

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>10 March, 2015</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>Engagement with members</b>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>Seeking further guidance on specific recommendations</b>
<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>Geraint George, Head of Democratic Services</b>

## **BACKGROUND**

1. The Democratic Services Committee will recall that I reported previously on a commission from this committee and the Customer Care Delivery Panel for work on our arrangements for engagement with members. This followed consultation on our arrangements with members (at workshops and through a questionnaire) that highlighted a number of key messages:-
  - That, in general, there is good co-operation between members and officers but that this is inconsistent
  - A failure to use the knowledge of local councillors effectively
  - A real need to improve and make better use of members in the difficult dialogue with the public
2. Following these initial discussions, a joint task group of officers (directors, heads and practitioners) and elected members (including cabinet members and front line members) was established.
3. The Task Group met on two occasions. At the first meeting, the positive and challenging elements of the relationship between members and officers were analysed and 11 areas for improvement were identified. However, it is fair to note that there is a considerable difference between them in terms of scale and complexity and that a number of matters are interlinked.
4. I should note, in passing, that the discussion in the Task Group has been beneficial and honest with members and officers appreciating the opportunity to discuss openly and honestly on issues such as, for example, the issue of trust.
5. At the second meeting, it was agreed that there were too many issues to give meaningful attention to all of them at the moment and that we should concentrate on two major issues, one of them being large in scale and strategic and the other being smaller and more operational in nature.

## **SPECIFIC PROPOSALS**

6. Big Changes / The Gwynedd Challenge – This is the main area that needs to be addressed in the near future. The basic principle is to seek to bring members into the discussions on big and significant changes as soon as possible. It was noted that this could prove risky if members went to the press or Social Media before a matter was ready.

Specific Action Points:-

- a) A commitment to use pre-scrutiny more extensively and that there is regular dialogue between Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs on issues that could be dealt with in this way.
  - b) A commitment from Cabinet Members and officers to contact local members who could be effected in discussions on significant changes in some area. NB Mention was made of a possible top 10 with other issues being dealt with under the operational arrangements noted below
  - c) A commitment from individual members to respect trust and confidentiality until new proposals are ready to be published and consulted upon.
7. Operational Contact Arrangements – It is deficiencies in this area that causes the greatest frustration amongst members with things happening within wards without their knowledge until the story appears in the Press or they are approached by one of their residents. A number have also expressed frustration that they do not know who to contact on various issues.

Specific Action Points:-

- a) Encourage members to make use, in the first place, of Galw Gwynedd because of the effectiveness of Galw Gwynedd's tracking system for enquiries
  - b) The Communications Unit to update a list of key contacts on the web-site publicising (through Rhaeadr) where that is available
  - c) Every department should remind officers to include local members on any local operational matters happening within their wards
8. The Democratic Services Committee is invited to consider and approve the above action points.