



**To:**  
**Councillor Rob Stewart**  
**Cabinet Member for Economy,**  
**Finance and Strategy (Leader)**

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4 March 2025

Summary: This is a letter from the Public Engagement Scrutiny Working Group to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy. The letter concerns the meeting held on 5 February 2025. A response is requested by 25 March.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

On the 5 February a Scrutiny Working Group met to discuss Public Engagement. We are grateful to you, Lee Wenham and Amy Richmond-Jones from Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service for attending. We received an overview of the work being carried out by the Council in this area and a summary of the engagement approaches used by the Fire Service.

The following work is currently being conducted by the Council -

- Their work with the public targets four areas, providing information, consultation, participation and coproduction covering the spectrum of engagement opportunities.
- The biggest single change has been the demise of traditional media and the growth of social media.
- The team hold a series of events and surveys throughout the year and support individual services with their own engagement.
- There will be a focus in the upcoming municipal year on how to target hard to reach and underrepresented groups.
- Feeding back to the public is important to demonstrate action.
- Audit Wales have produced a Wales wide and Swansea specific report focussing on the perspective of service users so this information will also be reviewed over the next 12 months.

### **Views of young people**

We heard that the views of young people are mainly carried out by the children's rights team which has 5 events planned for 2025 called Big Conversations. Regarding school pupil forums we heard that they deal primarily with school related issues, and that most

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engagement is through the Big Conversations. Overall, we feel this is an important group to hear from and we did feel pupil forums could provide an opportunity to utilise existing groups of young people for Council consultation.

### **Social Media**

We understand that social media is a changeable landscape and when asking about plans to use Bluesky heard that user numbers are still relatively low. The Council's use of Tik Tok is currently increasing due to the increase in adult users but other forms of social media are being constantly monitored and if felt appropriate, Bluesky could be used in future.

### **Online Surveys**

We were informed that online polls are not always a reliable representative response and can be manipulated, which affects their accuracy. Whilst we understand this point, they can often give a quick snapshot. We asked if using polls through YouGov would help to provide structure and security. Currently the Council don't use YouGov mainly due to resource challenges but again officers gave assurance that they are open to the changing landscape. You added that opportunities to increase engagement will always be considered if they add value and costs are reasonable. We heard that there is a large amount of control over SNAP surveys.

We asked for more information on the Data Cymru survey and heard that this was a free opportunity to brand and promote a Wales wide survey. The data is currently being compiled and we will be interested in seeing the localised and benchmarked results. We asked if these 1344 responses were considered a good response, Officers informed us that just over 1000 is usual. Overall, the survey was viewed to be worth the time and resources and the Council would want to take part again in future. We asked if the responses were representative of Swansea as a whole and we heard that the survey will include a breakdown based on categories like protected characteristics and geography. This will be explored further with Data Cymru.

### **Gathering in person responses**

We were interested in how the Council carry out face to face consultation. We heard that for specific topics, localised meetings or groups can be held as was the case for consultation on the Mumbles sea defences. There are also several forums and Big Conversations, so face to face consultation can be carried out if deemed the most appropriate mechanism. Focus groups have not been held since before the pandemic, this appears to mainly be a resource issue but will hopefully form future coproduction work which is suited to this style of engagement. There may also be examples of focus groups elsewhere in the Council not covered in the report. We feel that there is a place for focus groups as these provide an opportunity to give context and meaning as there is a place for qualitative as well as quantitative data.

### **Increasing response rates**

We were interested to find out if the Council research new methods of engagement. Officers highlighted some learning regarding topics that engage and topics that don't, timings and using networks and groups including Councillors. We agreed that using Councillors networks and social media presence can help to boost survey responses.

We felt that some surveys contain a lengthy preamble which can be off putting. The budget survey was highlighted as an example of this. We also received confirmation that surveys do include a “don’t know” option and comments boxes when appropriate.

Regarding the promotion of surveys, officers highlighted the use of the website, social media, known networks and the use of libraries. Community noticeboards are not currently used to promote surveys, but the officer did take this on board as a potential opportunity to consider community centres or district housing offices as locations to target.

We asked if there were any specific targets or efforts related to gathering feedback from the Welsh speaking community and heard about the new Welsh language promotion strategy and work with Menter Iaith Abertawe. It is hoped that through implanting the strategy, engagement with Welsh speakers would increase.

We were interested in how other departments are supported with their own engagement and if there is a cross cutting process/approach to consultation. Departments do generally approach the central team for support so there is a general awareness of engagement across the Council. There is also the opportunity to share ideas. We asked if Council resources are an issue for gathering qualitative data. We heard that this mainly falls on the individual services to provide resources. The analysis would also fall on individual departments.

### **Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service**

We heard from Amy Richmond-Jones how the Fire Service are engaging with the public as an example of how other agencies tackle public engagement. They highlighted the following.

- Use of social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
- Using incentives like competitions.
- Boosting social media posts to target certain demographics and areas with lower response rates.
- Using their external website, internal intranet, internal forums and attending internal meetings to utilise other staff networks.
- Public services boards were identified as extremely helpful in promoting key messages and encouraging information sharing.
- Attending external events including road shows.
- Paid promotion via Wales online.
- Using internal staff groups such as community safety teams and fire crews, to distribute leaflets and raise awareness of any consultation and engagement events within their local areas.
- A stakeholder group who are kept informed.
- A network of community ambassadors, to act as a critical friend.
- Fire cadets and the young persons parliament.
- Advice via the Consultation Institute.
- Evaluation reflection after engagement to identify lessons learnt.

We heard that consultations have not been hugely successful with response rates of around 500 therefore the Fire Service are finding face to face engagement more

fruitful. We felt that this does illustrate the advantages of having multiple approaches, using existing networks internally and externally and the advantages of face to face engagement.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

From the briefing received and questions asked we held a discussion on progress and made the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. We were pleased to hear that there will be further work on consulting with underrepresented groups and will be interested in this being followed up by the Scrutiny Programme Committee in due course.
2. We recommend the Council consider using pupil forums to circulate questionnaires or for consultation.
3. We encourage the Council to use the asset of Councillor networks for encouraging and sharing Council consultations. Councillors attend many groups and have their own social media presence which could be utilised.
4. We would be keen to see the results of the Data Cymru survey and benchmarking once analysed.
5. We request some current examples of coproduction within the Council.
6. We suggest the reintroduction of focus groups to feed into larger consultations.
7. We understand the advantages of digital consultation and the reliance on this, however digital exclusion is an issue, so thought is needed on how best to provide opportunities for those affected. Are paper copies still provided in community buildings and if so what is the uptake on this and how is this advertised?
8. We would like to know if ward profiles are known and considered when advertising consultation opportunities. For instance, targeting more face to face opportunities in areas of high digital exclusion.
9. We feel the preamble at the start of surveys needs to be simplified, particularly for the budget survey.

### **Your Response**

We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the issues raised in this letter and would ask that you respond to the points in our conclusions and recommendations by 25 March.

Yours sincerely,

### **Councillor Lyndon Jones**

Convener, Scrutiny Working Group – Public Engagement

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