

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Community Participation Committee : 17 August 2011

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Citizens' Panel - Evaluation

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The report informs committee members about the evaluation of the West Dunbartonshire Citizens' Panel on two fronts – evaluation of panel users' experiences (people who commission survey questions and focus groups) and evaluation of panel members' experiences.

2. Background

- 2.1** Citizens' Panels are used widely in the public sector to gather the views of citizens on a range of subjects. Our Panel is an important consultation tool which enables us to:
- check if what we are already doing is working
 - test out new ideas
 - measure change
 - test awareness of services and new developments and
 - inform future planning of policies and services.
- Using our Panel effectively helps to ensure that our services and policies reflect the needs of West Dunbartonshire residents.
- 2.2** West Dunbartonshire Citizens' Panel is run on a community planning partnership model. This approach maximises resources and helps co-ordinate partner consultation, contributing to delivering Best Value in consultation and engagement.
- 2.3** The Panel is administered by Hexagon Research & Consulting. We evaluate our panel regularly to ensure that it is working effectively and delivering value for money.

3. Main Issues

Panel Users Evaluation

- 3.1** An evaluation of panel users – those who commissioned surveys and focus groups between January 2010 and February 2011 - was carried out early in 2011.

The full evaluation report is listed as a background paper, available on request. 14 responses were received and feedback was very positive with key points as follows:

- There was a high level of satisfaction with the process for preparing the surveys and with the quality of the report and the follow up service from Hexagon Research and Consulting, with all respondents rating these as very good or good.
- Of those who used focus groups all rated the arrangements and preparation as good and the report as very good or good.
- A range of information was gathered providing evidence of how Panel members' responses influenced future action. Some of this was used to feedback to Panel members in 'Feedback', the Annual Newsletter.
- Overall, all respondents rated the service from the Consultant and from the Policy Unit as very good or good.

Survey Response Rates

- 3.2** During 2010-11, survey response rates have remained high, with an average of 66% (953) over the four surveys.

Panel Members Evaluation

- 3.3** Panel members receive a summary of the findings of each survey with the next questionnaire. In addition, once a year, we provide an Annual Newsletter "Feedback" which goes into more detail on how community planning partners have responded to what Panel members tell them. The full Panel evaluation report is contained in the Local Development Plan and Panel Feedback Survey, June 2011, available on request.
- 3.4** Four surveys were carried out during 2010-11 and the vast majority of panel members regarded them as relevant and useful:
- Social Work and General Election (95%)
 - Libraries and Cultural Services/Measuring Progress/Contacting the Council (93%)
 - Multi-topic Survey (93%)
 - Community Safety Survey (91%)
- 3.5** 74% of panel members agreed that the Feedback Annual Newsletter provides evidence that community planning partners are listening to what they tell us in developing and changing the way we provide services (68% agreement for evidence of targeting resources at issues of concern and 73% agreement for evidence of providing information in better ways).

Information from both sets of evaluation will be used to further develop the Panel.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** There are no people implications.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** There are no additional financial implications.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** It is necessary to maintain the funding of the Panel and the officer resource, including partner input, to maintain the current high standard of operation.

7. Equalities, Health & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required in relation to this report. The demographic information on panel membership provides the opportunity for analysis of survey results to assist with identifying equalities issues.

8. Strategic Assessment

- 8.1** The Citizens' Panel is an important tool for consultation and can provide relevant information in relation to all the strategic priorities which can be used to develop and improve services.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** The evaluation of both the panel users and panel members indicates a high level of satisfaction in general with how the Panel is working.
- 9.2** Members of the committee are invited to note the contents of the report.

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Chief Executive
Date: 6 July 2011

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: WD Citizens' Panel, User Evaluation Feedback
2011 Citizens' Panel Survey (and summary)

Wards Affected: All wards