

TRANSFORMING THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS – KEY FEATURES

1. Context

Angus Council faces unprecedented financial challenges in addition to a rapidly aging socio-demographic profile and an increasing demand for services. At the same time the cumulative effect of several years of funding constraints and unfunded inflationary cost pressures is really starting to challenge the Council's ability to be financially sustainable. The Council has made good progress in addressing the issues raised by Audit Scotland in the Council's last Best Value Audit Report in 2016 but there remains more work to do ahead of the Council's next Best Value Audit. Key recommendations from the most recent Accounts Commission Overview Report which are relevant in this context include:-

Effective leadership and robust planning is more important than ever to ensure council services remain sustainable.

Councils should ensure they are continuously improving their work in key areas by:

- continuing to improve understanding on how the landscape within which their council operates may change, by considering its demographics, the public spending environment and policy changes
- developing long-term financial and scenario planning that takes these factors into account and considers the impact on all their services and their users
- considering how to make the most of new technology, for example streamlining processes and communicating differently with service users
- working with communities - so that they are actively involved in decision making, know the effect decisions are expected to have on services and communities and see the impact of community empowerment
- focusing on the delivery of priority outcomes through:
 - working with communities to understand their needs
 - establishing effective cross-party relationships to work together and make the sometimes difficult decisions needed to achieve the council's priorities
 - clearly linking budgets to plans and outcomes
- using the data collected and monitored to report publicly on the quality of services, as well as user satisfaction with those services.

In order to respond to these points, this transformation plan has been prepared which will inform, engage and consult with citizens in the most appropriate way in order that they may understand what the council proposes to do and why and in particular how this affects the choices made when the Council sets its budget.

2. Public Engagement with the Council

Communication and public engagement needs to be about more than the council's budget and some of the limited choices therein. The rise of social media and 24/7 news, means that there is now a far greater expectation from citizens and staff to be given more information



and to be engaged and consulted with. This is as true for public bodies as it is with companies and brands and the council must reflect this shift in the dynamics of public communication.

Further, it is necessary to ensure that the council's agreed priorities and outcomes captured in the LOIP and Council Plan are central to any engagement which requires a more holistic approach.

This paper therefore proposes taking a different approach to how the council **informs, engages and consults** with citizens and staff which must be consistent in approach and adhere to key messages central to the work of the council. Therefore the recommendations in this paper go well beyond the traditional budget-related consultation that Angus and other Councils have done in the past and are of greater value and less resource intensive than other options.

3. The Case Against a Survey

General consultation has been and is being done at all times between the council and citizens including a growing number who seek to engage with the council on social media about a wide variety of issues. An outline of current consultation mechanisms is included as Annex 1. A wide-spread survey around general budget principles is not helpful as these discussions are not focused on a constructive dialogue around the necessary reductions to services, nor can they easily involve complex decision making such as conflicting budget priorities.

Many of the decisions around budgetary restrictions are no longer optional, so consultation is fruitless and adds further to public frustration as they have to face cuts that they made clear were not wanted when they were consulted. However, it is clear that the public has not grasped the scale and speed of cuts already made and that are still required in order to meet financial targets in the coming three years. This is the more pressing communications challenge that needs to be addressed.

Additionally, elected members have been elected on their own mandate be it around local issues or national, political affiliations, etc. and it is therefore incumbent upon them to take these difficult decisions. Finally, surveys are of limited use. When faced with a morality-based decision, such as free parking vs more teachers, people will make a moral choice but it will not positively influence acceptance of the reality of this decision at the time it affects them directly. Surveys are also expensive and time-consuming.

However, it is useful and right that citizens are:

Informed: with simple, relevant facts that frame the financial realities of the council such as the amount required to be saved over the next three years.

Engaged: with the difficulties resulting from the real facts outlined above which are now facing the council, specifically regarding the choices that must now be taken.

Consulted: directly, and on local issues where there are real choices to be made around how specific services will be delivered.

This is the proposed model and to help frame this format, it is suggested that Angus Council investigate and if appropriate implement an "Angus Deal", based on the model of the well publicised Wigan Deal. This will move the discussion towards what the council is doing, and what can still be done with the help of citizens, rather than what the council is going to stop doing.



4. The Wigan Deal

Wigan Council has taken a new and genuinely asset-based approach to public sector reform and has branded it as "The Wigan Deal". The deal is about how the Council is working together with communities to achieve their vision. It is articulated through an informal agreement between the council and everyone who lives or works in Wigan to collaborate towards creating a better borough (Annex 3). Wigan Council has committed to working and behaving in a different way, but it is clear that it also needs to encourage and support behaviour change in its communities. So far Wigan Council (annual revenue budget of £865m) has saved £115m, but more is planned.

Research into the deal shows that the deal:

- Was born out of experience of taking a dramatically different approach to adult social care through a "creative Council" programme as well as other initiatives that took a systems approach to service delivery
- Was articulated as part of setting the Council's budget and agreeing the Council Plan
- Takes a positive, asset based approach – it is not about how much money the Council has to save, but how much it has to invest, and the matters that are within its control
- Is about how the Council will operate (i.e. be people-centric) and what others need to do to support and contribute to that
- Is a very successful PR exercise, but is not just a PR exercise. Time was spent overcoming distrust that Council initiatives come and go, but residents have always been faced with the same Council, until now
- Is all encompassing way of behaving and working

5. Potential to Develop Our Own "Deal"

At this stage officers see an Angus Deal as a possible rather than definite approach to future service provision and engagement with local communities. Constructing and implementing the Deal in Wigan took time and considerable resource and officers are therefore working to fully understand what was involved and what would be required to create an Angus equivalent.

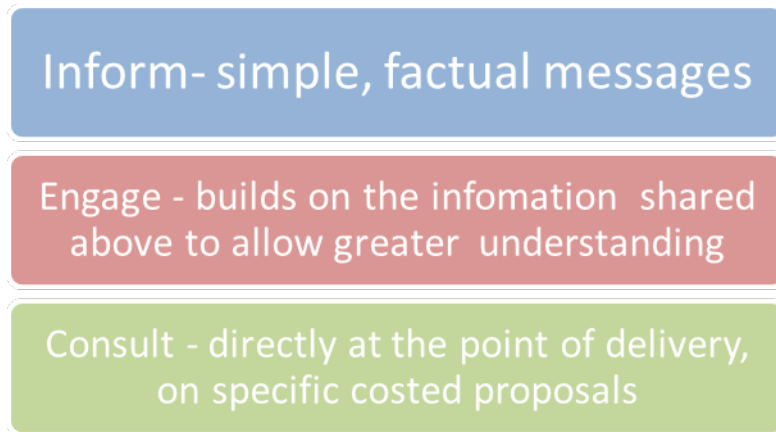
In particular we need to understand the more fundamental shift in public service provision that underpins the Wigan Deal, and as such we are not yet ready or able to produce a comprehensive and radical shift in operations in the five months up to the next budget in February 2019. However, it is possible to use some of the core principles of the deal: building new relationships and having new conversations to present Angus Council's financial challenges. This will provide a road map as to how the council will engage with communities and individuals going forward, and will begin to inform how services will be designed and delivered.

This represents a 'warm-up' phase for developing and branding our own "deal" which can be taken further over the next three years, with the Organisational Design from Zero Based Budgeting (OD/ZBB) review work across every Council service providing a lot of detail in the first 18 months. In addition, participatory budgeting will continue to grow over the next two to three years. It is therefore essential that the council starts to develop methods of engaging and consulting with its communities in a more timely, meaningful and constructive way now or the value of this will be lost to both the council and the community. This will begin that process while a work stream to examine the extent and methodology of the Wigan Deal, and how it might apply to Angus is initiated.



6. Communications Framework

By shifting the focus from a survey to conversation, the council can have a more rich dialogue with its citizens. However like all communications campaigns, it is essential that once agreed, all parties must adhere to the methodology and key messages and maintain the consistency of approach. The 3 key strands are about informing, engaging and consulting as shown in the diagram below.



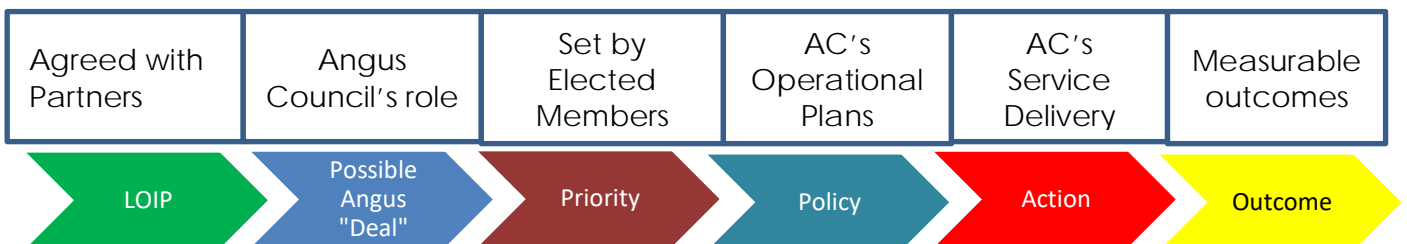
7. The Communications Proposal

It is proposed that we develop our communications plan from the [Angus Council Plan](#), which has priorities set by the administration, derived from the 'big six'. These priorities are underpinned by the policies and strategies to which the council works, such as Agile, the Digital Strategy, the Workforce Strategy etc.

Each priority will be linked to the internal policies that support that priority along with an outline of what the council will do to contribute towards that priority. This will be framed by what the council will stop doing or deliver differently, and what citizens can do for themselves, along with how the council could support their efforts. This can be supported going forward by our outcome measures as contained within the current Angus Council Plan Annual Report and as they develop further.

This will present a clear line from actions taken that impact upon citizens, the day to day operations of the council which are changing and will continue to change, the strategic policies, set by elected members and ultimately the [Local Outcome Improvement Plan](#). It also means that as the way services are delivered changes, members and officers will be able to demonstrate the strategic thinking that underpins each change and point to other actions that support that approach through e.g. the OD/ZBB work which can also be presented to reflect this.

The Logical Progression



This clearly links any individual act by the council back to a strategic priority and the LOIP outcomes. The diagram below provides further information.



The LOIP

The Council Plan

Angus Council has set four priorities for services which provides services which are:
Statutory, preventative and or invest in the future

Economy

We want Angus to be a 'go to' place for business
Engage with businesses
Make it easier, quicker and better to do business and invest
Improve digital and physical infrastructure

Tay Cities Deal, Economic Strategy, Regional Transport Strategy, Dundee & Angus College Regional Outcome Agreement

People

We want to maximize inclusion & reduce inequalities
Intervene early
Provide educations and physical experiences to stretch young people
Help and sustain young people in positive destinations

Financial Inclusion Strategy, Child Poverty Strategy, Carers Strategy, Third Sector Strategic Plan, Angus Social Enterprise Strategy, Health and Social Care Strategic Plan, Health Equity Strategy, Angus Youth Justice Strategy, Corporate Parenting Plan, Community Justice Outcomes Improvement Plan

Place

We want our communities to be strong, resilient and citizen led
Support planning in localities
Support communities to achieve their goals
Increase the supply of affordable housing

Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Locality Implementation Plans, Community Learning and Development Plan, Angus Local Police Plan, Local Housing Strategy, Community Safety Strategy, Angus Local Fire and Rescue Plan, Climate Change Strategy

How We Work

We want Angus Council to be effective and efficient
Our customers at the heart of what we do
We are responsive, accessible and fair to all
Our services represent best value and focused on the greatest need

Change Programme, Local Development Plan, Digital Strategy, Angus Council Sustainability Strategy

8. Communications Plan

Objectives

- To maintain consistent messages and approaches in order to reinforce key messages
- To inform the public and staff of the financial realities that the council is facing and the scale and pace of the changes required to meet financial imperatives
- To be clear internally what Angus Council will be going forward, given that it will effectively be reduced by one third over the ten years from 2011 to 2021
- To engage the public and staff with what this means for service delivery, public expectation as to the role of the council and how they can contribute to shaping and providing additional services at a local level
- To consult on specific, costed and realistic proposals which directly affect people at the point of delivery
- Investigate and if appropriate develop an early version of an "Angus Deal" which consists of a "We will, We will stop and We can help you to" deal

Strategy

Using the 'inform, engage, and consult' model, it is possible to present an Angus Deal which shows, for each council priority:

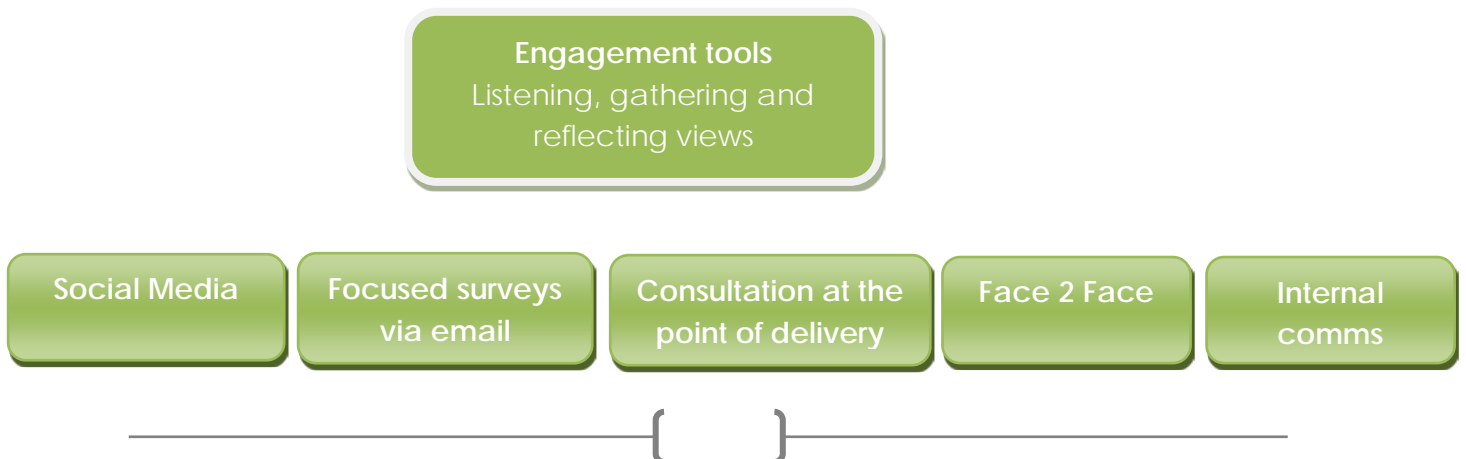
- What the council is going to do
- What the council will stop doing or deliver differently
- What the community can do to support that priority outcome and how the council could help

Key Messages (examples)

- **Information -**
We have diminishing funds – we must make difficult decisions:
- **Engagement -**
 - We will concentrate on statutory, preventative and investment work to support our four priorities:
 - We will charge for additional services beyond this for those who wish to use them
 - Digital services are convenient, efficient and will increase unless F2F essential
- **Consultation-**
 - We will share what we will do, what we will stop and what we can help you to do.
 - Where possible, we will also provide costed variation of service delivery consultation

Engagement Tools

It is intended to have two-way symmetrical communications which means that systems are in place for our citizens views to be heard which informs the strategic view.



Annex 1 - Current Engagement Tools

Council services are engaging with citizens on a daily basis through social media, surveys, consultations, ACCESSline and face to face meetings. There are specific tools in use which include:-

Citizen's panel

Our Citizens' Panel is made up of local people who have agreed to be consulted on a wide range of topics. Members of the panel take part in surveys two to three times a year or and additionally if there is a particular focus on a specific area. For example the council has consulted directly on matters such as community justice issues. These surveys can be by post, online, or by phone. Due to the recent GDPR legislation which precluded the transfer of personal data to a new data base without specific consent to do so we have lost a number of participants and currently have 230 users. We are actively seeking new panel members, specifically from a younger demographic.

Citizens Survey

The Citizens survey is a partnership piece of work with Dundee City Council and is conducted every two years to gather views of local residents, gauge satisfaction with services and highlight any areas of development/improvement. The findings from the last survey can be found on the website and the next survey is due 2019.

'Have your say'

'Have your say' is a link on the homepage of [our website](#) which allows citizens to review current consultations:-

More Services

[Business](#)

[The environment](#)

[Leisure, sport and countryside](#)

[Transport and streets](#)

[Community campuses](#)

[Have your say](#)

[Libraries, museums and archives](#)

[Visitors and tourism](#)

[Community empowerment](#)

[Jobs and training](#)

[Noise, neighbours, pets and pests](#)

It is periodically promoted as allowing people to help to shape how the council works for them. 'Have your say' (HYS) allows the public to complete consultations and also to find out other ways to engage, with the council specifically:

- speaking at a council or committee meeting
- tenant participation
- make a complaint or comment about our services
- citizens' survey

They can also view the feedback from completed consultations and what we are doing with the results. The majority of traffic to this site is from our social media sites. This year there have been 2667 page views on HYS. Of these 52% reached the pages via social media, 28% were direct traffic (using a specific url), and 17% via search engines.

Surveys

Survey Monkey is used to provide short, sharp feedback on events, services and new projects. However Survey Monkey surveys are only as good as the questions they ask, which has highlighted the need for more consistency and better regulation. However, these surveys can provide valuable insights into how the council is performing and areas for improvement.

Housing Blog



The Angus Housing team have a blog which citizens can sign up for or check regularly. This includes key information around developments, services and local works. <https://angushousingblog.wordpress.com/>

GLOW

Glow is a system used by education services to share information about funding, new programmes and it contains a help function. This space also hosts the Children and Learning blog <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/an/>

Social Media

Angus Council uses Facebook and Twitter to signpost to our consultation events and online consultation pages. While we do not ask followers to leave comments as part of our wider consultation engagement processes, we do take into account all comments submitted when we are finalising our consultation results. We are currently exploring ways to increase capacity across Angus Council to enable us to use social media more effectively as a two-way engagement platform.

Social Pinpoint

A Social Pinpoint Interactive Map encourages residents to drag and drop a pin to leave a comment and/or photo with what they like and dislike about different sections of the area. This was recently used by planning services for the Accessible Arbroath consultation. <https://www.socialpinpoint.com/project/angus-council-accessible-arbroath/>

Shaping the Future

As part of our commitment to continually improving the activities related to our council plan, we are currently reviewing the manner in which we engage with our citizens and local business. This includes:-

Customer Services Strategy

Strategic Policy and Planning are currently updating our entire customer services strategy which is aimed at linking our Customer Care Standards and the current methods of customer engagement highlighted above, in a much more strategic way, which dovetails with our forward planning change programme. In particular maximising potential benefits from our new 'One Contact Centre' and our digital transformation programme supported by the Digital Strategy, which was recently agreed. The updated customer services strategy will also connect into our 'open for business/ business charter'.

Citizens Space - https://www.citizenspace.com/info/who_uses_it

Used by Scottish Government - "we wanted to make the process of responding to the consultation as simple as possible: simple for users to express their views, and simple for us to redact, analyse and publish those responses... We were very happy with the outcome." Christian Storstein, Digital Engagement Manager, Scottish Government.



Hive

This is an internal engagement tool currently being investigated to enable better engagement with staff around the changes within the council. Areas for concern include staff morale, values and awareness of key information such as the council vision, GDPR and digital skills. Although it carries significant cost, the recent engagement event 'Shaping the Future' highlighted that there are large numbers of staff within the council who are yet to fully engage with the rate and pace of change that the organisation is seeking to make. It will not be possible to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency, as required by the most important priority of the Council Plan 2017-2022 unless the majority of staff are engaged. This makes investment in this area crucial for the long term viability and success of radical redesign of services.

User Testing of Digital Services

The council's web team is committed to a regime of continuous improvement. One of the most effective ways of identifying improvements is by listening and engaging with our users.

The web team has developed a user testing model to ensure that angus.gov is providing a clear and user-led experience, and to help identify any confusing language or web page navigation.

This model will form a core part of the development of any new online processes and will be done before release. It will also be carried out on existing processes/web content to identify improvements. This model has been successfully piloted recently when the team has worked with council volunteers to redevelop the garden waste form.

Website feedback

Every page on angus.gov has a feedback form for users to engage with us about web content. All feedback is monitored and action or further investigation undertaken where required.



Annex 2 – the Wigan Deal



The Deal

Wigan Council

Our part

- Keep your Council Tax as one of the lowest
- Help communities to support each other
- Cut red tape and provide value for money
- Build services around you and your family
- Create opportunities for young people
- Support the local economy to grow
- Listen, be open, honest and friendly
- Believe in our borough

Signed *David Molyneux*
Councillor David Molyneux, Leader of Wigan Council

Your part

- Recycle more, recycle right
- Get involved in your community
- Get online
- Be healthy and be active
- Help protect children and the vulnerable
- Support your local businesses
- Have your say and tell us if we get it wrong
- Believe in our borough

Signed

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