



Your Moray - Your Community

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GROUP – 16 OCTOBER 2008

SUBJECT: E-PETITIONING

**BY: MORAY COUNCIL, CORPORATE POLICY UNIT
MANAGER**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 This report is to advise members of the group on a web-based system of consulting and engaging with the public. A live demonstration of the system has been arranged for the group to view during this item.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the group study the report and decide if they wish to recommend approval to the Community Planning Board.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At the last meeting of the Community Planning Statutory Partners it was agreed that proposals for e-petitioning as a method of engaging the public be submitted to the Community Engagement Group for consideration. E-petitioning is currently deployed by authorities and government departments in England - most notably by the Prime Minister's office - in a successful effort to engage members of the public in consultations, to seek opinions and facilitate debate.

3.2 E-petitions would allow any member of the public to suggest a subject about which they wish to petition the Community Planning Partnership, and seek support online from others who may feel as strongly. The subject will be restricted to those matters upon which the Community Planning partners collectively and individually have the authority to effect a change.

3.3 A petition can be submitted by any member of the public, on behalf of a group or organisation, or any local/national politicians.

3.4 The system can also be used by the Community Engagement Group to consult on any issue with the public, thus expanding the Partnership's existing consultation base. The Partnership can use the system to gauge support or otherwise for a project or plan, and attract feedback on how these would impact on individuals and groups.

- 3.5 The scope of the e-petitioning can be extended to all Community Planning partners individually, or be restricted to the Community Planning Board as an entity. E-petitioning will be managed by The Moray Council within existing staff resources on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership. However, depending on the level of engagement from the public, e-petitioning may require the identification of a member of staff within each organisation to co-ordinate responses for petitions directed at them.
- 3.6 The system works as follows:
- A member of the public submits a petition to the web-page, which is checked by an officer appointed by the Partnership against set criteria and uploaded to the site with a closing date
 - Those wishing to sign the petition would register and record a vote, with the option of adding a comment.
 - In accordance with Data Protection Act principles, those signing would not be contacted by the Partnership, nor would their log-in details be kept once the petition has closed.
 - Once the closing date has passed a report based on the petition and comments would be prepared by the appropriate officer and submitted to the relevant committee for debate.
 - The outcome of each stage would be communicated to the originator of the petition, and the conclusion disseminated to the wider public by posting on the E-petitions page.
- 3.7 Fifty per cent of the Moray population have access to the internet in their own homes, and the Moray Council provides free internet access via its library services in most towns. It is therefore easier for the public to take part in e-petitions than organise traditional hard copy versions, especially in a rural area such as Moray.
- 3.8 Local authorities and government departments that have employed the system report positive outcomes to many petitions. In Bristol City Council, the authority say they were unaware that some issues existed until a petition was submitted. These were often minor matters and relatively quick fixes (such as the retention and protection of a 'Banksy' graffiti artwork on the city centre wall before the Community Wardens service pressure-washed it off), generating a positive outcome for the council and the petitioners.
- 3.9 The system envisaged to engage the public with the Community Planning process is offered by Public-i Ltd, a Bristol-based firm specialising in webcast technology and site hosting services. for approval and verification to an officer appointed by the Partnership against set criteria.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Community Plan / Theme Plans / Partner Plans

The Community Engagement Group's proposed remit is to contribute the views of the community to the development of

outcomes and actions in the Single Outcome Agreement, and to ensure the Partnership engages with, involves and offers regular feedback to the community.

(b) Policy and Legal

None

(c) Resources (Financial, Staffing and Risks)

The cost of establishing this service over three years is estimated to be £4,000. This covers initial start-up costs and annual fees to Public-i for hosting the site. At the board meeting on May 29th the Community Planning Partnership approved a budget for the next three years which included an allocation of £21,000 for other costs, £7,000 of which has been earmarked for administration and support. It is proposed that this allocation be used to fund the e-petitioning service. Staffing can be met within existing resources.

(d) Consultations

Community Planning statutory partners

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 It is recommended that the group study the report and decide if they wish to recommend approval to the Community Planning Board.

Author of Report: Peter Jones, Communications Officer, Moray Council

Background Papers: E-Petitioning guidelines

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