



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Public Engagement Strategy - update

23 March 2023

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 20

## Executive summary

1. The SPCB agreed a new Public Engagement Strategy in November 2021 and this paper provides an update on what we have been doing to achieve the aims of the strategy and looks at the proposals coming from the work of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee (CPPPC) and considers ways in which these might be progressed as part of the overall organisational work to achieve the Public Engagement Strategy.

## Issues and options

2. The overall direction of the Public Engagement Strategy is to focus on people and communities who do not normally engage with us and the specific aims of the 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

## Current activities

3. The Parliament has a wide range of services that support public engagement. These include tours and talks, education sessions onsite and in schools, an annual programme of both major and Member-sponsored events and exhibitions and a new user focused website. Our work recognises that people want to engage with us in a variety of ways – in the Parliament building, in their own communities and digitally. An effective overall engagement programme will always have a combination of all three methods of engagement. That broad spectrum of public

engagement helps build trust in, and knowledge of, the democratic process and is also a building block for our more specialised public participation work.

4. In addition, below are some of the main ways in which we have been trying to achieve the aims of the Strategy, categorised as 'internal', 'external' and 'digital' activities/services.

#### **Internal (engaging in the Parliament)**

- Peek in the Parliament – this is a pilot where we invited local community groups into the Parliament from the surrounding area over three weekends. Around 80 people came along from a very wide age range – many visiting for the first time, despite living less than one or two miles away.
- We have aligned the major events and exhibitions programme to the Public Engagement Strategy to ensure the programme overall is more diverse and that events themselves are more diverse and inclusive in nature.
- We have established 'experts by experience' panels to support committee inquiries in addition to the ongoing work supporting committees to hear from a more diverse range of people.

#### **External (engaging outwith the Parliament)**

- Building partnerships and contacts so that we are able to quickly find people to share their experience with committees, for example through a Third Sector conference we held.
- Supporting committees on external engagement visits.
- Building on the partnership with the Scottish Youth Parliament and other children and young people's organisations to support the more systematic involvement of children and young people in committee inquiries.

#### **Digital (engaging through digital means)**

- Digital education sessions – these have allowed us to increase the geographical spread of schools who engage with us and provide an option that requires less time and resource from those schools.
- We have used more sophisticated targeting of messages to different communities using online and social channels.

- We have increased the production of high quality digital products such as podcasts, videos and animations and placed them on other platforms where we know our audiences are already looking for democratic content, for example education platforms.
- We have made more use of digital tools such as Citizen Space and Your Priorities to allow people to share their views more easily with committees.

### **Future Activities**

5. The Public Engagement Strategy is underpinned by annual delivery plans. When considering our delivery plan for 2023/24, we want to build on the work we have done this year and consider what we should prioritise that will both help us deliver the aims of the Strategy and address the recommendations made by the CPPPC citizen panel.
6. The CPPPC is considering all of the recommendations from the citizen's panel it set up and will report its findings in due course. The panel recommendations that we are specifically focusing on for the Public Engagement Strategy delivery plan are:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Remove barriers to participation so that everyone has an equal opportunity to be involved in the work of the Parliament

*Grouped with*

Recommendation 2: Create opportunities for people to use and share their lived experience to engage on issues that they care about.

Recommendation 5: ensure that community engagement by MSPs doesn't exclude people outwith community groups, including by using evenings, weekends and online services

RECOMMENDATION 3: Raise awareness of Parliamentary business in plain and transparent language including visual media

*Grouped with*

Recommendation 15: Use media outlets, documentaries and short films to highlight Parliament successes and real life stories of engagement to improve public perception and trust.

Recommendation 16: The Parliament should run a general information campaign explaining the role of the Scottish Parliament – a single brochure or leaflet explaining who your local MSPs are, what a call for views is and the role of the Parliamentary service and its impartiality and separateness from Government.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Bring the Parliament to the people

*Grouped with Recommendation 11:* Carry out a cost-benefit analysis of the Parliament itself or committees meeting outside of Holyrood and compare this to (a) more support and targeted invitations for people to come to Holyrood and (b) reinstating Parliament days (MSPs going out into communities for a day of activity).

RECOMMENDATION 6: Create a system such as a webpage where people can register and be notified about opportunities to engage  
*Grouped with Recommendation 12:* Set a 9-month deadline as a default for feedback on the outcome of any engagement & make the live status of the decision making process clear and transparent.

7. In addition to the work we are currently doing (outlined in the previous section), below are some of the main activities we are either taking forward or considering for the remainder of this session.

### **Internal**

- We will be developing a new marketing and engagement campaign aimed at increasing the overall awareness of what we do in the Parliament. This campaign will have a number of strands including:
  - the development of accessible and engaging materials explaining the work and role of Parliament;
  - improved external signage including a new digital sign allowing us to more easily show a range of information such as live committee consultations and parliamentary business.
- We will pilot regular parliamentary awareness sessions in Holyrood and through digital means. This will include looking at Gaelic and BSL sessions as well as English.
- We hope to refresh the permanent exhibition in the Main Hall about the work of the Parliament which currently features video interviews with people with lived experience of the impact of the Parliament's work.
- We are exploring how we can remove financial barriers to participation, building on the work that was done when we reviewed the rules around expenses paid to witnesses. This would also include looking at reimbursing costs, in certain circumstances, for constituents where their MSP has invited them into the building (currently there is no way of reimbursing costs under the Members' Expenses Scheme).
- We will hold an event for Members' families. To ensure we have the resources to commit to this, we would look to present this to the SPCB

as part of the major events programme for 2024-25, which will also need to include consideration of any events relating to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## **External**

8. Over the years, we have used different methods of bringing the Parliament into communities. These include:
  - Travelling exhibition
  - Information hubs
  - Partner libraries
  - Parliament Days
  - External committee meetings
  - Committee visits
  - Education sessions in schools
  - Parliament full sittings outside of Edinburgh
9. Outward committee visits and meetings are beginning to increase, post-COVID. In addition, our intention is to look at other methods we have used and examine what worked, what didn't and why. This will help us assess how external engagement can be most effective and meaningful for the areas where we engage. In doing this, we want to consider how we can work with others – for example, Members in particular areas, organisations for example in the third sector who are working on the ground in those areas.
10. External activities require a lot of staff time and resource (dependent on scale) and so our aim would be to carry out some smaller-scale pilot projects initially which will help with a cost benefit analysis (linked to recommendation 11 from the CPPPC citizen panel).

## **Digital**

11. We will consider how we can refresh and update the digital tours we offer.
12. As part of our continuous improvement of the website, we will scope and develop a 'What's New' feature to make it easier for users to find new information such as new bills introduced or committee inquiries launched and we will also look at how an automated alert service could be provided.

## **Members**

13. In addition, we will hold an event for Members' families. To ensure we have the resources to commit to this, we would look to present this to the SPCB as part of the major events programme for 2024-25, which will also

need to include consideration of any events relating to the 25th anniversary.

## **Governance**

14. Accountability for the Public Engagement Strategy sits with the Group Head of Engagement and Communications. The Group Head also chairs a group focussed on the delivery of the Public Engagement Strategy, comprising staff from across the Parliament. The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee will make recommendations on public participation in its inquiry report.

## **Resource implications**

15. Currently, the work on public engagement is being taken forward from within existing resources. As outlined above, some activities may be more resource intensive than others (particularly taking elements of the Parliament into communities) and we will need to consider whether the overall programme can be delivered within existing resources by prioritising those activities and services that are most effective in delivering the outcomes needed or whether some additional funding may be required.

## **Publication Scheme**

16. This paper can be published.

## **Decision**

17. The SPCB is invited to note this update. To help us with further work, we are particularly keen to hear the SPCB's views on:
  - How best to involve and support Members to help us deliver on the strategy given that collectively, Members have an insight into every area of Scotland and know their local communities.
  - What might be the most effective and meaningful ways of taking the Parliament into communities.
  - Whether, in principle, we should look at how Members might reimburse constituent travel and expenses, in certain circumstances.

## **Engagement and Communications Group**

March 2023