

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Citizens' Panel Update</b>
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<b>Department</b>	Place Management Team
<b>Exempt?</b>	No

**Purpose of report:**

- **To resolve**

**Synopsis of report:**

A report brought to Corporate Management Committee in 2023, detailed the work of Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL), on requirements for a future Citizens' Panel.

Changes to personnel within the Council has seen this objective transfer to the Community Services, Service Area Plan, with the Assistant Chief Executive (Place) remaining the project sponsor.

In addition, since the previous report to Corporate Management Committee, the change in emphasis and approach to financial savings and efficiencies, and the nil growth position of the Council, has meant that consideration has had to be given to a delivery model that whilst maintaining the principles of the RHUL report, makes the delivery of a Citizens' Panel viable and reflects the current position of the Council.

**Recommendation(s):**

- 1. Members are asked to approve the approach to delivering the Citizens' Panel, and undertaking an initial one-year pilot, focussing on two priority areas, as detailed in the report.**

**1. Context and background of report**

1.1 In July 2023, CMC resolved that –

- 1. Committee recognised the value of a Citizens' Panel in gathering evidence on residents' views of the Council and potentially partner organisations' services.*
- 2. Approval was given to the establishment of a Runnymede Citizens' Panel.*
- 3. Committee approved expenditure of £10,000 Shared Prosperity Fund to recruit the membership of the Panel.*
- 4. Virement was approved for the remaining costs associated with the Panel from the central Community Budget, held by the Chief Executive. This would enable the authority to offer participants a small incentive for retaining their membership.*

1.2 The report was accompanied by academic research by Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL). The RHUL report recommended a deliberative format comprising a representative sample of the borough population, structured so that subsets can be

identified according to demographic, socio-economic, and geographical characteristics for consultations specifically relevant to them.

- 1.3 Within the report by RHUL, several detailed recommendations were made, relating to the size, make up and mechanisms for working with the Citizens' Panel, including:
- A Citizens' Panel to be set up with broadly a representative sample of around 1,000 residents.
  - Bring in partners at an early stage on a steering committee, to help provide the expertise (e.g., RHUL), and the outreach e.g., social institutions and local businesses.
  - Intensive deliberative exercises to be (initially) focused on new policy initiatives with resourcing, two or three per year with clear objectives and timelines.
  - Focus groups to be undertaken 3-4 times per year with Panel members from a particular population cohort (e.g., students, social housing tenants, residents of a particular town or ward), who can help the Council address specific and pressing challenges.
  - Surveys to be undertaken of the whole panel (approximately 4 times per year to maintain interest and prevent overload), to understand broader questions such as citizens priority issues or behavioural preferences.
- 1.4 Since the decisions made at Corporate Management Committee in July 2023, there have been changes in relevant personnel, and the Council has been actively working to deliver a programme of work associated with receipt of the Non-Statutory Best Value Notice (NS-BVN). Prior to the NS-BVN being received, the Council was already working to develop plans to reduce an identifiable budget gap in future years and has adopted a "no growth" position for revenue budgets from April 2024. Therefore, with limited budget provision available, there is a need to plan the Citizens' Panel in a way that has the best chance of being affordable and sustainable over the longer term.
- 1.5 The recommendation of RHUL included a suggested panel size of 880 residents. However, identifying this number of residents, who would meet the recommended population demography in the way that has been proposed, will be too resource intensive for our current operating context.
- 1.6 Equally the need to maintain the demographic coverage year on year will create an ongoing administrative responsibility. In reviewing the approach to developing a Citizens' Panel, officers have carefully considered how the Citizens' Panel can be effectively delivered in a way that it can be resourced as part of 'business as usual' once it has been set up.
- 1.7 This report will focus on how a Citizens' Panel, can be achieved in the spirit of the previous CMC approval and with due regard to developing a sustainable approach to citizen engagement that the Council can resource for future years without additional growth.
- 1.8 The report will also reference how the Citizens' Panel should form part of a wider approach to resident engagement via a number of different methods and access channels.
- 2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended**

- 2.1 By reviewing the approach to developing a Citizens' Panel, officers have identified a way to deliver the Council's commitment to meaningfully engaging residents on key issues.
- 2.2 The 880 resident target outlined by RHUL, should remain, but should not serve as a limit to the number of residents who could be engaged by a streamlined process.
- 2.3 The Citizens' Panel will be developed via a survey that interested people will be asked to complete, which will populate a database of participants by demographic characteristics, against which we can target for specific engagement purposes. This approach reflects the recommendations of RHUL, who reference estimated percentages of panel members against demographic data including age, gender, race, disability, religion, housing/accommodation status, relating to deprivation measures, residents ward etc. Residents will have the opportunity to opt out of completing elements of the survey, but this will mean they will potentially not be engaged in specific focus areas, as a result. By developing the panel and targeting demographic groups in this way, we will be able to reduce the set up and ongoing costs of servicing this engagement measure.
- 2.4 In addition, through the survey, questions that identify residents' key areas of concern/focus etc. will be asked, and this will facilitate potential targeting of smaller, dedicated cohorts to engage on specific subject matters. Examples of these could include climate change, community safety, parks and open spaces, planning policy, sport, leisure and recreation etc. Residents will be able to select as many or as few as they wish.
- 2.5 The approach in 2.3 and 2.4, reflects much of the conversation to date, however, to ensure that such an approach does not become difficult to resource, we will not adopt an intensive search process to identify representatives of specific demographics, to achieve specific representative percentages within the future Citizens' Panel. Instead, we will use the demographic information provided in the initial survey responses to identify gaps to help target groups and people with interests in subsequent recruitment campaigns. These communications will be proactively undertaken using our existing networks, as part of our efforts to recruit under-represented demographics.
- 2.6 The sign-up process will include seeking details of preferred engagement methods, to determine the access and preference of participants in terms of how they would want to be engaged.
- 2.7 Engaging residents to become members of the Citizens' Panel is key to ensuring we achieve appropriate representation from across the population demography. Officers will deploy a range of techniques to maximize our reach. These may include:
  - Social media and website
  - Established panels, groups, networks, forum, and partnerships etc.
  - Flyers, posters etc. to promote the opportunity.
  - Direct engagement with residents through business activity
  - Engagement via schools/colleges to target younger residents.
  - Word of mouth, resident to resident recommendation
  - Promotion of opportunity by elected Members.
  - Inclusion of the opportunity within other communications from the Council

The above list is not exhaustive, and the growth of the Citizens' Panel will be an organic, self-sustaining, and ongoing process, enabling people to join and leave the panel as may suit them. It will not be a one-off activity.

- 2.8 A Data Privacy Impact Assessment will be prepared at the outset of the project to help the Council identify and minimise the data protection risks of the project. All resident data will be securely stored. Use of the Citizens' Panel will be agreed by the Corporate Leadership Team before any engagement exercise. The means of engagement need to be clear and understood, and RBC must be mindful to prevent overload or a scattergun approach to engagement.
- 2.9 Given the unknown ongoing requirements regarding resourcing the Citizens' Panel, it will be delivered based on a one-year pilot, subject to review at the end of the year and associated recommendations. In the first year, there will be two main subject areas as the focus for engagement. These are:
  1. The Council's engagement and communication with residents and communities (how do our communities want us to engage with them?)
  2. Residents' key priorities as part of an initial consultation exercise, working towards an evidence-led future Corporate Business Plan
- 2.10 These areas of focus have been identified for specific reasons. Discussing engagement and communication preferences may support the further development of a broader Council strategy/approach to resident engagement. A broader approach may allow for an increase in resident engagement by using a range of channels and approaches, and also allow for consideration of how the council will seek to formally (and consistently) engage with businesses, the Third Sector, other public sector partners and hard to reach communities. The second area of focus presents a timely opportunity within the planning cycle for a future Corporate Business Plan, whereby residents can have their opportunity to contribute to the future priorities of the Council.
- 2.11 Additional targeted engagement events, relating to specific subject areas, may also be undertaken with the panel during the 12-month period, led by services with issues they want to seek views about, following a toolkit developed to ensure consistency. Within the toolkit, there will be the requirement for the appropriate committee chair, or in the event of geographic specific engagement, ward Councillors, to be included within the planning. This will be on a case-by-case basis dependent on the nature of the issue being consulted on. A communications plan will also be required to consider the ways in which residents are intended to be engaged with and to set out the proposed feedback mechanisms. Oversight will be coordinated by an officer group, that will be established.
- 2.12 As referenced in the report of July 2023, a sum of £10,000 has been allocated to the setting up of the Citizens' Panel, from the Shared Prosperity Fund. It is likely this will be used primarily to incentivise residents to participate and for required elements such as paid social media etc. Fund. In addition, a further one off budget of £10,000 to support the set up and launch of the project. Both funding amounts are required to be spent by March 2025.
- 2.13 An annual revenue provision of £15,000 has been allocated for the development of the Citizens' Panel. How the annual provision will be spent will be identified during the initial pilot.

### **3. Policy framework implications**

- 3.1 The delivery of the Citizens' Panel meets one of the key objectives within the Corporate Plan and would also help deliver objectives from within the Council's Empowering Communities Strategy.
- 3.2 The delivery of a Citizens' Panel has been transferred to the Community Services Service Area Plan for 2024/2025.

### **4 Resource implications/Value for Money**

- 4.1 The delivery of a Citizens' Panel, is supported by a £10,000 allocation of funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund, which is required to be spent in 2024/2025. It is intended that this funding will be used to support establishing the panel and the first two engagement subjects identified within the report. In addition, a one off sum of £10,000 has been allocated by the Council to support its development.
- 4.2 An annual revenue provision of £15,000 has been allocated for ongoing costs, some of which will be identified during the pilot period.
- 4.3 The report outlines that establishing the Citizens' Panel will be resourced by Officers in "Place" services, with the Assistant Chief Executive as Sponsor. Additional support will be provided via existing Graduate Trainees at the Council, currently placed within Community Services, as part of their planned rotation programme.

### **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 None identified.

### **6. Equality implications**

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) will be written as part of the work undertaken in advance of launching the Citizens' Panel, with any launch not proceeding until sign off of the EQIA has been received.

### **7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct environmental implications because of this report, however in designing the processes for engagement with the Citizens' Panel, consideration will be given to environmental impacts, including the need for travel to and from meetings, the printing of materials etc.

### **8. Risk Implications**

- 8.1 There are no major risks identified relating to this report.

### **9. Other implications**

- 9.1 A Data Privacy Impact Assessment will be completed once the categories to be used for data collection are agreed. No work on the registration of residents to the Citizens' Panel will commence until the Data Privacy Impact Assessment has been approved by the Data Protection Officer.

### **10. Timetable for Implementation**

10.1 A timetable for the project will be written, following the established project management office processes.

## **11. Conclusions**

11.1 The proposed initial pilot of a Citizens' Panel in 2024/2025, builds on the work and recommendations of RHUL, and will deliver on the approvals of the Corporate Management Committee in July 2023.

11.2 Further to CMC in July 2023, there has been changes to key personnel and having reviewed the relevant approvals and proposed approach to delivering a Citizens' Panel for Runnymede, officers have carefully considered how to develop this form of engagement in the most sustainable and cost-effective way, and to actively engage with residents and communities to understand what matters most to them.

11.3 The Council has a duty to ensure it communicates effectively with residents and communities, as well as to ensure there is meaningful engagement around subjects that are both of interest, and which will shape, in future years, communities, towns, and Runnymede as a borough.

## **12. Background papers**

- Corporate Management Committee Report – July 2023