

Involving People

A Public Engagement Strategy for
Rhondda Cynon Taf

March 2013

“Public Engagement is about citizens having a voice in the public decisions that impact their lives.”

(Wales Audit Office 2012)

Foreword

‘Involving People’ is a new Public Engagement Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf, setting out how partners will engage with people who live and work in Rhondda Cynon Taf to inform their service planning and delivery.

We, as the Local Service Board for Rhondda Cynon Taf, represent the partner organisations of the area. We will be the lead body for this strategy and will monitor the accompanying delivery plan to ensure that engagement activity in Rhondda Cynon Taf is the best that it can be. The Board members are: the Chief Executive and Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council; the Chair and Chief Executive of Cwm Taf Health Board; the Chief Superintendent of the Northern Basic Command Unit in South Wales Police; the Chair of Interlink (Community Voluntary Council); and a representative from Welsh Government.

Our joint vision is that all people in Rhondda Cynon Taf are safe, healthy and prosperous. We’ve reflected this in ‘Delivering Change’, our Single Integrated Plan for the County Borough¹. To achieve this we recognise that we need to embed effective public engagement into our service design, delivery and evaluation. By involving people from the beginning in achieving the outcomes of ‘Delivering Change’, we can make a real difference in their lives.

This Strategy is about coordinating an effective approach towards public engagement across partner organisations. There are some fantastic examples of engagement in Rhondda Cynon Taf; working together with our communities to build on these approaches, share experience, develop new ideas and delivery, this strategy will be a key element for success.

The Strategy will link closely with the joint Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil consultation and engagement European Social Fund (ESF) project, which aims to provide an effective and efficient approach to consultation and engagement across Cwm Taf Regional Collaboration Board partners. This Strategy will form the basis for a joint approach in the future.

Signed:

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Service Board

¹ www.rctcbc.gov.uk/singleplan

Our Values

Our values are underpinned by 'Participation Cymru's National Principles of Public Engagement in Wales'².

We will:

1. Make a difference together
2. Create opportunities for everyone who wants to be involved
3. Organise appropriate engagement and make sure timescales are realistic
4. Work with others
5. Make it easier for people to take part
6. Make sure people can understand us
7. Help people to learn and develop through being involved
8. Manage our time, money and staff better
9. Provide good feedback
10. Keep learning and getting better

What have we done so far?

Methodology

In response to the Wales Audit Office (WAO) 'Public Engagement in Local Government' study³, a multi-agency public engagement 'task and finish' group was established to develop a joint Public Engagement Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf on behalf of the Local Service Board. The group is made up of key partners representing Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council; Cwm Taf Local Health Board; Interlink RCT; VALREC; the Community Safety Partnership; the Fframwaith Partnership Board and Communities First.

The WAO study called for:

- Continued development of a strategic process to promote public engagement;
- Awareness-raising of public engagement;
- The embedding of a culture of public engagement into our services;
- An approach to building better relationships between services and the public; through, for example, providing effective feedback and information on opportunities to get involved and influence decisions.

The group developed a County Borough-wide consultation exercise to scope the opinions of people in Rhondda Cynon Taf to engagement, based around two surveys:

1. '*How Involved Do You Feel?*' which asked how service users in Rhondda Cynon Taf felt about engagement.
2. '*How Do You Engage?*' which was aimed at service providers, asking how they engaged with the public.

The exercise included holding various focus groups; attending forums and events like the Big Bite; and promotion through social networks and online mailing lists. Responses were received from 69 service providers and 409 service users and residents, informing the direction of this Strategy as part of the Single Integrated Plan 'Delivering Change'. For more detail on the consultation exercise, please refer to Appendix I.

² <http://www.participationcymru.org.uk/principles>

³ http://www.wao.gov.uk/assets/englishdocuments/Public_Engagement_Report_English.pdf

Results

The consultation exercise results suggested that practice is varied in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The WAO study defined public engagement using five categories, as follows:

1. **Informing** – giving a message, but not seeking feedback or comment.
2. **Consulting** – allowing a choice between pre-determined options, with or without the opportunity to propose alternatives.
3. **Deciding together** – views shared and options generated jointly. A course of action agreed.
4. **Acting together** – working with others to make decisions and carry through the action agreed.
5. **Supporting local initiatives** – supporting and empowering groups to develop and implement their own solutions.

Good public engagement within organisations should consist of a variation of all five categories. The results to the consultation exercise suggested that there are many examples of informing and consulting in Rhondda Cynon Taf, but fewer approaches that are collaborative between services and users.

Some very good examples of public engagement were identified within the County Borough, which we will look to encourage and develop. For example the Fframwaith Partnership Board has made participation central to its processes to plan and deliver local services that support children, young people and families. Glyncoch Communities First Partnership use co-production techniques to actively involve residents in service design and delivery. Rhondda Housing Association and other social landlords have tenant representation on their boards. However, the research indicated that there are many areas for improvement.

Some key findings were:

- Many barriers exist that prevent people from getting involved.
- Good public engagement is linked to good customer service.
- Public engagement lacks consistency and feedback is seldom given / received.
- There is a lack of information available on how to get involved.
- There is a lack of common understanding of what good public engagement is (amongst service users, residents and providers).
- People feel that often public engagement is tokenistic and an afterthought.
- There is a lack of support available for those wanting to engage and for organisations.

What are we going to do?

We have listened to our partners and the public to develop the following four key areas for development. These will form the basis of our delivery plan and inform a toolkit for the use of partner organisations.

1. Develop a consistent partnership approach to public engagement

- Ensure that there is a common understanding across partner organisations of public engagement.
- Work towards a common goal in developing a citizen-centred approach to developing and monitoring service delivery.
- Form a community of organisations to share resources, support, knowledge and learning to inform future engagement.
- Establish a collective body to monitor and evaluate progress.

Achievement of this aim will lead to a better use of resources, reducing the duplication of engagement activity across partners, resulting in less confusion and inconsistency for members of the public.

2. *Ensure public engagement becomes core business*

- Embed public engagement into the culture of all partner organisations in the planning and delivery of local services.
- Ensure public engagement is linked to service improvement and evaluate the effectiveness of activity to ensure that the information collected is used for this purpose.

Achievement of this aim will lead to more meaningful engagement for partner organisations and service-users.

3. *Promote and publicise public engagement in Rhondda Cynon Taf*

- Publicise public engagement to members of the public more effectively.
- Promote the benefits of effective public engagement to partner organisations as a way of improving services and communities.

Achievement of this aim will lead to more people becoming involved and more partners using engagement as a method of evaluating and developing services.

4. *Develop better ways of communicating*

- Develop better systems for providing feedback.
- Communicate in a way that is suitable for all people that choose to get involved.
- Maximise the use of technology to support all aspects of engagement.

Achievement of this aim will lead to more people being able to access public engagement in Rhondda Cynon Taf and understanding the contribution they have made to public services.

These areas for development aim to build a more transparent culture which is based on trust between service users and providers, breaking down barriers and increasing communication. This will foster a greater appreciation of services amongst the public as they will understand the decision-making process.

How will we know we are making a difference?

Achieving these aims will depend on the commitment of partner organisations to adopt the delivery plan and toolkit. The consultation exercise has provided baseline information, which tells us the percentage of people who feel listened to by public services and the barriers to effective engagement in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We will measure our progress by carrying out follow-up consultation to determine whether service-users and partner organisations feel that we are improving in developing meaningful engagement. To measure the impact of this, we will adopt a Results Based Accountability™ approach.

The delivery plan will outline the outcomes we wish to achieve, key actions, organisations involved and ways of measuring the difference we are making. As a result, the delivery plan will meet a number of the objectives of the joint Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil consultation and engagement ESF project.

The Public Engagement Task and Finish Group will be responsible for developing the delivery plan and toolkit.

“Community Involvement is an essential part of an inclusive and democratic society and adds value to the quality of life in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is recognised that all partners make a valuable contribution to the economic, environmental and social development of Rhondda Cynon Taf.”

(The Rhondda Cynon Taf Compact).

Links to national and local policies and procedures.

The right to be involved in public decision making is becoming embedded in local and national government policy and practice. For example, the Welsh Government has endorsed ‘Participation Cymru’s National Principles for Public Engagement’, which are an essential requirement of all public sector plans and delivery. There are a number of key national and local documents listed below that have helped to shape policy and practice in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

National

Shared Purpose / Shared Delivery, Welsh Government	Making the Connections ‘Delivering Beyond Boundaries’ 2004
National Principles of Public Engagement – Participation Cymru, 2011	National Participation Standards for Children and Young people, Participation Consortium for Wales
The Equality Act, 2010	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
One Wales, One Planet – Welsh Government	Sustainability Bill – Welsh Government
Social Services Bill – Welsh Government	The Third Dimension, 2008
Public Engagement in Local Government, June 2012, Wales Audit Office	Local Government Wales Measure, 2011
Together for Health, Welsh Government	NHS Wales Engagement and Consultation Guidance

Local

Delivering Change – RCT Single Integrated Plan	RCT COMPACT
Do It! – Children, Young people and Families Participation Strategy, Fframwaith	RCT & Merthyr Tydfil Joint Consultation and Engagement ESF Project
Commission Accomplished, 2011	Cwm Taf Strategic Equality Plan
Health Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy	Communities First Cluster Involvement Plans, 2012
RCT Strategic Equality Plan, 2012	RCT Council Consultation Strategy 2010