

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 11 December 2008

Subject: Evaluation of Local Democracy Week 2008

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive

Contact officer: Brian Leigh 828072

Purpose / summary: To update Cabinet with an evaluation of the activities held during Local Democracy Week (13th – 19th October)

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: There are none.

Recommendation / decision: To note the contents of the evaluation report

The decision will be made as a result of this report and will be published within 48 hours

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	None
Staffing:	None
Policy:	Evaluation of activities may inform future policy development
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	No
Wards affected:	All

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

No

If yes, have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property Officer?

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications have been considered when producing this report.

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?

A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications have been considered when producing this report.

Has the Service Director - Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? **Yes**

Has the Service Director - Corporate Services confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? **Yes**

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No**

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:	x
Discussion leading to a decision	
Monitoring	
Sharing for corporate understanding	x

	x
Discussion	
Decision	
Information	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
	CSG 26.11.08		
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council

List of Background Papers in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

Title of document	Which meeting did it go to?	Date of meeting	Copy available from?
Communities and Control White Paper	n/a	n/a	www.communities.gov.uk

Proper Officer Sue Johnson

Date 28 November 2008

Background:

From 2006 onward, the council has progressively increased its involvement in Local Democracy Week (LDW). Each year, we have evaluated the programme of activities with a view to embedding successful elements and building upon them in the following year.

Our objectives for LDW are set out below for the information of Cabinet Members, and these mirror and build upon the purpose of the national programme. We have also been conscious of the opportunity to make connections between LDW and ongoing work to make engagement in the democratic process a more constituent part of the Council's achievements. The importance of this work is evidenced by the recent 'Communities and Control' White Paper, and the potential for local authorities to have a duty to promote democracy in an active way.

Our objectives for Local Democracy Week

- To run a programme of events that generate interest in the work of the Council and the role of elected members
- To expand on the different methods used for working with young people – and for engaging their interest in the role of Councillors and the democratic process
- To promote the role of elected members and to encourage increased interest from people in becoming councillors in the future
- To generate positive publicity for the Council and its partners
- To use new communication and publicity methods to achieve a greater level of engagement and promotion

Proposals:

Evaluation of Local Democracy Week 2008

The planning group for Local Democracy Week in 2008 included many officers who ran the events in 2007. We extended the invitation to a wider group, including youth workers, democratic services and the I.T. and communications team to ensure that there was a wider consensus on the work and that our plans to expand the project could be fulfilled. A number of elected members offered their support to the work and regularly attended meetings, including the Chair of Member's Services Group. The group was highly engaged in developing the programme and elected members sought to deal with the challenge of engaging the interest of local people.

Summary of the programme

- 'A day in the life of an elected member' – evening sessions in localities
- Question Time in Wigan Town Hall for public audience
- Three successive school Question Time events at Westleigh High School, Byrchall High School and Standish High School
- Mayor for a Day – a young person who had won an open competition run through LINC accompanied the Mayor on a day of formal visits and engagements
- Youth reporters – attended Question Time to write an article on the event
- Joint Cabinet meeting with young people
- "I'm a Councillor... get me out of here!" – national online contest involving 5 elected members from each of the main groups – with active participation from about 30 high schools

‘Day in the Life of an Elected Member’ - locality sessions

This event was organised to demonstrate to the public the active role of elected members, together with the range of responsibilities that attach to the public office of elected councillor. It aimed to promote the work of the Council on a non-political basis in three local sessions across the Borough: Queens Hall Methodist Mission in Central Wigan; Ince Community Centre and the Golborne Linc Centre. The use of community venues was an effort to make the events more accessible to local people.

Elected members were keen to support this work and there were at least two members at each venue. Business Support Services provided Wi-Fi enabled laptops to enable members to show the public the operation of the members enquiry system and we made up resource packs which included the Corporate Plan, other key council policies and timetables of formal meetings. This information was useful in explaining the varied commitments of elected members. Despite prior publicity in Wigan and Leigh papers, the events were not well attended in Wigan or Ince. The event at Golborne was well attended, but its success was mitigated by the behaviour of a member of the public.

Future development

Based on the success of the “I’m a Councillor...get me out of here!” methodology and the new interactive “blogs” being trialled elsewhere, we should explore the potential to use electronic means of engaging the public with the work of local Councillors. The Local Government Association magazine has published an article written by a Wigan Councillor, in which she describes her day to day activities. We should take the opportunity to make connections between this and the events run during Local Democracy Week.

‘I’m a Councillor...Get me out of here!’

This was an online contest involving 5 elected members from each of the political parties – with active participation from students in 30 local schools. It was part of a national initiative.

“The way the Chat room worked was good... and the questions!”

“The ‘buddy’ system seemed to work well as did the guidelines given to councillors prior to the event.”

“The main system had some problems and councillors got frustrated with the slow upload.”

This was Wigan’s second year of taking part in the game. The evaluation of Wigan’s performance provided by the host web company, Gallomanor, gives a clear indication of the progress we have made from last year to this.

Out of twenty one Councils taking part:

- Wigan as a district had the most questions and votes per user
- Our young people were busier asking questions and voting than any others in the country and almost twice as busy as the average across the UK.

This evidences real engagement with young people for the event.

The reasons for our improvement are likely to be varied:

- Extremely effective recruitment of schools by the Children and Young Peoples Services, Personal Social and Health Education + Citizenship team – with 34 expressing interest and 12 becoming active participants in the programme.
- PSHE + C team prepared very thoroughly and sent out the information packs provided by the company to schools as early as May and June and reminding schools about IAC in the subsequent months.

The recruitment of elected members to take part was relatively easy compared with last year, through nominations by group leaders. Having looked at the difficulties facing some Councillors last year when getting to grips with the way the site worked, we produced our own guidelines alongside those of the Company. These included examples of the kind of questions that might be asked; some tips for writing for young people from the Young People's Information Officer, and listed a specific Council officer to support each member throughout the game. Nevertheless, there were still some technical difficulties which Gallomanor had to resolve with specific Councillors.

Last year we encountered some problems with the game being used for overtly political reasons in the local press. This year, the evaluation provided by the sponsor of the event commented on the real achievement of all the participating Councillors in keeping the event good humoured and positive, by listening to young people's concerns and giving real answers.

Future development

The early planning and staged reminders about the event for the Borough's schools worked well this year – we could expand on this in the future. We also need to address some of the technical issues with the site earlier and ensure that Councillors are aware of the increased commitments resulting from a greater number of participants. A summary of the issues raised by the young people in the game, provided by Gallomanor, will be considered by the UK Youth Parliament.

Since the game is very popular with schools and generates a high level of publicity, we should also encourage awareness within the Council of the issues and format.

Mayor for a Day

Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust youth officers hosted a competition through the LINC programme to find a young person who could accompany the Mayor on day of formal visits and engagements.

"The young person enjoyed the day."

"The event worked well, we had some good responses from young people."

This year, the young people were able to nominate friends as well as themselves, which contributed to the overall number received. Publicity for the event was arranged in advance and we used the SMS facility to enable young people to text us with their nominations; however, the take up for this was very poor. The nominations that were received were well considered and positive, and the young person who won was nominated by her friend for her charity work and keen interest in participation. She will share her experiences in the LINC magazine, which will actively promote the civic role of the Mayor among its young audience. The event

generated a lot of positive publicity and seemed to be well received in a range of settings.

Future Development

The SMS facility was not well used and the postcards appear to be the main method of contact. We should aim to better publicise this event by distributing these earlier next year, and highlight the event in the LINC magazine beforehand. We could also take the opportunity to “design” the day more effectively to allow young people to participate more actively, possibly by a visit to the winner’s school/college.

Joint Cabinet Meeting with Young People

Last year, this element of the LDW programme provided the opportunity for young people to observe Cabinet and understand its role. Development this year, saw a pilot joint Cabinet meeting with young people to discuss issues directly relevant to them. A preparation session, run by officers from the Youth Participation team, was held on Sunday 5 October. This was attended by around fifty young people and the young people’s Cabinet Champion, Councillor Sue Loudon.

“The meeting had excellent support from the young people and their workers, and from Cabinet members.”

The preparation contributed greatly to the success of the meeting, as the young people were able to organise their ideas and direct the discussion. For the Cabinet meeting itself about 25 young people attended. They presented on the key issues of things to do and places to go, feeling safe and having a voice for young people, demonstrating that young people understand the concerns of the wider population. The meeting had an atmosphere of lively engagement and a proposal for future meetings is now being developed.

Future development

Feedback from the event suggests that the issue of timing in the meeting needs refining but that this will improve as the format develops. Due to the excellent contribution of the young people at this session, a proposal has since been put forward that their strategic relationship with the Council should develop by having representation on the LSP Board.

Youth reporters

The aim of this activity was to involve the young reporters from the LINC magazine in Local Democracy Week to generate publicity about the events amongst their peers. Three young people attended the evening session of Question Time and wrote articles on this event, to be published in the LINC and in the Wigan Courier. The owner of the Courier, Mark Ashley, ran a joint training session with the Young People’s Information Officer, Andrea Smith, for those young people who would be involved. Feedback from the event suggested that input from a professional local news reporter added an extra dimension to the events. There was some disappointment at the low turn out but despite this we have received well written and different reports to use in The LINC magazine and The Courier.

Future development

We should consider running a training workshop a couple of weeks in advance of Local Democracy Week and offer young people the chance to report on more of the Local Democracy Week events. Andrea Smith, the Youth Information Officer, may be able to provide 'journalism skills workshops' with youth groups throughout the year to increase the confidence of young people to get involved.

Question Time in Wigan Town Hall for public audience

The objective was to promote a topical and lively debate on current local and national issues with a panel of 4 elected members from each of the main groups together with local media publisher Mark Ashley. The event was publicised to a wide range of partners by in-house and CVS mail shots as well as in local press. It was also promoted directly to a number of youth groups and projects. About 60 people attended on the evening for a two hour session. Key questions included transport and congestion charging, getting involved in the work of the Council, car parking, the credit crunch and A levels.

"Good numbers, some excellent discussion"
"Some topics went on too long!"

Electronic voting equipment used in the event gave a measure of involvement for participants. Dave Guest (BBC) gave the event a sense of gravitas and ensured that everyone had a chance to speak.

People involved felt that the debate suffered from long periods spent on one subject – roughly one hour of the debate was given over to a discussion around local transport and congestion charging. However, this is something that is very relevant to local people. There was some excellent discussion around topics and most people felt they had a chance to have their say.

Future development

Being more disciplined by seeking questions in advance of the event may enable a better flow of debate. We could also make better use of the new voting equipment.

Young People's Question Time

Last year, this session ran at Standish High School with other schools linking in via video conferencing. While this did work well we wanted to make the event more inclusive. This year we ran three separate sessions in one day in schools across the Borough: Westleigh High; St. Edmund Arrowsmith and Standish High. Feeder schools were invited to attend for the debate and panels were made up of local Councillors, community representatives and relevant officers.

"Having representatives from a number of schools' feeder primary children attending rather than video conferencing went well."

Children and Young People's Services reported that the three schools and the feeders involved thought it had gone really well and that the pupils did get a lot out of it. The pupils in attendance were extremely engaged with the event and appeared to relish the opportunity to have their say. The PSHE + C team felt that the sessions could still benefit from "warming up" beforehand. One feeder school for Westleigh

took the opportunity to watch the proceedings via video conferencing and although Dave Guest did his best to include them, it was difficult for them to feel really involved.

Future development

As with the “I’m a Councillor” contest, the early planning and sign up to the event about worked well this year – we could expand on this in the future. We could explore ways of including more schools and ask the young people for their opinion on the make-up of the panels.

General Publicity

We tested out some new methods of promoting Local Democracy Week this year. We produced a presentation which highlighted each of the events of the week and the overall aims of the programme, which was displayed on the plasma screen in Wigan Town Hall. Press releases were issued separately for each event and publicity was also generated through local notice boards and word of mouth.

We also trialled a “Live Diary” on the Council Internet to record the events of Local Democracy Week for people to follow, which included a commentary of each event and photographs. The web team allowed us to submit and approve the page ourselves so that the diary could be instantly updated. The diary worked very well as a method of publicity, receiving 267 hits, which was quite a good response considering the short time the page was up.

The level of interest in Local Democracy Week among elected members was high, with over a third being involved in the events in some capacity.

Future development

Some more localised publicity such as a leaflet drop may improve attendance at events as well as earlier general publicity. We could also make use of local radio as this has been successful in previous years. We may also want to develop the web channel to include events under the banner of the theme of “active democracy”, to continually publicise and record local participation.

Costs

The main costs included the agreement with the web site running the “I’m a Councillor” event and the costs of engaging Dave Guest to host the 2 question time sessions. Other nominal costs such as venue hire, catering, promotion etc. were incurred on most activities. The overall expenditure on the week’s activities was approximately £3,900

Alternative options considered and reason for the recommended option:

Conclusions:

This area of work has continued to develop over the past two to three years and has the potential to facilitate wider public understanding of local democracy and the role of elected members in particular. Local Democracy Week has the potential to be a positive and cost effective vehicle for engagement work. We should continue to

promote the active development of local democracy throughout the year by planning ongoing events.

Diversity Impact Assessment form

Section: Chief Executive Services

Policy/Service Area: Democratic Services/Business Transformation

Person Completing Form: Brian Leigh

Date: 26.11.08

Do any of the below groups suffer specific disadvantage (please indicate)

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Race			Disability		
Ethnicity			Gender		
Age			Religion		
Class			Sexual Orientation		

Is there evidence of disadvantage or associated problems?

There is some evidence of under representation of minority groups in Council.

How was the information collected and/or who have you consulted with?

Data from the national census of councillors

Action Plan – *What specific actions are planned to tackle any disadvantage identified?*

The aim of LDW is to promote awareness in the local population as to the function of the Council as a democratic institution, and also to engender a better understanding of the role of elected members.

Is the policy in line with current equality legislation and relevant codes of practice?

Recent White Papers advance the need to improve engagement with citizens, and LDW support this aim.

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Timescale	
Responsibility	
Comments	

Are the actions specified included in any other documents/plans?

Departmental Service Plan	Yes
Section/Team Plan	Yes
Other (Specify)	

Date for further review