



Your Moray - Your Community

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GROUP ON 16 OCTOBER 2008

SUBJECT: CITIZENS' PANEL PROGRAMME EVALUATION 2005-08

BY: MORAY COUNCIL – COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The reason for this report is to provide the Community Engagement Group with an evaluation of the first Citizens' Panel contract in order that a decision can be taken with regard to how the Panel will be taken forward.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Community Engagement Group considers the way forward with respect to the Citizens' Panel in the light of the evaluation of the first three-year programme of surveys as set out in the report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At a previous meeting of the Community Planning Board held on 29 May 2008 (*para 10 of the Minute Refers*) it was agreed to continue the funding of the Citizens Panel until such time as the outcome of the consultation regarding Area Committees is known.

- 3.2 At the last meeting of the Community Engagement Group held on 3 July 2008, (*para 4 of the minute refers*) it was agreed that funding of the Citizens' Panel should continue on an ad hoc basis for the current financial year, until the outcome of the consultation regarding the Area Committees is complete. The group requested a report on the surveys carried out under the previous three-year contract and the outcomes.

- 3.2 This report provides an evaluation of the previous survey programme and assesses how far the original Panel objectives were met.

3.3 Objectives of Citizens' Panel

- 3.3.1 The Community Planning Partnership set up the Moray Citizens' Panel in 2005 with the following objectives:

- *to create a sounding board to test policies and practice with a robust and representative sample of local people*
- *to access those people whose opinions are often under-represented*
- *to establish baseline information then track changes in views, needs and priorities over time*
- *to access public opinion in a cost-effective manner*

- *to enable recruitment of focus groups*
- *to enhance accountability by giving citizens the potential to influence decision-making and improve service delivery*
- *to access hard-to-reach groups*

3.3.2 The extent to which these objectives have been met is evaluated in Section 3.4 below.

3.3.3 In common with the practice of other Community Planning Partnerships, a decision was taken to bring in outside expertise in running the Panel for an initial 3-year term. Craigforth Consultancy & Research were awarded the contract to run 8 surveys and were responsible for:

- panel recruitment
- the establishment of a database of Panel members
- questionnaire design and distribution to Panel members
- issuing of reminders
- data processing of responses
- analysis of results and publication in report format
- rotation of Panel membership

3.3.4 The budget for the 3-year programme of surveys was £65,000. As one survey was dropped from the programme, an underspend of £8,000 occurred in the final year of the contract.

3.3.5 No financial incentives were offered to Panel members as part of the surveys forming the main contract with Craigforth. However focus groups were set up to consider the Council's Public Performance Reporting format and this was financed separately. Participants were financially reimbursed for their time. Grampian Fire and Rescue also consulted the Panel over their annual action plan.

3.4 Extent to which original objectives have been met

3.4.1 The first term of the Citizens' Panel was inevitably a learning process in terms of gathering information on attitudes and perceptions. The Partnership now has a basis upon which to undertake more fine-grained data collection. The extent to which each of the original objectives has been met is evaluated below.

Create a sounding board to test policies and practice with a robust and representative sample of local people

3.4.2 The first aim was largely achieved. The Panel membership was demographically representative of the Moray population as a whole in terms of gender, age, geographic area, tenure, economic status, and ethnic background. However social rented sector tenants were under-represented on the Panel. Feedback to questionnaires has averaged over 70% indicating that there is a very lively interest among residents in having a say on the future of Moray.

Access those people whose opinions are often under-represented
Access hard-to-reach groups

- 3.4.3 The issue of under-representation of social rented sector tenants is a consistent feature of Citizens' Panels. Craigforth therefore recommend that if the Partnership needs to capture the views and experiences of social rented tenants in particular pieces of research it would probably be more fruitful to survey them directly without trying to persuade them firstly to join a Panel. A three-yearly Tenant Survey is carried out, primarily on issues affecting Council tenants, but also on wider community plan themes.
- 3.4.4 Special approaches such as focus group or interview based research have been recommended to target hard-to-reach groups depending on the topics being researched in order to complement surveys undertaken through Citizens' Panel membership. The Partnership did not go down this route under the previous contract. Triangulation of data is very important in order to obtain a full picture of the needs of under-represented people and hard-to-reach groups. The Citizens' Panel therefore needs to be used in conjunction with other data collection sources such as Area Forums.
- 3.4.5 The existing area forums, Tenant Participation and Patient Participation forums and the new equality forum can provide targeted access to hard to reach groups

Establish baseline information then track changes in views, needs and priorities over time

- 3.4.6 The first programme of surveys was primarily an information gathering exercise. The first survey on 'Getting in Touch with Local Agencies' was repeated at the end of the survey programme so developments in Panel members' experiences can be tracked on this aspect. However with regard to the other surveys, it was not possible to track changes systematically because each Community Planning theme (excepting Working for Increased Prosperity) was the subject of a single survey and there was not much overlap between the areas of interest covered in the questionnaires. If a second contract were run, the themes could be revisited thus enabling the identification of trends.

Access public opinion in a cost-effective manner

- 3.4.7 The utilisation of outside contractors was a costly exercise however this should be balanced against the expertise and support that Craigforth were able to offer. Recognition should also be given to the costs in terms of time and staffing that would have been required if the Partnership had run this exercise themselves.

Enable recruitment of focus groups

- 3.4.8 There was always been scope for this, for example, focus groups were created to inform the Council's Public Performance Reporting approach. Nonetheless initiatives of this nature were not maximised under the contract.

Enhance accountability by giving citizens the potential to influence decision-making and improve service delivery

- 3.4.9 This potential needed to be developed. There has been little evidence that Panel views have influenced service delivery as surveys have primarily elicited views on existing provision.
- 3.4.10 The information received from the analysis of the surveys has not necessarily been utilised as effectively as it could have been. Greater cross-referencing and follow up and feedback may have been beneficial. A fair degree of timetable slippage also occurred. This affected the production of newsletters and subsequent surveys. It would be preferable to respond to survey findings timeously and participants should receive feedback more quickly than has hitherto been the case.
- 3.4.11 In terms of value for money, it is acknowledged that more pertinent information could have been obtained. However, the first round of surveys was useful in establishing baseline information concerning attitudes to issues and services currently offered by the Partners.
- 3.4.12 According to the Accounts Commission Best Value 2 May 2008 briefing note the second round of local government Best Value audits will include a stronger focus on the experience of citizens and service users. The Citizens' Panel provides a mechanism to collect that kind of data.
- 3.4.13 Theme Group lead officers have provided the following comments on the survey relating to their theme on the following matters:
- Their expectations
 - The survey process itself
 - What they got out of conducting the survey
 - What they did with the data collected
 - Measurable impact on service provision
 - Ways of increasing the usefulness of future surveys or enhancing Value for Money
 - Whether the citizens' panel meets their public feedback needs
- 3.4.14 Their comments are set out in **Appendix 1** to this report. There is a general impression given in the comments that the panel has been helpful and could be a very useful tool in meeting the needs of partners. However it has not been used as effectively as it could have been. There was a need for more in depth analysis of the findings and better use of the findings to impact on service delivery. There was very little evidence of impact but recognition was given to the importance of improving the planning, organisation and preparation of the information in any future programme to ensure impact from the process. Surveys should be used alongside data and intelligence from other sources.

4 SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) **Community Plan / Theme Plans / Partner Plans**

The Citizens' Panel is a useful source of information, which has the potential to facilitate service planning if used to its full extent. The Moray Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) states that "the influence which the people in Moray will have over decisions which affect their communities and lives and their active participation within communities will increase". The SOA therefore includes a specific commitment under National Outcome 11 to renew the Citizens' Panel contract and to develop use of the Panel.

(b) **Policy and Legal**

The Local Government Scotland Act 2003 requires that the Partnership engage with the community as part of the Community Planning Process. The Scottish Government is seeking through their National Outcome 11 to "have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others".

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

There are financial and staffing implications depending on the preferred course of action and these 3 surveys in the current programme will cost £30,000 and for a three year programme could cost in the region of £90,000.

(d) **Consultations**

Lead Officers of the Community Planning Theme Groups were consulted in the Citizens Panel evaluation.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 An evaluation of the Citizens Panel first contract has been carried out and the Community Engagement Group is invited to consider the way forward with respect to the Citizens' Panel in the light of this evaluation of the first three-year programme of surveys set out in the report.**

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