

Report title	RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel Recruitment Phase Update
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Department	Community Services
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

- **For information**

Synopsis of report:

This report shows the breadth of work and detailed consideration that has been undertaken by officers working on this project since the previous report submitted to CMC in July 2024.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 In July 2024, CMC approval was given to the establishment of an in-house Runnymede Citizens' Engagement Panel, with delivery of this project designed to fit sustainably into limited ongoing budget availability.
- 1.2 To ensure the Citizen's Engagement Panel is sustainable both in terms of financial viability and with regard to residents' engagement with it, the intention is for it to be delivered as a one-year pilot, concluding with a review that will determine next steps.
- 1.3 For the pilot, two main subject areas were proposed as the focus for two panel-wide consultations. These are:
 - The Council's engagement and communication with residents and communities i.e. How our communities want us to engage with them
 - Residents' key priorities as part of an initial consultation exercise, working towards an evidence-led future Corporate Business Plan
- 1.4 At this stage, it is not intended to run additional targeted engagement events relating to specific subject areas, but there is scope for this to occur at a later stage. This has been included within the planning for the Citizens' Engagement Panel.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress across various areas, working towards launching the 'Recruitment Phase' of the Citizens' Engagement Panel pilot in late November/December.

2. Report

Recruitment Phase Design & Planning

- 2.1 Research has been undertaken, looking at other Councils who have run Citizens' Panels and similar initiatives with a focus on the mechanisms around sign-up processes and identifying where incentivisation has been utilised effectively.
- 2.2 review of Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census data was conducted to form a basis for the in-house demographic data analysis which will be integral to this initiative. This involves compiling a selection of questions to be asked of prospective panel members regarding different demographic markers on registration, and then for the data provided to be collated and compared against ONS data, to assess whether the number of panel members under each marker is broadly representative of the borough.
- 2.3 Officers designed a registration form with an appropriate balance in the number, nature and scope of questions asked. A thorough review of potential questions reflecting the scope of ONS data was also conducted. This resulted in a focussed number of questions, which collectively provide enough data to monitor and steer towards broadly proportional representation, without the process of analysis being too intensive to manage in-house (as well as not asking for more sensitive information than required or than might be comfortable for residents to provide).
- 2.4 A paper version of this sign-up form is included (Appendix A). These will be made available in both standard and large print, to accommodate residents who may require them. However, it is believed that most residents are likely to register using the online version of the registration form.
- 2.5 It is intended that only residents aged 18+ will be able to sign up for the purposes of the initial pilot phase. In the event of continuation of the Citizens' Engagement Panel post pilot, and/or as part of a wider council engagement strategy, consideration to the inclusion of children and young people will be given, although the Citizens' Engagement Panel approach may not be the most effective way to engage this cohort.
- 2.6 Consideration has also been given to representation within the Citizens' Engagement Panel, relating to the staff and elected representatives of the Council. Given that approximately 40% of the councils' workforce resides within the borough, it is important to ensure that employees, as residents, can participate. This is to ensure their views and contributions are included.
- 2.7 Given that elected members will be the recipients of any evidence and feedback collated through the Citizens' Engagement Panel, and the role of members in determining strategic and policy related decisions associated with this feedback, the Panel itself must remain politically neutral. Councillors will not be invited to participate in the Citizens' Engagement Panel itself.

Customer Relationship Management System

- 2.8 Officers from the Digital Services (DS) team have supported the development of the RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel, through use of the customer relationship management system (CRM system) to support registration and delivery. Provisions will be in place for the automated secure storage, of all data in registration form submissions.
- 2.9 To ensure that the day-to-day running of the panel does not become excessively resource intensive, the DS team have built process flows to streamline and maximise automation where possible. These can be viewed in Appendix B.
- 2.10 At the time of writing this report, user testing is taking place and will lead to the CRM being ready for launch imminently. The DS team are finalising the online registration form and

completing the build of the CRM System to enable demographic representation to be monitored effectively and anonymously.

Equality and Data Protection Considerations

- 2.11 A Data Privacy Impact Assessment (DPIA) pertaining to the recruitment phase and CRM system for the panel has been prepared to help the Council identify and minimise the data protection risks of the project. This has been included in the appendices (Appendix C). Once the nature and format of the engagements has been finalised, a second DPIA will be written to cover new considerations for the engagements phase of the project.
- 2.12 As this initiative is relevant to equality, an equalities screening document has been submitted. The internal Equalities Group will determine whether a full Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) is required. A copy of the screening document can be found at Appendix D.

Communications & Marketing

- 2.13 Working with colleagues in Communications and Marketing, a Communications Action Plan has been drafted to identify how the Citizens' Engagement Panel will be promoted to residents. This includes the use of digital and other, more traditional approaches.
- 2.14 The campaign will be delivered in 2 phases. Phase 1 (late 2024) will be a soft launch and will focus on the council's standard and free communications activities. This will run for a period of four weeks. Phase 2 will commence in mid-January 2025 for 10 weeks, and will include mass distribution and targeted communications (based on assessment findings). If required, messaging may need to be amended at this stage following assessment findings. Phase 2 will also incorporate utilising the Council Tax billing process to ensure reach to every household, through the inclusion of a leaflet to promote sign up.
- 2.15 The intention of having two phases to the marketing plan, will enable a review of the demographic markers of the residents signing up (for comparison against proportions indicated by the Census data we have collated) and to identify where gaps in representation remain as the panel grows, allowing us to release more targeted communications and marketing.
- 2.16 In addition, in July 2024, in discussing the potential to incentivise residents to register with the Citizens' Engagement Panel, members expressed a preference to retain the possible use of incentives until the initial registration process commences and initial levels of sign up are understood. Therefore, the potential use of any incentive (such as by running a prize draw for a shopping voucher or charity donation across the pool of panel members) will only be considered during the review period of the 'Recruitment Phase', as planned into the communication and marketing plan. Use of an incentive will only be actioned if such exercises are deemed beneficial to recruit the total number of panel numbers targeted.
- 2.17 Officers in Community Services are in the process of writing copy for the Councils website, which will be uploaded and publicly accessible at the point the "Recruitment Phase" commences.
- 2.18 Due to limited resources within the Communications team, it is intended that up to £5K of Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funding (that is required to be utilised by 31 March 2024) is directed towards working with an agency who would be able to deliver creation of graphic elements and also manage the digital marketing campaign. In addition, a small budget for the printing of materials such as leaflets and posters has been earmarked within the SPF. Given the likely requirement for ongoing promotion of the Citizens' Engagement Panel, it is

intended that as part of this arrangement, all digital and design materials created will be provided to the council to allow for continued use.

Next Steps

- 2.19 The direction of the RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel as outlined in this report results in the project moving into the launch of the "Recruitment Phase".
- 2.20 It is intended that sign up will commence with a soft launch of the "Recruitment Phase" prior to Christmas, which will be followed by a review of progress and demographic analysis that will lead into a more intensive promotional campaign in the New Year. The initial sign-up process is projected to run until March 2025. Residents will, however, be able to leave/join the panel beyond this point should they wish to, and membership will be monitored periodically to ensure it remains a relevant and representative panel of the borough.
- 2.21 To proceed, all elements outlined in this report will need to be completed and in place. Should, for any unforeseen reason, this not be possible resulting in a delay to launch, an update will be provided to Members.
- 2.22 Once the "Recruitment Phase" has been launched, it is intended for a project group of officers to be put together to consider the design of the first engagement activity, as agreed in the report of July 2024.

3 Policy framework implications

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

4 Resource Implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 As shared in the previous committee report, the delivery of the RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel is supported by a £10,000 allocation of funding from the SPF, which is required to be spent by 31 March 2025. In addition, a one-time sum of £10,000 has been allocated by the Council to support its set-up development, also to be used by 31 March 2025.
- 4.2 Consideration has been given to utilising the SPF funding for the promotion of the Citizens' Engagement Panel. In addition, should an incentive scheme be introduced this would also be funded by the SPF. Further expenditure may be identified during the remainder of Q3 and in Q4 of 2024/2025.
- 4.3 An annual revenue provision of £15,000 has been allocated to the delivery of the Citizens' Engagement Panel.
- 4.4 The previous report outlined that establishing the Citizens' Engagement Panel will be resourced by officers in "Place" services, with the Assistant Chief Executive as Sponsor. This approach will be used in the development of the engagement design phase of the project.

5 Legal implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications identified relating to this report.

6 Equality implications

- 6.1 As stated in the report this initiative is relevant to equality, a screening document has been completed, with the possible need for a full Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) to be written. This will be completed by officers in advance of the launch, if required.

7 Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 There are no direct environmental implications to be considered as a part of this report, however in designing the processes for engagement with the RBC Citizens' Engagement 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 The only risk identified currently is the capacity of officers to complete all elements of the work set out in this report and in the engagement design phase, given existing responsibilities and commitments.

9 Timetable for Implementation

- **Late November/Early December:** Soft Launch of "Recruitment Phase"
- **Early January:** Review progress, consider who is missing from demographics and how many more sign ups we need (with considerations for incentivisation if required).
- **Mid/Late January to March 31st:** Full campaign for "Recruitment Phase"
 - **February 2025:** All households will receive promotional material contained in their Council Tax billing mailout.
- **April 2025 – March 2026:** 12-month pilot for RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel pilot, during which at least 2 consultations will be conducted, with a focus on exploring:
 - **First engagement in Quarter 1:** How our communities want us to engage and communicate with them
 - **Second engagement in Quarter 3:** What our communities consider key priorities, to be considered as we work towards an evidence-led future Corporate Business Plan

10 Conclusions

- 10.1 This report shows the breadth of work and detailed consideration that has been undertaken by officers working on this project since the previous report submitted to CMC in July 2024.
- 10.2 The Runnymede Citizens' Engagement Panel is close to being ready for the 'Recruitment Phase' to go live, subject to the support of members and approval of the direction of progress as outlined in this report.
- 10.3 Once the 'Recruitment Phase' commences and sign-up is launched, intentions are for officers to move forward with the planning and design of the first panel-wide engagement.
- 10.4 A future report to the Community Services Committee (given the inclusion of this objective within its service area plan) will be intended for May 2025, following the completion of the initial 'Recruitment Phase' of the project.

11 Background papers

- Corporate Management Committee Report – July 2023

- Corporate Management Committee Report – July 2024

12 Appendices

- A) RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel - Paper Registration Form
- B) RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel - CRM System Process Flows
- C) RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel - Recruitment Phase DPIA
- D) RBC Citizens' Engagement Panel - Full EIA