

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 18 July 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Let's Talk About Life in the Vale – Review of Public Participation Strategy
Purpose of Report:	To report on the review and reprioritisation of actions in the Public Participation Strategy in light of the results of the Let's Talk about Life in the Vale survey exercise.
Report Owner:	Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Regulatory Services
Responsible Officer:	Director of Corporate Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cabinet Members and Elected Member Champions
Policy Framework:	To inform the development of the Corporate Plan 2025-30
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's Talk about life in the Vale was a survey exercise run in partnership with Data Cymru to understand residents' experiences of life in the Vale of Glamorgan and identify their priorities to inform future service delivery. • The bilingual survey was conducted using an online survey tool, SmartSurvey, hosted by Data Cymru, between 22nd August and 18th December, 2023. There were 4,009 responses to the survey. • The results of the survey have been considered in various forums and a number of conclusions drawn. • The Council's Public Participation Strategy has been reviewed and four key areas of work highlighted as immediate priorities in response to the survey's findings. 	

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet note the conclusions drawn by various groups following the publication of the results of the Let's Talk About Life in the Vale ('Let's Talk') survey and suggestions for how the experiences and priorities of Vale residents can be used to better inform future service delivery.
2. That Cabinet note the review of the Public Participation Strategy.
3. That Cabinet agree to the actions highlighted within this report being prioritised as part of the Council's work to deliver its Public Participation Strategy.
4. That Cabinet receive further updates on the progress being made under the Public Participation Strategy as part of the Annual Self-Assessment Report and standalone reports in due course.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. The Let's Talk survey exercise is an important first step in preparing the Council's next Corporate Plan and wider service delivery, in order for it to reflect the needs of the community.
2. To ensure Cabinet and other Elected Members are assured the Strategy and accompanying is adequate and relevant.
3. To ensure the Council's work to develop its Communications and Participation functions is in line with the views of residents and Elected Members.
4. To enable Cabinet to maintain oversight of the work underway.

1. Background

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 As required by the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act (2021), in 2022 the Council published its Public Participation Strategy to explain how it would encourage and facilitate public participation in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 1.3 The strategy sets out how the Council will be diverse in its engagement methods, using social media platforms, community connectors and face-to-face engagement, to take an integrated approach to public participation.
- 1.4 The 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.
- 1.5 The strategy is supported by an action plan which the Council has been working to deliver since 2022.
- 1.6 To better understand the opinions of residents living in the Vale of Glamorgan, the local Council commissioned Data Cymru to create, run, and analyse a bespoke survey for residents – Let's Talk about Life in the Vale. Data Cymru was

commissioned to ensure that the survey provided the Council with statistically robust and reliable data.

- 1.7** The bilingual survey was conducted using an online survey tool, SmartSurvey, hosted by Data Cymru, between 22nd August and 18th December, 2023.
- 1.8** There were 4,009 responses to the survey. Analysts have calculated that this sample is representative of the Vale's population by using a margin of error calculation across all questions.
- 1.9** The survey was primarily conducted online and so further engagement with some groups who are not as well represented in the sample of respondents has been undertaken.
- 1.10** The survey covered a wide range of topics, and the questions were separated into 11 themes. These included public service priorities, cost of living, climate change, volunteering, and travel.
- 1.11** The results showed people are generally happy with the Vale as a place to live. 60% of respondents stated that they are either very or fairly satisfied with the Vale of Glamorgan as a place to live, and 80% would recommend the Vale of Glamorgan as a place to live.
- 1.12** The results also showed that the Council's priorities are broadly in line with those of residents. However, the results also showed there is more work to be done in how we explain our work, public perception of our work, and engage residents in decision making. More respondents stated that they disagreed than agreed with statements that the services provided by the Vale of Glamorgan Council are of a high quality; that the Council acts in the interest of local residents; that the Council takes residents' views into account when making a decision; and that the services provided by the Council represent good value for money.
- 1.13** The results of Let's Talk about Life in the Vale were reported to Cabinet on 11th April, 2024 and it was agreed the Council's existing Public Participation Strategy be reviewed, its actions updated and reprioritised based on the survey results from Let's Talk, and all progress to date be reported to Cabinet before the summer recess and incorporated into our Annual Self-Assessment report.
- 1.14** The results of Let's Talk about Life in the Vale were also considered at meetings of Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee, Corporate Resources and Performance Scrutiny Committee, Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group, the Council's Elected Member Champions, the Public Services Board, the Equalities Consultative Forum, the Council's Strategic Leadership Team, the Council's Insight Board, and the Council's Public Participation Practitioners Network.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** Appendix A to this report sets out the progress to date towards delivery of the Public Participation Strategy action plan.
- 2.2** Twenty six actions were agreed with the Public Participation Strategy. These include individual pieces of work and more general changes to practice across the Council.

- 2.3 There are three workstreams within the action plan – Reach, Engage, and Involve. Each action is aligned to one of the Council’s values and contributes to at least one of these workstreams.
- 2.4 Significant progress has been made since 2022 in improving the way in which the Council seeks to inform residents about its work and engage stakeholders in decision making.
- 2.5 The Council has launched a new online platform, Participate Vale, to provide stakeholders with a hub for involvement with decision making. It has trialled new methods of engaging people online while also better promoting face to face opportunities. A new internal officers network has also been established to better coordinate participation work and share best practice across the organisation.
- 2.6 However, more work is required in some areas to address the issues raised by the Let’s Talk about Life in the Vale survey.
- 2.7 Appendix B to this report sets out the common themes identified when reviewing the results of the survey as well as the comments forwarded for consideration by Cabinet by Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.8 Appendix B also sets out how these issues are currently planned to be addressed in the Public Participation Strategy and any additional proposed actions.
- 2.9 In line with the comments made and themes discussed it is proposed that three of the current actions are prioritised:
- 2.9.1 **Set up and promote the ePetitions process.** The results of the Let’s Talk survey show that signing a petition is by far the most common way in which residents seek to influence a decision. The Council’s e-Petitions process was launched in 2022 but is not widely used. It is proposed that the action be re-opened and a new promotional campaign be developed to increase its use.
- 2.9.2 **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.** Many responses to the survey and general feedback from officers and Elected Members suggests that it is often unclear to residents how the Council operates, the services it delivers, or the role of Elected Members in overseeing this. In order for citizens to be able to effectively engage with our work we must do more to help them understand what we do and why. It is proposed that a running campaign be developed to address this and information be provided to Elected Members for them to use.
- 2.9.3 **Develop a series of case studies to showcase where effective public participation has resulted in positive outcomes for stakeholders and the community.** There are many examples of the Council’s work being influenced and services being developed in line with the response to public participation. However, there is still a perception amongst residents that the Council does not always listen to residents’ views. It is proposed that a series of case studies be produced to demonstrate this.
- 2.10 Work to deliver the other actions still to be completed will be maintained.
- 2.11 One of the primary objectives of the Let’s Talk project was to gather robust data on citizens’ perceptions of Life in the Vale. Now that the Council has gathered this it is committed to ensuring that the data is used to inform decision making.

The results of the exercise have already been key in developing the draft well-being objectives for the Council's next Corporate Plan. The Council will continue to make strategic use of the insight now available in this way as the Strengthening Communities theme for the new Reshaping programme develops and as important insight into other projects, such as service transformation proposals. This will be aided by the implementation of the Council's new Data Strategy.

- 2.12** As part of the development of the Council's new Strategic Equality Plan consideration will also be given to how this data can be used to better inform Equality Impact Assessments.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Let's Talk about Life in the Vale exercise provided the Council with its most robust data set ever on residents' perceptions. The improved understanding that this offers will greatly enhance our abilities to work with and for our communities and demonstrates how the Council seeks to involve others in decision-making.
- 3.2** The exercise has been delivered collaboratively with Data Cymru and the way in which the survey has been run is being shared widely with colleagues across Wales.
- 3.3** The data is now being used to inform long-term decisions informed and enable a preventative approach.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** The improved understanding of residents' views on the climate and nature emergencies provided by the Let's Talk about Life in the Vale survey will help support the delivery of Project Zero and other work underway to address these.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** None as a direct result of this report. The cost of the exercise has been met within existing resources as will the implementation of Public Participation Strategy action plan.

Employment

- 5.2** None as a direct result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3 The insight gained through the Let's Talk about Life in the Vale exercise and subsequent review of the Council's Public Participation Strategy will directly inform the development of a new Strategic Equality Plan for the organisation.
- 5.4 Further work continues to engage with individuals with protected characteristics and groups that advocate for them to ensure the survey data is representative of all residents in the Vale.

6. Background Papers

Let's Talk About Life in the Vale, Cabinet Report, 11th April, 2024

<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2024/24-04-11/Lets-Talk-About-Life.pdf>

Appendix A

AMBITIOUS	Reach	Involve	Represent	STATUS	Progress
Develop our social media channels as a platform to ask questions and share views and support Councillors' awareness of the benefits of social media				New approaches trialled during 2022/23 initially as part of Penarth Esplanade engagement. Twitter polls, FB polls via Stories, Q&A posts all now regularly used. Social media training delivered to all elected members as part of new member induction process.	Complete
Develop our methodology for sharing consultations and engagement exercises on social media and other platforms				All participation activity is promoted via social media (among other methods). The performance of this content is regularly monitored by the Communications team.	Complete / Ongoing
Embrace the use of digital discussions, for example forums, Facebook Live stream and webinars				Online webinars/discussion sessions are being used as part of policy consultations (eg.Project Zero, RLDP).	Complete / Ongoing
Develop a wide-ranging and ongoing campaign to promote the existing participation mechanisms, as well as those that will be developed in future.				Not yet started.	Not started
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.				All significant public engagement exercises include a face-to-face opportunity for stakeholders to have their say.	Complete
Bring all the Council's consultation, engagement and participation activities together into a single, easily accessible online hub, with the long-term objective of developing a portal that joins together all pathways for participation in the Vale.				Participate Vale was launched in 2022. The majority of the Council's public engagement and participation work is now hosted on Participate Vale. The Council has recently begun featuring links to engagement work being undertaken by local partners to further develop the platform.	Complete
OPEN	Reach	Involve	Represent	STATUS	Progress
Inform people about cabinet meetings and how they can get involved.				Social media posts regularly shared ahead of meetings to encourage residents to participate. However, these tend to receive only limited engagement so work is underway to refresh this content.	Complete / Ongoing
Inform and promote the role of the public in our consultation exercises, particularly at Council meetings.				Social media posts regularly shared ahead of meetings to encourage residents to participate. However, these tend to receive only limited engagement so work is underway to refresh this content.	Complete / Ongoing
Promote greater understanding of the role and work of the Council in issues that affect residents.				This is a very wide-ranging action that requires proper scoping in order to be delivered effectively. This will be progressed in 2024/25.	Not started
Develop methods to better brief and engage councillors at the outset of participation activities to enable them to work as better advocates for both residents and the Council itself.				The Communications team has trialled providing briefing/promotional content to elected member champions as part of the Let'sTalk about Life in the Vale survey. This approach now needs to be mainstreamed.	Underway
Provide guidance to officers on producing documents that are accessible to those with protected characteristics and easier for stakeholders to understand. This includes improving the internal understanding of using the correct language when talking about participation				New advice on accessible PDF documents has been published for Council staff and a new approvals process for the Council's website should prevent inaccessible documents being published in future.	Complete
Clearly articulate that there will always be non-digital routes for people to participate in decision making				All significant public engagement exercises include a face-to-face opportunity for stakeholders to have their say and this is widely promoted.	Complete
TOGETHER	Reach	Involve	Represent	STATUS	Progress
Set up and promote the ePetitions process.				Live via Participate Vale. A promotional campaign is now required to increase usage.	Complete / Ongoing
Identify and show where residents' opinions have affected the outcome of a consultation/survey				A new feedback mechanism has been built in to the Participate Vale platform. New methods of feeding back the impact of public engagement work is now required.	Complete / Ongoing
Find ways to link in with town and community councils, third sector organisations and other community leaders (community connectors) to reach more people				The Council's Placemaking team is having significant success in building new links with community leaders. This work is ongoing.	Underway

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.				This work is being progressed as part of the development of a new Strategic Equality Plan for the Council. To support this a review of the Council's Equality Impact Assessment process and Equalities Consultative Forum are both underway.	Underway
The Council must work effectively with a wide range of community groups to reach its full potential. We will map these community networks and develop a plan to support them.				Mapping exercises to build an understanding of community groups in the Vale have been undertaken by the Elected Member Champions group and the Communications team. The work of the Placemaking team and improved links that are being built by the Strategy and Policy are also contributing to this. More effective ways of linking with the groups being identified are now required.	Underway
Develop arrangements for independent advocacy for groups with protected characteristics – we recognise that not all current participation activities are fully accessible to all groups with protected characteristics.				This work is being progressed as part of the development of a new Strategic Equality Plan for the Council. To support this a review of the Council's Equality Impact Assessment process and Equalities Consultative Forum are both underway.	Underway

PROUD	Reach	Involve	Represent	STATUS	Progress
Be better at sharing what happens in council meetings				This is an ongoing action. The Council has effective mechanisms for sharing what happens at Council meetings via the media but continues to have difficult getting residents to engage with our social media content. New approaches will be explored in 2024/25 including the use of Reels and Stories to share clips from Council meetings.	Underway
Improve how we highlight where people have helped us make a decision				A new feedback mechanism has been built in to the Participate Vale platform but the reach of this is limited. New methods of feeding back the impact of public engagement work is now required.	Complete / Ongoing
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.				It was originally intended to link this to a proposed WLGA campaign. However, in light of the results of the Let's Talk survey the action will be progressed independently. It is intended to launch the campaign in Autumn 2024.	Not started
Develop a series of case studies to showcase where effective public participation has resulted in positive outcomes for stakeholders and the community				A number of successful schemes have been reviewed. These will be used to create 600 word case studies for Participate Vale (as has proved successful for other local authorities) and a series of animations and gallery pieces for social media.	Underway
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.				The Council always seeks to engage citizens in this way. The internal Public Participation Practitioners Network exists to share best practice internally and help improve standards within the organisation.	Complete / Ongoing
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.				The Council always seeks to engage citizens in this way. The internal Public Participation Practitioners Network exists to share best practice internally and help improve standards within the organisation.	Complete / Ongoing
Develop a communications plan template for Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee reports in line with checklist proposed in the Welsh Government guidance				This action is on hold while the Council's reviews the performance of various content currently being shared to promote engagement with Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings.	Not started
Better link the Council's customer contact platforms with public participation activities to capture and respond to all ad-hoc feedback and pertinent questions.				This action will be consider as part of the implementation of the Council's Digital Strategy	Not started

KEY:
Primary
Secondary
Priority action

Appendix B

Issues raised and proposed response

Issue/Theme	Relevant Public Participation Strategy action	Proposed action
That the Council must communicate more effectively how and why it takes decisions to residents. (Cabinet)	Inform and promote the role of the public in our consultation exercises, particularly at Council meetings.	Maintain work to achieve this.
Increase the use of place making to improve how we involve, communicate and consult with people and ensure citizens have the opportunity to have their voices heard. (Cabinet, SLT, Insight).	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.	Maintain work to achieve this.
That the Council could work more closely with the third sector and other partners to ensure opportunities for participation are publicised/promoted as widely as possible. (Cabinet, VSJLC)	Find ways to link in with town and community councils, third sector organisations and other community leaders (community connectors) to reach more people.	Maintain work to achieve this.
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. (CPR)	Inform and promote the role of the public in our consultation exercises, particularly at Council meetings.	Ensure opportunities for participation in formal decision making (eg. at Planning Committee) are being effectively promoted.
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. (CPR)	None	A review of the Council's website to ensure it is fit for purpose was agreed by Cabinet in February 2024 as part of the new Reshaping programme.
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. (CPR)	None	Report to Cabinet and relevant scrutiny committees on the review of the Public Participation Strategy (this report).

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. (CPR)	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.	Prioritise work to achieve this.
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. (CPR)	Develop a series of case studies to showcase where effective public participation has resulted in positive outcomes for stakeholders and the community	Prioritise work to achieve this.
Further opportunities be considered to engage with 16–24-year-olds. (CPR)	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.	Continue work to address this and link more effectively with the Vale Youth Service and other community and third sector groups.
Steps should be taken to better inform residents of the Council's responsibilities and service standards – what we do and how. (SLT)	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.	Prioritise work to achieve this.
There must always be an element of face-to-face engagement or other methodology to reach those who may be digitally excluded. (ECF)	Clearly articulate that there will always be non-digital routes for people to participate in decision making.	Maintain work to achieve this.
The results of public participation work should be more effectively used as part of completing Equality Impact Assessments. (ECF, Insight)	None	To be considered as part of the development of the new Strategic Equality Plan and review of the current Equality Impact Assessment process.
The results of public participation work should be accessible to all chief officers and those involved in service planning to ensure insight gathered is being fully utilised. (Insight, PPPN)	None	To be considered as part of the implementation of the Council's new Data Strategy and development of the organisation's Insight function.
The Council must more effectively promote its e-petition platform as part of Participate Vale (SLT, PPPN).	Set up and promote the ePetitions process.	Prioritise work to achieve this. Re-open this action and more effectively promote the e-Petitions facility.

CPR – Corporate Performance & Resources Scrutiny Committee

ECF – Equalities Consultative Forum

Insight – Strategic Insight Board

PPPN – Public Participation Practitioners Network

SLT – Strategic Leadership Team

VSJLC – Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee