ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES TASK GROUP

Meetings with community groups and organisations – February 2015

1 The task group agreed that representatives of Town and Parish Councils and other community groups and organisations should be invited to contribute to the review by commenting on their experience of the way in which Wyre Council engages with their organisation.

2 All organisations on the Engagement Network and Wyre Together databases were invited by email to attend one of a series of drop-in sessions to be hosted by the task group. The council’s website also highlighted the sessions, providing details of times and venues.

3 Nine drop-in sessions, of two hours each, were held between Tuesday 3 and Tuesday 17 February, one at each of the following locations:

- Knott End High Street
- Great Eccleston High Street
- Garstang High Street car park
- Fleetwood, West View Community Association
- Cleveleys Community Centre and Church
- Fleetwood Town Council
- Wyre Estuary Country Park
- Thornton village
- Poulton Market Place

Information obtained from two other unscheduled sessions run by one task group member in Fleetwood is also included in this analysis.

4 A total of 46 people, who were either representatives of community organisations or interested members of the public were interviewed. Members of the following organisations contributed their views, although it must be recognised that they were not always speaking on behalf of that organisation, preferring to pass on their personal opinions:

- Environment Agency
- Fleetwood Cancer Support Group
- Fleetwood Civic Society
- Garstang Scottish Country Dance Group
- Garstang Town Council
- Great Eccleston Village Centre
- Great Move Lettings
- Larkholme Community Centre, Fleetwood
- Poulton Forum
- Poulton Partnership
- Preesall Parish Council
- Stalmine Residents’ Association
5 Councillors had two areas of questioning that they explored with respondents:

(i) What has been your experience of engagement between Wyre Council and your organisation (or you as an individual) in the past? What has worked well? What has worked not so well?

(ii) What could be done differently in the future to improve engagement between your organisation (or you as an individual) and Wyre Council to make it more effective? Please give specific details.

6 The responses to the two areas of questioning were as follows:

**What has been your experience of engagement between Wyre Council and your organisation (or you as an individual) in the past? What has worked well? What has worked not so well?**

a) Council is doing the best it can.
b) Wyre Voice is helpful.
c) Wyre Voice is OK but it does not get to the nitty-gritty truth; it read like spin.
d) Very happy with the way council is run. It’s a good council.
e) Absolutely fantastic.
f) You get all the same faces at voluntary groups and their meetings.
g) Posters work well.
h) Information in newspapers is helpful.
i) Don’t know who to approach at the council (x2).
j) Councillors are unreliable – don’t follow things up or inform about outcome.
k) E-newsletters are good.
l) 891000 number very helpful.
m) Feel fobbed off on the phone.
n) Website good.
o) Direct visits to Civic Centre helpful.
p) Very good experience of the council.
q) Don’t like being passed from person to person.
r) Never heard of Shaping Your Neighbourhood (x4).

**What could be done differently in the future to improve engagement between your organisation (or you as an individual) and Wyre Council to make it more effective? Please give specific details.**

1. Councillors should be visible at forum meetings and community groups.
2. Councillors do not always turn up to meetings.
3. Engagement should be a two-way thing.
4. Shaping Your Neighbourhood should not be all about allocating money.
5. Councillor surgeries needed (x2)
6. More use of social media is needed (x9)
7. Need to engage with more than just the ‘usual suspects’ (x2).
8. Regular meetings would be helpful.
9. Communication/engagement needs to be bottom-up as well as top-down.
10. Need list and photos of officers to know who they are.
11. Need to know what decisions are going to be made, in advance, so that we can influence them (x3).
12. Can we have suggestion boxes in various locations?
13. A free-phone number for the council would be helpful.
14. Avoid duplication with Regenda who are increasingly effective at representing residents in Fleetwood.
15. Residents would like more of a say in how the council’s money is spent.
16. Comments are often submitted but they are not taken into consideration.
17. Council need to look at better understanding how Parish Councils work.
18. Need to consider the roles of both Borough and Parish councillors.
19. Wyre councillors should attend more Parish Council meetings.
20. Borough and Parishes working together will lead to a harmonious relationship.
21. What is the definition of ‘Engaging with the community’?
22. Would like more information sent out by email.
23. Need regular forums with residents (x9).
24. Councillors should knock on more doors and make themselves known.

7 These varied responses make an interesting read, but should only be considered alongside a number of caveats:

- The number of organisations that responded was only a very small percentage of those that were contacted directly.

- The total number of respondents (46), including members of the public as well as representatives from community groups and organisations was insignificant when compared with the population of Wyre.

- Most of the views given were personal and did not seek to represent the opinions of a wider community.

- There were parts of the borough that were not represented in any way by the responses given.
Some common themes can be identified, including:

1. There are many different interpretations of what is meant by the phrase ‘community engagement’.
2. There is a desire for community forums in some parts of the borough.
3. Councillors should hold regular surgeries to improve engagement.
4. There is an interest in knowing how the community might influence future decision-making, including the allocation of resources.
5. Social media should be used more to enhance engagement.
7. Residents and community organisations are largely content with top-down communication but have few ideas about how bottom-up engagement is effectively facilitated.
8. The community knows little about Shaping Your Neighbourhood.

Peter Foulsham
Scrutiny Officer
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