

Report

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Part 1

Date: 26 July 2018

Subject Review of public engagement

Purpose To update the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the current position with regards to engagement and outline the in-depth review of engagement across the Council, which is underway.

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Ward Newport wide

Summary This report explains current engagement arrangements, emerging issues and addresses the key points raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, particularly in relation to budget engagement. It also outlines an ongoing review which will focus on how engagement can be improved in terms of reach, methods, communication and good practice. This review will also consider the issues raised by the committee in greater depth and it is proposed to report back to the Scrutiny meeting on 15th November.

Proposal The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is requested to receive the following report as an update before the engagement review is completed and reported to their November meeting

Action by Head of People and Business Change

Timetable The engagement review is currently underway and will report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in November 2018

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Head of People and Business Change
- Senior Partnership Officer (engagement)
- Overview and Scrutiny Officer
- Head of Finance

Signed

Background

1.0 Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee have asked that the Council report back on any work being done to address / implement their recommendations from their consideration of this year's Public Engagement related to the Budget process (made at their meeting on 1 Feb).

As such, it requested that the Committee be provided with this update at their meeting on **Thursday 26 July.**

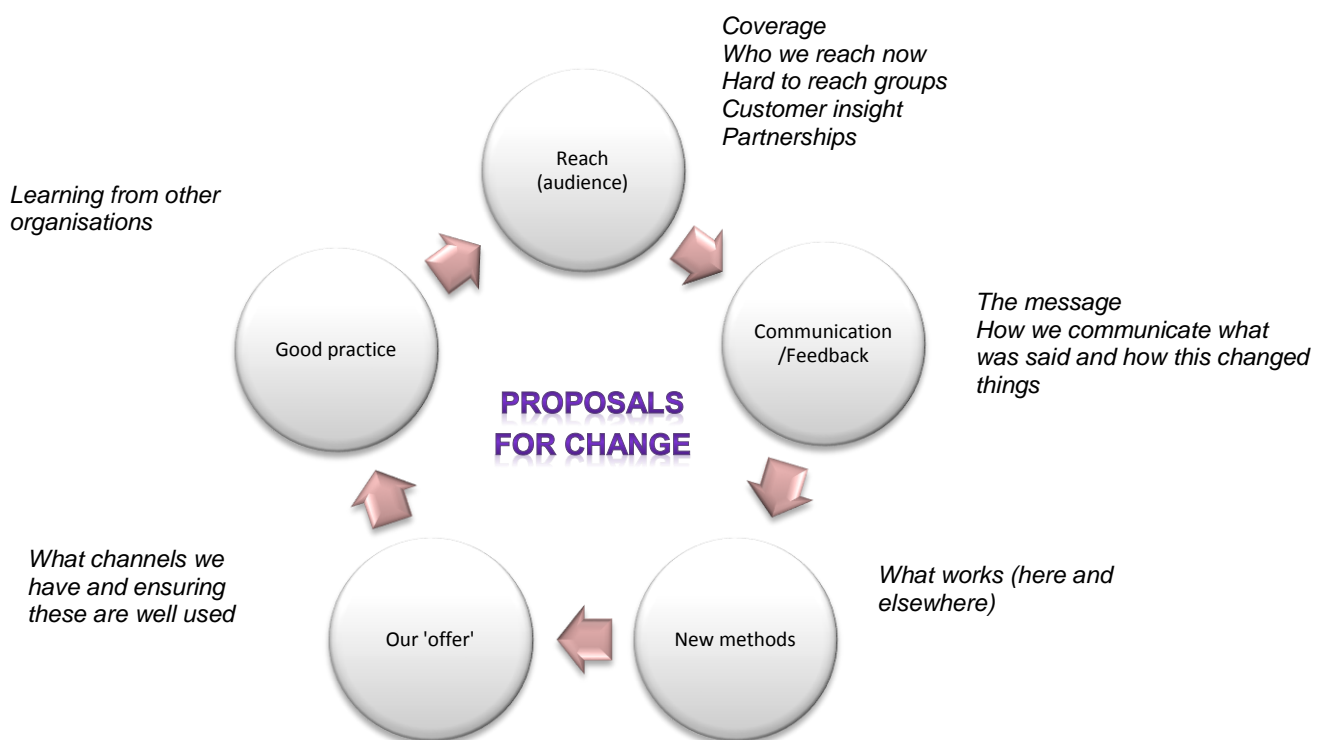
The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Council's planning and preparations for public engagement during the budget setting process for the next financial year, and how the concerns raised by the Committee are being addressed. These are summarised as:

- What actions the Council are undertaking to address concerns about the Public Engagement process in the budget for 2019/20
- What steps the Council are making in the development of a strategic approach to Public Engagement,
- Process for ensuring robust information is presented next year as part of the public consultation (including the consistency of information within the business cases)
- How to ensure that feedback is made available to consultees,
- And the medium the Consultations are available, through to ensure increased ease of access to the public in the future.

2.0 Engagement Review

Following Scrutiny's feedback on budget engagement and other issues around response rates reported for other engagement exercises is a wider engagement review is underway.

The scope of this review considers:



It is suggested that this review would provide a more in-depth response to the issues raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and could be reported to their meeting on November 15th.

The engagement review will look at the elements shown in the diagram above and would also consider compliance with statutory duties e.g. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and good practice framework such as the National Participation Standards for Wales (see appendix 2).

The review will be undertaken by a team of representatives from corporate services and will consult with the One Newport Engagement Group (a multi-agency advisory and coordination group).

2.1 Reach – Across the Council consultation and engagement work already reaches many thousands of Newport residents covering a wide geographical and demographic spread. The Council is now achieving 8,000 – 9,000 responses a month using electronic surveys through the free wifi on Newport Transport buses. This is a step change in engagement and allows us to reach more people in a month than we might over more than a year using traditional methods. Our citizens panel is a reliable way of reaching an older audience and asking longer, more in depth survey questions. We are also making good use of electronic surveys shared through social media and can reach thousands of respondents with the Council's social media following exceeding 20,000 people. It is probably fair to say that electronic methods are now the primary means of engaging with residents, however this presents an issue in itself in terms of digital inclusion.

Given the fairly recent adoption of electronic engagement methods we now need to review our reach and respondents in terms of coverage and representativeness. We are mindful that there remain 'hard to reach' groups who are less likely to respond to engagement exercises. There are of course, face to face engagement opportunities and although these are vital they tend to involve lower numbers of people and suit more qualitative methods e.g. focus groups and question and answer sessions.

We are aware that service areas sometimes plan and run their own engagement exercises without corporate awareness and support, whilst they are entitled to do this the quality and effectiveness is sometimes questionable e.g. low response rates, limited demographic coverage and problems with methodology. To address this the Partnership, Policy and Involvement Team have briefed the senior managers outlining corporate engagement resources, support, access to networks etc that are on offer to our service areas. Appendix 1 shows the paper prepared for senior managers.

2.2 Communication and feedback – Communication links closely with reach and response but also relates to raising awareness of when we are consulting, providing clear and understandable information on what is being proposed, providing meaningful options and then giving feedback on how citizens views have been considered.

One of the National Participation Standards for Wales (see Appendix 2) covers the importance of providing feedback and demonstrating that engagement is meaningful and is considered by decision makers. In terms of budget engagement cabinet receives a detailed report on the responses received before considering its final budget proposal. Once agreed by Council the final budget is reported in Newport Matters however it is likely that the review of engagement will conclude that more work is needed on the 'feedback loop' so that respondents feel that they are able to influence decision making and the Council is accountable.

In terms of clearly communicating budget proposals, when completing the consultation respondents are asked how well they thought the proposal was explained. It was noted that some proposals were regarded as less clear than others. It is proposed that for the 2019/20 budget consultation more stringent clear communication standards are applied and that proposals which are indicated to be unclear are immediately revised.

The Partnership, Policy and Involvement team has recently started to monitor the proportion of people who think they “can influence decisions affecting their local area” and which consultation and engagement activities they access (e.g. Citizens Panel, online surveys, public consultation events etc). This will help to assess the level of engagement and views as to how meaningful they think engagement actually is. The results will inform the engagement review and will be reported to the committee in November.

The committee’s concerns about the difficulty in finding and accessing the budget consultation on the Council website are noted and will be addressed when planning the 2019/20 consultation work.

2.3 New methods – As has been mentioned above we have recently invested in technology that allows us to survey users of the free bus wifi (before they are able to login/connect). The massively enhanced reach that this now gives us demonstrates the potential of electronic engagement methods, however we have not fully evaluated what other new methods are available and are being effectively used by other organisations, this will be within the scope of the engagement review.

New methods should not be limited to online and electronic approaches and could include innovative face to face methods. For instance we have recently appointed a new provider to run Newport Youth Council and they have experience in the use of creative media e.g. film making to encourage young people to become involved in decision making.

Using a budget simulation, as used by other local authorities has been suggested. Such a simulator was actually used in Newport in 2014 with limited success. We note that the LGA who developed the simulator has now stopped supporting it. The review of engagement will evaluate their use in other authorities, but our own experience is that they are a simplification of very complicated funding decisions and priorities and their main use is to demonstrate the difficulty in setting a balanced budget and the financial constraints.

2.4 Our ‘offer’ – As outlined above we already have a range of methods and approaches to support engagement across the Council. Some of these are outlined in the following table. The Policy, Partnership and Involvement team will lead a review of these methods to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. We also are developing links with partner organisations through an Engagement Group to coordinate engagement activities and share best practice and resources. This group includes the main statutory partners and third sector engagement specialists e.g. GAVO Engage project. The Engagement Group will contribute to the review and will act as a critical friend.

Engagement methods	Reach	Comments
Budget Consultation	All ages can respond including children and young people	Responses are often clustered around specific proposals which affect them personally. Rather than a more objective and holistic viewpoint.
Citizens Panel	Response rates are currently around 300-400. Ages from 16+ can take part, however in practice active members tend to be 45+ age ranges with few young people	Well established and used by services. Recent steps taken to recruit additional members. Service Areas to be reminded of this and other corporate engagement resources.
Bus Wifi Surveys	Around 7000-8000 respondents. Can be used every month. Age range is younger than citizens panel and reaches a high number below age 25.	A new method which has proven ground breaking in terms of reach. However surveys must be kept short and not in-depth.

Schools Wellbeing Survey	Runs every 3 years and focusses on pupil wellbeing. Response rates between 500-1500.	Will be run again in 2019.
Newport Youth Council	Young people aged 11-25. Currently around 15 members	Aims to involve young people in influencing decision making and giving them a voice in public life.
Social media online surveys (using SNAP)	Reach is large with more than 20,000 NCC social media followers.	Increasingly used to share information, news, surveys and events
Consultation on major strategies e.g. Wellbeing Plan, Local Development Plan	Depends on the focus of the strategy. The recent Wellbeing Assessment/Plan involved widespread engagement and achieved diverse response rate.	Service Area to be reminded of corporate resources and support available for this type of consultation and engagement.
Pupil Participation and Learning Network	Primary school network aimed at empowering young people and developing the 'pupil voice'	Strong work at school level although limited to 8 schools at present
Specific engagement events e.g. Families Love Newport, budget Q&A sessions. 'Kids take over Libraries' event.	Can be targeted to clients groups or open-access. Can use council venues e.g. the Market, Info Station, libraries, summer events.	Working to better coordinate events through multi-agency Engagement Group and to make use of existing events wherever possible, rather than run additional events

2.5 Good Practice – As the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee noted there are a range of alternative methods of engaging with the public that are used by other organisations in the public sector and also the business and the third sector. The engagement review will consider new methods and good practice and evaluate their suitability for Newport. It should be noted that improving engagement can be as much about changing culture and working practices, as well as adopting and investing in new methods and tools. This is particularly the case when moving towards more empowering/involving/collaborative approaches as shown in the following diagram 'hierarchy of engagement methods'. The Committee requested that the Council should outline how it plans to move up the hierarchy of engagement, and this will be within the scope of the engagement review.

Such a move towards citizen empowerment and involvement is implicit in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, however this is about engagement in its widest sense and will require significant culture shift over several years. It is also not something that can be achieved 'across the board' and suits certain services and projects more than others. It is likely that the People and Culture Strategy will play a critical role in supporting this shift and linking citizen empowerment with the medium term financial plan and change programme. Furthermore strengthening community resilience is a key aim of the Council's Corporate Plan and the Wellbeing Plan (Public Services Board) and will require improved citizen empowerment and involvement. These plans will provide a strategic framework for the move up the hierarchy of engagement, and will allow elected members to monitor progress towards this end.

The Hierarchy of Engagement Methods

5. Empower

- to place final decision making in the hands of the stakeholders

4. Collaborate

- to partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution

3. Involve

- to work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that concerns and views are consistently understood and considered

2. Consult

- to obtain stakeholders feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions

1. Inform

- to provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives or solutions

3.0 Budget awareness and engagement survey

It should be recognised that the effectiveness of engagement cannot be measured solely in terms of numbers of responses. For instance, during the 2018/19 budget we asked a large sample of residents (6,300 bus wifi users) whether they knew about the budget consultation and if they intended to take part. Around 40% already knew that the Council was consulting with residents (this means an additional 3,800 were made aware through the survey). Almost half of the respondents said that they did not intend on taking part in the budget consultation. This finding, is on the one hand, encouraging in that if our reach is improved we might achieve a larger response rate (27% said they would respond now they knew about the consultation), but it also suggests that a large proportion would not respond in any case. Further review work could look at the reasons for this e.g. apathy, a view that the proposals are not relevant, tacit approval, accepting the Council's democratic mandate for decision making etc.

Key points from the survey are:

- Around 6,300 responses were received from a wide demographic range, with significant responses from the younger 18-44 age range (who are often less represented than older adults).
- 40% said they were aware that the Council was consulting on its budget for 2018-19.
- 55% said they either had already responded or planned to respond, and 45% said they did not intend to respond.
- For those not intending to respond the figure for young people under 25 was only marginally higher than for older adults (47% compared to 43%).

4.0 Year-round engagement processes

The Committee recommended moving to a year-round budget consultation and engagement process, rather than what was perceived as a condensed period during Christmas/New Year. As indicated in this report consultation and engagement is already a year-round process and the intention is to gather insight and intelligence which can be used as widely as possible to inform service development and strategy.

For instance the Wellbeing Assessment (revised every 2 years) involved extensive public engagement and then informs key strategies like the Corporate Plan which ultimately inform service planning and business change decisions. There are also good examples of where public engagement is used to inform the planning of projects which contribute to improving wellbeing e.g. a recent example is the St Paul's Walk project where the public have been consulted on the design and future uses of the site and young people are working on an art project to prevent vandalism

Whilst further work remains to be done on co-production and involvement of service users in the development of change proposals, it should also be recognised that this type of engagement already takes place, and is supported by officers from People & Business Change. However there is a balance that needs to be struck between communication, engagement, openness and avoiding unnecessarily alarming service users and staff.

Consideration will be given to extending the formal budget consultation period and beginning consultation earlier, however the timings are tied in with the release of Welsh Government funding settlement figures.

Appendix 1

Consultation and Engagement Support

PARTNERSHIP, POLICY & INVOLVEMENT TEAM

The Policy, Partnership & Involvement Team can facilitate and support both Newport City Council and external partners to consult & engage on a wide range of topics. This offer includes a number of different options depending on who you want to consult with and how.

The different options available as part of this offer is as follows:

Involve Newport Citizens Panel

Involve Newport is the name for a panel of Newport residents who receive regular bilingual surveys with the aim to represent the views and opinions of the people within the city. The panel was established by the Council in 2002 and is now used jointly with its partners through the One Newport Public Services Board (PSB) and its wider partnership. Partners are able to include any questions in the panel surveys by contacting the team.

The panel provides a platform through which residents' views on local services can be accurately gauged. It also gives us the opportunity to understand why people's views are changing and provide opportunities for more focussed research about specific services.

The panel currently has around 700 members and anyone living in Newport has the opportunity to join, including young people. Members receive around four surveys each year during Spring, Summer, Autumn & Winter and are asked for their opinions and suggestions on current services affecting the city and its residents. Typically there are between 200-300 responses received from each survey circulated.

The results from each survey are collated into a report along with the raw data and any source spreadsheets, which are available to whoever made the request.

Bus Wi-Fi Survey

Newport City Council and Newport Transport provide funding that allows the public access to free Wi-Fi on Newport Transport buses. As part of this contract we have the opportunity to include a short survey that members of the public have to complete in order to access this Wi-Fi (this only needs to be completed once for the period of time each survey runs).

The Team works with the company running the system to include a set of questions for an agreed period of time. This short survey can accommodate up to 5 option based questions (single or multiple responses) alongside their age and gender. Open ended questions are not usually included unless there is a valid reason.

We have run each survey for about a month and we have received between 8,000 and 9,000 responses for each survey including approximately half from people aged 25 or under. The topics areas consulted on have included safety in Newport, perception of Newport, city centre events and budget consultation awareness.

The results from each survey are collated into a excel spreadsheet that includes the raw data, overall tables and graphs along with a breakdown and comparison by age if relevant (25 or under and over 25), which are then available to whoever made the request.

Online Surveys

The Team can provide staff the option to set up and host more detailed online bilingual surveys (internal and external) in SNAP.

This support includes offering advice on the questionnaire itself including the questions being asked and the wording. Once a questionnaire has been set up we contact SRS for them to create an online link, which can be used by staff and/or the public.

The completed online surveys are imported into SNAP and results are available to whoever made the request. The results can be given as raw data only, basic figures & free text comments or displayed as tables & graphs. Regular updates on the numbers of surveys completed can also be provided.

Examples of online surveys developed have included consultations on the Council’s budget proposals, the Public Services Board’s Well-being Assessment & Plan, Customer Services and a number of Education surveys. We can also support the publicising of these surveys across our partnership networks and on social media.

Printable versions of the surveys are also provided as and when required.

Youth Council

The Youth Council’s membership includes young people aged between 11-25 years old and provides opportunities for these individuals to get their voice heard and influence decisions on the things they care about in Newport.

The Team provide an opportunity for anyone carrying out consultations a chance to engage with the Youth Council to obtain the views of young people. They may also be able to promote this among their peers and/or assist with any consultation process.

Advice and support for consultation and engagement

The Partnership, Policy and Involvement team can provide informal advice and support for services, including partner organisations, on public consultation and engagement. For example this could be on engagement methods, best practice, use of partner’s networks and how to access ‘hard to reach’ groups. The team also runs an Engagement Group to share information and resources, coordinate activities and increase levels of participation in decision making.

Table 1: Consultation and engagement options and support offered

	Short / Simple surveys	Long / in-depth surveys	Provide advice and support on use	
Involve Newport Citizens Panel	✓	✓	✓	
Bus Wi-Fi Survey	✓	x	✓	
Online public surveys	✓	✓	✓	

Appendix 2

National Participation Standards for Wales

[Full resolution image of standards available here](#)

	This means:	We will:
<p>1</p> <p>Gwybodaeth Information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have the right to information that is easy to understand and allows you to make an informed decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information that is good quality, clear and accessible. Inform you about who's going to listen and let you know what difference your involvement could make.
<p>2</p> <p>Chi biau'r dewis It's your choice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have the right to choose to be involved and work on things that are important to you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give you enough support and time to choose if you want to get involved.
<p>3</p> <p>Dim gwahaniaethu No discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people are all different and have the right to be treated fairly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge discrimination. Provide a range of opportunities and support to meet the needs of children and young people.
<p>4</p> <p>Parch Respect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have the right to have a say. Your opinions are important and will be respected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to your views, experiences and ideas and take you seriously. Work with you on things you say are important. Value what you have to offer.
<p>5</p> <p>Bod ar eich ennill You get something out of it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have the right to learn and be the best you can be. You will have opportunities to work with others and make a difference. We want you to be involved in positive experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with you in safe, fun and enjoyable ways. Make the most of what you know and do things that build your confidence and skills.
<p>6</p> <p>Adborth Feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have the right to know what differences you have made and how your ideas have been listened to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always ensure you have feedback in an agreed time. Tell you how your ideas have been used and why. Tell you what happens next.
<p>7</p> <p>Gweithio'n well drosoch chi Working better for you</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who make decisions that affect children and young people should put children's rights at the centre of everything they do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with you and learn how we can do things better. Ensure your views make a difference to the way we make plans and decisions.