

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

3 November 2016



Report of: Anna Klonowski, Interim Strategic Director, Business Change

Title: Engagement and Democracy

Ward: Citywide

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Recommendation

1. That Members note that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board have agreed, as part of their work programme, to review and improve the City Council's approach to securing public engagement in democracy; and
2. That Members discuss and agree the appropriate method for taking this work forward. It is recommended by officers that a Select Committee be the most suitable method; and
3. That Members note that the Constitution Working Group, which is reviewing the Council's Constitution, has a work stream on public engagement, and also that an independent review of the 2016 election processes (currently underway) is likely to make recommendations related to public engagement in democracy. It is recommended that the Select Committee align its work to complement these two work streams and this be specified in the terms of reference; and
4. That the Terms of Reference for the Select Committee be prepared, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, for consideration at the next meeting of OSMB

Context

- The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) have agreed to look at ways to improve public engagement in democracy as set out in the work programme adopted 9th September 2015. This will be a significant work stream for OSMB focussed on increasing voter turnout at the 2020 election, as well as public engagement generally with the City Council democratic processes.
- The suggestion that OSMB look at ways to improve public engagement has come from a number of sources including Scrutiny Members, the Mayor, a referral from the Audit Committee, the Party Group Leaders and the public, and the details of these will contribute to the setting of the Terms of Reference for this work.
- It is recommended that all interested parties, including the public and relevant external organisations, be kept updated on progress around this work stream and will be invited to participate.

Suggested Approach

That a cross party Select Committee be established by OSMB as the mechanism for carrying out this work. It is recommended this commence early 2017 (enabling OSMB to focus upon the budget and other priorities in 2016) and run until following the 2020 elections (with increased frequency of meetings at the beginning and later meetings to assess progress and carry out relevant scrutiny activity aligned to the election preparation).

The Terms of Reference for the Select Committee should be prepared in consultation with Members and other appropriate stakeholders (e.g. Deputy Mayor, Equalities groups etc.) for consideration at the next OSMB meeting, but broad areas of focus would include;

1. To increase public engagement with democratic decision making, including a review of the current public forum arrangements and discussion around the strategy for other types of interaction – use of digital channels, the media etc. This will require alignment with the work of the Constitution Working Group.
2. To increase voter turnout at the 2020 elections and improve participation across all demographic groups.
3. To consider the outcomes of the independent review of the 2016 elections, in particular those exploring new ways of working such as electronic voting.
4. To consider the work of the Bristol City Council's Consultation team and how this contributes to public engagement.
5. Key performance indicators should be established so that the Select Committee would have a clear set of parameters to measure impact

Risk Assessment

This work will contribute to the delivery of the following draft corporate priorities:

- Ensure City Hall is open and accessible to the public to sustain participation in decision-making.
- Bring greater clarity and purpose to the constitutional role of city councillors to ensure our elected members are representative of Bristol in all its diversity.

- Renew our democracy and help people to avoid losing their right to vote within the rules set by the Electoral Commission.

Public Sector Equality Duties

The Select Committee will aim to specifically address the requirement of the Public Sector Equality Act to 'encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.'

It is suggested that the Select Committee be used as a vehicle to test new ways of engaging with the public. The following are suggestions, requiring further development, for the Committee to consider:

- One example is to pilot the use of an interactive digital timeline to publish all activity relating to the Select Committee including meeting papers, webcasts, evidence gathering and other means of engagement
- It is recommended that a media engagement strategy be prepared.
- Consideration should be given to trying different locations for meetings and/or holding them adjacent to existing events
- Members themselves should be encouraged to use their communication networks to promote the Select Committee and its aims and objectives

Financial Implications

Proposals will have to be fully costed and this information should inform the Select Committee as to what they wish to put forward as recommendations to the Mayor.

Legal and Resource Implications:

Through-out the life of the Select Committee Legal Services will need to review relevant recommendations. For example:

- Any recommendations requiring changes to the Constitution will require sign-off by legal services
- All elections related activity must adhere to the legal requirements set out by the Electoral Commission and will require assessment by the appropriate statutory officer.
- Health and Safety advice must be sought if recommendations relate to public and member interaction across the city (e.g. lone working etc.).

The Select Committee will be resourced from within the Democratic Engagement Services, primarily the Scrutiny team who are resourced to deliver the work programme of which this is a key component.

Appendices:

N/A

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985:

N/A