

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD – 4 MARCH 2010

SUBJECT: CITIZENS' PANEL – FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

BY: CORPORATE POLICY UNIT MANAGER

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 The Community Planning Board is asked to consider the options available for the future maintenance of the Citizens' Panel.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Community Planning Board approves the continuation of the management of the Citizens' Panel through an external consultant for 1 year to enable Grampian Police an opportunity to investigate the possibility of managing the Panel on behalf of the Partnership.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Current Provision

3.1.1 At the meeting on 19th November 2009, the Community Planning Board:

- Recognised the value of the Citizens' Panel as an integral component of the Community Engagement Framework;
- Agreed the continued use of the Panel until the end of the current financial year;
- Asked that a report on options for the future funding and operation of the Panel be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.

3.1.2 The Citizens' Panel is currently run by Craigforth, a social research company. Craigforth had a contract with the Partnership between April 2005 and March 2008; it is now used on an ad hoc basis. The services currently provided by Craigforth include:

- recruitment and management of Panel membership;
- design and distribution/facilitation of consultations (whether paper survey or discussion forum);
- analysis of and reporting on results; and
- the production of a regular newsletter to provide feedback to Panel members.

3.2 Use of Citizens' Panels by Other Local Authorities

3.2.1 Most local authorities are using some sort of panel to gauge views of the general public. Arising from our survey of authorities (**Appendix**) it revealed that:

- 25/32 Local Authorities use Citizens' Panels (1 Local Authority has not provided information)
- 19/25 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

3.2.2 These figures clearly illustrate the widespread use of Citizens' Panels by Local Authorities (78%). They also show that the overwhelming majority of those Local Authorities using Citizens' Panels entrust the management of them to an external consultancy (76%).

3.3 Funding of the Panel

3.3.1 The use of the Panel varies per year. In 2009-10 we carried out a five surveys (customer care, community safety, Fairer Scotland Fund, Budget and trading standards). One survey was scheduled to take place for the Fire & Rescue Service but it was later agreed to not proceed with this survey. Normally the Partnership usually undertakes 2-3 surveys per year but this year two of the topics were carried forward from 2009-10 (community safety and Fairer Scotland Fund).

3.3.2 The Partnership has allocated approximately £30,00 per year for the Panel. In 2009-10 the total spend was £28,600.

3.3.3 The statutory partners were consulted on the continuation of the panel and current level of funding. All were supportive of continuing with the panel and allocating funds towards it. Andrew Fowlie stated that he supports this work provided it links in with work being undertaken within the Health & Social Care Partnership. Additionally Mike Devenney suggested that the number of surveys could be reduced from 3 to 2 per year.

3.4 Future of the Panel

3.4.1 The initial contract with Craigforth ran from April 2005 – March 2008 with the option to extend for a further 2 years. Therefore this contract expires at the end of March 2010 and it is not likely under procurement regulations that we will be allowed to extend this contract again.

3.4.2 Grampian Police have indicated that they may have the capacity and experience to manage the Citizens' Panel through their research department in Aberdeen. This department employs several personnel who, as part of their remit, design and carry out consultations, using an on-line tool (SurveyMonkey) to produce them. At present an email system is used to invite individuals to take part in consultations, with the aim of reaching as broad a section of the population as possible.

- 3.4.3 Further research is needed into this option in order to finalise the practicalities of this possible working arrangement. Sharon Milton has indicated that the Police would need another year before they have the necessary resources in place to facilitate their management of the Citizens' Panel.
- 3.4.4 Given the opinion of the partners to continue with the panel albeit to a lesser extent and budget is available in the next financial year for it, it would be suggested that the Panel contract is re-tendered. As Grampian Police have indicated their interest in providing this service in the future, it is suggested that the contract be advertised either as:
- a 2 year contract with a clause written in to specify that the contract may break after 1 year; or
 - a 1 year contract with the option for a 1 year extension.
- 3.4.5 This would allow Grampian Police to consider their position to provide the service in the future. If, during the time of re-tendering for the contract, the Police consider they are in a position to take on the work they would be able to tender at this time.

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 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 continued use of the Citizens' Panel for a further two years will cost approximately £50,000. 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 (produced by Communities Scotland).

Grampian Police have expressed an interest in managing the Panel on behalf of the partnership but require time to investigate resources required..

(d) Consultations

The following consultations have taken place and the comments received incorporated into the report:

- Diane Law (Payments Manager) on procurement and Best Value in terms of tendering for the Citizens' Panel contract;
- All Scottish Local Authorities to establish how the requirement for Community Engagement is met elsewhere;
- Grampian Police as to their capacity to manage the Citizens' Panel; and
- The statutory partners were consulted their support of and contribution towards the continuing the Panel. Their comments are contained in the report.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 The Citizens' Panel provides a valuable tool for the Community Planning 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 Grampian Police have indicated an interest in providing this service on behalf of the partnership but are not yet in a position to do so. Further the existing contract can not be extended further and we are required under procurement regulations to re-tender the contract. Therefore it is recommended that the Board re-tender the contract with a clause which allows the partnership to review the situation after one year to take account of the Police proposal.

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Background Papers: held by author
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