

**REPORT OF THE LEADER****NOTTINGHAMSHIRE CITIZENS' PANEL  
THE WAY FORWARD POST JUNE 2013****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide a preferred option for the management of the citizens' panel in order to deliver the County Council's Public Engagement Policy and support delivery of the strategic plan.

**Information and Advice**

2. In June 2007 the County Council entered into a four year contract with Ipsos MORI to recruit and manage a citizens' panel. The panel, which remains the property of the County Council, comprised of approx 1,000 residents from each district area recruited on a representative basis. The cost of the fixed price contract was £34,800, although recruitment to the panel proved to be far more problematic than anticipated and it is estimated that the actual cost to Ipsos MORI was in the region of £130k; this would be the cost to the Council if a new panel were to be recruited.
3. The panel has been used many times during the past six years and number of joint surveys have been conducted with public sector partners (Districts, Police, Fire & Rescue, Health) making consultation cost effective, as the cost has been shared. Due to people moving out of Nottinghamshire, or no longer wishing to take part, the panel now stands at just under 6,000 Nottinghamshire residents; still one of the largest panels in the country.
4. The original contract with Ipsos MORI was extended for two years in June 2011 and a decision needs to be made as to how the County Council should proceed following the termination of the contract in June 2013. Procurement regulations prohibit any further extension of the contract.
5. The panel continues to represent a beneficial and relatively low cost resource for consulting Nottinghamshire residents on important issues, especially using on-line methodology. Although the panel is the preferred consultation mechanism for the Council, it 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 target consultation resource to maximise returns.

**Options**

6. A number of options have been identified and are detailed below:-

**Option A:**

Do nothing. Disband the existing citizens' panel upon completion of the existing contract extension and commission ad hoc research as and when required. Potential risk - there would be no co-ordination of consultation projects undertaken by departments. Ad hoc commissioning arrangements would prove more expensive in terms of cost, resources and time. Once the panel is lost it will be too expensive to re-instate/re-recruit (as outlined in paragraph 2).

**Option B:**

Bring the management of the citizens' panel in-house. Maintain control and influence over the panel - establish a number of subsets covering panellists who prefer to be contacted by email, telephone, face to face or postal format. Actively manage our own capacity – a baseline study of capacity has been undertaken and it has been found feasible to undertake the running of the panel in-house. There may be a need for additional in-house support to assist with cleansing/refreshing the panel database and it is proposed to explore options with the Customer Service Centre in this respect. Recruitment to the panel will be ongoing and Nottinghamshire residents will be able to join the panel at any time by completing an on-line form on the Council's website.

**Option C:**

Disband the citizens' panel and enter into partnership arrangements with other public sector organisations such as NHS Nottinghamshire and Nottinghamshire Police. Potential risk - limited access to residents i.e. NHS service users only and victims of crime, which could result in over-consultation with certain residents and knowledge gaps due to lack of interaction with others. Resources – there could be an issue around data protection, and partners may not wish to share details of their networks without charging the Council a fee.

**Option D:**

Undertake a procurement exercise to secure a new four year contract. Potential risk - Panel members may not agree to their contact details being passed on to a different research agency. This option will be costly in terms of recruitment of new panellists, management fee and legal costs (as outlined in paragraph 2).

**Preferred option**

7. In terms of cost/benefit, Option B represents the best value for money and as such is the preferred option. In practical terms, the panel would continue to operate as before, using in-house resources to replace functions previously carried out by Ipsos MORI. This approach will continue to deliver the outcomes of consultation required by the authority - to involve local people in decision making in relation to the delivery of public services across Nottinghamshire, to understand their views and improve the quality, effectiveness and delivery of local public services. Partner participation in the panel will continue to be encouraged to increase revenue and reduce costs for the Authority.

**Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

8. The proposed option supports the Council's values around respect and customer focus as set out in the strategic plan, and forms one of a number of options enabling people to get involved in influencing decisions.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

9. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Equality implications**

10. This report has been compiled giving due regard to the Council's public sector equality duty. By bringing the management of the citizens' panel in-house, the Council will continue to ensure, as far as possible, a representative mix of panellists to reflect the diverse population of Nottinghamshire and their views.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that Policy Committee

- i. Approves the recommendation to self-manage the citizens' panel as per option B detailed in the report and explore options for support with the Customer Service Centre.

### **Councillor Kay Cutts Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council**

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Angela Smeeton, Senior Consultation Officer  
telephone: 0115 9772937 E: [angela.smeeton@nottscc.gov.uk](mailto:angela.smeeton@nottscc.gov.uk)

### **Constitutional Comments [SLB 04/01/13]**

Policy Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

### **Financial Comments [MB 03/01/13]**

Costs associated with the citizens' panel are met from the budget for Communications and Marketing. Any additional costs for in-house resources can be contained within this budget.

### **Background Papers**

None

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All