

28 September 2011

SPCB PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Executive summary

1. The current public engagement strategy (2009-2011), approved by the previous SPCB, is due to be refreshed. Part of this strategy work focussed on establishing a way to assess the public's understanding and perceptions of parliamentary engagement.

2. At its meeting on 28th September SPCB will receive a presentation on this work. This paper summarises the background to the 2009-11 public engagement strategy and invites SPCB consideration on some key issues to help develop the new strategy.

Issues and Options

3. As commentators have noted the Scottish Parliament has been at the forefront of citizen engagement from its inception, inspired by the process through which it was established. The 2009-11 strategy was developed to take account of this, recognising that the founding principles set out broad public expectations of the relationship between Parliament and the public.

4. An analysis of the research available at the time of writing the 2009-11 strategy showed:

- The Scottish Parliament is regarded as an institution which has the interests of Scotland at the core of its activities – it is seen as accessible.
- Low knowledge and understanding of the role and activities of the Parliament tended to result in a perception of low relevance which can affect engagement.
- The majority of those engaging are our key audience – those who live in Scotland - and all our research shows that this contact shapes people's knowledge and attitudes.
- Those who are educated and have reasonable levels of income are likely to engage already. There are some groupings who are under engaged – those who have less disposable incomes; those under 16 and between 17-25 years and people from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with a disability. Overall we also know that men tend to be more represented in our engagement work than women.

5. Our analysis showed that not everyone needs or wants to engage with the Parliament. So the strategy was not per se about trying to drive up overall numbers of those engaging. It focussed on the public in Scotland having confidence that we are open, accessible and participative – and that we encourage engagement – and then making sure that for those who do want to engage they could learn more and do so.

6. We learned a lot through our outreach work, and through working with under-represented groups, to appreciate that even if someone does want to engage in some way with Parliament, that a very complex interplay of issues can affect whether or not they feel they can. For some information is enough – and all we need to do is make sure it is available – for example through our website or at the end of a telephone line. For others simply giving out information isn't enough if they lack confidence and the wherewithal to engage and so a different approach is required.

7. Therefore the aim of the 2009-11 strategy was to **build confidence amongst the public in Scotland that the Parliament is open, accessible, and participative and that we take a proactive approach to engaging the Scottish public – in particular those groups most excluded.**

8. The strategy drew on broader public affairs work looking at how awareness and understanding can directly affect whether people feel something is “relevant” to them, their perceptions and whether they should try it; and then subsequently how their perception changes. As such the engagement strategy set out broadly to do a number of things:

- Increase levels of awareness and understanding of the Parliament and its work (and as part of this try to differentiate broadly Parliament's representative role from Government).
- Increase understanding of the relevance of Parliament's work to people living in Scotland.
- Build confidence that the parliament is “everyday” accessible for people wanting to have a say in devolved issues affecting them.
- Improve the balance of engagement opportunities with under-represented groups.

9. The 2009 -11 strategy focussed at the top level on 5 main ways to achieve this:

- via the mass media – so through print, online and broadcast media, including our website (e.g. the new media strategy for committees over the last three years showed a 45% rise in press coverage of the Parliament, driven by a 77% rise in coverage of the committees)

- developing ways to support MSPs' parliamentary engagement (e.g. by developing our Member sponsored events and exhibitions, free tours, and education programme)
- working with other partners where this could help deliver on our engagement aim (e.g. the community partnerships project specifically works with under engaged audiences)
- working with "significant others" – gatekeepers, friends , relatives (e.g. 98% of visitors would recommend a visit to a friend)
- extending the range of ways people can have a personal experience of the Parliament – both here and in their community (e.g. introduction of free tours and the Scottish Parliament travelling exhibition which visits local communities across Scotland)

10. The pyramid chart attached at Annex A shows where a range of our activities, based on the above approach, fit on the spectrum between awareness-raising, providing opportunities for differing levels of learning and engagement and participation in parliamentary business.

Strategy development 2011 – 2016

11. The presentation on the 28th sets out for SPCB the results from the first public understanding and perceptions' survey on parliamentary engagement. The results will be helpful in developing the next strategic plan for public engagement.

12. As with all attitudinal change it is not possible to say that there is a direct causal link between the activity and the outcome because there are many factors that influence people's perceptions. However the public research has been developed to be balanced with similar research on our activities (such as a visit to Parliament). In this way we can measure the impact of the activities we offer and the broader public understanding and perceptions over time.

13. This plan will be developed as we undertake budgetary cuts. It will mean that resources on public engagement activities will have to be sharply focussed and this will require some prioritisation of activities.

14. Following the presentation it would be useful to discuss the following issues with SPCB in order to refresh the public engagement strategy.

- Balance of efforts with engaged and under engaged
- Improving links with parliamentary business where possible
- Any feedback that can be considered for prioritising activities
- Financial considerations

Resource Implications

15. The budgetary cuts will affect all areas of the SPCB's work. A number of offices which deliver the engagement strategy have already been reviewed and have achieved staff and non staff savings, others are current. The strategy will take this into account.

Dependencies

16. There are no further dependencies.

Governance issues

17. The current Public Engagement Strategy significantly supports delivery of the SPCB's commitments in its Single Equality plan. An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of the development of the new strategy.

Publication Scheme

18. This paper can be published, as well as the accompanying presentation.

Next steps

- Development of the new public engagement strategy
- Equality Impact assessment
- Proposed strategy to SPCB by end of 2011

Decision

19. The SPCB is invited to:

19.1 consider the findings of the first wave of research into public understanding and perceptions of parliamentary engagement; and

19.2 give feedback to shape development of the new public engagement strategy for 2012-2016.

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