



meeting **CABINET**

date **10 JANUARY 2006**

agenda item number

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF COUNTY COUNCIL

CITIZENS' PANEL FOR NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to approve the estimated expenditure of £428,500 to procure a four year flexible framework contract for a Nottinghamshire wide citizens' panel.

Information and advice

Background

2. The purpose of a citizens' panel is to provide a systematic approach to consultation for the Council to inform policy and service development.
3. A citizens' panel for Nottinghamshire will establish a pool of potential respondents within Nottinghamshire (8,000 citizens). This group of potential respondents will be asked to engage in a range of quantitative and qualitative research including telephone surveys, face-to-face interviews or self-completion questionnaires (posted or e-mailed).
4. The panel is designed to strengthen public confidence in decision making. It will enable the Council to carry out a coordinated programme of countywide consultation and engagement. The panel will also be used as a sounding board to test specific options or proposals for local services and develop views about future needs.
5. It has the advantage that people who join the citizens' panel are the *willing*, and consultors are assured of reasonably high response rates and the ability to track the changing perceptions of a defined group over time.
6. The citizens' panel will be a preferred single consultation mechanism for the Council. The panel is not intended to replace all existing methods of consultation – especially that designed to engage with socially excluded groups and young people. It is designed to complement these more specialist and targeted involvement activities, reduce duplication and focus consultation resources to create savings.

7. Citizens' panels generally achieve a high response rate and are considered to be fairly cost effective. The broadly representative membership of the panel means that particular groups, such as elderly people or black and minority ethnic groups, can be targeted specifically for their views on issues.
8. In addition, the panel partnership itself provides a useful and practical means of sharing good practice on consultation matters.
9. A report outlining this proposal to procure a four year flexible framework contract for a Nottinghamshire wide citizens' panel was considered by the Leader on 29 August 2006 and by Corporate Management Board on 19 September 2006.

Scope of the project

10. The project will be funded by Nottinghamshire County Council. The framework contract will provide sufficient flexibility for other public service partners in Nottinghamshire to use (buy-in) to the panel. A service level agreement and pricing strategy will be drawn up in consultation with our public sector partners who, together with departmental colleagues, will form a 'user group'.
11. The citizens' panel will provide complete geographic coverage and panel membership will be representative in terms of age, gender, socio-economic background and ethnicity. The panel will be representative of the county's adult population and its geographical distribution.
12. Nottinghamshire County Council will maintain ownership of all data and the database of citizens.

Procurement

13. The expected level of expenditure (£0.5M over the length of the four-year framework contract) requires Nottinghamshire County Council to observe European Union rules concerning public procurement. A likely timetable for the EU directive procurement, using the *restricted procedure* (recommended by legal services) is six months.
14. If approval is given tendering will begin early in the New Year.
15. A likely timetable for the recruitment of a new citizens panel (8,000 : 1,000 panellists per District, comprising 7 shire Boroughs/Districts and the unitary City of Nottingham) is around thirteen weeks from the signing of the contract stage through to delivery.
16. The procurement process will be undertaken by existing staff, with assistance from Corporate Procurement Unit and Legal Services.

Interfaces

17. The aim of the **White Paper**, *Strong and prosperous communities*, is to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives. It places citizen participation and consultation right at the forefront of the agenda for all deliverers of public services.

18. A strong council will have "...a good use of engagement methods, that suit the needs of local people. The needs and aspirations of different communities are successfully balanced." **(CPA)**
19. One of the principles in the **Strategic Plan 2006-2010** which drives our efforts to improve is '*putting our customers at the heart of everything that we do*'. The authority wants to make sure that we take into account the needs of the whole community, including our existing customers and those who do not currently use particular services, to shape the way we plan, deliver and change our services.
20. Consulting with and understanding the needs of our citizens is at the heart of our **Customer focus programme**.

Predicted costs and budget

21. Adoption of a four year framework contract is a major commitment for Nottinghamshire County Council. It is only after the specification has been agreed that we would have a clearer idea of the actual cost, which is likely to be approximately £143,500 for the first year of the contract i.e. recruitment of citizens' panel of 8000 residents (£65,000) plus suggested options of activity (£74,000) and Legal costs (£4,500).
22. In order to fund this project for the first year, savings can be made from recouping/diverting £47,400 from the MORI liveability study. The remainder (£96,100) will come from the customer management budget.
23. A budget will need to be identified for years two, three and four to include refreshment of the panel, anticipated at £21,000 per year, and engagement activity, anticipated at £74,000 per year. The MORI liveability study funding (£47,400) is available annually.
24. These costs need to be set against the council's current, planned and ad hoc expenditure on consultation, which includes:

	Costs of past consultations	Forward planner for 2007/8/9
Annual budget consultation	£6,000 (2004)	2007, 2008 and 2009
Best value user satisfaction surveys	£15,000 (2006)	2007 and 2008
Liveability survey	£51,000 (2004)	2008
Building better communities	£6,000 (2006)	2007 and 2008
Sure Start Childrens' Centre (nine surveys at £6,000)	£54,000 (2006)	2007 and 2008
Household waste and recycling	£30,000 (2005/6)	2009 and 2012
Rufford country park surveys	£3,000 (2006)	2007, 2008 and 2009
Sherwood country park surveys	£3,000 (2006)	2007, 2008 and 2009
Public libraries user surveys	£11,000 (2005/6)	2007, 2008 and 2009
Building on Achievement: developing the role of special schools in Nottinghamshire	£15,000 (2006/7)	

Many of which can be delivered by the citizens' panel.

25. Because of the flexible nature of the contract, and the interest shown by partners wishing to use the citizens' panel, there is the potential for income in years 2, 3 and 4, which will reduce the cost of engagement to Nottinghamshire County Council.
26. A defined and agreed scale of charges for partner organisations, for consulting via the citizens' panel, will be agreed and set out in the service level agreement.

Public Engagement Policy

27. The procurement of a four year framework contract for a Nottinghamshire wide citizens panel is consistent with the Council's agreed public engagement policy.

Statutory and policy implications

28. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report. Attention is however drawn to the following:

Personnel implications

29. Following award of the citizens' panel contract to the successful supplier, and the recruitment of panel members, discussions will take place regarding the operational function of the panel; this includes drawing up an annual calendar of consultations, gathering questions, liaising with the successful tender and partner organisations, commissioning reports. It is anticipated this function will take place in-house and will require a half-time post (either additional or changed responsibilities). The funding for this post is to be determined.

Financial implications

30. The following table sets out cost over the lifetime of the framework contract:

	Year 1 (2007/2008) £	Year 2 (2008/09) £	Year 3 (2009/10) £	Year 4 (2010/11) £
Recruitment of panel, build database, produce reports, welcome letter to citizens	£65,000			
Legal costs	4,500			
Range of activity <i>maximum</i>	74,000	74,000	74,000	74,000
Refreshment of panel (one-third each year – based on full panel of 8,000 members)		21,000	21,000	21,000
	143,500	95,000	95,000	95,000

Equal opportunities implications

31. A Service Diversity Review is currently in progress. This review is undertaking an equality impact assessment on the introduction and use of a citizens' panel across the following equality strands - age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and other areas of social exclusion. The outcome of the assessment will be recorded within the Service Diversity Review System

Implications for Service Users

32. The citizens' panel sets out an approach to joined up working between Nottinghamshire County Council and its public and voluntary sector partners, with the aim of providing a useful and practical means of sharing good practice on consultation matters. Service users will be instrumental in shaping the development of the specification and service level agreement. Operational service arrangements are to be determined.

Human Rights Act Implications

33. The Human Rights Act implications arising from this report have been assessed in accordance with the Council's adopted protocol.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- (1) the estimated costs of procuring the Citizens' Panel for Nottinghamshire (£428,500) set out in this report are approved; and
- (2) Cabinet receives a report on the outcome of the procurement process recommending appointment of the successful tenderer.

**COUNCILLOR DAVID KIRKHAM
LEADER OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL**

Legal Services comments

Any procurement exercise must be carried out in accordance with Council's financial regulations. Cabinet has the power to take the decisions set out in this report. [PTW 12/12/06]

Strategic Director (Resources) financial comments

The financial implications indicate that approximately £137,000 has been spent on consultation exercises in the last year, which could possibly in future be undertaken through this proposed approach at an annual cost of £95,000. The initial investment of £70,000 for the recruitment of the panel etc would be recouped in less than two years. The initial cost of creating the panel and ongoing cost of maintaining the panel would be met from the Access to Services budget within the Deputy Leader Portfolio, with the cost of undertaking the individual surveys etc being a cost to the commissioning departments. [NS 13/12/06]

Background papers available for inspection

- (1) Business Case
- (2) Report to Leader on 29 August 2006
- (3) Report to Corporate Management Board on 19 September 2006

Electoral divisions affected

All