

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 4th JUNE 2007

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/ DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

CITIZENS PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report is to inform committee about the progress and operation of the citizens' panel over the past year. Membership has remained high and stable and response rates have been maintained at a high level.

2. Background

- 2.1. At the committee meeting of 2nd October 2006, members requested an annual report reviewing the citizens' panel function be prepared.

3. Annual Report

Panel membership

- 3.1. There are currently 1895 members on the citizens' panel. At full complement the panel runs with 2400 members. A continual cycle of re-recruitment takes place to maintain numbers as close to full complement as possible.
- 3.2. Recruitment is designed to ensure that the citizens' panel is made up of a representative cross section of Wirral residents. This is calculated by matching the proportion of the panel within each age group to 2001 census statistics. For example, 14% of Wirral's population is aged 16-24 (according to 2001 census) therefore the aim is to have 14% of the panel (331 members) from that age group.
- 3.3. There are some socio-demographic groups that are under (or over) represented. This is because particular groups are harder to recruit and retain. The under 40's, males and people with no car are under represented on the panel. Current membership by socio-demographic group is attached at appendix 1.

Panel response rates

- 3.4. The following tables record the response rates achieved in each district for each quarter's citizens' panel survey during the year 2006-7, for both paper and online questionnaires.

3.5. Wirral's overall response rates have remained high varying from 62% in April 2006 to 52% in July 2006 and 60% in January 2006.

April 2006		Paper Survey			E-Mail Survey			Total
District	No. sent	No. returned	% response	No. sent	No. returned	% response	% response	
St.Helens	1615	715	44.3	312	151	48.4	44.9	
Knowsley	2069	873	42.2	342	159	46.5	42.8	
Liverpool	1795	1098	61.2	408	251	61.5	61.2	
Sefton	2731	1529	56.0	688	381	55.4	55.9	
Wirral	1694	1076	63.5	480	275	57.3	62.1	
Merseyside	9904	5291	53.4	2230	1222	54.8	53.7	

July 2006		Paper Survey			E-Mail Survey			Total
District	No. sent	No. returned	% response	No. sent	No. returned	% response	% response	
St.Helens	1126	610	54.2	353	156	44.2	51.8	
Knowsley	1576	885	56.2	376	176	46.8	63.4	
Liverpool	1590	987	62.1	425	228	53.7	60.3	
Sefton	2358	1400	59.4	668	345	51.7	57.7	
Wirral	1461	795	54.4	480	217	45.2	52.1	
Merseyside	8111	4677	57.7	2302	1122	48.7	55.7	

3.6. There was no citizens' panel survey undertaken in October 2006, due to the requirement to undertake the statutory general residents' survey.

Jan 2007		Paper Survey			E-Mail Survey			Total
District	No. sent	No. returned	% response	No. sent	No. returned	% response	% response	
St.Helens	966	540	55.9	317	158	49.8	54.4	
Knowsley	1578	671	42.5	359	164	45.7	43.1	
Liverpool	1575	831	52.8	427	209	48.9	52.0	
Sefton	2358	1278	54.2	667	347	52.0	53.7	
Wirral	1454	888	61.1	476	266	55.9	59.8	
Merseyside	7931	4208	53.1	2246	1144	50.9	52.6	

Panel Turnover Rates

3.7. The table below shows panel members removed for non-response and other reasons (such as deceased, ill health, lost interest, moved away) during 2006-07. Panel members are removed after 3 consecutive non-responses to the questionnaires, or at their request.

3.8. The column on the right shows that the turnover rate for the Wirral panel is low (11.8% of members) compared to other districts. This indicates a stable membership, suggesting that respondents are engaged with the questionnaires sent out.

District	Panel members during 2006-07	Removed from panel	Other reasons	% turnover
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St.Helens	1927	698	3	36.4
Knowsley	2411	451	29	19.9
Liverpool	2203	177	9	8.4
Sefton	3419	388	10	11.6
Wirral	2174	244	13	11.8
Merseyside	12134	1958	64	16.7

Topics covered

3.9. Panel members have been surveyed on range of topics during the past year. These are outlined in the table below.

Quarter 1 (January) 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of the Police • Local Community Safety issues
Quarter 4 (October) 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National General Residents Survey to sample households – no Citizens Panel survey undertaken; resources diverted to undertake national survey
Quarter 3 (July) 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Survey • NHS sign-posting campaign • Local Guide to Health Services • Choose & Book • Primary Care • Walking • Eating
Quarter 2 (April) 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Transport Plan • Wirral Library Service • Local Heritage • Streetscene & Recycling (informing local PIs) • Community Involvement (informing local PIs)

3.10. Results have been fed back to panel members via the citizens' panel newsletter. Reporting of results to members takes place via the virtual committee site. Services and organisations receive the results either direct from Mott MacDonald MIS (in the case of the Police) or in tabulated form from Corporate Policy. All services are requested to feed back on the impact of the results on service delivery.

3.11. Full reports, discussions and presentations of previous panel results are located on the virtual committee site.

Outcomes achieved

3.12. The citizens panel has helped inform the development of the local transport strategy and priorities for local transport plan 2 (LTP2). Citizens' panel information has been used alongside other consultation event feedback and alongside Government guidance to shape the transport strategy and priorities contained within the plan.

3.13. The panel has helped inform the development of an effective public transport awareness campaign. By asking questions about people's existing awareness of the local transport plan for example, a picture is obtained of what people actually know about and what the public recognition levels are. This has enabled informed judgements about what should be promoted, for instance

whether the local transport plan should be promoted as a document or as a set of outcomes in terms of actual improvements to a certain mode of transport. These discussions are on going as part of a re-branding exercise.

- 3.14. Overall, the Merseyside-wide citizens' panel transport results have been used to support the performance monitoring of the local transport plan and to inform work around the four shared priority areas of congestion, accessibility, road safety and air quality.
- 3.15. Panel results from the libraries question set have been compared with the data obtained from Wirral library service's own "non user survey" which was carried out in March 2006. Some of the same questions were used in both surveys, helping to build up a broader picture of barriers to library use for users and non-users alike.
- 3.16. The results have shown what the competing pressures on potential library users are, and what improvements (such as potential changes to opening hours) should be considered to attract new customers.
- 3.17. The findings have been used by Wirral library service to help focus marketing more closely on particular groups.
- 3.18. The information on local heritage gathered through the citizens' panel has provided baseline data to help inform the development of a new business plan for Wirral museums service.
- 3.19. The information gathered has been shared with other attractions named in the survey. The comments, both positive and negative, have been used to help make decisions about future programming and marketing for the section.
- 3.20. Streetscene questions feature regularly on the panel questionnaires and in Wirral's local area agreement. BV 199 (The proportion of relevant land and highways that is assessed as having combined deposits of litter and detritus that fall below an acceptable level) is one of the key measures for the safer and stronger communities block of the local area agreement. The council is committed to focusing on the factors measured by this indicator and the citizens' panel is a useful source of information for measuring perceptions and success in this area. The emphasis has shifted away from asking detailed Streetscene and condition questions towards ascertaining respondent's experience of using the amenity (roads, footways, crossings, etc.).
- 3.21. The Streetscene results have confirmed that one of the priority areas in terms of low levels of satisfaction is litter. Technical Services have been publicising the use of fixed penalty notices for littering. A series of education and enforcement programs will target secondary shopping areas and the routes from these to schools, with the aim of preventing people from dropping litter. New litter bins have also been installed in some areas of the borough.

Future surveys

3.22. The spring 2007 survey is currently underway. Topics include local transport plan core questions, Streetscene, questions related to the new waste contract and questions about the council's corporate objectives and local area agreement themes.

3.23. The summer 2007 survey is a health survey (for which the PCT is invoiced) with questions currently being formulated by the PCT.

3.24. The autumn 2007 survey will contain perception questions related to the local area agreement.

Panel costs and changes to the contract

3.25. The cost to the council of the citizens' panel has been approximately £34K per year, £8K of which is reclaimed from partners.

3.26. Due to renegotiation of the Mott MacDonald contract and Police withdrawal from the panel, there may be a subsequent increase in costs for the panel. There is now an opportunity to review the outputs received in relation to the panel and explore ways in which costs can be contained.

3.27. Changes likely to be implemented include:

- A reduction in the number of surveys conducted each year.
- Provision of tabulated data and data files only (with presentation of results to be brought in-house to Corporate Policy).
- Increased flexibility around the survey methodology employed (for example, the ability to conduct rapid return telephone surveys on 'hot topics').
- Introduction of incentives to panel members to improve responses from typically hard to recruit and retain groups.

4. Financial & Staffing implications

4.1. None additional from this report.

5. Equal Opportunities implications

5.1. None arising directly from this report. However, equal opportunities implications may be generated by responses from members of the citizens' panel

6. Human Rights implications

6.1. None arising directly from this report.

7. Local Agenda 21

7.1. None arising directly from this report.

8. Local Member Support implications

8.1. None arising directly from this report.

9. Planning implications

9.1. None arising directly from this report.

10. Community Safety implications

10.1. None arising directly from this report.

11. Background Papers

11.1. None

12. Recommendations

12.1. That the report is noted

12.2. That committee considers the proposals for the coming year

12.3. That committee considers proposed changes to the panel contract.

J. WILKIE

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

Contact Officer:

Abi Davey

Corporate Policy

Tel 691 8027

abigaildavey@wirral.gov.uk