

SUBJECT:	LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK UPDATE
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 the Council's involvement with the project.

2. Background

2.1 Local Democracy Week 2013 will take place between 14 and 20 October. At the previous meeting of the Committee, members noted the challenge faced in arranging suitable events at relatively short notice. As such, Local Democracy Week 2013 has been targeted as an opportunity primarily to develop initial ideas with a view to increased activity and effectiveness in 2014.

2.2 Members approved proposals relating to lesson plans promoting awareness of local government and public involvement with the Council, while also suggesting increased use of social media to reach younger people. In particular, members proposed that the Leader's weekly question-and-answer session on Twitter should be advertised to schools with a view to holding a special event during Local Democracy Week.

2.3 For members' information, the following proposals were brought to the last meeting of the Committee and are now being developed for use as part of Local Democracy Week:

Democracy lesson plans

Lesson plans will be developed and distributed for Local Democracy Week 2014 which would teach children about local democracy, elections, and councillors. 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 will be encouraged to engage directly with the democratic process by compiling questions to put in person to an appropriate Full Council meeting. 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.

2.4 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, a poster-designing competition will be developed and promoted asking children to produce a poster showing what democracy means to them. Small prizes can 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. Summary of Activities

- 3.1 As noted by members at the previous meeting and further to discussions with the chair, timescales for activities relating to promoting democracy lesson plans in schools were agreed to be particularly challenging in view of the difficulty in contacting schools during the summer holidays. Without active input from teaching professionals and sufficient notice for lesson plans to be promoted and implemented there is a risk that any lesson plans distributed would not be broadly adopted.
- 3.2 As the intention for increased democratic engagement with schools is a long-term continuing goal, there is a risk that under-prepared material would negatively affect school's receptiveness in future years. As such, following discussions with the chair, this element of the programme will continue to be developed and monitored by the Committee over the coming year with a view to adoption as part of Local Democracy Week 2014.
- 3.3 In addition to the proposals outlined above for implementation in 2014, the Committee also suggested and agreed that the Leader would host a special version of his regular Twitter broadcast aimed at engaging with young people. Details of this are provided below. Officers have been working with the Communications Team to organise and promote a suitable event, based around the opportunities and barriers for young people to engage with their communities and local democracy.
- 3.4 Promotional activities are being focused upon schools within Lincoln; each secondary school will be contacted to pass on information regarding the event and how pupils are able to engage with it. Equally, details will be promoted to the local media and within the Council's internal news system for any staff with school-age children who would like to take part.
- 3.5 In recognition that access to Twitter may be limited at some schools, the Council is also developing a system to allow children to submit questions and comments via the Council's website without the need for a Twitter account. While the focus is being placed upon promoting the Twitter session as a special event, it is intended that the weekly sessions already carried out by the Leader will continue and so this could widen the ongoing audience for this form of engagement.
- 3.6 Officers have also been in contact with the Parliament Outreach Services at the Houses of Parliament in Westminster with regard to Parliament Week which takes

place from 15-21 November 2013. Parliament Week is described as a 'UK-wide programme of events that aim to engage, inspire and connect people with Parliament and democracy'. As members will note, this event shares a similar theme with Local Democracy Week and takes place approximately one month later. As such, officers are currently minded to focus attention upon Local Democracy Week on an ongoing basis given the significant likelihood of duplication between the two programmes. However, there would certainly be benefits to incorporating some of the materials and broader themes for Parliament Week within the future Local Democracy Week agenda.

4. Organisational Impacts

4.1 Finance

All proposed events and activities can be funded within existing budgets. As there is no discrete budget available for Local Democracy Week, activities have been planned according to the funds available and the need to ensure maximum value for money.

4.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications to this report.

5. Recommendation

5.1 That members note the work undertaken with regard to Local Democracy Week.

5.2 That members offer any views on maximising or improving the effectiveness of planned events and activities for Local Democracy Week 2013 or the coming year.