

Golborne & Lowton Township Forum

A future model for Neighbourhood Engagement – brief for Joint Chairs

Golborne & Lowton Township Forum has debated its views on the basis for its engagement with Wigan Council in the future and it is proposing a ward based model for Golborne & Lowton West and for Lowton East. The principles of this approach are;

Every resident should be a member by right. We want to encourage everyone to get involved but this doesn't have to mean attending meetings.

Communication is very important. The new method of working should maximise the use of technological solutions to keep people informed; while ensuring there are other means of communication used to engage with residents who may not be engaging with new technologies. This should include a community website, newsletters of the new group and its partners (including Borough Life) and notice boards – physical and electronic.

Information needs to be easy to get and understand. The Council and other bodies need to make information available in a way that works for local people. It needs to cover both the ward and Borough wide issues that have an impact on the ward.

Funding and access to it is important for local projects and 'breeding success' – which will encourage people to engage and participate. The new model of working should have access to a local devolved budget; similar to the Environment Fund and be able to influence local spending by services; similar to the Section 106 Funding. Along with advice on funding opportunities that the ward based organisation could apply to get things delivered on the ground.

Empowering local people to make decisions that shapes and influences what happens where they live. All residents should have the chance to vote on what they think the important issues are. The methods used need to be clear, open and transparent with the outcomes communicated back to residents – residents will need to be informed about issues to help them make decisions. Focusing on the ward and ward issues will help people relate to issues as it will be about something within their area.

An encouraging environment to share skills, knowledge and experience. The ward based method would enable groups to share information, knowledge and skills to help support one another.

The support that Golborne & Lowton Township Forum would like to see from Wigan Council to the two ward groups includes;

Set up. There may be some costs involved with establishing the ward groups but this would be minimal. It vital that the council and others don't impose a model for how the groups should be established – the agenda should be a mix of local and partner issues but in the control of the local residents.

Assistance may be required to develop a community based website and other social networking technologies for communicating with residents. Help may also be required to develop the most appropriate means of communicating with those not switch on to technology.

Access to any existing data bases of community groups in the ward would also help the setting up of the ward based group.

Funding. The ward based groups should continue to access funding on the same basis as is currently available i.e. access to section 106 open space funds and an environmental fund of £10k per ward. Advice on opportunities to apply for other funding sources such as grants to implement projects and improvements needs to be available. Access to funding advisors.

Support of councillors. Its seen as essential for the success of the ward based model of working to have commitment and consistent attendance at meetings by the appropriate ward councillors.

Support from the Council and other service agencies staff. The support of partners in helping identify the causes and possible resolutions to issue is seen as important. As is their willingness to share information about what they are doing in an area and give unambiguous and transparent explanations about the way they are delivering services to the ward.

Access to information. The ward based group should to be kept informed of important issues affecting their areas in a timely and effective way - the information should be presented in a manner which is easily understandable. They would like the opportunity to take part in discussion and consultation on these issues and where they affect more than a single ward by meeting across ward boundaries as appropriate.

Support person/team. The new method of working should have a support person or team who the ward group access easily for advice, guidance and support when needed; in addition to facilitating the linking of several ward groups to discuss issues that affect more than 1 ward.

Support services for Community Groups. Being able to have access to legal and other advisors to assist groups establish and with projects – would help engagement and participation.