

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee : Cabinet

Date: 14th July 2008 : 24th July 2008

Subject: Routes to Involvement – A New Approach to Engagement

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive

Contact officer: Siân Jay x 6151

Purpose / summary: This report summarises the work to date in developing a new approach to engagement for Wigan Council. This new way of working concentrates on practical tools for engagement and on refreshing existing practices. The work has been carried out as part of the corporate approach to achieving Level Three of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG), a key target for 2008.

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: The ESLG sets a number of specific benchmarks that local authorities must evidence action against. If we do not review our policy in this area we do not meet the requirements of ESLG

Recommendation / decision: That Elected Members note the progress to date in developing a new engagement approach for the Council and endorse the future phases outlined for this work.

Key Decision: This report involves a key decision within ground(s) Ground 3.

The decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have elapsed, i.e. before 21st July 2008
This item is included in the Forward Plan.

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	Within existing Council resources
Staffing:	Within existing Council resources
Policy:	New policy
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	Yes

Wards affected:

All

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

No

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

A full diversity impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to this report.

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

A diversity impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to 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**

For Cabinet reports only:

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

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
			SPT 18/03/08
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
	14 th July 2008	24 th July 2008	

Background Papers

Strategy and Policy Guidelines on translation and interpretation services – corporate customer relations group February 2006 (contact Sian Jay - s.jay@wigan.gov.uk)

Communication Strategy and tool kit 2004 <http://boston/cexec/communication.hdn>

Consultation Strategy 2004 <http://boston/pub/cexec/consultation/consultation-strategy.pdf>

Consultation Handbook 2004 <http://boston/cexec/consultation/handbook/cttext.pdf>

Proper Officer Sue Johnson

Date 26th June 2008

1.0 Background

1.1 Wigan has a strong history of partnership working – the Council has long understood that decisions taken in isolation are rarely efficient or effective. Our definition of partnership working is broad and ranges from strategic planning through to neighbourhood action.

1.2 As part of its leading role within Wigan Borough Partnership, Wigan Council funds and manages the co-ordination of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), including delivery partnerships and the strategic board; it funds and manages locality engagement through Township Forums and it funds the Community Empowerment Networks.

1.3 Government policy and guidance is clear on the need to continually review and improve the opportunities the Council provides for local people to shape their own communities. The strong partnership foundation in Wigan has meant that the Council has been able to take an evolutionary approach to engagement over a number of years, building on existing foundations alongside its LSP partners.

1.4 The recent development of health LINKs (Local Involvement Networks) for instance, has been an inclusive process allowing stakeholders to properly inform the local brief. Neighbourhood policing is being implemented through the PACT process and in Wigan this means Partnerships and Communities Together, with the Council and other partners reorganising how they deliver at a neighbourhood level, alongside the police.

2.0 Drivers for Change

2.1 There are national and local drivers influencing the development of our approach:

- The new ‘duty to involve’ that Government will introduce to local authorities later this year, provides an opportunity to take stock of current practice and identify work that can enhance and improve involvement locally.
- The Place Based Survey, being carried out in September of this year, will have a renewed emphasis on capturing what local people think and feel about their level of influence.
- The Comprehensive Area Assessment Process will want to see evidence that opportunities have been taken up, not just provided. If services are to be able to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency they will have to be able to evidence that this assessment has been made by local people as well as through tried and tested business practices.
- The Council also needs to demonstrate its community leadership – that both councillors and officers are enabling local communities to steer their own future. This means using all the tools at their disposal, and developing new ones, to engage communities in making their own difference.

2.2 There is a particular challenge in promoting in those debates seldom heard voices, who find services hard to reach, and avoiding the silos that public

bodies find helpful in making sense of what needs to be done. Bureaucracy provides a useful structure for services to use to deliver services and monitor their effectiveness but clearly acts as a barrier to many communities.

2.3 The Equality Standard for Local Government, and Wigan Council's commitment to achieving Level Three in 2008, has provided an effective benchmark for current practice. The Council has challenged itself and has been challenged by its communities to refresh its community engagement strategy and to actively promote involvement. This has led to the development of Routes to Involvement (R2I), a new engagement approach.

2.4 Work with the council's Citizens Panel and other consultation mechanisms has shown that communities are looking for a range of opportunities and would like more choice about how to get involved. This knowledge has informed the new approach.

3.0 Approach

3.1 The aim has been with R2I to develop ambitious and long term improvement plans focusing on practical tools rather than strategy documents. The initial work has been led by a cross partner development group including the council's main delivery departments, arms length partners – Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust and Wigan and Leigh Housing – and other key partners including Wigan, Leigh and Ashton PCT, Greater Manchester Police, and Wigan and Leigh Council for Voluntary Service. The group carried out an audit of existing practice and considered the support council officers needed to be most effective.

3.2 Phase one of the work has been to improve and co-ordinate the work of officers working across the Council. Future phases, already under development, include reviewing the support given to councillors in their community leadership role, co-ordinating practice across the LSP and enhanced access for all community members to Routes to Involvement.

3.3 This phased approach has allowed the Council to cross-reference some complex and detailed work that impacts on several areas of strategy development. The table at Annex A outlines how the Routes to Involvement (R2I) work relates, for example, to the Democratic Services Review, the development of the Joint Service Centre, the review of LSP architecture and 3rd Sector development.

3.4 This is being embedded as part of our standard performance management framework and reporting through the Council's and LSP's management structures. Robust targets are in place for 2008 and future work is being programmed.

4.0 2008/09 Improvement Plan

4.1 Work has focused on a new policy framework with two key strands:

- Building practitioner strengths
- Building community strengths

which mirror the approach of the Community Development Foundation and the Council's new policy development approach of Business and Customer Transformation.

The next sections describe the priorities within the current improvement plan – these 'products' are available internally at <http://portal-wigan/sites/routes> .

4.2 Building Practitioner Strengths

The R2I work began with an audit of current activity – the **matrix** brings together engagement activity in a form that allows officers to exchange and share this good practice (it will inform the Community Resource described in section 5.0).

The council also recognises that it needs to look again at the questions it is asking and what it does with the answers – a new emphasis on **e consultation**, including a refreshed database, calendar and on-line consultation policy, builds effectively on current practice.

4.3 This is one of a number of tools, new and existing, that have been brought together as an **engagement resource** on a shared corporate site. This covers a number of aspects including defining terms and common language, illustrating Wigan's approach to the participation ladder and specific guidance for working in neighbourhoods and with young people. This work is informing the interactive web resource described in section 5.0. below.

4.4 A new council policy on **language and other formats** has been developed that focuses on developing a customer and service specific approach, based on equality impact assessment. Over time, all council services will review the communication needs of their particular customers, and potential customers, and develop custom practices.

4.5 Building Community Strengths

The vision for enhancing the way in which citizens experience engagement in Wigan has been distilled into a **pledge** document. This is currently being tested through a readers' panel and focus group work before being shared more widely with local communities and will inform the development of the Charter described in section 5.0.

4.6 The Council is bringing together all of its various (and varying) approaches together in a streamlined and coordinated approach with equality and diversity as its core principles. It is intended to be championed by the Council in a way that makes it sensible for all other partners to share the same approach and systems. A proposition for a **Community Networking Programme** is being developed, to build on the foundation achieved through the Community Empowerment Programme. This reflects the seven social identity model (Age, Belief, Class, Disability, Gender Race Sexual orientation) and that features 'seldom heard voices'. This will provide support to citizens who traditionally find it hard to have their needs understood and their views listened to.

5.0 Future Development

Early emphasis has been on improving and co-ordinating the work of officers working across the Council. However, work is already underway on the next phase and this is outlined in the table below with some indicative milestones.

Task	Action to date	Milestones
Community Resource	An interactive web resource (which can be reproduced in paper form) is being developed that will guide communities through a range of options for getting involved.	Available during 2008/09
Consultation Database	The prototype is being developed and will be tested from September this year.	Available to the general public by March 2009
Engagement Resource	The current SharePoint site will be developed into interactive web pages available to all partners.	Stakeholder event held July 2008 to discuss needs. Available during 2008/09
Community Charter	A detailed Charter, specifying the standards for engagement to which the Council should be held accountable, will be developed following consultation on the Engagement Pledge.	Draft Charter in place by March 2009.
Performance Management	An indicator set for measuring the impact of engagement has been set within Wigan's Local Area Agreement.	Place Based Survey expected September 2008. Incremental monitoring reviews to April 2009.
Community Networking Programme	A long term proposal for a Community Networking Programme that facilitates seldom heard voices is being developed for submission to the LSP	September 2008

6.0 Recommendations

That Elected Members note the progress to date in developing a new engagement approach for the Council and endorse the future phases outline for this work.

How Routes to Involvement relates to other areas of strategy development

Strategy Development	R2I Activities	Key Actions
Democratic Services Review	Engagement Resource	Supporting ward members in their community leadership role
		The role and governance of township forums
		The role of elected members in developing the PACT process
		Programme of equality training for elected members
Joint Service Centre	Engagement Resource Community Resource E Consultation Pledge and Charter	Promotion of opportunities to influence services
		State of the art approach to access
		Development of web resources
		Advice and signposting
LSP Architecture	Engagement Resource Community Networking Programme	Development of hubs/spokes
		The role and governance of township forums, neighbourhood and community networks
Local Area Agreement/CAA	Performance Management	Skills/capacity building
		Increasing opportunities for local people to engage in co-production
3rd Sector Development	Pledge and Charter Community Networking Programme	Establishing protocols for enhanced scrutiny arrangements and community calls for action
		COMPACT development work
		Commissioning framework
Community Cohesion	Language policy Community Resource Performance Management Community Networking Programme	Monitor 3 rd sector perceptions (NI7)
		Developing inclusive practices Exercising community leadership

Diversity Impact Assessment form

Section:
Business Transformation

Policy/Service Area: Equalities and Cohesion

Person Completing Form: Siân Jay	Date: 24 th June 2008
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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?
The approach includes specific provision for seldom heard voices and those who find services hard to reach.

How was the information collected and/or who have you consulted with?
A cross service steering group brought evidence to the table from their consultation practices. Specific consultation has taken place with the Citizens Panel.

Action Plan – <i>What specific actions are planned to tackle any disadvantage identified?</i>
An action plan is included in the report

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

Timescale	To March 2009
Responsibility	Business Transformation
Comments	

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

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