

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD – 19 NOVEMBER 2009

SUBJECT: CITIZENS' PANEL – FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

BY: COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 It is recommended that the Community Planning Board recognises the role of the Citizens' Panel as an integral component of the Community Engagement Framework, and agrees on the following recommendations for the continued running of the panel.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Community Planning Board recognises the value of the Citizens' Panel as an integral component of the Community Engagement Framework, and agrees on the following recommendations for the continued running of the Panel:

- The Panel is used in conjunction with other community groups such as Community Councils, Local Area Forums, Moray Equalities Forum, and Tenant Participation Forums to access public opinion.
- A variety of consultation methods are used to access Panel opinion to produce robust and well-rounded results eg online and/or postal questionnaires, discussion forums and telephone interviews.
- The Panel's opinion is sought to meet a real information need where the results are actively used by the Partnership.
- The Board approves the use of an external consultancy to manage the Panel, and approves the allocation of a £60,000 budget for a two year contract.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Citizens' Panel's role within the Community Engagement Framework

3.1.1 Section 15(1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 requires local authorities, as facilitators, to consult and co-operate with community bodies and with other public sector bodies as appropriate in the Community Planning process.

- 3.1.2 In the context of Community Planning, the main aim of community engagement should be to improve the planning and delivery of services by making them more responsive to the needs and aspirations of communities.
- 3.1.3 The Moray Council has also signed up to the National Standards for Community Engagement which have been developed to enable Community Planning Partnerships to understand and act upon the needs or issues that the community experiences.
- 3.1.4 The Community Planning Partnership is in the process of developing a Community Engagement Framework in line with the Scottish Government's 2009 Community Empowerment Action Plan. Community empowerment harnesses the energy of local people, encouraging their active involvement in building a positive community.
- 3.1.5 The Moray Council is currently establishing a Community Support Unit which will focus upon community capacity building ie providing support to Community Councils and Local Area Forums. This will benefit the community engagement process by strengthening relations between local groups and the Partnership, and enabling these groups to develop the skills required to take an active part in the development of their local community.
- 3.1.6 Community engagement is therefore an integral part of the development of the Community Planning Partnership in terms of identifying the needs of the local population. These identified needs are subsequently used to inform and develop appropriate policy for meeting the local outcomes of the Single Outcome Agreement.
- 3.1.7 Moray's Citizens' Panel was directly involved in informing the 2009/10 Single Outcome Agreement via the 'Identifying Priorities for Moray' consultation. This clearly illustrates the benefit of maintaining the panel as a means of accessing local opinion.

3.2 Use of the Panel

- 3.2.1 The questionnaire element of the 'Identifying Priorities for Moray' consultation was followed by a series of discussion forums which allowed panel members to expand upon their views and opinions. It is important to note that different methods of consultation will appeal to different individuals and groups eg online surveys for those who regularly access the internet, discussion forums for those who like to debate, and Local Area Forums and Community Councils for more active members of the community.
- 3.2.2 Previous discussions regarding the future of the Citizens' Panel have focussed upon using the panel or some other form of consultation mechanism. However, by widening their approach and using the Panel as one of several avenues for accessing public opinion, and by using a range of consultation methods the Partnership would;

- be able to strengthen and verify research findings by cross-checking them against an alternative/additional research method;
- build a fuller picture of the views and needs of the local community which will enable them to develop the most appropriated policy and strategy to meet this need;
- be able to use the most appropriate method of consultation for the target audience;
- access a wider section of the community;
- access hard-to-reach groups (eg social sector housing tenants are traditionally hard-to-reach but consultation via the Tenants' Forums may help to overcome this issue).

3.2.3 In this way the Citizens' Panel can continue to be a valuable resource within the developing Community Engagement and Community Empowerment agendas, enabling Moray to work towards the guidance as set by the Scottish Government.

3.2.4 Consultation with other Scottish Local Authorities has found the following usage of Citizens' Panels:

- 24/31 Local Authorities use Citizens' Panels (1 Local Authority has not provided information)
- 19/24 use an external consultancy
- 15/19 use the external consultancy for the whole process
- 4/19 use the external consultancy for part of the process

3.3 Use of the Citizens' Panel to address an information need

3.3.1 It is important to learn from the previous programme of Citizens' Panel surveys in order to make the most effective and efficient use of this resource.

3.3.2 The initial survey programme required each theme group to develop a survey for completion by the Citizens' Panel;

- Getting In Touch With Local Agencies (1)
- Improving Travel Facilities, Choices and Safety
- Achieving A Safer Community
- Achieving A Healthy And Caring Community
- Protecting And Enhancing The Environment
- Investing In Children And Young People
- Building Stronger Communities
- Getting In Touch With Local Agencies (2)

3.3.3 Since the initial survey programme, the Citizens' Panel has been used on an ad hoc basis to meet an information need as and when it has arisen. This has resulted in a more efficient use of the Panel:

- As discussed, results from the 'Identifying Priorities for Moray' consultation were used to inform the 2009/10 SOA.
- Moray Council's 'Designing Better Services' project commissioned a consultation on the Council's standards of customer service as part of its remit to help improve the efficient running of the Council.
- The Fairer Scotland Fund has used the results from Citizens' Panel discussion forums in its decision-making process to determine how to best allocate its funds.
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Unit has surveyed the Citizens' Panel on Community Safety with the aim of comparing the results with the previous safety-based surveys to identify any emerging trends.

3.3.4 These examples illustrate a more efficient and effective way of using the Citizens' Panel, ie where a need for gathering data is met, and the results are actively used in working towards meeting local outcomes of the SOA and the overall direction of the Partnership.

3.4 Management of the Citizens' Panel by an external consultancy

3.4.1 The Community Engagement process has benefited from the use of an external consultancy to manage the Citizens' Panel in the following ways:

- Access to a range of experience and expertise in consultation design and facilitation of discussion forums.
- The ability to carry out consultations at short notice and to a short time scale.
- The consultancy provided members with anonymity to freely express their views by acting as an intermediary between Panel members and the Partnership. This has particularly been appreciated in the discussion forums the consultancy has facilitated.
- The community engagement process remains transparent.

3.4.2 At present the Partnership has no formal contract with the external consultancy it uses. In relying upon this ad hoc arrangement, the Partnership runs the risk that the consultancy may not be available to meet the next information need and deadline that arises.

3.4.3 Formal tendering procedures will be adopted for a contract value of over £30,000. There is no prior assumption that Craigforth would be awarded a second contract.

3.4.4 It is proposed that the contract run for two years, with a budget of £60,000 for that period.

4 SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Single Outcome Agreement/Service Improvement Plan

The Citizens' Panel contributes to National Outcome 11 in the Single Outcome Agreement; "we have strong resilient communities where

people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others”, and to National Outcome 15; “our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people’s needs.”

(b) Policy and Legal

The Local Government Scotland Act 2003 requires that the Community Planning Partnership engage with community bodies and organisations as part of the Community Planning Process. In 2007 the British Government launched ‘Our Community Empowerment Action Plan’, the aim of which is to enable better engagement in the decision making process for communities.

In Scotland the Concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities has led to a more focussed approach in response to communities’ needs at a local level. In recent years, three key national initiatives have set the challenge for local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland to respond to community engagement with communities. Local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships will be subjected to external scrutiny by Audit Scotland and HMle on the following standards:

- Single Outcome Agreements
- National Standards for Community Engagement
- Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan – Celebrating Success: Improving Change

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

The continued use of the Citizens’ Panel for a further two years will cost approximately £60,000. This would be met from the Community Planning budget, as 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.

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 recognise the value of the Citizens' Panel as one of several tools for community engagement and empowerment, and that it should be used in conjunction with other community-based groups.**
- **That the Panel's opinion should be asked for in relation to a particular information need of the Partnership, where the results of the consultation will be actively used to inform policy and/or the direction of the Partnership.**
- **To agree that the use of an external consultancy is the best way of managing the Citizens' Panel, and agree that the process of putting this contract out to tender can begin as soon as possible.**
- **To agree to a budget of £60,000 for a two year contract.**

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Background Papers:

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