

Engaging with the Community

On behalf of the Local Service Board, the Council has previously arranged a series of Community Forums across the County which had senior representatives from all of our key public / voluntary sector agencies. Although widely publicised, attendance at these meetings was poor with more Officers present than members of the public. It was agreed therefore to move away from public meetings unless there was a specific issue to be consulted upon (e.g. school modernisation, Local Development Plan) and concentrate on other forms of consultation and public engagement.

Most Services are engaged in some form of public / user consultation at any one time either through surveys / questionnaires or direct contact with the community. This approach is underpinned by extensive consultation on our key corporate strategies such as the Corporate Plan, The BIG Plan (our single integrated plan) or Service led engagement e.g. faith based education and Town Plans. A mapping exercise was undertaken in 2012 of all consultation activities undertaken by individual Services demonstrating a wide ranging and relevant subject base (see 4.2 for example).

The Council is using more creative opportunities to engage with residents or 'communities of interest' with greater emphasis on the use of social media (Twitter, Facebook and blogs) and the complete re-design of our website which will be launched in August and will improve on-line consultation questionnaires and surveys. A Residents Survey to approximately 6,000 residents will also be undertaken in 2013.

The Council will also respond positively to developing issues which arise requiring immediate public engagement e.g. the recent establishment of a St Asaph and Ruthin Community Flood Recovery Group.

Through the City, Town and Community Council Charter, the Council has strengthened its engagement procedures with councils which complement the Liaison meetings, Cluster meetings and Town Clerks Group meetings. 34 of the 37 City, town & Community Councils have formally endorsed the Charter and its effectiveness is being monitored and reported to the Liaison meeting.

There is considerable engagement activity being undertaken by the Council at present, a flavour of which has been included in Section 4.2 of the report.

However there is further work to be undertaken with Councillors in respect of identifying engagement opportunities between Councillors and residents either individually or on a ward basis (e.g. councillor surgeries) or as Member Area Groups (e.g. annual open meeting or annual report feeding back on the actions in the City/Town/Area Plans).

Recommendations 3.3 refers to this task.

An Excellent Council Close to the Community

An initial review and agenda setting document to develop this theme within Denbighshire.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Corporate Plan 2012/2017 sets out an ambitious agenda for change within the Council, and places a clear focus on developing excellence, whilst also remaining close to our communities. Since we began to define in more detail what being close to the community really means, a number of improvements have been achieved over the last 18 months or so. With the development of the new Corporate Plan, it is an opportune time to reflect and review what has been achieved, and refine the priorities and actions necessary to ensure that we meet the ambition and desire to be close to our community.

This document aims to reflect on the achievements to date, and also attempts to set out the focus for future actions.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

In the initial Getting Closer to the Community Action Plan, three key themes were identified namely:

- ❖ Representation and Engagement
- ❖ Service Delivery
- ❖ Community Development

(a) Representation and Engagement

The objective here was to:

“Improve the Council’s level of meaningful engagement and representation leading to improving perceptions, understanding and service delivery”

- To this end, the Council has established 6 Member Area Groups (MAGs), with an appropriate support structure and corporate leadership in place. These have been working effectively, over a period of about 18 months, and have now been given revised Terms of Reference. Members have valued this development and officers are engaging positively with the opportunities provided by Member Area Group consultations and discussions.
- A Community Engagement Strategy has been developed and agreed by Members. The outworkings of this strategy is managed by the Community Engagement Manager within the Partnership Team. A draft Participation Strategy has also been written to advise colleagues on engaging with children and young people.
- The Charter between Denbighshire County Council (DCC) and City, Town & Community Councils (C,T&CCs) has been signed by 35 out of 37 City, Town & Community Councils. The importance of this Charter has been discussed at Senior Leadership Team (SLT), liaison meetings between DCC and Town & Community Councils and at individual departmental team meetings. The monitoring of the effectiveness of the Charter is being carried out by the Community Engagement Manager, and a full review will take place in May 2013.
- The Council has been heavily involved in delegating certain services to the larger Town Councils. This has included the transfer of responsibility for the Llangollen Town Hall to

the Town Council, the Corwen Healthy Living Centre to a Community Partnership and a cost sharing arrangement between the Council and Denbigh Town Council for the operation of Denbigh Town Hall. Discussions are now underway with Ruthin and Prestatyn Town Councils.

- The second residents' survey has been completed and services have been requested to reflect relevant messages from our residents into their Business Plans.
- Work has begun on improving the way information is made available by the Council through the development of the new website, and a review of the way that we deal with feedback and complaints.
- Our engagement with the business community within Denbighshire has been progressed, and there are now clearer arrangements in place in terms of liaising with business groups, Chambers of Trade, etc.
- The support arrangements for the Third Sector Liaison Group have been improved by an appointment made by Denbighshire Voluntary Services' Council (DVSC) and this forum provides for an effective partnership between DVSC and the Council.

(b) Service Delivery

The objective of this priority was to:

“Ensure that services respond effectively to the needs of residents by becoming increasingly more resident focussed”

All services were asked to carry out an initial self-assessment of the activities and processes that enabled them to work in a way that was closer to the community. Subsequently, the service challenge process has included this aspect in service position statements.

Whilst it is not possible to specifically measure improvements in the way services are delivered to reflect the needs of our customers and residents, services have become more customer focussed over the last 18 months, and there are some clear examples of where services have attempted to become more community focussed. These include:

- Bringing the regulatory Planning processes closer to the communities, community based deployment of staff and the mapping of provision within Youth Services, and now the emerging structure for the new Highways and Environmental Services Department
- The priorities within the Corporate Plan and The Big Plan are largely based on what the community has been stating as important issues
- New Corporate Plan includes a commitment that we will work with all of our councillors through MAGs to develop the road maintenance programme
- The involvement of services in participatory budgeting schemes
- The Town Plans have been agreed for our main towns and these are currently being further reviewed with the additional requirement to consider the needs of rural communities beyond the towns. This brings business planning closer to the communities
- Work on developing the customer standards for all services has been undertaken with a view to finalise the standards in early 2013
- The budget planning process has been managed in a way that has seen frontline services largely protected from cuts

- Social care services have been developing a single point of access and community champion schemes
- During the recent flooding emergency, the Council responded in a way that brought it closer to the communities affected by the floods, both in the response and recovery phases
- An Armed Services Covenant has been agreed with a workshop taking place with representatives of various Council services and the armed services, the Royal British Legion, SSAFA, Citizens Advice Bureau and Job Centre Plus. A formal signing of the Charter will take place in June 2013.

(c) Community Development Role

The objective under this priority was:

“To provide an improved infrastructure to enable community development and enrichment to take place coherently within DCC”

- The funding that has been available for community revenue and capital projects has been secured for the foreseeable future, and forms part of the funding strategy for the Corporate Plan. A review of how this funding is to be allocated in the future has been undertaken in order to make funding decisions that are more strategic in nature than has been the case in the past.
- Funding has also been agreed within this element to support the infrastructure required for future participatory budgeting opportunities within the Council
- Through a partnership with the Community Foundation in Wales, a Community Development Fund has been set up which will make use of 57 redundant trust funds that the Council has not been utilising effectively in the past
- The Communications, Marketing and Leisure Department have developed a Denbighshire Volunteering Strategy, which will become a Council wide strategy in the near future
- Locality based mapping, planning and delivery structures has enabled the Council to better understand the needs of the communities and where there are gaps in provision
- Ongoing active support is provided to aid the development of the Communities First Cluster in Denbighshire

3. Securing Further Improvements

In order to build on the work that has already been undertaken, four new strands have been developed, which clearly overlap with the priorities identified in the initial plan. The proposed revised strands are as follows:

- 1) Democratic and community engagement
- 2) Putting our customers first
- 3) Mapping community needs and aspirations and building capacity
- 4) Service improvement - this involves 2 sub-strands:
 - a) Developing the right culture; and
 - b) Designing services to be physically close to their communities

The element under these four themes are summarised further in Appendix 3.

1. DEMOCRATIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Lead Officer : David Davies (Jackie Walley)

These are the main action points that will be integrated into Service Business Plans and monitored accordingly:

- 1.1 Member Area Groups (MAGs) – continue to support and develop the MAGs as effective local, political fora
- 1.2 T&CC Charter – monitor the implementation of the T&CC Charter and review its effectiveness in May 2013 and continue to liaise effectively with the 37 Town & Community Councils through an annual liaison meeting, the three Cluster Group meetings and Town Clerk meetings
- 1.3 T&CC Delegation of Services - continue to work with T&CCs and other organisations on the delegation and/or shared management of assets and functions
- 1.4 Communication with Members (Member/Officer protocol) – further improve the way that we work with Members on local ward issues (Jackie Walley)
- 1.5 Community Engagement Strategy – in line with the Local Government Measure, ensure that the Community Engagement Strategy is implemented effectively
- 1.6 Develop further opportunities for members to become leaders within their communities e.g. as Town and Area Plan Champions
- 1.7 Ensure an effective working relationship is in place between the Council and DVSC and the voluntary sector more generally

2. PUTTING CUSTOMERS FIRST

Lead Officer : Jackie Walley

These are the main action points that will be integrated into Service Business Plans and monitored accordingly:

- 2.1 Customer Standards – publish the newly created Customer Standards for all services in April 2013, and begin to monitor their effective implementation as from September 2013
- 2.2 Access to Information – launch the new interactive website in June 2013 and improve access to information and the ability of customers to interact with the Council
- 2.3 Feedback and Complaints – improve the feedback and complaints procedures in order to meet the 95% target for complaints handling and encourage more pre-complaint stage feedback
- 2.4 Reviews of One Stop Shops provision from June 2013
- 2.5 Community Hubs - consider how we can improve the access to information within communities, using community hubs or mobile provision, especially in rural areas
- 2.6 Residents Survey (3) - carry out a third residents survey in 2013 and act on the information received through service plans
- 2.7 CRM System -improve the way that the current Contact Centre operates, in order to improve and speed up responses to queries from services by locating customer service staff within service areas e.g. Housing to improve knowledge

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2012 - 2017**

3. MAPPING NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS AND BUILDING CAPACITY

Lead Officers : Peter McHugh and Jamie Groves

These are the main action points that will be integrated into Service Business Plans and monitored accordingly:

- 3.1 Town Plans/Area Plans – review the current approach to community based planning and develop the Town Plans to encompass the surrounding areas
- 3.2 Community based funding strategy – the development of community based planning process and associated funding strategy as defined in Town/Area Plans
- 3.3 Community Endowment Fund – support the implementation and development of the Denbighshire Community Endowment Fund in conjunction with the Community Foundation in Wales
- 3.4 Locality mapping of provision and needs e.g. YS, others – promote the use of locality mapping such as the pilots undertaken within the Youth Service
- 3.5 Participatory budgeting schemes – support the infrastructure requirements for additional participatory budgeting schemes to be supported within Denbighshire
- 3.6 Volunteering strategy and voluntary sector engagement – develop a DCC wide volunteering strategy to both encourage volunteering activity for staff, together with making effective use of volunteers within the Council in conjunction with DVSC
- 3.7 Engagement with businesses – further develop our engagement and support function for local businesses

4. SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Lead Officer : Alan Smith (Jamie Groves and Paul McGrady)

These are the main action points that will be integrated into Service Business Plans and monitored accordingly:

- 4.1 Establish a new corporate self-evaluation framework that gives greater emphasis on monitoring how close the service is to its community and raise the bar in terms of improving service delivery for residents
- 4.2 Service statement on what Bringing the Council Closer to the Community (BCCC) means for the service - require services to produce a service statement defining what BCCC means for that particular service
- 4.3 Welsh Language Standards – the development of Welsh Language standards to reflect new levels of expectations from the Language Commissioner and our bilingual community (deferred until clarity emerges about the new standards) (Jamie Groves)
- 4.4 Structural design and operation to enhance closeness to the community – how the structural design and operation of services enhances the ability of that service to be close to its community
- 4.5 In line with 4.4 above, consider the way services respond to communities of need (not merely geographical communities) such as vulnerable families, children living in poverty
- 4.6 Assets – how can the way we use our assets promote community development and sustainability in partnership with other statutory services, T&CC and the voluntary sector (Paul McGrady)

