

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Executive summary

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the SPCB on recent developments in public engagement activity.

Issues and Options

Current Initiatives

2. In the Time for Reflection address following the referendum, the Presiding Officer referred to the “unprecedented level of involvement” by the public. She also stated that the Parliament, as an institution, would “embrace and nurture that desire for political expression”.

3. This ambition is reflected in the Parliament’s new Strategic Plan. A key priority for change is to “harness increased public involvement in politics to build improved engagement in the work of the Parliament”.

4. Inherent in this statement is that engagement adds value to the work of the Parliament. This is the first time that this connection between engagement activity and the work of the Parliament has been explicitly made. As such it presents a significant opportunity for Members and officials to engrain engagement in the business of the Parliament.

5. Set out below is an update of what steps have been taken to give effect to the Presiding Officer’s commitment in respect of Parliament Days and engagement activities by committees. In addition, a paper on the Young Women’s Conference and programme will be provided for the next SPCB meeting in January.

6. The highly successful Parliament Days initiative is being expanded to ensure engagement with more deprived communities. These events will be shorter and more informal allowing the Presiding Officer and members to meet with people from the local community with opportunities to tie in other local activities. The first of these will take place on 8 December in Levenmouth where there will be a public meeting and in addition, the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee will visit a local school to find out views on 16 and 17 year olds being given the vote.

7. Committees continue to undertake a range of engagement activities from formal and informal meetings in local communities to holding events in the Parliament to which groups and communities are invited. A number of committees are adopting innovative approaches to seeking views on inquiries and bills such as producing videos and podcasts to encourage interest and seeking views via video, online surveys and encouraging views via Facebook.

Committees have also sought to engage directly with individuals and harder to reach groups, for example the *Your Say* initiative involving those directly affected by reforms to the welfare system and a committee working with charities to hear from people who had direct experience of using homelessness services.

Parliamentary Service and Public Engagement

8. The welcome increased focus on public engagement sets a challenge for how the parliamentary service can best meet raised expectations. Our approach will ensure that we match the ambition set out in the Parliament's Strategic Plan. As important, it will also translate that direction into improvements in how we deliver engagement services. Two examples are given below of this type of continual improvement work.

Integrated working

9. As set out above, increasingly committees are seeking to engage on issues that are relevant to the people of Scotland. They offer an obvious vehicle by which the public can get involved with the work of the Parliament, on areas that matter to them. As such, committees are likely to be at the heart of participatory activities and it is important our strategic thinking reflects this.

10. While it is right for the focus to be on engagement in the work of the Parliament, we think it is important for these activities not to be too narrowly construed. It will remain important for the Parliament to seek to engage with as wide a range of people as possible, using a breadth of activities.

11. Engagement is an inherently cross-cutting activity. Officials are working together to ensure that there is clarity as to the purpose of the engagement activity from the outset. Thereafter, joined-up working will help deliver the intended outcomes. Linkages will be made between the various arms of engagement: awareness-raising; informing and participation so that a coherent approach is taken, all with the aim of ensuring that we make engagement as easy and convenient as possible for people.

Digital developments

12. The public now expect dialogue and discussion with the Parliament rather than just information. That is to say, communication must be a two-way, interactive flow of information. Digital ways of working (web and social media most obviously) provide a means to facilitate engagement as well as a way of disseminating information.

13. There was a 30% increase in followers of the Scottish Parliament twitter account between July and September. Officials are examining how we can build on the increasing usage of social media channels across the Parliament. Our focus will be to match the purpose/audience with the medium. Similarly, there is a review of the online strategy which will capture,

amongst other things, how we can enable an interactive dialogue through the website.

Resource Implications

14. There is an increased profile for public engagement following the referendum. The parliamentary service will continue to examine how it can most efficiently deploy resources to deliver on this strategic priority. Resourcing is in place to give effect to the specific initiatives referred to in the paper.

Governance issues

15. Governance issues have been considered. The public engagement strategy will be revised to align with the Parliament's recently published Strategic Plan. Equalities considerations will be to the fore as a greater focus is placed on how we can best enable people from under-represented groups, to engage in the work of the Parliament.

Publication Scheme

16. This paper can be published.

Next steps

17. A further update will be provided to the SPCB in early 2015.

Decision

18. The SPCB is invited to note the paper.

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