

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD – 7 MAY 2009

SUBJECT: CITIZENS' PANEL - FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

BY: COMMUNITY PLANNING OFFICER

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 The Community Planning Board is asked to approve the continuation of the Citizens' Panel for a further two years, using an external contractor.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Community Planning Board approves the continuation of the Citizens' Panel for a further two years, using an external contractor.

2.2 If approved, it is recommended that the Board remits the progression of the tendering process for the new contract to the Community Planning officer in close liaison with the Council's Procurement team.

2.3 If approved, it is also recommended that the Board remits the development of the survey programme to the Community Planning Officer, in consultation with the partners, the Theme Groups and the Community Engagement Group.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 **Evaluation of Survey Programme (2005/08)**

3.1.1 At the meeting of the Community Planning Board on 29 May 2008 it was agreed "that a report on the studies that have been undertaken by the Citizens' Panel and the outcomes be submitted to a future meeting of the Board." (*para 10 of the minute refers*) The evaluation of the surveys carried out through the Panel can be found in **Appendix 1**.

3.1.2 In summary, the evaluation suggests that the survey programme was useful in informing the work of the Partnership, notably in evidencing the public perception of services. It was felt to be a good method of gaining a cross-section of public opinion with the opportunity to benchmark these opinions over time. There was general agreement that the panel and survey programme had been well managed by Craigforth, the external contractor appointed to do so.

3.1.3 However, general concern was expressed about the restrictions imposed by basing the programme around the themes and the resulting effect of surveys

not always being carried out at the most appropriate time. It was also felt that the considerable amount of data collected was not always utilised as fully as it might have been and that if more effective questions had been asked, more useful information might have been utilised.

3.2 Current Ad-Hoc Arrangements

- 3.2.1 At the same meeting of the 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”.
- 3.2.2 Given that it has now been running on this basis for over a year, a clear decision on the Panel’s future is now required to be made by the Board. 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.
- 3.2.3 There is a statutory requirement for the Partnership to engage with the local community and, as such, appropriate mechanisms 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.”
- 3.2.4 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.
- 3.2.5 As 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.
- 3.2.6 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.
- 3.2.7 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.
- 3.2.8 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. The potential for organising a number of Focus Groups to inform the investment of the Fairer Scotland Fund is also being investigated.

- 3.2.9 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 response to the questions being asked. This impartiality also ensures the transparency of the community engagement/consultation process.

3.3 Recommendation of Community Engagement Group

- 3.3.1 At the meeting of the Community Engagement Strategic Group on 23 April 2009, it was agreed to recommend to the Community Planning Board the continued use of the Citizens' Panel as one important tool in engaging with the local community.

- 3.3.2 It was also agreed to recommend the continued use of an external consultancy to manage the Panel and the future programme of surveys.

3.4 Budget Implications

- 3.4.1 An indicative budget of £60,000 is proposed to cover the proposed two-year contract. This takes account of inflationary costs since the previous contract was costed and provides flexibility over how the programme is run. If it appears that the programme will exceed the anticipated budget, the Community Planning Partnership will be able to rationalise the survey schedule accordingly. Contractors will be invited to submit bids on the basis of how much they anticipate the programme will cost to run.

- 3.4.2 It is anticipated that there would be three surveys per year plus newsletters to provide feedback after the second, fourth and sixth surveys. Additionally there would be a final newsletter that would bring together issues raised during the survey programme as a whole. There would also be scope to utilise focus groups, if and when required.

- 3.4.3 Money is available for the Citizens' Panel in the three-year Community Planning (2008/11) budget. A report was presented to the Board on 29 May 2008, presenting figures for 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 Tender Process

- 3.5.1 Formal tendering procedures would have to be adopted for a contract value of over £30,000. There is therefore no prior assumption that Craigforth would be awarded a second contract. The following steps would be required for the tender process:

Advertise tender specification	June 2009
Develop survey programme	June – September 2009
Tender evaluation	mid-August 2009
Award contract	end August 2009
Contract in operation	September 2009

3.6 Survey Programme

- 3.6.1 If approved, the survey programme will commence in September 2009 with three surveys being undertaken between then and March 2010. Three further surveys will be carried out over the next year (2010/11). Dependant on the actual cost of carrying out each survey, it may be possible to implement a fourth survey at the end of that year.
- 3.6.2 It is proposed that the new survey programme takes into account the key points raised from the evaluation of the initial survey programme. It is important to ensure that surveys are not 'imposed' on Theme Groups, but rather reflect the need to gather information, which will be used constructively to inform the future activity of the Partnership. This should ensure that considerable officer time is not taken up in facilitating the process on behalf of the contractor, as was the case previously.
- 3.6.3 Rather than focus on the themes, it is suggested that the new programme supports the need to gather information to inform the delivery of the key actions agreed to address the Partnership's ten priorities within the new SOA (2009/10) – this will result in feedback, which cuts across the themes. As these key actions have not yet been agreed, it is proposed that the survey programme is drafted once that process is complete and reported to the next Board meeting.
- 3.6.4 In drafting the survey programme, there will be close liaison with the Theme Groups, the Community Engagement Group and Partner analysts to ensure that the right information is being gathered to assist in measuring our performance against the identified priorities and actions to be delivered. Such liaison is also designed to ensure that all stakeholders involved in commissioning surveys are fully committed to providing the necessary preparatory information to assist in compiling such surveys and to utilising the information thereafter in the most effective manner.
- 3.6.5 It is also proposed that provision is left within the survey programme to slot in a couple of additional ad hoc surveys requested by partners or Theme Groups to meet a pressing identified need at the time.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

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

The Citizens' Panel is 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 (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 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 previously and noted the budgetary implications of continuing to operate the Citizens' Panel.

The Community Engagement Group has been consulted and agrees with the recommendation to continue the operation of the Panel for a further two years.

Tricia Herley of the Council's Procurement team has been consulted in respect of the tendering process for the new programme and her comments reflected in that section of the report.

The Corporate Policy Unit Manager has been consulted in respect of the new survey programme and is of the view that it should be based on the need for public feedback on services, as it arises, and not be tied to informing the delivery of SOA priorities. This reflects her concern over the amount of officer time spent during the previous survey programme in facilitating the process and the lack of perceived use of the information gathered, notably by the Theme Groups.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 **The Citizens' Panel provides a valuable tool for the Partnership in**

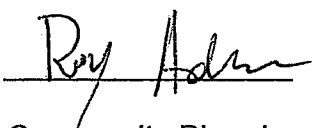
engaging with a cross-section of the Moray population to inform its work. It offers a means of measuring public perception, service satisfaction and service improvements to inform its future priorities.

- 5.2 The Board is asked to continue to support the Citizens' Panel for a further two years. The budget is available and the tendering process will follow the Council's procurement procedures. Development of the survey programme will involve close liaison with the Theme Groups, the Community Engagement Group and Partner analysts. This will ensure that the programme meets the Partnership's requirements.

Author of Report: Roy Anderson, Community Planning Officer

Background Papers: Evaluation of Citizens' Panel Survey Programme (2005/08)

Ref:

Signature: 

Date: 29/04/09

Designation: Community Planning Officer

Name: Roy Anderson