Engaging with Communities
Scrutiny Review

- Draft Report – v2

Chairman:
Councillor Lesley McKay

Task Group Members:
Councillor Emma Anderton
Councillor David Bannister
Councillor Colette Birch
Councillor Roger Brooks
Councillor Rita Hewitt
Councillor Kerry Jones
Councillor Paul Moon
Councillor Patsy Ormrod
Councillor Dave Walmsley

Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Chairman: Councillor Michael Vincent
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Purpose of the Review

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. (See scoping document, Appendix 1).

Aims of the Review

1 To consider the way in which the council currently engages with the community.
2 To consider the effectiveness of the Lead Member role.
3 To identify ways in which the council can better support Lead Members and councillors to engage more effectively with their communities.
4 To contribute to a review the effectiveness of the Engagement Network and to help identify improvements that will encourage and enhance community engagement with individuals and established community groups.
5 To consider how engagement can be improved in areas that do not have established community groups.
6 To identify ways in which the Council can engage more effectively with Parish and Town Councils.
7 To review current methods of on-line engagement and identify opportunities for future development.

(See scoping document, Appendix 1).
Background information

Background information was provided at the task group's first meeting by Marianne Hesketh (Head of Transformation) and Sara Ordonez (Policy and Performance Officer) in order to inform councillors about the context within which the review was taking place.

The council has no formal engagement team or resource allocated for that purpose. Engagement was previously carried out through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and an Engagement Officer, but that changed in 2012 when the LSP was disbanded. Consequently Local Area Forums, which had been relatively resource-intensive, were also discontinued. There had been mixed opinions about their value and effectiveness, although in some areas they had been viewed very positively, for example in Poulton and Cleveleys where active forums are run independently of the council.

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

A database of individuals’ email addresses, known as the Engagement Network, is one of the mechanisms for community engagement currently used. It seems that members of the Engagement Network have not properly understood their role and, as a consequence, have not effectively shared information with the wider community, as had been intended. Many of the communications with the Engagement Network are about consultations so it is important to ensure that the Network is operating effectively.

The role of the Shaping Your Neighbourhood Lead Member has not been developed as effectively as had been originally intended.

Having heard the information provided by the Head of Transformation and the Policy and Performance Officer, task group members made a number of comments which included the identification of issues that might require further consideration and investigation during the review. These include:

- The effectiveness of the Engagement Network
- It seems possible that the funding allocated within Shaping Your Neighbourhood (SYN) could be a distraction from the aim of engaging with the community.
- SYN is viewed as being very successful in some parts of the borough, e.g. Fleetwood, although this opinion has possibly been influenced by the allocation of money.
- The council appears to be lacking a widely understood vision for engagement. This includes uncertainty about why and how the council proposes to engage with residents. The point was also made that there seems to be an assumption that engagement is a good thing, of which the council should be doing more,
when some residents simply want to know that the council’s services are being delivered effectively. The council appears to be unsure about what it means by engagement with the community and what it seeks to achieve from it.

- Many councillors do their best to engage with their communities, with or without SYN, some councillors seeing engagement as a primary part of their role and others not.
- The LSP showed that effective partnership working, often with harder to reach groups, was possible, although the reasons for its discontinuation are understood.
- Local Area Forums gave a local flavour, which seems to be missing now, despite the best efforts of the SYN initiative.
- It seems likely that the role of SYN Lead Member would benefit from some further clarification and development if its full potential is to be realised.
- It continues to be the case that the same interested people are involved in engagement time after time and that is something to be tackled so that others can be encouraged to engage more actively.

The council still carries out a Life in Wyre Survey every two years, the most recent one having been published in December 2014.
Councillor Gibson informed the task group that Shaping Your Neighbourhood (SYN) is intended to be about how local councillors can be champions for their communities, and it recognises that different areas have different needs.

SYN is likely to prove more effective than its predecessor, the Local Strategic Partnership, and it incorporates all the strengths of that arrangement. The council stopped supporting the Local Area Forums as it believed that local communities could run them better themselves and this has proved to be the case, Poulton being a good example.

A wide range of methods of engagement is already in place, including ward walks, discussions with Parish Councils about planning issues, face-to-face consultations (e.g. Fleetwood Market and Fleetwood Ferry Task Groups), the Life in Wyre survey (sent out to 3000 people) and other consultations (e.g. Rossall sea defences) as well as the use of Facebook, Twitter, the Wyre Voice magazine and the council's i-bus.

It is important that SYN gets ‘buy-in’ from councillors and residents in the future. Councillors play a key role in finding out how people want the council’s services to be tailored to meet their needs. A Neighbourhood Plan would enable residents to say where they would like developments in their areas.

80% of Wyre residents are on line, which provides great potential to improve engagement.

Councillor Gibson specifies four priorities for developing engagement in the future:

1. The role of SYN Lead Members needs to be developed.
2. Councillors need to engage more with residents and other established community groups.
3. Advantage should be taken of the opportunities afforded by electronic engagement.
4. The council’s services need to be tailored to meet the needs of residents.

In response to specific comments and questions from the task group, Cllr Gibson added:

- Neighbourhood Lead Members do not work to a set brief; they all have an officer mentor and they learn from each other.
- Lead Members report to Full Council.
- Engagement is a two-way process.
- Residents need to be made more aware of all the services that Wyre provides.
- The council needs to engage more closely with residents’ groups.
- It is important that residents take ownership of issues and services.
- It is not the task group’s responsibility to write a protocol or strategy about community engagement, although such a document would help ensure the delivery of the four priorities detailed above.
Summary of evidence from four Shaping Your Neighbourhood Lead Members

Four of the council's six SYN Lead Members gave evidence to the task group and the other two are members of the task group itself.

Methods of engagement currently used by SYN Lead Members include newsletters, surgeries (in some areas), close working with Town and Parish Councils and a specific focus on the allocation of SYN funding. Different approaches to the allocation of funding are taken in different parts of the borough. Once the funding is allocated, it is important to ensure that the preferences of the community are delivered, and Lead Members have a role to play in this.

The Lead Members made the following additional points:

- The SYN funding has become the major focus of community engagement, perhaps to the detriment of other aspects of higher level engagement. The money “gets in the way”.
- Lead Members play a key role in signposting people to other potential sources of funding.
- Lead Members have not received any training specific to their role.
- Lead Members have been left to work out the role for themselves, supported by officers from the Transformation Team.
- The Poulton Forum works well and is community-led.
- The demise of PACT meetings has removed another forum for community engagement.
- SYN Lead Members need to lead by example.

The Lead Members interviewed accepted that the following issues should be considered further by the task group:

- The role of SYN Lead Members currently lacks definition; it is sometimes difficult to be clear about the difference between the Lead Member role and that of any other non-Executive councillor.
- Specific, tailored training would probably help Lead Members and others understand the role of SYN Lead Members more clearly.
- There is some concern that SYN funding might become a distraction from genuine community engagement.
- It should not be assumed that the same methods of engagement are appropriate for all parts of the borough.
- Some consideration could be given to the re-introduction of a community forum in some parts of the borough (there is already a successful one in Poulton), as long as it was community-led.
Rebecca Heap, Community Involvement Manager at South Ribble Borough Council is responsible for the My Neighbourhoods initiative, which was launched in South Ribble in 2012.

Before 2012 there were six Area Committees in South Ribble, which were resource-intensive, expensive and often without tangible outcomes. They were formal meetings co-ordinated by council staff.

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

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

Rebecca Heap made the following additional points, in response to questions and comments from task group members:

- The scheme is driven forward by the Cabinet member for Regeneration.
- The forums are 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 prefer the informal forums to the previous formal Area Committees.
- The forums often facilitate the swift solution of problems.
- Venues are often offered free of charge because neighbourhoods are keen to host meetings.
- Meetings are not always held at the same venue in each area.
Councillors Brooks, Hewitt and Moon visited South Ribble Borough Council and met with three members, including the responsible Cabinet Member, to discuss the My Neighbourhood initiative.

The key points made were:

- Engagement is a fundamental part of how the council operates; the council has adopted a very open approach, allowing members of the public to speak in all the council’s meetings.
- Previous Area Committees did not work.
- A previous Grants Committee was disbanded as the allocation of money was seen as a distraction to effective engagement.
- A “different way of working” was sought.
- The new approach is intended to be entirely ‘bottom-up’, and it has become very much community-led.
- Managing expectation has become the new challenge.
- Projects are identified in five agreed geographical areas.
- Each area has its own Neighbourhood Plan.
- External funding has been obtained to support as many projects as possible.
- My Neighbourhood is staffed by officers who have been re-designated from other roles in the council.
- Quarterly forum meetings are run on an informal basis.
The task group carried out a survey of councillors’ engagement methods, asking each of the fifty-five councillors the following question:

*From your experience as a councillor of engaging with residents, what methods have worked the best?*

Twenty of the fifty-five councillors (36%) responded to the survey.

The most favoured methods of engagement were:

- letters/phone
- email
- door to door
- newsletters/leaflets

The least favoured methods of engagement were:

- Surgeries
- Noticeboards
- Social media

75% of respondents had never used any form of social media to engage with residents and communities.

Councillors recognised that the survey had been very limited, designed only to provide a snapshot of councillors’ current individual preferences.

A summary of the results of the survey is included at Appendix 2.
A survey was sent to 124 members of the Engagement Network, excluding councillors who were to be included in the survey of councillors’ engagement method (see page 11). Twenty responses were received, a disappointing return. Because of the low rate of return the figures are not statistically significant although they are helpful indicators. A full analysis of the responses received is included at Appendix 3.

Sara Ordonez, Policy and Performance Officer, advised the task group that the Engagement Network is intended to facilitate two-way engagement with the community, and response rates are improving. The Life in Wyre Survey 2014 yielded the biggest response to date. That said, the Engagement Network is not being as effective as had originally been hoped. The network is not yet fully developed, focusing mainly on consultations, and it will be improved.

Members of the task group agreed that the evidence suggests that the Engagement Network needs to be changed as it is not working as effectively as it could. It should be recognised that the use of email was declining and that the use of social media was increasing. It was possible that better branding might help the Engagement Network become more effective.
The task group agreed to give representatives of Town and Parish Councils and other community groups and organisations the opportunity to contribute to the review by commenting on their experience of the way in which Wyre Council engages with their organisation.

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.

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.

A total of 46 people, who are 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 in many cases 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
- Thornton Action Group
- West View Community Association, Fleetwood
- Winmarleigh Parish Council
Councillors explored two areas of questioning 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.

The responses are informative but should only be considered within the context of several 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 of the common themes identified were:

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.
Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1
That

RECOMMENDATION 2
That . . . . . . . .

etc.
Responsibility for implementation of agreed recommendations

The responsibility for implementing the recommendations will lie with . . . . . (to be completed)
There were six meetings of the task group. Representatives from the task group also visited South Ribble Borough Council and attended drop-in sessions for community groups and organisations, each attendance being reflected in the table below.

* the meeting of 9 March is yet to be added

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<th>Community Drop-in sessions attended</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Councillor Bannister</td>
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<td>Councillor C Birch</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Councillor Jones</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Councillor McKay</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor Moon</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor Ormrod</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Councillor Walmsley</td>
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Acknowledgements
## List of appendices

<table>
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<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 1</td>
<td>Engaging with Communities task group – Scoping Document</td>
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<td>APPENDIX 2</td>
<td>Councillors’ Survey of Engagement Methods – Summary of Results</td>
</tr>
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<td>APPENDIX 3</td>
<td>Engagement review headlines – 9\textsuperscript{th} December 2014</td>
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27 February 2015

arm/tg/ec/cr/15/0903pf2
# Engaging with Communities - Task Group

## Scoping Document – FINAL

**Review Topic**  | Engaging with Communities  
---|---  
**Chair**  | Cllr Lesley McKay  
**Group Membership**  | Councillors Emma Anderton, Lady Atkins, David Bannister, Colette Birch, Roger Brooks, Kerry Jones (Vice Chair), Paul Moon, Patsy Ormrod and Dave Walmsley  
**Officer Support**  | Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer  
**Purpose of the Review**  | 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.  
**Aims of Review**  |  
- To consider the way in which the council currently engages with the community.  
- To consider the effectiveness of the Lead Member role  
- To identify ways in which the council can better support Lead Members and councillors to engage more effectively with their communities  
- To contribute to a review the effectiveness of the Engagement Network and to help identify improvements that will encourage and enhance community engagement with individuals and established community groups.  
- To consider how engagement can be improved in areas that do not have established community groups  
- To identify ways in which the Council can engage more effectively with Parish and Town Councils.  
- To review current methods of on-line engagement and identify opportunities for future development  
**Methodology**  |  
- Reviewing relevant reports and documentation  
- Interviewing witnesses at task group meetings  
- Attending a selection of meetings of local community groups, as observers.  
- To review positive community engagement work undertaken by other local authorities  
**Scope of Review**  |  
- The review is limited to how the Council engages with communities, using councillors as its primary resource  
**Potential Witnesses**  |  
- Leader of the Council  
- Cllr Pete Murphy (Chairman of Councillor Development Group)  
- Chief Executive  
- Head of Transformation
- Wyre Council's Lead Members for Shaping Your Neighbourhood
- Backbench/Ward councillors
- Representatives from Town and Parish councils
- Representatives of local community groups
- Councillor Development Officer (or appropriate line manager)
- Representatives of ‘good practice’ examples of community engagement in other Local Authorities
- Anti-Social Behaviour/Licensing Enforcement Officer (regarding ‘Pride Weeks’)

**Documents to be considered**
- Business Plan Project Brief
- Shaping Your Neighbourhood Evaluation Report – submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the Head of Transformation on 28 April 2014.
- LGIU Policy Briefing – People-shaped places – How Lambeth let residents redesign the neighbourhood (June 2014)

**Risks**

**Level of Publicity**
Low

**Indicators of a Successful Review**
- Increase in number of residents who know who their local councillor is
- ‘Life in Wyre’ survey results, around how well the Council runs its services

**Intended Outcomes**
More effective council decision-making.

**Approximate Timeframe**
To be completed by 31 December 2014 (so long as the results of the ‘Life in Wyre’ survey can also be taken into account.

**Projected Start Date**
23 September 2014

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8 October 2014

arm/tg/ec/cr/15/0903pf2
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

From your experience as a councillor of engaging with residents, what methods have worked the best? Please remember, we are looking backwards at how things have really been – we are NOT looking at how things might be at some time in the future, in an ideal world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Found to be very successful</th>
<th>Found to be quite successful</th>
<th>Sometimes but not always successful</th>
<th>Never Used (please tick if appropriate)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letters/phone calls</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeries</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward walks</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door to door</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Forums</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Groups</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters, leaflets, Wyre Voice, etc.</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticeboards</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council’s website</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>Other methods referred to were Parish Councils (1 response), responding to direct resident requests (3), using a local pub as an informal ‘surgery’ (1) and social events/official openings (1).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
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](image)

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”.

S.Ordonez, Transformation Team. Tel: 887267
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>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tr>
<td>Can’t tell what comes from the engagement network</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not sure what I am meant to do with it</td>
<td>1</td>
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<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 we 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...”