

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE AND PARTNERSHIPS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 January 2011

Citizens' Panel

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To provide information to allow the committee to assess the value of the Citizens' Panel.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the quarterly Performance Monitoring meeting of the Executive on 16 November 2010 Carl Les gave an update on Citizens Panel activity.
- 2.2 The Executive agreed with his suggestion that this Committee review the current status of the Citizens' Panel but in so doing assess the value of the resource and what evidence there is that results are being used by directorates to inform service planning.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The coalition government's Big Society and localism agendas have made it clear that local authorities need to consider the views of local people. Community engagement therefore continues to have an important role within the work that we do.
- 3.2 The Council has signed up to a community engagement promise that sets out what communities in North Yorkshire can expect. In order to keep this promise we need to make sure we gather the views of local communities. The North Yorkshire County Council Citizens' Panel is one cost effective method available to the Council to gain the views of local residents.
- 3.3 The Citizens' Panel has been operating since 2004 and is made up of approximately 2,000 members from all backgrounds and all areas of North Yorkshire. It is designed to be broadly representative of the overall profile of adults across the County in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and geographic location.
- 3.4 An independent market research company carries out the survey, analyses the results and provides the County Council with a report on

the findings. This provides the public and the County Council with assurance of the independence and objectivity of the findings.

- 3.5 One third of panel members are changed annually. The longest standing members are removed from the panel and replaced with new members. This ensures that more people are given the opportunity to join the panel and that panel members continue to reflect the population of the county.
- 3.6 Each year we conduct up to four questionnaires and refresh the membership of the panel. These questionnaires are self completion questionnaires up to 12 pages long and are sent out in the post to approximately 50% of members whilst the remaining members are sent a link via email.
- 3.7 Over the years we have conducted 21 panel surveys and have asked the panel about a variety of topics including waste management, customer service, recycling, highways and transportation, community safety, social care and our council plan and budget priorities. We obtain a good response rate of between 65% and 75% per survey.

4.0 CONTRACT COSTS

- 4.1 NWA Research Ltd, an independent market research company is contracted to manage the panel on our behalf. They design and distribute questionnaires, distribute reminders, receive completed questionnaires, collate, input, analyse and report on the data received. In addition they refresh the panel on an annual basis.
- 4.2 The panel has been put out to tender twice and on both occasions NWA came out as the most cost effective option. Subsequent work quoted for by NWA has also been cost effective.
- 4.3 The current contract was awarded in 2007 to the lowest cost supplier. The contract agreed a standard price of £5,725 per survey for up to 4 surveys per annum and £3,695 for the annual refresh of the panel. The contract will run out in March 2011.

5.0 IMPACT OF THE PANEL

- 5.1 The results of the panel have been used in a variety of ways including:
 - Informing strategic documents such as the JSNA and Local Transport Plan that shape the future directions of services in North Yorkshire.
 - Informing the annual budget consultation process, the setting of council priorities and council tax level.

- Informing the Stroke Awareness Scrutiny report which has resulted in the 'Find the 5,000 campaign' which is looking for the around 5,000 people who have undiagnosed hypertension or high blood pressure in North Yorkshire and York.
- Informing the report on the proposals for safety cameras.
- Informing the performance management of access to services, highways and transportation and doorstep traders.
- Informing the development of the Local Information System in terms of the type of data members of the public would like to use.
- Informing the communications plan for the Credit Union.

5.2 The table in Appendix 1 shows full details of how the topics covered by the last 8 surveys have been used.

5.3 The panel was seen as an effective means of consulting with citizens in the internal Audit review of Equalities issued in December 2010. The report recommended that directorates consider if they could utilise the panel more effectively.

5.4 The panel members have also been used in other research activities not managed by NWA, these include:

- Waste Management focus groups - the panel was used to recruit focus group members for a research project that developed the waste management campaign programme.
- Highways and transportation focus groups - the panel was used to recruit focus group members. The results of these groups fed into the wider performance review of highways and transportation and the safety cameras evaluation.
- Mystery Shopping – the panel was used to recruit people to mystery shop the customer service centre. The results are being used to identify training needs and develop the centre's knowledge bank.

5.5 The additional costs of these activities can be minimised by using in-house facilitators.

6.0 FUTURE REQUIREMENTS / OPTIONS

- 6.1 There is still a need to understand how the public perceive their services. The statutory surveys such as the Place Survey may have disappeared but the localism and big society agendas create a greater need to engage with local people. In addition the changes to services taking place will create a need to engage communities more, both before and after service changes.
- 6.2 There is less central direction about what and how we should measure in relation to performance. However, some policy documents suggest that there may be a need for surveys to measure performance. The report “The role of local government in promoting wellbeing, healthy communities programme” by Local Government Improvement and development, NEF and National Mental Health Unit highlights the future need to measure wellbeing and suggests using surveys to do this.
- 6.3 Internally there still continues to be a need for surveys for statutory engagement activities:
- Local Transport Plan – the plan requires local people’s views as part of the development and the monitoring of progress.
 - Minerals and Waste Development Framework – the guidance on this statutory process heavily stresses the need for community engagement and therefore the team have planned to use the citizens’ panel to consult the general public.
 - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – the next version will need to be produced in 2012 and there will be a need to gain community input.
- 6.4 The citizens’ panel remains one of the most cost-effective and quick ways of consulting with a statistically representative sample of local people from across the council on a variety of issues with a guaranteed good level of response. If the panel did not continue in its current method, there are a number of alternatives we could consider:
- More flexible use of the current panel
 - Individual surveys
 - Running the panel in-house
 - Turning the panel into an e-panel
 - Joining up with other panels
- 6.5 The panel could continue but could be used more flexibly. Instead of conducting four surveys during the year we could only do one or two surveys. We could also continue to use the panel to do ad-hoc activities such as focus groups, mystery shopping in-house. This would

save money by reducing the number of surveys and allow us to utilise the recently refreshed panel.

- 6.6 If the panel was not available individual surveys would need to be commissioned. This would be a less cost effective means of collective survey results as the panel allows questions from a number of services to be brought together in one questionnaire and one off surveys are likely to be more expensive. In the past statutory individual surveys have cost considerably more than the panel, the Place Survey cost approximately £10,000 per district and the Parent Survey cost around £12,000. The response rate would also be likely to be lower requiring more questionnaires to be distributed to gain the same number of returns.
- 6.7 An option that is often put forward is to save money by bringing the service in house. However, this would create considerable extra work internally at a time when we are looking to reduce the number of staff. It would create a considerable administrative burden in printing questionnaires, stuffing envelopes and inputting questionnaires. It would also require extra resource and skills to design the questionnaire, conduct the analysis and write the reports. A rough calculation of the cost of carrying out a survey in house covering stationery, printing, postage and staff time suggests the cost would not be significantly reduced (calculations in Appendix 2). We would also lose the professional skills, knowledge and the independence that come from using an established agency that also run panels for other authorities.
- 6.8 The costs of running the panel in-house would reduce considerably if the panel were to become an e-panel. However, only around half of our current panel members have signed up to completing questionnaires on-line so the panel would no longer be statistically representative of the population of North Yorkshire as a whole. It would also mean that some groups within the population would be under represented. We asked members on the last survey if they would be willing to complete the questionnaire online only. A significant number of members aged over 60 and of Scarborough residents would not be happy to complete online only.
- 6.9 There would still be a need to use an agency to refresh the panel even if the rest of the panel was run in house. Other authorities that run panels in house have found that they struggle to recruit new members and need to buy in research agencies with the necessary skills and experience. The recruitment process requires a number of methodologies to be used to recruit a representative sample such as on street and telephone interviewing, skills which are not present within a local authority. The cost for refreshing the panel would likely be higher than the current cost of £3,695 within the contract. The usual

cost for an agency recruiting 1,000 new members could be around £10,000.

- 6.10 Another option that has been put forward is a joint North Yorkshire Citizens' Panel for members of the NYSP. The benefits of a statistically representative panel for the whole of North Yorkshire at district level were considered as part of the NYSP community engagement and neighbourhood management framework work. This review found that such a panel would not be cost effective (NYSP report in Appendix 3) due need to create/renew panels in five districts and the costs related to the ongoing management of seven panels of around 2,000 in size. The cost for an agency setting up a panel of 1,000 citizens is in the region of £10,000 so a considerable investment would be needed to create a representative panel. However, there is scope to offer to run questions on the existing panel on behalf of partner organisations for a charge related to the share of the questionnaire that is used.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 That the Committee consider the options for the future of the citizens' panel and report its view and conclusions to the Executive.

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Head of Policy and Partnerships

County Hall
Northallerton

January 2011

Background Documents: Nil

Appendix 1 – Usage of survey results

Panel Date	Survey Topics	Usage of survey results
June 2008	Health & Well Being	<p>The health and well being questions were asked as part of the community engagement process for the development of the first Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) produced by the County Council with North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust and other partners.</p> <p>The results formed an important part of the citizen voice, one of the 3 sets of information within the JSNA alongside the core dataset and evidence of effectiveness of different interventions and service models are. The information was put together within the JSNA to tell the story of the local communities of North Yorkshire in terms of health and well-being. The JSNA identified the priorities for health and well-being services in North Yorkshire and was used for service planning and service commissioning.</p>
	North Yorkshire Customer Service	See comment on June 2009 survey on contacting the council.
	Community Cohesion	These questions were taken from the Place Survey which was due to take place in December 2008. The results were used to provide a base line for the Place survey. The results were shared with the district councils and the Rural Partnership.
	Local Democracy	
	The Tall Ships Races – Hartlepool 2010	We received payment for placing these questions on the panel from Hartlepool Borough Council.
	On-line completion of questionnaires	This resulted in a decrease in the number of hard copy questionnaires sent to panel members.
Oct 2008	County Council Priorities & Budget	The results contributed to the annual budget consultation exercise.
	Trading Standards - Doorstep Traders	Reducing doorstep crime is a key service priority for Trading Standards. The results were used to assess performance against the service priorities and develop the service plan. In 2010 the Regional Doorstep group adapted the questions and ran a survey across the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

Panel Date	Survey Topics	Usage of survey results
Jan 2009	Highways & Transportation	See outcome of June 2010 survey on same topic.
June 2009	Contacting The Council	These questions were used to test the customer experience of contacting the council in person, by phone and via the web. The results fed into our management of performance of access points and used to focus areas of work. The survey was used to assess citizens' preferred methods of accessing council services. Customers showed a clear willingness to use the web /email (email having not figured anywhere as a channel before) to contact us and therefore we will progress the NYCC online project to meet this demand.
	Credit Union	The results have been used to set a baseline of awareness for the Credit Union and were then used to develop a communications plan.
	Flooding	The results helped to inform the communications activity of the county's emergency planning arrangements. The Dec 2009 edition of NY Times included an article on preparing for flooding and general emergency preparedness information for residents.
October 2009	County Council Priorities & Budget	The results contributed to the annual budget consultation exercise.
	Waste Management	The results have been used to measure customer satisfaction and to identify ideas for service improvements at local tips/ household waste recycling centres. The results have been used in the new contracts for household waste recycling centres, a communication plan, additional training for site staff and changes to operation, materials and signage on site.
	Accessibility	These results were used to develop policy on accessibility as part of the development of the Local Transport Plan 3.

Panel Date	Survey Topics	Usage of survey results
	Safety Cameras	<p>The survey was used to assess the opinions of North Yorkshire residents' views of safety cameras. Overall views towards safety cameras were positive. Additional research with members of the public was also carried out and this research confirmed the results of the panel members.</p> <p>The results were used to put together a report on the case for introducing safety cameras in North Yorkshire.</p>
March 2010	Democracy	<p>The findings confirmed that even those that were aware that they could attend meetings of County Council, did not know that they could ask a question or make a statement at the meeting. The results also demonstrated that interest in a local issue was most likely to prompt attendance. This information has helped inform working practices and opportunities for public involvement are now better promoted. For example the Councils Petition Scheme, and public involvement in Area Committees, the Executive and County Council - attendance/participation has increased considerably particularly over recent months, as the public have very actively engaged with discussions around local issues of concern e.g. Waste PFI, North Craven Schools Review.</p>
	Citizens' Charter	<p>The panel was used to assess the acceptability of the customer charter, to check it was in line with customers' expectations. The survey found that the charter did meet expectations but if the panel had reported that this was not the case then the charter would have been redesigned.</p>
	Neighbourhood Profiles	<p>The results are being used in the development and implementation of the North Yorkshire and York Local Information System.</p>

Panel Date	Survey Topics	Usage of survey results
	Stroke	<p>The results were used by the Scrutiny of Health Committee / Care and Independence Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of stroke awareness and recognition. The citizens' panel was a big part of the research and provided much of the basis of the committee's conclusions. The survey provided an evidence base and helped the report carry more weight - important when trying to influence health professionals. The report was well received by NHS North Yorkshire and York and has resulted in the 'Find the 5,000 campaign' which is looking for the around 5,000 people who have undiagnosed hypertension or high blood pressure in North Yorkshire and York.</p>
June 2010	Highways & Transportation	<p>The Highways and Transportation Service undertook a review of its performance and its performance management processes in 2010. The review has considered data collected through a variety of methods, one of which being the citizens' panel which provided three years of comparable data. Detailed analysis was conducted on aspects of service provision, particularly in terms of studying longitudinal trends, with the information from the panel survey forming the picture of the public's perception of the performance of the service. This has been used to develop the service's objectives for the future, the allocation of resources and its service plan. One specific outcome was the need to focus on maintenance rather than improvement work. The panel results were also used in the development of the Local Transport Plan 3.</p>
August 2010	Budget Consultation	<p>The results contributed to the annual budget consultation exercise considering specifically areas for savings to be made. The survey was also made available to the general public on the internet for no extra charge.</p>

Appendix 2 – Cost of Providing Service In-house

The table below sets out the very rough costs per survey for sending out 2,000 surveys.

Item	Approximate Cost £
Professional Staff – Co-ordination of process, survey design, analysis and report writing	2,796
Administrative Staff – preparing mail outs and opening returned questionnaires.	593
Specialist Staff - Setting up on-line questionnaire, scanning in hard copy questionnaires and preparing cross-tabulations	593
Stationary	100
Printing	400
Postage	1,400
Total	£5,882

Appendix 3 – Extract from NYSP Report on Joint Citizens’ Panels

North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership - Executive

1 October 2009

Progress report on joint community engagement and neighbourhood management work

Appendix 7 - Joint citizens’ panels

1. A group was set up to review current practice and assess the benefits of a joint panel.
2. Currently Harrogate Borough Council, North Yorkshire County Council, Richmondshire LSP, Scarborough Borough Council and Selby District Council run a Citizens’ Panel. These are all run ‘in house’ apart from the North Yorkshire County Council panel which is contracted to an external agency. Additionally Hambleton District Council is in the process of setting up a new panel.
3. Research has been carried out into joint panels in other counties and the cost implications of a joint panel. This research indicates that setting up a joint panel would not be cost effective.
4. However, the work undertaken has highlighted that many of the benefits of joint panels could be realised through closer working between partners utilising the existing panel arrangements. It is therefore proposed that partners work closer together over the coming year.

This closer working will include:

- Using the North & East Yorkshire and York Community Engagement Group meetings to co-ordinate the work on citizens’ panels and share learning.
- Using the IDeA Communities of Practice to share information including questionnaires, reports and lists of topics covered.
- Developing a level of co-ordination between panels so that common themes are run at similar times.
- Sharing of questions so the same questions can be run in different areas of the county.
- Using the same equalities questions.
- All organisations are proposing to / will use SNAP so there will be opportunities to share joint training / experience / questions / templates.
- Develop common methodology for sharing the results and outcomes of panel research.
- Investigate the use of customer profiling of panel results to allow learning from research carried out in one district to be transferred to other areas.
- Scarborough Borough Council providing additional support for Ryedale District Council to develop their skills in this area.

Appendix 4 – Article on Citizens’ Panels

The MJ (Management Journal) 18 November 2010

Citizens’ panels are go

The desire to understand what social and public value public services generate and how they are perceived to be performing has not disappeared just because statutory requirements to report back national performance indicators have been removed.

The mantra of ‘Long live representative and direct democracy – research and evidence-based decision-making is dead’ is a seductive one for many reasons, but we all know from studies, many of which Ipsos MORI has authored – it will be some time before we achieve a critical mass of civic and political engagement.

There is still very much a place for good research and consultation. Why? Some, but not all of the arguments are presented as follows:

- as public services expect local people to rely less on services which no longer exist, or have radically changed, and to take more responsibility for taking care of themselves and their local areas, behaviour change research will become more important
- public services still have a duty to protect the vulnerable, and know how policies and changes to service delivery affect the poorest and those most in need of help
- decisions about the savings public services need to make – given how huge they are – should be made in a robust and inclusive way with those who will be affected by them.
- during this time of great economic and social change, it is even more important to complement representative democracy by engaging with local people through good research and consultation, but the trick is to do it in a way which is cost effective and relevant to those invited to take part.

So, given the above, local partnerships should be asking themselves a few questions, such as, how can we engage more with our customers/residents? How can we get more for less? How can we work more closely with our partners? And what are the key hot topics/issues?

One answer to all these questions can be provided in two words – citizens’ panels.

Given shrinking research and consultation budgets, coupled with an increased need to engage with local communities – think Big Society and localism – there has never been a better time for public services to come together, either within an area, such as LSP partners, or across areas, such as districts and county council, to run a citizens’ panel. And panels are very much back in fashion, given the value for money they can deliver – not least in terms of partnership working and economy of scale.

Citizens' panels are not just a cost-effective and quick way of consulting with local people on a wide range of issues, but also allow the opportunity to deepen relationships between participants and public services, and between participants, so they can agree local solutions to local problems and build connections with each other.

Panels are a no-brainer. They are a group of 1,000-5,000 people willing to give their views and much more, which is a local resource that cannot be sniffed at. To capture the constructive ideas and creative input of these many people at a flick of a switch – and it is as easy as that – or through a text message is something for local services to consider seriously.

But panels can do so much more. They can test services, report local problems and help with service redesign. Panellists can act as critical friends, and can help identify issues before they become 'campaigns' or a problem.

Clever partnerships out there will be looking to use their citizens' panels in the future as a vehicle for capacity building and for getting participants to engage with their local area, their communities and the organisations that serve them. How Big Society is that?

John Kennedy is associate director at Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute