now, and being ambitious in our approach, we are **looking to the long-term** in developing a strategy that is fit for the future and can adapt at the pace and in the direction of the modern world, reflecting changes in technology and ways of working.

The strategy sets out how the Council will be diverse in our engagement methods, using social media platforms, community connectors and face-to-face engagement, to **take an integrated approach** to public participation.

Our strategy seeks to provide as many stakeholders as possible the opportunity to participate and become involved in the decision-making process, enabling people to shape what we do and how we do it. By considering the opinions, values and needs of stakeholders, we will maximise our contribution to the community.

The Council recognises that public participation is improved by linking up with third sector organisations, partners and community connectors, and we will deliver better outcomes by **collaborating with others**.

The steps included in our strategy to involve and be transparent with stakeholders in the decision-making process, will ensure early **prevention** of potential issues in the decision-making process and development of projects.

This Public Participation Strategy outlines the Council's current position, as well as our short and long-term goals and how these will contribute to delivering our wellbeing objectives.

1.2. Public participation can be any process that directly engages the public in how decisions are made and gives consideration to how the public inputs into making that decision.

Public participation is a process, not a single event. It consists of a series of activities and actions taken over the lifespan of a project to both inform the public and obtain input from them. Public participation affords stakeholders (those that have an interest or stake in an issue, such as individuals, interest groups, communities) the opportunity to influence how decisions are made that affect their lives and community.

1.3. Public participation plays a key role in providing better outcomes for both the Council and stakeholders.

When done in a meaningful way, public participation results in greater understanding of additional facts, values, and perspectives obtained through public input – to bring to bear on the decision process and to shape how the organisation works.

Decisions are more implementable and sustainable because the decision considers the needs and interests of all stakeholders including vulnerable/marginalised populations, and stakeholders better understand and are more invested in the outcomes. This in turn improves relationships and trust between decision-makers and the public.

## **Public participation**

> Who are we trying to reach?

> What is the Council already doing?

> What are the Council's outcomes?

2.1 The Vale of Glamorgan Council wishes to encourage all stakeholders to take part in the decision-making process by helping determine what the decisions are about, understanding the issues and developing solutions in a co-designed and co-productive way.

The Council's stakeholders include citizens, businesses, visitors and others. The Council wants to take steps to ensure all voices are heard, particularly those from seldom-heard groups and young people are also given the opportunity to participate.

The Council recognises that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to engaging such a broad range of stakeholders. As part of our commitment, we will be diverse in the way that we engage and connect with different groups.

2.2 Previously the Council has sought to develop the methods used to engage with stakeholders in a way that is accessible and convenient.

This includes using Zoom webinars as means to consult, in which stakeholders were invited to meet and discuss with Council officers in a constructive way. Feedback from these sessions showed that they were well-received and that they could be developed further.

The Council has also expanded its use of social media to include social media polls and encouraging residents to leave 'comments' expressing their views. Data from both the polls and comment section have then been used in reports. We have also used social media to promote consultations, alongside bespoke videos to promote greater understanding of the issues in question.

We still undertake to host face-to-face engagement sessions where possible and to provide consultation documents online.

2.3 The Public Participation Strategy contributes to the delivery of the Council's wellbeing objectives and specifically pursues actions contained in the commitments of Well-being Objective 1 - "To work with and for our communities."

The outcomes of our public participation work that we want to achieve are to:

**Inform** : We want to be transparent about how decisions are made and the role of stakeholders in the process.

**Engage** : We want to encourage, and make it easy for stakeholders to take part in the decision-making process.

**Feedback** : We want to improve the way we feed back to stakeholders, so they understand the outcome of their participation.

To ensure these outcomes are achieved, the Council has developed a series of actions. Reflecting our organisation's values of being Ambitious, Open, Together and Proud our Public Participation Strategy reflects the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and pursue our duties to comply with section 39 and 40 of the Act..

## **Our values and actions**

> Ambitious

> Open

> Together

> Proud

3.1. We want to be **ambitious** with how we engage with the public, build relationships and explore new ways of reaching our communities.

We will:

**Action 1:** Develop our social media channels as a platform to ask questions and share views and support Councillors' awareness of the benefits of social media. (WG 2d, f)

**Action 2:** Develop our methodology for sharing consultations and engagement exercises on social media and other platforms. (WG 2d, f)

**Action 3:** Embrace the use of digital discussions, for example forums, Facebook Live stream and webinars. (WG 2c, d, f)

**Action 4:** Meet with stakeholders face-to-face within their own communities and groups so that we can better get to know them and the issues that matter to them.

3.2 We want to be **open** and transparent about how we make decisions and help citizens understand and fulfil their role in the decision making process.

We will:

**Action 1:** Inform people about cabinet meetings and how they can get involved. (WG 2a, b)

**Action 2:** Inform and promote the role of the public in our consultation exercises. (WG 2d)

**Action 3:** Promote greater understanding of the role and work of the Council in issues that affect residents. (WG 2a)

3.3. We want residents to feel that decisions have been made **together**, taking on board public opinion when making Council policy.

We will:

**Action 1:** Set up and promote the ePetitions process. (WG 2c)

**Action 2:** Identify and show where residents' opinions have affected the outcome of a consultation/survey.

**Action 3:** Find ways to link in with town and community councils, third sector organisations and other community leaders (community connectors) to reach more people. (WG 2c)

**Action 4:** Adopt a 'no voice left behind' approach by finding ways to encourage and facilitate participation from all groups, including the seldom-heard, through things such as face-to-face and discussion-based outreach. (WG 2c)

3.4 We want to be **proud** of our decisions and share and follow up on them.

We will:

**Action 1:** Be better at sharing what happens in council meetings. (WG 2a)

**Action 2:** Improve how we highlight where people have helped us make a decision.

**Action 3:** Deliver a campaign to enhance understanding of what councillors do and how the Council functions. As part of this, we'll update our existing web pages. (WG 2a, b)

**Action 4:** Develop a series of case studies to showcase where effective public participation has resulted in positive outcomes for stakeholders and the community.

**Action 5:** Make sure that the participation process is accessible to all. This includes the language we use, which should be in plain language and translated where needed. It also includes the way we engage, for example addressing digital exclusion or transport limitations.

**Action 6:** Engage with people on their own terms for example by meeting with them in environments where they feel comfortable and giving sufficient time for people to respond.

### **Monitoring & Delivery**

The Council will monitor progress against the actions in this strategy every year and include details of the progress made and any challenges in the Council's Annual Self-Assessment Report to be published in the autumn each year. This will enable any areas of development to be reflected in the forthcoming year's Annual Delivery Plan and/or the Council's Service Plans.

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