

**REPORT TO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIC GROUP –
23 APRIL 2009**

SUBJECT: CITIZENS' PANEL

BY: MORAY COUNCIL – COMMUNITY PLANNING OFFICER

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 The Community Engagement Strategic Group is asked to recommend to the Community Planning Board the continuation of the Citizens' Panel for another two years.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 **The Community Engagement Strategic Group is asked to recommend to the Community Planning Board:**

- **the continued use of the Citizens' Panel as a means of engaging with the local community and informing the decision-making of the Board**
- **the use of an external consultancy to manage the Panel and future programme of surveys**

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At a meeting of the Community Planning Board on 29 May 2008 it was agreed "to continue the funding of the Citizens' Panel for the current financial year on an ad hoc basis" and "that a report on the studies that have been undertaken by the Citizens' Panel and the outcomes are submitted to a future meeting of the Board." (*para 10 of the minute refers*)

3.2 At a meeting of the Community Engagement Strategic Group on 3 July 2008 it was decided that "it would be useful for this group to have sight of the evaluation" and "that a further report be brought back on the outcome of the evaluation." (*para 4 of the minute refers*)

3.3 A report on the evaluation of the Citizens' Panel was presented to the Community Engagement Group on 16 October 2008. It was decided at this meeting "that consideration of this matter be referred to the Action Plan Co-ordinating Group and the outcome to be reported back to the Group." (*para 6 of the minute refers*)

3.4 At this meeting, Councillor Wright, The Moray Council, stated that "the funding would have to come from the Community Planning budget." (*para 6 of the minute refers*). Money is available in the three year Community Planning budget (2008/11) for the Citizens' Panel. A report was presented to the Community Planning Board, 29 May 2008, setting out figures relating to the

cost of the Panel, and “the Board agreed to note the current position in relation to the three-year budget.” (*para 5 of the minute refers*).

- 3.5 A report on the survey programme for 2008/09 was also submitted at this meeting. It was agreed that “no further use of the Citizens’ Panel be undertaken until the Action Plan Co-ordinating Group has completed the review.” (*Para 7 of the minute refers*)
- 3.6 On consideration of the evaluation report at its meeting on 16 March 2009, the Action Plan Coordinating Group, now known as the Community Engagement Implementation Group, agreed to recommend that “the existing contract with Craigforth should be extended for a further ad hoc period after the end of March to enable the Panel to be consulted by Partners, if desired.” (*para 4 of the minute refers*)
- 3.7 Given that the Citizens’ Panel has now been running on an ad hoc basis for over a year, a clear decision on its future is now required to be made by the Community Planning Board on 7 May. It is not good practice for the Council, on behalf of the Partnership, to be committing funding to external bodies without a binding contract in place.
- 3.8 There is a statutory requirement for the Partnership to engage with the local community and, as such, appropriate mechanism need to be in place to facilitate such engagement. Such mechanisms should adhere strictly to the National Standards for Community Engagement. In addition, the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning Progress Report, February 2009, stated that the Council needs “to accept the value of external support to help deliver its improvement agenda.”
- 3.9 Late last year there was a pressing requirement to gather the views of the people of Moray on the priorities to be addressed within the new Single Outcome Agreement (2009/10). The Citizens’ Panel, the Moray Equality Forum, Local Area Forums and the Patient Participation Forum, as well as a range of voluntary and community organisations, were involved in this consultation.
- 3.9As all partners now have to sign up to the whole Single Outcome Agreement and are responsible for setting priorities and delivering against the agreed actions, it was imperative from a Community Planning perspective that the views of the people of Moray were gathered and taken on board during this process.
- 3.10 It should be noted that this consultation was carried out to a very tight timescale during the period from November 2008 to February 2009. It was due to Craigforth’s specialist expertise in the field, and because they could be called on at short notice to meet our requirements that the consultation was completed satisfactorily on time.
- 3.11 If no consultation mechanism had been in place at this time the Partnership

would not have been able to fulfil its statutory requirement to consult with the public on this matter. This illustrates the importance of the Partnership retaining the use of the Citizens' Panel, as well as the advantages of continuing to use an external specialist consultancy to provide the service.

- 3.12 Craigforth Consultancy and Research has provided a good service in establishing and managing the panel and delivering the planned programme of surveys during 2005 – 08, in addition to the ad hoc consultation, which informed the Single Outcome Agreement. Craigforth is currently completing a consultation on Customer Service for the Moray Council, and is about to commence another on Community Safety for the Safer Coordinating Group.
- 3.13 Using an external consultancy has provided the added advantage of an impartial service which gives the Panel members a level of anonymity, thereby encouraging a more open responsiveness to the questions being asked. This impartiality also ensures the transparency of the community engagement/consultation process.
- 3.14 It is therefore proposed that the Group recommends to the Community Planning Board on 07 May 2009 the continuation of the Citizens' Panel for a further two years and the use of an external consultancy to manage its operation during that period.

4 SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

The Citizens' Panel provides an invaluable source of information to facilitate the planning of services in Moray. The results from the 'Identifying Priorities for Moray' consultation were used to inform the draft Single Outcome Agreement for 2009-10.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Council and its Community Planning partners have a statutory duty under Section 15(2) of the Local Government Act in Scotland 2003 to make effective provision for consulting with the public over the planning and provision of services.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

The financial implications of continuing with the Citizens' Panel for a further two years are set out in this report ie approximately £60,000. This would be met from the Community Planning budget, agreed by the partners.

There are clear risks attached to not continuing the use of the Citizens' Panel in terms of the Partnership meeting its statutory requirement to

engage effectively with the people of Moray, in line with the National Standards of Engagement.

(d) Consultations

The Community Planning Board has been consulted and noted the budgetary implications of continuing to operate the Citizens' Panel.

The Community Engagement Implementation Group has been consulted on the evaluation of the Citizens' Panel survey programme from 2005-08 and proposed the continuation of the Panel on an ad hoc basis until more permanent arrangements were put in place.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 The Community Engagement Strategic Group is asked to recommend to the Community Planning Board:

- **the continued use of the Citizens' Panel as a means of engaging with the local community and informing the decision-making of the Board**
- **the use of an external consultancy to manage the Panel and future programme of surveys**

Author of Report: Roy Anderson, Community Planning Officer

Background Papers:

Ref: