BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO PARTNERSHIPS AND GOVERNANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

05 APRIL 2016

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE – LEGAL & REGULATORY SERVICES

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH SCRUTINY

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   To advise Members of the plans to develop public engagement with Scrutiny

2.   Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

2.1   The report supports all of the corporate priorities:

1.   **Supporting a successful economy** – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business and ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.

2.   **Helping people to be more self-reliant** – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.

3.   **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible; and supporting the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver its vision.

3.   Background

3.1   At its meeting on 29 October 2014, the Committee agreed that scrutiny officers develop steps to promote public engagement in scrutiny in order to meet its statutory obligation through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to ensure the public engage with scrutiny by:

- establishing the extent and range of public engagement activities that are already being undertaken,
- identifying existing and new opportunities to increase public knowledge and understanding of scrutiny;
- developing suitable protocols to increase the opportunities for the public to engage with Scrutiny

3.2   Section 62 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure) places a requirement on local authorities to make arrangements that enable all persons who live or work in the area to bring to the attention of the relevant overview and scrutiny committees their views on any matter under consideration by the committee. Section 62 also provides that an overview and scrutiny committee must take into

account any views brought to its attention in accordance with arrangements under this section.

3.3   As such, the statutory guidance in relation to the Measure states that overview and scrutiny committees are expected to raise public awareness about their role and function. However, in common with other local authorities across Wales, engagement in scrutiny is sporadic. Public attendance at formal committee meetings is low.

3.4   Improving public engagement is a significant challenge faced by all local authorities. There are numerous opportunities which could be progressed to enhance public engagement. However, the resources required to implement and sustain any or all of these opportunities is likely to be limited and the most cost effective and efficient methods of engagement need to be prioritised and developed.

3.5   The Bridgend County Borough Council Consultation and Engagement Toolkit was issued in August 2014. The toolkit integrates Participation Cymru's National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales that have been adopted by the council. In summary the ten principles that underpin effective consultation are:

1. Ensuring consultation and engagement is effectively designed to make a difference.

2. Encouraging and enabling everyone affected to be involved, if they choose to be.

3. Ensuring consultation and engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way.

4. Working with relevant partners.

5. Providing information that is jargon free, appropriate and understandable.

6. Making it easier for people to take part.

7. Enabling people to take part effectively.

8. Giving the right resources and support to be effective.

9. Telling people the impact of their contribution.

10. Learning and sharing lessons to improve the process of engagement.

4.   Current Situation / Proposal

4.1   The Consultation and Engagement Toolkit identifies a number of traditional methods for engaging with stakeholders and the public. These include:

4.1.1 Citizens' Panel
There are currently 1,400 members of the Citizens' Panel who receive up to three surveys per year on a range of topics such as street cleanliness, customer service and the local housing strategy. It is important that the Citizens' Panel reflects the

views of as many different groups of people as possible to ensure that the panel is representative of the people of Bridgend County Borough. Members receive updates through a newsletter 'you said, we did'. The newsletter shows panel members how responses have changed the way the council operates.

4.1.2   Questionnaires – Postal and online
Sophisticated software used within the council allows for all postal and online response data to be held in one location. This enables the council to: analyse data more easily; use OCR readers to scan paper copies of surveys automatically and create bespoke online surveys accessible through mobiles, tablets and laptops. The method is used frequently within the council from small internal surveys to major engagement projects such as the budget consultation and the council's Citizens' Panel.

4.1.3   In-depth interviews.
The consultation and engagement team have recently received additional training as part of a Local Service Board project in engaging with the public using one-to-one interviewing techniques. The method is popular for developing initial concepts or adding qualitative input to quantitative findings. Regarding scrutiny, this method could be useful in gaining service feedback in unique cases including the potential use of audio or visual recording for feedback purposes.

4.1.4   Voting pads.
During meetings with groups where there are several set questions the council wish to have answered using voting pads allows presentations to record feedback through response cards (also referred to as voting pads or clicker pads). These handheld devices allow attendees to 'vote' on an option during presentations. All data is then collated and automated reports are created for reflection purposes. These voting pads have been used successfully as part of senior management meetings and during the budget consultation.

4.1.5   Workshops.
Typically one day events for 10-30 people, the workshop tends to explore various aspects of a specific issue rather than aiming to reach decisions. The workshop allows more qualitative based data from open-ended information. Workshops are useful to generate detailed information but would require further analysis as it is not statistically reliable. Having experts present helps to guide the attendees and allows the council to manage expectations. These have been used during Active Travel consultations.

4.1.6   Focus groups.
A meeting typically involving 8-12 people, with the intention of an in-depth discussion to gather views/ideas. The focus group itself can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Semi-structured or unstructured focus groups give the opportunity to explore based on the conversational direction of the group. Structured focus groups ensure that questions requiring answers are all addressed to the council's requirements. The consultation team has a database of citizens who may be interested in attending focus groups.

4.1.7   Exhibitions, roadshows and public meetings.
Exhibitions and roadshows (along with open days) provide an opportunity for members of the public to see information such as plans, maps, photographs,

displays as well as ask questions on the particular subject. They can be used for exploratory or confirmatory based questions. The technique can humanize the council in their decisions and gives an excellent opportunity for two-way dialogue. They should only be undertaken when you have a clear understanding of what you are trying to achieve as the process may come under scrutiny.

4.1.8　The purpose of public meetings is to share information, ideas, develop relationships etc. Attendance is open to any interested member of the public. The meeting allows two-way dialogue but may also involve scrutiny from attendees. The occasion is a good opportunity for both sides to express their views.

4.1.9　Attendance to such events is typically low due to the emergence of online communication methods. Managing the events with activities is crucial to ensure effective use of resources.

4.1.10 Alternative methods are less common but in some instances are more suitable than the traditional methods.
- Door step and street surveys.
- Forums.
- Polls, referenda and ballots.
- Action planning – event(s) where citizens work with experts on issues for community benefit.
- Community visioning – the community sets clear, realistic goals, before working backwards to achieve them.
- Vox pops – are short collated video recordings of individual responses

4.1.11 It should be noted that not all engagement has involved the consultation and engagement team but it has been supported at least 20 engagement events during the 2015-16 financial year.

4.1.12 The Communications, Marketing and Engagement team also provide assistance to Officers to select a suitable combination of promotional messages, tools and activities to reach the target audiences:
- Webpages – documents can be published on the council's, partner's and/or dedicated sites.
- Social media – the council has a corporate Twitter, Facebook and Flickr. Some service areas also have their own dedicated social media pages.
- Push strategy promotion – encourage promotional activity from: press releases; externally promote through the bi-annual County Borough Bulletin, or; in the Civic Offices using the information screens.
- Internal promotion – Reach all staff through the Bridgenders email, the Bridgenders magazine issued quarterly. Councillors can also be reached directly via the bi-monthly Bridgemembers newsletter.
- Paid advertising – through newspapers and magazines, radio stations or via the internet.
- Posters/leaflet drops – used to promote events or publicise the documents.
- Face to face – presentations, events and public meetings can all be used for two-way interaction.
- Partnerships – provides the benefits of pooled expertise and resources.

4.1.13 The council has three social media accounts currently in operation: Facebook,

Twitter and YouTube. In total there are 4,699 Facebook followers, 6,866 Twitter followers and 3,217 unique views on the council's YouTube videos.

4.1.14 The Facebook and Twitter accounts have been used to host social media debates including consultations on waste collection, the MTFS budget and creating citizen-based performance indicators. These debates reach around 10 per cent of the population with no financial cost.

4.1.15 An event to enhance awareness of scrutiny and how scrutiny can benefit the Authority and the public could be developed. The session could explain the role of scrutiny and how it could be used to improve engagement with the public, partner organisations and in turn enhance the impact of scrutiny.

4.2   Webcasting

4.2.1   Democratic Services has been developing the use of webcasting to increase the openness and transparency of the decision making process.

4.2.2   Following initial technical difficulties the webcasting system was implemented in January 2016. Since then the following meetings have been broadcast and archived:

Committee	Date	Total Views	Unique Views
Development Control Committee	07-Jan-16	826	462
P&G Overview and Scrutiny Committee	14-Jan-16	447	278
CYP Overview and Scrutiny Committee	21-Jan-16	402	305
CEL Overview and Scrutiny Committee	27-Jan-16	333	223
Audit Committee	28-Jan-16	369	255
CRI Overview and Scrutiny Committee	09-Feb-16	328	172
ASC Overview and Scrutiny Committee	11-Feb-16	228	166
Development Control Committee	18-Feb-16	240	136
Cabinet	01-Mar-16	243	176
Council	10-Mar-16	326	174
Total		**3742**	**2347**

4.2.2   The latest viewing figures as at 16 March 2016 show of a total of 3742 views with 2347 of these being unique. These figures are encouraging and they show a significant improvement compared with the numbers of the public attending formal meetings.

4.2.4   The initial feedback from the public is generally positive *"(The webcast) which I must admit was excellent. It certainly saved us valuable time for which we are most grateful".* However some of the feedback provided an opportunity to quickly adapt our procedures to address minor concerns. Examples of this include:

Technical
- Improving access to the webcasts from the BCBC website by adding links from a variety of logical locations on the BCBC website.
- Displaying suitable messages at the start of the broadcast before the meeting begins to inform the public of relevant information, performance and innovations. These messages have included; planning statistics, advertisement of the social

media facilities of the authority and performance data of the authority in comparison with other Local Authorities in Wales.
- Developing the information available during the webcast including links to reports and presentations and to Elected Member profiles on the BCBC webpages.

Procedural
- providing explanations of the meeting procedure during the webcast to enable the audience to have a better understanding exactly what is happening at the meeting.
- modifying the "Apologies for absence" process,

Personal
- providing a short briefings before webcasts to advise Elected Members of good practice.
- Elected Members were requested to view recordings and identify opportunities to minimise any ineffective practices and to improve the experience of the viewer in future webcasts.

4.3   Modern.gov (committee administration system)

4.3.1   The implementation of this committee administration system has provided the ability for the public to subscribe to updates and be automatically provided with information subsequently published on the topics they have identified. It also enables internal and external subscribers to be automatically sent reports for committees when they are published.

4.3.2   However, this has only led to 3 members of the public utilising this feature. Greater efforts are needed to make the public aware of this facility and its benefits.

4.4   Progressing Engagement Opportunities

4.4.1   Based on the available options and the existing resource limitations the following have been identified as the most appropriate tools to be developed and increase the opportunities for public engagement.

4.4.2   Scrutiny page(s) on the BCBC Website

4.4.3   Following discussions with the Marketing and Engagement Team it was identified that further work was needed on the webpages to encourage greater accessibility and interaction. The scrutiny page is not very easy to find without actively searching for the term 'scrutiny'. Further work is being undertaken with the Marketing and Engagement Team to provide the scrutiny webpages with a higher profile which will enable easier access to the public.

4.4.4   The Scrutiny webpages require updating to meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. This creates an opportunity to review the content of all of the scrutiny webpages. To make positive changes to the scrutiny pages, the following amendments were suggested:

- The webpage should be simple, well designed, friendly and easy to read, as there is not much text and you do not need to move the page up or down to read all of the content. A suggested layout is shown in Figure 1 below.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Scrutiny</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny Explained
What is it?
How does it work?</td>
<td>Scrutiny Committees
Details of the scrutiny Committees</td>
<td>Scrutiny Reports
View reports presented to Scrutiny Committees Subscribe to updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny Work Programmes
Details of the Scrutiny work that will be undertaken this year</td>
<td>Getting Involved

Can I get involved?
How can I have my views heard?</td>
<td>Scrutiny Request Form

A form for the public to suggest a topic to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee</td>
</tr>
</table>

Figure 1

4.4.5 This will require the scrutiny process chart / map to be updated and simplified to reduce the volume of formally worded text, which can be intimidating or off-putting for some readers.

4.4.6 During research it was identified that Conwy integrate their Scrutiny webpage page within the Modern.gov system. This enables the Scrutiny Request form to be completed and submitted online. This would require further development of our Modern.gov webpages but could be implemented in due course.

4.4.7 With the improvements to the webpages the Scrutiny presence on the intranet and internet can be enhanced to increase awareness. Adding relevant links to other teams/ departments webpages in order to direct traffic to and from the Scrutiny webpages. One service area which may increase the awareness of Scrutiny is to integrate the role of scrutiny as part of the complaints process.

4.5 <u>Enhancing webcasts</u>

4.5.1 Webcasting does not afford the public the opportunity to interact as it only allows one way communication from the Authority to the public rather than providing two way engagement.

4.5.2 To address this issue it is intended to develop the integration of Twitter feeds into the webcast for scrutiny meetings. This will enable the public to provide their views into the meetings whilst watching the live webcast. The tweets from the public can be monitored during each meeting and responses to the tweets can be provided via the webcast. This will provide rapid turnaround of questions and provide answers to the whole webcast audience

4.5.3 The initial tranche of webcast meetings has been completed and a review is now being carried to assess the Forward Work Programmes of committees and likely interests of the public to optimise viewing figures and participation.

4.5.4 Once the webcasting programme is developed it could be promoted on the BCBC

social media accounts and on the website. The publicity would outline the meetings being webcast and how the public can have their say during some of the meetings via twitter.

4.6   Development of the Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes

4.6.1 It is acknowledged that the public will engage with the Authority on specific issues which have a direct impact on them. Previously the published Scrutiny Forward Work Programme has contained generalised topics which lacked the specific impact and outcomes which would encourage the public to participate with Scrutiny.

4.6.2 With the forward work programmes currently being developed for 2016-17 there is an opportunity to provide clear and specific descriptions of the plan items being considered as part of the scrutiny process.

4.6.5 The Scrutiny Forward Work Programme currently being developed by Elected Members would benefit from appropriate input from partner organisations or the general public.

4.7   Developing Opportunities for Engagement with Partners and other Organisations

4.7.1 There are a few established opportunities for others to participate in the scrutiny process. Current arrangements provide for Registered Representatives with the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and occasional invitees from partner organisations which have included representatives of the Registered Social Landlords of the County Borough and Community Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4.7.2 The Committee may wish to consider to establish an informal pool of contacts from our partner and other organisations who could be invited to:
   • attend scrutiny meetings during consideration of suitable topics to provide a specialist perspective to the debate.
   • provide filmed interviews.

4.7.3 Initial discussions have been held with the Partnerships Team who are compiling a list of partner and third sector organisations. These organisations and partners could be contacted to promote the opportunities for engagement with scrutiny and to be invited to participate in the scrutiny process.

4.7.4 The Town and Community Council Charter has also recently been revised with one of the proposals being that the Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes be made available to Town and Community Councils and discussed at quarterly meetings with their Clerks. This would enhance the awareness of the topics being considered and appropriate engagement encouraged.

4.7.5 Many Elected Members are also Town and Community Councillors which could provide an opportunity for them to act as ambassadors for Scrutiny and to promote engagement with their Town or Community Council.

4.7.6 It is also hoped that the relationship with the Youth Council can be developed in order increase their awareness of scrutiny and enable them to submit their views to the Scrutiny Committees.

4.7.7 To support the engagement with these organisation the updated Scrutiny Forward Work Programme will need to be published updated regularly and utilise cost effective advertising via social media to promote engagement.

4.8 Engagement Material

4.8.1 To support and promote the engagement with the public additional material may be needed. The following opportunities could be developed:

- Flyer/posters to be placed on notice boards in Leisure and Community Centres and on the public notice boards supported by Town & Community Councils
- Scrutiny Slideshows on the display screens in the reception of the Civic Offices and other Council Buildings
- Press releases and the publication of information via the BCBC twitter, Facebook and You Tube facilities.

4.9 E-Petitions

4.9.1 The Modern.Gov functionality includes an e-petition facility. The software allows members of the public to submit a request via the internet for an e-Petition to be published on the website.

4.9.2 A number of Councils have used the e-petition process and one active example is Lambeth Council with Welsh authorities including Conwy, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire and Merthyr Tydfil keen to develop the e-petition process.

4.9.3 The experience and lessons learned of other authorities can be used to determine how the e-petition process can be developed for use in Bridgend in the future.

4.10 Modern.gov (committee administration system)

4.10.1 Following a review of the webpages to meet with the revised Welsh Language Standards, changes were made which improves the access to subscribe to updates and other information regarding the democratic processes. The use of the subscribe to updates functionality will be monitored over the next 3 months to determine whether further advertisement and action is required.

4.11 Managing Expectation

4.11.1 It was indicated that it was very difficult to stop members of the public contacting Scrutiny once their awareness was raised of the scrutiny function and invited the communication of issues. Forthcoming changes (e.g. budget cuts and merger) will naturally lead to an increase in uncertainty and frustration with residents. This will require the careful management of the scrutiny profile carefully to prevent the team being inundated with cases and disappointing the public by being unable to deal with issues in a timely and effective manner.

4.12 Achieving the desired outcomes

4.12.1 Progressing these engagement opportunities will take considerable resources and

time and therefore it is intended that the period until 31 March 2017 be used to develop those opportunities that the Committee considers viable.

4.12.2 The review will identify those opportunities which are considered as providing effective engagement within existing resources which can then be fully implemented and where appropriate integrated into the induction programme following the 2017 Local Government Elections.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

5.1 The work of the Partnerships and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee relates to the review and development of plans, policy or strategy that form part of the Policy Framework and consideration of plans, policy or strategy relating to the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental well being in the County Borough of Bridgend.

5.2 Development and implementation of the opportunities described in this report may lead to changes being required to the procedure rules listed within the Bridgend County Borough Council Constitution.

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

6.1 This report identifies engagement opportunities with the public which will have to be developed bilingually to meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. There are no other direct equalities impact issues arising from this report.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 The report has highlighted that any decisions of the Committee will have to be developed within existing resources which are subject to the constraints of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

8. Recommendation

8.1 The Committee is requested to note the content of the report and provide their views regarding the development and implementation of a viable action plan.

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Background Documents:
The Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011