Gwynedd Council Engagement Strategy 2013 -2017

Draft version 9 [following submission to Management Team].

1. Why do we need an engagement strategy?

Engagement is a broad term used to describe the dialogue between the Council and the people of Gwynedd that takes place as we go about our work of providing services for those people.

It can take place in various ways and on almost all occasions where there is contact between the Council and the people of Gwynedd, both formally and informally.

It is acknowledged that effective Engagement is an essential tool in good Governance arrangements as it allows us to gain a better understanding of each other.

Traditionally, engagement was considered to be a way to gain an understanding of the aspirations and priorities of our people in an attempt to use that information to drive our actions.

Of course, engagement takes place already and it is done well in pockets across the Council; however, there is an element of quantitative evidence that everything is not as it should be [see part 3 below].

Nevertheless, in the current financial climate engagement will become increasingly important as the relationship that any council must have with the people it serves changes.

It will not be possible for us to continue to act in the way that everyone has become accustomed to and there will be a need to ensure, not only that we have a better understanding of the aspirations of our people, but that they in turn understand the new financial reality and what that entails.

Therefore, if we wish to secure sustainable services for the people of Gwynedd in future, we can only do so by working together and by gaining a better understanding of each other.
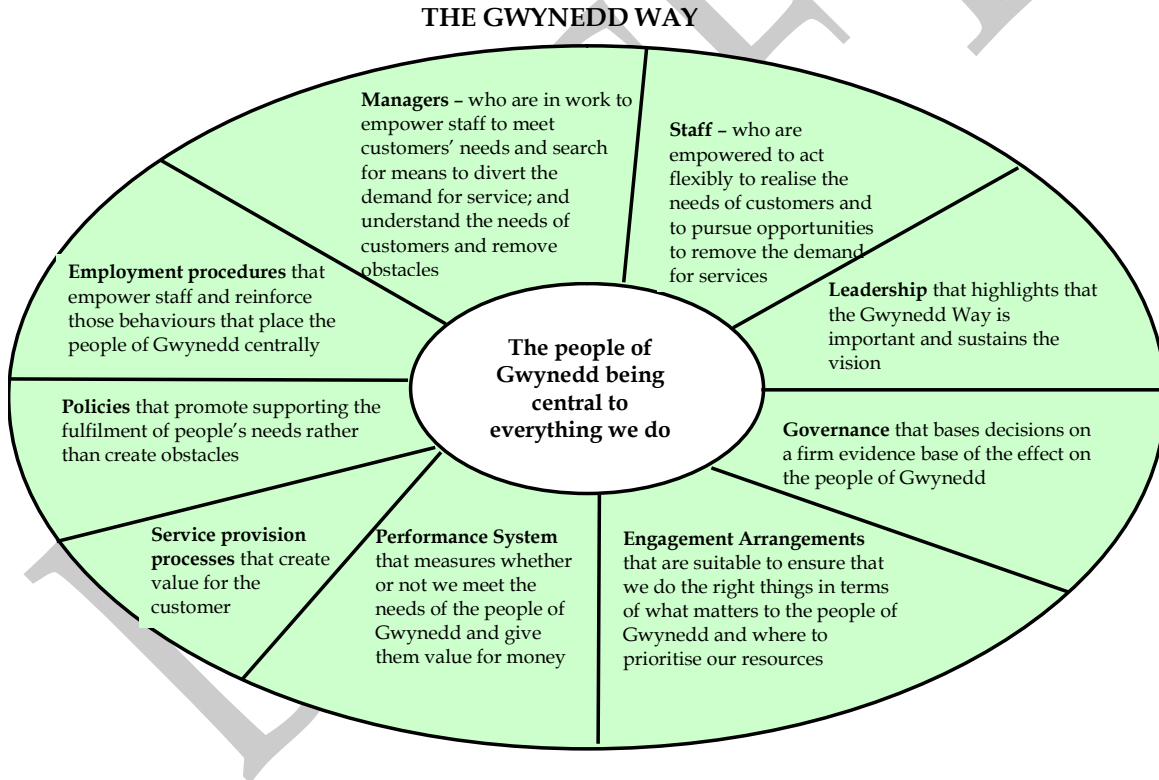
As a result, this strategy is required in order to create a new relationship for a new world.

2. What will be the purpose of the engagement strategy?

The Gwynedd Council Strategic Plan for the period 2013-2017 sets out the Council's priorities for the period and describes what the Council will do to achieve those priorities.
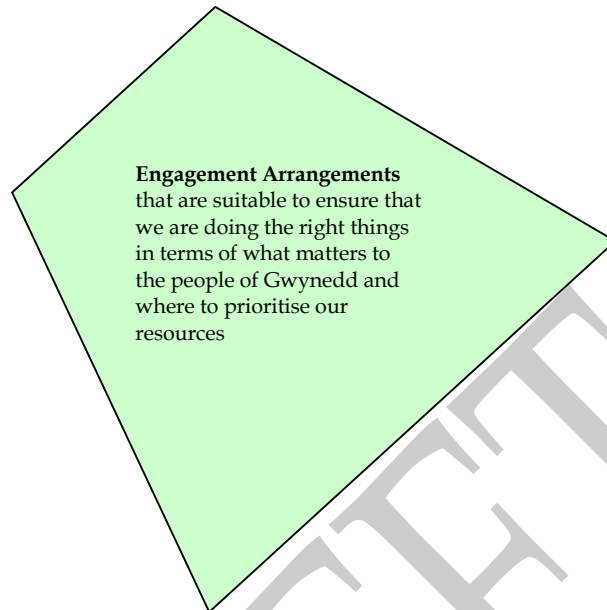
The Council has a vision of ensuring that the people of Gwynedd are central to everything we do and to ensure that this happens, the Council will promote a culture which reflects that vision throughout the entire Council. To ensure that this happens, we have identified a number of factors that need to be in place if we are to embed "The Gwynedd Way" in all of the Council's activities.

These can be seen in the diagram below.

THE GWYNEDD WAY

Managers – who are in work to empower staff to meet customers' needs and search for means to divert the demand for service; and understand the needs of customers and remove obstacles

Staff – who are empowered to act flexibly to realise the needs of customers and to pursue opportunities to remove the demand for services

Employment procedures that empower staff and reinforce those behaviours that place the people of Gwynedd centrally

Leadership that highlights that the Gwynedd Way is important and sustains the vision

The people of Gwynedd being central to everything we do

Policies that promote supporting the fulfilment of people's needs rather than create obstacles

Governance that bases decisions on a firm evidence base of the effect on the people of Gwynedd

Service provision processes that create value for the customer

Performance System that measures whether or not we meet the needs of the people of Gwynedd and give them value for money

Engagement Arrangements that are suitable to ensure that we do the right things in terms of what matters to the people of Gwynedd and where to prioritise our resources

It can be seen that one essential element of "The Gwynedd Way" is to ensure that we have suitable engagement arrangements in place to ensure that we do the

things that matter for the people of Gwynedd and to be able to prioritise our resources appropriately.

Engagement Arrangements
that are suitable to ensure that we are doing the right things in terms of what matters to the people of Gwynedd and where to prioritise our resources
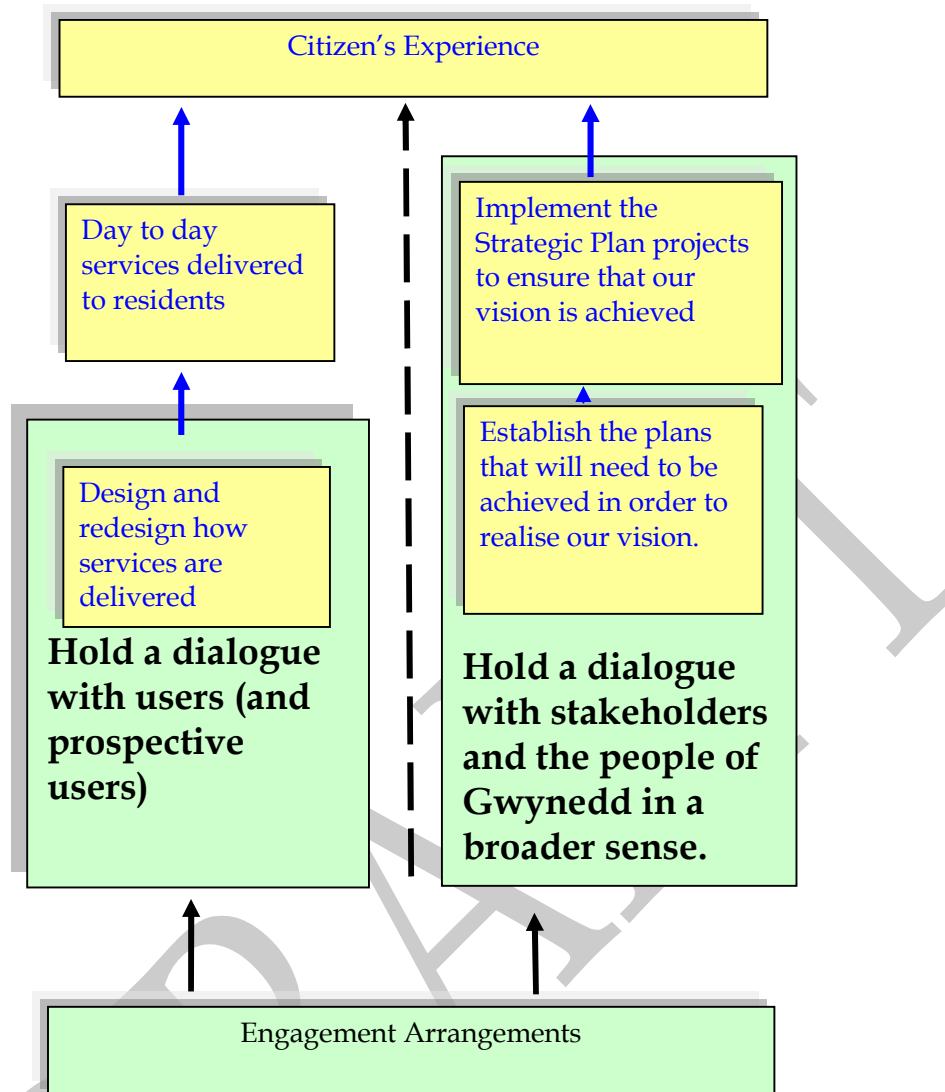
Suitable Engagement arrangements will also be a powerful tool when attempting to divert the demand for services and achieve strong and self-sufficient communities.

If we are to achieve the visions noted for the various fields within the Strategic Plan, the Council will not be able to achieve them unless the people of Gwynedd join us and play their part in the key changes that we must see happening.

However, the need to ensure effective engagement is broader than just those plans for change that are noted in the Strategic Plan. It is also essential in our day to day work to ensure that we do the right things when delivering services to residents over the range of services delivered.

The following diagram shows the role of engagement when attempting to affect the experiences of our people.

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                      Citizen's Experience

  Day to day                        Implement the
  services delivered                Strategic Plan projects
  to residents                      to ensure that our
                                    vision is achieved

         Design and                 Establish the plans
         redesign how               that will need to be
         services are               achieved in order to
         delivered                  realise our vision.

  Hold a dialogue                   Hold a dialogue
  with users (and                   with stakeholders
  prospective                       and the people of
  users)                            Gwynedd in a
                                    broader sense.

                    Engagement Arrangements
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Then, by improving engagement we should ensure that the community has more influence on the Council's work and for the Council to better explain what it is doing when designing its activities, and thus ensure that we **meet the needs of the people of Gwynedd** as far as possible.   In doing so, we should gain improved trust between the Council and the people of Gwynedd.
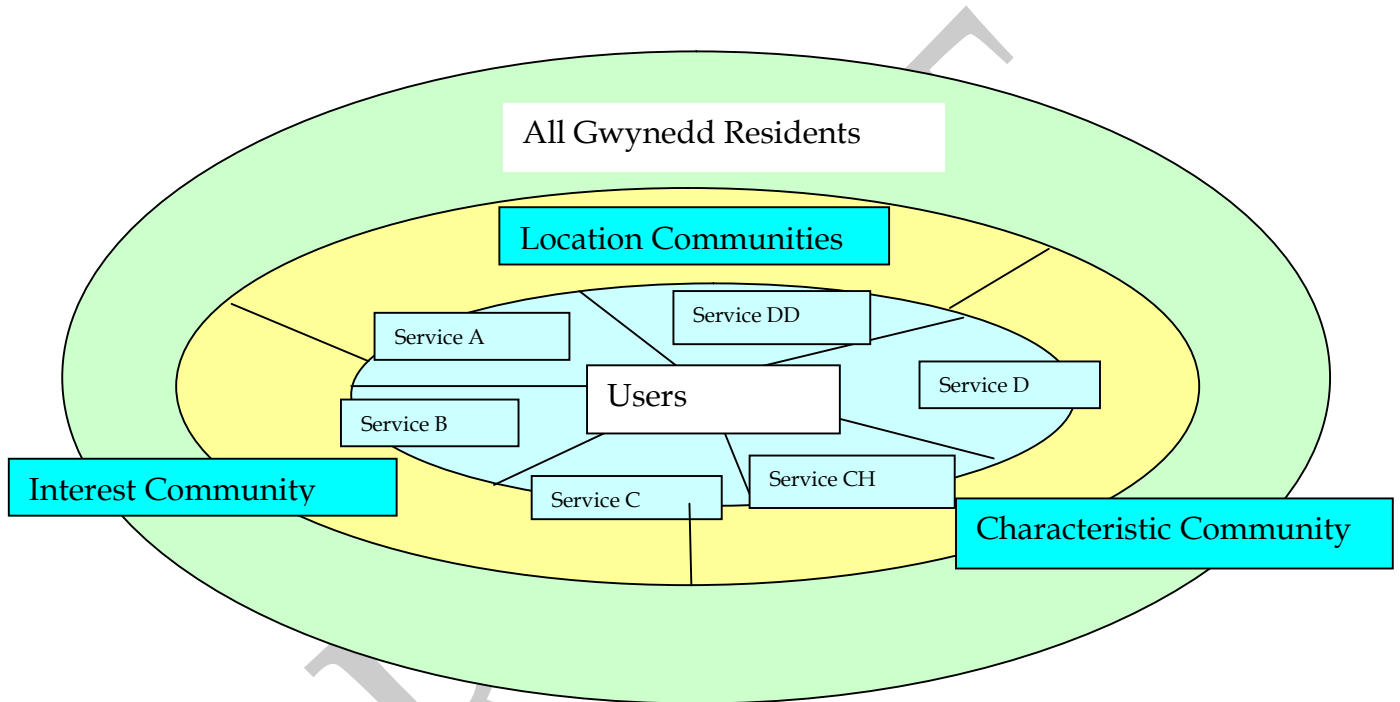
It can also be used to build bridges between the Council and its people so that they better understand the choices that must be made and to assist to change our people's attitudes and expectations and the need for them to play their part in any change also.

Specifically, effective Engagement will be essential if we hope to persuade the people of Gwynedd to change their expectations in terms of what the Council will be able to provide in the future. If we are to effectively control the demand

for services, this will call for a substantial effort if we wish to take the people of Gwynedd with us on this journey.

3 How does Engagement currently take place?

Engagement can take place on different levels with various communities and various parts of communities as noted below.

All Gwynedd Residents

Location Communities

Service A

Service DD

Service D

Users

Service B

Interest Community

Service C

Service CH

Characteristic Community

At its most general level, we will wish to engage will all Gwynedd residents.

Then, on the next level, we would often identify specific communities, such as

➢ Location Communities – namely people who identify themselves with a specific area – be that a broad area; a community or town council area; a specific village or even a housing estate.

➢ Interest Communities – namely people who share a common experience or interest – for example, people who are interested in environmental matters or in the arts.

This can also include bodies that are active in various fields within the territory of Gwynedd, whether those are other public organisations, third sector businesses or the voluntary sector.

> ➢ Characteristic Communities – namely people who share a specific characteristic – such as ethnic groups or disabled people or people of a specific age such as young people, older people, etc.

We will also want to engage with service users on an ongoing basis in order to establish what is important to them and how we can improve the provision. **This can all take place on a formal and informal level.**

We can see from the diagram above how engagement takes its place in our delivery arrangements for the residents of Gwynedd by ensuring that the people of Gwynedd are central to everything we do and that it encompasses the following -

   a. A day to day dialogue when providing services. The personal experience of the individual when receiving a service by the Council is the factor that influences very heavily on people's attitudes towards the Council and in order to ensure that the experience is positive, we must have a dialogue with our users.

   b. Dialogue as part of the process of introducing change. Unless we hold a two-way dialogue with the relevant communities, how can we ensure that we do the right things and ensure that we understand the reasons behind our decisions?

   c. Public links and the use made of a broad range of electronic and traditional media. The image portrayed in the media influences people's perceptions and the media is an important method for the Council to use to provide information and explain viewpoints.

   d. Specific arrangements the Council has to strengthen the dialogue we have with specific cohorts, e.g. opportunities to engage through the Residents' Panel, Area Forums, etc. and relevant techniques.

Of course, engagement takes place already and it is done well in pockets across the Council.

However, there is an element of qualitative evidence that everything is not as it should be.

In a MORI Survey undertaken by the Council in November 2009, 43% of Gwynedd residents considered, after taking everything into account, that they were satisfied with how Gwynedd Council run things (compared with 45% within our statistical neighbours).

In the same survey, 63% felt that it was not possible for them to influence decisions in their local area (compared with 73% in our statistical neighbours) and 29% noted that they would like to have more of a say in the decisions affecting their local area with a further 59% noting that they wished to have more say, depending on the matter in question.

However, the picture is not completely clear. In the most recent survey held by the Welsh Government across Wales in 2012/13 – 54% of Gwynedd residents noted that it was not possible for them to influence decisions which affected their local area – namely the eighth best in Wales.

In the survey undertaken amongst stakeholders in terms of considering what are the weaknesses in our current customer care arrangements, a number noted that one of the reasons why it is considered we do not provide better customer care is that we do not spend enough time establishing what is important for the citizen.

Practical experience also shows that the quality of engagement varies and there is evidence from a number of transformation projects that there are many occasions where we did not get things right.

An analysis of the reasons why we are failing show that the main reasons for this are as follows -

➢ Very often, we do not commence the engagement process soon enough in the process for change; and

➢ We do not always allow sufficient time to engage properly as we rush to achieve the change and think that engagement is a "desirable addition";

➢ Project leaders do not always have the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to do it effectively and they use the wrong technique or ask questions that are inappropriate for the situation.

➢ We are not always clear about what exactly we do and give the impression that we discuss a situation where anything is possible where in reality there are possibly only two practical choices;

➢ Sometimes, we even forget about important stakeholders.

Therefore, if we are to see better results, we need to address these weaknesses.

4   What will the strategy achieve?

Therefore, we can state that the aim of the strategy is -

"…to ensure that there is a structured procedure within the Council to ensure opportunities for the people of Gwynedd and the Council to gain a better understanding of each other."

This is a matter of changing culture amongst all Council staff and members and this could be a very long and challenging journey.

The strategy will therefore:

- ➢ Set the core principles that should be followed in order to improve engagement within the Council, namely;
  - o Considering early enough what engagement has already taken place and that engagement needs to happen;
  - o Being clear from the outset regarding who are the relevant stakeholders;
  - o That the most relevant methods should be used according to the situation we are facing;
  - o If uncertain, the person responsible for the field should call for assistance from the source available for them;

- ➢ Support and provide a strong foundation to develop policies and design day to day services by ensuring that decisions are made based on an understanding of the needs of individuals and communities.

- ➢ Increase and strengthen the contribution of communities when developing and implementing the major changes of the Council's Strategic Plan;

- ➢ Support communities to act and empower communities to identify their needs and assist them to develop their own solutions;

- ➢ Improve the quality of engagement exercises;

- ➢ Improve engagement with difficult to reach groups to ensure that they also have a voice.

5   How will we achieve this?

As a starting point, we will:

 ➢ Provide an engagement framework in order to ensure that there is a handbook that managers can turn to in order to steer their activities in this field;

 ➢ Raise awareness of the value of engagement and the handbook amongst managers and leaders and project managers;

 ➢ Improve the skills of individuals who are responsible for engagement;

 ➢ Provide a resource to support managers who need advice regarding the engagement field and to ensure quality on some of the most key projects;

 ➢ Ensure robust governance arrangements in order to assess the effectiveness of engagement activities in terms of ensuring that they engage with the right people, on the right subjects and at the right time, by reviewing the lessons to be learnt and what needs to be done further to improve our performance in this field on a regular basis;

 ➢ Experiment with new procedures to see what works and what does not work;

 ➢ Create an Engagement Forum for practitioners to share good practice and offer support to each other.

Appendix 1 shows an initial work programme for achieving what is noted above.

It is anticipated that the work programme will evolve further as we learn lessons from our experiences over the coming period.

6   How will we know if we have succeeded?

If the intention of engagement is to ensure that we have a better understanding of each other and thus, ensuring that the Council's decisions take what is important to the people of Gwynedd into consideration, we should be measuring:

 ➢ Whether or not the residents of Gwynedd and us understand each other better

> ➢ Have we established what matters for all Gwynedd residents
> ➢ Are our decisions being influenced by that feedback

The problem is that these matters are very difficult to measure, in particular the first two, and it is difficult to imagine how they can be measured in real terms.

Meanwhile, it is suggested that the success of the strategy should be measured by measuring the following -

> ➢ How many Gwynedd residents are satisfied with how Gwynedd Council runs things;

> ➢ How many Gwynedd residents agree that it is possible for them to influence decisions in their local area;

> ➢ How many Gwynedd residents have participated in order to influence what happens in the county;

> ➢ How many engagement exercises have led to influencing the final plan;

> ➢ What are the feelings of elected members as a whole about the engagement arrangements at the end of the period.

From establishing the compound picture obtained from the five abovementioned measures, we should be able to measure whether or not our attempt to improve engagement is successful.

7   How will we monitor the implementation of the strategy?

The Cabinet Member for Customer Care on the Council's Cabinet will be responsible for achieving the aims of this strategy and will ensure that this takes place by submitting ongoing reports to the Transformation Delivery Panel.

Over the period of the strategy, the exact steps that will need to be delivered will evolve as we learn from the activities taking place and in order to ensure that ongoing attention is given to the field, it is intended to establish an Engagement Project Board that will evolve into an Engagement Management Board in turn.

Membership of the Board will be as follows -

Customer Care Cabinet Member
Cabinet member with responsibility for communication

Corporate Director
Head of Customer Care Department
Senior Delivery and Support Manager

The Project / Governing Board will -
- ➢ Assist the Cabinet Member to ensure that the aims of the strategy are being achieved;
- ➢ Keep a log of engagement activities and assess the quality and effectiveness of those activities;
- ➢ Call on Project Leaders / heads as needed in order to learn lessons from engagement campaigns;
- ➢ Consider any examples of good or bad engagement and consider how that influences what needs to be done in this field;
- ➢ Recommend any change in direction required to the Transformation Delivery Board;
- ➢ Consider what is the situation with implementing the matters noted in section 4 above;
- ➢ Consider whether or not the measures show the success of the strategy;
- ➢ Consider any messages from the Practitioners' forum;
- ➢ Determine the priorities of the Residents' Panel.

Initial work programme for the delivery of the strategy's aims

No.	Task	| 2013/14 ||||||||||									| 2014/15 ||||||||||||												| 2015/16 ||||||||||||											
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3
1	**The Strategy**																																		
1.1	Complete the Strategy	■																																	
1.2	Present the Strategy to the Management Team	■																																	
1.3	Present the Strategy to the Panel	■																																	
1.4	Initial meeting of the Governing Board (shadow)	■																																	
1.5	Cabinet adopting the Strategy		■																																
1.6	Establish a baseline for the measures				■																														
1.7	Present to the Management Group				■																														
1.8	Present to the Senior Managers' Academy					■																													
2	**The Handbook**																																		
2.1	Complete the Handbook			■																															
2.2	Present to the Management Group				■																														
2.3	Present to the Senior Managers' Academy and Project Leaders					■																													
2.4	Assess the benefit of the Handbook in light of experiences																		■																
3	**Resources for Engagement**																																		
3.1	Source of assistance for those who wish to engage available on the Intranet				■	■																													
3.2	Review the sufficiency of the assistance												■													■									
4	**Extend use of modern media**																																		
4.1	Paper submitted to the Management Board on the lessons learnt and future needs	■																																	
4.2	Proposals to the Management Team				■																														
4.3	Proposals to the Cabinet					■																													

Projects and other activities evolving following the experiences reported to the Engagement Governing Board

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7 Engagement Forum

7.1 Arrangements, membership and structure agreed

7.2 First meeting held

7.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of arrangements

8 Members' needs for Engagement

8.1 Define the role of members in the engagement process

8.2 Hold a dialogue with members regarding what
they need to be a key part of engagement

9 Engagement in Major Events

9.1 Assess current arrangements and identify any
problems

9.2 Agree on amended arrangements if required