Engaging with Communities
Task Group Notes

Notes of the meeting of the Engaging with Communities task group held on Tuesday 9 December 2014 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Task Group Members present:

Councillor Bannister  Councillor McKay (Chair)
Councillor Brooks     Councillor Moon
Councillor Hewitt     Councillor Ormrod
Councillor Jones      Councillor Walmsley

Others present:
Rebecca Heap, Community Involvement Manager, South Ribble Borough Council
Sara Ordonez, Policy and Performance Officer
Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

EC.23 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs E Anderton and C Birch.

Cllr Lady Atkins’ apologies were also received immediately after the meeting.

EC.24 Declarations of Interest

None.

EC.25 Notes of last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 10 November 2014 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Peter Foulsham advised councillors that a report recommending the continuation of Shaping Your Neighbourhood funding for 2015/16 was due to be considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 21 January 2015. It was
important that members were aware of that recommendation as it could influence any related recommendation that the task group might choose to make in due course.

**EC.26 Engagement Network**

Sara Ordonez, Policy and Performance Officer attended for this item and presented the findings of a survey of members of the Engagement Network.

The survey had been sent to 124 members of the Engagement Network, excluding councillors who were to be included in a separate survey. Twenty responses had been received, a disappointing return. Because of the low rate of return the figures could not be said to be ‘significant’ although they were helpful indicators.

A full analysis of the responses received is attached to these notes at Appendix 1.

Councillor Brooks asked whether the aim was simply to use the Engagement Network to pass information down to community groups or whether there was the expectation of a two-way process. Sara Ordonez said that the intention was that it should be two-way and that response rates were improving. The recent Life in Wyre survey had yielded the biggest response yet.

Councillor Brooks also made reference to the four objectives detailed in the Wyre Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2015 and asked whether much of the content of that strategy had been lost. Sara Ordonez responded by saying that the council was still working towards those objectives, the difference being that there was now an expectation that communities be asked to do that themselves. The Engagement Network was only a small part of the council’s engagement strategy. Sara Ordonez conceded that the Engagement Network was not being as effective as had been hoped although there remained hopes that it could be made more effective in the future.

Councillor Jones commented that the evidence suggested that the Engagement Network needed changing as it was not working. It should be recognised that email was dying and that the use of social media was growing.

Councillor McKay suggested that people feel overloaded by emails and that better branding might help make the Engagement Network more effective.

Sara Ordonez concluded by saying that the Engagement Network was not yet fully developed, focusing mainly on consultations, and it would be improved.

The Chairman thanked Sara Ordonez for her contribution to the task group’s work.
South Ribble Borough Council – My Neighbourhood

Rebecca Heap, Community Involvement Manager at South Ribble Borough Council gave a presentation about the My Neighbourhoods initiative, which was launched in South Ribble in 2012.

Until that time there had been six Area Committees in South Ribble, which had been resource-intensive, expensive and often without tangible outcomes. These had been formal, minuted meetings co-ordinated by council staff.

The My Neighbourhood initiative had a neighbourhood forum in each of five areas of the borough. The forums were only for one hour (7-8pm) four times a year, and they did not have an agenda. Each area of the borough ran their forum in a different way with different aspirations. Rebecca Heap said, “one size definitely does not fit all”. The meetings were quarterly and were totally community-led. Representatives from a number of different organisations attended, and parish councils played a significant role.

Any tensions or pressures from particular groups or individuals were dealt with using a common sense approach. They had not been problematic.

Each Forum was coordinated by a different member of staff, the team having been brought together by a number of former specialist posts being redefined. The team comprised four officers and Rebecca Heap, the Manager. There was an enabling budget to facilitate the initiative in addition to a core budget of £500 per councillor. Leyland, for example, received a total of £16,000 per annum by application of the formula.

In response to further questions from councillors, Rebecca Heap advised the task group that

- The scheme was driven forward by the Cabinet member for Regeneration.
- The forums were promoted through the council’s newsletter, twitter, Facebook, councillors’ visits to areas, parish newsletters, A5 ‘flyers’ sent out with all council communications (Council Tax bills, for example), and any other means available.
- Residents generally preferred the informal forums to the previous formal Area Committees.
- The forums often facilitated the solving of problems very quickly
- Venues were often offered free of charge because neighbourhoods were keen to host meetings
- Meetings were not always held in the same place in each area

Rebecca Heap’s presentation slides are published with these notes see Appendix 2.
EC.28 Next steps

As the result of an unavoidable delay to the start of the meeting two items were not dealt with and postponed to the next meeting. These were:

- Survey of councillors’ engagement methods (Peter Foulsham)
- Community Engagement in the current climate (Cllr Rita Hewitt)

Efforts would also be made to arrange for interested task group members to visit South Ribble and to talk to the responsible Cabinet member and other councillors about the My Neighbourhood initiative.

EC.29 Date and time of next meeting

Monday 12 January 2015 at 6pm in CR2.
Engagement review headlines for O&S Task Group, 9 December 2014

We received 20 responses from a possible 124 engagement network (EN) members.

- 17 people said they were part of a community group or parish/town council, 3 didn’t respond
- 50% of the respondents were aware of the EN objectives as below:

1. to be a good way of sharing information about consultations and information, related to the council primarily and occasionally organisations that the council works with e.g. Clinical Commissioning Groups, Public Health, Environment Agency.

2. to be successful in encouraging wider distribution e.g. members sharing with other residents and community group members

3. to increase the response to consultations e.g. completion of surveys online

The survey asked how effective respondents felt the EN has been in achieving each of the objectives above and the following options provided: very successful, fairly successful, neither, fairly unsuccessful and unsuccessful. The results are as follows.

**OBJECTIVE 1** – The majority of respondents (70%) consider the EN to be successful as ‘a good way of sharing information’. No one reported it as being unsuccessful.

*Figure 1*

**OBJECTIVE 2** – Close to two thirds of the respondents (63%) said that the EN was successful in encouraging wider distribution of information.

*Figure 2*
OBJECTIVE 3 – Just over half of the respondents (55%) feel that the EN is successful in increasing responses to consultations, with 30% stating it was neither successful nor unsuccessful.

Figure 3

Respondents that answered ‘unsuccessful’ to any of the above were invited to state why:

The 6 replies were:

1. “I didn’t realise that this was part of a wider formal network, I don’t know who else is in it, and I don’t know what else forms part of this network in terms of activity. I always read emails that I receive, but I hadn’t noticed that any were marked up of a particular significance…”

2. “Residents generally have little idea of the Council structures. This means they have no idea of who they are talking to or what effect it might have. Residents do not feel they have a part to play and regard the Council as a political organisation rather than one oriented towards their local environment and future. The few that do want to use the Council to improve the local situation, generally approach local community based organisations to help them interpret the language and structure used by Local Government in general”.

3. “We get information on some of the things the council is doing but never seen anything that suggests there is any sharing…”

4. “Response using peoples value time is very often not taken up”

5. “Not all consultations are forwarded to me to ensure our 272 members have a chance to input”.

6. “We have no idea whether this has increased your survey responses as we have no benchmark to set any data against. We can say, however, that as we have recently launched a website for the parish (www.cabuspc.org.uk) we are including links to appropriate consultation surveys from our homepage to promote and increase participant engagement”.

Respondents were given 8 options and asked to select how they use the information that they receive. The responses are below.

**Figure 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can’t tell what comes from the engagement network</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure what I am meant to do with it</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delete it without reading</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly nothing - it isn’t very relevant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly nothing - I have too many other emails</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read it and share it with a select number of others</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read it and share it with all members of groups I am</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read it and act upon the request</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked how the council can engage better with residents, respondents ranked their top 3 from a list. The top choice was by e-newsletter, joint second was community meetings and community publications e.g. Wyre Voice.

People were asked if they would like to suggest other methods. There were 4 responses. The main theme was around councillors and better interaction with residents. Other suggestions were community TV, and relevant timed events according to the nature of the engagement event.

Example comment

“It may be surprising but the number of people who know who their councillor is, is in the minority. They are good enough to attend Forums when they can but this is no substitute. They need to be more visible...”
The ‘My Neighbourhood’ approach was launched in 2012 as South Ribble’s new way of working with communities.

It pulls together what were previously disparate teams within the Council, to work more efficiently and effectively.

My Neighbourhood Forums replace previous Area Committees; forums are informal public meetings, held quarterly in venues around the Borough.
Borough divided into 5 areas: Western Parishes, Leyland, Central, Eastern & Penwortham.

Key difference from Area Committee structure in geography is a united Leyland – it was previous divided into east and west.

Full time officer for each of the areas, working on improvement projects, liaising with the local community and co-ordinating council activity.

A brand new approach with 5 different areas, 55 Councillors, dozens of community groups and thousands of residents........ we’re on a learning curve!
Initial forums were aimed at identifying and agreeing local priorities.
Interactive, workshop type approach - using maps to add context / support discussion
Neighbourhood Forum set up
Residents have direct access to Councillors – no appointments or questions in advance. Local Councillors involved in all aspects of the meeting – cross party ownership.
Use of visual displays, not reports or presentations to communicate messages – people can pick out what they are interested in.

From these comments and existing plans, we whittled down to 20 potential projects per area.

At the second forum, residents voted with sticky dots for their top ten.

From these results, feedback from other consultation and in line with the local knowledge of members, we narrowed this to 10 priority projects and 10 reserve projects.
The 10 priority projects for each area make up the body of each My Neighbourhood Plan.

Plans are available at www.southribble.gov.uk/myneighbourhood
Some of the things we’re working on

• Enhancements to Greenbank Rd conservation area
• Bringing an off road cycle track to Much Hoole
• Supporting a new Gregson Green community centre
• Townsway Community Orchard
• Improving Moss Side playing fields
• ‘Love Where You Live’ campaigns
• Facebook pages
Greenbank Road Conservation Area, Penwortham
Walmer Bridge’s new bridge!
Mill Street community garden
Lostock Hall local market
My Leyland Community

What have you been up to?

My Leyland shared South Ribble Borough Council's status.
Posted by Sue SouthRibble 26 minutes ago

Are you a fan of Fairtrade? If so why don't you visit St Andrew's Church Hall in...
Lots of challenges!

- Raising awareness in the community
- Volunteers to get stuck in
- Civic pride & ownership
- Support with graphics
- IT & Social Media