

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| SUBJECT: | LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK |
| REPORT BY: | DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES |
| LEAD OFFICER: | CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES) |

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 Local Democracy Week is a pan-European event intended to promote young people's engagement with democracy. Following consideration at their previous meeting, members requested further details regarding possible involvement. This report is intended to provide details regarding the costs and benefits of increasing the Council's engagement with Local Democracy Week.

2. Background to Local Democracy Week

2.1 The Local Democracy Week is an event organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council (of the European Union). The principal aim of the week is to 'promote and foster democratic participation at a local level through public initiatives which involve citizens'.

2.2 The annual Local Democracy Week has a different theme each year. The theme for 2013 is 'Active citizenship: voting, sharing, participating'. The theme emphasises that 'functioning democracy at the grassroots level implies active citizenship and this is a common responsibility of citizens and their elected representatives.' While the annual event as a whole has a broad link with the recently-enhanced scope of the Ethics and Engagement Committee, this year's theme is of particular relevance to the work of the Committee.

2.3 Local Democracy Week 2013 will take place between 14 and 20 October. Members requested at the previous meeting that officers should investigate opportunities for the Council to actively engage with Local Democracy Week. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 1 October 2013; while a summary report could be scheduled for this time it is unlikely that significant arrangements could be made so close to the event taking place. As such, members will need to give a clear indication of their expectations during the current consideration of this item.

2.4 The Council's involvement with Local Democracy Week has been relatively limited in recent years. An initial drive to encourage participation was undertaken a number of years ago, but was not as successful as hoped. Broad feedback on the events at that time suggested that the week did not meet initial expectations, possibly as a result of under-resourcing. Members will be aware that limitations on resources remain a very present consideration at this time.

3. Scope for additional involvement

- 3.1 The Council already carries out a number of the activities which other local authorities tend to arrange for Local Democracy Week. These include engagements between young people and civic leaders, including youth parliaments and councils, as well as those, such as the member-student panels, already under active development by the Committee.
- 3.2 There are a large number of additional activities which could be undertaken by officers with small groups of participants which would be likely to raise young people's awareness of local democracy. For example, during the 2013 elections Lincolnshire County Council staff visited schools across the county to encourage young people to vote. However, sending individual officers to meet with small groups is unlikely to be feasible in a smaller local authority given the significant time investment required in officers arranging, travelling to, and then delivering content to relatively small groups of participants. Instead, the activities outlined below would see the Council undertaking a facilitating role which could be easily replicated and adjusted in future years. These are intended to enable the Council to achieve maximum impact across a broader target audience, rather than concentrating individual resources on comparatively small numbers of pupils to the detriment of other services.
- 3.3 Officers are also in contact with colleagues from neighbouring authorities who are potentially interested in similarly developing their involvement in Local Democracy Week. There is potential scope for sharing ideas and resources for targeted activities within local authorities' individual areas and this will be pursued wherever appropriate.
- 3.4 Democracy lesson plans
Some consideration could be given to developing and distributing lesson plans which would teach children about local democracy, elections, and councillors. It is unlikely that officers could offer significant hands-on assistance in running the lessons. It is also unclear to what extent schools would be able and willing to incorporate additional activities within existing lessons. However, the process is likely to set in place a template lesson which could be easily distributed and potentially amended for future years. Where possible, officers will seek to draw upon existing resources and the advice of teaching professionals in compiling suitable materials. In addition, pupils could be encouraged to engage directly with the democratic process by compiling questions to put in person to the Full Council meeting scheduled for 26 November 2013. This would encourage pupils both to consider the responsibilities of councillors and also to think about how, for example, they can improve their own neighbourhoods.
- 3.5 What does democracy mean to you?
Fixing the interest of primary schoolchildren upon an abstract concept such as democracy could represent a challenge with some of the usual methods employed by other local authorities during Local Democracy Week. With this in mind, one straightforward interactive activity would be a poster-designing competition asking children to produce a poster showing what democracy meant to them. Small prizes could be awarded to the winners in addition to a possible visit to the Guildhall to meet members of the civic party.

It would also be possible to incorporate winning entries as the front page of the agenda for Full Council, thereby providing a visual reminder of the link between young people and local democracy. Entries could also potentially be displayed in the entrance lobby to the committee rooms.

3.6 Youth executive

As outlined above, it is proposed that activities be developed with a view to providing materials which can be widely disseminated with the lowest possible impact on resources. This entails avoiding set-piece events which can be extremely resource-intensive in comparison with the actual public benefit. Lincolnshire currently puts forward a number of Youth Parliament representatives, while Lincolnshire County Council has historically taken a lead in providing youth councils. As such, members may feel that establishing similar projects would be duplicating activities which tend primarily to benefit groups of pupils who are already engaged with the democratic process.

However, if members were minded to consider developing a similar activity, establishing some form of youth executive would potentially offer a variation on the usual and pre-existing youth councils. These could possibly take the form of a series of individual youth executives at different local schools or one single executive comprising representatives elected from across the city. It would also be necessary to decide whether the youth executives would deal with pre-set scenarios intended to communicate the challenges and the decisions faced by councils' real executive members, or as a form of shadow youth executive looking at real issues of particular relevance to young people.

4. Organisational Impacts

4.1 Finance

There is no existing budget to cover engagement with Local Democracy Week so any additional commitments would need to be met from other resources. The activities outlined above are likely to be deliverable at minimal expense.

4.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5. Recommendation

5.1 That members offer any suggestions or feedback on proposals for the Council to take part in Local Democracy Week.

5.2 That officers be requested to work with the Chair to coordinate suitable activities for Local Democracy Week.