

Lincolnshire County Council
Customer Service Centre
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Citizens Panel Proposal Details

In a bid to improve the coordination of consultation and to gain much needed 'pulse' feedback from our customer base, Lincolnshire County Council has made a commitment to establish and maintain a Citizens' Panel. This Panel has the potential to provide benefits for many partner agencies, such as the Primary Care Trust.

What is a Citizens' Panel?

The Citizens' Panel is made up of approximately 500 adults aged 16-80 who represent the population of the county to provide an "ordinary persons' perspective". To maintain objectivity the panel is "refreshed" (i.e. new members recruited, existing ones asked to leave) by a third every year.

How does it work?

We contact the panel members via outbound telephony, three times a year and ask them to complete a questionnaire. We also ask Panel members regularly, if they would like to join any other consultation and feedback groups which may involve them taking part in focus groups, workshops and interviews. Panel members receive a newsletter with each survey, informing them of survey findings/consultation, proposed actions and achievements. In addition these newsletters can also be accessed on-line as a means of communicating with all our customer base on up to date matters and views.

The Panel allows us to consult with an easily accessible group of people and we can consult with them in a variety of ways on a regular basis. There is the opportunity for a range of questions to be asked each time the Panel is surveyed and we aim to cover areas of interest to the general population as well as a generic set of questions which allow for survey upon survey comparison as well as a 'hot topics' set of questions. The latter will be decided upon at the time depending upon time of year and political steer.

The Panel compliments the existing (and developing) community networks and forums, and is a useful way of gaining views from the community on broad strategic, commissioning and well-being issues.

Benefits of using the Panel

The Panel provides a number of significant benefits:

- It enables consultation on large strategic issues. For instance, the Council Business Plan, Council Budgets etc. It provides easily accessible, regular and

robust information on attitudes, perceptions, vision and behaviour of local people.

- It provides a method through which consultation can be more effectively co-ordinated thereby reducing overlap, fatigue and cost. For instance each survey can contain questions from different service areas if appropriate.
- It develops and enhances opportunities for participation, providing benefits for individuals and the general population. It builds on current methods of getting involved, for example; voting, community networks, school governors, voluntary and community activity and service user groups. Panel members are encouraged to take part in other activities.
- It improves communications. Organisations that have panels are seen to be listening and acting organisations and show transparent decision making. Participants have said that they felt listened to and involved in decision making and understand when they are able to influence decisions of LCC and partners. An excellent and regular source of reliable data and information.
- It provides a cost-effective method for consulting large numbers of people.
- A consistent question set around overall customer satisfaction and brand values are always asked.

Limitations of a Panel

The method of recruiting hard to reach groups, i.e. quota sampling, and getting them to partake in the panel may be an issue. A maximum of three surveys per year to each panel member is the maximum recommended; any more than this then the Panel can become "too knowledgeable" and response rates reduce.

How is the Panel Used?

- Collect views on Lincolnshire County Council.
- As a 'quiet' evaluator which will help LCC identify customer opinion
- To identify trends in public opinion
- Monitor the performance of the council and its services.
- To support the work of any fundamental reviews and scrutiny.
- To recruit residents for further consultations on specific issues.
- To improve communication and develop public consultation.

Project Sponsor

This is a specific requirement from the Leader of the Council, and as such, sponsor will be Richard Wills, Executive Director for Communities, and coordinated by Mark Haynes, Head of Customer Service, with support from Karen Spence Strategic Communications Manager and Martin Wilson, Head of Community Engagement.

Project Team

Sponsor – Richard Wills

Coordinator – Mark Haynes

Communications Lead – Karen Spencer

Data Provider – Local authority/NHS partners

Data Collection – CSC Touchstone Team

Data Analysis – CSC Quality and Performance Team & Community Engagement Team

Data Report – Martin Wilson & Community Engagements Team

Process

Once the questions are set, panel members and the regularity of the survey is agreed, then a data set of information is provided to the CSC. The CSC will input the data into SNAP and Martin Wilson's Community Engagement team will be responsible for the production of meaningful qualitative reports for the Executive and CMB.

The CSC will also proactively collect e mail contacts so we develop our own database for use in future consultation/conversation need for LCC

Example questions to be used

- Satisfied with clearing of streets from snow and ice
- Agrees that LCC provides value for money
- Thinks that quality of service will reduce
- Informed about services
- Opinion of council website for ease of use

Budget

- Set up costs
- Revenue costs
 - Comms
 - CSC
 - Community Engagement

To be managed within the forward budget