

Committee: COMMUNITY AND HOUSING

Agenda Item

Date: 21 JANUARY 2010

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Title: CITIZENS' PANELS

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Item for information

Summary

1. Members of this Committee requested an update on this issue at their last meeting. This report updates Members on the progress made towards the development of a Citizens' Panel.

Recommendations

2. That this report be noted.

Background Papers

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
 - Minutes of Uttlesford Futures Local Strategic Partnership Board meetings.
 - Government White Paper on citizen empowerment

Impact

4.

Communication/Consultation	This initiative will enable better communication through a regular consultation process.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	The representatives on the Citizens Panels will form a representative sample of the community
Finance	The initiative will be funded through a growth bid for the council's communications budget with a contribution from Uttlesford Futures.
Health and Safety	None

Legal implications/ Human Rights	None
Sustainability	The initiative will contribute towards sustainable planning of services and partnership activities in the future.
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	Staff resource has been identified to run the Citizens Panel

Situation

5. The Government White Paper on empowerment suggested a range of measures that local authorities and partnerships could be using to ensure that services are planned in accordance with the community's requirements.
6. Among them are area/community forums, such as the model that this council already runs, and Citizens Panels.
7. The Head of Community Engagement has been developing a Citizens Panel for Uttlesford over the last few months. A Citizens Panel is a consultative body made up of residents in the district, which is representative of the district as a whole in terms of age, ethnicity, gender etc.
8. It would allow the council to carry out qualitative consultation on a range of policies and issues, including gaining early opinion for initiatives which have yet to be put in place.
9. There are two companies listed in the Procurement Agency for Essex Public Consultation and Opinion Research Services Framework Agreement, and detailed proposals and quotes have been obtained from each.
10. Although there is money available in this financial year to cover the set up cost of the panel, a growth bid needs to be approved in order for the council to be able to run the panel from 2010/11 onwards.
11. The model the council is looking at is for the question collation, panel management, response collation, analysis and reporting to be handled by council officers. The annual refreshment of the panel would be carried out by the chosen company. This way, the cost of running a Citizens Panel can be kept as low as possible.
12. It is likely the panel will contain 500 people. About 200 people expressed an interest in being involved in further consultation through the Place Survey last year and these will be used as a starting point before further recruitment is carried out. The aim is to send out four questionnaires a year, initially by post but then asking if members wish to be consulted on-line instead.

- 13 The district's Local Strategic Partnership, Uttlesford Futures, has also expressed an interest in using the Citizens Panel as a consultative mechanism. Therefore Uttlesford Futures will be able to pay for space in each questionnaire to ask whatever it wishes. For example, if a 12 page questionnaire is being sent out, and Uttlesford Futures wishes to use four pages of it, then it pays for a third of the postage costs for that survey.
- 14 An appropriate reporting mechanism is currently being developed to ensure that all services have the opportunity to use the Citizens Panel for consultation, that the results are reported properly and that those results can be used in policy and service development in a meaningful way.
- 15 If the growth bid for funding is approved, the panel set up work will begin in March and consultation will begin during 2010/11.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That the council and/or LSP fails to take the views of the Panel into account when devising policies/initiatives or making changes to service delivery	2 – Officers requesting to use the panel will have made the choice to do so and therefore will wish to pay heed to the results	3 –Panel members will expect to see their views represented in decisions the council makes.	Feedback on consultation will be provided to Panel members and an explanation of how the results have informed council decisions.
That there is insufficient budget to cover the cost of running a Citizens Panel	1 – The panel will only be set up if funding is secure.	3 – The council's communications budget would risk being overspent if the growth bid is not approved	Work to recruit the panel will not begin until after the Budget goes to Full Council in February.

- 1 = Little or no risk or impact
 2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.
 3 = Significant risk or impact – action required
 4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.