



Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item no.
Cllr McKay, Chairman of the Engaging with Communities task group and Philippa Davies, Corporate Director of Resources	Cabinet	29 July 2015	5

Engaging with Communities task group – final report

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To report the work of the Engaging with Communities task group to the Cabinet.

2. Outcomes

- 2.1 Wyre Council engages more effectively with local communities.

3. Recommendation/s

- 3.1 That a clear definition of 'community engagement' be agreed, consistent with the Business Plan's strap-line 'Together we make a difference' and from which an engagement plan be devised to ensure that there is a common understanding and agreement about the way in which the council seeks to engage with the community in the future.
- 3.2 That a clear role description be written for Shaping Your Neighbourhood (SYN) Lead Members, which is agreed and understood by all councillors. Once the role of SYN Lead Member has been defined more clearly, tailored training and development opportunities should be provided to Lead Members and other councillors to help ensure that the role is carried out effectively. Lead Members are to be encouraged to meet as a group to share learning and explore potential funding opportunities.
- 3.3 Ensure that the review of the effectiveness of the Engagement Network, as set out in the Business Plan, be carried out and improvements identified, in particular ensuring that members of the Engagement Network are clear about their role as a link to the council.
- 3.4 Support the planned work to ensure more effective and valuable engagement between Wyre Council and Town and Parish Councils in the borough.

- 3.5 That the further development and promotion of local forums run by local people be encouraged.
- 3.6 That methods of electronic engagement, including the use of social media, should be further developed and encouraged for Elected Members.

4. Background

- 4.1 In April 2012 the Full Council approved the SYN initiative, a new approach designed to engage and involve communities in identifying local issues, priorities and solutions within their neighbourhoods. The role of councillors was seen as a key element of the new approach.
- 4.2 Prior to the introduction of SYN the council had no formal engagement team or dedicated resource allocated for that purpose, engagement having previously been carried out primarily through the Local Strategic Partnership and an engagement officer.
- 4.3 This current review sought to identify ways to improve community engagement and ensure that residents are more involved in shaping the design and delivery of services pertinent to particular geographical areas.

5. Key issues and proposals

- 5.1 Throughout the review the task group has wrestled with an often circuitous argument about the purpose and value of community engagement. Whilst the task group accepts the fundamental principle that the council should engage effectively with the residents of the borough, there are wide ranging views about what this really means and how it should be done.
- 5.2 The task group's research shows that it is only a small percentage of people who wish to actively engage with the council; most are happy to simply leave it to the council to deliver services, so long as they are provided effectively. The comment has been made that residents become more highly energised to engage with the council if things are not going well or if services are likely to be withdrawn.
- 5.3 The task group has also considered the meaning of the term 'community engagement', and has concluded that, despite the definition of 'neighbourhood engagement' in the report from April 2012, it lacks clarity and is interpreted differently by different people at different times. There is a whole spectrum of meanings, from the simple provision of information by the council at one extreme, to a community making decisions about how the council's money is spent at the other, and everything in between.

- 5.4 The role of the SYN Lead Members is not clear, is often misunderstood, and needs to be reviewed. There is little consistency in the way the role is delivered, and there is a lack of common understanding of what the role entails; this applies to the SYN Lead Members and the wider councillor group, all of whom need to be clear about the expectations and requirements of the role.
- 5.5 The task group took the view that the provision of ad-hoc annual funding to the six SYN areas shifts the focus of SYN to such an extent that it risks becoming the sole purpose for the initiative. There is concern that funding might inhibit the true intention of SYN, which was to engage communities.
- 5.6 The task group would like to see more effective engagement with Town and Parish Councils and via the previously established Engagement Network.
- 5.7 The success of the active and very well-supported Poulton Forum was noted. The task group view the Forum as a very effective means of engagement, which could be replicated in other parts of the borough if run by local people.
- 5.8 The council uses social media to engage with the public with increasing effectiveness. Social media has the potential to be a very effective tool for use by an increased number of councillors, and the SYN Lead Members in particular.
- 5.9 The overall conclusion of the task group, based on the evidence gathered, is that the council falls short of achieving the outcomes for SYN which were stated in the 2012 report, notwithstanding the positive content of the 2014 evaluation report.

Financial and legal implications	
Finance	The recommendations of the task group can all be delivered within current budgets.
Legal	There are no legal implications to be considered.

Other risks/implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with an x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	x
equality and diversity	x
sustainability	x
health and safety	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
climate change	x
data protection	x

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List of background papers:		
name of document	date	where available for inspection
Shaping Your Neighbourhood – our new approach	26 April 2012	http://www.wyre.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/129/full_council

List of appendices

Appendix A Engaging with Communities Scrutiny Review – Final Report

arm/ex/cab/cr/15/0107pf1

arm/O&S/cr/16/item 6 engaging with communities

Extract from minutes of Cabinet meeting on Wednesday 29 July 2015

CAB.11 Engaging with Communities task group – final report

The chairman of the Engaging with Communities task group and Corporate Director of Resources submitted a report detailing the work of the task group.

Cllr McKay presented the report and expressed her thanks to the members of the task group for their enthusiasm and to the officers who had helped.

Councillor V Taylor said in response that she too thanked the task group, including the four members of the group who were no longer councillors, for the worthwhile work that had been undertaken.

Decision taken

Cabinet agreed the following recommendations:

- That a clear definition of 'community engagement' be agreed, consistent with the Business Plan's strap-line 'Together we make a difference' and from which an engagement plan be devised to ensure that there is a common understanding and agreement about the way in which the council seeks to engage with the community in the future.
- That a clear role description be written for Shaping Your Neighbourhood (SYN) Lead Members, which is agreed and understood by all councillors. Once the role of SYN Lead Member has been defined more clearly, tailored training and development opportunities should be provided to Lead Members and other councillors to help ensure that the role is carried out effectively. Lead Members are to be encouraged to meet as a group to share learning and explore potential funding opportunities.
- That the review of the effectiveness of the Engagement Network, as set out in the Business Plan, be carried out and improvements identified, in particular ensuring that members of the Engagement Network are clear about their role as a link to the council.
- That the planned work to ensure more effective and valuable engagement between Wyre Council and Town and Parish Councils in the borough be supported.
- That further development and promotion of local forums run by local people be encouraged.
- That methods of electronic engagement, including the use of social media, should be further developed and encouraged for elected members.