

Public Engagement How can the Council improve its engagement practices?

**An Inquiry by the Public Engagement Inquiry Panel
City and County of Swansea - Dinas a Sir Abertawe**

June 2014



Why This Matters



Convener
Councillor Joe Hale

Good Public engagement is fundamental to the success of any large organisation especially when there are severe economic pressures to contend with such as those affecting public spending at the moment.

This inquiry panel sought to take a fresh look at how the Council engages with communities and people at the forefront of delivering quality services for the residents of Swansea.

The panel believe that all engagement needs to be citizen centred, it needs to be genuine and not tokenistic. Our organisation needs to know who it needs to engage with, when that engagement should take place and why; more importantly it needs to be told the outcomes to those engagement exercises.

In order to bridge the gap in Health, Wealth and Education that exists in Swansea the panel felt that the Council needed an engagement strategy that was inclusive, with citizens being equal partners in delivery of services in a rapidly changing landscape. Only then will we be able to have equality in partnerships and decision making that affects our communities, our environment, where we live and where we work.

Throughout the inquiry the panel recognised the good public engagement that has taken place but we have also recognised where lessons have needed to be learnt.

The panel would like to thank everyone who contributed to the inquiry and it hopes the recommendations will be acted upon and will lead to a more inclusive engagement strategy.

Summary

1. Aims of the Review

- How is the Council meeting the objectives within the Consultation and Involvement Strategy?
- How well is Swansea Voices and other consultation and engagement mechanisms used to engage the public in Council decision making?
- How will the current review of Corporate Culture improve the Council's engagement with staff?
- How does the Council promote engagement in the Local Service Board?
- How will budget cuts impact on the Council's ability to consult and engage its stakeholders?

2. Evidence Considered

- Briefing report - how the Council delivers its objectives under the Consultation and Engagement Strategy, provided by Head of Service for Communications and Consultation, Lee Wenham, and the Corporate Consultation Co-ordinator, Rhian Millar.
- Consultation and engagement good practice report – examples from within the Council
- National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales – Participation Cymru
- Verbal evidence on external examples provided by the Welsh Local Government Association, Clover Rodrigues
- Question and answer session with the Local Service Board lead officer, Dave Mckenna, and the Chair of the LSB engagement Group, Cllr Christine Richards
- Question and answer session with Corporate Services Director, Dean Taylor and Head of Service for Communications and Consultation, Lee Wenham
- Briefing report and question and answer session the review of corporate culture with Head of HR, Steve Rees

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Swansea Voices is a significant corporate consultation and engagement tool used to understand the views and needs of residents but the social demographic make-up was unclear to the panel
- 3.2 There are excellent examples of consultation and engagement good practice identified across the Council and these should be shared
- 3.3 The Local Service Board is an important collaborative body and would benefit from greater public engagement and councillor involvement
- 3.4 The panel is supportive of the Cabinet Member's policy commitments which related to public and staff engagement
- 3.5 Effective staff engagement is important for continuous organisational improvement
- 3.6 Councillors are a useful source of information from their wards and communities and could be better engaged during consultations
- 3.7 The Council uses a variety of methods to communicate with residents of Swansea

4. Recommendations

The Panel recommends to Cabinet that it:

- 4.1 Provides information via a variety of media, including Swansea Voices, to councillors and residents on how to become a Swansea Voices panellist, how it functions, the social demographic profile of the panel, results and outcomes.
- 4.2 Reviews the social demographic make-up of Swansea Voices and takes any action required to ensure that the panel is representative of the communities of Swansea.
- 4.3 Reports to Council on how Swansea Voices influences policy development and Council decision making.
- 4.4 Ensures that all consultation and engagement is carried out in line with any the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, with a particular focus on participant feedback.
- 4.5 Senior managers must increase visibility to services users during public consultation and engagement events.
- 4.6 Increases community involvement in significant planning issues by setting up community planning groups, going beyond the statutory to notify residents.
- 4.7 Increases non-executive councillor engagement in the Local Service Board by holding open meetings and providing meeting details and minutes to all councillors.
- 4.8 Improves public engagement in the Local Service Board by making its meetings open and accessible to the public.
- 4.9 Works with the LSB to develop greater coordination of engagement between the LSB partners and develops the LSB Engagement Group as a group of experts providing advice to the wider LSB on consultation and engagement.
- 4.10 Implements a programme of regular and ongoing staff engagement which encourages openness and sharing of ideas and which has clear link to the Chief Executive (“golden thread”) by the end of the calendar year.
- 4.11 Keeps staff informed on a quarterly basis of changes within the organisation as a result of the review of corporate culture.
- 4.12 Includes in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy a method to inform councillors of consultation and engagement in their wards and to consult with them, where appropriate, as a stakeholder group.
- 4.13 Includes in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy clear processes to capture information from consultation and engagement; feed it into departments; communicate to participants the change and difference as a result of the consultation
- 4.14 Ensures that all relevant and public consultation and engagement opportunities continue to be posted in the “Have Your Say” section on the website and that this retains its visibility on the Council’s homepage.

- 4.15 Reviews the use, format and focus of the Swansea Leader through engagement with readers and cross-party, non-executive councillors to ensure that it is relevant, provides value for money and is used to its full potential.
- 4.16 In the face of growing demand from the public, maintains provision for face to face contact for residents wishing to engage with the Council in this way.

Full Report

1. Aim of the Inquiry

- 1.1 The aim of the Inquiry was to examine how well the Council engages the public, staff and external stakeholders and how it can improve its engagement practices

2. Evidence Considered

- 2.1 The inquiry was carried out in by the Public Engagement Scrutiny Inquiry Panel over a period of 7 months. The panel held 7 evidence gathering session and 2 additional sessions to write the final report.
- 2.2 The following evidence was considered by the Inquiry Panel between September 2013 and April 2014

Date	Meeting	Evidence considered
11/9/13		Inquiry pre-briefing
28/10/13		Consultation & Engagement Strategy Consultation & engagement good practice
3/12/13		Engagement in the Local Service Board
16/12/13		Cabinet Member's policy commitments
20/1/14		Consultation & engagement good practice and the national perspective
24/2/14		Budget cuts and the Council's ability to consult and engage stakeholders
24/3/14		Corporate culture and staff engagement

3. Conclusions

3.1 Swansea Voices is a significant corporate consultation and engagement but the demographic make-up of it was unclear to the panel

3.1.1 The Council has a duty to consult and engage with residents it provides services for. It does this to:

- Plan services and make them more cost effective
- Provide Citizen Centred Service Delivery
- Develop new ideas
- Improve local democracy and feelings of involvement
- Develop better policies and priorities
- Undertake scrutiny, review and performance.
- Promote community cohesion, inclusion and participation

3.1.2 The Council uses a variety of methods to consult and engage including research activities, information giving, consulting on opinions, direct involvement of stakeholders in service development, collaboration and partnership working in decisions and empowerment of stakeholders to make decisions.

3.1.3 One of the methods used is Swansea Voices Citizens' Panel. The panel consists of a representative sample of 1,250 residents who are regularly consulted by the Council about its services and local issues. The panel has been in operation since 1999. Its membership is regularly refreshed to ensure the Panel continues to be representative of the County's population and to give as many people as possible the opportunity to take part.

3.1.4 The panel was informed that Swansea Voices is one of the main corporate consultation mechanisms used by the Council to ascertain views and opinions of the public on Council service issues, policies and developments. It learned that the majority of the corporate consultation budget was spent on Swansea Voices. Recent areas of consultation have covered subjects such as views of the local neighbourhood and the City Centre; perceptions of safety and security; use of Council services and priorities for the Council's budget.

3.1.5 The panel welcomed the variety of consultation and engagement methods including Swansea Voices. The panel agreed that Swansea Voices could be effectively used for Council policy development but it was not clear how departments used the results and analysis of Swansea Voices. The panel felt that councillors needed to be better informed about Swansea Voices including the results and outcomes of the surveys, how it functioned, the demographic make-up of it and how residents could become a member of Swansea Voices.

3.1.6 The panel concluded that Swansea Voices was a significant and important corporate consultation tool. More needed to be done to understand how the data and analysis was used to influence policy decisions and changes to service

delivery. The panel also concluded that it was of the utmost importance that Swansea Voices was truly representative of the communities within Swansea. The panel therefore recommends that Cabinet:

Provides information via a variety of media, including Swansea Voices, to councillors and residents on how to become a Swansea Voices panellist, how it functions, the social demographic profile of the panel, results and outcomes.

Reviews the social demographic make-up of Swansea Voices and takes any action required to ensure that the panel is representative of the communities of Swansea.

Reports to Council on how Swansea Voices influences policy development and Council decision making.

3.2 There are excellent examples of consultation and engagement good practice identified across the Council and these should be shared

- 3.2.1 Service areas across the Council have developed successful and effective processes for consulting and engaging their stakeholders. The WLGA attended the evidence gathering session which considered good practice and the organisation said that “Swansea is ahead of the game in terms of its consultation practise: it consults in a real and effective way using many different processes”.
- 3.2.2 The panel found evidence of this when it invited representatives from the Children and Young People Participation Team, Community Regeneration Team and the Planning Team to talk to the panel about their consultation practices. The panel was impressed by the scope and extent of recent consultations on the Local Development Plan, Target Area consultation and engagement to tackle poverty and consultation with young people and the Swansea Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB).
- 3.2.3 Each of these consultations were well thought out and scoped, aims and objectives were agreed, a range of methods were used including questionnaires, workshops, interviewer completed questionnaires, social media, online consultation pages, public consultation events and innovative practice was encouraged.
- 3.2.4 The panel found evidence of innovative practice during each of the consultation and engagement good practice examples. During the Swansea Safeguarding Children Board consultation 30 young people and the members of the Board were brought together in one event to make the SSCB more accessible to the young people. The panel heard that Target Areas each had their own engagement officers whose role it was to encourage greater direct community involvement in developing an approach to tackle poverty in Target Areas. To stimulate greater public involvement and engagement in the Local Development Plan the team adopted creative and new approaches to ensure that the consultation was more inclusive and that the resulting policy making was more transparent. This was achieved by a multi-faceted media, public relations and information campaign to raise the profile, providing accessible information for the different types of consultees and undertaking a range of consultation and

engagement activities to ensure as many people as possible were able to contribute.

3.2.5 A common theme that the panel found was that the consultation and engagement activities were taken to the stakeholders so that their involvement was made as easy as possible. The panel also noted that each of these consultations and the innovative practice were all carried out within existing resources, each drew on internal support and support from partners, officers were visible and a good range of engagement methods were used.

3.2.6 In conclusion the panel felt that there were some excellent examples of good practice consultation within the Council and the panel welcomed the WLGA's opinion on consultation in Swansea and felt that this and good practice should be shared throughout the organisation. The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Ensures that all consultation and engagement is properly scoped and carried out in line with the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, with particular focus on participant feedback.

Senior managers must increase their visibility to services users during public consultation and engagement events.

Increases community involvement in significant planning issues by setting up community planning groups, going beyond the statutory to notify residents.

3.3 The Local Service Board is an important collaborative body and would benefit from greater public engagement through councillor involvement

3.3.1 The Local Service Board had recently undergone a structural change to improve the way it works to provide better support to frontline work. A new Engagement Group was established to support the Local Service Board in effective engagement with the public and professionals.

3.3.2 The panel recognised the importance of the Local Service Board as a collaborative body that works across service delivery organisations and partnerships to identify and improve the key health, social and economic challenges in Swansea.

3.3.3 At the time of the inquiry the panel found that engagement in the Local Service Board had been limited to organisations that were members of the it, councillor engagement had been limited and public engagement in the LSB had primarily been associated with the consultation for the One Swansea Plan.

3.3.4 The panel felt that greater public engagement in the Local Service Board could help improve the outcomes of the Local Service Board and through its discussions, identified a number of ways in which greater public involvement could be achieved.

- Educate the public: Give the Local Service Board a public face through communication channels to promote why the Local Service Board exists, what it does, what it's achieved and what it hopes to achieve.

- Make the Local Service Board relevant: Narrow the focus of the consultation to stimulate engagement from particular groups that have something to contribute on a specific issue - if an issue affects people they have an incentive to get involved. Not all issues are suited to public engagement.
- Make it accessible - make it easy for people to be involved and to contribute to consultations, engagement exercises, community events. Don't reinvent the wheel, use existing networks, mechanisms to provide ways for people to be involved
- Acknowledge that not everyone has the desire to be involved and that participation might be limited to small numbers.

3.3.5 In conclusion the panel felt that Swansea's Local Service Board would benefit from increased public engagement. The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Works with the LSB to develop greater coordination of engagement between the LSB partners and develops the LSB Engagement Group as a group of experts providing advice to the wider LSB on consultation and engagement.

Increases non-executive councillor engagement in the Local Service Board by holding open meetings and providing meeting details and minutes to all councillors.

Improves public engagement in the Local Service Board by holding open meetings

3.4 The panel is supportive of the Cabinet Member's policy commitments which related to public and staff engagement

3.4.1 The Cabinet Member's policy commitments in this area are:

- Collaboration and a "Team Swansea" approach
- Improving citizen engagement
- Improving staff consultation and engagement and encourage the sharing of ideas
- Reviewing the Corporate Culture of the Council

3.4.2 The panel welcomed the Cabinet Member's commitment to collaboration and agreed that working in an outward facing collaborative way with regional bodies such as the Western Bay in Health and Social Care and the Regional Consortia in Education would produce benefits for the Council.

3.4.3 The Cabinet Member considered that the engagement with young people on the budget proposals was an effective consultation and was keen to use the model in other consultations. The panel welcomed the review of Corporate Culture and agreed that genuine staff engagement was vital to the corporate health of the Council.

3.4.5 The panel felt that these policy commitments would help the Council improve its engagement with the public, staff and external stakeholders and its engagement

practices. The panel therefore endorses and supports the Cabinet Member's policy commitments in this area.

3.5 Effective staff engagement is important for continuous organisational improvement

- 3.5.1 The Cabinet Member is committed to improving staff consultation and engagement and to encouraging the sharing of ideas. The last council-wide staff survey was in 2008 and 1.5k responses were received. The panel learned that staff surveys have been carried out since 2008 but more often on particular issues and conducted online. It concerned the panel that there were still many council employees who were not office based and therefore did not have IT access to contribute their views to online staff surveys. The panel welcomed the new strategy that would focus on staff without IT access to ensure that they had the opportunity to contribute their opinions and ideas.
- 3.5.2 The panel learned about the establishment of the staff survey group that was set up to look at employee engagement and good practice in this area. The group will also help develop the staff survey that will be available to staff to complete later in the summer. The panel welcomed this and agreed that this would help the Council understand how staff want to be engaged and the issues they want to be engaged on.
- 3.5.3 The panel was pleased to hear that staff engagement does not incur high expenditure costs but rather it is time costly when it comes to analysing and reporting on the results; with staff reductions this could pose a risk to the achievement of greater staff engagement.
- 3.5.4 The panel felt that significant consultation such as the Council-wide survey needed involvement and visibility of Cabinet Members and senior officers to demonstrate the importance of the survey and the importance of staff to be involved and contribute their ideas.
- 3.5.5 The panel felt that there were a number of good communication tools that were used to communicate with staff – for example Jack's weekly blog and StaffNet. The panel agreed they were good information sharing tools but that on big corporate issues it would be good practice to have an engagement plan with different types of engagement activities which enabled the involvement of as many people as possible.
- 3.5.6 In conclusion the panel felt that staff engagement needed to be regular, feedback provided in a timely fashion which clearly demonstrated how staff views had impacted on changes. The panel felt it important that staff were encouraged to be open and honest when providing their views and that engagement should be regular and ongoing. The panel was supportive of the Council-wide staff survey and felt that the staff survey group was a positive development. The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Implements a programme of regular and ongoing staff engagement which encourages openness and sharing of ideas and which has a clear link to the Chief Executive (the "golden thread") by the end of the calendar year.

Keeps staff informed on a quarterly basis of changes within the organisation as a result of the review of corporate culture.

3.6 Councillors are a useful source of information from their wards and communities and could be better engaged during consultations

3.6.1 It was acknowledged during the evidence gathering sessions that councillors are useful source of information from their wards and that they could be much better engaged during consultations. It was also acknowledged that capturing information from councillors is a challenge. The panel felt that councillors were key stakeholders of the Council, were valid consultees and they were a good way into communities for departments undertaking consultation and engagement activities.

3.6.2 Effective consultation and engagement brings extensive benefits to the citizens and agencies involved, including knowledge of local issues which allows service providers to reach a better understanding of their communities and be more in tune with needs or problems as they arise. Councillors, in their role as the community voice are well placed to help achieve this benefit.

3.6.3 The current consultation and engagement strategy is undergoing a revision. The panel felt that this was an opportune time to include within the framework practice that improves involvement of councillors in corporate and service delivery consultations.

3.6.4 In conclusion the panel felt that Councillors offered valuable and unique perspectives and needed to be an integral part of consultation and engagement practices. The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Includes in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy a method to inform councillors of consultation and engagement in their wards and to consult with them, where appropriate, as a stakeholder group.

Includes in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy clear processes to capture information from consultation and engagement; feed it into departments; communicate to participants the change and difference as a result of the consultation.

3.7 The Council uses a variety of corporate communication methods to engage with residents of Swansea

3.7.1 It was found that the Council, within departments as evidenced in previous sections of this report, and corporately used a wide variety of methods to communicate with residents of Swansea, keep them informed of developments & important issues and enable residents to conduct their business with the Council. The panel welcomed this and agreed that a wide variety of communication methods was important to ensure that all residents had the ability to engage with the Council.

3.7.2 The panel was pleased to hear that the corporate consultation budget had not

been reduced in the last budget and that capacity within this service area was not affected. The panel learned that the Council's role to consult and engage with the public and stakeholders would be developed rather than be reduced. The recent budget consultation moved away from the traditional type of consultation which has asked residents to rate services. Rather, it tried to engage residents in a conversation about how they felt about services and how they would like to see services provided. The panel learned that this was the direction that the Council wanted to move in but that this type of consultation takes time to develop.

- 3.7.3 As well as Swansea Voices which has been addressed in previous sections of this report, the council uses a number of other corporate consultation methods. The Swansea Leader is delivered to 105,000 homes in Swansea, six times per year and costs £74,000 per year to print and deliver. The Swansea Leader offers the Council an opportunity to reduce advertising costs in other media and it is a proven way to disseminate information directly to residents. The effectiveness of the Swansea Leader is regularly tested via Swansea Voices and in the last survey it was ranked 2nd behind the Evening Post as a source of council information. The panel was supportive of the Swansea Leader but felt that now was an appropriate time to review the use of the Leader to ensure that it represented value for money
- 3.7.4 The Council also has the website as a means of communication with the public. There is a "Have your Say" section on the front page of the website which invites visitors to the website to take part in current consultations. The number of visits to the Council's website has increased year on year from 2.5million visits in 2011, 3 million in 2012 and 3.2 million in 2013. The panel learned that the use of social media within the Council as a means of communication, consultation and engagement is in development and will be part of a package of tools used by the Council. There were 29 Twitter accounts and 27 Facebook accounts across the Council in regular use. The Council will need to develop skills within the organisation to use social media to the greatest effect.
- 3.7.5 A very visible and valued method of communication was the contact centre. The panel felt that this was an important service that provided the opportunity of face to face or telephone contact for residents of Swansea. The panel acknowledged that many residents value the importance of being able to speak directly to an officer within the Council to help them resolve an issue or provide them with information or advice. The Contact Centre, along with the wide variety of print, written, social media and electronic communication and engagement methods ensures that all residents have the opportunity to transact business with the Council, receive and share information and to take part in consultation and engagement activities.
- 3.7.6 The panel felt that corporate communications had a role within the Council to help services and departments improve their consultation and engagement practices. There were a number of recent examples of consultations where lessons needed to be learned, for example the EMLAS, care homes and respite consultations. A number of lessons could be taken from these and shared, such as, consultation proposals and information provided were not specific enough, lack of communication between departments and corporate consultation and the

location of consultation events. Given that the Council will continue to feel budget pressures and there will be less resource available for expenditure on consultation, departments and the corporate consultation service will need to strengthen their working relationships to ensure that departments' consultation and engagement exercises are successful and provide value for money

- 3.7.7 In conclusion the panel felt that smarter use of existing consultation, engagement and information tools and improved working between service department and the corporate consultation unit will help to offset the effects of reduced resources and budget pressures. The panel saw the value of electronic communication and social media but felt that maintaining a face to face option of communication for residents in the form of the contact centre was important. This would ensure that a wide variety of methods were available to all residents of Swansea. The Swansea Leader is a valued communication tool but the authority must continue to ensure that it represents value for money. The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Ensures that all relevant and public consultation and engagement opportunities continue to be posted in the "Have Your Say" section on the website and that this retains its visibility on the Council's homepage.

Reviews the use, format and focus of the Swansea Leader through engagement with readers and cross-party, non-executive councillors to ensure that it provides value for money and is used to its full potential.

In the face of growing demand from the public, maintains provision for face to face contact for residents who wish to engage with the Council in this way.

4. Recommendations

The Board commends Cabinet to consider all issues and ideas raised by this inquiry and, in particular, the recommendations set out below.

The Board recognises that the Authority

- (a) will need to ensure that any subsequent actions are legal and meet the requirements of any relevant legislation;
- (b) has a responsibility to make the best use of limited resources and that any additional costs will need to be considered carefully as part of the annual budget setting process.

The Board has kept these principles in mind in the course of its investigations.

The Board recommends to Cabinet that it:

- 4.1 Provides information via a variety of media, including the Swansea Leader, to councillors and residents on how to become a Swansea Voices panellist, how it functions, the social demographic profile of the panel, results and outcomes.
- 4.2 Reviews the social demographic make-up of Swansea Voices and takes any action required to ensure that the panel is representative of the communities of Swansea.
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- 4.12 Includes in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy a method to inform councillors of consultation and engagement in their wards and to consult with them, where appropriate, as a stakeholder group.
- 4.13 Includes in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy clear processes to capture information from consultation and engagement; feed it into departments; communicate to participants the change and difference as a result of the consultation.
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- 4.16 In the face of growing demand from the public, maintains provision for face to face contact for residents wishing to engage with the Council in this way.

Acknowledgements

The Board is very grateful to the following people for their participation and contribution to the review:

Amanda Williams, Manager, Participation Cymru

Rhian Millar, Corporate Consultation Co-ordinator, CCS

Euros Owens, Manager, Access to Services, CCS

Lee Wenham, Head of Service, Communications and Consultation

Councillor Christine Richards, Cabinet Member, Citizen & Community Engagement & Democracy, CCS

Steve Rees, Head of Human Resources, CCS

Daniel Jones, Welsh Government

Julie Gosney, Children's Rights & Participation Manager, CCS

Katie Spendiff, Children & Young People's Participation Officer, CCS

Anthony Richards, Communities First Collaborative Working Connections Officer, CCS

Rachel Davies, Planning Officer, CCS

Clover Rodrigues, Policy Officer Improvement & Governance, Welsh Local Government Association,

About the Public Engagement Scrutiny Inquiry Panel

The **Public Engagement Scrutiny Inquiry Panel** is a body of Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. Their role is to scrutinise the performance of Council services and to make recommendations about how services can be improved.

Members of the Panel

Joe Hale
Ann Cook
Fiona Gordon
Terry Hennegan
Yvonne Jardine
Andrea Lewis
Lesley Walton
Mary Jones
Susan Jones

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