Notes of the meeting of the Engaging with Communities task group held on Tuesday 23 September 2014 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

**Members present:**

- Councillor E Anderton
- Councillor C Birch
- Councillor Brooks
- Councillor Jones
- Councillor McKay
- Councillor Moon
- Councillor Walmsley

**Others present:**

- Marianne Hesketh, Head of Transformation
- Sara Ordonez, Policy and Performance Officer
- Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

**EC.01 Election of Chairman**

Councillor McKay was elected as Chairman of the task group.

**EC.02 Election of Vice Chairman**

Councillor Jones was elected as Vice Chairman of the task group.

**EC.03 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Lady Atkins, Bannister and Ormrod.

Cllr Gibson had also been invited to the meeting but tendered his apologies. He had made it clear that he would be pleased to attend a future meeting of the task group if invited to do so.
EC.04 Declarations of Interest

None.

EC.05 Context of the Review

Marianne Hesketh summarised the methods of engaging the community that were already in place. She reminded members that there was no formal engagement team or resource allocated. Previously engagement had been carried out through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and an Engagement Officer, but that changed in 2012 when the LSP was disbanded.

Much of the focus over the past two years had been on Shaping Your Neighbourhood (SYN). The decision was taken to employ a mechanism that made use of structures that were already in place. A Lead Member was appointed to each of six areas (Fleetwood, Cleveleys, Thornton, Poulton, Rural East and Rural West). Locality Plans had been agreed for each area, with some funding attached. The Shaping Your Neighbourhood Evaluation Report (April 2014) set out what the council set out to do and assessed whether it had been achieved.

It has been identified that the Engagement Network (a database network of individuals’ addresses) might not have properly understood their role and probably had not effectively shared information with the wider community, as had been intended. Sara Ordonez added that many of the communications to the Engagement Network were about consultations so it was important to ensure that it was operating as had been envisioned. The Network had been seen as a way of doing more with less.

A review of the Engagement Network was a priority that had been identified by officers, as was the need to strengthen links with Parish and Town Councils.

Ms Hesketh reported that there was a view that the Lead Members’ roles had also not been developed as effectively as had been anticipated originally, a matter which would need to be dealt with via the Councillor Development programme.

Task group members raised a number of points, including:

- If SYN was about giving out money, that was perhaps a distraction from the aim ‘to engage’ (Cllr Brooks)
- SYN was very effective in Fleetwood, with a large number of organisations bidding for funding (Cllr E Anderton)
- Why does the council wish to engage in this way when many communities are already content so long as their bins are emptied regularly? (Cllr Brooks)
- It is right that councillors do their best to engage with their communities (Cllr Jones)
Some councillors see engagement as part of their role, others don’t (Cllr Walmsley)

The LSP did a good job and showed that effective engagement was possible (Cllr Moon)

Local Area Forums gave a local flavour, which is missing now (Cllr Moon)

It is important that councillors engage in the right way and at the right time (Cllr E Anderton)

Communities should not wait until the council provides something for them – they should take a lead from the example set by Garstang residents who got a skate park just by getting on and doing it (Cllr Brooks)

Lead Members need further training and guidance if they are to be effective (Cllr McKay)

There is always the danger of the same interested people being involved in engagement time after time and that is something to be tackled so that others can be encouraged to engage more actively (Cllr McKay)

Sara Ordonez confirmed that the council still carried out a Life in Wyre Survey, but that the People’s Panel had been disbanded.

The Chairman thanked Marianne Hesketh and Sara Ordonez for their report and their contribution to the meeting.

**EC.06 Scoping Document**

The task group considered the draft Scoping Document and agreed to return to consider it again at a future meeting. Members took the view that engagement by the council and by councillors were both relevant to the review but they agreed to await further information that was to be provided by the Leader of the Council at the next meeting, before the document was finalised.

**EC.07 Public Involvement**

It was agreed that meetings of the task group would be held in public.

**EC.08 Next Steps**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Gibson, would be invited to the next meeting. His remit would be, simply, to address the question, ‘What is your vision for engagement with communities?’

Councillors proposed a number of possible future tasks for the group, depending on their views following the meeting with Cllr Gibson, including:

- Considering examples of good practice from other local authorities
- Interviewing the Chairman of the Councillor Development Group
- Considering the role of Lead Members and how that is supported and
developed
- Assessing the effectiveness of the Engagement Network
- Exploring how links with Parish and Town Councils might be strengthened
- Making proposals about an engagement strategy for the council

EC.09 Date and time of next meeting

Wednesday 8 October 2014 at 6pm in CR2.