

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING

26TH APRIL 2007

'Community Choice' – Council's Citizens' Panel (2007 – 2010)

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Delivering Quality Services
KEY PRIORITY:	Communication and Consultation
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr. John-Paul Campion
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Alison Braithwaite Ext. 2781 alison.braithwaite@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES	Appendix A – Frequently Asked Questions Sheet for 'Community Choice' Panel Members Appendix B – Frequently Asked Questions Sheet for Elected Members and Officers on the operation and management of the 'Community Choice' Panel

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report on the proposed setting up of a new Citizens' Panel for the period of May 2007 to April 2010.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is asked to DECIDE that:

- 2.1 The Council's current Citizens' Panel '*Community Choice*' which was established for the period of July 2004 to April 2007 be disbanded, and we thank them for their service.
- 2.2 A new '*Community Choice*' Panel for the period of May 2007 to April 2010 be established from the 350 residents who registered their interest in joining the Panel, when completing the recent MORI BVPI Survey.
- 2.3 The revised 'Frequently Asked Questions' Sheet for '*Community Choice*' Panel Members on the operation and management of the Panel, as set out in Appendix A, be approved.
- 2.4 The revised 'Frequently Asked Questions' Sheet for Elected Members and Officers on the operation and management of the '*Community Choice*' Panel, as set out in Appendix B, be approved.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council is committed to open, accessible and inclusive local government. It uses a wide range of approaches to public consultation to ensure it effectively engages and considers the views of its citizens in its decision making processes, including those for service design, delivery and improvement.
- 3.2 To support this, the Council set up its first Citizens' Panel of Wyre Forest District residents in 2000, which was replaced by a new Panel of members in 2004. Best practice from the Improvement and Development Agency recommends that Citizens' Panels should have a life span of no more than four years to ensure that membership remains representative and reliable.
- 3.3 Over the last six years, Panel members have been invited to participate in a wide range of strategic consultation exercises including the development of the:
- a) The Council's Corporate Plan – *'Building a Better Future'* 2003-2008;
 - b) The Wyre Forest Matters Community Strategy – *'Helping to transform your life'* 2004-2010;
 - c) The Council's Consultation Strategy – *'Building a Better Future Together'* 2005-2008;
 - d) The Council's Corporate Communications Strategy – *'Moving the Council beyond the tick box to communications'* 2006-2010;
 - e) The Council's Branding Strategy - *'Building a reputation to be proud of'* 2006; and
 - f) The Council's Disability Equality Scheme 2006-2009
- 3.4 Panel members have also been involved in a range of external service inspections including:
- g) Cleansing Services Best Value Service Review in 2002
 - h) Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004
 - i) Environment and Communications Assessment in 2006
- 3.5 All *'Community Choice'* Panel members are issued with clear guidance on the standards that underpin the co-ordination and management of the Panel, which is set out in a Frequently Asked Questions format. Likewise similar guidance is issued to Council Officers and Elected Members to ensure there is clear and consistent understanding of how the Panel can be used for consultation purposes.

4. PROGRESS

- 4.1 Over 350 Wyre Forest District residents have recently registered their interest via the MORI BVPI Survey (December 2006) in joining the Council's next Citizens' Panel, which in line with best practice should be established for the period of May 2007 to April 2010.
- 4.2 It should however be noted that recruitment to the Panel will be ongoing throughout the three year period to ensure that the make-up of it remains as representative as possible of the Wyre Forest District population as a whole.

- 4.3 To support the continued effectiveness of a new Citizens' Panel and in light of feedback received from existing Panel members the operational and management procedures have been reviewed. In this regard, revised Frequently Asked Questions Sheets for Panel members and Elected Members / Officers have been developed and are set out in **Appendix A and B** respectively.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The use of a Citizens' Panel is a very cost effective means of consulting as all Panel members have agreed to take part in completing regular surveys, so we can rely on obtaining a higher response rate compared to when we send out surveys to non Panel members.
- 5.2 Financial implications connected with the administration of using the Citizens' Panel are met through existing Divisional Budgets.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council's Consultation Strategy 2005-2008 recognises the use of a Citizens' Panel as a key consultation tool for effectively engaging local residents in both quantitative and qualitative consultation exercises.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 If the membership of the Council's Citizens' Panel is not renewed there is the likelihood that it will become unrepresentative of the District's population as a whole and response rates to exercises could decline.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Listening and responding to the public, as citizens and service users, is fundamental to the Council's work and without consultation tools like the Citizens' Panel, we cannot be sure that our services are the right ones, or that they meet the needs and expectations of local residents.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1
- Chief Executive
 - Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Council's Consultation Strategy '*Building a Better Future Together*' 2005-2008

'COMMUNITY CHOICE'Wyre Forest District Council's Third Citizens' Panel (2007-2010)FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS SHEET FOR PANEL MEMBERS
(April 2007)**Q1. Why have a 'Community Choice' Citizens' Panel?**

- A.**
- The Council is committed to open, accessible and inclusive local government. It uses a wide range of approaches to public consultation to ensure it effectively engages and considers the views of its citizens in its decision making processes, including those for service design, delivery and improvement.
 - The 'Community Choice' Panel gives local people from all sectors of the community a regular opportunity to say what they feel about the Council services they receive, and what they would like to see changed to improve quality of life in the District.

Q2. How was the 'Community Choice' Citizens' Panel established?

- A.**
- Through the completion of an independent customer satisfaction survey (MORI) 2006, some 350 plus residents have volunteered to join the Panel for the period 2007 to 2010. This Panel replaces the Council's second Citizens' Panel, which was established for the period of 2004 to April 2007.
 - However recruitment to the Panel will be ongoing to ensure that the make-up of it remains as representative as possible of the Wyre Forest District population as a whole, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and geographical location.

Q3. How does the Panel work?

- A.**
- Annually (the period from 1st April to 31st March) all Panel members will:
- Receive up to **four strategic issue based surveys**; and
 - Be invited to participate in up to **four focus group discussion sessions** on specific service or policy matters.

It should be noted that:

- The consultation exercises may include some questions from the Council's local strategic partners e.g. Police, Worcestershire Primary Care Trust and The Community Housing Group who work closely with us to deliver services.

Q4. What standards underpin the co-ordination and management of the Panel?**A. The Council's contract with members of the Panel is as follows:**

- We will value Panel members' contribution to consultation and will not ask the

same questions over and over again in a short space of time, without good cause.

- We will provide sufficient background information to enable Panel members to understand and respond to the consultation material.
- We will produce consultation results that are measurable and can be evaluated objectively.
- We will explain clearly the purpose of the consultation and will endeavour to offer Panel members meaningful choices.
- We will be clear about how the consultation is being organised and how responses should be made.
- We will aim to make the consultation inclusive by taking account of any particular needs or difficulties that Panel members have to enable them to respond to the consultation.
- We will provide feedback on the results of the consultation and on how the results have been used to inform decision-making, once the consultation is complete.
- We will consider any suggestions Panel members may have for improving future consultation exercises.

Q5. What do we expect the Panel to achieve?

A. We have two key aims:

- By improving our understanding of what local people and communities want, we will be able to design and deliver more effective and quality services which achieve the best value possible and meet identified needs.
- To help us to plan for '*Building a Better Future*'. Whether it is for issues that affect the whole district, or more local areas, or communities, we will use the Panel as a way of increasing the level of public participation and influence on future decisions in the District.

Q6. Will Panel members be asked to comment on services provided by Worcestershire County Council?

- A.**
- Primarily all consultation exercises will be focused on services provided by Wyre Forest District Council. However on occasions there may be questions from other agencies, including Worcestershire County Council. We shall clearly identify those questions that have been included from another local agency.
 - It should be noted that Worcestershire County Council has a Countywide Citizens' Panel, which includes residents from the Wyre Forest District.

- For further information on Wyre Forest District Council's Citizens' Panel '*Community Choice*', please contact the:

Media and Marketing Officer
Tel no: 01562 732745

APPENDIX B

'COMMUNITY CHOICE'

Wyre Forest District Council's Third Citizens' Panel (2007-2010)

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS SHEET FOR ELECTED MEMBERS AND OFFICERS ON
THE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PANEL
(April 2007)**

Q1. Why have a '*Community Choice*' Citizens' Panel?

- A.
- The Council is committed to open, accessible and inclusive local government. It uses a wide range of approaches to public consultation to ensure it effectively engages and considers the views of its citizens in its decision making processes, including those for service design, delivery and improvement.
 - The '*Community Choice*' Panel gives local people from all sectors of the community a regular opportunity to say what they feel about the Council services they receive, and what they would like to see changed to improve quality of life in the District.

Q2. How was the '*Community Choice*' Citizens' Panel established?

- A.
- Through the completion of an independent customer satisfaction survey (MORI) 2006, some 350 plus residents have volunteered to join the Panel for the period 2007 to 2010. This Panel replaces the Council's second Citizens' Panel, which was established for the period of 2004 to April 2007.
 - However recruitment to the Panel will be ongoing to ensure that the make-up of it remains as representative as possible of the Wyre Forest District population as a whole, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and geographical location.
 - It should be noted the membership of the Panel does not include elected Members or Officers of the Council. However Cabinet Members will be advised of Panel exercises, which are specific to their areas of responsibility.
 - Existing internal consultation mechanisms will be used to seek the views of elected Members and Officers on strategic and corporate issues.

Q3. How does the Panel work?

- A. Annually (the period from 1st April to 31st March) all Panel members will:
- Receive up to **four strategic issue based surveys**; and
 - Be invited to participate in up to **four focus group discussion sessions** on specific service or policy matters.

The following points should be noted:

- That the four surveys and the invitation to participate in four focus groups will be sent to all Panel members. We do not take a random sample of members from the Panel.
- It should be noted that the response rate to previous focus group sessions has been between 25-30 Panel members.
- That the consultation exercises may include some questions from the Council's local strategic partners e.g. Police, Worcestershire Primary Care Trust and The Community Housing Group who work closely with us to deliver services.

Q4. What standards underpin the co-ordination and management of the Panel?

A. The Council's contract with members of the Panel is as follows:

- We will value Panel members' contribution to consultation and will not ask the same questions over and over again in a short space of time, without good cause.
- We will provide sufficient background information to enable Panel members to understand and respond to the consultation material.
- We will produce consultation results that are measurable and can be evaluated objectively.
- We will explain clearly the purpose of the consultation and will endeavour to offer Panel members meaningful choices.
- We will be clear about how the consultation is being organised and how responses should be made.
- We will aim to make the consultation inclusive by taking account of any particular needs or difficulties that Panel members have to enable them to respond to the consultation.
- We will provide feedback on the results of the consultation and on how the results have been used to inform decision-making, once consultation is complete.
- We will consider any suggestions Panel members may have for improving future consultation exercises.

Q5. How can Divisions use the 'Community Choice' Panel?

- A.**
- At the beginning of each financial year (1st April), CMT will be provided with the scheduled consultation programme for the next 12 months which will identify those consultation exercises wishing to use the 'Community Choice' Panel.
 - CMT will then agree which exercises (4 strategic issue based surveys) and (4 focus group discussion sessions) shall use the 'Community Choice' Panel.

- For the identified exercises, Divisions will need to ensure that the standards listed under question 4 are met. The Strategy and Performance Unit will require evidence that these procedures have been carried out.
- The co-ordination of the consultation exercise including the collation and analysis of data will be the responsibility of the lead Division. The Strategy and Performance Unit will provide advice and guidance as required.

Q6. Can Council Committees use the Panel?

- A.
- Any request for use of the Panel by Council Committees would have to be provided at the time when CMT consider the annual consultation programme at the beginning of the new financial year.
 - It is acknowledged that local authority Citizens' Panels are frequently used for scrutiny exercises. However in such instances the Panels usually comprise of 1,000 plus residents. We need to take care not to overuse our relatively small Panel which is the reason why we have stated that members will receive up to four strategic issue based surveys and be invited to participate in up to four focus group discussion sessions on an annual basis.
 - It should be noted that the Council has access to many other local forums including hard-to-reach groups. The Strategy and Performance Unit can provide contact details of these groups.

Q7. What do we expect the Panel to achieve?

- A. We have two key aims:
- By improving our understanding of what local people and communities want, we will be able to design and deliver more effective and quality services which achieve the best value possible and meet identified needs.
 - To help us to plan for '*Building a Better Future*'. Whether it is for issues that affect the whole District, or more local areas, or communities, we will use the Panel as a way of increasing the level of public participation and influence on future decisions in the District.

Q8. Will Panel members be asked to comment on services provided by Worcestershire County Council?

- A.
- Primarily all consultation exercises will be focused on services provided by Wyre Forest District Council. However, on occasions there may be questions from other agencies, including Worcestershire County Council. We shall clearly identify those questions that have been included from another local agency.
 - It should be noted that Worcestershire County Council has a Countywide Citizens' Panel, which includes residents from the Wyre Forest District.
 - **For further information on Wyre Forest District Council's Citizens' Panel '*Community Choice*', please contact the:**

Media and Marketing Officer
Tel no: 01562 732745