

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 6TH JUNE, 2024

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 22ND MAY, 2024

“ LET'S TALK ABOUT LIFE IN THE VALE – SURVEY REPORT AND
FURTHER ENGAGEMENT (REF) –

Cabinet had on 11th April, 2024 referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for its consideration, with the request that any views be referred back to Cabinet. The Director of Corporate Resources, in presenting the report, commenced by advising that the Survey responses provided the Council with a rich source of information and would be critical to the development of the Corporate Plan in the coming months. The Survey had primarily been conducted online by Data Cymru who had considered the response received with the overall margin for error of 1.6% to be very good in statistical terms. Representatives from Data Cymru were present at the meeting and provided a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee.

Sam Sullivan commenced by advising that Data Cymru provided a range of statistical and research services to Local Authorities. Over 4,000 responses had been received to the Survey out of a population of approximately 130,000 in the Vale, with the response rate of 3.7% and in his opinion that was considered to be a good response rate. The Vale of Glamorgan was part of a pilot for a broader national approach to running resident surveys which would go live in July 2024 for all other Councils. He took the opportunity to thank all the officers involved from the Vale for their support. It was noted that there was a wide range of topics covered in the Survey, with questions separated into 11 themes which included public service priorities, cost of living, climate change, volunteering and travel. However, the results also showed that there was more work to be done in how the Council explained its work and engaged residents in decision making which was an area where attention must be focused.

The Operational Manager for Communications, Participation, Equalities and Directorate Development also provided a PowerPoint presentation in relation to the results of the Survey and the actions for the Council going forward, advising that the headline results were generally that people were happy with the Vale as a place to live and their priorities for different services being ranked in order of preference. It was accepted that there was more work for the Council to do in response to the findings relating to questions regarding perceptions of Council services, including engaging residents in the decision-making process. It was the intention that the ideas that had been suggested within the Survey would be shaped going forward. Examples of work that needed to be undertaken were to engage more fully with users, promote the e-petition process, seek further ways and initiatives about sharing what happens at Council meetings and encouraging public participation at meetings.

The Public Participation Strategy had been established as a priority over the last two years and at Cabinet the Cabinet Member had made a recommendation about undertaking a review of the action plan in response to the Survey's findings.

Councillor Franks said he was reluctant to give much credit to the Council for the responses in relation to living in the Vale or community cohesion due to his view being that the 4,000 responses were not considered to be a good response rate and that in his view, highway maintenance was a particular concern for residents. He considered that the responses advised that 21% of people were happy with the Vale which meant that 79% were not. He however, looked forward to the proposed future report to Cabinet with suggestions for new ways of engagement.

Both Councillors Carroll and Franks commented on the length of the presentation provided to the Committee, however the Chair said that she personally welcomed and enjoyed the presentation as it was important to understand the process and the data that had been provided. The Chair further commented that she considered it to be a very important Survey and that the data be used to its best effect.

The Cabinet Member, with permission to speak, advised that the presentation by Data Cymru detailed that it was a good response rate, they were the experts in providing data around such surveys and that, in her view, Councillor Franks should have paid more attention to the content of the report. The Survey was an opportunity to listen to the residents of the Vale and the Council would use the information provided to develop its Public Participation Strategy as it was important to learn from residents. The Cabinet Member wholeheartedly commended the presentation and the responses.

Councillor Hanks stated that she thought on the whole it was a positive Survey, although she felt it did show the need to explain more to the public the workings of the Council. Councillor Hanks drew a comparison with the Eagleswell Project where members of the public had advised her that they had not been informed about the proposals in advance and they had not been consulted on them. She said it was important that the Council listened to residents and their views and possibly considered adjusting ideas as a result.

In response, the Operational Manager for Corporate Communications, Participation, Equalities and Directorate Development advised that it was important to learn from the results of the Survey stating that there were a number of areas that needed to be progressed which the Council was seeking to prioritise.

Councillor Carroll asked the Cabinet Member if she had been surprised at the responses received. The Cabinet Member commented that it was important to recognise that some of the responses were requesting changes in areas that the Council had no responsibility for. However, the Survey did inform the Council that it needed to be more transparent in its work and to prioritise certain areas. Communication was a key aspect that needed to be progressed as well as engagement and that the Public Participation Strategy would be reviewed in light of the comments received. It was apparent that there was a gap between the perception of what people thought the Council was doing and what it actually did. Councillor Carroll stated that he had not been surprised at the responses having held

discussions with local constituents and he was also aware of the Eagleswell plans which had been placed on the community without proper engagement in his view.

The Cabinet Member further stated that it was important for the Cabinet to have a robust Participation Strategy which would be kept under revision throughout its life.

The Vice-Chair commented that there were areas that needed more focus, for example residents were stating that they needed more public transport. Promoting the e-petition scheme was important as well as encouraging residents to participate in the decision-making process and make their voices heard. He stated that on the whole the Council was transparent, meetings were able to be watched online and archived for future viewing on the Council's website. He did, however, suggest that further work be undertaken in relation to the Council's website in making the website easier for the public to understand and having regard to it being written in a user-friendly style. He also drew attention to particular Scrutiny Committee titles, for example the title of Corporate Performance and Resources, he said was difficult for the public to understand what the remit of the Committee was from the title he found easier explanations like money and finance being far easier to understand.

Councillor Loveluck-Edwards commented that it was opportune to reassess how the Council operated and consider what information it provided to the public. The cost-of-living crisis was having a massive impact on people, but she pointed out that it was important to note that even though 70% did not respond to the Survey, the Council could not assume that they were unhappy. She also commented on the lack of engagement between 16–24 year olds and that further work needed to be undertaken in that regard. In referring to her Older People's Champion role, she was well aware that working with young people was essential and that she would be championing further work in that direction. The Operational Manager for Corporate Communications, Participation, Equalities and Directorate Development advised that measures were being put in place for young people to get more involved and to test the Council's strategies and there were certainly opportunities going forward for further initiatives and ideas to be taken forward.

Councillor Franks also suggested that it would be important for all parties to be involved in considering surveys going forward and suggested that an all-party working group be formed to further assist.

The Chair advised that she take the suggestion to the Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group for an all-party group to consider his request.

Following the discussion at the meeting, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the results from the Vale of Glamorgan Residents survey be noted.
- (2) T H A T the following comments be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration:
 - (i) That the Committee supports that further work be undertaken to engage residents in the decision-making process of the Council;

- (ii) That, when specific projects, for example Eagleswell, are to be explored, consideration to consultation within the local community be undertaken prior to decisions being made;
- (iii) That the Council's website be reviewed and updated to ensure that it is more user friendly to the public, for example that reference to the remit of Committees be provided in a more easily accessible format for the public;
- (iv) That the priorities identified within the Survey be progressed as soon as possible and considered in line with the review of the Public Participation Strategy;
- (v) That the responsibilities of the Council be more easily identified to the public so that they are aware of the responsibilities and accountabilities that the Council has;
- (vi) Initiatives be developed that show the public that the Council is listening and that the Public Participation Strategy be developed further to explain to people how they can better engage with the Council and its decision making process;
- (vii) Further opportunities be considered to engage with 16- 24-year olds;

(3) T H A T an update report be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in due course following further consideration of the consultation by Cabinet and the development of initiatives to promote public participation strategy.

(4) T H A T a working group of all parties be established to further assist the public participation strategy going forward and that this be referred to the Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group for consideration.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the presentation provided at the meeting, the reports within the agenda and discussions at the meeting.”

N.B. Cabinet is advised that at the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group meeting held on 28th May, 2024 the following was recommended -

THAT the all party political working group be progressed by the Director of Resources in respect of the need to develop initiatives to engage further with the public and in the development of the Corporate Plan.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the comments made during the Lets Talk About Life in the Vale survey discussions at Scrutiny Committee Corporate Performance and Resources and consideration of the recommendation for an all party working group to be established