

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 12 April, 2012

Lead Officer: Corporate Director - Learning and Communities

Report Author: Community Engagement Manager

Title: Community Engagement Update

1. What is the report about?

To update Scrutiny on the progress of the Community Engagement Strategy called 'Let's Keep Talking' and actions to improve the coordination of consultation and engagement activities within the Council.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide information regarding the Council's corporate approach to formalising and standardising the many consultations and engagement undertaken by Services and provide guidance to colleagues and councillors who are carrying out community engagement exercises. To ensure that community engagement throughout the County is streamlined and carried out to a consistently high standard.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee supports the approach outlined below in developing a structured methodology for the Council's consultation and engagement activities to ensure the Authority adopts a professional, co-ordinated and cost effective approach.

4. 'Lets Keep Talking' Engagement Strategy

4.1 Communities Scrutiny has previously commented on a draft version of the Community Engagement Strategy. In response to Members comments it has been amended to specifically include a section on consultation and engagement with our Elected Members (Appendix 1).

4.2 The Draft Engagement Strategy has been circulated internally for comments and is currently being designed to follow the same format as previous easy read versions of Council strategic documents such as the BIG Plan. 'Let's Keep Talking' will be formally adopted to become the corporate community engagement guide to all Services and Members.

5. On-line Consultation Management System

- 5.1 Most of the Council's services undertake some form of consultation and engagement; however most of it is undertaken in an unstructured and 'ad hoc' manner with little guidance given to using the most appropriate engagement mechanism and little co-ordination between Services.

There are many examples of good practice within the Authority relating to public or service specific engagement. The underpinning public documents supporting the LDP process, the Leisure and Youth Forums and the publicity surrounding the extended 'x2 Waste Collection Service' are a few examples of how we currently engage and it is our intention as part of this management system to harness, evaluate and disseminate all this useful feedback on service delivery.

- 5.2 The Council is currently exploring the introduction of consultation portals as part of our on-line dialogue with residents so that any public engagement undertaken by Services is organised, publicised and analysed on a dedicated 'consultation page' linked to our website. It will provide built in software for creating surveys, analysing data and generating reports etc.

- 5.3 The advantages of adopting such a system are:
- The website will be a one-stop shop for the community to see every consultation being run by Denbighshire (and potentially its partners) and its results.
 - The website will include 'back office' pages and tools (for internal consumption) so that activities can be co-ordinated to avoid duplication.
 - All consultation will adopt a professional 'best practice' approach to ensure professional standards such as the 'National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales' are adopted.
 - The software will analyse all data and generate reports in different formats i.e. tables, graphs etc.
 - The web pages will be managed to ensure a consistent approach to public engagement.

- 5.4 There is an opportunity for the software to be procured in partnership with neighbouring authorities or on a Local Service Board basis and information and data shared on a collaborative/reciprocal basis.

6. New approaches to engaging with young people

- 6.1 Key public sector agencies in Denbighshire are keen to engage with young people on a variety of issues which affect their daily lives. These issues may relate to healthy lifestyles, the environment, work skills, community safety and many other outcomes identified in Denbighshire's BIG Plan and other key documents which shape how the public sector resource and prioritise their services.

Although we have developed very good channels of communication such as the Youth Forums, how we and our partners develop a fruitful and appropriate mechanism for engaging with young people is our challenge, coupled with identifying existing opportunities and creating new engagement techniques.

We have identified two particular issues namely:

a) where and how do we engage with young people and

b) can young people themselves assist us in undertaking the consultation.

We have come to the natural conclusion that the most effective channel of engaging with young people is to deploy other people of a similar age to act on our behalf, namely with students undertaking formal and informal consultation/engagement with their peers on a structured basis perhaps as part of their curriculum.

Sanctioned by the college our proposal is that students use their social networks and social media to engage with their peers on our behalf in social situations or at locations where they naturally congregate. We are currently having on-going discussions with the Principals of Rhyl and Denbigh Colleges to progress matters.

- 6.2 The Denbighshire Children and Young People's Participation Strategy is now subject to review as the previous version was for the life-span of the Children and Young People Single Plan. A small Working Group with representatives from Education, Youth Service and DVSC is currently revising the document and it will be subject to extensive consultation with children and young people.

7. Local Service Board – Communication Plan

- 7.1 We are represented on a 'Task and Finish Group' under the auspices of the Conwy and Denbighshire Local Service Board (LSB) tasked with writing an LSB Communication Plan. It is currently in draft form and will be presented at the next LSB meeting.

- 7.2 The purpose of this document is to set out:

- The overall communication objectives for the LSB for the next 12 months. This will enable us to increase clarity, understanding, communication and market the LSB and its priorities;
- to support the LSB in communicating with all partner organisations and identified key stakeholders (internal and external);
- the key messages;
- a communication work plan.

8. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

All of these engagement initiatives contribute to our corporate objective of 'Getting Closer to the Community'.

9. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Along with neighbouring Authorities we have had on-line demonstrations by two companies who provide engagement software and are currently awaiting costs of the software and annual licences. There is no dedicated consultation and engagement budget; therefore any costs will be met from within existing resources.

10. What consultations have been carried out?

The 'Let's Keep Talking' Engagement Strategy will be subject to further formal internal and external consultation and an internal 'Task and Finish' Group will evaluate the engagement software packages.

11. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

Risks associated with not agreeing the recommendations;

1. There is a corporate risk that a failure to consult and engage effectively with communities and work with partners to tackle key priorities will adversely affect the Council's Corporate Plan and result in lower resident satisfaction levels.

2. In its last Annual Report to the Council, the Welsh Audit Office specifically questioned our approach to public engagement particularly in relation to seeking the views of children and young people.

3. Consultation and engagement activities need to be planned to avoid the risk of 'consultation fatigue' and declining levels of community involvement.

4. The lack of a coordinated approach to our consultation with Denbighshire's residents may result in them feeling disengaged and disempowered.

5. Unstructured engagement may result in an inefficient service delivery as services are shaped to meet the needs of local people and potentially harm the reputation of the Council.

11. Power to make the Decision

Local Government Act 1999; Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009

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Extract from the 'Community Engagement Strategy'

9.0 Engaging with Councillors

- 9.1 As leaders of our communities, councillors are crucial to both local government and to local democracy. As representatives of their communities they:
- advocate – arguing for council resources to address local issues and championing individual cases
 - lead – giving a vision and direction for their communities as a whole
 - enable and facilitate – mobilising the local community to help itself, encouraging people to get involved
 - are part of the decision-making process of the council – most often through scrutiny arrangements but also through Full Council, planning and licensing committees and the Member Area Groups.
 - represent the council and their communities on external bodies – as such they are a key link in ensuring that partner bodies work together to address the needs of the community as a whole.
- 9.2 The Council recognises the essential role of the Member who represent the interests and issues of the people in their ward. All Officers should always consider local Members during their work as a matter of course and the local Members should be kept informed of anything which may affect their work so that their views may be taken into account as the work progresses. Care should be taken that the local Member does not first find out about something which is happening in his/her ward from his/her constituents or in the press.
- 9.3 Officers will seek to assist where possible any local Member's enquiry and will deal expeditiously with any issue raised.
- 9.4 Members for their part will seek to help Officers communicate effectively with their ward, helping to promote and attend meetings where necessary at mutually convenient times. Members, if arranging such meetings, will have regard to Officer workloads.
- 9.5. Officers will observe relevant protocols for consulting with local Members before decisions are taken on issues affecting their wards. Whenever a public meeting is organised by the Council to consider a local issue, all the Members representing the ward or wards affected should as a matter of course be invited to attend the meeting. Similarly, whenever the Council undertakes any form of consultative exercise on a local issue, the ward Members should be notified at the outset of the exercise.

- 9.6 Councillors have an important role in acting as a conduit between the County Council and Town and Community Councils through attending their meetings regularly and feeding concerns raised at such meetings with appropriate Services.
Officers will ensure County Councillors are kept informed of communications with Town and Community Councils in their area.