



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Public Engagement Strategy for Session 6

4 November 2021

Reference: SPCB (2021) Paper 66

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is asked to consider and agree the refreshed Public Engagement Strategy for session 6, attached as an annex to this paper. The Strategy builds on the successful work of last session, which focussed on issues-based engagement and engagement an integral part of scrutiny .The strategy also builds on the work we have been doing to increase diversity and aligns with the aspirations set out in the s6 Strategic Plan already agreed by SPCB.
2. In particular, it aligns with the ‘Modern, Dynamic Parliamentary Democracy’ part of the Strategic Plan which states that “We need to ensure people are connected to their Parliament and parliamentarians. So, our engagement focus will be on increasing the reach of the Parliament’s engagement to bring about meaningful participation and influence on policy debate”. It goes on to say “we will focus our engagement strategy on removing barriers to increase the diversity of the people engaging with us.”
3. The strategy sets out the overall direction we want to go in, which is to focus on people and communities who do not normally engage with us. If this Strategy is agreed, we will work on detailed plans about how we can achieve this. Our intention is to listen to the issues that people have, not dictate or make assumptions; to try and increase trust in us as an institution and increase engagement - with us and with the whole democratic process.

Issues and options

4. Our approach to Public Engagement has been to ensure we engage with more diverse communities and groups. Seeking different perspectives and lived experience enhances scrutiny and also tackles political disengagement. If people do not value or trust an institution, they are unlikely to value or trust the decisions it makes and we are stuck in a vicious circle of disengagement. We know there are still a large number of people who do not know, value or participate in the democratic process and so our strategy seeks to address this disengagement.
5. The aims of the refreshed Public Engagement Strategy are:
 - Increase the reach of the Parliament’s engagement and the diversity of those engaging with us

- Improve the knowledge and confidence of people to engage with us and with the democratic process
 - Improve the Parliament's reputation as a relevant and trusted institution
6. Our strategic change objectives set out how we plan to transform how we do this. The three objectives are:
- Connecting with communities
 - Developing Partnerships
 - Operational Excellence
7. As set out above, we have made significant progress in integrating engagement into scrutiny activities. This strategy is designed to support this through looking at practical ways to increase the diversity of those who engage with us. We aim to do this by working with communities to understand more about the barriers they face and working together to remove or reduce those barriers. Experience shows that partnership working with communities and partners can be a very effective way of reaching different audiences and establishing trust.
8. This is a long-term strategy and for it to be successful, we must recognise that we will not achieve our desired outcomes overnight. The annual delivery plans will set out targeted and focused activities for each year of the strategy. We will need to pilot different approaches and some of them will work, some of them may not but we will learn what is most effective through trying different approaches.
9. Alongside delivering our current, restarted public engagement services, in the first year, we will collect data on current audiences and current partnerships. We will use this to determine our priorities going forward and develop ways in which we can collect and share our data effectively. Given we want to work with communities to find out what the barriers are to their engagement, we simply do not have the capacity to work with every community immediately. We will use the data collected to determine our priority list of groups and communities. This will also ensure transparency around the decisions we take for future years' delivery plans.
10. By working with communities and partners to identify barriers, we will also identify the steps needed to help remove or reduce those barriers. Whilst we expect there will be commonalities across the disengaged communities, we also know this is not going to be a one size fits all approach. We need to develop services and activities that have a broad appeal but we also need a targeted approach where that helps us overcome barriers and increase our reach.

Governance

11. Accountability for the Strategy sits with the Group Head of Engagement and Communications.

Resource implications

12. The strategy will be delivered within existing resources.

Publication Scheme

13. This paper can be published. A communications plan is being worked up to launch the strategy once agreed.

Decision

14. The SPCB is invited to agree the refreshed Public Engagement Strategy.

Engagement and Communications

November 2021