

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEEETING	5 SEPTEMBER 2013
TITLE	THE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Ioan Thomas

1 Background

- 1.1 Whilst considering what to include in the Strategic Plan and having reviewed the Council's current working practices, it became apparent that attention needed to be given to our engagement arrangements.
- 1.2 If we are to improve, in order to do so in a structured manner, a strategy is required, and work is ongoing to create such a strategy.
- 1.3 There is a lack of a clear understanding within the Council as to what "engagement" means and the purpose of the strategy will be to try and explain this and to map out how we intend to improve engagement within the Council.
- 1.4 It should be noted that this will not be a matter of "pressing a button" and getting a quick solution, but rather, accomplishing a series of improvements, which when taken together, will change the engagement culture within the Council. As with all culture change this will not happen overnight.
- 1.5 In preparing this report I have been asked to address several issues and I have structured the report on the basis of those issues.
- 1.6 A copy of the draft Engagement Strategy as it presently stands is attached as an appendix to this report.

2 What is the basis of our analysis that the present arrangements are deficient ?

- 2.1 Part 3 of the Strategy sets out how engagement should happen and what evidence exists to suggest that Gwynedd Council has room to improve.
- 2.2 It is apparent from this part that we have some evidence from the Mori Survey and the survey undertaken amongst stakeholders when we looked at customer care arrangements, that things aren't quite as they should be; along with examples from a number of transformational projects where it can be seen that at times proper engagement goes astray.
- 2.3 This part of the strategy also tries to analyse why this has happened.

3 What is the ambition for the engagement arrangements – how will we measure success?

3.1 Part 4 of the strategy details what we aim to do in the medium term.

3.2 The ambition at the end of the day is to ensure that the people of Gwynedd and the Council understand each other better, and as is noted in part 4 of the strategy, the aim of the strategy is to ensure that there is a structured process in place within the Council in order for this to happen.

3.3 The Strategy notes that it is a case of changing the culture amongst all of the Council's staff and members and it will essentially be a long and difficult journey.

3.4 Part 6 of the strategy details how we intend to measure success and notes that whilst it is difficult to measure something as abstract as engagement, we will be using the following measures and consider the overall picture shown by taking them all together to see if it shows improvement or not -

- How many Gwynedd residents are satisfied with the way Gwynedd Council operates;
- How many Gwynedd residents agree that it is possible for them to influence decisions within their local area;
- How many Gwynedd residents have taken part in order to influence what happens within the county;
- How many of the engagement initiatives have resulted in influencing the final project;
- What do elected members in their entirety think about the engagement arrangements at the end of the period.

4 Is the ambition for improving engagement now actually realistic in view of the new financial challenges facing the Council?

4.1 In view of the future financial constraints with which we will be faced, it is certainly true that we will have to carefully consider which elements of the Strategic Plan we can continue to accomplish.

4.2 Of course, in one respect, it could be argued that in such circumstances effective engagement is even more important in order to ensure that we do the right things with whatever resources we have, by reflecting our people's priorities.

4.3 As yet the Cabinet has not given consideration as to which projects within the Strategic Plan have to be re-prioritised but I shall be recommending that the engagement project be retained but that we try and do this within the resources presently available.

4.4 After discussing with officers I foresee that this should be possible with a substantial part of the strategy but if additional resources are required for any aspect, this can be considered in view of any resulting benefit that would arise.

5 What will be the role for executive/backbench members within the new engagement arrangements?

5.1 Obviously, members are key “engagers” for the Council – not necessarily because they are part of a formal project within the Council – but because they are in constant contact with a cross-section of the people of Gwynedd (namely their electors).

5.2 It can be seen from Appendix 1 of the Strategy that there is one work stream (Workstream No 8) that deals with the requirements of members within the engagement process.

5.3 The work programme identifies that the first two elements to be considered within this area are to define what exactly is the role of members within our overall engagement arrangements and to undertake a dialogue with members on what they require in order to be a key part of engagement.

5.4 Once this work has been completed (it is envisaged in the work programme that this will happen by May/June next year), we will be able to implement any suggestions that arise.

5.5 Of course members also have a role in considering the success of the whole strategy as their findings will be part of the measurement process (see last bullet point in section 3 above.)

6 What kind of assistance and guidance will be available to Council members, managers and staff?

6.1 It can be seen within the strategy that a large element of it ensures that managers and staff dealing with engagement receive the support and skills necessary to undertake this effectively.

6.2 Many of the workstreams and arrangements to develop further arrangements revolve around the need to ensure that we identify the needs of those involved with engagement and try to establish what is actually needed in order to ensure success.

6.3 One of the essential resources in this respect is the Engagement Handbook referred to in part 5 of the strategy, which will be available on the Council's internal website. The handbook will assist individuals to consider the nature of engagement required in order to ensure that the essential information is to hand for those commissioning or running the project.

7 How will we assess the success of the new arrangements?

7.1 We will measure success as a result of what the five measures noted in section 3.4 above tell us.