

Appendix 1

Bridgend County Borough Council

Engagement and Participation Strategy

This document is also available in Welsh.

Foreword

We recognise that local people should be involved in decisions about public services and policies that affect their lives.

Our Participation and Engagement Strategy 2023 has been developed to outline the steps we will take as a Council to keep people well-informed about our services.

With a wide selection of channels available to us, we want to ensure that we offer the best opportunity to listen and respond to people's views and engage with all members of our community around the services we deliver for the people of Bridgend County Borough.

We know that by working with citizens and involving them in the decision-making process, by addressing their concerns through consultation and involving them early in the process, we will be in a much better position to make key decisions about changes that can affect them.

We want to build trusting relationships within our local communities and improve our accessibility and accountability to local people.

As we have set out in our 'Delivering Together' Corporate Plan 2023–28, we have committed to consulting with the public on an annual basis and publishing our self-assessment of how we have done in the previous year.

We want to achieve more than this though, by ensuring that public engagement and participation is an integral part of our planning and decision making process. This strategy will ensure that by regular engagement with local people, we are in a stronger position to develop services that meet the needs and improve outcomes for our local communities.

This strategy will not only look to improve existing engagement methods but will also identify new and emerging ways to engage with as many people in our communities as possible.

Mark Shephard, Chief Executive

Council Leader, Huw David

Introduction

Bridgend County Borough Council has a duty to engage effectively with the people of Bridgend. We believe that good engagement is the responsibility of everyone who works for the Council. Communication is two-way and it is important that we listen to and take on ideas from the public as well as giving out clear information. This strategy sets out how we will do this.

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

- 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

We will also follow best practice and national standards, for example the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards and the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales. This strategy sets out our corporate approach to engagement with the people of Bridgend County Borough.

The principle of this strategy is to promote choice, independence and collaborative working. Bridgend County Borough Council wants to listen, to understand people's needs and work with them to fulfil those needs.

The council engages with all key stakeholders of Bridgend County Borough.

The area we cover

Bridgend county borough covers around 100 square miles with a population of 145,760 in the 2021 census. In our population –

- 50.6% are female and 49.4% are male.
- 1.48% of people identify as Asian, 0.29% identify as black, 1.16% identify as mixed race, 96.78% identify as white and 0.29% identify as other ethnic group.
- 17.9% of people are aged 0-15, 61.4% are 16-64 and 20.7% are 65+.
- 22.64% of our population have reported disabilities that limit their day-to-day activities a little or a lot.
- 91.03% of people are straight, 1.35% are gay or lesbian, 0.95% are bisexual and 0.20% are other. 6.47% did not answer that question
- 94.4% of people are the same gender as registered at birth, 5.33% didn't answer the question
- 0.12% have a different gender identity to that registered at birth: 0.06% are trans women, 0.05% are trans men, 0.02% are non-binary and 0.02% are other sexual orientations

Our Participation Duties

As a Local Authority we have statutory duties to involve communities in shaping our services. However, our principal reason for involving communities in our processes is because we see the value communities add to discussions, and the great improvements in council services that come from having people involved in planning and decision-making processes.

Feedback suggests we could be more consistent in inviting and enabling participation and engagement, improve how we share learning and experiences to make the most of our collective community resource, as well as improve communication and feedback on engagement processes to demonstrate impact.

This feedback has informed the key strands of our strategy.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a number of duties on local authorities regarding participation. These are to:

1. Promote awareness of the functions the Council carries out for local residents, businesses and visitors.
2. Share information about how to go about becoming an elected Member, or Councillor, and what the role of Councillor involves.
3. Provide greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the Council.
4. Provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the Council, including comments, complaints, and other types of representations.

Engagement Principles

We have signed up to **The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales**

which gives guidance for best practice on citizens engagement. This ensures information provided is jargon free, appropriate, and understandable.

- Participation: People being actively involved with strategy makers and service planners from an early stage of policy and service planning and review
- Consultation: A formal process by which policy makers and service providers ask for the views of interested groups and individuals
- Engagement: An active and participative process by which people can influence and shape policy and services that includes a wide range of different methods and techniques
- Co-production: An asset-based approach to public services that enables people providing and people receiving services to share power and responsibility, and to work together in equal, reciprocal, and caring relationships.
- Involvement: requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of “working with” rather than “doing to” and being supported to remain involved through the process.

Engagement and Participation methods

It is important that our communities have a clear understanding about the purpose of any activity that is designed to involve them, so that it is clear to them whether, and to what extent, they can influence decisions being made.

We currently use a range of different methods to encourage residents and businesses across the County Borough to get involved in key council decisions. Current methods are detailed below:

Methods	
Bridgend County Borough Council website	Contains the latest information about what's going on, the services we provide and how you can get involved.
Citizens Panel	Made up of a group of people who live in Bridgend County Borough and are regularly consulted on services run by the council by signing up here: https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/my-council/consultations/citizens-panel/
Digital communication platform	Residents can subscribe to choose the news or updates they want to receive.
Digital engagement platform	An opportunity for residents and others to contribute to decision making by taking part in consultations. These are available on the website during the consultation period and advertised via our social media platforms.
My Account	Reporting issues to the Council using our online forms Managing your council tax account online Managing your housing benefit account online Request pest control visit (domestic properties only) Apply for school admissions and free school meals
Social Media	A presence on social media sites Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube
Chatbot	Conduct an online chat conversation via text or text-to-speech, finding answers to a wide variety of queries instantly.
In person	Residents and businesses can get involved with engagement and participation activities by attending our Civic offices, local libraries and community-based consultation events.
Petitions	An ePetition is a petition which collects signatures online.

Methods	
	<p>Anyone who lives, works or studies in the area can submit or sign an ePetition.</p> <p>ePetitions are part of the Council's ongoing commitment to listening to and acting on the views of the public.</p> <p>Details relating to ePetitions can be found under the Council's Petition Scheme</p>
Out-of-hours Customer Services	Emergency issues such as homelessness, highways and more
Concerns and formal complaints policy	<p>Opportunities to feedback any concerns or complaints you may have about our services.</p> <p>Information can be found on Bridgend Council's website</p>
Bridgend Public Services Board	Brings together public bodies who deliver services locally to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Bridgend.
Webcasting	Join Committee meetings live or playback, as well as accessing meeting agendas and reports and the ability to contribute to certain meeting such as Development Control Committee.
Contacting your Councillor	A full list of Councillors' contact details by ward are available on Bridgend County Borough's website, for residents to discuss issues or concerns within their ward.
Council public meetings	Members of the public are able to attend Civic Offices to view public meetings in person, live online, as well as ask questions in line with section 4.18 of Bridgend County Borough Council's Constitution .
Watching / Getting involved in council meetings	The majority of council meetings are recorded and streamed live online for residents to watch, as well as being stored in the archive for residents to refer to at a later time.
Overview and Scrutiny Committees	<p>The public and other stakeholders can get involved in scrutiny by providing evidence to a committee, suggesting an items for scrutiny by completing a request form, or by speaking at a committee as a representative. Further information can be found on https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/my-council/democracy-and-elections/overview-and-scrutiny-committees/.</p>
Becoming a member of the council	Anyone who meets certain qualifying criteria, can stand at the next Local Elections in May 2027 to represent their community as a Councillor in the Council and have their say in how things

Methods	
	<p>are run in Bridgend. 'Be a Councillor' awareness sessions are run about 6 months prior to the elections.</p> <p>https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/my-council/democracy-and-elections/have-you-thought-about-becoming-a-councillor/</p>
Engaging with Town and Community Councils	<p>Town and Community Councils contact information is available on the Council's website.</p> <p>https://democratic.bridgend.gov.uk/mgParishCouncilDetailsList.aspx</p>

Your Council's 7 Wellbeing Objectives

Your Council has 7 wellbeing objectives in place and this Strategy has been developed in line with these to ensure all key stakeholders across Bridgend County Borough are involved in key strategic decision. The Council's wellbeing objectives are:

- A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable
- A County Borough with fair work, skilled, high-quality jobs and thriving towns
- A County Borough with thriving valleys communities
- A County Borough where we help people meet their potential
- A County Borough that is responding to the climate and nature emergency
- A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of a community.

A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives to achieve these objectives whilst ensuring effective engagement and participation, we aim to do the following:

	<u>Aim</u>	<u>Method</u>
Inform	<p>Providing appropriate (balanced and objective) information about services, policies, and decisions to highlight the issues or problems to be solved, and the solutions being considered</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Collecting or using existing information about the views and needs of local people to inform services, policies, and decisions</p>	<p>By using the appropriate communication and engagement methods to keep communities informed and by keeping information about the views and needs of local people accurate and updated to best inform the decision-making process across services</p>
Consult	<p>Offering an appropriate (one-off or time limited) opportunity to have a say about a service, policy, or decision</p>	<p>By keeping communities informed, offering timely opportunities to raise concerns and provide feedback, and by demonstrating the impact of engagement on decisions made</p>
Involve	<p>Providing opportunities to have a say and get involved in activities in a more influential and timely way (on an ongoing basis)</p>	<p>By collaborating with communities to ensure their concerns and their ambitions directly influence the options considered, and by demonstrating the impact of engagement on decisions made</p>
Collaborate	<p>Working in partnership in each aspect of the decision-making process, including developing and selecting the preferred solutions to issues or problems</p>	<p>By actively seeking advice and innovative ideas from communities to develop options for consideration and by incorporating that advice and those ideas into the final decisions taken</p>
Empower	<p>Where appropriate, empowering partners to lead decision making processes and/or placing the final decision in the hands of the community or relevant stakeholders</p>	<p>By listening to what those empowered have to say, accepting constructive feedback and comments and implementing what those empowered to drive decision making decide or recommend</p>

Geographical communities

We will engage with citizens in specific locations as well as across the County Borough as a whole. This engagement will take place in our towns and the wider rural setting. We will also make sure that we engage with relevant communities of interest. This is where people have a shared characteristic, experience, or interest, for example carers, or those with specific expertise.

Equality Impact Assessments

When we make plans to create a new policy or change the way we do things, we must consider the impact this will have on our citizens, including those who have protected characteristics.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) brings together the relevant legislations and sets out how we will take due regard, (give appropriate weight), to making decisions. Appendix A explains more about 'due regard'. When we carry out an EIA:

- We are considering relevant evidence to understand the likely or actual effects of policies or practices on those who are vulnerable within our communities, including those who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- We are thinking about where we might be able to reduce negative impacts.
- We are identifying missed opportunities and capitalising on positive impacts.
- We are considering the rights of the child.

These are characteristics that are protected by the Equality Act 2010. It is essential that we reach out to these communities so that we can capture their lived experiences, which will better inform our understanding of the impact of our actions and decisions. This feeds into our requirement to carry out Equality Impact Assessments. These characteristics are :

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour, or nationality
- Religion or belief – including lack of belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership' (in terms of discrimination in employment).

Stakeholders

Carrying out a stakeholder analysis will help to identify key stakeholders and their levels of influence. We will also ensure that engagement is inclusive across the diverse make up of our communities. We will include people with protected characteristics and marginalised or seldom heard people and communities in our engagement.

Engagement with Elected Members

Elected Members are leaders within their communities and can provide important links to engage with a wide range of people. In addition to matters of interest to their wards, Elected Members may sit on several different Committees and will attend full Council meetings.

We will ensure Elected Members have the right information at the right time to enable them to engage with their constituents.

Engagement with Staff

We employ around 6,000 people. Our staff have a very wide base of experience and come from a diversity of backgrounds. We engage with our staff by several different means including staff news bulletins, e-mails, and surveys. We are in the process of developing a new staff portal for our staff to use, which will increase staff involvement, engagement, and communication. Human Resources directly engage with staff and unions on employment matters.

Engagement with Children and Young people

All children and young people have numerous rights. The right to have their views taken seriously, to freedom of expression, to have access to appropriate information, to have dignity, independence, and active participation in their community. These rights are protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Meaningful engagement with children and young people across Bridgend will lead to services and policies being more relevant and appropriate to their needs.

Bridgend Youth Council are a diverse group of young people aged between 11-25 years. They actively work in partnership with Bridgend Council and other organisations to make positive changes for young people. We hold monthly meetings to discuss current issues faced by young people in Bridgend and how we can work towards resolving them.

Digital Engagement Platform

We will improve engagement through the development of a digital engagement platform specifically for consultation to give us the ability to create a cohesive series of engagement activities. The digital platform will enable us to organise engagement across the council services. Some examples of tools that can be utilised in a digital platform are:

- Surveys
- Quick polls

- Story walls
- Ideas sharing
- Timeline of engagement

It is hoped that through utilising these tools we can improve our engagement with citizens in Bridgend County Borough.

Evaluation, Feedback, Drawing Conclusions and Making Recommendations

We will feedback the results of our consultation and engagement activities in a variety of ways, such as publishing reports on our website and providing direct feedback to groups or organisations involved in our engagement. The feedback will summarise an evaluation of our engagement and also demonstrate how the engagement influenced and was considered with our decision making.

Our aims and ambitions

We want to ensure our residents and other key stakeholders are involved in key strategic decisions. The following aims have therefore been developed to ensure we achieve this.

Aim 1	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 Bridgend County Borough
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Aim 2	Ensure effective engagement and participation across Bridgend County Borough
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Aim 3	Keep up to date with the latest and best methods of engaging with residents of Bridgend County Borough
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How will this be achieved

To achieve these aims, we will:

- Further develop our new digital consultation and engagement platform across a range of consultation/engagement activities
- Embrace the use of digital discussions, such as forums, social media live streams, webinar to further improve levels of engagement with Bridgend residents
- Maintain non-digital methods of community engagements to improve the overall levels of engagement across the county borough
- Make sure all council consultation and engagement activities are published in fully accessible formats,

- Improve levels of engagement with residents who have protected characteristics
- Ensure timely feedback is given on the outcomes from all consultation and engagement activities
- Continually review this Strategy to ensure it is kept up to date with the latest engagement developments
- Update the staff engagement toolkit to ensure consistency across all consultation and engagement activities
- Liaise with key partners across Wales to share methods of best practice
- Review feedback from residents and other key stakeholders to monitor and measure effectiveness
- Review and improve the way we inform people about the Council's responsibilities.
- Ensure that consultations with children and young people are more frequent, engaging and age appropriate.

Measuring Success

To measure the outcome of the implementation of this strategy, we will monitor:

- Site hits and registrations on both our digital engagement and communication platforms
- The number of responses and levels of engagement we receive to public engagement exercises
- Engagement levels with both the Scrutiny process and petitions.
- National Survey for Wales questions regarding Local Democracy
- Review how the consultation has impacted on policy development and service delivery
- Liaise with children and young people to ensure feedback has been given to them and actioned where appropriate.