

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>18 March, 2014</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>Engagement with Members</b>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>To report on recent discussions and initial proposals on improving engagement with members</b>
<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>Geraint George Head of Democratic Services</b>

## **BACKGROUND**

1. Improving communications and engagement with members has been identified by this committee and other forums as a subject requiring attention for some time.

2. In line with the promise given at this committee, a consultation was held about the Council's engagement arrangements in general (that is an issue for the Corporate Scrutiny Committee) and also on engagement with councillors, that is part of that broader picture (that is a matter for this committee).

3. The response to the questionnaire was a little disappointing in terms of numbers but the main messages that came out of that consultation were:-

- Members' views on the way in which the Council engages with the public and with members - 6 out of 10
- Generally good collaboration with members but it is inconsistent
- A failure to use members' local knowledge effectively
- There is a real need to make proper use of councillors in the dialogue with the public that is going to be harder over the coming years

4. In addition, two workshops were held with members (in Porthmadog and Bethel) to address the issues more fully. At those workshops, several suggestions were made to improve arrangements.

5. The remainder of the report addresses the different main issues and our initial proposals in response to those needs.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ARRANGEMENTS**

6. There is an appreciation of Rhaeadr as a means to share information but there was a view that a simpler set-up similar to that of the Welsh Local Government Association bulletin would be better – We plan to review Rhaeadr with that in mind

7. Departments arrangements for contacting members when work is happening or is planned within their wards **must** be improved.– We plan to talk to Heads of

Departments to identify what are the obstacles to that happening to establish new arrangements or improve on what is in place.

8. Sending every press release to every councillor for information would help in sharing information – using the tablets for doing so would cost nothing – We plan to distribute a link to every pro-active press release, starting that immediately

### **COUNCILLOR CENTRED**

9. Councillors have an important role in bridging between the Council and the people of Gwynedd by being able to receive and share information with their electorates on behalf of the Council, as well as transferring messages back from their electorates for consideration by the Council.

10. To enable Councillors to implement this role effectively, a joint understanding needs to be established between officers and councillors about the role, and the advantages of implementing that role for the Councillor and the Council. As a first step, it is intended to hold discussions with the Council's Management Group based on the main messages of the 2 workshops held, and following that, consideration will be given to the possibility of bringing councillors and officers together to hold further discussions and to jointly plan any further steps.

### **THE AREA FORUMS**

11. At the meeting of the full Council on 28th February, 2014, it was decided to move to a system of Area Forums after the Annual Meeting in May, 2013. However, it was noted in the debate that this should be reviewed again in a year.

12. By the end of the year, the four Area Forums will have met on 5 occasions, including one being a special session to discuss the proposed content of the Strategic Plan for 2014/15 and an information session on re-cycling and composting.

13. It is fair to say that the experience of the four areas has been different with different agendas and also different attendance levels in each area.

14. There will be a discussion at the next meetings of the individual Area Forums to collect members' views on the future of the area forums now that the first year is coming to an end. In addition, we also plan to use Rhaeadr to seek the views of all members in order to get the views of those members who have not been attending the forums.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

15. The Committee's views are sought on the above proposals.