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# **The role and purpose of citizens' panels: A case study**

By  
Nadine Morrisroe

A thesis submitted for the degree of MA by  
Research in the School of Applied Social  
Sciences, University of Durham

June 2009

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## Abstract

Central government has been consistent in its rhetoric about the need for local authorities to consult and engage with local people in decision-making since the implementation of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda. Local authorities have responded to this and other imperatives by providing a range of participation opportunities for local people. Citizens' panels are one such approach that has risen in prominence since 1997.

This thesis considers the expectations and implementation of citizens' panels and their future role with reference to a detailed examination of a case study panel and emerging national policy. The case study draws on my own experiences and observations as practitioner-researcher, documentary analysis, interviews with council officers and a survey of panellists.

The study reveals that in common with other local authority panels, the panel did not achieve some of the initial expectations and suffers from some of the wider difficulties experienced by public participation. The panel has however found a role for itself and succeeds in getting a large group of people more involved in local government. The study concludes that there is potential to build on this and in doing so help to deliver on the national policy agenda and better achieve panellist expectations. The panel can only truly flourish however if some of the unresolved issues regarding public participation are addressed including the extent to which central government and the local authority create an environment in which the benefits of public participation can truly be met and the extent to which local people respond to this.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Tim Blackman for his advice and guidance throughout this study. I would also like to thank the case study authority who funded the study and enabled me to access the participants, data and documents. A special thank you is owed to the research participants without whom this research would not be possible.



## Chapter one - Introduction

This study considers the future role of a local authority citizens' panel. Taking a case study approach, it reflects on the implementation and development of a panel, determines the needs of panellists and council officers and considers emerging requirements from central government with respect to consultation. In doing this, the study provides a deeper understanding of a citizens' panel in a local context and provides a range of recommendations for improvement.

Citizens' panels are one of a range of consultation techniques which rose in prominence following the Local Government White Paper 'Modern Local Government: In Touch With The People' (Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR), 1998). Panels are traditionally considered to comprise a representative sample of people who will be asked to participate in consultation activity on an ongoing basis. A survey undertaken on behalf of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) revealed that 71% of local authorities had established citizens' panels by 2002 (Birch, 2002). Panels were established for a variety of reasons, including the need to address and manage the consultation requirements placed upon local authorities and achieve democratic renewal and service improvement objectives. It would however seem that panels cannot achieve all of the many varied aims that were expected of them.

The case study panel was established in 2002 with the aims of improving the co-ordination, efficiency and cost effectiveness of consultation activity across the council and partner organisations. In 2006, as Research Officer at the

local authority, I felt that that despite the many aspects of good practice being adopted, the panel was not achieving its full potential from the perspective of panellists, council officers or central government. In addition the forthcoming local government White Paper (Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2006) was expected to encourage greater participation and engagement in decision making and service delivery and it was important to ensure that if the panel was to continue, it could match up to expectations. It was therefore agreed that the panel should be reviewed and the following objectives were established:

1. To understand central government's expectations with respect to consultation and public participation.
2. To understand the implementation and development of the case study panel, how it is used and perceived and the context in which it is operating at the local authority.
3. To understand the needs, expectations and perceptions of panellists and determine to what extent the panel meets those needs.
4. To formulate practical recommendations to improve the panel and better meet the needs and expectations identified.

The study took place over a period of two years from October 2006 to August 2008 and during this time, there was much activity from central government with respect to the community engagement agenda following the publication of the 2006 White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (DCLG, 2006). In undertaking this research I adopted the role of 'practitioner-

researcher' (Robson, 2002) since I continued to be employed by the local authority throughout the study. The overall design is broadly considered to be a case study and chapter two explains the approach in more detail including the data collection methods used and analysis undertaken. A range of methods were used in order to address the objectives and reflect the different stakeholders to be considered including a literature review in relation to central government expectations and citizens' panels and a survey, interviews and documentary analysis within the local authority.

Chapter three considers how consultation activity in local authorities has evolved over the last ten years and the issues and tensions that have been encountered in implementing the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA)<sup>1</sup>. It goes on to outline recent proposals and legislation with respect to consultation and thus provides the context in which local authorities will be operating.

Chapter four provides an overview of the citizens' panel technique and how and why panels evolved. It goes on to consider in more detail the issues raised when implementing panels including aspects such as representativeness, fitness for purpose and panel users. The chapter draws on literature relating to local authority citizens' panels and methodological texts.

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<sup>1</sup> The LGMA refers to a range of policies arising from the 1998 and 2001 White Papers, much of which will be described in further detail in Chapter three.



Taking a case study approach, chapters five and six consider consultation at the local authority and the citizens' panel. Drawing on my own experience and observations, documentary analysis and interviews with council officers, chapter five examines the development of the panel, issues raised in managing the panel, perceived benefits of the panel and possible improvements and future use. It also provides contextual information about the local authority and discusses the development of consultation at the council and challenges faced. Chapter six presents the findings of a survey with panellists and considers panellists' expectations and perceptions of the panel and how the panel could be improved from a panellist perspective. The local authority has been anonymised throughout this study.

Chapter seven considers the evidence presented so far in relation to the national policy context, the review of citizens' panels and the case study authority and discusses what this is telling us in relation to the wider literature.

Finally chapter eight provides a range of practical recommendations for how to take the local citizens' panel forward which take account of the challenges and opportunities presented in the local and national context and the needs and expectations of the stakeholders involved. The chapter also reflects upon the research design employed and strengths and weaknesses of the approach used.

# Chapter two - Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter explains the research design, methods of data collection and analysis used in the study. A case study design was adopted which

Robson (2002:178), in taking the lead from Yin (1981, 1994), defines as:

a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.

In line with this definition, the study examines a citizens' panel in a local context using a range of approaches and sources of evidence. The study is considered to be an 'intrinsic case study' (Stake, 1995:3) since the citizens' panel was selected to be of interest in its own right and the aim was to gain a rich understanding of the panel in order to improve it. As a case study, this research does not set out to be generalizable to all local authority citizens' panels since it investigates in detail a panel at a local level and represents this particular panel. The case study panel does however operate in the same national policy context as other local authority citizen's panels and the findings may have varying degrees of relevance and significance to other practitioners. Therefore the study could be said to have some 'instrumental' properties (Stake, 1995:3) whereby it could provide some general understanding about citizens' panels.

Given that I was employed full-time by the local authority during the two year study and was therefore interacting with various stakeholders and experiencing events and occurrences with respect to consultation and the panel, I adopted the role of 'practitioner-researcher' in this project (Robson,

2002). This unique position and my having been with the local authority for four years when the study was initiated, enabled me to draw on my own direct knowledge, experience and observations. Indeed Robson (2002:535) outlines this to be one the key benefits of a practitioner-researcher role. This will be returned to in chapter eight in the discussion around the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

A range of techniques were used to understand the perspectives of the different stakeholders and their inter-relationships and to address the research objectives, comprising the following key elements:

- An assessment of central government's expectations with respect to consultation and the implications for local authorities
- A literature review of citizens' panels
- A review of consultation and the citizens panel at the case study authority including research with council officers
- Research with panellists

A proposal was drawn up around this and approved by Durham University and my line manager. It was also submitted for ethical review to the School of Applied Social Sciences and approved without condition. The remainder of this chapter explains how each element of the research was conducted.

## **Panellist research**

Research with the panellists was the first phase of the study, for reasons that will be later described. In broad terms the purpose of this stage of the research was to determine panellists' expectations and experiences of the

panel. This section explains the design and implementation of the research undertaken with panellists with reference to research methods literature.

### **Research Design and method**

The research objectives were based on my knowledge and experience of the panel as Research Officer and following some initial reading on other local authority panels as detailed in chapter four and verification with my line manager. The objectives of the research with panellists were as follows:

1. Identify panellists' motivations for joining and expectations of the panel
2. Determine new panellists' satisfaction with the local authority and local area and compare with the general population
3. Investigate whether current panellists' views of the local authority and area differ from new panellists' opinions
4. Determine current panellists' perceptions of the panel in terms of key outcomes<sup>1</sup> and compare perceptions of key outcomes with expectations and results from previous panel surveys
5. Determine current panellists' perceptions of the more operational aspects of the panel such as questionnaires, feedback and members' packs
6. Measure satisfaction with the panel and explore what other variables are most closely associated with satisfaction
7. Compare perceptions by age, gender, area, Mosaic grouping and year of joining the panel

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<sup>1</sup> To include four key outcomes for which perception data was collected in the previous three years.

8. Investigate how certain factors might influence response to surveys and whether there are any differences in opinion by age, gender, area Mosaic grouping and year of joining the panel
9. Investigate how the panel can be improved

A cross sectional design was adopted since the research objectives required that descriptive data be collected from a number of panellists at a particular point in time and the exploration of patterns of association between different variables. Quantitative, survey research was determined as the most suitable data collection method. The main reasons for this are as follows:

- Panellists join on the basis that they will be invited to take part in three surveys per year. Most panellists only ever take part in surveys and surveys are completed by a wider cross-section of the panel than more qualitative research.
- Less detailed data about panellists' perceptions is collected by means of a survey on an annual basis and this would allow comparisons to be made with previous years on four key outcomes.
- This would also allow perceptions of the local authority and area to be compared with the Annual Residents' Survey (a face-to face survey of local residents conducted between 4 September and 31 October 2006 by Ipsos-MORI).
- A survey offers flexibility in the types of data that can be collected and whilst it is a quantitative data collection method, it would also permit the collection of more qualitative data through open questions.

A telephone survey was selected as the principal means of administering the survey; the main reasons being:

- A telephone survey was already scheduled to take place during November 2006 as part of the annual budget consultation and the questionnaire was only 10 minutes in length. This would allow for a further 10 minutes of questions as panellists are advised that questionnaires will take around 15-20 minutes on joining the panel. The other two programmed surveys with the panel would be longer which would limit the questions that could be asked for this study.
- Data on panellists' perceptions had not been collected in 2006 and amongst other things this data would be useful for a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection taking place in January 2007.
- New panellists had just been recruited and had not received newsletters or questionnaires so it was a good time to obtain some initial data on their motivations and expectations before exposure.
- The other two annual programmed surveys with the panel would primarily use a postal survey methodology. A telephone survey in November 2005 generated a higher response rate than previous postal surveys for the budget consultation (67% compared to 53% in 2004 and 49% in 2003) and a better demographic mix of respondents and previous non-respondents took part.

The telephone survey would also offer a number of methodological advantages over the postal survey. For example, it would better lend itself to asking open ended questions since interviewers take away the burden of

recording the answers and in addition can probe for more information and clarification (Borque and Fielder, 2003; Bryman, 2004). This may be useful for objectives 1 and 9. There are also a number of benefits relating to control. Critics observe that there is no control over who responds to postal surveys (Erdos, 1970; Moser and Kalton, 1971; Frey and Oishi, 1995; Robson, 2002; Bryman, 2004) but the telephone survey would enable the interviewers to ask to speak to the named contact. In addition telephone surveys permit control over the sequence in which respondents answer the questions (Frey and Oishi, 1995; Czaja and Blair, 1996; Borque and Fielder, 2003; Robson, 2002; Bryman, 2004) and tend to yield fewer incomplete questionnaires / missing data than self-completion questionnaires (Babbie, 2004; Bryman, 2004). If conducted from a central location, telephone interviews also permit ongoing supervision or monitoring of interviews and thus greater quality control over data collection (Frey and Oishi, 1995; Borque and Fielder, 2003; Crano and Brewer, 2002; Seale, 2004; Babbie, 2004; Wilson, 2006).

Whilst the telephone survey was the main method of administration, the survey was also administered using self-completion questionnaires (postal with the additional option of online completion). This was with an appreciation of the drawbacks of postal surveys in comparison to telephone surveys but on balance the dual methodology was felt to be better for the following reasons. When panellists are recruited to the panel they have a choice about how they prefer to take part. Respondents could not be excluded because, for example, there was not a valid telephone number for them, they have previously said that they do not wish to take part over the telephone or they are hard of hearing and 28% of panellists fell into this category at the outset. In addition

numerous commentators highlight problems associated with telephone interviewing in terms of accessing respondents and obtaining a representative sample (Frey and Oishi, 1995; Kent, 1999; Crano and Brewer, 2002; Babbie, 2004; McDaniel and Gates, 1993; Payne and Payne, 2004; Bryman, 2004). In this instance, given that telephone numbers had already been supplied, this might include answering machines, call screening, call waiting and telephone numbers changing, for example. The dual methodology would therefore counteract some difficulties and also encourage as many people to respond as possible. It should be noted that this was decided with an appreciation that responses may differ according to the data collection method used (Dillman, 2000). Differences in methodology would also need to be considered when making comparisons with the results from the Annual Residents' Survey (face-to-face interviews) and previous panel surveys (postal surveys).

A 100% target sample was undertaken given that panellists have been recruited to take part in three surveys per year and this study formed part of one of those surveys. It was also important to give all panellists the opportunity to respond.

### **Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire was developed to address the research objectives. Responses to previous panel surveys and studies and questionnaires carried out by other local authorities were consulted (RBA Research, 2001; Norfolk Citizens' Panel Partnership Forum, 2001; Derby City Council, 2003; Sheffield City Council, 2004a,b,c; Consultation Institute, 2005; North East One, 2005; Consultation Institute, 2006; Stockton on Tees Borough Council, 2006).



If there had been more time to prior to undertaking the survey, qualitative work may have been undertaken initially to help better understand panellists' motivations and expectations of the panel, what is important to them and what improvements could be made. This would have principally been used to help identify measures to include in the survey (referred to as facilitation), although it may have also provided opportunities for triangulation and complementarity (Hammersley, 1996 cited in Bryman, 2004:455).

In developing the questionnaire the dual methodology was taken into account to ensure that the questions and question format were appropriate for both methods. There were two questionnaires (one for current panellists and one for new panellists) and there were two versions of each (telephone and postal). Copies of the postal versions are included in Appendix 1. The questionnaire was developed according to good practice guidelines in terms of question formatting, wording and sequence and questionnaire layout (e.g De Vaus, 1990; Foddy, 1993; Schuman and Presser, 1996; Oppenheim, 2000; Bryman, 2004) and initially pre-tested in the Performance Improvement Team. The questionnaire length was restricted to 20 minutes (including 10 minutes for the budget consultation) for telephone respondents and an 8 page booklet for postal respondents. This would comply with panellist expectations and although there is conflicting evidence regarding the length of telephone interviews (Frey and Oishi; 1995; Wilson, 2006; Crano and Brewer, 2002), reduce the risk of respondents becoming bored or fatigued.

The questionnaires were pre-tested and the current panellist questionnaire was sent to the market research agency for further testing and piloting

(described in Appendix 2). The postal version and questionnaires for new panellists were piloted in the office only since there was not enough time to include additional pilots. Changes were made to the questionnaire based on the results from the pilots. Appendix 2 also provides a brief rationale for the final set of questions.

Table 1 outlines how the final set of questions relates to the objectives:

<b>Table 1 Relationship between questions and objectives – Panellist research</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Current Survey</b>	<b>New Survey</b>
Investigate panellists' motivations for joining the panel and expectations of the panel	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6	Q1,Q2,Q5, Q7,Q8
Determine new panellists' perceptions of the Council and area and compare with the general population		Q1,Q2,Q3,Q4
Investigate whether current panellists' views of the Council and area differ from new panellists' opinions	Q1,Q2	Q1,Q2
Determine panellists' perceptions of the more operational aspects of the panel such as questionnaires, feedback and members' packs. Make comparisons between identified groups	Q5, Q8, Q10, Q11,Q12, Q13, Q14, Q16	Q6,Q9,Q10, Q11,Q12,Q13, Q15
Determine panellists' perceptions of the panel in terms of key outcomes and compare perceptions of key outcomes with expectations and results from previous panel surveys. Make comparisons between identified groups	Q6, Q7	
Measure satisfaction with the panel and explore what other variables are most closely associated with satisfaction and dissatisfaction.	Q15, others as appropriate	
Investigate how certain factors might influence responses to surveys. Make comparisons between identified groups	Q9	Q14
Investigate how the panel can be improved	Q16 and others as appropriate	Q15 and others as appropriate

Demographic information is collected from respondents when they first join the panel so that it does not have to be collected for each survey. This includes age, gender, disability and postcode. Social class would also be a useful demographic measure for this survey but it would have been difficult to collect the required information through the self-completion questionnaires.

Panellists were therefore coded with Experian's Mosaic categories to provide an indication of education/affluence, as explained in Appendix 2.

### **Data Collection, processing and analysis**

Data collection took place in Autumn 2006, as detailed in the timetable (Appendix 3, Table 1). The telephone survey was tendered out and a market research agency was selected on the basis of cost, service offered, experience and quality control procedures. The agency selected proposed to conduct the survey using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software. The CATI service was felt to have the following key advantages over paper-based completion:

- the interviews would be conducted from a central location and a supervisor would be there at all times to ensure interviews were being carried out correctly. In addition 5% of all interviews were to be remotely monitored. Numerous commentators observe the benefits of CATI in terms of such control (e.g. McDaniel and Gates, 1993; Frey and Oishi, 1995; Borque and Fielder, 2003)
- CATI easily enables the questions asked to be tailored for different sub-groups (Borque and Fielder, 2003) and would therefore allow different questions to be asked depending on whether panellists were new or current
- the system controls the question sequence and response options and does not allow interviewers to proceed without keying in a valid answer, so questions cannot be answered incorrectly or missed for example (McDaniel and Gates, 1993; Frey and Oishi, 1995; Borque and Fielder, 2003; Bryman, 2004)

- the call back system would allow up to 20 call backs on different days and at different times enabling as many people from the panel to be contacted as possible
- CATI eliminates the need to process questionnaires after data collection since the data is immediately ready for data processing and analysis (McDaniel and Gates, 1993; Borque and Fielder, 2003; Babbie, 2004 ) and avoids possible data entry inaccuracies arising from manual data input.

The market research company guaranteed that all interviews would be carried out in accordance with Market Research Society Guidelines and were asked to complete a contract agreeing to comply with data protection legislation.

Respondents were divided into the appropriate questionnaire categories, i.e. new or current and postal or telephone. Details of 1171 current panellists and 354 new panellists were provided to the market research agency. These were panellists for whom there was a valid telephone number and who had not previously indicated that they did not wish to take part in telephone surveys. The remaining 380 current panellists and 212 new panellists were sent the questionnaire by post. All panellists received a letter about the survey which explained the purpose of the survey, how long it would take, when the survey would take place, how the information would be used and provided assurances of confidentiality. Telephone respondents received the letter in advance of the telephone survey informing them that an interviewer would be in touch (Appendix 4). Commentators highlight the use of advance letters to encourage respondents to participate in telephone interviews (Frey and Oishi,

1995; Borque and Fielder, 2003). Self-completion respondents received the letter with the questionnaire including return instructions, a prepaid reply envelope and instructions should they wish to complete online (Appendix 4).

The letters were accompanied by information relating to the budget consultation. A copy of the latest newsletter and survey report were also included for current panellists only. The newsletter for current panellists and letter for new panellists featured a line about the Annual Prize draw. This comprised donated prizes ranging from theatre tickets to free swimming passes and was used to thank panellists for their participation, although Dillman (2000) argues that offers of prizes have little, if any effect on response rates. The use of incentives is further discussed in chapters four, seven and eight.

Telephone interviews took place over a 5 week period between 10am – 9pm Monday- Friday (primarily 5pm-9pm) and 10am – 6pm on Saturdays (unless different appointment times were requested by respondents) as per the timetable (Appendix 3, Table 1). This included a one-week extension due to an insufficient number of interviews being completed. If respondents were unwilling to take part by telephone and it looked like they would refuse, then they were offered the self-completion option. This was then relayed back to the office and self completion questionnaires sent out accordingly. Self-completion questionnaires were also sent out if phone numbers were found to be invalid. Postal versions were therefore sent to an additional 180 current and 32 new panellists. A reminder letter was sent out to respondents who had

received postal versions and not responded which gave them a further 10 days to respond.

When panellists join the panel they receive a Members' pack which explains what their membership will involve, that participation is optional and provides guarantees about data protection. They are then allocated with a unique reference number which is used on questionnaires and questionnaire data so that their personal data are not attached to them. This corresponds to a separate database at the council which holds respondents' personal details and demographic information which is password protected and can only be accessed by a small number of staff. The telephone data and postal questionnaires featured the unique reference number and this was used as a means of recording who had responded and for later importing demographic information into the data set.

As previously described, the CATI system enabled responses to the telephone survey to be inputted at the point of data collection and the questionnaire was routed prior to the interviews. The accuracy and spelling of verbatim responses was then checked for accuracy. The data was exported into SPSS data analysis package. The self-completion questionnaires were scanned using data capture software and responses exported into SPSS for data analysis. The questionnaires completed online were exported directly into the same data set. 10% of scanned questionnaires were checked for accuracy. Open responses were typed up in full verbatim. There were two final SPSS data sets – one for current panellists and one for new panellists.

Relevant demographic data was imported into each prior to analysis and the data coded appropriately.

Univariate analysis was undertaken initially by producing frequency tables and graphs. This was followed by bivariate analysis and where appropriate, multivariate analysis in the form of contingency tables appropriate to the survey objectives. Given that the data was a mixture of nominal, ordinal and dichotomous variables the chi-square test was employed in order to investigate statistically significant associations between variables. The test was not used where more than 20% of the expected frequencies had a value of less than 5 and where appropriate, response categories were combined or omitted. Associations are only reported when they are statistically significant (at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) and considered to be relevant and/or important. The decision to report on only significant results was based on space limitations.

Binary logistical regression was also applied to identify factors that were most important in explaining satisfaction with the panel. A number of variables were identified to explore based on conclusions from the bivariate analysis, as detailed in Chapter 6 and Appendix 15. The variables were dichotomised in order to perform the analysis. Ideally multi-category ordinal logistical regression would have been used to avoid loss of information but this approach was adopted due to sample size limitations and to simplify interpretation. Open responses were read in order to create response categories and coding frames established. The responses were then post-coded into the appropriate categories and frequencies calculated.

## **Research at the local authority**

The next phase of the research was to examine the implementation and development of the citizens' panel at the case study authority and the challenges faced in relation to consultation. This section explains the design and implementation of the research undertaken at the council.

The research objectives were based on the research in relation to central government expectations and citizens' panels and my own knowledge and experience as Research Officer. They were as follows:

1. Explore and describe the main challenges with respect to consultation at the local authority
2. Investigate the benefits and drawbacks of the panel
3. Explore representativeness of the panel, officer understanding and meeting the competing needs of council officers and panellists and how they can be addressed
4. Explore the future role of the panel
5. Investigate how the panel can be improved

There were three elements to this stage of the research; exploration and analysis of existing data and documents, primary research with council officers and drawing on my own knowledge, experiences and observations as practitioner-researcher. This approach had a number of strengths - it enabled different but complementary aspects of the study to be investigated, it permitted triangulation of certain aspects of the study, it allowed the analysis of documents and data and my own knowledge and experience to inform the



design of officer interviews and strengthened the findings overall. Such advantages are recognised by many authors (e.g. Robson, 2002; Bryman, 2004). A timetable for this stage of the research is included in Appendix 3, Table 2.

### **Existing data and documents and my own knowledge**

The exploration of existing data and documents started before the research with council officers and extended beyond it. It comprised the following elements:

- Analysis of papers, reports, strategies and plans relating to consultation and the panel obtained from the Performance Improvement Team's computer and manual files and the council's intranet and internet
- Analysis of the consultation database
- Analysis of perception data from the BVPI General Survey and Annual Residents Survey
- Analysis of response rates and profiles to panel surveys, refresh exercises and other consultations including coding of panellists by Mosaic classifications and Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to permit additional analysis
- An assessment of panel literature including questionnaires, survey reports, newsletters and Members packs
- Clarification on relationships and situations by speaking to relevant officers including the Consultation Manager, Consultation Administration Officer, Area Regeneration Officers, officers working in the LSP, Review Committee officers, Equality and Diversity officers and the Corporate Consultation Group (CCG).

This was combined with note taking of any significant or relevant events and experiences during the course of the study and drawing on my own experiences and knowledge as practitioner-researcher.

### **Officer Research**

It was crucial to supplement my own knowledge and the above analysis by undertaking research with council officers. This would generate a greater understanding of the context, challenges and issues in different council directorates, allow me to explore perceptions of the panel from a user perspective and generate suggestions for improvement and tackling particular issues.

A qualitative approach was selected in order to generate this data. Qualitative research would provide flexibility to explore what respondents perceive to be important rather than pre-determined options and this would be useful in terms of identifying the issues surrounding consultation in respondents' directorates and their perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the panel. It would also permit further explanation, elaboration and examples to be given which would aid understanding. A key feature of qualitative research is that it can provide insights and understanding (Kent, 1999; Gillham, 2000; Silverman, 2000; Wilson, 2006, Flick, 2007) and Kumar, Aaker, Day (2002:179) observe that 'data have more depth and greater richness of context – which also means a greater potential for new insights and perspectives'. Authors also highlight the potential for creativity and generating ideas to be a strength of qualitative research (Kent, 1999; Ritchie, 2003,

Snape and Spencer, 2003 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This would be useful in generating suggestions for improvement and for tackling particular issues with the panel.

Semi-structured individual depth interviews were identified as the most appropriate data collection method. Since a good proportion of research into the topic had already been undertaken there was a clear idea of what needed to be explored. The semi-structured interview would allow particular issues to be covered but at the same time still offer the flexibility of the qualitative approach (Robson, 2002; Bryman, 2004) in terms of for example following up on particular issues, exploring unanticipated issues and deviating from the question order. The focus group approach was considered since some commentators suggest that it offers more opportunity for creativity (Kent, 1999; Ritchie, 2003 and Lewis, 2003 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) and therefore may have been more useful in terms of generating suggestions. It was however ruled out since one of the objectives was to understand the context and issues in individual departments at the council and respondents' individual perspectives and experiences of the panel. A key feature of individual depth interviews is to provide an in-depth personal or individual perspective (Robson, 2002; Lewis 2003 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Flick, 2007)

A further factor was more practical in nature; it would have been difficult to schedule a group to which all participants could attend and different levels of seniority amongst participants may have inhibited participation. Commentators highlight possible difficulties in bringing together a group of busy respondents

for a group discussion (Kent, 1999; Kumar, Aaker Day, 2002, Lewis, 2003 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Wilson, 2006) and where there might be differences in status (Lewis, 2003 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Bryman, 2004).

It was not appropriate to draw a random sample of council officers in this instance and 'criterion based or purposive' sampling (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:78) was employed instead. It was more important to establish a sample of officers with the requisite knowledge and/or experience, reflecting the definition of a 'good informant' (Morse, 1998:73 cited in Flick, 2002:69) which Flick describes as criteria for selecting meaningful cases. Eight officers were selected for interview based on the following:

- Officers who have used the panel or panel data
- Representation from each of the council directorates (excluding Children's Services who did not use the panel) with officers who have a good awareness of consultation in their directorate
- To include officers working in Overview and Scrutiny, Community Development and Policy and Performance for whom the Local Government White Paper will have a significant influence.

In some ways the respondents could be considered to be 'key informants' (Payne and Payne, 2005:134) or 'expert interviews' (Flick, 2002:89).

The interview guide (Appendix 5) was developed to address the research objectives (Table 2), utilising the information already gained during the study including the analysis of existing data and documents. The guide included over-arching questions and prompts of issues that could be further explored.

The guide was piloted with two officers at the council to ensure that it flowed, made sense and was able to elicit the required information.

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Question</b>
Explore and describe the main challenges with respect to consultation at the Council	1, 2, 3
Investigate the benefits and drawbacks of the panel	4a, 4b
Explore representativeness of the panel, officer understanding and meeting the competing needs of council officers and panellists and how they can be addressed	5, 6, 7, 8
Explore the future role of the panel	9, 10
Investigate how the panel can be improved	4-10, 11

Appointments were arranged with selected council officers for one hour duration in private offices/rooms and interviews were undertaken between 19 June 2007 and 10 July 2007. On arranging appointments officers were informed of the purpose of the research and how the information would be used. They were also provided with assurances of confidentiality and their permission was sought to use the tape-recorder. These points were covered again at the beginning of each interview.

The interviews were conducted in line with good practice guidelines in terms of listening, probing and non-verbal cues. Notes were taken and the interviews were also recorded on to audio cassette tape to ensure that all responses were captured. The notes taken during each interview were typed up as close to the interview taking place as was practicable. The audio cassette tapes were then listened to in order to verify the notes, fill in any gaps in the data and type in full verbatim portions of the interviews where useful and relevant.

A form of content analysis was adopted for the data analysis. The data generated for all three stages was read and themes/topics identified. It was

then re-read, the themes refined and the text included under appropriate themes. The themes were reviewed and then considered against the themes in Chapters three and four. Where particular themes were identified and there seemed to be a lack of information, the data was re-examined and further information was gathered where possible.

## **Desk research**

This section briefly describes the desk research undertaken as part of the study with respect to central government expectations and citizens' panels.

A range of relevant documents pertaining to central government policies were obtained from central government websites including Local Government White Papers, Local Government Acts, best practice and guidance documents and reports relating to research and evaluations commissioned by central government departments. In addition, briefings, reports and publications were obtained from the websites of the Audit Commission, Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Involve, Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA), Centre for Local and Regional Government Research and Institute for Public Policy Research. A number of academic commentaries and reviews were also consulted. This aspect of the research was ongoing throughout the project due to the extent to which policy was evolving and to ensure the project was up to date and relevant.

With respect to citizen's panels, various local authority websites were visited and local authorities contacted to obtain information and reports relating to their panels. In addition, relevant documents were obtained from the LGIU, CabinetOffice archive website, LARIA, I&DeA and LGA websites. The CabinetOffice archive site also provided information on the People's Panel and Ipsos-MORI provided further information on this and citizens' panels. The 2006 and 2007 Consultation Institute seminars on citizens' panels were attended and the 2005 and 2008 conference papers obtained (Consultation Institute, 2006, 2006, 2007, 2008). With respect to wider methodological issues, publications and papers were obtained from the websites of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), National Centre for Social Research and Institute for Social and Economic Research and methodological texts and papers were also consulted. Whilst most of this research took place between March and June 2007, it was also ongoing throughout the project.

This chapter has explained the approach used to undertake the research. The design and methods were based upon a range of factors including the research objectives, the stakeholders involved, timescales and issues of reliability and validity. Chapter three considers the first element of the desk research undertaken in relation to research objective one and central government's expectations of public participation in local authorities.

# Chapter three – Consultation in local government

## Introduction

There has been an unprecedented growth in consultation activity in local government since the implementation of the LGMA. This is echoed in a recent meta-evaluation of the impact of the LGMA on stakeholder engagement (Leach, Lowndes, Cowell and Downe, 2005)<sup>1</sup>, where the authors point to a significant increase in the supply of participation opportunities over the past 10 years.

By drawing on relevant government documents and academic commentaries and reviews, this chapter will explore the increase in consultation activity since the introduction of the LGMA. In doing so, it will consider the government's expectations of consultation and the issues and tensions that have been encountered in implementing this agenda. Finally it considers the new policy context emerging from recent government proposals. The chapter also explains some key concepts and policies used in local government, which will provide necessary background information for the remainder of the thesis.

Before proceeding it is important to provide some clarification on what is meant by consultation activity in the remit of this study. Firstly, this study will principally focus on consultation with the general public as opposed to other stakeholders such as businesses, partner organisations (voluntary, private and public) and staff. Secondly, consultation activity will be taken to include

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<sup>1</sup> The conclusions from Leach et al are from an interim assessment and are therefore provisional.



the following range of activities which Leach et al (2005:37) describe as 'participatory initiatives' and have usefully categorised as follows:

Traditional methods	e.g. public meetings, consultation documents
Consumerist methods	e.g. complaints/suggestion schemes, satisfaction surveys
Innovative-consultative	e.g. citizens' panels, interactive website, referenda
Innovative-deliberative	e.g. citizens' juries, visioning exercises, issue based or neighbourhood forums, co-management of services

It is important to note here that this range of activity is sometimes referred to as 'consultation' and sometimes 'participation' in government documents and by academics, although much literature makes clear distinctions between these terms (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Gyford, 1991; Involve, 2005a). Other terms such as 'engagement' and 'involvement' are also increasingly used in similar contexts and there is also a lack of clarity between the terms 'consultation' and 'research' in the local government arena (Percy-Smith, Burden, Darlow, Dowson, Hawtin, Ladi, 2002:9). It is not within the remit of this study to discuss the distinctions and definitional differences between such terms. It will use the terms interchangeably to include the above activities, recognising that they may range widely along a number of dimensions. Perhaps the most important point is that they are all 'attempts to encourage participation in local affairs beyond the traditional processes of political engagement (voting and party membership)' (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001a:207).

## **Consultation activity prior to the LGMA**

One of the aims of this chapter is to consider the LGMA and how it has impacted on consultation activity. It is also important to briefly consider the development of consultation activity prior to this.

Numerous commentators have highlighted that the concept of public participation in local government is not new (e.g. Pratchett 1999; Needham, 2002a; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Research commissioned by the DETR in 1997 revealed that public participation activity was already well established in local authorities (Lowndes et al, 2001a). More consumerist and traditional forms of consultation were most prevalent such as customer complaints / suggestion schemes, satisfaction surveys, public meetings and consultation documents. More innovative methods of consultation were also being used but to a lesser extent, although there was a rapid increase in the take up in these methods from 1994/1995 and an increase in all methods of participation.

Commentators suggest that there were a combination of drivers impacting on increased consultation levels prior to the implementation of the LGMA, including:

- The 'citizen-consumer' agenda of the 1980s (Pratchett, 1999; Wilson, 1999; Lowndes et al, 2001a)
- In response to centralising Conservative policies (Leach et al, 2005)
- To address democratic deficit and strengthen the relevance and legitimacy of local authorities (Pratchett, 1999), still considered to be

one of three key rationales for public involvement in decision making (McAteer and Orr, 2006)

- Party political endorsement (Pratchett, 1999; Lowndes et al, 2001a)
- The introduction of statutory consultation requirements prior to 1997 on individual service areas and in relation to specific groups, as detailed by Solesbury and Grayson (2003) and participation requirements attached to initiatives such as City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget (Leach et al, 2005:40).

It is interesting, however, to note that despite the likely contribution of government policies and statutory requirements to the increase in consultation activity, respondents to the 1997 survey did not perceive central government to be as important in stimulating participation initiatives as internal factors such as corporate strategy and departmental projects (Lowndes et al, 2001a: 211). This perhaps supports Lowndes et al (2001a:210) in suggesting that local authorities were displaying a genuine willingness and enthusiasm to try new methods and share their experiences.

## **The Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA)**

Having briefly considered the development of consultation prior to the LGMA, the next section considers the 1998 and 2001 Local Government White Papers and associated policies and their implications for consultation activity.

## **The Local Government White Paper 1998**

In 1998 the government published the Local Government White Paper 'Modern Local Government: In Touch With The People' (DETR, 1998). The paper was a fundamental element of their plans to modernise public services and provided detailed proposals on eight main areas which sought to bring about 'more effective local political leadership, reinvigorated local democracy and quality local services' (DETR, 1998:1.22).

Legislation followed in the form of the 1999 and 2000 Local Government Acts and statutory guidance (DETR, 2000a). An integral part of the proposals in the White Paper was the need to 'consult' with local people:

The Government wishes to see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils ..... and undertaken across a wide range of each council's responsibilities (DETR, 1998:4.6).

The rationale was that consultation and participation could help to address some of the shortcomings of current democratic practice and the idea that participatory democracy could complement representative democracy.

The supposition was that consultation and participation (together with other elements of the proposals) would encourage people to become more interested and involved in, and better informed and positive about local government and would help to improve service delivery and decision-making.

This in turn would make local government more accountable and responsive.

It is widely recognised that whilst there was still an emphasis on using consultation and participation to improve services, the focus had broadened to include democratic renewal.

Below is a brief description of some of the key elements of the paper and subsequent legislation that are particularly pertinent to consultation.

### Best Value

The duty of Best Value was a key feature of the modernisation agenda. It was implemented in April 2000 and required local authorities to:

make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Great Britain, 1999:3(1)).

This included the requirement to consult with taxpayers, business ratepayers, service users and other interested parties.

A new statutory performance management framework was introduced. This included a set of national performance indicators (Best Value Performance Indicators - BVPs) and standards against which authorities were required to set targets and monitor their performance. These had to be published in annual performance plans. The BVPs included user satisfaction indicators which were to be collected through statutory satisfaction surveys on a triennial basis. Results were used to track changes in attitudes over time and make comparisons across local authorities. Surveys were conducted in 2000/01, 2003/04 and 2006/07.

Best Value also required that local authorities undertake performance reviews of all their services over a five-year period. The reviews had to assess service delivery using the '4 C's' – challenge, compare, consult and competition. Both

reviews and performance plans were to be subjected to external inspection and audit by the Audit Commission.

### Political Structures

The White Paper (DETR, 1998) and subsequent legislation (Great Britain, 2000) and statutory guidance (DETR, 2000a) detailed proposals for new political management structures. Authorities had to adopt one of three models that were based on separating the executive and backbench roles of councillors

to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability of decision-making.

The executive would be responsible for making most decisions and would also have responsibility for proposing and implementing the policy framework and budget. Non-executive<sup>2</sup> councillors would be able to spend more time in the local community and better represent local people (DETR, 1998:3.42).

A crucial element of the new arrangements and where non-executive councillors would have a role to play, was the requirement to have in place overview and scrutiny committees whose role would include:

- developing and reviewing policy; and
- holding the executive to account

to achieve enhanced accountability and transparency of the decision making process (DETR, 2000a:3.15). A key element of effective overview and scrutiny committees was to obtain input from local people (DETR, 2000a:2.13).

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<sup>2</sup> The terms 'non-executive', 'backbench' and 'frontline' councillor will be used interchangeably.

A further aspect in which non-executive councillors could have a role to play would be through area committees or forums<sup>3</sup>. Both the white paper (DETR, 1998) and subsequent guidance (DETR, 2000a) acknowledged the important role that they can play in involving local people in decision making.

### Referenda

The paper also included proposals to give local authorities the power to hold referendums which they may use 'on such issues as major local developments or matters of particular local controversy' (DETR,1998:4.7). A referendum was to be held if proposals for new political structures included a mayor.

### The well-being of communities

Councils were to adopt a 'community leadership role' and given a new 'duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas' (DETR, 1998:8.8). As part of this they were required to produce a Community Strategy to set out how this would be achieved. The guidance required that a range of stakeholders were involved in developing the strategy and proposed Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)<sup>4</sup> as the best way for local authorities to work with stakeholders (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), 2001a).

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<sup>3</sup> Area arrangements vary across authorities but can help councillors to engage with local people and develop decision making processes locally (Gardiner, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Cross-sectoral umbrella partnerships bringing together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to provide a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other, more specific partnerships can work (DTLR, 2001a: footnote 6).

Legislation and guidance highlight the importance of involving a wide range of local people and communities in developing and implementing Community Strategies (Great Britain, 2000; DTLR, 2001a; DETR, 2001) and keeping councillors involved and informed (DETR, 2000a; DTLR, 2001a).

The requirement to consult in relation to Best Value performance reviews and Community Strategies was prescribed (DETR, 1998:4.6,4.7) but consultation in relation to overview and scrutiny and area arrangements was not (Leach, Lowndes, Chapman, 2006:25).

### **The Local Government White Paper 2001**

In 2001 the government published the white paper 'Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services' (DTLR, 2001b). This was the next phase in the modernisation agenda and was intended to build on the previous reforms. A brief description of the key elements of the paper that are particularly pertinent to consultation follows.

#### **Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)**

A key element emerging from the White Paper was Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), which was introduced in 2002. The aim of CPA is to provide an overall assessment of how local authorities are delivering services for local people. User focus and citizen engagement is a cross-cutting theme upon which local authorities are assessed in their Corporate Assessment. As part of the assessment, inspectors will typically



meet and talk with local people and service users. The framework was revised in 2005 to include more emphasis on how local authorities engage with their communities, enhance user focus and meet the diverse needs of their communities (Audit Commission, 2006).

### Community Engagement and Empowerment

The White Paper reinforces the importance of community involvement and highlights the role of involvement as part of Best Value and developing Community Strategies. It advocates the increased use of area forums, public assemblies and citizens' user boards in addition to giving citizens better access to council meetings. It also reaffirms its commitment to legislate for local authorities to be able to hold referendums.

## **Consultation activity following the introduction of the LGMA**

Research was commissioned by the ODPM in 2002 (Birch, 2002) to determine how public participation had developed in local authorities following the implementation of the LGMA and to allow comparisons with the 1997 survey (Lowndes et al, 2001a). The survey revealed that local authorities were increasingly providing participation opportunities for the general public and that there was a marked take up of more innovative participation methods. The most striking were citizens' panels, focus groups and interactive websites (Birch, 2002:13). The survey also showed that the role of central government has increased in significance in influencing participation activity since the 1997 survey, no doubt reflecting the consultative requirements of

the LGMA (Birch, 2002:40). Survey and case study evidence from research undertaken during 1998/99 also pointed to the importance of central government as a 'driver' of consultation activity and in particular Best Value (Sanderson, Percy-Smith and Dowson, 2001).

Leach et al (2005:47-48) conclude that the LGMA is likely to have increased consultation activity and highlight consultative requirements attached to Best Value, Community Strategies and new political management arrangements as being likely contributors. However they also point out that 'the LGMA has intensified an already existing flow of participatory activity' and that local authorities were already 'developing a commitment to increased levels and more varied approaches to participation ... well before the requirements attached to the LGMA began to bite'.

## **Tensions and problems with public participation**

Having considered the various factors impacting on the growth of consultation activity and the government's expectations, the next section reflects on some of the interrelated tensions and problems in implementing the public participation agenda and consequently achieving the intended outcomes.

### **Resources / Time**

This section briefly introduces the problems of resource and time constraints but the issues are illustrated in more detail when viewed in terms of some of the other tensions associated with delivering this agenda. The 1997 and 2001 surveys both indicated 'lack of resources' followed by 'lack of time' to be the

most significant problems in implementing consultation initiatives (Leach et al, 2001a; Birch, 2002). This is also supported in a number of other studies (Sanderson et al, 2001; Martin & Boaz, 2000; Needham, 2002a; Hall, James, Llewellyn, Lock, Mackie, Rees, 2007).

One of the issues is the problem of allocating resources to consultation activity when faced with competing demands for resources (Sanderson et al, 2001; Lowndes et al, 2001a). This may result in compromise in terms of which consultations are undertaken, the methods used, the quality of the exercises, how the consultation information is used and disseminated and the capacity to respond to consultation findings.

### **Service improvement and democratic renewal**

One of the conflicts identified by commentators is that of achieving the dual aims of service improvement and democratic renewal. Each implies different consultation techniques, focus, scope, levels of involvement, commitment, time and resources. Critics argue that despite the rhetoric, the government has prioritised service improvement over democratic renewal through legislation and policies (Lowndes et al, 2001a; Needham, 2002a; Pratchett, 2002; Leach et al 2005). For example the Best Value initiative emphasises service efficiency and effectiveness and monitors local authorities through performance indicators, inspection and audit. Needham (2002a:705) contends that this promotes the use of more 'auditable' forms of consultation such as quantitative techniques. The statutory BVPI User Satisfaction Surveys exemplify such consultation methods. These techniques are less likely to build

relationships with communities and achieve the democratic renewal objectives than more participatory methods; Pratchett (1999:621) asserts that consumer-oriented consultations such as satisfaction surveys have 'limited democratic ambitions' but that they can 'contribute to a utilitarian achievement of greater democracy'. Some critics are also concerned that consumerisation may impede the furthering of more democratic goals (Needham, 2002a; McAteer and Orr, 2006).

There are also suggestions that the 2001 White Paper places greater importance on service improvement than democratic renewal (Pratchett, 2002; Needham, 2002a). Pratchett (2002:346) argues that service improvement increased in significance through initiatives such as Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs)<sup>5</sup> and CPA and suggests that democratic renewal objectives had been more difficult to achieve than service improvement objectives.

From the perspective of the general public, there is evidence to suggest that they will typically choose passive consultation methods such as surveys as their preferred means of giving their views, rather than more participatory methods (DETR, 2000b; Williams and Coleman, 2006; Martin and Boaz, 2000). Needham (2002a:710) points to case study evidence and national findings that state that:

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<sup>5</sup> LPSAs are challenging service improvement targets negotiated between local authorities and central government to achieve performance above and beyond normal expectations in return for financial assistance and new freedoms. They were extended to Local Area Agreements (LAAs) for which local authorities and other local agencies were jointly responsible.

people support the principle of greater involvement, but are rather less likely to want more involvement themselves, particularly those forms which are most likely to build personal relationships between local residents and the council.

In addition McAteer and Orr (2006:134) found that the public will engage more easily in service specific issues than broader strategic issues. Thus initiatives that have the potential to further democratic aims may be also limited by the willingness of the public to take part, as discussed later.

Given the above situation, coupled with the issues of limited time and resources, the implication is that local authorities will focus on service related consultations or issues upon which they will be measured, leaving little room for broader democratic forms of engagement. Leach et al (2005:40) conclude that 'the prospect of more tangible and easily measurable gains in relation to service improvement is another important driver in an increasingly inspection and audit-driven local government culture'.

Evidence from the 2001 survey suggests that local authorities have prioritised service improvement over democratic renewal, in terms of the drivers, purpose, policy focus and perceived benefits of conducting participation activities (Birch, 2002) as does research undertaken by McAteer and Orr (2006). In addition customer satisfaction surveys and complaints / suggestions schemes continued to be the most popular participation methods in 2001 and are used most often in relation to service delivery and best value (Birch, 2002: 11, 24). On the other hand, the 2001 survey points to a similar proportion of local authorities consulting on the environment / local community

as service delivery/best value and growth in deliberative methods of consultation such as community plans/needs analysis and visioning (Birch, 2002:23,13). These consultations could be considered to have a broader focus and may be borne out of the requirements attached to developing Community Strategies for example. Deliberative exercises may also have more potential to achieve democratic outcomes since they encourage relationships between the local authority and participants. Qualitative research conducted as part of the 1997 study (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001b:448-449) indicated that officers and members and citizens involved in more deliberative exercises, valued democratic outcomes, such as 'learning'. This is also recognised by Wilson (1999:253) who goes on to suggest that 'members, officers and citizens frequently find it difficult to pin-point specific service or policy-related outcomes'. More deliberative exercises were however, the least used overall in 2001, in particular citizens' juries were only used by 6% of local authorities. It is suggested that cost may be a possible reason for this (Birch, 2002:13) and Martin and Boaz (2000:51) highlight the constraints of costs, staff time and skills in relation to more participatory initiatives.

### **Central control**

Critics observe that the LGMA has increased central control over local government (Brooks, 2000; Chandler, 2000; Cope & Goodship, 2002; Needham, 2002a; Percy-Smith et al, 2002; LGA, 2006) through aspects such as performance indicators and increased regulation. This can create difficulties for local authorities who are trying to respond to elements of the

agenda such as public participation and community leadership at the same time as meeting central government's requirements. Numerous commentators highlight the tensions between the government's 'top-down' prescriptions and 'bottom-up' public involvement (Brooks, 2000; Martin and Boaz, 2000; Needham, 2002a; Cope & Goodship, 2002; Percy-Smith et al, 2002; Newman, Barnes, Sullivan and Knops, 2004; May, 2006).

This can impact on public participation in terms of how local authorities consult, the issues they consult upon and their ability to respond to local priorities obtained through consultation. As previously highlighted, central government and Best Value are increasingly important drivers to consultation activity and researchers provide empirical evidence to suggest that consultation resources are focussed on statutory areas or aspects measured rather than on local priorities (Needham, 2002a; Higgins, James and Roper, 2005). Critics also point to conflicts between timescales attached to projects or policies and the ability to consult effectively (Wilson, 1999; Needham, 2002a; Newman et al, 2004). In addition commentators highlight difficulties caused by the limited discretion authorities have to respond to local priorities (Percy-Smith et al, 2002:50; Martin and Boaz, 2000:51; Newman et al, 2004:218). Cope and Goodship (2002:37) believe that central government choice is still very apparent in local government although Pratchett and Leach (2004:378) argue that there is choice in terms of implementation and outside of priority areas.

Critics also suggest that the regulatory regime affords less importance to public participation. Cope & Goodship (2002) emphasise the role of regulatory agencies such as the Audit Commission in ensuring local government compliance with central government policy and observe that the involvement of local people is limited. In a recent investigation May (2006) concluded that the Audit Commission 'appears to impose a penalty for superior public consultation performance' (May, 2006:487) and explained:

Bottom-up public consultation ... is fundamentally antithetical to the top-down core values of central government and its regulatory regime, and cannot be granted equal status with those core values without loss of internal consistency ..... It is to be expected that [the Audit Commission] will share the centre's top-down view of consultation as lying on the margin, not at the heart, of local government (May, 2006:490)

This is interesting given that a key theme of CPA is user focus and citizen engagement, although research undertaken by Percy-Smith and Darlow (2005:59) indicates that there is a relationship between certain indicators of research effectiveness and CPA rating, in particular commitment of senior management and research partnership arrangements with the LSP and other authorities.

### **New political structures**

There are a number tensions identified with respect to the new political arrangements and increased participation. The first relates to the new role of non-executive councillors. The white paper promotes this as an 'enhanced role' where they can spend more time in the local community and better represent local people (DETR, 1998,3.40-3.45). Many commentators,



however, observe the marginalisation of non-executive councillors and lack of influence they have over decision making (Chandler, 2000; Needham, 2002b; Wilkinson and Craig, 2002; Gardiner, 2006; Cox, 2007; Dungey, 2007). Some commentators argue that non-executive councillors will not have the means to translate their new expanded representative role into policy outcomes (Needham, 2002a; Chandler, 2000). Others are concerned that the significant time commitments required under the new arrangements may limit the ability of backbenchers to further develop their representative role (Stoker, Gains, Greasley, John and Rao, 2004; Jones and Stewart, 2005 in Gardiner, 2006). Research indicates that under the new system, non-executive councillors 'were considerably less convinced of their own effectiveness or ability to take up issues on behalf of the public' than executive councillors (Fenwick & Elcock, 2004:523) and that the new arrangements have not led to more engaged backbench councillors or improved public involvement in decision-making (Stoker, Gains, Greasley, John and Rao, 2006).

The new legislation promoted opportunities for non-executive councillors on overview and scrutiny committees and area committees. Numerous commentators have however reported that the implementation of effective overview and scrutiny has been problematic (Snape and Taylor 2001; Ashworth and Snape, 2004; Fenwick and Elcock, 2004; Stoker et al, 2004; Gardiner, 2006; Dungey, 2007) and that success has varied across authorities and with regard to the different roles it has to play. In terms of public participation, survey evidence shows that the views of councillors and officers are mixed about the extent to which overview and scrutiny committees have

been effective in ensuring local views are taken into account, although they have improved since 2003 (Stoker et al, 2006:24,44). Ashworth and Snape (2004:542) point to research undertaken by Leach and Davis' (2004) which revealed 'a distinct lack of public engagement in the overview and scrutiny process'. Snape, Leach and Copus (2002:90-95) however, provide good practice examples of how local authorities are involving the general public in overview and scrutiny, although they also acknowledged that strategies to involve the general public and partners were not yet in place in several case study authorities and Leach et al (2005:48) point to evidence that 'the new overview and scrutiny committees provide a range of opportunities for involving the public which have increasingly been taken up'.

Evidence regarding area arrangements is also mixed. Wilkinson (2005:16) identifies benefits being experienced by local authorities including the effective engagement and involvement of citizens in decision-making; he also, however outlines a number of difficulties including public disillusionment. Fenwick and Elcock (2004) and Dungey (2007) also point to good practice examples of effective area committees and forums. There are however, concerns over the extent to which area arrangements have empowered frontline councillors (Gardiner, 2006; Needham, 2002b) and local people (Needham, 2002b, Wilkinson, 2005) to influence decision-making and again effectiveness seems to vary across local authorities (Fenwick and Elcock, 2004; LGA, 2004; Wilkinson, 2005; Gardiner, 2006). In addition, McAteer and Orr (2006:136) highlight tensions between decentralising decision making to, for example area committees, in order to address local

issues and 'the need to preserve equity or uniform standards across certain activities and services'.

Commentators (Stoker et al, 2004; Gardiner, 2006) also identify difficulties in improving democratic engagement and decision making through full council. They include apparent lack of public interest, the tensions between efficient management and public involvement, the concern that full council often does not have a decision-making remit and ambiguity over its role.

A further issue is the potential threat of participatory democracy to representative democracy. Commentators identify negative perceptions and resistance from councillors who feel that their role in representing their locality will be undermined by participatory initiatives (Wilson 1999; Sanderson et al 2001; Callanan, 2005). Percy-Smith et al (2002) report that many Members do not consider research to be useful, instead preferring to use their own knowledge. Orr and McAteer (2004:143) point to research evidence that councillors view themselves as 'representatives of the public and not their delegates'. They also suggest that central government prescription enables councillors to 'advocate public participation in decision making' but adopt their preferred representative role (Orr and McAteer, 2004:144). Whilst other commentators point to concerns that participative decision-making may make voting in elections even more inconsequential (Brooks, 2000; Callanan, 2005), potentially hindering the government's aim of increasing electoral turnout.

## **Decision Making**

More effective, efficient, transparent and accountable decision-making were identified to be aims of the LGMA and better decision-making was perceived to be a benefit of public participation (Birch, 2002:41). More participatory decision-making can however also create conflict with other aims of the LGMA.

Critics highlight clear conflicts between strong leadership and public participation in decision-making (Brooks, 2000; Abram and Cowell, 2004; Involve, 2005a). A related issue is the tension between participative decision-making and more traditional forms of representative accountability (Callanan, 2005; Pratchett and Leach, 2004; Involve, 2005a; Ashworth and Skelcher, 2005). In an increasingly complex setting where local authorities have relationships with citizens, stakeholders, central government and partners, participatory decision-making can create two key problems. The first is that un-elected, potentially unrepresentative participatory processes are given decision-making powers without being formally accountable (e.g. through election or formal guidelines). The second is that it may be difficult to distinguish who is responsible for decision-making which can also reduce transparency. Rhodes (1997:55) cited in Callanan (2005:914) questions why anyone should behave responsibly in this instance. Ashworth and Skelcher (2005:14) state that 'there may be trade-offs to be made between strategies that improve outcomes for citizens and communities and those that enhance accountability'. There are also tensions between accountability to central government and local people, as discussed in other sections.

It is also recognised that participatory decision-making can be misused by politicians (Wilson, 1999; Brooks, 2000; Needham, 2002a; Involve, 2005a). For example 'to garner support for a pre-agreed policy or to discredit opposition forces ... or to off-load a politically sensitive issue' (Needham, 2002a:707) or 'with a view to using it as scapegoat should the decision cause problems, or ignoring the results of the process, depending on which is more politically expedient' (Involve, 2005a:24).

There are additional tensions between public participation and speed of decision-making (Brooks, 2000; Pratchett and Leach, 2004; Ashworth & Skelcher, 2005; Involve, 2005a) and concerns that effectiveness 'may be compromised' (Leach et al, 2003 cited in Fenwick and Elcock, 2004:536). In the 2001 survey, it was reported that that 39% of authorities (of the 97% perceiving disadvantages) believed that participation initiatives slowed down the decision-making process (Birch, 2002:43).

### **Lack of Participation**

Lack of participation is a well-documented problem in implementing participation initiatives. Callanan (2005:915) cites a review of 102 participatory initiatives in 10 local authorities in 10 different countries, where 'one of the key findings was the difficulty in mobilizing and motivating citizens to participate'.

Public apathy is deemed to be a significant problem and in the 1997 and 2001 surveys 'lack of public interest' was ranked to be the third greatest problem in implementing participation initiatives (Lowndes et al, 2001a; Birch, 2002). It is

important, however to be careful in the interpretation of this since 'lack of public interest' was a pre-determined option and some respondents may have selected this option to indicate lack of participation, when in fact lack of interest is just one of a number of reasons why people do not participate. Indeed recent thinking suggests that apathy be may be overstated (Rogers,2004; Leach et al, 2006). A number of researchers have investigated why people do and do not participate (e.g. Lowndes et al, 2001b; Simmons and Birchall, 2005; Millward, 2005) and Aspden & Birch (2005:18) draw upon a range of research to usefully summarise some of the main factors (Table 3).

<b>Table 3</b>
<b>Factors influencing public participation in both local politics and decision making</b>
Interest in, and understanding of, local government and local politics
Trust in local council and councillors
Satisfaction with service delivery
Capacity to participate e.g. access to resources and income
Time
Local authority's communication and consultation with citizens and positive experiences of participation
Involvement in social networks and associations
Whether an issue is worth voting for and their perception of whether their opinion/vote will make a difference
Demographic factors e.g. age, socio-economic group, ethnic background
Social capital
Experience of informal or formal volunteering

It is not within the remit of this study to consider the individual factors in great detail but it is important to note that some of these factors can be directly influenced by local authorities. It is also noteworthy that evidence suggests that many people may only get involved in issues that directly affect them or their community rather than wider issues (Wilson, 1999; Lowndes et al, 2001b; Orr and McAteer, 2004; Fenwick & Elcock, 2004; Callanan, 2005; Involve, 2005a). Indeed, some studies have shown perceptions that active participation may be an indicator of dissatisfaction and inactivity a sign of

satisfaction (Wilson, 1999; Orr and McAteer, 2004; Callanan, 2005; Fenwick & Elcock 2004, LGA, 2006).

It is generally recognised that participation problems can be more evident amongst particular groups of people and that the most excluded in society may not be heard (Pratchett, 1999; Audit Commission, 1999; Wilson 1999; Martin & Boaz, 2000; Orr and McAteer, 2004; Callanan, 2005; Leach et al, 2005; Aspden & Birch, 2005). Wilson (1999:252) asserts that 'initiatives frequently simply reinforce existing patterns of social exclusion and disadvantage'. So called 'hard-to-reach' groups may include for example, black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, young people, people with disabilities and those living in areas of high deprivation. In the 2001 survey, 44% of local authorities reported difficulties in engaging particular social groups and those presenting greatest difficulties were 'citizens from ethnic minorities and young people' (Birch, 2002:44).

This is coupled with the criticism that participation initiatives frequently involve the 'usual suspects'. In the 2001 survey, 56% of responding authorities were concerned that 'consulting the public may simply capture the views of dominant, but unrepresentative, groups' (Birch, 2002:42). This was also evidenced in the survey and qualitative research from the 1997 study Lowndes et al (2001a; 2001b). Nevertheless, there is also acknowledgement that the usual suspects or local activists are 'seriously undervalued' and that although they 'may be criticized by other participants or policy-makers, [they] are relied upon and encouraged in practice' (Millward, 2005:749,740) and

'appreciated' (Lowndes et al, 2001b:447-448). Indeed May (2007:72) argues that the 'phantom army of community members whose views are being muffled [by usual suspects or activists] doesn't exist'.

It is generally acknowledged that different methods may be needed to capture the views of different groups (Wilson,1999; Pratchett, 1999; Lowndes et al, 2001b; Rogers, 2004; Smith, 2005). This, however, might not always be possible in practice given resources and time constraints - Aspden & Birch (2005) point to evidence of capacity problems in promoting engagement of 'hard-to-reach groups'. Whilst Lowndes et al (2001b:453) highlight the difficulty of:

on the one hand, building the competence of those already involved in participation initiatives and on the other hand, continuously widening the process to include new groups of citizens.

### **Impact**

A key issue identified in studies is the limited impact of participation initiatives on decisions (Audit Commission, 1999:para 110; Lowndes et al, 2001b; Percy-Smith et al, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; Smith, 2005) although there has been evidence of some improvement in follow-up studies (Birch, 2002; Percy-Smith and Darlow, 2005).

Impact may be limited when local authorities are unable to implement findings due to, for example, financial or legal constraints. Commentators provide examples of where budgetary constraints have restricted a local authority's ability to respond (Needham, 2002a; Percy-Smith et al 2002; Fenwick and



Elcock, 2004; Cole, 2004) and Needham (2002a:711) provides case study evidence of where a decision needed to be based on scientific evidence which was contrary to consultation findings. Impact may also be limited when findings conflict with national policy or relate to issues over which local authorities have little control, as discussed previously.

Allen (2004)<sup>6</sup> highlights that the type of consultation conducted will also influence the impact it has and suggests that there are very few examples of consultations which have led to service improvement. He examples the BVPI Surveys, for which vast amounts of money is spent but asserts that 'very little, if anything, could ever improve as a direct result'.

Organisational culture and the value that organisations and staff place on consultation can also limit the impact of consultation initiatives. Commentators point to resistance from professionals to involve the public in decision-making (Involve, 2005a, Smith 2005) and Percy-Smith et al (2002) found disparity within and between local authorities in terms of the value they place on research. Critics highlight the fact that all stages of the process from the issues to be consulted on to the impact they have are typically determined by the local authority (Pratchett, 1999; Needham, 2002a; Newman et al, 2004). It is argued that entrenched structures and resistance to change often mean that power is retained by the local authority. This in turn can limit the impact on decision-making and potentially alienate participants (Barnes, Sullivan, Knops and Newman, 2004:65). Case study evidence shows that participants are often involved in the latter stages - to respond to proposals or plans rather

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.publicnet.co.uk/features/2005/04/01/consultation-fatigue-what-are-customers-really-tired-of/>

than influence them (Cole, 2004:207; Needham, 2002a:711). Guidance suggests that this may be a way of managing expectations (Audit Commission, 1999: para 64) but critics believe that the reasons are often cynical (Pratchett, 1999; Brooks, 2000; Needham, 2002a; Cole, 2004). Indeed there are criticisms that consultation may be used as a public relations exercise (Pratchett, 1999:632). Cole (2004:210) provides case study evidence of where consultation was used in this way and Hall et al (2007:7) point to problems of 'tokenistic' involvement.

A related concern is that consultation is being conducted to achieve 'a tick in the box' for a funding bid or statutory consultation for example, exemplified by Cole (2004) and Percy Smith et al (2002) or in response to pressure from central government (Pratchett, 1999:632). In such cases it is likely to be 'poorly executed and half-hearted' (Smith, 2005:106) and impact may be difficult to demonstrate. Whilst Involve (2005a:23) points to concerns that requirements to consult or prescription may lead to participation being viewed as 'another hoop ... to jump through, rather than ... an enhancement of current decision making'.

A factor closely related to organisational culture is that of research skills, which can also limit impact. Studies have pointed to a lack of skills in utilising research findings (Martin & Boaz, 2000; Sanderson et al, 2001; Percy-Smith et al, 2002) and lack of time to read and understand findings (Percy-Smith et al, 2002; Percy Smith and Darlow, 2005).

A further factor relates to difficulties in raising participant expectations through consultations, as evidenced by Cole (2004). The 2001 survey revealed that 53% of local authorities (of the 97% reporting negative effects) believe that consultations can raise expectations that the local authority cannot meet (Birch 2002:42), although Lowndes et al (2001b:453) consider low expectations to be a greater challenge. Guidance promotes the need to be clear about what can and cannot be changed at the outset and to provide clear feedback on the outcomes of decisions and reasons for them (Audit Commission:1999:para 64, 115). Leach et al (2005:57) posit that even when decisions go against people, they will accept them if they feel they have been listened to. A number of studies however have pointed to a lack of feedback to participants (Newman et al, 2004; Smith, 2005; Taylor and Williams, 2006; Hall et al, 2007) and in the first round of CPA, 52 out of 150 councils were identified as having poor consultation systems and lack of feedback was a key issue (Audit Commission, 2003:3).

Lack of impact (actual or perceived) can negatively affect people's trust and satisfaction with the council (Taylor and Williams, 2006), cause cynicism and deter future participation (Lowndes et al, 2001b; Aspden and Birch, 2005; Involve, 2005a). Lowndes et al (2001b:452) found it to be the greatest deterrent to participation.

### **Consultation overload/fatigue**

A possible consequence of the increase of consultation activity being undertaken by local authorities and partner agencies faced with statutory and good practice consultation requirements is consultation overload or fatigue (Smith, 2005; Leach et al, 2005) – the concept that people will refuse to participate because they have been asked too many times. ‘Consultation overload’ was perceived to be the greatest negative effect of participation initiatives in the 2001 survey<sup>7</sup> (Birch 2002:42). Some commentators observe that there is a risk that particular communities or groups are more likely to become overloaded, for example, communities in actions zones (Duncan and Thomas, 2000; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004), ‘hard-to-reach’ groups (Allen, 2004; Hall et al, 2007) and community activists or ‘usual suspects’ (McAteer and Orr, 2006:136). May (2007:74) however, questions whether consultation fatigue exists and suggests that it may be ‘an excuse for a poorly designed project’. He also argues that ‘usual suspects’ are unlikely to be overloaded. Other commentators acknowledge that whilst consultation fatigue is a risk, it is caused by a lack of impact rather than too much consultation (Duncan and Thomas, 2000; Allen, 2004; Involve, 2005b).

A related concern is duplication of consultation activity. McAteer and Orr (2006:136) point to the risk that:

different council services will duplicate their efforts at consultation in ways that drain resources of an authority and overburden or confuse prospective participants.

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<sup>7</sup> 64% of authorities considered it to be a problem (of the 97% reporting negative effects).

The risk is not just within local authorities but also with partner agencies who may be consulting on similar issues. Co-ordination and joint working should help to avoid overload and duplication, encourage information sharing and better use of information (and potentially impact) and the more efficient use of resources. Empirical evidence, however, suggests that co-ordination has been difficult to achieve (Martin and Boaz, 2000; Cole, 2004 and McAteer and Orr, 2006) and departmentalism seems to prevail. Departmentalism is also evident in central government which may restrict joint working at a local level (Percy-Smith et al, 2002:50).

### **Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and preparing the Community Strategy**

As previously highlighted, the government believes that LSPs should be responsible for the development of the Community Strategy and guidance highlights the importance of community participation in developing and implementing the strategy (DTLR, 2001a; DETR, 2001).

There are however difficulties in achieving public participation in partnership settings. The first issue is with respect to representativeness and the extent to which the wider community are represented in LSPs. Lowndes and Sullivan (2004:59) describe LSPs as being 'relatively distant from the community' and that 'citizen input is via representative mechanisms on the board'.

Commentators (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004; Callanan, 2005) raise concerns about who such representatives speak for, how they consult, how they were selected and how can they be held to account. Leach et al (2005:51) argue

that such structures can simply replicate the problems of representative democracy but perhaps to a greater extent because the mechanisms for accountability are often vague or absent. Indeed there are many concerns about the accountability of LSPs (Ashworth and Skelcher, 2005; ODPM, 2006; Geddes, Davies, Fuller, 2007). There are also concerns about the extent to which socially excluded groups are represented through such mechanisms (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004; Leach et al, 2005). Authors recognise that community representatives cannot be a substitute for wider public involvement (Cowell, 2004; Leach et al, 2005; Russell, 2005; ODPM, 2006). A related tension is the extent to which such community representatives have the skills and knowledge to participate and the influence they have in such partnerships (Abram and Cowell, 2004; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Lowndes and Sullivan (2004:62) also suggest that community representatives may become 'incorporated' into the process and thus less likely to raise or resolve local concerns.

A further issue is uncertainty about how to engage the wider public meaningfully in community planning whilst trying to achieve integration across a range of agencies (Abram and Cowell, 2004) and as previously discussed difficulties in engaging the general public in more visionary or strategic consultations (Cowell, 2004; Leach et al, 2005; Sullivan, Downe, Entwistle, Sweeting, 2006) which may have limited obvious influence (Cowell, 2004). That said, however, a recent evaluation of Community Strategies (Darlow and Percy Smith, 2006:11) concluded that many areas were conducting 'major consultation exercises to inform their revised plans using a variety of different,

often innovative, processes [and] ... have made valiant attempts to make their community engagement and consultation processes inclusive'.

It should also be noted that the previous tensions associated with public participation are present and sometimes exacerbated in a partnership setting, for example, marginalisation of non-executive councillors, speed of decision making, retention of power by partners and limited impact of public participation.

To conclude this section then, local government is faced with significant challenges in effectively implementing the public participation agenda, arising from various parties including the general public, councillors, council officers, central government and partnerships. In the context of these challenges, the government published a new Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' in October 2006 (DCLG, 2006) reaffirming the importance of public involvement in local government and setting out fresh proposals. The next section of this chapter outlines the main aspects of the White Paper and subsequent policies, which are pertinent to public participation.

## **The Local Government White Paper 2006**

The White Paper provides evidence to suggest that despite improvements, public satisfaction with the performance of local councils is still relatively low and a high proportion of citizens feel that they cannot influence local decisions

(DCLG, 2006:30-31). Thus it sets out proposals on seven key areas to empower local communities and rebalance the relationship between local government and their partners, central government and communities. As with 1998 White Paper (DETR, 1998) the government posits that public participation will lead to better decision-making and services, improve democracy and that people will become more positive about local government:

Public services are better, local people more satisfied and communities stronger if involvement and empowerment are at the heart of public service delivery (DCLG, 2006:45).

To support this further, the results from the 2006/07 BVPI User Satisfaction Surveys showed a link between satisfaction with opportunities to participate in local decision-making and overall satisfaction with the council (Communities and Local Government News Release, 2007).

The paper therefore sets out a range of proposals to involve and support citizens and communities, including the most marginalized, in decision-making. A range of legislation, guidance, policies, reports, initiatives and consultations have followed and are still emerging to support these aims (as detailed in Appendix 6). Below is an outline of the key elements that are particularly relevant to public participation.

- The new 'duty to involve'. The duty requires that local authorities take steps where appropriate to involve local people (including the most marginalised and vulnerable) in the exercise of their functions in terms of providing information, consultation and more interactive involvement.



(HM Government, 2008). The duty is scheduled to come into effect on 1 April 2009.

- The duty for local authorities and partners to work together to agree priorities through the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement (LAA)<sup>8</sup> and for citizens to be involved in determining the LAA.
- For local authorities to co-ordinate consultation and engagement across the LSP and streamlined consultation processes for Sustainable Community Strategies, LAAs and Local Development Frameworks to avoid duplication and overload.
- Stronger customer and citizen involvement in driving improvement and monitoring performance and inspection including encouraging the consideration of the views of local people in the new Annual Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which replaces CPA and other reviews and assessments, and which will focus on the capacity and effectiveness of the LSP to deliver.
- The ability for citizens to seek action through the Councillors Call for Action (CCfA) which provides frontline councillors with the power to take up issues on behalf of local people and organizations through an appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Best Value legislation ceased on 31 March 2008. A new set of national performance indicators were introduced including 25 citizen perspective indicators of which 18 are to be collected through the new Place Survey, which will replace the five BVPI surveys. The survey is

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<sup>8</sup> LAAs are agreements between local authorities (with the co-operation of their partners) and central government that set out targets for improvement, tailored to local needs.

to focus on on improving outcomes for local people and places rather than individual services and agencies. One of the indicators is the extent to which people feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area.

- The establishment of Local Involvement Networks (LINks) by April 2008, which are a new way for local people, organisations and groups to have their say about Health and Social Care services.
- Improving accountability to local people by providing easily accessible, up-to-date information about services provided by local authorities and their partners in their local area.
- Encouraging local charters between communities and service providers which set out what people can expect from their services, and what action they can take if standards are not met.
- Greater encouragement, support and opportunities for communities to take on the management and ownership of local facilities and assets.
- More opportunities for Tenant Management organisations.

## **Conclusions**

In order to better understand central government's expectations of public participation, this chapter has outlined the national policy context and the issues and tensions that have been encountered by local authorities in responding to it. It finished by outlining a range of new policies and initiatives coming from central government aimed at moving further with this agenda. On paper it would seem that the new proposals may help to alleviate some of the challenges identified previously, for example, consultation duplication and

overload. Others tensions do not seem to have been addressed or may be exacerbated by the new proposals and doubtless there will be new challenges to come. Success will depend on the extent to which central government consistently drives this agenda, what emphasis is given to engagement in CAA and the extent to which local authorities and local people respond. Leach et al (2006:40, 38) argue that the proposals will have 'marginal impact' since there are few 'explicit proposals in the White Paper to strengthen public engagement'

Further consideration of the implications of the White Paper (DCLG, 2006) will be given in the discussion and conclusion chapters when considering the relevance for the case study authority. Before focusing on the local context however, the next chapter considers the purpose and development of citizens' panels, a consultation technique which has risen in prominence since 1997.

## **Chapter four – Citizens' panels**

### **Introduction**

As previously highlighted, there was a significant growth in the provision of more innovative participation methods by local authorities between 1997 and 2001. The consultation method that saw the greatest growth was citizens' panels. First established in the mid 1990s, 18% of local authorities used panels in 1997 and this had increased to 71% by 2001 (Birch, 2002:13). Central government also established the People's Panel in 1998, a UK wide citizens' panel.

Despite early interest and literature on citizens panels in the late 1990's (Dungey, 1997; Cabinet Office, LGA, Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), 1998; Page, 1998; LGA, 1999) very little national research has been undertaken or commentaries written on their management and development in a local authority setting in recent years. Some commercial market research organisations have undertaken studies of local authorities, for example RBA Research (2001) and QA Research (2005) and the Consultation Institute has held annual seminars on citizens' panels since 2005. Individual local authorities have also undertaken or commissioned evaluations in relation to their own panels, for example Sheffield City Council (2004), the South Lanarkshire Partnership via RBA Research (2001), Camden Council (2006), Norfolk Citizens Panel Partnership (2001 and 2007), Bristol City Council (2007) and Derby City Council (2005). In addition some local authorities have explored satisfaction of panellists with their panels (as evidenced at the 2006

Consultation Institute seminar, from discussions with officers and reviewing panel web pages).

This chapter will initially provide a brief overview of citizens' panels and the government's People's Panel. It will go on to explore in more detail the issues raised when implementing panels by drawing on the above documents and survey methodology literature.

Citizens' panels have been defined as:

a representative sample of local residents. The panel is maintained to provide a basis for survey research and possibly other feedback and research activities. The panel is used more than once, probably on a regular planned basis, for different surveys.

(Dungey, 1997:4)

ongoing panels which function as a 'sounding board' for the local authority. Panels focus on specific service or policy issues, or on wider strategy. The panel is made up of a statistically representative sample of citizens whose views are sought several times a year (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 1998: para 1.1, box 1; Birch, 2002:66).

Two common strands emerge, firstly that they comprise a 'representative sample' of people and secondly that those people will be asked to give their views on an ongoing basis. Having reviewed the aforementioned literature, it is possible to summarise the main reasons why many local authorities established citizens' panels and as such their potential uses:

- A cost effective and quick method of conducting survey research (typically postal surveys) with a representative sample of residents and an anticipated high response

- To track changes in views over time
- As a sample, with whom the BVPI User Satisfaction General Survey could be conducted
- To assist in meeting the consultation requirements of Best Value
- A cost effective and quick means of recruiting people to take part in more qualitative or deliberative research and consultation events
- The ability to target groups of people with particular characteristics for research
- To get local people more involved, more informed about and potentially more positive towards local government and the local area
- To form closer relationships with a large group of people
- As a symbol of a local authority's commitment to consultation
- To help improve co-ordination of consultation activity within local authorities and with their partner organisations
- To encourage partnership working
- To improve services and decision making
- Feeling compelled to do so
- An easy way of ticking the consultation box.

This is quite a varied list and it is apparent that a number of uses relate to addressing and managing the consultation requirements placed upon local authorities from central government whilst others relate more to service improvement and democratic enhancement objectives. Not all reasons will be

relevant to all authorities although Wilson (2002)<sup>1</sup> highlights that 'some authorities have seen panels as the answer to all our consultation needs'. This chapter will consider the extent to which these uses have been achieved.

First of all it is useful to briefly consider the establishment of the government's People's Panel in 1998 which coincided with the growth in citizens' panels. The People's Panel was a panel of 5000 UK citizens who were representative of the wider population according to key characteristics. The panel was established as part of the Modernising Government Agenda to 'provide a major research resource for the Government to investigate attitudes towards public services' (Gosschalk, Page, Elgood, Skinner, 1998:1). The panel was dissolved in January 2002. Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Cabinet Office, Chris Leslie MP (Cabinet Office, 2002)<sup>2</sup> explained that consultation had improved greatly in government departments and agencies since the panel was established and they could now consult more effectively themselves. It is however likely that other factors also impacted on the demise of the People's Panel, problems that are inherent to running panels and which will be considered in the next sections.

## **Representativeness**

Citizens' panels were previously described as comprising a 'representative sample' of people and one of the principal intended uses was for survey research (typically postal surveys) and in some local authorities, the BVPI

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.laria.gov.uk/content/features/68/feat3.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2001/panel/pp.demise.2002.htm>

User Satisfaction General Survey. A representative sample is one which accurately reflects its population in terms of relevant characteristics so that the results from such surveys can be generalised on to the population. There are however a number of issues to consider in practice with respect to the initial recruitment and subsequent maintenance of citizens' panels that impede their representativeness.

An initial question to consider is what 'representative' means in the context of citizens' panels. The People's Panel was structured to be representative of UK citizens according to a range of social, demographic, geographic and attitudinal characteristics (Page, 1988:4). Similarly local authorities require that their panels represent citizens living in their area in terms of such characteristics. Wilson (2002) however highlights that many local authorities only structure their panels to be representative in terms of key demographic criteria and that they often do not check on their representativeness with regard to attitudinal, behavioural or socio-economic factors.

Another factor to briefly consider at this stage is how such representativeness is determined, that is, against what data are such characteristics being compared. It is vital to have reliable information about relevant population characteristics. Such population statistics are typically derived from census data<sup>3</sup>; there are however well documented concerns over census data and

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<sup>3</sup> Census data is obtained via a survey of the entire population conducted on a decennial basis. The data is updated annually with mid-year estimates. The last UK Census was conducted on Sunday 29 April 2001. It was supplemented by the Census Coverage Survey to correct for underenumeration.



subsequent population estimates (Simpson, Hobcraft, King, 2003; Smith, Chappell, Whitworth and Duncan, 2003; Boyle and Dorling, 2004, Redfern, 2004) which therefore raises questions over the reliability of the information held about the general population against which representativeness will be measured. The next section will consider achieving representativeness with a sample.

### **Recruitment**

There are three key sources of bias to achieving a representative sample for any research (Moser and Kalton, 1971; Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000; Bryman, 2004). They relate to the sampling frame, non-response/refusal to take part and problems associated with non-probability methods of recruitment.

With regard to sampling frames, citizens' panels typically require a listing of the general population in the local authority area, as a sampling frame. Many citizens' panels are recruited by post and Erdos (1970:30) contends that 'frame bias .. can be one of the most serious flaws in survey design' for postal surveys. Lynn and Taylor (1995:174) observe that there is no complete and up-to-date list of the general population in Britain. There are however two lists that have typically been used in the UK as sampling frames, the Electoral Register (ER) and the Post Office Address File (PAF), both of which could be applicable to recruitment for a citizens' panel (Foster, 1993). Wilson and Elliot (1987:235) highlight that lists such as these 'which are compiled for purposes other than sampling may be deficient in their coverage of the target

population'. Below is a brief discussion of the adequacy of these sampling frames.

The first issue to consider is that both lists rely on people living at a residential address and therefore exclude vagrants, the homeless and travellers, for example.

The ER provides a list of individuals who are eligible to vote and it is updated on an annual basis. The ER was the main sampling frame used until the early 1980's (Lynn and Taylor, 1995; Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000) and Dungey (1997:10) reports that it was the most commonly used sampling frame for postal recruitment of citizens' panels. As a sampling frame the ER does however have a number of shortcomings, the main ones are as follows:

- It excludes or under-represents groups such as:
  - Those under the age of 18, non-British subjects and non-residents in a particular area on the qualifying date (Lynn and Taylor, 1995; Chisnall, 1997)
  - Individuals who have failed to register. Research indicates that certain groups are less likely to register, for example those living in Inner London, young adults, ethnic minorities and private renters (Foster, 1993; Chisnall, 1997; DCLG and the Audit Commission, 2006) and those who do not wish to be part of society's official processes (Lynn and Taylor, 1995:180; Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000:38)
  - Recent movers (Wilson and Elliot, 1987)

- The ER may include duplicates – for example, people who have recently moved house may appear twice (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000:38)
- ER data is collected annually and published some 4 months later which means that it is 4 months out-of-date when published and 16 months out of date when due for replacement (Moser and Kalton, 1971; Chisnall, 1997).

Furthermore, since 2002 people can opt out of having their name on the commercially available register (now called the Edited Register). Evidence from Experian indicates that 32% of those on the full register opted out of the edited version and that this figure ranged from 4% to 75% amongst different local authorities (Tipping and Nicolaas, 2006:35). Tipping and Nicolass (2006:43) also report that the edited ER under-represents young adults, people who rent their accommodation from a private landlord and those in non-manual occupations.

The PAF is generated by the Post Office and provides a complete list of addresses in the UK. The small-user residential file tends to be used for survey sampling since this excludes most non-residential addresses (Tipping and Nicolaas, 2006:34). In the early 1980's the PAF replaced the ER as the sampling frame used by the OPCS<sup>4</sup> for major surveys which sample households (Butcher, 1988; Lynn and Taylor, 1995; Chisnall, 1997). The PAF was also used as a sampling frame for recruitment of the People's Panel

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<sup>4</sup> Office of Population and Censuses and Surveys (now the ONS)

(Page, 1998). Commentators contend that the PAF provides better coverage than the ER (Wilson and Elliot, 1987; Butcher, 1988; Lynn and Taylor, 1995).

The PAF however, also has a number of shortcomings as a sample frame:

- It provides addresses not named individuals and if a sample of individuals is required, individuals must be weighted to correct for the differential probabilities of selection (Butcher, 1988; Lynn and Taylor, 1995, DCLG and the Audit Commission, 2006).
- It includes approximately 10% ineligible addresses, for example non-residential addresses, demolished houses and houses not yet occupied (Dodd, 1987; Butcher, 1988; Foster, 1994; Wilson and Elliot, 1987; Tipping and Nicolass, 2006) and commentators suggest that the spread of ineligible addresses is uneven across postal sectors and regions (Wilson and Elliot, 1987; Foster, 1994; Butcher, 1988; Dodd, 1987).
- Some addresses may comprise more than one household which may lead to some households being excluded on the PAF (Wilson and Elliot, 1987:238-239).
- Since it does not provide named individuals, mailings can not be personalised (Rahman and Dewar, 2006). Tipping and Nicolaas (2006:34) suggest that this can negatively affect response rates although there are conflicting views on this (e.g. Linsky, 1975).

Turning now to the issue of non-response/refusal to respond, chapter three identifies lack of participation in consultation activity to be a problem. Low response rates have important implications for representativeness because

there are likely to be differences in the characteristics of respondents and non-respondents (De Vaus, 1990; Miller, 1991; Robson, 1993; Bechhofer and Paterson; 2000; Bryman, 2004). Robson (1993:143) states:

even if you get everything else right (perfect random sample from perfect sampling frame), anything other than a very high response rate casts serious doubts on the representativeness of the sample you achieve.

Non-response is exacerbated in recruitment for panels due to the on-going commitment required of participants and 'the initial co-operation rate is lower than for single contact' (Sharot, 1991:325). Low response rates are typical in panels that are recruited by post, a method which many local authorities employ. Commentators point to response rates that range between 9% and 22% (Dungey, 1997; Page, 1998; RBA Research, 2001; ODPM, 2003) and critics suggest that such response rates will not achieve representativeness (Page, 1998; DETR, 2000c).

Recruitment for the People's Panel involved a complex sampling procedure and employed a variety of approaches to achieve representativeness, including face-to-face recruitment. This resulted in a 50% response rate although this was still observed to be lower than for a one-off survey and criticised for 'severe non-response bias' (Gregory, 2002:7). Local authorities, however, will not have the resources or necessarily the expertise to undertake such a rigorous recruitment exercise as that adopted for the People's Panel. Nevertheless, Dungey (1997:10) provides examples of higher response rates when face-to-face and telephone recruitment is undertaken, but recruitment costs and time need to be balanced against such benefits. In addition whilst

interviewer recruitment may result in a higher initial take-up, some commentators report that such panels also have higher levels of attrition (Dungey, 1997:10; Page, 1998:9).

Low response rates consequently lead to concerns about the type of people who join panels. Page (1998:6) suggests that:

around 17-22% of residents are likely to want to be actively involved with the Council or similar local body on an ongoing basis .... people in this category tend to be older than average, and in cities, are more likely to be white than from one of the major ethnic minority communities.

There is also evidence to suggest that panels are biased towards those in socio-economic groups AB (Wilson, 2002; Whiteman, 2005) or more affluent or educated people (Dungey, 1997:11). Indeed despite even the most rigorous recruitment efforts, the People's Panel still comprised 4% more ABs than the country profile. As with other participation initiatives, there are well-documented difficulties in recruiting and retaining young people on panels (Dungey, 1997; Page, 1998; Pratchett, 1999; Wilson, 2002). People who do not speak English as their first language and with poor literacy skills are also unlikely to join (Dungey, 1997), particularly when postal recruitment is used. In addition Wilson (2002)<sup>5</sup> comments that:

there are certain subgroups of the population who are systematically "missed" by most methods of recruiting for panels, particularly groups such as homeless people or people with disabilities.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.laria.gov.uk/content/features/68/feat3.htm>

Research undertaken by Sheffield City Council (Sheffield City Council, 2004a:10) points to a divergence of opinion in how to target 'hard to reach' groups. It reports that the majority of local authorities undertake 'booster' recruitment to improve the representation of hard to reach groups on their panels whilst others believe that other, more appropriate methods of consultation should be used with these groups. Such differences in opinion are also evident in other literature. For example, booster samples were used for young people in the 16-24 year age group when recruiting for the People's Panel (Page, 1998:3) and Camden Council undertook 'booster' recruitment to ensure 'young and disabled people and those from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups were well represented' (Camden Council, 2006:5). Some commentators however contend that it can be more effective to consult certain groups in other ways outside of a panel (RBA Research, 2001; QA Research, 2005). The subsequent disproportionate rate of attrition with booster groups experienced in Camden may bear this out (described later).

In addition, Pratchett (1999:623) argues that even when individuals from 'recalcitrant' groups are successfully recruited there is a danger that they will be atypical of the group they are recruited to represent. Indeed there are a number of concerns about the motivations and attitudes of people who join panels. Tull and Hawkins (1976:399) highlight a lack of evidence in this regard but suggest that whatever distinguishes those people who join a panel from those who do not, may or may not relate to relevant variables. Other commentators point out the 'self-selecting' nature of panels (Pratchett, 1999; DETR, 2000c) and there are concerns that those who respond are more

interested in local government or issues than those who do not (DETR, 2000c:112; Dungey, 1997) or that they are more 'more pro-public service than the general population, and are generally more frequent users of council services' (Wilson, 2002)<sup>6</sup>. This therefore raises questions over the extent to which a panel can accurately represent the wider population.

The third source of bias to achieving a representative sample occurs when non-probability sampling is used. The main distinction between non-probability sampling and random sampling is that the selection of respondents relies upon the judgement of an interviewer rather than probability procedures. One of the main types of non-probability sampling used is quota sampling and this is outlined by Dungey (1997) as a possible approach to recruiting for citizens' panels. In brief, this could involve setting quotas according to relevant characteristics (e.g. age, gender, social class), based on census data, to reflect the population. Interviewers would then be allocated quotas to achieve and the selection of respondents would be left to them. Authors highlight a number of problems with quota samples, in terms of achieving representativeness (Moser & Kalton, 1971; Kinnear and Taylor, 1983; Chisnall, 1997, Churchill, 2001; Bryman, 2004) and the main ones are summarised in Appendix 7.

Despite concerns, quota sampling is used extensively in market research and academic studies (Melnick, Colombo, Tashjian, Melnick, 1991) and Moser and Kalton (1971:136) concede that it can provide 'reasonably accurate

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.laria.gov.uk/news\\_f.htm](http://www.laria.gov.uk/news_f.htm) laria news issue 68



results' when expertly applied but they caution that 'it is not suitable for surveys in which it is important that the results are derived from theoretically safe methods'. On the other hand Melnick et al (1991:577), argue that the advantages of probability sampling are often lost due to non-response and non-probability sampling is preferable for 'small scale surveys and especially where the non-response may be quite large'.

Some local authorities allow volunteers to join their panels (e.g. North Tyneside Council, Gateshead Council) and others use a form of snowball sampling by asking panellists to ask friends etc (e.g. Gloucestershire County Council). These approaches clearly raise issues in terms of representativeness although snowballing is considered to be an effective means of mobilising people to participate (Simmons and Birchall, 2005; May, 2007).

To conclude, Trivellato (1999:344-345) contends that a high quality initial sample is essential for a panel survey:

deficiencies of frame, departures from sound sampling methods, a high percentage of non-random nonresponses at the first wave are problems that, often, can never be satisfactorily remedied.

Even if a local authority is confident that a panel is representative at the time of recruitment, it is difficult to ensure that it will remain so. The research conducted by QA Research (2005:2) reported that 19 authorities had stopped using panels and one of the most common reasons cited was the struggle to

keep panels representative. There are two key issues that will impact on the representativeness of a panel over time – attrition and conditioning.

### **Attrition and non-response**

Attrition is a key concern with panels (Klevmarken, 1989; Sharot, 1991; Miller, 1991; Dungey, 1997; Page, 1998, 2005; Trivellato, 1999, De Vaus, 2001; Hill and Willis, 2001; Atkinson, 2002; Lee, Hu and Toh, 2004; Baker 2006). It is inevitable that as time goes on panellists will die, move or ask to leave the panel and that response rates will fall.

Many commentators believe that attrition is not random (Sobol, 1959; Miller, 1991; Ribisl, Walton, Mowbray, Luke, Davidson, Bootsmiller, 1996; De Vaus, 2001; Lee, Hu and Toh, 2004; Toh and Hu ,1996) and if this in terms of characteristics that are relevant to the research, it may bias the results (Toh and Hu ,1996:129). Ribisl et al (1996) cite a range of studies that identify particular characteristics of those respondents more likely to attrite and thus the potential for bias. With specific regard to citizens' panels, BVPI guidance (DETR, 2000c) suggests that between 10% and 20% of the panel will drop out after one year and that it 'tends to be most common in young people, the very old and minority groups' (DETR, 2000c:112). Page (2005:slide21-24) also illustrates how a panel becomes increasingly older in responses to surveys over the course of a year. Empirical evidence supports this and the first year evaluation of the People's Panel, showed that the panel was becoming more middle aged, white, middle class and professional, and activist as a result of attrition (Evaluation Associates, 2000:15). Camden Council also found that

their panel profile had changed after one year 'with representation from ..... BME and young people, falling. The panel is now becoming proportionally older and increasingly white' (Camden Council, 2006: para. 3.10).

Trivellato (1999:347-348) provides suggestions for combating attrition, which can be summarised as follows:

- Offering respondents a choice of how to participate
- Regular contact with panellists
- 'Tracing techniques' to find missing panellists
- Incentives to all or only reluctant panellists

There are however a number of issues to consider with such suggestions.

In terms of offering respondents a choice of how to participate, Dillman (2000) points to evidence from Groves and Kahn (1979) that people do have mode preferences, although he questions whether providing a choice will increase response rates. It is however important to acknowledge that this may not be simply about offering someone the most convenient method for them to use, it is also about accessibility, for example people with sight difficulties may require telephone or face-to-face interviews rather than postal surveys.

There is also evidence to suggest that some modes may encourage hard to reach groups to participate, for example in research conducted by Sheffield City Council (2004a:10), two local authorities identified phone surveys to be more suitable for BME groups and young people, which has helped to make the results 'more demographically representative.' In managing a successful panel of 15-25 year olds, Marks (1998:4) also identified the need for a 'flexible

approach to data collection' – nine years ago email was already proving to be popular with this group. There are, however, well-documented concerns that responses to surveys will differ according to the data collection method used (Dillman, 2000). Thus whilst mixed-method administration may encourage or help people to respond and potentially some harder-to-reach groups to take part, local authorities need to consider whether these benefits outweigh the possible impact on data quality. Ribisl et al (1996:10) however argue that measurement errors from mixed mode surveys may be less than bias arising from attrition.

In terms of regular contact, feedback is widely acknowledged to be crucial in terms of ensuring that panellists feel that their views are valued and encouraging their continued participation (Dungey, 1997; Kent, 1999; Wilson, 2002; De Vaus, 2001; RBA Research, 2001; Sheffield City Council, 2004b; Camden Council, 2006). Gregory (2002: 28) highlights feedback to be a key feature of successful panels, 'feedback on results, information on action arising from findings and regular keeping in touch helps maintain the Panel'. A dilemma manifests, however, in that keeping panellists informed and involved may help to reduce attrition but conversely may risk conditioning, as discussed next (Page, 1998:5). Dungey (1997:13) suggests that this should be taken into account when considering the level of detail provided in the feedback although feedback should not appear to be superficial, which was a criticism of the summary newsletters produced for the People's Panel (Gregory, 2002:6). The issues around providing such feedback are considered in more detail on pages 88, 95-97.

With regard to 'tracing techniques' a number of authors acknowledge the importance of keeping track of panellists (Ribisl et al, 1996; Trivellato, 1999; De Vaus, 2001; Lynn, Buck, Burton, Jackle, Laurie, 2005). The practicalities of doing this, time and costs will need to be taken into account, however. A further issue to consider in this regard, with respect to citizens' panels in particular, is that if respondents move out of the local authority area then they will no longer be eligible to be part of the panel anyway.

The final suggestion is that of incentives, indeed there is a wealth of literature about using incentives to encourage response rates in surveys. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the literature in detail but it will outline the most pertinent aspects with respect to non-response and attrition in postal surveys and panels. Dillman (2000:167) asserts that:

second to multiple contacts, no response-inducing technique is as likely to improve mail response rates as much as the appropriate use of financial incentives.

Dillman (2000) advocates a token prepaid financial incentive and provides strong support for this approach over for example making postpayments, offer of prizes or donations to charity. The effectiveness of prepaid financial incentives in mail surveys is supported by a number of researchers (Erdos, 1970; Linsky, 1975; Kanuk and Berensen, 1975; Brennan, 1992; James and Bolstein, 1990; Church, 1993; Warriner, Goyder, Gjertsen, Hohner and McSpurren, 1996; Gendall, Hoek, and Brennan, 1998; Bryman, 2004; Simmons and Wilmot, 2004; Lynn et al, 2005).

Simmons and Wilmot (2004:6) point to evidence to suggest that incentives can reduce response bias amongst groups who are typically under-represented in surveys, including low income and education groups, BME groups and younger respondents. Results relating to this are inconsistent however, for example Shettle and Mooney (1999) did not find any evidence that the prepaid \$5 affected response bias in their study and they point to a number of studies with conflicting findings.

With respect to longitudinal studies, researchers observe that the evidence is limited with regard to using incentives (Simmons and Wilmot, 2004; Laurie, 2007; Jackle and Lynn, 2007). Some empirical studies indicate that prepaid incentives have reduced attrition/non-response in panel studies (Mack, Huggins, Keathley and Sundukchi, 1998; Creighton, King and Martin, 2007; Jackle and Lynn, 2007) and that targeted incentives to previous non-respondents had been effective (Creighton et al, 2007).

There is little available evidence to indicate whether or not local authorities have used prepaid financial incentives to stimulate response rates for panel surveys. Dungey (1997) provides examples of local authorities that offer incentives such as entry to prize draws but there is no indication as to how effective they are and Dillman (2000:169) argues that offers of prizes and contributions to charity have little, if any effect. In the evaluation of South Lanarkshire's panel, RBA Research (2001:18) conclude that 'the additional expense of offering an incentive is not justified by the small increase in response rates' and that other factors have a stronger effect. In her review of

best practice Gregory (2002:29) 'found no clear evidence that incentives are important in maintaining Panel membership' although she did report they were effective with 'hard-to-reach' groups such as young people. The evaluation at Camden Council (2006) also found that incentives had been useful in encouraging particular groups such as young people to participate. This corresponds with findings from Simmons and Wilmot (2004) previously and Dillman (2000). Such results have led to the notion of targeting incentives to only certain groups of respondents; this may however raise ethical issues and concerns about fairness although Singer, Groves and Corning (1999) found that when respondents were aware of this, it had no significant effect on their willingness to participate or participation in future surveys but Laurie (2007) suggests that this an issue which requires further investigation.

Additionally there are concerns that incentives of any nature are not good use of local authority money and conflict with the objective of promoting citizenship (Dungey, 1997; Camden Council, 2006) and some studies report that panellists do not support the use of incentives (RBA Research, 2001; Camden Council, 2006). There are also concerns that the use of incentives in such surveys may conflict with or erode civic duty (Gendall, Hoek and Brennan, 1998:347; Simmons and Wilmot, 2004:8) although Shettle and Mooney (1999) considered this issue and did not find any negative reactions to the use of incentives for a US government survey. Many authors agree that much more investigation is required into the issues surrounding incentives and longitudinal studies.

In terms of other factors that may influence attrition and non-response, respondent burden or participation fatigue can lead to attrition (Toh and Hu, 1996; DETR, 2000c; De Vaus, 2001). This can perhaps be viewed in two ways, firstly in terms of the number of times a respondent is contacted and secondly in terms of the burden associated with a particular request. Toh and Hu (1996:136) concluded that attrition caused by participation fatigue is the 'more potent source of systematic attrition' (1996:136) and recommend that this can be minimised by reducing respondent burden. In terms of respondent contact however there is a need to achieve a balance. Too much contact may exacerbate fatigue and conditioning (De Vaus, 2001) and too little may negatively affect the contact rate (De Vaus, 2001; Lynn et al, 2005). A further issue to consider in this regard is the possible tension between overburdening panellists and meeting the needs of panel users as observed by Gregory (2002:19) in the evaluation of the People's Panel.

Even if a panel was to remain representative, this does not guarantee that response rates to individual waves will be which has implications in terms of non-response bias (described previously). Dungey (1997:12) acknowledges that all the usual factors that impact on participation rates for postal surveys still remain, for example good questionnaire design, questionnaire length, subject matter and timing. Indeed such principles can be more important in longitudinal studies and Lynn et al (2005:25) observe that 'in a panel survey ... the details of the survey (length, subject and so on) affect not only the response at the present wave but also response at future waves'.



Dillman (2000:150-153) puts forward 5 elements that are required to achieve high response rates with postal and internet surveys and form part of his renowned Tailored Design Method (TDM), as outlined in Appendix 8. There is an abundance of literature with respect to these elements and it is not within the remit of this study to discuss them in any detail but simply to acknowledge their importance in minimising non-response at each wave. One other important issue, which is particularly relevant to responses to individual waves, is the concept of 'topic saliency'<sup>7</sup> which authors acknowledge can have an important positive influence on response rates to postal surveys (Heberlein and Baumgartner, 1978; Goyder, 1982). In the review of South Lanarkshire's panel, panellists identified a number of the aforementioned factors as influencing whether or not they will participate in a particular survey or project (RBA Research, 2001:12):

- Methodology
- Layout/design of questionnaires
- Time/lifestyle
- Action being taken as a result
- Attention to detail.

It is beyond the scope of this study to consider in great detail how attrition bias can be assessed and corrected for, but is useful to briefly consider this.

Commentators have suggested various approaches, each with their own limitations, to measuring bias arising from attrition and/or non-response. Toh

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<sup>7</sup> When the respondent is interested in the topic of the survey, or they believe that their group might be advantaged by the information, or they enjoy the chance to exhibit their knowledge about the subject, they are more likely to participate (Lynn et al, 2005:12-13).

and Hu (1996:131) acknowledge this to be an 'unresolved controversy' and describe two of the main approaches used:

- compare the characteristics of those who remain in the panel with those who leave
- treat the original sample as the population, and then test whether those who remain in the panel are a representative sample of the population.

Lynn et al (2005:19) additionally suggest that the characteristics of those who remain on the panel can be compared with a reliable external data source relating to the population, although they also acknowledge limitations to this approach.

Assuming attrition does occur it can be tackled by topping up the panel with replacement respondents from either reserve lists or fresh recruitment although this can be time consuming (RBA Research, 2001:43). Alternatively, those groups who are more likely to drop out can be over-recruited at the outset. Whilst such approaches can reinstate the demographic representativeness of the panel, there are still concerns about biases introduced by drop-outs (Trivellato, 1999; De Vaus, 2001; Gregory, 2002). Another option is to weight the sample so that it better reflects the population (De Vaus, 2001), for example Norfolk Citizen's Panel Partnership (2007) weight the results by area, age and gender although Ribisl et al (1996:16) point to concerns that such weighting adjustments or statistical methods 'cannot eliminate all biases introduced by attrition and nonresponse'. Specifically they point to problems in cases where non-response is non

random, where differences may not be apparent in the characteristics being compared and may be apparent in aspects which are more difficult to detect. Another approach is to supplement panel responses to particular surveys with other methods, for example Bristol City and Lewisham Councils use their online panels to complement panel responses (Derby City Council, 2005).

### **Conditioning**

A further concern with panels is conditioning which is the premise that panellists may change their attitudes and/or behaviour as a result of being on the panel and that they will become atypical of the population they were recruited to represent over time, as recognised by numerous commentators (e.g. Sharot, 1991; Miller, 1991; Dungey 1997, Chisnall, 1997; Page 1998, 2005, Pratchett 1999, De Vaus, 2002; Wilson, 2002; Gregory, 2002; Lynn et al, 2005; Sturgis, Allum, Brunton-Smith:undated).

Lynn et al (2005:52) report that conditioning is typically viewed as having negative effects on data quality. A key concern is when panels are used to determine change over time, since it is difficult to assess whether changes are actual changes or changes influenced by the effects of conditioning (De Vaus, 2001:133). It should be noted however, that whilst the primary purpose of panels per se is to measure changes over time, not all citizens' panels are used in this way and differences resulting from repeatedly being asked the same questions will not apply, although panellists might still be affected by conditioning.

The findings from the first year evaluation of the People's Panel suggest but do not confirm that conditioning occurred and question the ability of panels to measure changes in attitudes as panellists become more aware of and interested in issues (Evaluation Associates, 2000:25). Pratchett (1999:623) is also concerned that panellists become more aware of the authority and 'perhaps sympathetic to its activities'. The provision of feedback (as discussed previously) and the possibility of panellists being involved in more qualitative consultation exercises and events may amplify this risk. In the initial evaluation of the People's Panel it was recommended that the panel should no longer be used for focus groups since they are 'more likely to sensitise members' (Evaluation Associates, 2000:9). In the final evaluation of the Peoples Panel, it was found that panellists were more likely to give a substantive view over time but this was discounted as 'there was no systematic pattern in who changed from no opinion to opinion or vice versa'.

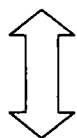
Conditioning can however also be viewed positively. Studies have suggested that panellists are more likely to give substantive, honest answers and be more politically aware (Sturgis et al, undated; Lynne et al, 2005) and that this may be beneficial in terms of 'serving to level out the information asymmetries commonly found in mass publics (Althaus, 2003 cited in Sturgis et al undated:12). In terms of citizens' panels, it has been acknowledged that increased levels of knowledge will provide 'more informed answers to questions' which may be beneficial in some instances (DETR, 2000c:111) and that it may help to develop citizenship (Dungey, 1997:7).

As with attrition, steps can be taken to try and identify and limit conditioning. In terms of identifying conditioning, local authorities could check panellists' views with those of an independent sample to see how they compare (Chisnall, 1997; Miller, 1991; Gregory, 2002). Commentators however, acknowledge the difficulty in clearly identifying the effects of conditioning and disentangling it from other factors (Sturgis et al, undated; Lynn et al, 2005). Researchers also point to the use of rotating panel designs where a series of short term staggered panels are established and managed simultaneously. Since fresh replicate samples are added at each wave and older samples retired, the possible effects of conditioning and attrition should be lower and can be adjusted for. Lynn et al (2005:55) however, point to studies which detect 'rotation group bias' which is 'the difference between estimates for the incoming group when compared to previously interviewed panel members'. A number of local authorities limit the time of panel membership and recruit replacement panellists, by for example refreshing one-third of their panel each year. Sheffield City Council (2004a:10) highlight that this has the additional benefits of 'boosting response rates and introduces new, more motivated members to the panel'. Chisnall (1997:215) however points to difficulties in removing panellists 'who have been loyal and reliable'. One solution is to place such panellists on lists that allow them to take part in other consultation activities and/or continue to receive information about the panel (Sheffield City Council, 2004a:10). This was raised at the 2007 Consultation Institute seminar and termed 'friends of the panel'.

### **Representativeness trade-offs**

It would seem then that it very difficult to attain and subsequently maintain representativeness with citizens' panels. In the survey conducted by QA Research (2005:6-7) representativeness was perceived to be the greatest benefit and problem of panels. RBA Research (2001:43) concluded that most panels were not representative, even in terms of the demographic criteria they set and also reported that some local authorities 'do not have the necessary skills and experience to be able to successfully maintain and monitor their panel databases'. Indeed recruitment and maintenance can be costly and time consuming and (Wilson, 2002) observes that efforts to try and keep a panel representative could diminish their cost effectiveness. Page (1998:10) contends that attrition and conditioning may mean that 'snap-shot' surveys are a more cost effective way of obtaining reliable, representative results but that panels can be 'relatively inexpensive' if representativeness and accuracy are not so important. Page (1998:5-6) also argues that there needs to be a trade off between cost, accuracy and engagement:

Lower cost, less representative, but more engagement



Higher cost, more representative, but less engagement

In addition May (2007:72,73) believes that there is a 'trade-off between representativeness and capacity' and highlights that whilst representativeness can be easily achieved if undertaking a one-off survey which involves little

capacity for engagement (time, intensity and contribution to strategy/policy), the 'participant pool' decreases the greater the capacity required.

The issues clearly raise questions over the appropriateness of citizens' panels to provide statistically reliable, representative results from survey research.

RBA Research (2001:43) contends:

panels fundamentally are not sources of representative data – they provide indicators from cross-sections of the public which are slightly more interested and slightly better informed than the public at large but which are not activists.

In their consideration of local authority panels, Evaluation Associates do not however, consider this to be a problem since they found that 'the primary purpose of many panels is to get closer to the public and listen to their views, rather than to deliver strict survey instruments' (Evaluation Associates 2000:23) and Baker (2006:slide 20) suggests that we 'don't get hung up on' panel representativeness.

This does however raise questions over the appropriateness of using citizens' panels to track changes over time and specifically for the BVPI User Satisfaction General Survey, as discussed next.

## **Tracking changes over time and the BVPI User Satisfaction General Survey**

The issues of attrition and conditioning raise questions over the ability of panels to track changes over time. In the final evaluation Gregory (2002:19) reports that the People's Panel was not being used to any great extent to

measure changes in attitudes, behaviour or knowledge and that there were concerns as to whether the panel could be used reliably in this way. As such, Gregory questioned whether the People's Panel was 'fit for purpose' and whether other research methods could not be used with fewer resources.

In the research conducted by Sheffield City Council, they describe 'several councils using their panels to monitor and track customer satisfaction over time' as a means of measuring the overall views of residents. They also found however, that other authorities argue that panels cannot provide such tracking data due to concerns about 'large confidence intervals associated with user satisfaction results, as sample groups are not consistent over time' (Sheffield City Council, 2004a:2). Critics also agree that citizens' panels are not suitable for tracking views or monitoring changes in satisfaction of the overall population (Dungey, 1997; RBA Research 2001; Wilson, 2002; Page, 1998). Commentators do however observe that panels can be used to see how individuals' views change over time, although there was little evidence of this happening (Page, 1998; RBA Research, 2001; Wilson, 2002). It should however be taken into account that practices to minimise attrition and conditioning such as rotating panel designs and replacing panellists will make analysis of change at the individual level more difficult (Sharot, 1991; De Vaus, 2001).

Such concerns over the ability of panels to deliver representative data and reliable trend data had serious implications for using citizens' panels for the BVPI User Satisfaction General Survey. As previously described the purpose



of the BVPI surveys is to collect performance indicator data, which would enable local authorities to see how they are performing from a service-user perspective and can be used to make comparisons across local authorities and time.

Hall and Wilson (2000)<sup>8</sup> pointed to early DETR guidance which indicated that randomly recruited panels could be used to collect this data and final guidance highlighted the fact that many local authorities were intending to or had already established citizens' panels for the purpose of conducting the BVPI General User Satisfaction Survey (DETR, 2000c). Despite this, the guidance effectively advised against the use of citizens' panels by requiring a minimum 50% response rate and 1100 responses, based on the people initially invited to join the panel (DETR, 2000c). As shown previously, it is unlikely that many local authorities could meet this criterion. Hall and Wilson (2000) concluded that:

This effectively excludes all panels recruited using postal methods, and many panels recruited using other methods as well. Many authorities have invested significant time and energy in developing panels, recruiting, monitoring and maintaining them, and will not necessarily have additional funds for undertaking different research for the performance indicators.

Only 23 out of 388 local authorities used their citizens' panel for this purpose in 2000/01. Guidance in 2003/04 recommended against the use of citizens' panels for the 03/04 survey due to low response rates and conditioning effects and insisted that the panel be refreshed using the PAF even if the original

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.laria.gov.uk/news\\_f.htm](http://www.laria.gov.uk/news_f.htm)

sample had been recruited via the full electoral register (ODPM, 2003:87-88). In 2006/07 the Audit Commission supplied the sampling frame from the PAF. Therefore no authorities used their panels in the 2003/04 or 2006/07 surveys. Thus one of the drivers behind local authorities establishing citizens' panels was very quickly obsolete.

## **Improving relationships with the community**

Some of the intended uses of citizens' panels relate to more democratic enhancement objectives. Page (1998:4) points to citizens' panels that 'are as much about the process of involving participants in consultation as obtaining accurate results' as also suggested by Evaluation Associates previously. The evaluation at Camden Council concluded that the panel had been central to improving relations with the general public, although this was not quantified (Camden Council, 2006:36).

In terms of achieving such aims, some commentators suggest that local authorities focus less on the representativeness of panels and more on participatory and innovative activities such as local events, qualitative research and deliberative activities (Wilson, 2002; Page, 2005; Baker, 2006). As highlighted in chapter three, such activities are better at engaging with and empowering participants than surveys and evidence suggests that panellists respond well to such activities (RBA Research, 2001; Sheffield City Council, 2004a; Camden Council, 2006). They were also found to have a good impact on service delivery in Camden's evaluation and more of these types of activities were recommended for the future, although deliberative exercises

were found to be expensive (Camden Council, 2006:32). There is evidence of authorities moving towards more qualitative or deliberative forms of consultation with panels, for example Birmingham City and Gloucestershire County Councils' citizens' panels are offering training for panellists to become mystery shoppers (BMG Research, 2008 and 2007) and Bristol City Council has used its panel to recruit panellists for a Citizens Jury (Bristol City Council, 2007).

There is however little available evidence about how many panellists get involved in more participatory activities although there are indications that the majority do not (Needham, 2002a; Baker, 2006; Camden Council, 2006). Participation is also likely to be lower amongst some of the harder to reach groups (as discussed previously) although Camden Council has been successfully utilising targeted recruitment for specific activities to improve representation from such groups, at some cost however. These indications correspond with findings in chapter three regarding participation in general.

Feedback is another issue to consider. The importance of feedback has already been highlighted in terms of combating attrition and non-response. Local authorities typically provide feedback in the form of newsletters and via panel websites. Effective feedback is an important means of keeping panellists informed and involved, particularly those panellists who do not wish to take part in more participatory activities. Commentators highlight that lack of feedback or poor quality feedback can cause disengagement rather than promote engagement and the key is to demonstrate that panellists are being

listened to by explaining how the council is acting on their views (Dungey, 1997; DETR 2000c; RBA Research, 2001; Sheffield City Council, 2004a) supporting research highlighted in chapter three. Despite this, panel evaluations identify the need to improve feedback in terms of appearance, frequency, timeliness and content (RBA Research, 2001; Sheffield City Council, 2004a,b,c; Camden Council, 2006).

Feedback is of course inextricably linked to the way in which the panel is used and impact a consultation exercise has, which is often limited as discussed in chapter three. In the research undertaken with local authorities, RBA Research (2001:42) found that there was a lack of understanding in organisations about the correct use of panels and their limitations. Liverpool Council stopped using its panel due to this lack of understanding and services using the panel as a 'tick box exercise' (Sheffield Council, 2004a:2).

Camden Council has also found that there is lack of awareness within some areas of the council and with partner organisations about the potential of the panel. Page (2005:slide26) highlights that some panels can sit redundant which can be a major source of disenchantment with panellists. RBA Research (2001:43) also found that many organisations were unclear as to whether panel consultations had influenced decision making or why questions were asked. In research with South Lanarkshire, RBA Research (2001:37) attributed the attitudes of service providers towards consultation to the apparent lack of impact on services. Camden Council outlined the need to formalise 'holding consultation sponsors to account to ensure CamdenTalks is

impacting on service improvement and/or decision making' (Camden Council, 2006:28).

Another issue is that sometimes the impact of consultation exercises is not always so immediate, tangible or substantial. For example, York City Council reported that impact is rarely prominent or dramatic enough (Dungey, 1997:18) and Camden Council experienced difficulties in demonstrating impact on policy and larger scale strategy developments that are more complex and take a long time to develop (Camden Council, 2006:25).

Camden's evaluation took a pragmatic view that sometimes impact would not be immediate or tangible and to be clear with participants about this at the outset.

## **Partnership working**

Panels were viewed as a means of improving co-ordination of consultation across local authorities and with partners and improving partnership working.

Some panels have been set up in partnership with other organisations and in 2005 research showed that 27% of local authorities had established panels as part of a consortium and 72% on their own (QA Research, 2005:3). Evidence indicates that other authorities allow their partners to access their panels on a cost basis rather than setting up formal partnerships (Dungey, 1997; Sheffield City Council, 2004a; Camden Council, 2006). This could perhaps be explained by the challenges with respect to establishing partnership panels such as organisations having different objectives (Page, 2005; Tizard, 2008)

different cultures, accountabilities, funding and resources and issues such as territorialism, protectionism and lack of trust (Tizard, 2008:7). Dungey (1997:14) points to challenges in terms of agreeing responsibilities and costs, accommodating everyone's requirements without overburdening panellists, quality control and publication of findings. A 2001 evaluation of Norfolk Citizens' Panel, reported difficulties in managing the partnership in terms of expectations, deadlines and communication (Norfolk Citizens' Panel Partnership Forum, 2001). The 2007 evaluation cited partnership working as a success but also highlighted the need to increase understanding of the panel in partner organisations (Norfolk Citizens' Panel Partnership, 2007), difficulties in agreeing questions and the need for a stronger protocol (Consultation Institute, 2007). In the research undertaken with local authorities by RBA Research (2001:44) they describe difficulties in terms of partners agreeing the structure and content of questionnaires and maintaining good relationships. Sheffield City Council (2004a:14) also report on panels that were set up in partnership but later had their funding withdrawn.

There is little evidence available with respect to co-ordination of consultation activity. York City Council identified a 'lack of co-ordination between citizens' panels and other consultation and research activity' (Sheffield Council, 2004a:2). Whilst Evaluation Associates (2000) found that the Peoples Panel has had limited success in encouraging joint working due to entrenched departmentalism.

## Conclusions

It is clear from the above discussion that some of the proposed benefits of citizens' panels have not been fully realised. There were those local authorities who set them up to be used for the BVPI General Surveys, only to find that their panels did not comply due to concerns over representativeness. Panels are not considered to be a suitable means of tracking the views of the wider population and their cost effectiveness in comparison to one-off surveys can be easily diminished in terms of recruitment and maintenance costs. It would also seem that a panel cannot achieve all of the aims local authorities have identified for them concurrently. Yet many local authorities still run citizens' panels – why?

In their evaluation of local authority panels, Evaluation Associates (2000:23-24) suggested that 'officers and councillors are most interested in gaining broad brush data on residents opinions, getting closer to residents and listening to them'. Page (1998) also acknowledges this purpose and it would seem that panels can deliver this. It is also important to bear in mind that many panels were established as part of a huge growth in consultation activity and some of the problems experienced have mirrored those experienced with consultation in general. Given that the importance of user focus and citizen engagement is not abating there is a possibility that local authorities have learnt from their experiences and developed their panels into useful consultation mechanisms which may not be in line with the original objectives, but are still of value and complement a range of other techniques used. An alternative proposition is that local authorities are running ineffective panels

that fail to meet the needs of the authority, the panellists and the panel users but for whatever reason they do not wish to dissolve them. Clearly the importance for local authorities is on deciding on the most appropriate uses of the panel, communicating this to panellists and users, ensuring that consultation is appropriate and that panel users provide good quality feedback on how the results have been used.

The next chapter considers the implementation and development of a citizens' panel at a local level, thus addressing research objective two. This helps to illuminate some of the issues raised here in further detail.



# **Chapter five - A case study citizens' panel**

## **Introduction**

This chapter considers the establishment and development of the case study citizens' panel and examines the issues faced in the management of the panel. In order to provide some context for this discussion, it initially provides some background information about the case study local authority and discusses the development of consultation at the council and challenges faced. The chapter draws on various documents produced by or on behalf of the authority, analysis of the panel database, semi-structured interviews undertaken with council officers in addition to my experience and observations as practitioner-researcher.

## **Overview of the case study authority**

The case study authority is a unitary local authority, responsible for a wide variety of public services which are delivered by five directorates:

Adult, Health and Housing

Children's Services

Community and Cultural Services

Development and Regeneration

Office of the Chief Executives

The council adopted a Leader and Cabinet structure in 2002 comprising the Leader, Deputy Leader and 8 portfolio holders for the following areas:

- Resources



- Children's Services
- Adult Services
- Planning and Transportation
- Housing and Public Health
- Neighbourhood and Street Services
- Regeneration and Community Cohesion
- Culture and Leisure

The structure is complemented by six Overview and Scrutiny Committees which are co-ordinated by 3 council officers:

Children's Services

Culture and Leisure

Environmental and Planning

Health and Well-Being

Policy and Co-ordination

Regeneration and Community

There are six area committees in place, made up of relevant ward councillors in each area. The committees have delegated budgets and their role is to consider spending proposals for projects in the local area. They also receive information and updates on local issues. The general public can only attend as spectators. There are also area forums operating, although not in all six areas of the city and some are better established than others. The forums enable the community and voluntary sector, public sector agencies, local residents, businesses and councillors to come together to share information

and tackle issues of local concern. They regularly report back to the Area Committees on issues arising. Council officers support both the area committees and forums. The council is currently seeking to update its area arrangements.

The LSP comprises a range of organisations from throughout the city and is responsible for implementing the Community Strategy which sets out priorities and action plans for achieving the economic, social and environmental well being of the city. The LSP has just developed its third Community Strategy for 2008 onwards and is developing the area strategies and a revised Local Area Agreement to underpin it. The Community Strategy identifies 5 priorities and the LSP comprises thematic groups who are responsible for priorities and action plans within them. Some thematic groups are better established than others and the range of members varies. The LSP has also established Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) to provide specific groups of people<sup>1</sup> with a voice in the LSP. The groups are supported by the council.

The council co-ordinates and leads the LSP and development of the Community Strategy. The council has also recently produced a Community Development Plan on behalf of the LSP and is working with the voluntary and community sector and partners to develop a Compact which is an agreement between the LSP and voluntary and community sector to improve relationships for mutual advantage and community benefit. A Community

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<sup>1</sup> Faith, gender, older people, younger people, sexuality, disability and black and minority ethnic groups. Comprising representatives and individuals with an interest in the particular theme.

Network enables the voluntary and community sector to influence decision making in the LSP.

## **Consultation at the council**

This section briefly describes consultation mechanisms in place at the case study authority and discusses the challenges currently being faced and implications for the future.

Much of the consultation undertaken at the council is on an individual service basis and some is undertaken on a council-wide corporate basis. Consultation is also undertaken in partnership with other agencies, for example through the LSP, and in conjunction with other local authorities. Service departments undertake a range of consultation activity, either in-house or through the use of consultants. Analysis of consultations carried out across the council shows that they are typically carried out for one or more of the following reasons:

- Assess and monitor customer satisfaction
- Inform policies, plans and strategies
- Understand needs, priorities and expectations
- Understand behaviour
- Evaluate schemes and programmes
- Collect data for performance indicators
- Assess awareness and knowledge of services
- As evidence for funding bids or funding received
- Statutory consultations
- As part of the Overview and Scrutiny process.

Examples include a mystery visitor exercise in leisure centres, group discussions to inform the Housing Strategy, a survey to determine satisfaction with recycling services, road shows to inform the Waste Management Strategy and an annual conference with young people employing various consultation techniques.

Corporate consultation is undertaken by the Research and Corporate Consultation Team (RCCT)<sup>2</sup> and includes:

- The citizens' panel
- Annual Residents' Survey
- Best Value Performance Indicator General Survey (superseded by the Place Survey)

The RCCT is also responsible for a range of corporate mechanisms to ensure that consultation activity is effectively co-ordinated across the council and with partner agencies; impacts on service delivery; is delivered to a high standard, provides value for money and meets government expectations (Case Study Authority, 2006a). These include:

- The Consultation Strategy (Case Study Authority, 2006a)
- The Corporate Consultation Group (CCG) - co-ordination group of representatives from the council and partners
- The Consultation Database - a searchable database on which consultations and their findings are recorded

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<sup>2</sup> Within the Performance Improvement Team in Office of the Chief Executive, it comprises a Consultation Manager, Research Officer and Consultation Administrator.

- Consultation resources (including the Consultation Manual and pages on the council's intranet and internet)
- Providing advice and assistance to services
- E-consultation mechanisms
- Membership of the regional Research and Consultation Group

These mechanisms evolved from the Consultation Framework and Action Plan (Case Study Authority, 2000) which was developed in response to a 'Best Value Review of Marketing, Market Research and Media Relations' and consultation audit. The Framework and Action Plan were updated in 2006 to reflect new developments and requirements in government policy and within the council and took into account lessons learned since 2000. The Consultation Strategy 2007-2012 and Action Plan were approved in December 2006 (Case Study Authority, 2006a), the objectives of which are included in Appendix 9. A Hard-to-Reach Framework (Case Study Authority, 2006b) was developed in conjunction with the strategy and outlines the council's approach to identifying and including hard-to-reach groups in consultation exercises.

The mechanisms complement the council's Equality Assessment Template (INRA) that was introduced as part of the Equality Standard to enable the council to demonstrate systematic equality management across all services, functions and projects. Consultation is a key element of this process in terms of identifying needs and explaining differences in usage or satisfaction of different groups.

Having outlined the key mechanisms in place, the next section considers some of the challenges in implementing them across the authority.

### **Co-ordination of Consultation**

Effective co-ordination of consultation activity is an objective of the Consultation Strategy (Case Study Authority, 2006a). As with other local authorities identified in chapter three however, effective co-ordination has proved difficult to achieve at the council. Mechanisms such as the CCG, consultation database and citizens' panel were developed from the original consultation framework to help achieve this objective but the first two have only achieved a limited degree of success.

The CCG was established as a means of implementing, monitoring and reviewing the framework. The idea was that a senior representative from each department would join the group and lead on consultation in their department. At the same time the consultation database was established to provide a searchable consultation resource and to collect information for performance indicators to enable the central monitoring of the effectiveness and quality of consultation exercises. It was suggested that directorates develop Consultation Working Groups to feed into these mechanisms.

By 2003 commitment to the CCG and database had diminished and there is no evidence that working groups had been developed or that the performance

indicators were used. Following a review of consultation<sup>3</sup> undertaken on behalf of the council in 2004, a consultation email-group replaced the CCG and the database was streamlined and re-launched. There was however little commitment to either despite reports to the council's Executive Management Team in 2004 and 2005. In January 2006 the CCG was re-established and personnel from directorates and partner organisations joined. The main responsibilities of the group are to meet and report on current and planned consultations, ensure the delivery of the Consultation Strategy and Hard To Reach Framework (Case Study Authority, 2006a,b) and record consultations on the consultation database. The CCG is still developing; it has been difficult to convince some of the value of such a group and recruit appropriate personnel. Some partner organisations are represented and others are not. In terms of those who do join, the level of commitment, knowledge and support varies and many consultations are not recorded on the consultation database. Associated with this is a lack of planning with respect to consultation with departments undertaking consultations at short notice and then failing to generate public interest or consult adequately. This is also raised later with respect to the citizens' panel and reflects a wider lack of strategic planning with respect to consultation activity.

By way of possible explanation of these difficulties, some interviewees identified that there are not the co-ordination mechanisms in place within their directorates or obligation for officers to feed into CCG representatives. This is

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<sup>3</sup> With a remit of identifying approaches to joint working, ORC International were commissioned to undertake in-depth interviews with board members of the LSP and officers working in the thematic groups. They also reviewed consultation case studies to examine the quality of consultations being undertaken.



also observed by the RCCT, particularly in one directorate and interestingly where the interviewee was unaware of any co-ordination problems. Another interviewee however highlighted that a survey programme had been introduced in their department to avoid consultation overload amongst some groups. One interviewee believed that there was a lack of awareness in some teams of the corporate co-ordination mechanisms in place and the fact that the information they need may already be available. Whilst others felt that the role of the CCG needed to be strengthened. All but one of the interviewees identified a more co-ordinated approach to consultation across the council to be a significant challenge and two interviewees believed that consultation needed to be delivered in a more 'holistic' way. For some interviewees co-ordination needed to extend across partner organisations, particularly in respect of requirements emerging from the White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (DCLG, 2006). A recent Peer Challenge also identified the need for 'a better partnership approach to consulting with local people' and identified the CCG as a possible starting point (Warwick Business School, I&DeA, SOLACE Enterprises, 2008). One interviewee also acknowledged the need to co-ordinate across the region with regard to the city regions agenda and multi-area agreements again arising from the White Paper (DCLG, 2006). Many supported the idea of an annual consultation plan and a more structured, integrated approach to consultation. This was seen to be crucial for those who anticipated a significant increase in the volume of consultation in the coming years. This clearly presents a challenge given the difficulties identified previously.

Some interviewees acknowledged consultation overload and duplication as consequences of this lack of co-ordination and some were concerned about overload amongst particular groups, for example children in care, IAGs, hard to reach groups. Consultation overload was also identified as an issue in the review undertaken by ORC International (2004) and was deemed to be brought about by lack of co-ordination and the range of consultations required for government initiatives. A good example of this was evidenced in Autumn 2008 when three large scale surveys, from different agencies, were sent out to large random samples of residents. The need to further develop opportunities for joint consultation is one of the tasks identified in the Consultation Strategy (Case Study Authority, 2006a:5.17) and the Hard to Reach Framework (Case Study Authority, 2006b:8.4). Some interviewees, however, foresaw problems in linking together consultations that perhaps did not sit well together or might be at the expense of the quality of each consultation, for example:

*"Are we going to bombard them with everything from planning .... to strategy development to vision setting to how the voluntary sector operates ... the quality in 2 hours has got to be questionable I think".*

### **Impact and feedback**

Objectives four and five of the Consultation Strategy focus on the need to ensure that consultation informs decision-making and that feedback is provided to all relevant parties and publicised as appropriate (Case Study Authority, 2006a). Again in common with the issues discussed in chapter three, there were a number of concerns raised during the interviews over the

extent to which this is the case. Similar concerns were raised in the review of consultation undertaken in 2004:

Several interviewees cited a general lack of feedback to people involved in consultations and a lack of action to follow up issues as being indicative of some consultations that take place (ORC International, 2004:4.10).

There are a number of possible contributory factors, mirroring many of the issues highlighted in chapter three. Some interviewees expressed concerns that consultation was sometimes being undertaken to achieve 'a tick in the box'. This is also observed by the RCCT when some services approach them for advice. One interviewee felt that sometimes they had to undertake statutory consultation even though they knew what the results would be and that the decision may be made irrespective of the findings. Another interviewee also recognised that statutory consultation had to be sometimes undertaken on issues that could not be influenced and felt that occasionally things need to be communicated rather than consulted on. The RCCT has also observed difficulties in departments carrying out statutory consultation, for example a department only being given a limited amount of time in which to conduct a consultation and being unable to fit the required consultation period into the council's planning cycle. A further conflict identified by one interviewee was the council being unable to deliver what consultees wanted due to conflict with statutory guidelines. There are also possible difficulties regarding consultation for funding bids, particularly when the bid fails and expectations may have been raised as a result of the consultation.

One interviewee pointed to a lack of response following Overview and Scrutiny reviews. The interviewee observed that whilst consultation findings feed directly into cabinet decision-making, suggested recommendations are not necessarily implemented in the services:

*“Service heads and directors continue to pursue service plans, sometimes they make efforts to accommodate, sometimes not”.*

It was acknowledged that sometimes changes in circumstances might mean that it is not appropriate to follow recommendations but at other times this is used as a 'get out'. The recent CPA inspection recommended that scrutiny needed to be strengthened with respect to challenging under-performance (Audit Commission, 2007a) and the council is currently seeking to improve overview and scrutiny arrangements. This interviewee also pointed to resistance amongst Members to the bottom up approach, echoing Callanan (2005), cited in chapter three.

*“There is a resistance, many of our elected members take the view that they've been put there so that they can decide what the priorities are and what the decisions should be and that people don't really know what is best for them”.*

The interviewee went on to say that when members do get involved, it gives consultations a higher profile and greater credibility. Another interviewee highlighted tensions between officers, local members, Cabinet and residents. There is also some evidence of elected members requesting consultation on issues where it is unclear what impact, if any, it will have.

Concerns were also raised regarding consultation for the Community Strategy. In the 2004 review an interviewee commented:

The [2003 Community Strategy] consultation was too limited, too focused and too directive and did not engage people .. the council frame the questions in a way to get the answers that they want (ORC International, 2004)

The consultation conducted during 2007 was also quite structured, focusing on the vision and only asking whether or not people agreed or disagreed with five proposed priorities. One interviewee found the 2007 consultation to be somewhat leading and felt that it was being directed by a small number of politicians. This echoes the discussion in chapter three about the reluctance to devolve power to participatory processes. Another interviewee felt that whilst consultation on the Community Strategy has improved since 2003, the process was still not collecting enough detailed information on people's priorities and issues, instead relying on statistics:

*"We need to be honest that we don't think we are good enough yet .... Trying to get to a position to give equal importance to people's perceptions, concerns and things that they voice as we do to hard and fast evidence ... At least if you've done that you can go back and say that we can't do this because of x, y, z. It's that two way communication so people realise we're not just saying we can't be bothered or didn't listen in the first place ...."*

In their evaluation, Darlow and Percy Smith (2006) highlight the tensions between using consultation evidence and other data.

The directive nature of determining priorities was also highlighted by other interviewees, one suggesting that the new Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill may require that priorities for Overview and Scrutiny are determined by area committees or the new Community Call for Action rather than internally. This interviewee also suggested that structures should be adjusted so that members of the public could come along to area committees to raise issues, whereas currently they are not permitted to speak and they are poorly attended.

Two interviewees spoke of the difficulties in generating public interest in strategies, for example the Community Strategy and Community Development Strategy, where there will be no visible or immediate impact on services or individuals, reflecting issues raised in chapter three. In 2003 the draft Community Strategy was sent to 120,000 households for comment and this was criticised by the general public. The interviewees spoke of the need to be more 'creative' and 'make real' consultation on such strategies.

Some interviewees could provide good practice examples of where consultation fed into decision-making, including for example the design of a skate park and the creation of an exercise room at a care home. It was suggested however that these were pockets of good practice rather than being across the board. The RCCT has also obtained a number of good practice examples but this was on request for an inspection and was not available corporately through the Consultation Database. Indeed lack of feedback corporately was identified to be a problem by some interviewees

and the need to share consultation and research findings was also identified in the review (ORC International, 2004). This clearly has implications for issues such as consultation overload and duplication since information may already exist that officers need to collect.

One interviewee felt that whilst they were quite good at feeding back, they needed to do more of it, in different ways and to publicise it more widely. The interviewee also felt that some services did not seem to understand the importance of feeding back. The RCCT has also observed reluctance on the part of some officers to feedback and appreciate the efforts of participants. One interviewee wondered whether perceptions may not be improving on certain issues due to lack of feedback rather than lack of response. Another interviewee felt that there was a combination of lack of action and lack of feedback and this could perhaps be addressed in part by identifying what 'quick wins' could be achieved from consultations and trying to deliver on these. This in turn would facilitate feedback and generate a positive experience for participants, who would hopefully be keen to take part on another occasion. For many interviewees, communication and feedback should be around:

*'what you said, what we did, what difference it made'*

Table 4 displays results from the Annual Residents survey with respect to the percentage of respondents who agree that the council 'asks for the views of local people' and 'listens to the views of local people' (Ipsos MORI, 2007a:44).

In 2006 the percentage of respondents agreeing to the statements dropped by six percentage points in both cases from 2005. They also fell below the operational targets of 41% and 30% (Case Study Authority, 2007:135) respectively.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Asks for the views of local people	34%	39%	34%	39%	39%	45%	39%
Listens to the views of local people	21%	27%	23%	26%	29%	28%	22%

Base: c. 1218 residents, 2000-2006

(Extract from Ipsos MORI, 2007a:44)

The report suggests that there may be issues around communicating 'the amount of consultation the Council engages in and publicising that consultation' (Ipsos MORI, 2007a:44). The results from the BVPI General Survey paint a similar picture. Only 32% of respondents agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area and 32% of respondents are satisfied with opportunities to participate in local decision making provided by their council (Ipsos MORI, 2007b). The case study authority does however compare favourably with other Metropolitan Authorities as shown in Figure 1 (Audit Commission, 2007b) <sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Data obtained from [http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/Performance/Downloads/Full\\_2006\\_07\\_BV\\_General\\_Survey\\_Data2.xls](http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/Performance/Downloads/Full_2006_07_BV_General_Survey_Data2.xls). Based on 36 Metropolitan authorities.



**Figure 1**

**Proportion of Respondents who are satisfied with opportunities to participate in local decision-making provided by their council - Comparison of extremes and mean score for 36 Metropolitan Authorities**



During the course of this study and following a high profile campaign in 2007, the Annual Residents' Survey figures did recover somewhat to 44% and 26% respectively.

### **Hard to Reach Groups**

Ensuring that consultation involves all sections of the community, including hard to reach groups is one of the objectives of the Consultation Strategy (Case Study Authority, 2006a). In common with issues outlined in chapter three, the council has experienced difficulties in achieving this. All interviewees acknowledged this, for example:

*"There is a lack of engagement between the council and certain groups of citizens"*

*"We're not reaching a significant part of the community"*

A recent CPA inspection identified the need for more effective engagement and impact measurement with marginal and vulnerable groups and differentiating between geographically distinct areas (Audit Commission, 2007a).

The original framework included actions in this regard but there is no evidence to suggest that they were implemented, other than some guidance in the Consultation Manual (Case Study Authority, 2003).

Interviewees indicated a need for further direction and guidance in terms of who services should be engaging with and how best to engage them. This has also been raised at CCG meetings. Two interviewees pointed to misconceptions about who these groups might comprise of, one highlighting that they are not only Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and another pointing out that the Bangladeshi community is not the only BME group and the need to ensure that other groups are not alienated. The Hard to Reach Framework (Case Study Authority, 2006b) proposes that groups will differ according to the service in question and need to be identified and consulted with accordingly. There seems to be some confusion around this but it was supported by one interviewee for whom 'traditional' hard to reach groups are not hard to reach in their service, whereas other groups are. The interviewee suggested that their service could offer expertise in consulting with particular groups, for example people with learning disabilities.

Another interviewee was particularly concerned about consulting with young people and the need to utilise 'a wider variety of approaches' and make it more 'worthwhile and interesting' for them. The interviewee raised concerns from Elected Members that the Youth Parliament comprises the same group of young people who seem to get involved in everything and that they are representing themselves rather than other young people.

There were also concerns raised by some in respect to the INRAs carried out for the Equality Standard. Some interviewees pointed out that knowledge varies across services. One interviewee commented:

*“There is a danger with the INRA process that it is only as comprehensive as the individuals doing it .... Some independent challenge on INRAs may not be a bad thing, certainly in the early years of developing them ... they may have missed things, jumped to conclusions or made assumptions about services ...”*

Another interviewee expressed concern about what changes have actually been made in practices since achieving Level 2 of the Equality Standard and how the standard could be translated into practical action. There was a sense that people may be simply going through the process. This was supported by another interviewee who was concerned that it could lead to more ‘tick in the box consultation’. An evaluation of INRAs in 2008 later revealed that the quality varied widely and steps were being undertaken to address this.

The IAGs were to be used as a sounding board and advice provider for certain hard-to-reach groups, however this has thrown up challenges of its own. Firstly, the ability to establish the groups has varied considerably and one interviewee described it as *‘phenomenally difficult to get reps for given groups’*. As previously highlighted, there are also concerns that once established they become overloaded and one interviewee reported that one of the groups *‘held their hands up in horror – oh no not another consultation’*. Officer support for the groups was established in late 2007, which may help to

alleviate some of the difficulties but the need to consult with such groups will not abate, given developments in the White Paper (DCLG, 2006) and requirements of the Equality Standard and there are still likely to be significant challenges ahead.

### **Resources/time**

Resource and time issues were identified to be significant obstacles to effective consultation in chapter three but these were not identified spontaneously to be challenges by any of the interviewees at the council.

After prompting, financial resources were not considered to be a problem with many interviewees pointing out that they have specific budgets allocated. Staff time and skills were however considered to be problematic, particularly given the perceived increase in activity arising from the White Paper (DCLG, 2006), although many interviewees suggested different working practices as a means to address such issues. One interviewee said that they would use consultants if they did not have the requisite skills and try to utilise grants available to pay for them, another also recognised the need to maximise external funding.

Others pointed to the merits of pooling resources such as money, consultation mechanisms and skills with other departments or partners. Examples of other mechanisms included groups set up by the police and the main Housing Association in the area. Such partnership working would also address issues around consultation overload. Another interviewee pointed to the need to make more of national research already available.

### **Awareness and training**

Objective one of the Consultation Strategy focuses on ensuring that there is an understanding and commitment to community consultation (Case Study Authority, 2006a). Many of the actions relating to awareness raising and training in the original framework were implemented according to the plan but they were not sustained which has meant that the awareness, understanding and commitment to the framework have gradually eroded. In addition actions in the original framework around providing consultation information to Cabinet and Area Committees and Member training were not implemented.

Perhaps unsurprisingly and as illustrated in previous sections, lack of awareness and understanding of good practice consultation principles and the corporate consultation approach and mechanisms is evident. It is starting to improve; the CCG is slowly making headway and one interviewee felt that the mindset is changing and officers do understand the importance of consultation.

### **Developing consultation mechanisms**

Some interviewees acknowledged the need to move further up the consultation spectrum towards involving and devolving. Interviewees also highlighted the challenge of moving up the spectrum at the same time as providing people with a choice of opportunities and making sure they are inclusive:

*"We've got to find a range of mechanisms that are effective, reach different sectors of the community and allow different people to engage to the level they want and how they want to".*

This was also observed by Lowndes et al (2001b) in chapter three and reflects issues emerging from the White Paper (DCLG, 2006). One interviewee expressed concerns about the resource implication of providing capacity building to move up the spectrum and acknowledged that this would be where partnership working would be of benefit.

Developing area consultation mechanisms was identified as a key issue in terms of developing local areas strategies and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and in response to the White Paper (DCLG, 2006). To this end, one interviewee identified the need to link into and develop area committees and forums and others identified the benefits of partnership working, as discussed previously. The citizens' panel was also mentioned in this context and will be considered next.

## **The citizens' panel**

The citizens' panel was one of the actions arising from the Consultation Framework and Action Plan (Case Study Authority, 2000), under the objective of ensuring a co-ordinated approach to consultation activity. The panel was implemented in 2002 and the RCCT has been allocated and retained an appropriate level of resources to deliver, manage and maintain the panel. Despite the many aspects of good practice being adopted, there are however concerns that the panel is not fully meeting the expectations of its panellists, officers at the council or the original expectations detailed in the Consultation Framework, nor is it fully achieving the expectations of central government, thus prompting the review of the panel.

Turning now to the inception of the panel, the consultation audit demonstrated strong support for a citizens' panel and it was believed that it would improve efficiency and cost effectiveness of consultation (Case Study Authority, 2000). The proposals recommended a panel of 4500 residents that would provide a large enough sample in each of the six areas of the city. This could then be used as a resource for the council and the LSP. It was anticipated that there would be up to four large-scale surveys per year focusing on corporate or strategic issues in addition to more ad-hoc work that could be commissioned by departments and partners. There was also the potential for the panel to replace the Annual Residents' Survey in the longer term (Case Study Authority, 2001). The proposals were agreed and recruitment for the panel commenced in April 2002. The next section considers how the panel has developed since and issues faced in managing the panel.

## **Representativeness**

### **Recruitment**

As with many local authorities, the council recruited panellists by taking a random sample from the full electoral register and sending out postal invitations. The original mailing was sent to 20,000 residents and achieved an initial response rate of 5%. A follow-up reminder was sent out and promotional activity increased to achieve a final response rate of 9%. This fell some way short of the projected response rate of 40% and panel size of 4500 members (Case Study Authority, 2001).

The panel has been refreshed a number of times since 2002 using the edited electoral register<sup>5</sup> (this is currently 71% of the electorate and the demographic profile is unknown). The invitations have evolved since 2002 and currently go out in booklet form, comprising an invitation letter from the Chief Executive of the council, further information about the panel and a tear off membership form. Invitees are given the option of returning their form in the freepost envelope, joining via a free phone helpline or completing the online application form. Panellists remain on the panel for three years (unless they choose to leave or fail to respond for a long period). Table 5 outlines random postal recruitment activity and response rates.

Date	Invitations Sent Out	New Members	Response Rate (not accounting for invalid addresses)	Invited to leave	Remaining number of panellists
April 2002	20,000	1885	9%		1885
June 2004	15,287	1057	7%	445 non-responders asked to leave	2400
September 2005	5,315	391	7%	All remaining 2002 panellists asked to leave (1339)	1413
September 2006	10,020	567	6%	81 non-responders asked to leave	2121
September 2007	13,052	674	5%	All remaining 2004 panellists asked to leave (783) plus 204 non-responders	1661

Representativeness of the panel is checked after recruitment. As with many of the panels identified in chapter four, it is measured against a limited range of demographic criteria (age, gender, area, disability and ethnicity) using census data and mid-year estimates. In terms of this criteria, young people (aged 34 and under) and those aged 75+ are consistently under-represented on the

<sup>5</sup> Introduced in 2002, the Edited Electoral Register is the commercially available register that excludes those people who have opted out of having their name included.



panel and those aged 45-64 are consistently over-represented, again mirroring findings in chapter four. The percentage from BME groups is not unrepresentative but given that only 1.9% of the city's population fall into these groups (from 2001 census data), the numbers on the panel are so low that the findings are unreliable. Panellists are broadly representative of electors in each of the six regeneration areas but not always in terms of individual wards, for example, one of the most affluent wards is consistently over-represented. The profile of panellists was compared with all residents in terms of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)<sup>6</sup> in August 2007. There tends to be an under-representation in the most deprived areas and over-representation in the most affluent areas as shown in Table 6.

	<b>Resident Profile</b>	<b>Panel Profile (August 2007)</b>
Base:	2007 IMD Ranking	1971
51 most deprived SOAs <sup>7</sup>	27.0	21.2
46 least deprived SOAs <sup>8</sup>	24.8	29.3

In terms of disability, figures can only be compared with those from the 2001 census that relate to 'a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability' (28.7%) and the proportion is consistently below this (14.4% in August 2007). In common with many panels outlined in chapter four, socio-economic and attitudinal characteristics have not been measured or compared for the panel. Indeed, in the interviews undertaken, there were concerns raised about the attitudes and motivations of panellists, for example in terms of whether they join with a particular agenda to promote or are more cynical or more enthusiastic than the general population, again echoing findings in chapter

<sup>6</sup> 188 super output areas (SOAs) in the city are ranked in terms of IMD.

<sup>7</sup> With percentile ranking of <10%

<sup>8</sup> With percentile ranking >40%

four. One interviewee also picked up on the 'self-selecting' nature of the panel and the type of people that it will attract but felt that as long as it is seen as just one element in a range of mechanisms, it is still 'very useful'. Whilst no analysis of social class has previously been undertaken, the panel was categorised by Mosaic (described in Appendix 10) in late 2006, which gives some indication of social class. Table 7 compares the resident profile with the current panel profile. The panel is under-represented in less affluent groups, particularly Municipal Dependency and over-represented in more affluent groups, particularly Suburban Comfort (described in Appendix 10). This supports the previous observations and findings in chapter four.

<b>Mosaic Group</b>	<b>Resident Profile</b>	<b>Panel Profile (August 2007)</b>
Base:	2007 Mosaic data	1971
Municipal Dependency	30.3	21.4
Ties of Community	19.1	23.1
Blue Collar Enterprise	10.6	10.2
Suburban Comfort	9.1	16.2
Happy Families	8.2	12.4
Welfare Borderline	6.9	4.4
Twilight Subsistence	5.4	2.2
Urban Intelligence	2.7	1.7
Symbols of Success	2.6	4.8
Grey perspectives	2.4	2.0
Rural Isolation	0.1	0.6
Unknown	2.8	1.0

During 2005 and 2006 additional efforts were made to increase the number of panellists from under-represented groups. This involved visits to community groups, targeted mailings and street interviews. Table 8 details the results of such exercises. Visits to community groups was the least successful method in terms of recruiting new panellists, particularly when the time involved was compared with the results. Street interviews appeared to have more success, although subsequent contact and surveys with these groups has revealed a

number of 'not at this address' type returns and high levels of non-response. For example as at August 2007, 272 of the 313 panellists recruited by street interview remain and 175 have never responded to any survey or consultation activity, 101 of whom are aged 17-24. It is difficult to determine to what extent this is based on the way in which these people were recruited (see page 74 where it is reported that interviewer recruitment generated a higher initial take-up but higher levels of attrition) or the characteristics of the groups they represent (see pages 79 where Camden Council experienced a disproportionate rate of attrition amongst young people).

<b>Table 8 New panellists resulting from additional recruitment efforts</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Joiners</b>
September 2005	Visits to various community groups	18
February 2006	Postal invitation to 89 respondents living in specific areas to Annual Residents' Survey who would be willing to take part in further research	15
March 2006	Street interviews for 6 days in city centre	178
April 2006	Street interviews for 5 days in city centre	118
May 2006	Street interviews for 1 day in outlying area	17

Thus the representativeness of the panel following recruitment is hampered by many of the issues discussed in chapter four, which can be summarised as follows:

- It relies on the edited electoral register as a sampling frame
- Postal random recruitment is used with high levels of non-response
- Non-probability sampling methods have also been used
- The panel is under-represented in terms of young people, less affluent people and those with disabilities. Older, more affluent people are over-represented.

As in chapter four however, there also further threats to the representativeness of the panel through attrition, non-response and conditioning, discussed next.

### Attrition and Non-Response

The number of panellists actively requesting to leave the panel is not as significant a problem as non-response at individual waves. The main reasons for requests to leave the panel are death, illness or moving out of the area. Other reasons include lack of time and lack of interest. There is also a small proportion for whom letters are returned by the post office as 'addressee gone away'. Long-term<sup>9</sup> non-responders are invited to leave the panel when it is refreshed (as indicated previously in Table 5).

Non-response for individual surveys is a significant issue for the panel. Table 9 indicates response rates for 2002 and 2003 before the programme was revised, and when some surveys were only sent to a proportion of the panel.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Summer 2002	75%	Full panel
September 2002	66%	Sample (995)
February 2003	60%	Sample (885)
April 2003	51%	Sample (900)
May 2003	56%	Full panel
September 2003	51%	Sample (1103)
November 2003	49%	Full panel

It is useful at this stage to briefly explain the survey programme from 2004 onwards. Since 2004 the panel has been used to investigate in more detail,

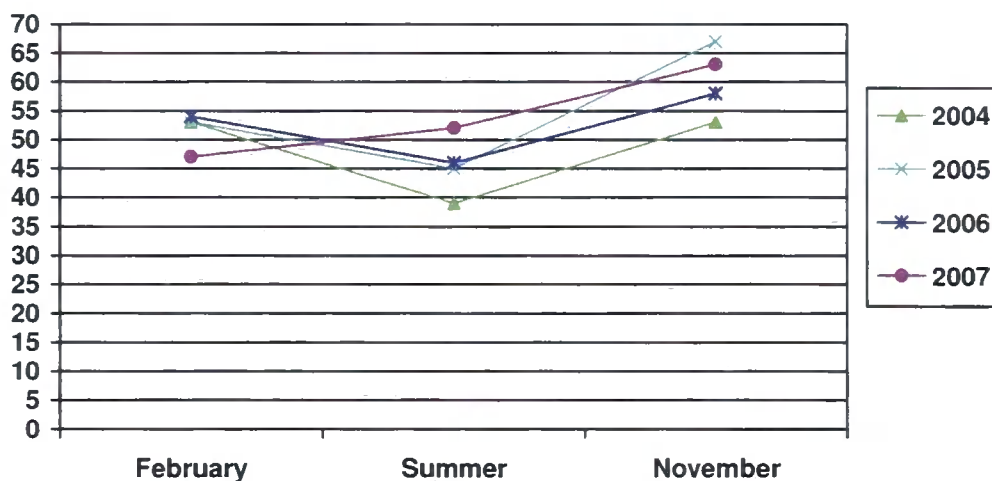
<sup>9</sup> Classified as no response in 1 year in 2004 but no response in 2 years since 2005.

those issues which are of most concern to residents through the Priority Issues Survey in February/March. This survey is used to help identify a theme to focus on in the Summer Survey and discussion groups. Examples of themes include young people, clean streets and public transport. The panel is also used to inform the Council's Revenue Budget through a survey and workshops in November. Figure 2 charts response rates since 2004.

As can be noted in Table 9 and Figure 2, by 2003 response rates had settled to around 50% although there was a low of 39% in Summer 2004 before the first panel refresh. Response rates tend to be lower for Summer Surveys although not the 2007 Summer Survey when reminder letters and questionnaires were sent out which increased the response rate by 15%.

**Figure 2**

Citizens' panel survey response rates – 2004 onwards<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> With the exception of three surveys detailed below, all surveys were principally carried out as postal surveys with the option of completing online or over the telephone, with a 3-4 week response time. Reminders were not used. In November 2005 and 2006 telephone interviews were used as the main method with postal/online versions being offered to those for whom no valid telephone number was held. A reminder letter was sent to postal respondents in the November 2006 survey. In the June 2007 and November 2007 surveys, reminder letters and questionnaires were sent to all non-respondents.

Table 10 compares the average profile of survey respondents with the resident profile. Again, age biases are evident but to a greater extent than with the panel profile. There is also a slight gender bias.

<b>Table 10 Comparison of average profile of survey respondents with the resident profile in terms of age, gender and disability</b>		
<b>Demographic Group</b>	<b>Resident Profile %</b>	<b>Average Response Rate %</b>
Base:	2005 mid-year estimates	Based on 11 surveys from February 04 to Summer 07
18-24	12.7	3.4
25-34	16.0	7.8
35-44	19.1	15.9
45-54	17.2	23.6
55-64	14.5	26.5
65-74	11.7	16.1
75 and over	8.8	5.9
Male	48	44.5
Female	52	54.8
Disability – yes	28.7	17.9

Table 11 compares respondents to the Priority Issues Survey 2007 with the resident profile in terms of Mosaic categories and the IMD. Again, the same biases as with the panel profile are evident but to a greater extent. In terms of Mosaic categories, those in the Municipal Dependency group are particularly under-represented and those in the Suburban Comfort group are particularly over-represented. In terms of the IMD, those from the most deprived areas are under-represented and those from the least deprived areas are over-represented.

<b>Table 11</b>		
<b>Comparison of survey respondents to the Priority Issues Survey with the resident profile in terms of Mosaic and IMD</b>		
<b>Mosaic Category and IMD grouping</b>	<b>Resident Profile %</b>	<b>Priority Issues 2007 Response %</b>
Base:	2007 Mosaic & IMD data	857
Municipal Dependency	30.3	17.6
Ties of Community	19.1	22.9
Blue Collar Enterprise	10.6	9.8
Suburban Comfort	9.1	22.1
Happy Families	8.2	12.0
Welfare Borderline	6.9	2.8
Twilight Subsistence	5.4	1.8
Urban Intelligence	2.7	1.2
Symbols of Success	2.6	5.8
Grey perspectives	2.4	2.6
Rural Isolation	0.1	0.8
Unknown	2.8	0.7
51 most deprived areas	27.0	18.3
46 least deprived areas	24.8	38.3

Panellists are also invited to consultation events such as the State of City Debate and budget consultation workshops and more ad-hoc activities which services approach the team about, for example waste management discussion groups and the Safer [City] Forum. Response rates to individual events and discussion groups range between 2% and 5% and again biases are apparent. Table 12 shows the profile of respondents to the 2006 Budget Consultation Event and State of the City Debate. As can be noted the age bias is apparent, particularly at the Budget Event. There are also somewhat more panellists attending from more affluent areas of the city.

<b>Table 12</b>			
<b>Comparison of the average profile of panellists attending two consultation events in 2006 with the resident profile in terms of age, gender, disability and IMD</b>			
<b>Demographic Group</b>	<b>Resident Profile %</b>	<b>2006 Budget Event Response %</b>	<b>2006 State of the City Debate Response %</b>
Base:	2005 mid-year estimates	67	55
18-24	12.7	1.5	3.6
25-34	16.0	2.9	3.6
35-44	19.1	2.9	16.4
45-54	17.2	14.9	16.4
55-64	14.5	29.8	25.5
65-74	11.7	29.8	23.6
75 and over	8.8	17.9	9.1
Male	48	52.2	50.9
Female	52	47.8	49.1
Disability – yes	28.7	26.9	16.4
51 most deprived areas	27.0	16.4	20.0
46 least deprived areas	24.8	35.8	43.6

Analysis of the panel database indicated that 17%<sup>11</sup> of panellists had taken part in such activities at least once in addition to surveys. It is also evident, that there is a core group of people who repeatedly take part in consultation events, these are aged 35+, mostly falling into the 55-74 age groups. One interviewee felt that:

*“you tend to have the more vociferous people coming along .. I don't know how representative some of that is at times because you do have the more difficult people coming along being very strong willed .. the same people coming along”*

and felt that this could perhaps be balanced with other work with ward Elected Members, for example.

Some interviewees were aware of the fact that the panel was a 'good cross-section' of people rather than being statistically representative and others

<sup>11</sup> Based on analysis of 1603 panellists in July 2008 with membership ranging from just under 1 year to just under 3 years.



were less sure about its representativeness. The difficulty in obtaining representative results was raised and interviewees asked their views on this. Some thought that we should try to ensure that exercises are more representative, one believing that it should be more inclusive and representative of harder to engage groups. In terms of addressing this some suggested incentives, some thought that going out into the community might help and one proposed that a sample of responses could be selected to ensure representativeness in surveys. One interviewee felt a cross-section was acceptable but that representativeness in terms of age and area were crucial and that we should 'go the extra mile' to ensure this. The Elections Team were commended for successfully increasing the number of young voters and it was suggested that they are approached for advice. Others felt that some groups could be picked up through other means than the citizens' panel, for example the IAGs, area mechanisms, e-consultation and employee feedback (given that a large proportion are also city residents). One interviewee felt that parallel consultations with other groups would make the results *'much more powerful'*. There was also the view that there is a need to be pragmatic and one interviewee who acknowledged the difficulties of getting people involved, commented:

*"forget about it, go with what you've got. I still got good information ..... don't get too hung up on representativeness".*

In managing the panel a number of approaches are used, aimed at reducing attrition and non-response and keeping panellists engaged, some of which reflect Trivellato's (1999) suggestions outlined in chapter four:

- Panellists are typically given a choice of how to complete surveys which includes by post, online or over the telephone.
- Panellists are offered alternative formats for documentation (eg large print, translations, audio cassette)
- A welcome pack is provided to all on joining which includes further information on what membership entails, useful contact details etc.
- Reply paid envelopes are provided with each survey or event invitation and a free phone help line is in operation
- Travel expenses are reimbursed for attendance at meetings and other facilities are offered such as signers, disabled access, childcare facilities and help with transport
- Meetings are held in local areas whenever possible/practical
- Newsletters are sent out three times per year accompanied by more detailed survey reports. Feedback meetings are also held for panellists with relevant services annually
- Questions have been included on surveys regarding satisfaction with the panel and improvements and changes introduced where possible
- In 2004, the survey programme was changed in an attempt to give panellists more influence over what would be addressed and enable them to consider a particular theme in more detail on an annual basis. It was also reduced to 3 surveys per year.
- Sessions are held with panellists to test the questionnaire to be used for the annual theme

- Satisfaction questionnaires have been introduced for key events such as the Budget Consultation and State of the City Debate to make improvements where possible
- An annual prize draw was introduced in December 2005 to thank those respondents who had taken part in the last 12 months for their efforts (all prizes are donated).
- Reminders with accompanying questionnaires were used since June 2007.

Nevertheless the representativeness of the panel is compromised by attrition and non-response.

### Conditioning

Conditioning is an issue that has not really been addressed with the panel, other than to limit panel membership to three years and there have been no attempts to ascertain whether or not conditioning is occurring as a result of panel membership. Since the panel is not used to track views or monitor changes in satisfaction over time<sup>12</sup> conditioning caused by being repeatedly asked the same questions is unlikely to occur. The type of conditioning that may occur, however is that which was recognised in chapter four whereby respondents may become more knowledgeable and interested in, and possibly sympathetic to, the council and council issues. Indeed it could be expected that this type of conditioning may occur because the feedback provided to panellists and consultation events such as the Budget

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<sup>12</sup> The case study panel was never used for the Annual Resident's Survey or BVPI General Survey following government guidance regarding concerns over high non-response at recruitment, attrition and conditioning (outlined in Chapter 4)

Consultation are specifically aimed at improving panellists' knowledge, understanding and awareness of issues, often so that they can provide more informed responses. The possible effects of conditioning and conflict with the need to feed back were outlined to interviewees and their views sought. Some interviewees felt that the development of knowledge and skills was part of the process and the consequences of this were largely perceived to be beneficial rather than negative. Some interviewees felt that it enabled panellists to develop skills and confidence which are crucial to the new government agenda, others felt that it generated 'advocates' and others suggest that a certain amount of knowledge will better enable panellists to participate, one suggesting they would give more 'realistic feedback'. This echoes observations from commentators in chapter four. One interviewee did however highlight the drawback that:

*"[Panellists] may be less willing to be critical of the council if they see themselves in a role that's working for the council then they may be not prepared to be too opposing if things were put to them. I suppose going native..."*

The majority of interviewees felt that refreshment after three years was required to help to limit the possible effects of conditioning. One interviewee believed that regular refreshment would enable the council to "*get through more of the population*" and ultimately generate more advocates. Another felt that membership of three years was important to allow people

*"time to settle in, to feel confident ....., go through a learning process and you would hope that people could see the benefit .. and are getting something out of it"*

One interviewee felt that asking people to leave after three years conflicted with the aims of the White Paper (DCLG, 2006) and a number recognised that there was a need to provide those panellists who would still like to be involved with other means of contributing, so that they can continue to develop their knowledge and skills. Some suggested area arrangements as being one such possible avenue for these people.

### **Bridging the gap between panel users and panellists**

From a RCCT perspective, a key difficulty in managing the panel is in meeting the needs of both panel users and panellists. Panel users are faced with an increasing number of consultation requirements, the timescales may be prescribed and the consultations may relate to strategies or plans that do not have an obvious or immediate impact. Issues to be consulted on are therefore often influenced by central government or corporate priorities. On the other hand panellists want to be consulted on issues of concern to them and want to see how their views have been used and resulting changes to service provision or decision-making. There is also a need to ensure that they are not over-consulted. Below are some examples of the difficulties experienced, echoing some of the problems described in chapter four.

There seems to be a lack of understanding amongst some officers about how the panel can be used. Some officers wish to use the panel as a quick and cheap means of achieving 'tick box' consultation, for research that is not actionable, as a mailing list, to give out information rather than consult or are

unclear about how the consultation will influence decisions. Officers are consequently disappointed if they are refused permission to use the panel. On one occasion the RCCT were over-ruled by senior management and required to send a survey out to some panellists, which breached good practice guidelines. A lack of planning and co-ordination is often apparent, typifying some of the wider problems previously identified. This can lead to requests for consultation on issues that have already been addressed, requests at very short notice or which clash with other panel activity. At times this lack of planning and co-ordination may be unavoidable but often it relates to consultations that were known about and could have been planned for, well in advance. These requests cannot necessarily be accommodated and when they must be, they can lead to consultation overload for the panel and put a strain on resources in the RCCT.

A further difficulty relates to what the panel is consulted on for the main survey programme. In 2002 and 2003 the surveys covered a range of issues, often with many issues covered in one survey. Some panellists expressed concerns about this approach:

Many people said that they did not like to receive 'tick-box' questionnaires about a wide variety of issues. The reasons given for this ranged from feeling that their opinions were not being asked at a sufficiently detailed level for them to say what they really wanted, to not believing that the responses really made much difference to the Council (Case Study Authority, 2004).

In response to this, the programme changed in 2004, as described previously. There were two key rationales for the revised programme, firstly that it would

provide panellists with more of an input into what they are consulted on and secondly that they could look at issues in a little more detail. The RCCT would also work with council services with a view to ensuring that the consultation findings feed into the decision-making processes of the council.

The revised programme has also created difficulties, however. Firstly, there is a need to reconcile respondent priorities with council priorities to ensure that services can utilise the information or take action on the results. Thus the council determines the themes included on the Priority Issues Survey (which directs the Summer Survey) on the basis of the Annual Residents Survey matched up with council priorities. One of the interviewees felt that determining the survey programme on this basis excluded more specialist services from input, for example Adult Services. Secondly, there is a limited range of general issues that people tend to feel are priorities (e.g. young people, clean streets, community safety) and these priorities do not seem to change much. A further issue, in some ways relates back to topic saliency, discussed in chapter four. By concentrating on only one issue in discussion groups and the Summer Survey, it risks non-response amongst those people who are not interested in that issue. Certainly the Summer Survey has received higher levels of non-response than the other surveys (as illustrated previously), but it is not clear whether this might be due to the time of year, the focus on one issue or other factors.

There is often a reluctance or inability from officers to provide feedback or attend feedback meetings and the provision of feedback is sometimes poor

quality. One example is when the panel was consulted as part of an Overview and Scrutiny Review in 2004 and although Cabinet approved the recommendations, no action was taken on them. Another example is when an officer who consulted with the panel subsequently left the council. A further example is from a consultation in 2004 which did not result in action until 2007 due to lack of funding by which time many panellists who had participated had left the panel. Echoing issues raised in chapter four, difficulties are also often borne out of more strategic consultations where specific improvements are not always immediately tangible, for example on the housing or climate change strategies. Indeed there is a crucial tension between the need to provide panellists with timely feedback on how their views have been used and resulting changes to service provision or decision-making when often such changes take many years to come about. In terms of some surveys, this may result in feedback which is often more about linking what is currently happening with respect to issues raised rather than actions taken as a direct result of the consultation. It comprises of, 'what you said' and 'what are we doing about this' type sections and is very much about improving people's knowledge and awareness. During the interviews, one interviewee was concerned that the feedback provided should be about actions taken or not taken and reasons why, acknowledging that this may take up to three years but that it is better than feedback provided after six months which is often about a document that has been produced 'feedback is a lot of paperwork ... a nicety, it doesn't mean much'.



Following on from this, there is some reluctance to share power or control with the general public. The 2007 Community Strategy Consultation is such an example, as highlighted previously. A further example is the 2007 State of the City Debate where the format was changed to give the council more control over the event. People could not ask questions on the night and instead had to submit them in advance. This enabled the debate to focus on 'bigger' issues that were relevant to everyone and avoided concentrating on very specific issues which could not always be answered fully. It was criticised however as it did not permit any kind of audience participation or debate. Another issue with events such as this, where other stakeholders are also invited, is that they may be held at times or venues to suit the needs of others rather than panellists.

A further challenge comes from the panellists themselves. Some panellists come along to events or complete questionnaires with one very specific issue of concern in mind or their own agenda, irrespective of the issue being consulted on. For example, one of the interviewees felt that a panellist was using a consultation event to promote the views of a political group. At other events, people have tried to dominate discussions with their own very specific, individual issues, for example at the State of the City Debate and public transport feedback sessions. The panel helpline is also frequently used as a complaints mechanism.

Panellists have in the past been asked some broad perception questions of their experience on the panel, the results of which are shown in Table 13. As

can be noted, perceptions have improved somewhat since the first evaluation in 2003. There is however clearly progress to be made around demonstrating that the council is listening to panellists and feeding this information into decision-making, although where they can be compared, the figures are more positive than those obtained from the Annual Residents' Survey (Ipsos MORI, 2007a), as provided on page 116.

<b>Table 13</b>				
<b>Panellists perceptions of the citizens panel – 2003-2005</b>				
<b>As a member of [the panel]:</b>		<b>2005 %</b>	<b>2004 %</b>	<b>2003 %</b>
	Base:	1258	955	457
I feel like the council is asking for my views	Agree	92	90	83
	Disagree	6	3	5
	<b>Net</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>78</b>
I feel like the council is listening to my views	Agree	67	61	49
	Disagree	22	14	16
	<b>Net</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>33</b>
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]	Agree	73	67	66
	Disagree	16	8	9
	<b>Net</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>57</b>
I know more about what is going on in [the city]	Agree	82	81	65
	Disagree	14	5	9
	<b>Net</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>56</b>

Interviewees were asked how the lack of officer understanding could be tackled and how the panel could better meet the needs of panellists and users. A number of suggestions focused on education and awareness raising amongst officers, some interviewees proposed awareness raising sessions for directorates and managers and others suggested conditions of use, guidance or terms of reference type documents. One interviewee felt that cascading information via Heads of Service did not work and suggested that information could be included with payslips for example. Some interviewees spoke of the importance of improving officer understanding that people are giving up their

time and need to see the value of participating. There were also a number of suggestions around a more planned approach and the possibility of linking in with a consultation plan. One interviewee went on to say that a business case approach should be used where officers would have to justify why they wanted to use the panel and another suggested there could be a service agreement for use of the panel. There was also a suggestion that the LSP thematic partnerships could be asked to prioritise their needs, agree jointly then roll together. In terms of determining issues to be looked at, one interviewee felt that the panel should have the opportunity to debate on priorities and criticised the 2007 Community Strategy Consultation where the priorities were already determined, stating that Members priorities are not necessarily the same as those of the general public. Another felt that the focus had to be on corporate priorities and that other issues could be picked up via different mechanisms, for example area committees (if the structures were adjusted).

In terms of encouraging good practice, one interviewee felt that officers could replicate large national consultation events. Another interviewee extolled the virtues of face-to-face consultation and the scope for it to build trust and confidence between officers and the general public. Events such as the budget consultation workshops offer such opportunities and are received positively by panellists. The RCCT do however observe reluctance from some officers to such face-to-face interaction. Another interviewee suggested that consultations that are turned down by the RCCT could be analysed to see if there is another way that they can be handled.

### **Benefits and the future of the panel**

The final section considers any benefits of the panel and the future role it might play that have not already been addressed in previous sections.

For a number of interviewees a key benefit is that the panel is a *'ready made'*, accessible resource which can obtain the views from a large cross-section of people. Some interviewees acknowledged difficulties in getting people involved otherwise, echoed by other panel users, and two interviewees saw the panel as a *'comfort'*, for example, *"if all else fails we wouldn't be able to consult"*. The consequences of not having a panel varied amongst interviewees and the extent to which they used the panel, although two interviewees whose use of the panel was limited, indicated that they would like to make greater use of the panel. The greatest impact would be felt at the corporate centre, reflecting the panel's use on the budget consultation and Community Strategy, for example. Indeed the panel's role in the budget consultation was identified to be key by some interviewees. The consensus amongst all however, was that the panel was a valuable resource and had a future role to play.

Many suggestions for the future role of the panel closely reflect the issues emerging from the White Paper (DCLG, 2006). The large number of people in each regeneration area and area analysis was perceived to be a benefit by some. A number of interviewees deemed this to be crucial in the context of developing area arrangements. Some foresaw a role for the panel in service design and delivery, one interviewee suggesting area management groups

where panellists would be able to purchase and commission additional services on a small scale for each area and review whether things are improving as a result. Another interviewee saw the importance of involving panellists in more than one stage of the process, suggesting that they have a role to play in reviewing the impact on service provision. Some interviewees felt that it was important that the panel empowers people and builds skills and confidence and some felt that there should be more around meetings, focus groups and local forums. Others identified the need to work more closely with partners in using the panel and co-ordinating with other mechanisms and one interviewee suggested joining up panels on a city-region basis. One interviewee felt that the panel programme could reflect Overview and Scrutiny.

In terms of other possible benefits and avenues for the panel, some interviewees identified cost effectiveness to be a benefit of the panel and one believed that this would be crucial over the next five years. This however depends on the perspective that officers are coming from, departments are not charged to use the panel if their consultation is part of the core programme but they are charged for time and costs for adhoc requests to use the panel. Others believed that more could be done around categorising or segmenting the panel to generate a greater understanding of panellists and consultation findings and to enable more targeted consultation. Mystery shopping was also identified as a possible role for panellists. One interviewee felt the additional comments on surveys to be particularly useful and thought that more detailed analysis would be helpful. Another believed that the panel would have a statutory role and one interviewee felt that there should more

linkages between the panel and Elected Members. Finally one interviewee believed that the one thing that would guarantee the future of the panel would be that it influences decision-making and is 'taken on board' by directors. Indeed, this could be said of consultation per se.

## **Conclusions**

It is clear that many of the tensions identified in chapter three are also apparent at the case study authority as are the motivations for establishing a citizens' panel and issues in managing the panel discussed in chapter four. The case study builds upon this knowledge and brings it up to date in terms of the new policy context under which local authorities will be operating. Following on from the issues identified here and to further build upon this knowledge, chapter six presents the findings of a survey with panellists to investigate their expectations and perceptions of the panel and explore how the panel could be improved from a panellist perspective, addressing research objective three.

# Chapter Six – Panellist survey

## Introduction

Having considered government expectations, citizens' panels in general, the views of panel users and issues faced in managing the panel, it is important now to understand in more detail the expectations and perceptions of panellists themselves. A survey was undertaken with panellists during November 2006, as described in chapter two. To recap, there were two versions of the survey, one for current panellists (who joined in 2004, 2005 and earlier in 2006) and one for new panellists (those who had just joined the panel in September 2006). Questionnaire extracts are included in Appendix 1.

This chapter presents the findings from the survey and in doing so considers each of the objectives (page 8-9). Firstly the chapter considers new panellists' opinions of the council and local area compared to those of the general population and current panellists in order to see if any differences exist and to potentially provide important clues as to why people join the panel and whether their views change as a result of being on the panel. The chapter then looks in more detail at panellists' motivations for joining the panel and their expectations of the panel. It also examines panellists' experiences of the panel in terms of key outcomes and more operational aspects in addition to how the panel can be improved. Finally, with issues of non-response in mind, it investigates what impact specific interventions might have in encouraging panellists to participate in surveys more often.

All panellists were contacted to take part in the surveys and this first section outlines the profile of survey respondents and compares them with the profile of panellists.

## **Profile of respondents**

### **Current panellist survey**

This survey was sent to 1551 panellists, 82 of whom attrited. Seven hundred and fifty-one of the remaining panellists responded representing a response rate of 51.1%. Five hundred and sixty panellists (74.6%) took part by telephone and the remaining 191 (25.4%) took part by post (including on-line).

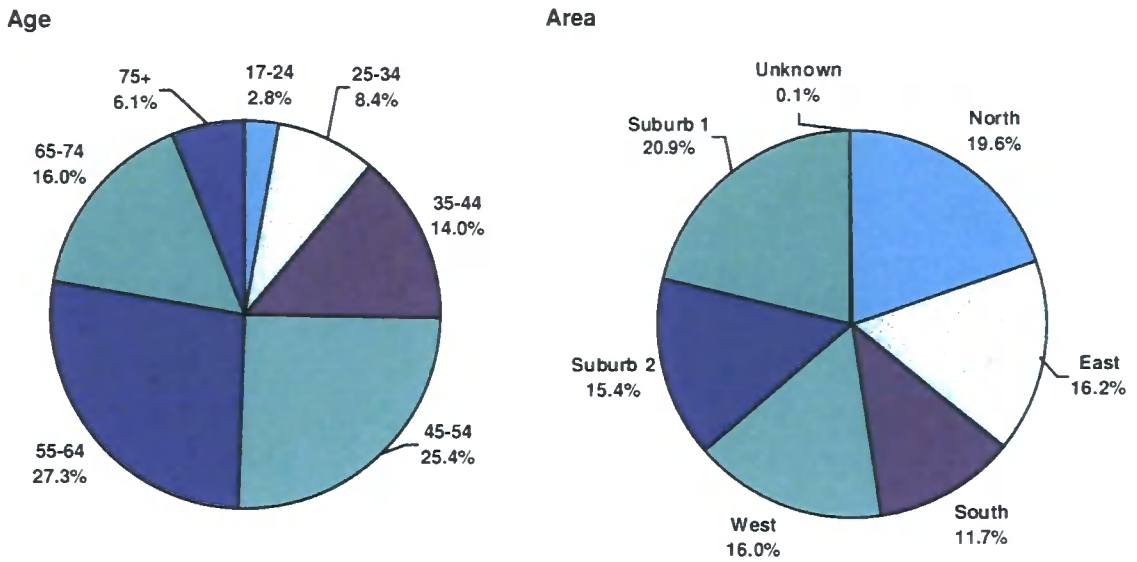
The profile of respondents is as follows:

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Disability</b>	
Male	47%	Yes	16.2%
Female	52.9%	No	83.6%
Unknown	0.1%	Unknown	0.1%



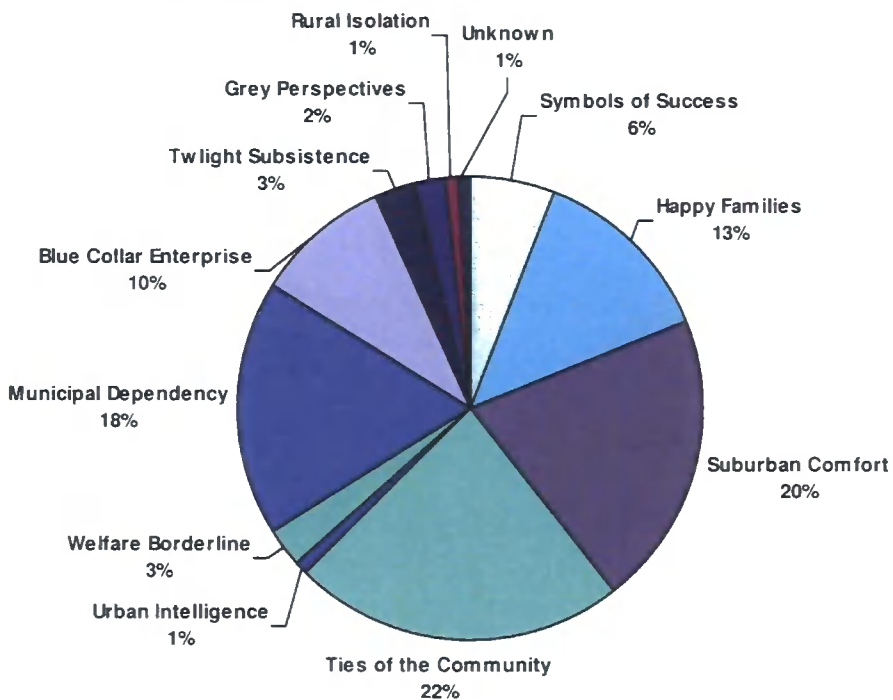
**Figure 3**

**Age and area profile of current panellist survey respondents**



**Figure 4**

**Mosaic profile of current panellist survey respondents**



For an explanation of Mosaic categories see reference Experian (2004).

Appendix 11 (Table 1) compares the profile of respondents with the profile of panellists as at November 2006 (after attrition from the survey) on key attributes. Respondents are over-represented in the 45+ age groups and under-represented in the 18-34 age groups. There are slightly more male and disabled respondents than in the panel overall and panellists who joined in 2004 and 2005 are over-represented, mainly due to the large under-representation of those panellists who joined via street interviews etc in 2006 (as discussed in chapter five). The area and Mosaic profiles are broadly similar to the panel profile with the exception of those from Municipal Dependency who are under-represented and Suburban Comfort who are over-represented (descriptions included in Appendix 10).

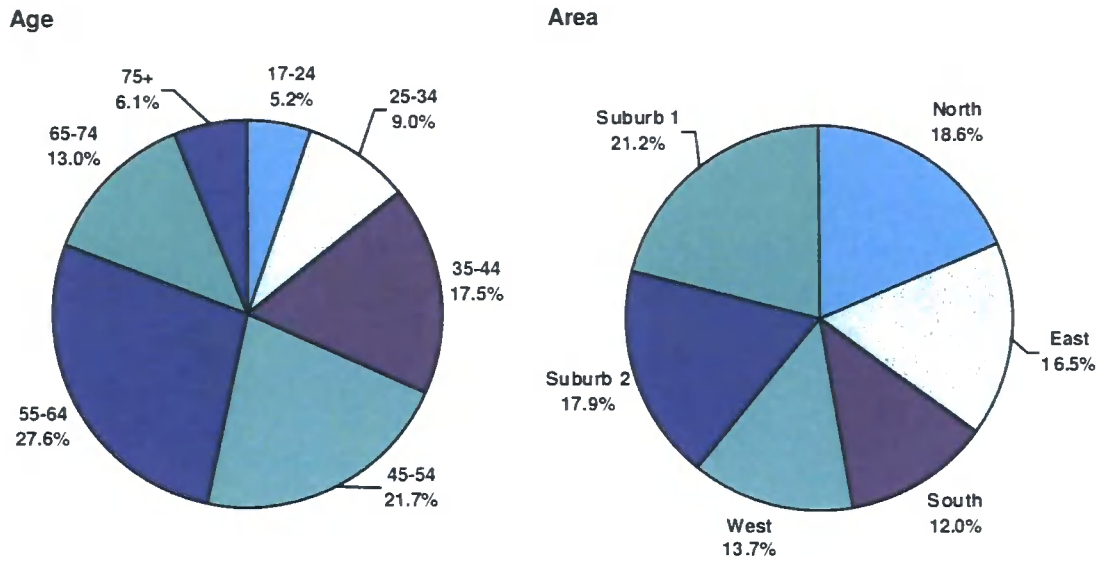
### **New panellist survey**

This survey was sent to 566 new panellists, 13 of whom attrited. Four hundred and twenty-four of the remaining panellists responded representing a response rate of 76.7%. Two hundred and fifty new panellists (59.0%) took part by telephone and the remaining 174 (41.0%) took part by post (including on-line). The profile of respondents is as follows:

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Disability</b>	
Male	48.8%	Yes	18.4%
Female	51.2%	No	81.6%

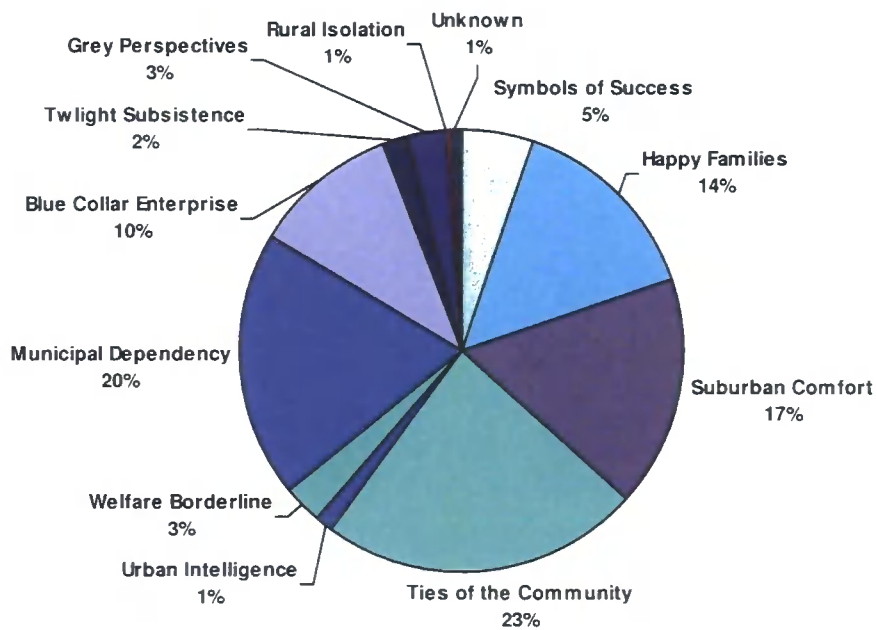
**Figure 5**

Age and area profile of new panellist survey respondents



**Figure 6**

Mosaic profile of new panellist survey respondents



Appendix 11 (Table 2) compares the profile of respondents with the profile of new panellists as at November 2006 (after attrition from the survey) on key attributes. As can be noted, the profile of respondents is quite close to that of new panellists

### **Further analysis**

When bivariate analysis was undertaken it was apparent that there were an insufficient number of respondents in the youngest and oldest age categories to allow for reliable analysis and some age groups needed to be combined. This resulted in 17-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds being combined and the 75+ age group being omitted from analysis by age. There were also an insufficient number of respondents in some of the eleven Experian Mosaic groups to make reliable comparisons and some groups needed to be combined. Three groups were formed in terms of affluence (Affluent, Mid and Not Affluent). The basis on which age and Mosaic groups were re-categorised is included in Appendix 12.

It should be acknowledged, however, that grouping age and Mosaic categories together in this way is not ideal and may mask differences between some of the some sub-groups.

## Perceptions of the case study authority and local area

### Comparison of perceptions between new panellists and the general population

It was shown in chapter five that panellists and in particular those who respond to panel surveys have a different demographic profile to the city population. Commentators suggest that people who agree to join panels may also have different interests and opinions from the general population and Wilson (2002)<sup>1</sup> argues that panellists are usually 'more pro-public service', as outlined in chapter four. Interviewees at the council were also concerned about the motivations of panellists. In order to investigate this further, four questions were replicated from the Annual Residents' Survey questionnaire (Ipsos MORI, 2006a)<sup>2</sup> and the results from the survey (Ipsos MORI, 2007a) were compared with the attitudes of new panellists, who have just joined the panel and therefore not been exposed to panel activity so far.

Figures 7 and 8 present comparisons of satisfaction with the local authority and the local area. The figures show statistically significant differences between the views of new panellists and respondents to the Annual Residents' Survey ( $p < 0.01$  in both instances). New panellists are less positive towards the council and local area, contrary to Wilson's (2002) observations.

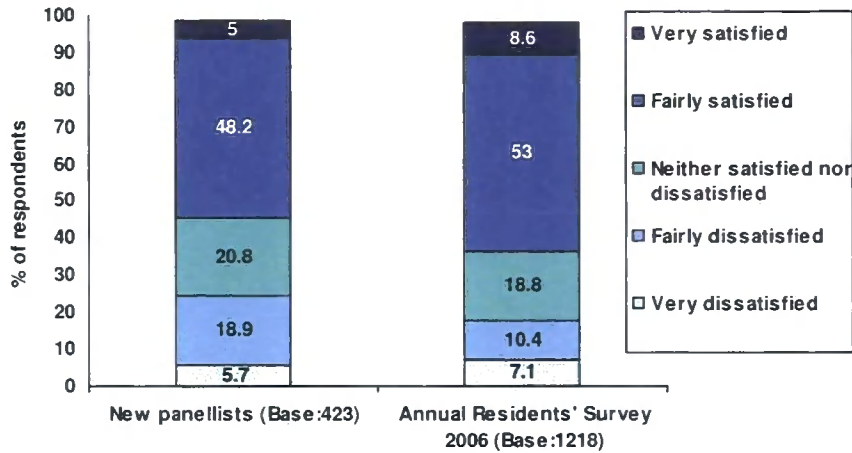
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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.laria.gov.uk/news\\_f.htm](http://www.laria.gov.uk/news_f.htm) laria news issue 68

<sup>2</sup> A face-to face survey conducted between 4 September and 31 October 2006. The survey is structured to be demographically representative of the city population and weighted accordingly.

**Figure 7**

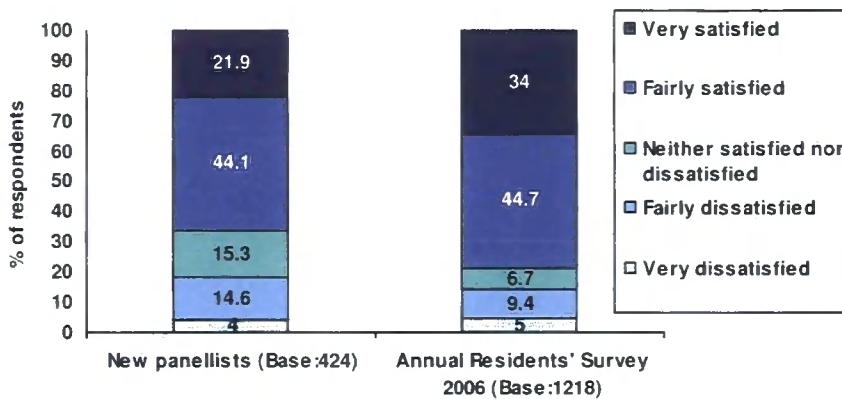
Satisfaction with the council – Comparisons between new panellists and 2006 Annual Residents Survey respondents



N.B. Don't knows not shown

**Figure 8**

Satisfaction with the local area – Comparisons between new panellists and 2006 Annual Residents Survey respondents



N.B. Don't knows not shown

It is however difficult to ascertain whether or not they represent real differences in attitudes since it is possible that they are confounded by other factors. For example, the Annual Residents' Survey is structured to be

representative in terms of the city population and weighted<sup>3</sup> accordingly so the respondent profile is different to that of new panellists responding to this survey. One example is with respect to age ( $p < 0.01$ ). There are somewhat fewer new panellists aged 34 and under ( $p < 0.01$ ) and somewhat more aged 45-64 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The possible implications of this can perhaps be exemplified in terms of satisfaction with the council across different age groups. The Annual Residents' Survey<sup>4</sup> reports that Under 24's are statistically more positive than the whole sample about the council and those aged 55-64 and 65+ are statistically less positive. If we consider that the panel is somewhat under-represented by under 24's and somewhat over-represented by 55-64's, this could be negatively affecting satisfaction amongst panellists.

Another factor to consider is that the Annual Residents' survey was conducted as a face-to-face survey and the survey with new panellists was mixed-mode (59% telephone, 41% postal). Dillman (2000) highlights various studies where differences in responses have been observed according to the mode used, although findings are inconsistent in terms of the extent to which differences may occur and reason for their occurrence. One pertinent example he cites is studies where telephone and face-to-face respondents were less likely to report community issues to be a problem than mail questionnaire respondents and he suggests that:

it is plausible that ... people are invested in their neighbourhood or community and are predisposed to put this environment in a positive light when interacting with an outsider (the interviewer)' (Dillman, 2000:231).

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<sup>3</sup> The data were weighted by age and gender to the 2001 Census data, as well as by work status and area to reflect the structure and distribution of the population (Ipsos-MORI, 2006:2). The weighted and unweighted bases are both 1218.

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from data tables (Ipsos MORI, 2006b:1)

In order to find out whether there were differences in responses according to mode, the results were broken out by postal and telephone respondents and compared as shown in the first two bars in Figures 9 and 10. Comparison<sup>5</sup> shows that there are statistically significant differences in terms of perceptions of the council ( $p=0.12$ ) and local area ( $p<0.01$ ) and postal respondents appear to be less positive than telephone respondents. Such variations cannot be attributed to any known significant differences in demographic profile between postal and telephone respondents (as illustrated in Appendix 13, Table 1) and this would therefore seem to provide some support for the notion that responses differ by mode used and Dillman's proposition.

In an attempt to counteract the effects of such mode differences, the views of telephone respondents were compared to Annual Resident's Survey face-to-face respondents and postal respondents compared to postal respondents from the BVPI General Survey<sup>6</sup>, also included in Figures 9 and 10.

In terms of satisfaction with the council, the views of telephone respondents differ statistically ( $p<0.01$ ) from those of respondents to the Annual Resident's Survey and telephone respondents are more negative. There are not however statistically significant differences in responses with respect to the local area. When postal survey respondents are compared with postal respondents from the BVPI General Survey, there are statistically significant

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<sup>5</sup> Including don't know and neither categories.

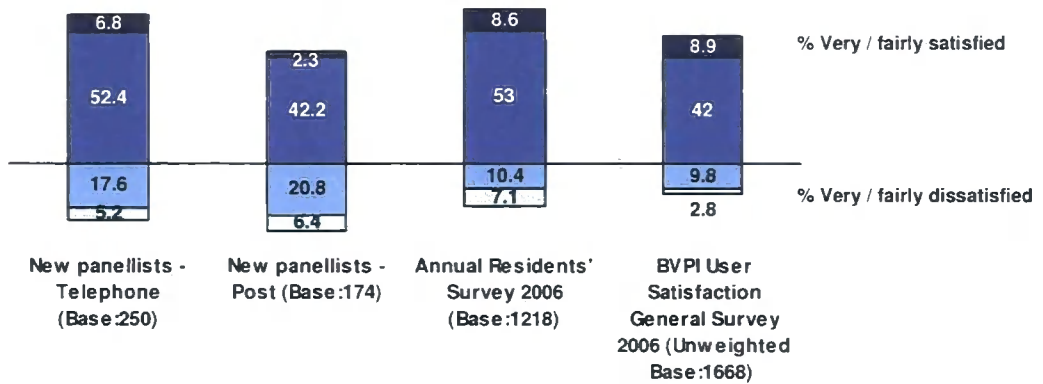
<sup>6</sup> A postal survey sent out to 5000 households randomly selected from the PAF with fieldwork between 27 September and 8 December 2006. The wording differed slightly and was as follows "Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the Council runs things?" and "Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?" and don't know was not an option. This data was also weighted.



differences in responses in terms of perceptions of the council ( $p < 0.01$ ) and local area ( $p < 0.01$ ) and it would seem that panellists are again more negative.

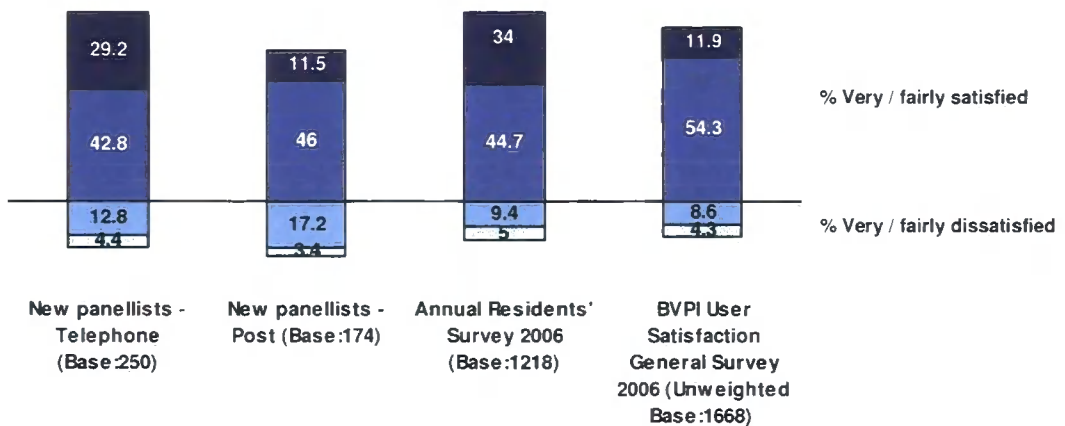
**Figure 9**

Satisfaction with the council – Comparisons between new panellists (by mode of response), 2006 Annual Residents Survey respondents and BVPI User Satisfaction General Survey respondents



**Figure 10**

Satisfaction with the local area – Comparisons between new panellists (by mode of response), 2006 Annual Residents Survey respondents and BVPI User Satisfaction General Survey respondents



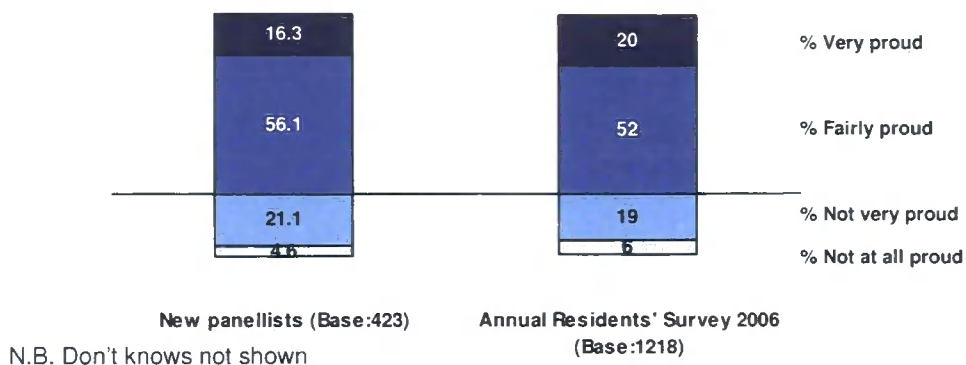
N.B. Don't know and neither categories not shown

On balance it would seem that panellists are less positive than the general population about the council and local area, contrary to Wilson's observations and this could support studies that indicate that active participation can be an indicator of dissatisfaction (as outlined in chapter three), although it is difficult to say for certain due to differences in methodology and sample profile when making comparisons.

Respondents' were also asked about the extent to which they feel proud of the area and results compared with the Annual Residents' survey, as shown in Figure 11. The results do not differ significantly between the two groups.

**Figure 11**

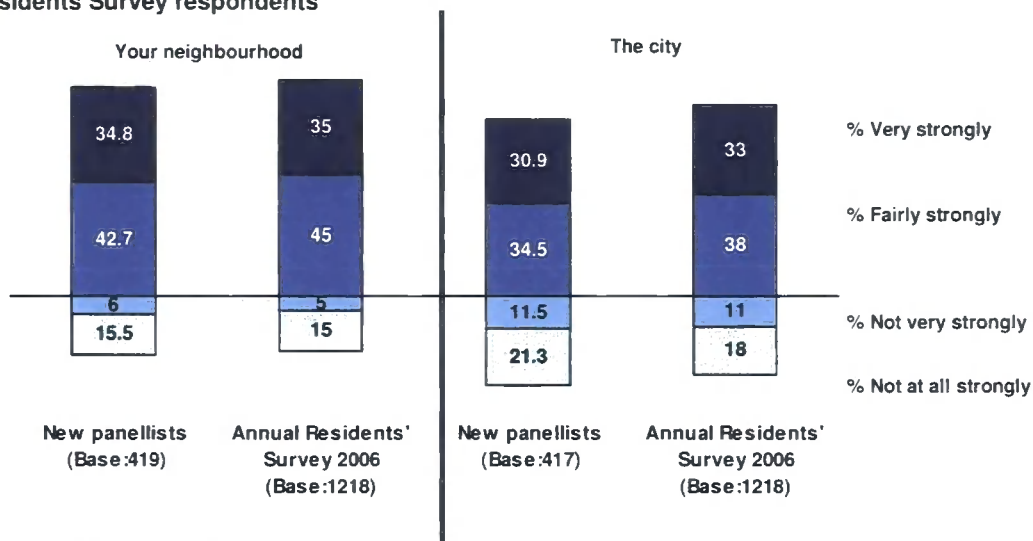
**Pride in the area – Comparisons between new panellists and 2006 Annual Residents Survey respondents**



Results were also compared in terms of the extent to which residents feel they belong to their local neighbourhood and city, as shown in Figure 12. Again the results from do not differ significantly for the two surveys.

**Figure 12**

**Perceptions of belonging – Comparisons between new panellists and 2006 Annual Residents Survey respondents**



N.B. Don't knows not shown

Given previous findings, it is useful to disaggregate these results by post and telephone. Table 14 presents summary results. As with questions about the local area and council, telephone respondents are statistically more positive than postal respondents in terms of how proud they feel ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the extent to which they feel they belong to their neighbourhood ( $p < 0.01$ ) and city ( $p < 0.01$ ). As outlined previously such variations cannot be attributed to any known significant differences in demographic profile between postal and telephone respondents.

When telephone respondents are compared to Annual Residents' survey respondents, there are no differences and there is no basis on which postal respondents can be compared. It would therefore seem that panellists do not differ from the general population in terms of pride and sense of belonging but it is difficult to draw any overall conclusions.

<b>Table 14</b>			
<b>Perceptions of pride and belonging – Comparisons between new panellists (by mode of response) and 2006 Annual Residents Survey respondents</b>			
	New panellists		Annual Residents' Survey (2006)
	Tel.	Post	Face to Face
<b>Taking everything into account, how would you describe your overall attitude towards the [authority] area? Would you say you feel ....?</b>			
Base:	246	171	1218
	%	%	%
Very/fairly proud of [city]	78.4	63.8	72
Not very/not at all proud of [city]	20.4	33.3	25
<b>How strongly do you feel you belong to your neighbourhood?</b>			
Base:	246	173	1218
	%	%	%
Very/fairly strongly	82.3	69.9	80
Not very/not at all strongly	17.1	27.8	20
<b>How strongly do you feel you belong to [the city]?</b>			
Base:	246	171	1218
	%	%	%
Very/fairly strongly	73.2	54.4	71
Not very/not at all strongly	25.6	33.2	29

N.B. Don't knows not shown

### **Comparison of perceptions between new and current panellists**

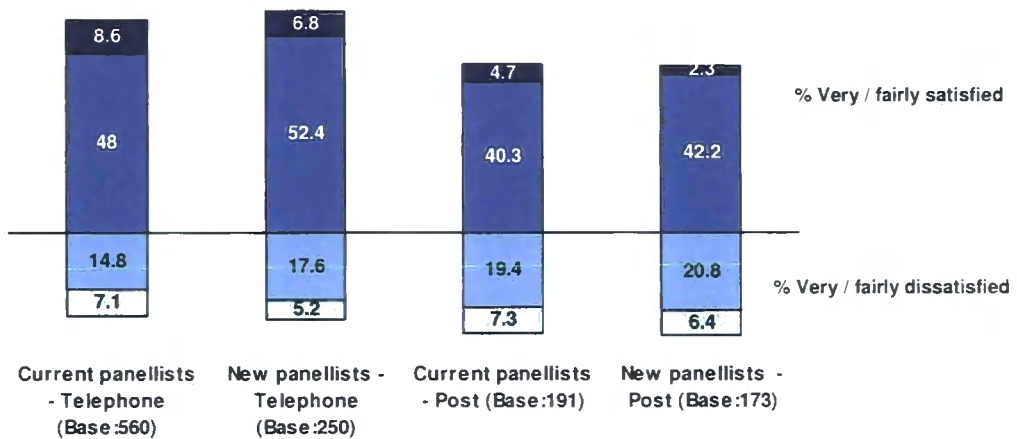
Some commentators argue that panellists may become more sympathetic to the council and council issues when they are on a panel, as discussed in chapter four. Current panellists were therefore also asked about their satisfaction with the council and the local area and the results compared with those of new panellists<sup>7</sup>. When the overall results are compared there are no significant differences in responses with respect to either measure. Given previous concerns over differences in results according to mode used however and the fact that a lower proportion of new panellists took part by telephone than current panellists (59.0% compared to 74.6% respectively), the results were broken down by mode used and compared in this way (as

<sup>7</sup> Non response bias should be taken into consideration when comparing the views of current and new panellists. Non-response amongst current panellists was higher at 48.9% compared to 23.3% for new panellists.

shown in Figures 13 and 14). Again there are no significant differences between new and current telephone respondents and no differences between new and current postal respondents in terms of satisfaction with the council and local area. Therefore there is no evidence to suggest that current panellists are more positive than new panellists about these issues, as previously suggested in chapter four.

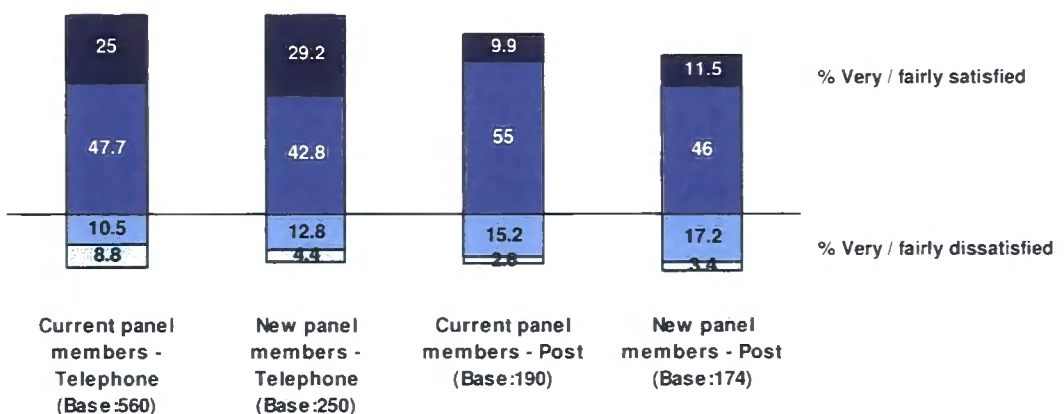
**Figure 13**

**Satisfaction with the council – Comparisons between new and current panellists (by mode of response)**



**Figure 14**

**Satisfaction with the local area – Comparisons between new and current panellists (by mode of response)**



N.B. Don't know and neither categories not shown

To conclude this section then, it would seem that overall panellists tend to be less positive about the council and the local area and that they do not become any more positive the longer they are on the panel. Perhaps a more useful way of measuring this, however, would be to ask these questions of new panellists when they join the panel and again when they leave the panel to see if their perceptions have changed on an individual basis, and if so how.

## **Motivations for joining the panel**

In order to find out panellists' motivations for joining and expectations of the panel, they were asked to say in their own words why they had joined. Seven hundred and forty-three current panellists and 417 new panellists responded<sup>8</sup>. Once categorised, the majority of responses fall into the following groups:

### **To be have a say/be heard**

One of the main reasons for joining the panel was the opportunity for panellists to put their views across or have their voice heard, either in general, on specific issues or on behalf of particular groups of people (40.1% current panellists and 37.9% new panellists). Below is a flavour of responses given:

*For putting our points of view forward and hoping it will be listened to and taken notice of.*

*So somebody could hear what I have to say. I feel I have a voice.*

*I want to be a voice for myself and my neighbours.*

---

<sup>8</sup> Percentages are based on these bases.

### **To help/contribute to the area/community**

A number of panellists joined for altruistic, community minded reasons (21.1% current panellists and 19.4% new panellists). They include helping to improve their local area for the benefit of all, to get more involved in the community, because they care for their area and to help or give something back to the community. For example:

*To feel as though I was helping my local community and putting a bit back in as well as getting something out.*

*Because I think I love the city I live in and if there is anything I could do about being involved and helping the city as much as I can, I will.*

*I hoped my thoughts and ideas might make a difference to the community and vastly improve the area I now live in.*

### **To improve knowledge/understanding**

Many panellists believed that joining the panel would help them to learn more about the council, how it makes decisions and spends money and find out more about what is happening in the city (16.6% current panellists and 18.9% new panellists). For example:

*To learn more about what the council actually do, how they spend money and the problems they have with budget. It's easy to complain when you don't know the whole picture.*

*I thought it would be a way of keeping up with what was happening in the area and with what the council does.*

### **Civic right/responsibility**

There is also a viewpoint that it is a right or responsibility of local people to join the panel and that people should not complain if they are not prepared to take part (8.9% current panellists and 12.0% new panellists). For example:

*I felt it was a civic duty. I am hoping it will make a difference. I don't think people should complain if they can't try and do something about it.*

*It's very important that the public have a say in the running of their area.*

### **To influence/change council decision making/services**

Some respondents also joined so that they might change or influence the way in which the council is run, council decision making, spending or services (8.5% current panellists and 8.2% new panellists).

*I wanted the city council to know what my opinions on their services were and therefore try to influence the council's spending.*

*My opinions may help to guide decision makers on the majority feelings, making major decisions sensible.*

And there were additionally 11.3% of new panellists and 5.8% of current panellists who wanted to make a difference or changes but did not specify in relation to what.

It is useful to consider whether the fact that respondents appear to be less satisfied than the general population with the council and local area is



apparent in their motivations for joining the panel. Only a small proportion of respondents (3.1% new and 2.0% current) explicitly state that they joined the panel because they are dissatisfied with the council or local area, although a number of respondents did join the panel to help improve their local area, council services or decision making.

## **Expectations and experience of the panel**

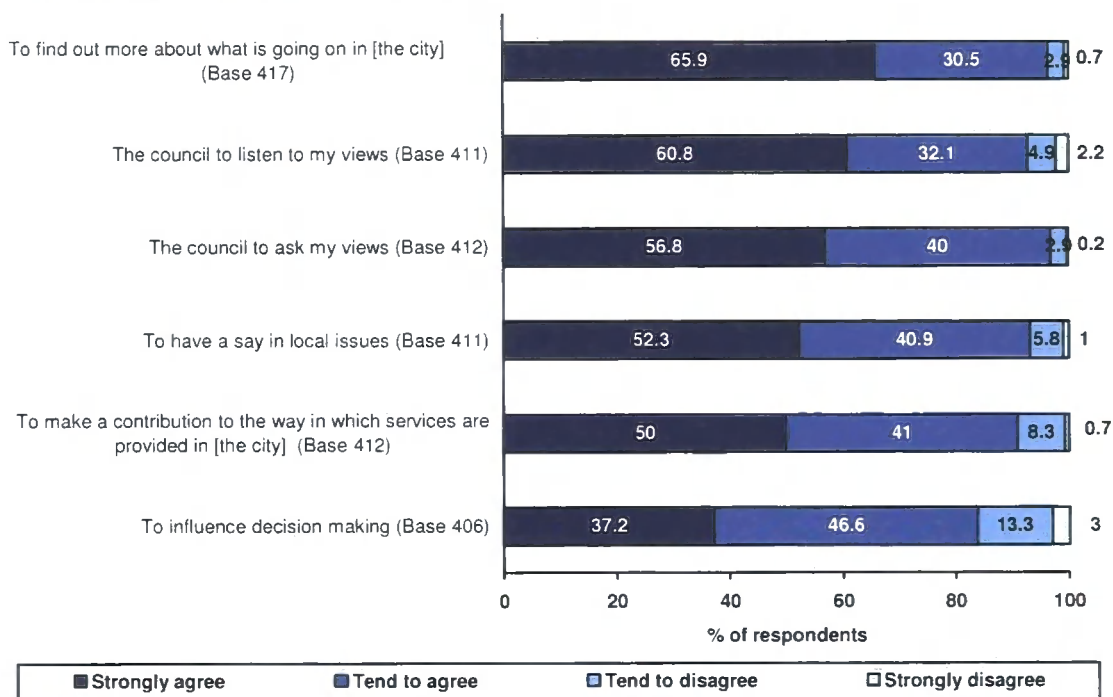
### **The six outcomes**

Both sets of panellists were asked about their expectations of the panel in terms of six outcomes, current members retrospectively and new members prior to their participation in the panel. Current panellists were additionally asked to what extent these outcomes had occurred.

Figure 15 illustrates the expectations of new panellists. As can be noted, virtually all respondents expect that each of the outcomes will occur. The outcome respondents most strongly agree with is that they expect to **find out more about what is going on in [the city]**. As previously this was a popular theme arising when respondents were asked to describe in their own words why they had joined the panel. This is not specifically promoted in the promotional literature but it is interesting given the discussion in chapter four regarding the dilemma between ensuring that panellists are kept informed and the risks of conditioning. It also perhaps supports the current practice of aiming to improve panellists' knowledge, understanding and awareness through feedback and events. The outcome to which respondents are least likely to strongly agree is **to influence decision-making**.

**Figure 15**

**Expectations of new panellists in terms of six outcomes**



N.B. Don't knows are excluded from analysis

It would perhaps be useful to ask these panellists their experiences on these outcomes when they leave the panel so that comparisons can be made with expectations at an individual level.

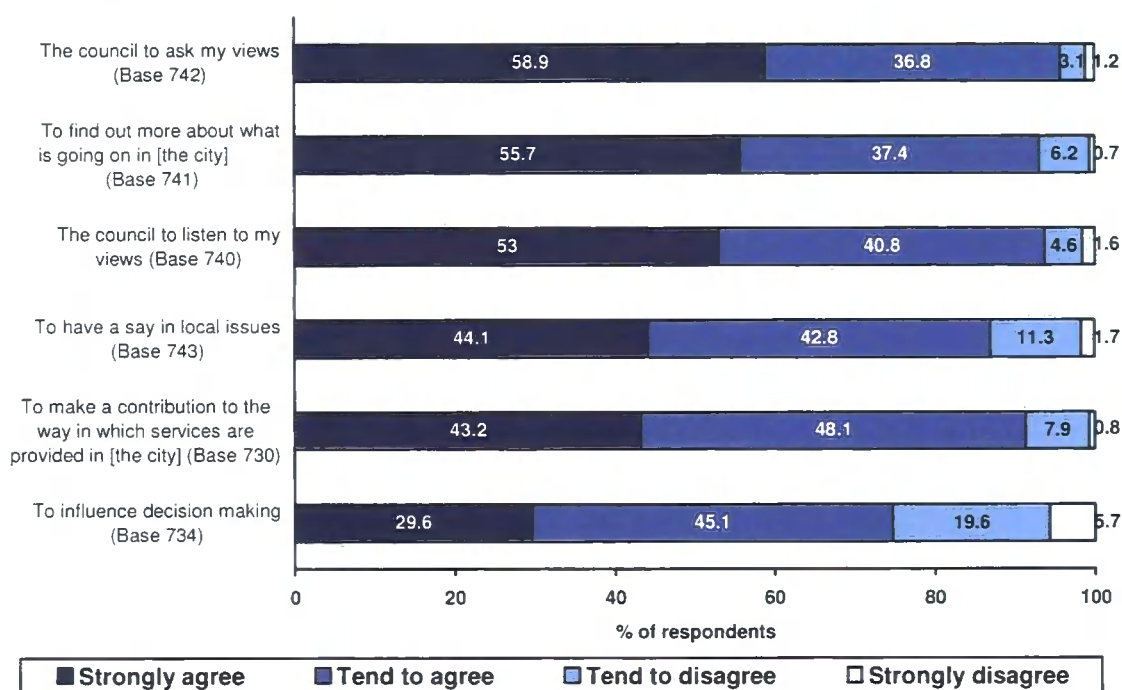
New panellists were additionally asked what they think being a panellist will involve and 406 panellists responded. Responses tended to fall into two main groups. They were either task orientated, for example, completing questionnaires and attending meetings/events, or more outcome focused and similar to motivations for joining the panel, for example, influencing decisions and receiving information on what is happening/the council. The main responses given are shown in Table 15.

<b>Table 15</b> <b>New panellists expectations of what being a panellist will involve</b>	
To complete questionnaires	163 respondents
To be put views across/voice opinions	141 respondents
To attend meetings	99 respondents
To receive information about what is happening/the council	46 respondents
To influence/change council decision making/services	43 respondents
To improve area/life for people	28 respondents

Expectations of current panellists in terms of the six outcomes are shown in Figure 16. Again the majority of respondents expected that the six outcomes would be achieved and expectations are quite close to those of new panellists, despite the fact that they are answering this retrospectively.

**Figure 16**

**Expectations of current panellists in terms of six outcomes**



N.B. Don't knows are excluded from analysis.

There are however statistically significant differences in responses in terms of overall agreement, where current panellists are less positive in their expectations than new panellists, in terms of:

**To find out more about what is going on in [the city]**       $p=0.02$

**To have a say in local issues**       $p<0.01$

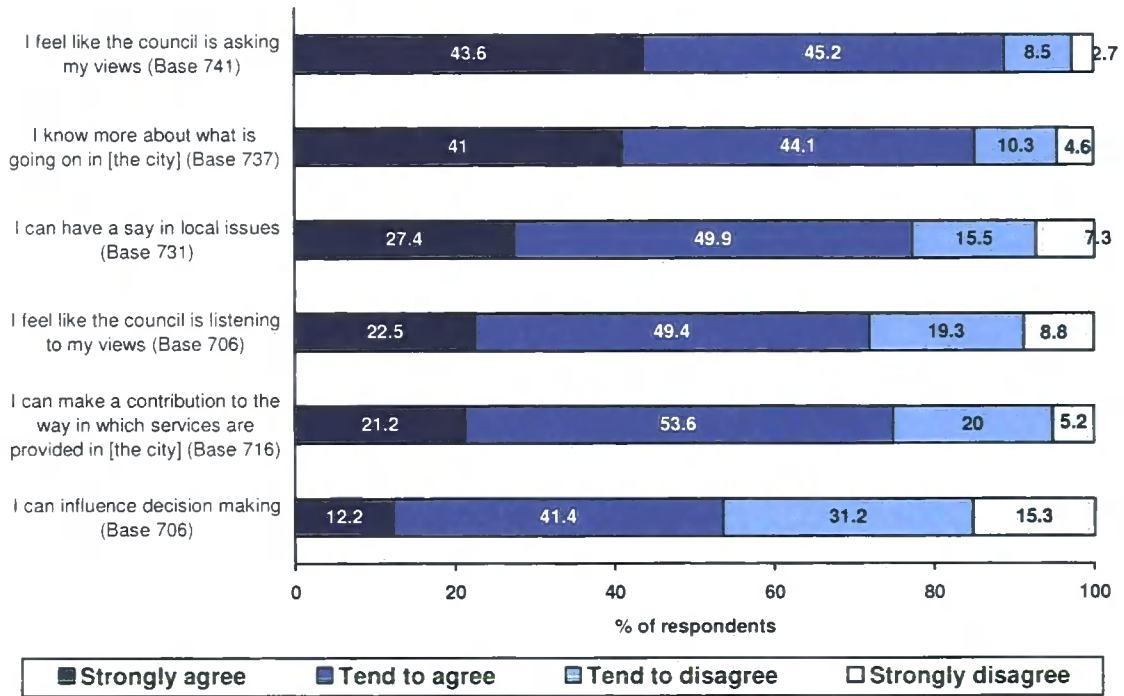
**To influence decision making**       $p<0.01$

This may be explained by the fact that they are answering retrospectively and their experiences are likely to affect their responses and indeed when analysis was undertaken to determine whether expectations on each outcome vary by experience, a statistically significant relationship was discovered for each outcome ( $p<0.01$ ). For example, in each instance the majority of respondents who strongly agree that they experienced an outcome, strongly agree that they expected the outcome. It is of course difficult to say to what extent experience has influenced expectations or expectations have influenced experience.

Figure 17 displays current panellists' experiences on the six outcomes. The majority in each instance agree with the outcomes and mirroring expectations, current panellists are most likely to agree with **I feel like the council is asking my views** and they are least positive about **influencing decision making**. Experiences are not however as positive as expectations as will be discussed on pages 173-175.

**Figure 17**

**Experience of the panel in terms of six outcomes – Current panellists**



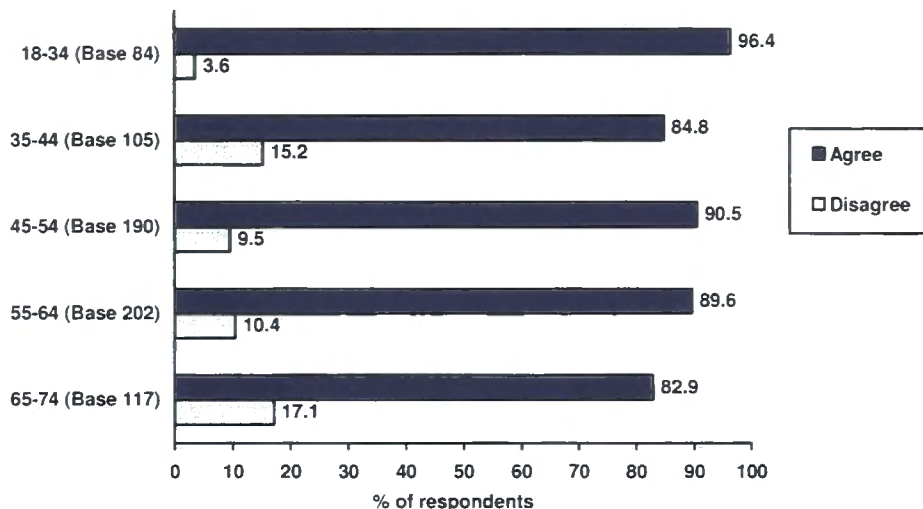
N.B. Don't knows are excluded from analysis.

When these experiences are compared across demographic sub groups, some differences can be observed as discussed next.

Whilst overall agreement is high across all age groups, experiences of **I feel like the council is asking my views**, vary by age ( $p=0.02$ ) as shown in Figure 18. Respondents aged 65-74 years are statistically less positive than other age groups ( $p=0.03$ ). They are also statistically less positive in their expectations of this outcome ( $p<0.01$ ) as shown in Table 16. Respondents aged 18-34 are statistically more positive on the other hand ( $p=0.02$ ).

**Figure 18**

Experiences of I feel like the council is asking my views by Age – Current panellists

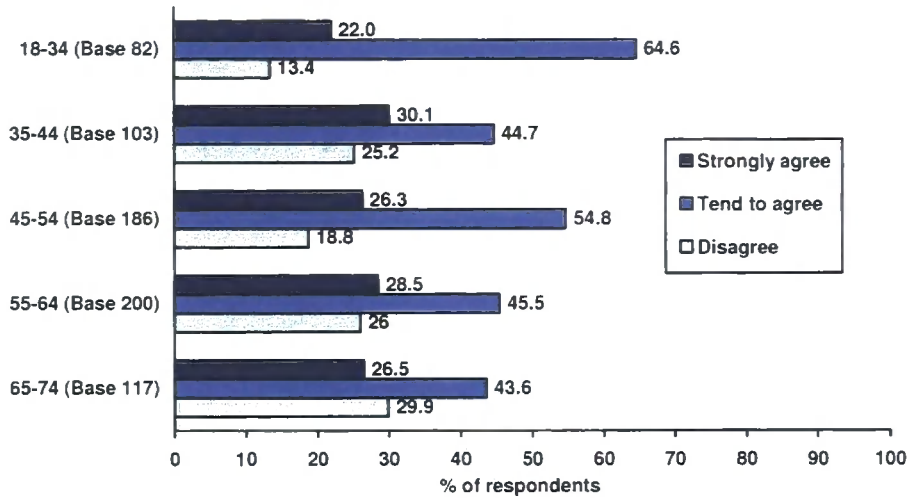


<b>Table 16</b> Expectations of I feel like the council is asking my views – 65-74 year olds (Current panellists)		
	65-74 year olds	Other age groups
Base:	120	577
<b>I expected the council is asking my views</b>		
Agree	86.7	97.4
Disagree	13.3	2.6

Respondents views also differ by age with respect to **I can have a say in local issues** ( $p=0.04$ ) and again respondents aged 18-34 are more positive about this than other age groups ( $p<0.01$ ), although levels of agreement are high across all age groups, as shown in Figure 19.

**Figure 19**

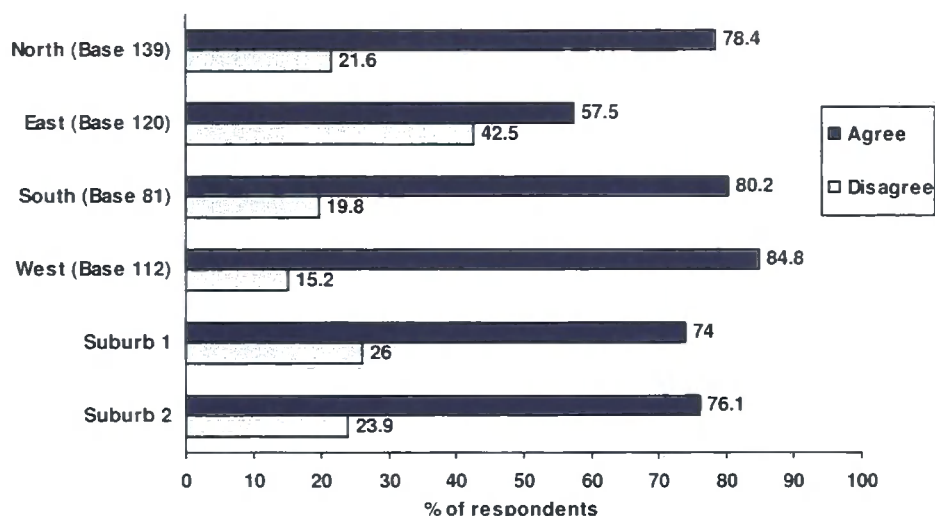
**Experiences of I can have a say in local issues by Age - Current panellists**



Analysis also revealed a difference by area in terms of **I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]** ( $p < 0.01$ ), as shown in Figure 20. As can be noted respondents from East are considerably more negative about this than those from other areas. They do not however differ significantly in their expectations of this outcome to other groups.

**Figure 20**

**Experiences of I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city] by Area - Current panellists**



On closer examination responses differ significantly across age groups in terms of those respondents living in East ( $p=0.05$ ) for this measure (Table 17) and 65-74 year olds are statistically more negative ( $p=0.04$ ) than other age groups from East (although base sizes are very small). There are no other apparent differences across demographic sub groups from East.

<b>Table 17</b>					
<b>Experiences of I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city] – Respondents from East by Age (Current panellists)</b>					
	<b>Respondents from East</b>				
	<b>18-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65-74</b>
Base:	17	20	31	22	19
<b>I can make a contribution towards the way in which services are provided in East</b>	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	82.4	45.0	61.3	63.6	36.8
Disagree	17.6	55.0	38.7	36.4	63.2

Additional analysis was undertaken with respondents from the East, firstly to establish whether there were any differences in their demographic profile compared to other groups but there were none. In the second instance analysis revealed that East respondents appear to be more negative about a



number of other aspects, illustrated in Table 18. The age dimension is not however apparent in these instances.

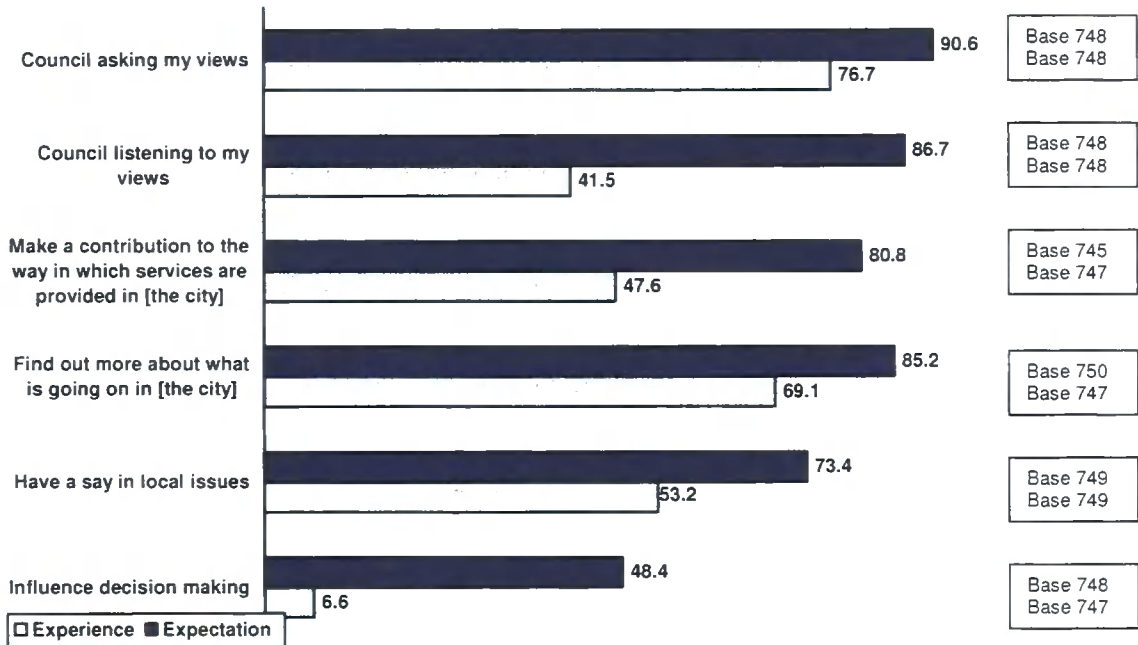
<b>Table 18</b>		
<b>Aspects to which respondents from East are more negative - Current panellists</b>		
	<b>East</b>	<b>Other areas</b>
<b>Satisfaction with the local area (p = 0.03)</b>		
Satisfied	70.8	80.4
Dissatisfied	29.2	19.6
<b>I feel like the council is listening to my views (p=&lt;0.01)</b>		
Agree	62.2	73.9
Disagree	37.8	26.1
<b>I can influence decision making (p=0.03)</b>		
Agree	44.4	55.3
Disagree	55.6	44.7
<b>Satisfaction with [the panel] (p=0.05)</b>		
Satisfied	87.6	92.9
Dissatisfied	12.4	7.1

Now turning back to experiences and expectations overall, Figure 21 compares net agreement scores<sup>1</sup> for expectations against experience on the six outcomes. It clearly shows that experiences fall short of expectations for current panellists, particularly with respect to the **council listening to my views** and panellists being able to **influence decision-making** and **make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]**.

<sup>1</sup> Net Agreement is the proportion who strongly/tend to agree minus the proportion who strongly/tend to disagree. For example, in terms of experience of the **Council listening to my views**, 68.0% agree, 26.5% disagree and 5.6% don't know (68.0%-26.5%=41.5).

**Figure 21**

**Expectations compared to experiences of the panel – Net agreement for current panellists**



When expectations and experience are compared on an individual basis, experience again falls short on the following expectations in particular:

**I can influence decision making**

**I feel like the council is listening to my views**

**I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]**

For example of the 207 respondents who strongly agree that they expected to influence decision making, 35.7% disagree that this outcome was experienced and of the 312 who tend to agree that they expected this, 35.6% disagree that they experienced this. This is illustrated in full in Appendix 14 (Tables 1 and 2).

The outcomes that most closely meet respondents' expectations on an individual basis again correspond with Figure 21:

**I feel like the council is asking my views**

**I know more about what is going on in [the city]**

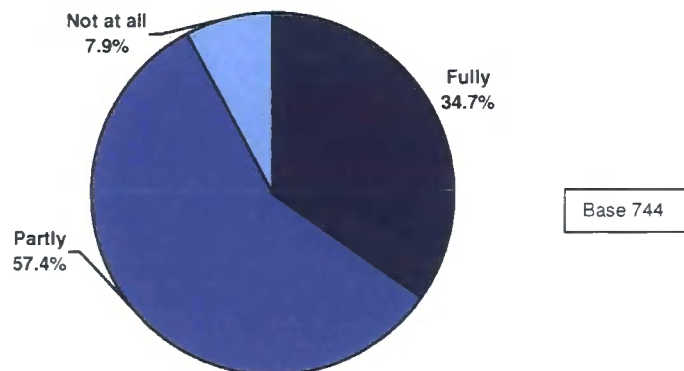
For example of the 433 respondents who strongly agree that they expected the council to ask their views, 59.8% strongly agree that they experienced this and of the 271 who tend to agree they expected this, 67.2% tend to agree they experienced this and for 21.4% expectations were exceeded as they strongly agree they experienced this. Again this is illustrated in Appendix 14 (Tables 1 and 2).

**Extent to which expectations were met**

Current panellists were also asked about the extent to which they think their expectations of the panel have been met. As can be noted from Figure 22, they have been met at least partly for the vast majority (92.1%).

**Figure 22**

**Extent to which current panellists expectations have been met**



When respondents give their reasons for the extent to which their expectations have been met, four common themes arise irrespective of whether their expectations were fully, partly or not at all met. These relate to:

- Quality/frequency of feedback
- Whether or not they feel they are been listened to/taken account of
- Changes/improvements in their area/services
- Being able to attend meetings

Of the 258 panellists who feel that their expectations of have been **fully** met, the main reasons given are shown in Table 19.

Good quality/frequent feedback/communication	94 respondents
The opportunities to take part/have a say	62 respondents
They have listened/taken notice/acted on views	34 respondents
It's delivered what I expected	18 respondents
It's led to improvements in the area/services	9 respondents
Enjoyed the meetings	6 respondents
Covered good range of topics	6 respondents
Professional/well organised	6 respondents

As might be expected, the 427 respondents whose expectations have been **partly** met have given a mix of positive and negative reasons for this response. The main reasons are shown in Table 20.

<b>Table 20</b>	
<b>Main reasons that current panellists expectations have been partly met</b>	
Not attending meetings due to for example, other commitments, meeting locations or times	61 respondents
Dissatisfaction with the council/the area	36 respondents
Don't see any changes/improvements	32 respondents
Don't feel that views are listened to/acted on	24 respondents
Dissatisfaction with/irrelevance of topics covered	20 respondents
It has led to changes/improvements	18 respondents
They have listened/taken notice/acted on views	17 respondents
Lack of time/other commitments	17 respondents
It's difficult to meet everyone's expectations/views	15 respondents
Good feedback/kept informed	14 respondents
Lack of feedback/poor quality feedback	10 respondents
Some things have improved, others haven't	9 respondents
Didn't know what to expect	8 respondents
Decisions have already been made	7 respondents
Lack of concern for outlying areas	6 respondents
Too early to say	6 respondents
Dissatisfaction with meetings	6 respondents
Time taken for improvements/decisions	6 respondents

Of the 59 panellists who feel that their expectations of had **not** been met, the main reasons given in Table 21.

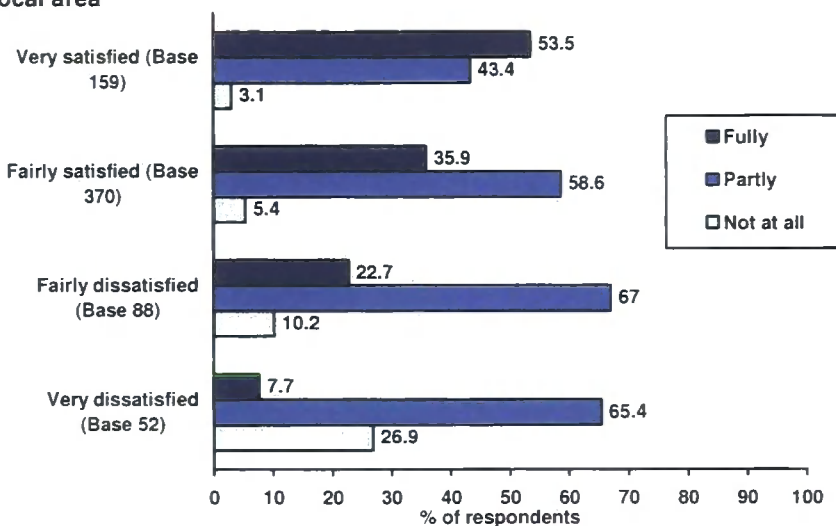
<b>Table 21</b>	
<b>Main reasons that current panellists expectations have not been met</b>	
Can't see any changes/difference	18 respondents
Dissatisfaction with the council/the area	14 respondents
Not being listened to	4 respondents
Lack of concern for outlying areas	4 respondents
Not being able to attend meetings	4 respondents

It is apparent that responses do not always relate to the citizens' panel directly but more to respondents' perceptions of their local area or of the council. This however needs to be considered in the context that many respondents join the panel in order to help improve their area/community, council services or decision making and if they do not see this happening then their expectations will not be fully met. This is perhaps further supported by the fact that there is a statistically significant relationship between satisfaction with the local area ( $p < 0.01$ ) and council ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the extent to which expectations have

been met. As can be noted in Figures 23 and 24, the extent to which expectations have been met increases the more satisfied respondents are with the council and local area. It is of course difficult to say whether perceptions of the local area and council are influencing the extent to which expectations are met or whether the reverse is true.

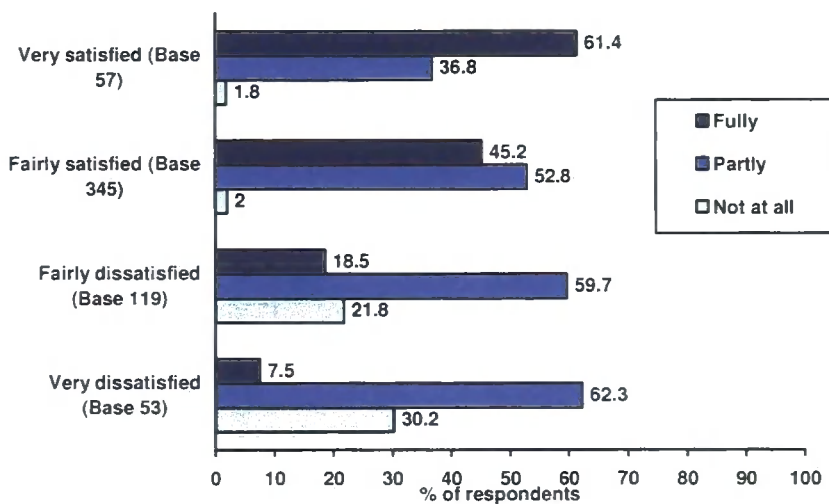
**Figure 23**

**Extent to which current panellists expectations have been met by satisfaction with the local area**



**Figure 24**

**Extent to which current panellists expectations have been met by satisfaction with the council**



Analysis was also undertaken to determine whether the extent to which expectations have been met varies according to experience on each of the six outcomes. A statistically significant relationship was discovered for each outcome ( $p \leq 0.01$  in each instance). In each instance, those respondents who strongly agree that they experienced an outcome are most likely to believe their expectations have been **fully** met. For those respondents who tend to agree or disagree that they experienced an outcome, in each instance the majority feel that their expectations have been **partly** met. As might be expected, those who disagree that they experienced an outcome are most likely to say that their expectations have **not at all** been met. Table 22 illustrates this in terms of **the council listening to my views**.

<b>Table 22</b>			
<b>Extent to which expectations have been met by experiences on I feel like the council is listening to my views - Current panellists</b>			
	<b>I feel like the council is listening to my views</b>		
	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Base:	106	125	19
<b>Extent to which expectations have been met</b>			
Fully	67.1	36.0	9.6
Partly	32.3	61.4	67.5
Not at all	0.6	2.6	22.8

If we consider those respondents who strongly agree that they experienced each of the outcomes, the highest proportion of respondents who feel that their expectations have been fully met are those who strongly agree with:

- I feel like the council is listening to my views (67.1%- 106)**
- I can influence decision making (66.3%- 57)**

It is also interesting to observe that 18.7% (60) of those who disagree that they can **influence decision making** still feel that their expectations have

been **fully** met. When this is analysed further, it is apparent that 61.7% (37) of these respondents disagree that they expected this outcome to occur.

Of those respondents who disagree that they experienced an outcome, the highest proportion of respondents who feel their expectations have not been met is in terms of those who disagree with **I feel like the council is asking my views** (32.5%-27). This corresponds with the fact that only 6.0% (5) of those who disagree that the council is asking my views, feel their expectations have been fully met.

### **Comparison over time**

Since 2003, panellists have been asked their opinions on their experiences in terms of four of the six outcomes that have just been discussed. Summary results for the last three years were presented in chapter five. Figures 25-28 compare the 2006 net agreement scores<sup>2</sup> with previous years for each outcome. As can be noted, there has been statistically significant declines in net agreement since 2005 for **I feel like the council is asking my views** and **I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]** (they have decreased by 9 points and 10 points respectively).

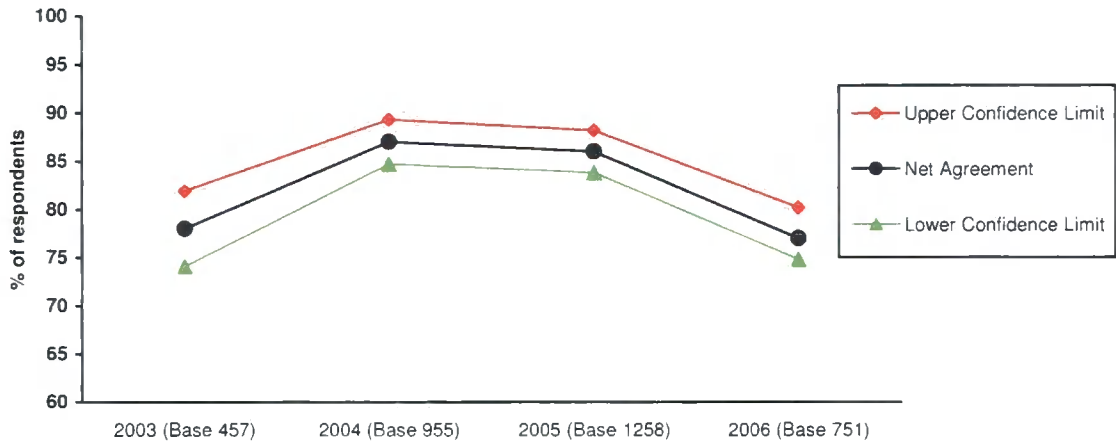
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<sup>2</sup> Net Agreement is the proportion who strongly/tend to agree minus the proportion who strongly/tend to disagree. For example, in terms of **I feel like the council is asking my views**, in 2005 92% agree, 6% disagree and 1% don't know (92%-6%=88).



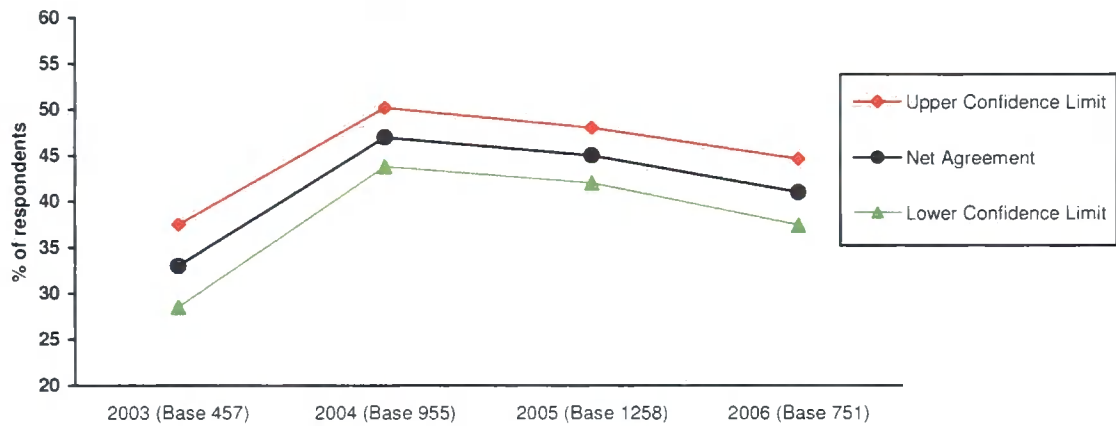
**Figure 25**

**Net Agreement with 'I feel like the council is asking my views' - Trend Data (2003-2006)**



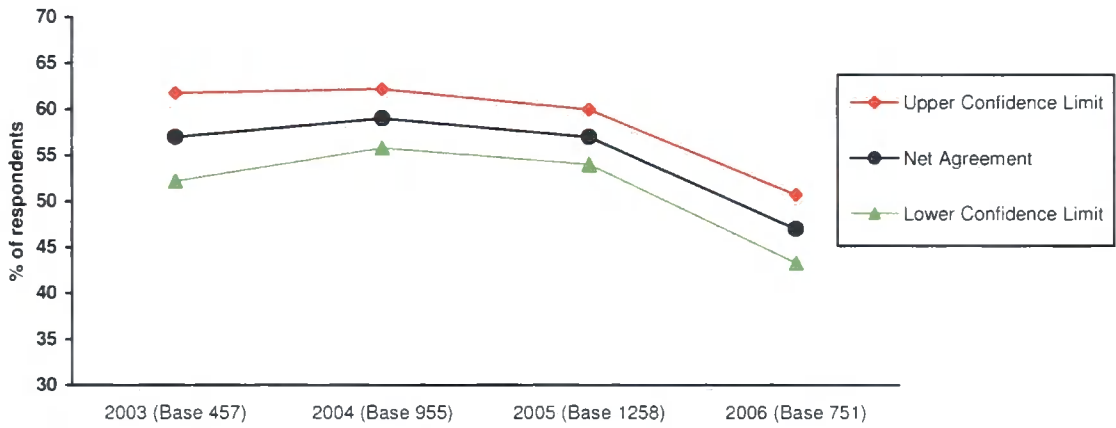
**Figure 26**

**Net Agreement with 'I feel like the council is listening to my views' - Trend Data (2003-2006)**



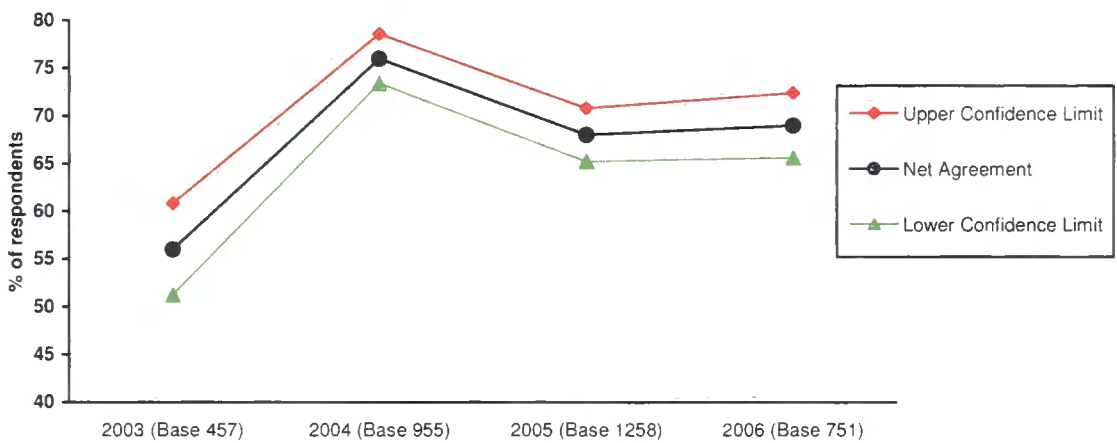
**Figure 27**

**Net Agreement with 'I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in Sunderland' - Trend Data (2003-2006)**



**Figure 28**

**Net Agreement with 'I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in Sunderland' - Trend Data (2003-2006)**



Some factors do however need to be taken into account when making year-on-year comparisons. The first is that (74.6%) of current panellists took part by telephone and (25.4%) by post, whereas the questions have always previously been administered via postal surveys. When comparisons are made between postal and telephone respondents (Table 23) and when confidence limits are applied, telephone respondents are statistically less positive than postal respondents about **I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]**, for which there was a 10 point decline in 2006, and **I know more about what is going on in [the city]**.

<b>Net Agreement</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Telephone</b>
	191	560
I feel like the council is asking my views	80.5	76.6
I feel like the council is listening to my views	45.1	43.5
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]	60.5	46.4
I know out more about what is going on in [the city]	75.7	68.3

Other factors that also need to be considered when making year-on year comparisons are that these questions were previously asked in 2004 and 2005 in the Priority Issues Survey that takes place in the Spring whereas this was part of the Autumn Survey. In addition the questions this time were preceded by questions around expectations and this was not the case previously.

In conclusion to this section then, panellists have high expectations of all six key outcomes but they are highest for the council **asking and listening to views** and **finding out more about what is going on in [the city]** and lowest for influencing decision making. It would appear that the panel is

delivering reasonably well with respect to **I feel like the council is asking my views** and **I know more about what is going on in [the city]** notwithstanding the fact that net agreement with **I feel like the council is asking my views** has dropped since 2005. Figure 21 and Appendix 14 (Tables 1 and 2) show that these outcomes most closely meet respondents' expectations. In addition, the most popular reasons given by those respondents who feel their expectations have been fully met, relate to good feedback and the opportunities to take part.

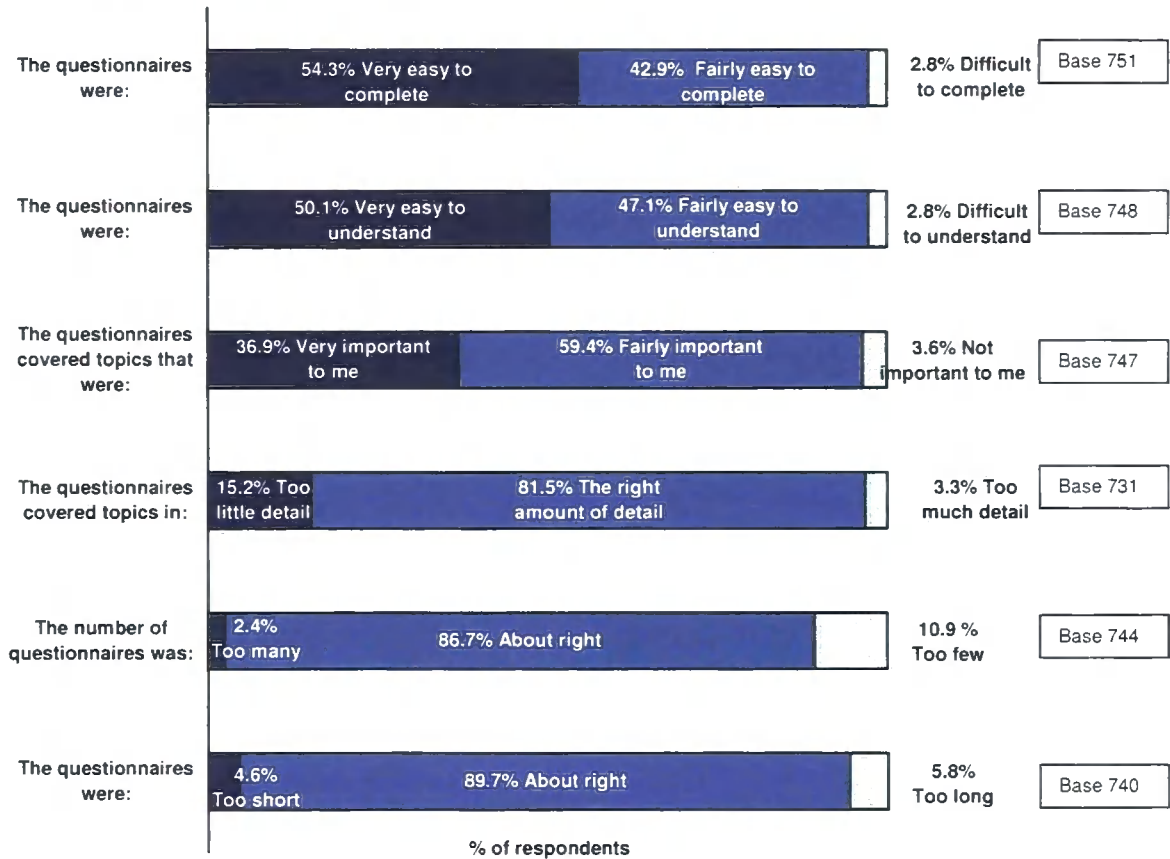
Experiences are not however as positive with respect to the **council listening to views** and the panel seems to be underperforming with respect to this, **influencing decision making** and **being able to make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]**. These three statements show the greatest disparity between expectations and experience as shown in Figure 21 and Appendix 14 (Tables 1 and 2). The latter statement also shows a significant decline in net agreement since 2005 (although there may be other confounding factors as described previously). This is supported to some extent in the qualitative responses where factors such as not seeing any changes or improvements and views not being acted on or listened to, are given as reasons for expectations being partly or not at all met. Furthermore, the highest proportion of respondents who feel their expectations have been fully met is in terms of those who strongly agree with these three outcomes. It would also seem that respondents' perceptions of their local area and the council are associated with the extent to which expectations have been met.

## **Questionnaires, feedback and satisfaction - current panellists**

Now turning to some of the more operational aspects of the panel, current panellists were asked for their perceptions of the questionnaires they have received in the last year. Given that completing questionnaires is a key aspect of a panellist's role it was important to explore this. As can be noted in Figure 29 virtually all respondents consider the questionnaires to be easy to complete and easy to understand and over half in each case rate them as being very easy. Virtually all respondents think that the questionnaires covered topics that were important to them. The majority of respondents also believe that the number of questionnaires and questionnaire length was about right and that questionnaires covered topics in the right amount of detail. There are however 15.2% of respondents who think that the questionnaires do not cover topics in sufficient detail.

**Figure 29**

**Perceptions of questionnaires received in the last year – Current panellists**



N.B. Don't knows have been excluded from analysis.

When results are compared across different groups of respondents there are no relevant, significant differences in responses.

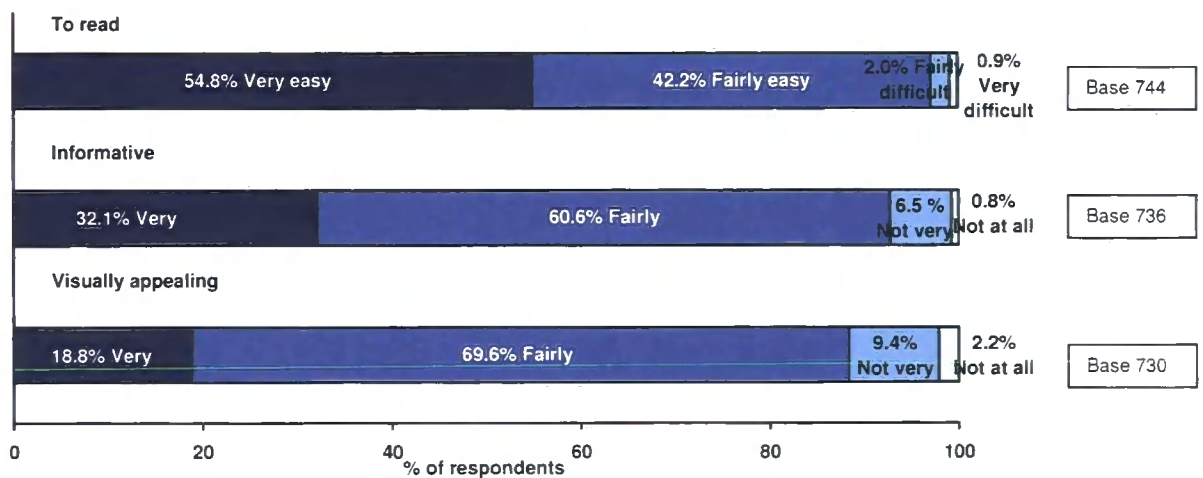
The importance of providing good quality feedback was outlined in previous chapters and is a crucial element of managing the panel and was previously shown to be important with respect to meeting panellists' expectations.

Current panellists were asked their opinions of the feedback they receive which includes the panel newsletter and the survey reports. With respect to

newsletters, the vast majority of respondents consider them to be easy to read, informative and visually appealing, as shown in Figure 30. There are however, 11.6% of respondents who do not think that the newsletters are visually appealing and 7.3% who do not think they are informative.

**Figure 30**

**Perceptions of newsletters received in the last year – Current panellists**



N.B. Don't knows have been excluded from analysis.

Again, when results are compared across different groups of respondents there are no relevant, significant differences in responses.

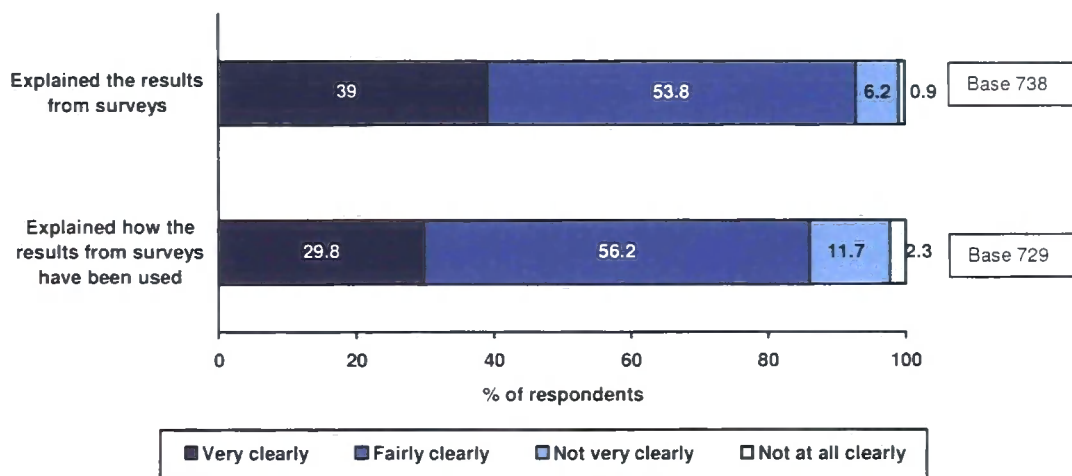
Of the 736 respondents who expressed a substantive opinion, 51.8% think the newsletters are **definitely** worthwhile, a further 44.2% think **to some extent** and 4.1% think **no**. As might be expected, the extent to which respondents feel the newsletters are worthwhile varies by their above perceptions of the newsletters ( $p < 0.01$  in each instance) and the more positive respondents are

on these aspects, the more likely they are to feel the newsletters are worthwhile. For example 77.3% (180) of those who think newsletters are very informative, think newsletters were definitely worthwhile whereas 24.5% (13) of those who think newsletters were not very/at all informative think newsletters were definitely worthwhile.

Now thinking about the survey reports received in the last year, panellists were asked how clearly they felt they explained the survey results and how the survey results had been used. As can be noted from Figure 31, the vast majority feel that they did this clearly (92.8% and 86% respectively).

**Figure 31**

**Perceptions of survey reports received in the last year – Current panellists**



N.B. Don't knows have been excluded from analysis.

Of the 732 respondents who gave a substantive opinion, 53.8% think the survey reports are **definitely** worthwhile, a further 42.2% think **to some extent** and 4% think **no**. As with the newsletters, the extent to which respondents feel the survey reports are worthwhile varies by their above

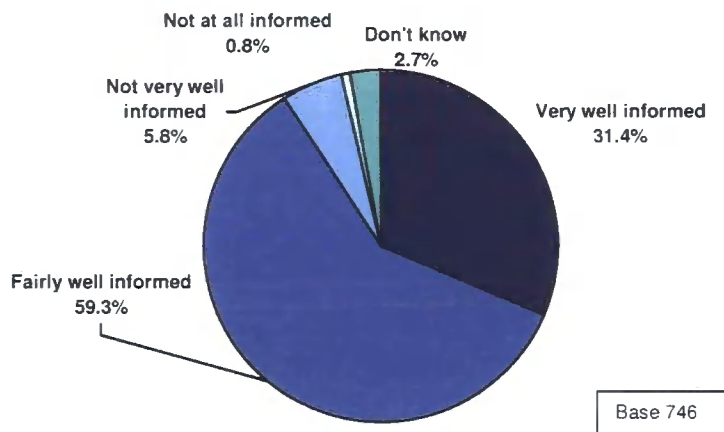


perceptions of the reports ( $p < 0.01$  in each instance) and the more positive respondents are on these aspects, the more likely they are to feel the survey reports are worthwhile. For example 82.2% (176) of those who think survey reports very clearly explained how the results from surveys have been used, think survey reports were definitely worthwhile whereas only 18.4% (18) of those who think survey reports did this not very/not at all clearly think survey reports were definitely worthwhile.

Panellists were asked how well informed they feel about the consultation exercises they have taken part in and the vast majority (90.8%) feel informed, as can be noted from Figure 32.

**Figure 32**

**How well informed current panellists feel about the consultation exercises that have taken part in**

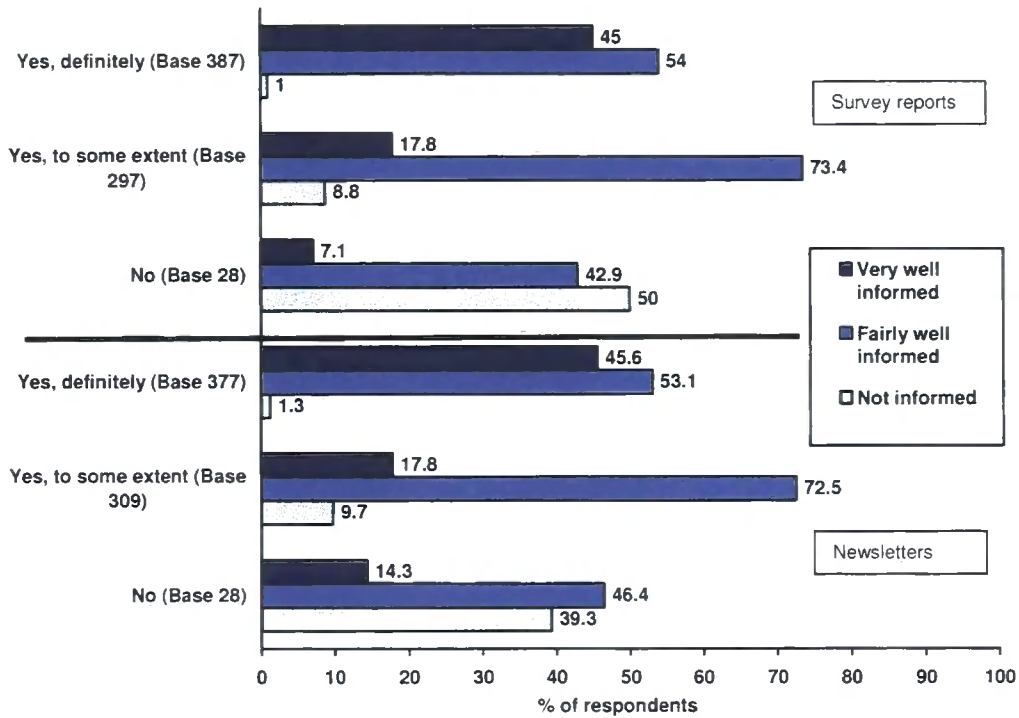


As might be expected, the extent to which respondents feel informed varies by how worthwhile they perceive survey reports ( $p < 0.01$ ) and newsletters to be ( $p < 0.01$ ) as shown in Figure 33. Those respondents who **definitely** think that the survey reports and newsletters are worthwhile are most likely to think

that they are very well informed, whereas those who **do not** think they are worthwhile are most likely to feel not informed.

**Figure 33**

**Extent to which current panellists feel informed by how worthwhile they perceive newsletters and survey reports**

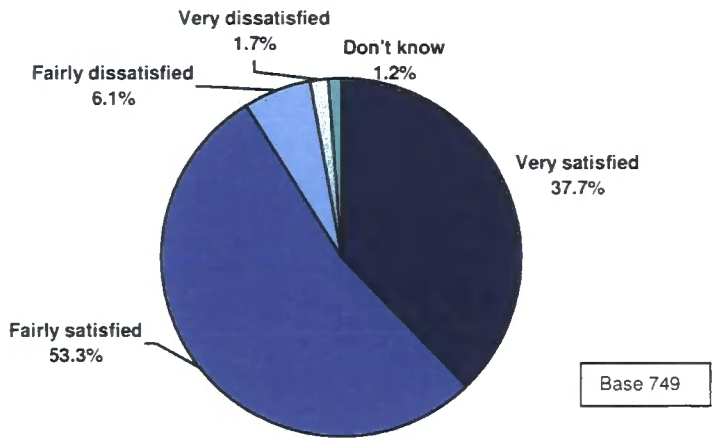


The extent to which respondents agree they experienced the six outcomes varies by their perceptions of the newsletters and survey reports and how well informed they feel ( $p < 0.01$  in each instance). Respondents who are most positive about the newsletters or surveys or feel well informed are more likely than the other respondents to agree with an outcome. Again a good example is in terms of agreement with the **council listening to my views**, 87.0% (200) of those who feel very well informed agree that the council is listening to my views whereas only 9.5% (4) of those who fell not very/at all well informed agree that the council is listening to my views.

Finally panellists were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the panel and the vast majority (91.0%) are satisfied, as shown in Figure 34.

**Figure 34**

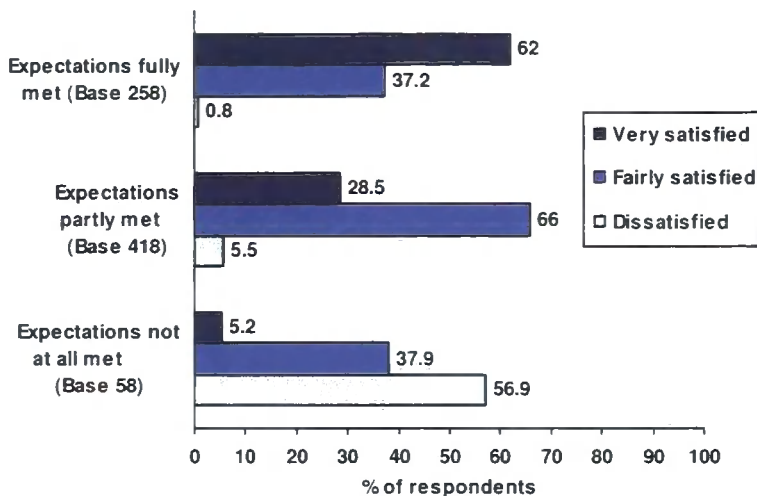
Satisfaction with the citizens' panel – Current panellists



There is a statistically significant relationship between satisfaction and the extent to which expectations were met ( $p < 0.01$ ). As might be expected, respondents whose expectations were fully met are most satisfied and those whose expectations were not met are least satisfied, as shown in Figure 35.

**Figure 35**

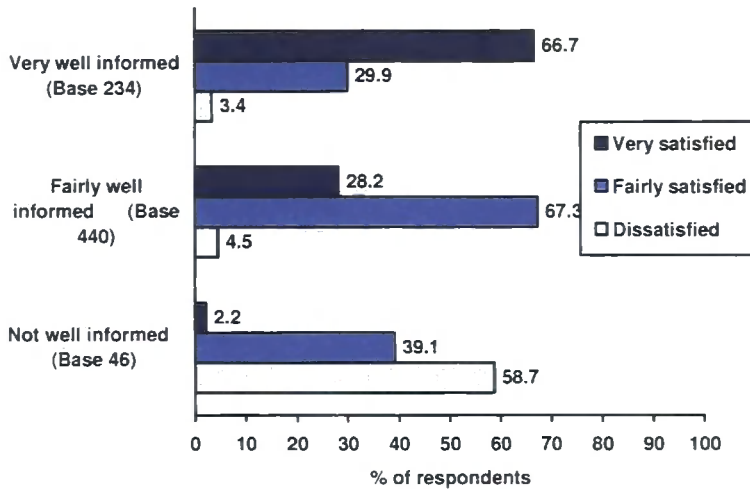
Satisfaction with the citizens' panel by extent to which expectations were met – Current panellists



There is a similar association between satisfaction with the panel and the extent to which respondents feel informed about the consultation exercises they have participated in ( $p < 0.01$ ), as shown in Figure 36.

**Figure 36**

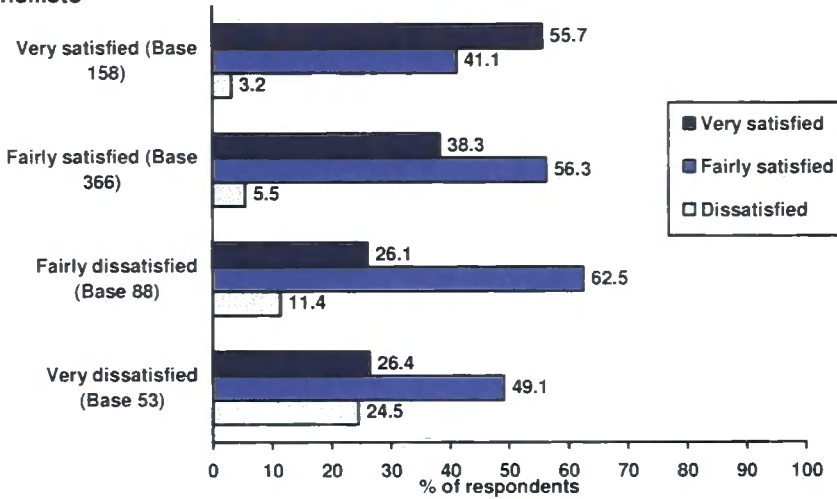
**Satisfaction with the citizens' panel by extent to which panellists feel informed – Current panellists**



Satisfaction also varies by satisfaction with the local area ( $p < 0.01$ ) and council ( $p < 0.01$ ) as shown in Figures 37 and 38. As can be noted, dissatisfaction with [the panel] increases the more dissatisfied respondents are with the council and local area. Again it is difficult to say whether perceptions of the local area and council are influencing satisfaction with the panel or whether the reverse is true.

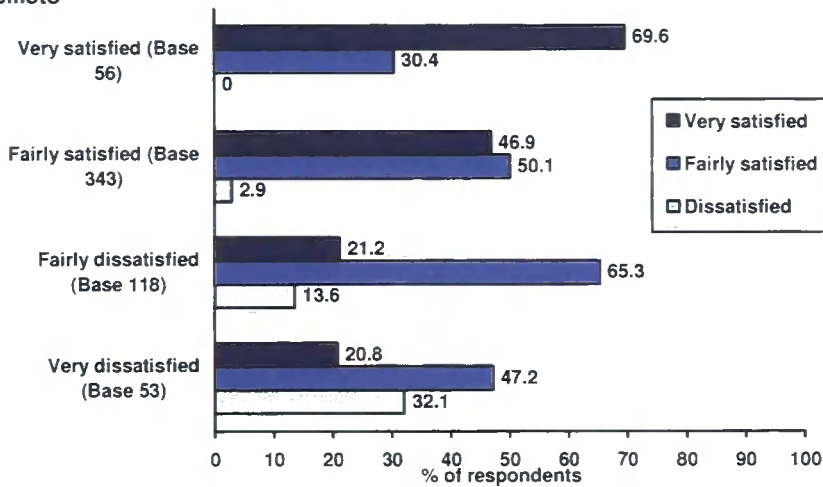
**Figure 37**

**Satisfaction with the citizens' panel by satisfaction with the local area – Current panellists**



**Figure 38**

**Satisfaction with the citizens' panel by satisfaction with the council – Current panellists**



In addition, satisfaction varies according to experience on each of the six outcomes ( $p < 0.01$  in each instance) in the same way that the extent to which expectations have been met varies by outcomes. Those respondents who strongly agree that they experienced an outcome are most likely to be

satisfied and those who disagree that they experienced an outcome are least satisfied. Table 24 below illustrates this in terms of being able to make a contribution to the way in which services are provided.

<b>Table 24</b>			
<b>Satisfaction with the panel by experiences on 'I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]' - Current panellists</b>			
	<b>I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]</b>		
	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Base:	151	379	177
<b>Satisfaction with the panel</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Very satisfied	67.5	38.3	16.9
Fairly satisfied	31.1	58.3	59.9
Dissatisfied	1.3	3.4	23.2

In terms of those respondents who strongly agree with the outcomes, the statements showing the highest levels of satisfaction correspond with those previously with respect to expectations being met:

**I can influence decision making** (79.8%-67)

**I feel like the council is listening to my views** (72.3%-115)

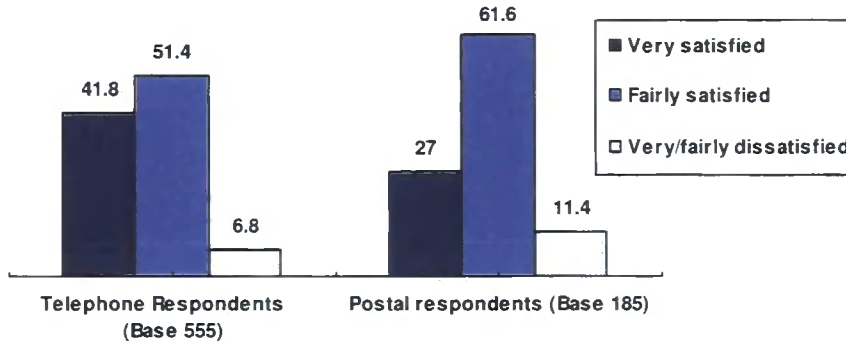
And similarly, for respondents who disagreed with the outcomes the highest level of dissatisfaction is for:

**I feel like the council is asking my views** (38%-30)

As was found in relation to the questions about satisfaction with the council and the local area, panellists who completed the survey over the telephone are more positive about the panel than those who completed the survey by post as shown in Figure 39 and the differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ )

**Figure 39**

Satisfaction with the citizens' panel by mode of completion – Current panellists



Interestingly this was not the case on experience of outcomes where postal respondents were more positive, as discussed previously.

In order to investigate satisfaction with the panel further, logistical regression was undertaken to determine which variables were most important in predicting satisfaction with the panel. Ten dichotomised variables, identified through previous bivariate analysis, were considered for inclusion (detailed in Appendix 15). The combination of variables which best predict satisfaction with the panel are shown in Table 25. As can be noted, five variables are significant and the extent to which panellists feel informed about the consultation exercises they have taken part in and feeling that the council is listening to them are most important relatively.

<b>Table 25</b>			
<b>Logistic regression model of the odds of satisfaction with the citizens' panel</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Odds ratio</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval</b>
Extent to which panellists feel informed about the consultation exercises they have taken part in	6.3 <sup>3</sup>	0.001	2.19-17.85
I feel like the council is listening to my views	5.1	0.010	1.47-17.81
I feel like the council is asking my views	3.1	0.011	1.31-7.54
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]	3.4	0.009	1.36-8.59
Satisfaction with the council	2.8	0.025	1.14-7.02

In conclusion to this section then, respondents are generally positive about the questionnaires and feedback they receive and the majority feel well informed and satisfied with the panel. Perceptions of feedback and how well informed respondents feel are positively associated with how satisfied they are with the panel as are the extent to which their expectations have been met and their experiences on six outcomes. There is also a positive association between satisfaction with the local area and council and satisfaction with the panel. Logistical regression shows that the extent to which panellists feel informed about the consultation exercises they have taken part in and whether they feel that the council is listening to them, are particularly important to satisfaction with the panel. This again underlines the value of demonstrating to panellists that they are being listened to by explaining how the council is acting on their views through good quality feedback.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, after controlling for the other four variables, a panellist who feels informed about the panel is significantly more likely to feel satisfied with the panel than a panellist who does not. The odds ratio is 6.3.

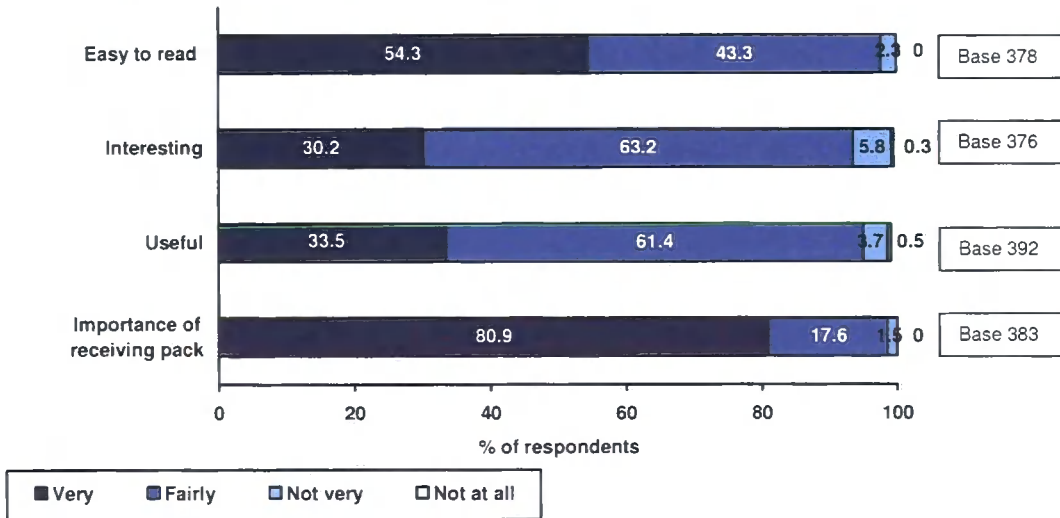


## Members' Pack - new panellists

New panellists are sent a Members' Pack when they join the panel. Of the 387 panellists who said they receive a pack, all but one person had read at least some of it with just over half (52.2%) having read all of it, 34.6% most of it and 12.9% some of it. As can be noted from Figure 40, the majority of respondents found the pack easy to read, interesting and useful and think that it is very important for new panellists to receive a pack.

**Figure 40**

**Perceptions of members' packs – New panellists**



N.B. Don't knows have been excluded from analysis.

New panellists were asked if they had any comments or suggestions for improvement to the Members' Pack. One-hundred and twenty-five responses were given and 59 responses were positive, suggesting that no improvements were needed, for example:

*No. I think it struck the right balance in terms of clarity, good English, layout and print quality.*

*No it's very useful and informative.*

A further 19 respondents did not feel they could answer at this stage. It is clear however from the remaining responses that not all respondents were answering about the Members' Pack – a number of responses seemed to relate to the budget booklet that panellists were sent out in advance of the survey and included comments about the level of detail provided and terminology used. This therefore also has implications for all questions asked about the members' pack.

Virtually all new panellists (93.2%) feel informed about what membership of the panel will involve (34.9% very well and 58.3% fairly well). Those respondents who say they did not receive a member's pack are less likely to feel informed than those who did ( $p < 0.01$ ), as shown in Table 26.

	<b>Pack-yes</b>	<b>Pack-no</b>
Base	380	26
Informed	93.9	80.8
Not informed	6.1	19.2

The fact that those panellists who said they received a pack feel better informed than those who did not combined with the perceived importance of receiving a pack suggests that it is important to continue providing a pack for new panellists. It may however be worth repeating these questions when new panellists join the panel to ensure that feedback received is about the pack and is not confused with other literature.

## **Additional comments**

Current panellists were asked if they had any further comments or suggestions for improvement to the panel and 410 gave comments.

As might be expected, a number of comments related to themes already identified previously. The greatest number of comments (101 respondents) given were to express satisfaction with the panel. Forty-three respondents gave comments about meetings, many concerning the need for different times or locations. Forty respondents have concerns over or feel the need for clarity on whether their views are listened to or acted on and if they have resulted in improvements or influenced decision-making. Thirty-seven respondents highlighted the need to improve questionnaires, many relating to their restrictive nature and need to include space for comments and 33 respondents made comments about the mode of completing questionnaires, many relating to telephone interviews and online options. Thirty respondents wanted particular issues to be covered by the panel or wanted to be able to influence issues covered. Seventeen respondents highlighted the need to publicise the panel more in an attempt to get more or broader involvement and 14 gave suggestions about improving feedback or communication. Fifty-five respondents gave comments that were not directly related to the panel but many of which related to dissatisfaction with the council, their local area or services.

New panellists were also asked if they had any further comments or suggestions for improvement to the panel and 169 members gave comments, although 60 of these felt that was that it was too soon to give any suggestions

at the moment. A further 36 respondents gave comments that were not related to the panel and included improvements that were required in the local area. Eight respondents gave comments about the times or locations of meetings and a further 8 were concerned that they are listened to/taken notice of. Five respondents gave comments about improving the questionnaire and 4 about having online/email options.

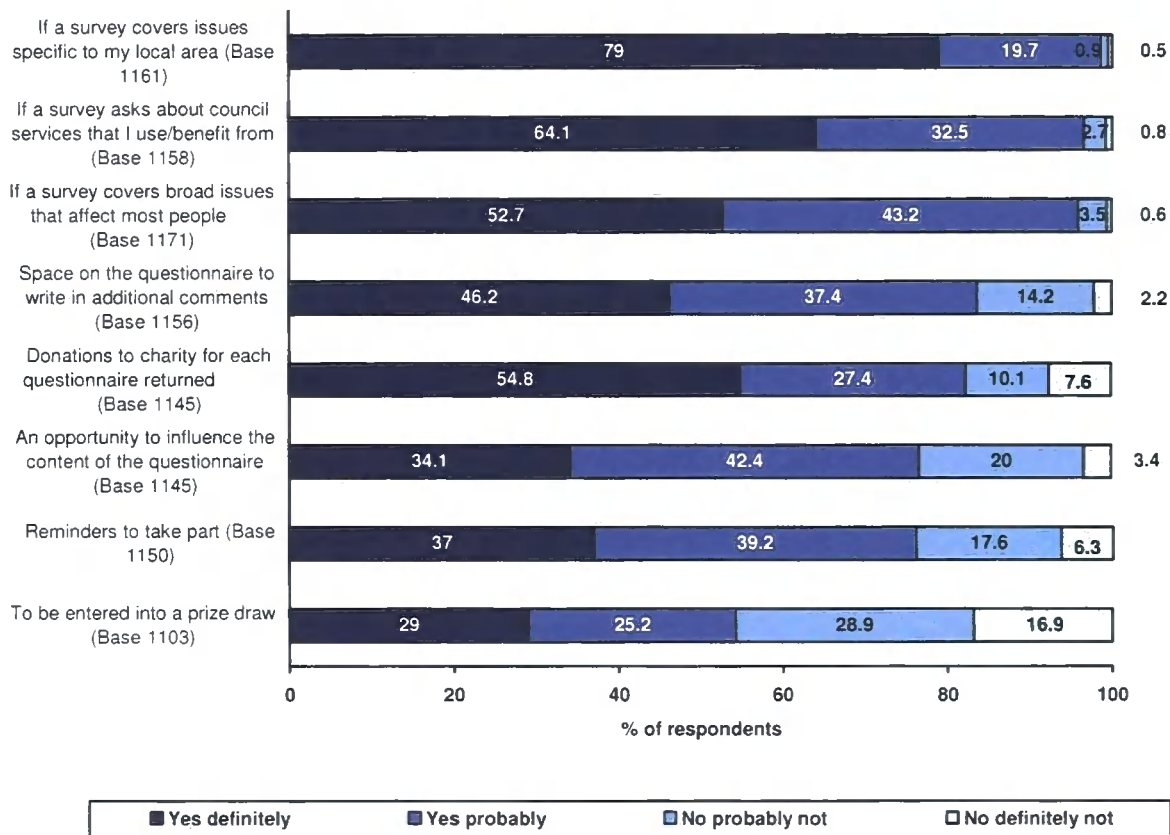
## **Future surveys**

As previously highlighted, participating in surveys is a key aspect of a panellist's role and given the issues of survey non-response outlined in chapter five, it was important to explore what influence a range of factors might have on the likelihood of panellists completing surveys. Both current and new panellists were asked whether or not a range of possible interventions would encourage them to take part in surveys. The data were combined for this question since it was more useful to conduct an overall analysis and the relative popularity of the suggestions followed a similar pattern amongst both groups of respondents. As illustrated in Figure 41, the majority of respondents indicate that all suggested measures would encourage them to take part, although there are differences in whether they would definitely or probably do so. The factors that are most favoured relate to the subject matter of the questionnaire and would seem to support the idea of topic saliency discussed in chapter four. The most popular factor of covering issues specific to their local area supports previous findings identifying the desire to help improve the local area. The least popular alternative is that of

prize draws which, as highlighted in chapter four, Dillman (2000) argues has little effect on response rates.

**Figure 41**

**Popularity of factors to encourage panellists to participate in surveys**



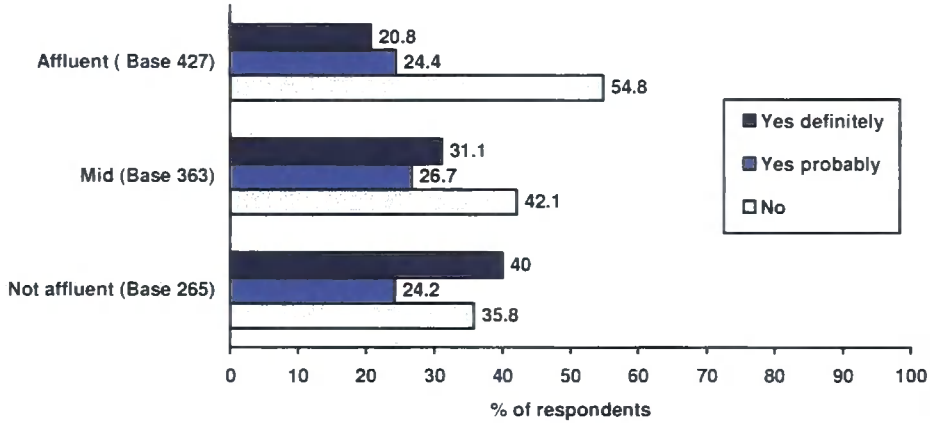
N.B. Don't knows have been excluded from analysis.

The popularity of some options varies by demographic group, and the most interesting are discussed next.

**Prize draw** was the least favoured factor presented and this sees the greatest variation in responses by demographic group. Receptivity to prize draws decreases as affluence increases, as can be noted in Figure 42 ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Figure 42**

**Influence of 'To be entered into a prize draw' on participation in surveys by affluence**



There are also differences in agreement by gender ( $p=0.02$ ) and disability ( $p=0.05$ ). Female respondents and those with a disability are more likely to favour prize draws as shown in Table 27.

	Male	Female	Disability-yes	Disability-no
Base:	519	583	188	914
<b>Prize draws</b>	%	%	%	%
Yes definitely	27.2	30.7	31.9	28.4
Yes probably	22.7	27.4	30.3	24.2
No	50.1	41.9	37.8	47.4

In addition 18-34 year olds are more receptive than other age groups to prize draws ( $p=0.02$ ), as shown in Table 28.

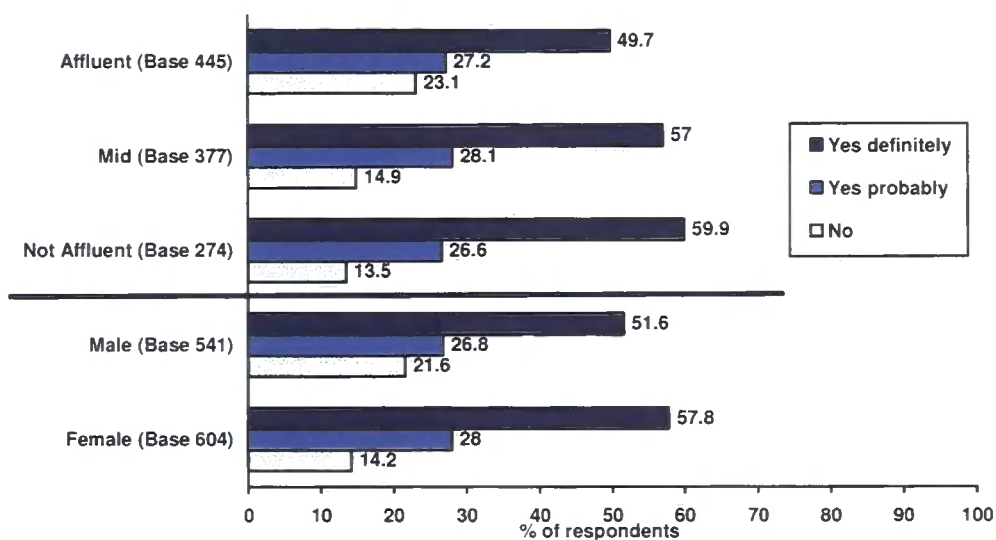
	18-34 year olds	Other age groups
Base:	137	896
<b>Prize draws</b>	%	%
Yes definitely	35.0	27.5
Yes probably	29.9	25.0
No	35.0	47.5

Given that non affluent respondents and 18-34 year olds are under-represented on the panel it is useful to consider these groups in more detail. Additional analysis shows that non-affluent respondents who are disabled are more in favour of prize draws than those who are not disabled (76.1% in favour compared to 59.8% respectively –  $p <= 0.01$ ).

Receptivity to **donations to charity** also varies by gender and affluence as shown in Figure 43 ( $p <= 0.01$ ). As with prize draws, affluent respondents are less likely to be in favour of donations to charity as are female respondents compared to males.

**Figure 43**

**Influence of 'Donations to charity for each questionnaire returned' on participation in surveys by affluence and gender**



Female respondents who are mid affluent and not affluent are more in favour of donations to charity than mid-affluent and non-affluent males as shown in Table 29.

<b>Table 29</b>				
<b>Influence of 'Donations to charity for each questionnaire returned' on participation in surveys – Mid and Non affluent respondents by gender</b>				
	<b>Mid Affluent (p&lt;=0.01)</b>		<b>Non- affluent (p=0.03)</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Base:	173	204	118	156
<b>Donations to charity</b>	%	%	%	%
Yes	79.8	89.7	81.4	90.4
No	20.2	10.3	18.6	9.6

To conclude this section, it would seem that the most popular interventions are those relating to the subject matter of the questionnaire and support for these does not typically differ across respondent groups. There are some interesting variations with respect to affluence for some factors and this is perhaps something that needs to be considered further given that the panel and response to surveys is under-represented by less affluent groups.

## **Conclusions**

One of the aims of this aspect of the study was to explore motivations and expectations of panellists who join the case study citizens' panel. Common motives include people wanting to have their say or have their voice heard and to become more informed about the council and local area. These two motives correspond with the three most strongly agreed with expectations of the panel (finding out more, being listened to and being asked views). Another popular reason for joining the panel is to help improve the local area and it would seem that people who join the panel are less positive than the general population about their local area. In addition, a focus on the local area is the most popular factor in terms of encouraging panellists to complete questionnaires. Motives such as contributing to service provision and



influencing decision making are also identified as reasons for joining the panel but to a lesser extent and are less popular expectations, although the majority of respondents still agree with them.

The panel seems to deliver quite well in terms of providing opportunities for people to give their views and helping them to feel more informed about what is going on in the city. Panellists are also reasonably positive about more operational aspects of the panel such as questionnaires, feedback and members' packs, although there are some issues to be addressed regarding meetings. The panel delivers less well in terms of listening to panellist's views and enabling them to make a contribution or have an influence. This perhaps reflects the difficulty of demonstrating the impact consultation with the panel has had, described in chapter five, and similar difficulties experienced by other citizens panels, discussed in chapter four. Positive experiences on these outcomes appear to have a positive influence on perceptions of the panel. Panel membership does not seem to have led to panellists becoming more positive about the council or local area and negative perceptions of the council and local area are associated with negative perceptions of the panel. There is clearly a need to strengthen the impact the panel has, potentially with a local area focus, and communicate this impact.

The next chapter discusses the implications of these findings and the local area context in relation to the wider literature and the expectations of central government.

# Chapter Seven - Discussion

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to consider how the case study citizens' panel can better meet the needs and expectations of its panellists, the local authority and central government. This chapter considers the findings of the research undertaken to address this and considers how the case study contributes to existing knowledge and understanding.

It is useful first of all to briefly review the research undertaken so far to arrive at this point. Chapter three discussed the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA) and its policies with respect to consultation and participation and went on to consider fresh proposals arising from 2006 Local Government White Paper (DCLG, 2006) in order to understand central government's expectations. It also explored some of the difficulties of implementing the agenda and achieving the intended outcomes in order to gain an insight into how these policies were being implemented in practice.

Before considering the case study, chapter four discussed the citizens' panel technique in more detail, the rationale for establishing panels and issues raised when implementing them by drawing on literature relating to local authority citizens' panels and methodological texts.

Having considered government policy and citizens' panels in general, chapter five introduced the case study and considered consultation and the citizens'

panel at the case study authority, drawing on interviews with council officers, documentary analysis and my own knowledge and experiences as practitioner-researcher. Finally chapter six presented the results from a survey with the citizens' panel in order to understand in more detail panellists' expectations and perceptions.

So having considered the various stakeholders involved and wider literature we are now in a position to consider what this is telling us.

## **The Policy Context**

Central government has been consistent in its rhetoric about the need to consult and engage with local people in local decision-making since the implementation of the LGMA, for example:

The Government wishes to see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils ..... and undertaken across a wide range of each council's responsibilities (DETR, 1998:4.6).

Effective community engagement leads to better decisions and better implementation.

Community involvement is a key component of best value, an increasingly important element in the improvements we are making to health services and is an important goal for LSPs in taking forward community strategies and other initiatives

(DTLR, 2001b:2.45).

Local authorities have responded to this and other imperatives to provide a range of participation opportunities for local people (Leach et al 2005; Leach et al 2006).

The Local Government White Paper (DCLG, 2006) and ensuing policies, initiatives and guidance acknowledge this progress but identify the need to further develop practice and deliver a coherent set of messages about the importance of involvement and empowerment.

Empowering communities has come a long way since 1997. But it's time to step up a gear; to go further and faster and to be more ambitious about what we achieve (Communities and Local Government, 2007:3).

Local government has always involved communities in decisions and services and there is a lot of good practice across the country. The new duty to involve seeks to ensure people have greater opportunities to have their say. The aspiration for the new duty is to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment (HM Government, 2007).

Implicit in the policy direction is an assumption that public participation will bring about a range of benefits<sup>1</sup>, including:

- Better policies, services and decision-making
- Improved perceptions of local government
- Better local democracy
- Greater trust and understanding
- More informed local people
- Improved social capital and cohesion
- Greater accountability and democratic legitimacy
- Improved community development and empowerment

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<sup>1</sup> Birch, 2002; Rogers and Robinson, 2004; Skidmore, Bound and Lownsborough, 2006; Communities and Local Government, 2007; The Consultation Institute & I&DeA, 2008

Local government has however faced significant challenges in effectively implementing the public participation agenda arising from various parties including the general public, councillors, council officers, partnership structures and conflicting policies from central government, which are briefly outlined next.

There can be conflict between achieving service improvement and democratic renewal objectives since they entail different consultation techniques, focus, scope, levels of involvement, commitment, time and resources.

Commentators suggest that authorities have prioritised the former due to government policy and regulation, time and resource constraints and lower public participation in initiatives that may bring about more democratic aims. It is argued that service specific and statutory consultations such as satisfaction surveys will achieve few of the benefits outlined above.

There are also tensions with respect to the new political structures (from the 1998 White paper) and public participation. Critics assert that the structures have led to a marginalisation of non-executive councillors, that public involvement in overview and scrutiny and area committees is patchy and there can be resistance from councillors who perceive participatory democracy to be a threat. There are also concerns that participatory decision-making can create difficulties in achieving certain aspects of accountability and efficiency of decision-making, that it may conflict with strong leadership and that it may be misused by politicians.

A further issue is lack of participation which is deemed to be a particular problem amongst certain groups of people. This can be brought about by a range of factors intrinsic to the individual or their circumstances and the relevance of the issue to them but also a range of factors that can be influenced by the local authority. Two such factors are previous positive experience of the local authority and the perception of whether they can make a difference. These factors are closely associated to two further tensions - impact and consultation fatigue. The limited impact that participation initiatives have is an endemic problem and can be hampered by a range of factors including the limited ability of local authorities to respond to local priorities due to central control, organisational culture and resistance to devolve power to local people within local authorities, lack of research skills, time and financial constraints. Perceived lack of impact may also be brought about by lack of or poor quality feedback. A possible consequence of lack of impact and reason for lack of participation is consultation fatigue. Other commentators believe that consultation fatigue may be a result of too much consultation activity that can be uncoordinated and may duplicate efforts.

A final challenge relates to public participation in an LSP setting, specifically with respect to the reliance on community representatives and issues around their representativeness, accountability and ability to influence and in terms of generating public interest in more strategic or visionary issues.

Thus local government has experienced difficulties in realising the proposed benefits that public participation can bring and whilst there have been improvements in services, public satisfaction with local government has

declined by 11% since 2000/2001 to 54% and a high proportion of citizens feel that they cannot influence local decisions (DCLG, 2007a). It will be interesting to observe whether the 2006 White Paper (DCLG, 2006) and associated initiatives will help local authorities to overcome these issues and realise the aforementioned benefits, particularly when the decision about when and how to involve local people is still at the discretion of local authorities.

## **The case study local authority**

So it is within this wider context that the case study local authority operates and one of the aims of this project was to see if and how the citizens' panel could respond to the new proposals. The case study is set at a unitary authority responsible for a wide range of functions. Much of the consultation undertaken is on an individual service basis and some is undertaken on a council-wide corporate basis, including the citizens' panel.

The authority experiences many of the challenges identified above.

Organisational culture is a key issue, manifesting itself in problems such as lack of planning and co-ordination of consultation activity and limited impact and/or feedback. This is also closely related to issues of awareness and training amongst officers and members. Whilst co-ordination mechanisms exist, they are not fully complied with and this can result in duplication. More senior encouragement to comply with the corporate mechanisms and a more planned, integrated approach will be particularly important in view of the emerging requirements from central government.

With respect to impact and feedback there a number of issues including a reluctance to devolve power to local people from both officers and Members, some departments going through the motions to 'tick the consultation box', a lack of appreciation of the importance of feedback and central government constraints when undertaking statutory consultations or in terms of how the authority can respond. In some instances there is a lack of feedback rather than lack of action and this relates not only to participant feedback but more widely and could potentially assist with issues of duplication. It should however be recognised that pockets of good practice do exist.

Another issue relates to difficulties in reaching particular groups of the community and a need for further direction and guidance in terms of who services should be engaging with and how best to engage them. With this was the concern that 'hard to reach' groups may become overloaded. There were also issues identified in terms of generating public interest when consulting on broad strategies and when departments were undertaking consultations at short notice and this was where the citizens' panel was perceived to be a good resource. Financial resources were not considered to be a significant issue but staff time and skills were, although perhaps more surmountable than other issues in terms of partnership working, attracting external funding and utilising national research.

## **Citizens' panels**

The case study panel was established in April 2002, as part of the corporate consultation arrangements. Before considering the panel in more detail it is



useful to first of all discuss citizens' panels in general. Citizens' panels are one of a range of consultation techniques which rose in prominence following the 1998 Local Government White Paper (DETR, 1998). In some ways the original expectations of citizens panels mirror the expectations of public participation in general in terms of meeting both service improvement and democratic renewal objectives and it would seem that local authorities believed they would address the new consultation requirements placed upon them from delivering representative surveys to undertaking targeted qualitative research. Unfortunately and unremarkably, citizens' panels failed to deliver on all expectations.

The first issue relates to representativeness and their ability to deliver reliable survey data. Representativeness was one of the key assumptions when citizens' panels were first established but as demonstrated in chapter four it is very difficult to attain and subsequently maintain representativeness with citizens' panels. When random sampling is used to recruit panels, problems may include deficiencies in sample frames and high levels of non-response typically resulting in an over-representation of older, more affluent respondents and under-representation of hard-to-reach groups such as young people, people with disabilities and from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. There are also issues with representativeness when non-probability recruitment methods are used such as quota sampling and snowball sampling and when people are invited to join on a voluntary basis. In addition there are concerns that the attitudes and motivations of people who join panels are different to that of the general population (Dungey, 1997; Pratchett, 1999; DETR, 2000c; Wilson 2002; case study interviewee, 2007) and Wilson (2002)

highlights that many local authorities do not check on the attitudinal, behavioural or socio-economic profile of their panel.

Attrition and non-response at particular waves are also key issues and can mean that even if a panel is representative at recruitment it can very quickly become unrepresentative. This is typically more common in harder to reach groups such as young people and BME groups. There is a range of literature aimed at combating attrition and non-response which includes aspects such as feedback, incentives, reducing respondent burden and good practice survey design in addition to ways in which attrition can be corrected for such as weighting or replacement. There are however further issues to consider with such options.

Conditioning is another concern; this is where panellists may change their attitudes and/or behaviour as a result of being on the panel and may become atypical of the population they were recruited to represent over time. This may be amplified when panellists are involved in more qualitative or deliberative exercises and when provided with feedback. Conditioning can however also be viewed as a benefit in that panellists may provide more informed and more substantive answers and greater involvement may help to develop citizenship.

Indeed issues of high non-response and conditioning were key concerns regarding the use of citizens' panels for the BVPI General User Satisfaction Surveys and one of the drivers behind some local authorities establishing citizens' panels was very quickly obsolete. Other commentators also acknowledge that panels are not suitable for tracking changes in the wider population (Dungey, 1997; Page, 1998; Evaluation Associates, 2000:25; RBA

Research 2001; Wilson, 2002) although some highlight that panels are useful in tracking how individuals' views change over time (Page, 1998; RBA Research, 2001; Wilson, 2002).

So panels and results from panel surveys and consultations are unlikely to be representative – but does this matter? Some commentators do not consider this weakness to be an issue since it is more important to build engagement with a group of people rather than deliver representative survey data (Evaluation Associates, 2000; Page, 2004; Baker 2006) and indeed this was one of the more democratic expectations of citizens' panels. So to what extent have they achieved this?

Evidence in this regard seems to be more anecdotal. Certainly current thinking is that panel managers focus on more participatory and innovative activities which are better at engaging with and empowering participants. There are indications in Camden's evaluation that panellists respond well and have some appetite for more face-face events and direct involvement with services (Camden Council, 2006:14). There is still evidence to suggest, however, that the majority of respondents are less likely to get involved in more participatory mechanisms (Needham, 2001; Baker, 2006). Baker (2006, slide 15) posits that 'in general people want to be listened to, more than they want to actively participate'. Perhaps this is where the importance of feedback comes in since it will reach a wider audience than those panellists who get involved beyond regular surveys. Good quality feedback which demonstrates that panellists are being listened to, can potentially promote engagement and build

understanding, knowledge, trust and satisfaction with the local authority. Therein however lies a problem –the limited impact participation initiatives may have was previously identified to be a difficulty of implementing this agenda and citizens' panels can face the same issues due to for example tick box consultation, lack of clarity over why questions are being asked and consultations where impact is less tangible or substantial. This creates difficulties in providing feedback and lack of feedback or poor quality feedback can cause disengagement and potentially have an adverse affect on the benefits of public participation anticipated by central government.

So more participatory and innovative activities and good quality feedback have the potential to achieve some of the more democratic aims but it is unclear to what extent they have. There is evidence that local authorities consult on more operational aspects of their panels but there is an absence in the literature of any great attempt to measure democratic outcomes with panellists. Norfolk County Council and Camden Council have made strides toward this, for example Norfolk measures the extent to which panellists feel they are contributing to public services, influencing decisions and whether their opinions of the partner organisations have changed and Camden Council asked about the extent to which panellists felt they were contributing to their area.

A further objective of panels relates to improving partnership working and co-ordination of consultation activity. Evidence however suggests that the majority of local authorities (72%) have established their own panels (QA

Research, 2005:3). This may in part be explained by issues over governance of partnership panels (Dungey, 1997; RBA, Research, 2001; Norfolk Citizens' Panel Partnership, 2001, 2007, Tizard, 2008). Nevertheless, Norfolk are making good progress and research points to local authorities allowing partners to use panels on a cost basis rather than having formal arrangements. As with consultation in general co-ordination proved difficult to attain at York City Council and with the People's panel. So again it would perhaps seem that panels have not quite accomplished what they set out to deliver but it could be said that this simply symbolizes consultation per se.

### **The case study citizens' panel**

So how does the case study panel compare and what else can we learn? In attempting to understand the panel it was important to take account of a range of stakeholders and evidence including panellists themselves, council officers, my own experiences as Research Officer and six year's worth of documents and data relating to the panel.

On the issue of representativeness the case study panel corroborates the wider literature in that it attracts a low initial take up and is unrepresentative in terms of age, disability and affluence as an entity and particularly in terms of responses to surveys and other consultations. Whilst targeted efforts to make the panel more representative were thought to be effective, attrition was disproportionate as experienced at Camden Council (2006).

In common with other panels there was no evidence regarding the motivations and attitudes of panellists as compared with the general population, either on joining the panel or as membership continues, and there were concerns from council officers that they may differ from the general population or have a particular agenda to promote. The survey with panellists attempted to consider this and indicated that on joining, panellists seem to be less positive than the general population about the council and local area. Qualitative comments provide further context to this; a popular reason for joining the panel is to help improve the local area and a focus on the local area is the most popular factor in terms of encouraging panellists to complete questionnaires. This seems to conflict with Wilson's (2002) observations that panellists are more pro-public service than the general population but tends to support Dungey (1997) and the DETR (2000c) who suggest that people who join are more interested in local government and the local area. These findings could also support studies that indicate that active participation can be an indicator of dissatisfaction (as outlined in chapter three).

With respect to the issue of conditioning, the panellist survey also compared the views of new and current panellists about the council and local area and there was no evidence to suggest that current panellists' views were any more or less positive than new panellists<sup>2</sup>. Whether or not this is a good or bad thing depends on what the objectives of the panel are. If the panel is striving for its members to become more positive about where they live and local

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<sup>2</sup> As observed in chapter four there may be other confounding factors when trying to ascertain if conditioning is occurring, for example the survey with current panel members had a higher non-response bias.

government then it would appear to have failed but if it is aiming to avoid the negative effects of conditioning then this could be viewed positively. Given possible limitations to this approach of measuring conditioning, a question was included in a short survey that was undertaken with panellists when they were retired in 2007 to investigate further, although it should be recognised that the response rate was only 29% (229/789). When asked about how their attitudes have changed, the majority feel they have become more positive about the local authority:

**Your opinion of [case study] Council has ...**

Become more positive	55.9%
Stayed the same	38.8%
Become less positive	5.3%

This is clearly an area that requires further investigation and perhaps a more useful way of measuring this would be to ask questions when panellists join the panel and again when they leave the panel to see if their perceptions have changed on an individual basis, and if so how.

Despite issues of representativeness, the panel is still used for survey research and three surveys are undertaken each year. It was not however used for the BVPI General survey and nor is it used to provide tracking data which is achieved via an Annual Resident's Survey. Instead surveys are used to follow up on issues arising from the Annual Resident's survey and as a complement to other research and consultation in addition to the Annual Budget Consultation. The average response rate from 2002 – 2007 was 52%,

although since introducing reminder questionnaires during this project, this has increased to an average of 61% over the last three surveys<sup>3</sup>.

Council officers' views were mixed with respect to representativeness of the panel with some feeling that extra effort should be made to attain this, others believing that the panel could be complemented by other groups or consultations and one suggesting that there was a need to be pragmatic. There were also suggestions given about improving representativeness of the panel in terms of getting out into the community and in relation to offering incentives. Some commentators suggest that the use of financial incentives can be effective with hard to reach groups such as young people (Dillman, 2000; Gregory, 2002; Simmons and Wilmot, 2004). The survey with panellists did not specifically ask about financial incentives but it did ask about entry to prize draws and receptivity varied with respondents who were younger, less affluent and with a disability being more in favour. This is consistent with the notion that incentives can be effective with hard to reach groups, although commentators are not referring to prize draws and Dillman (2000:169) argues that offers of prizes and contributions to charity have little, if any effect. On the face of it, it may seem that targeted incentives are worth further consideration given that there is evidence to suggest that harder to reach groups may be more receptive but this does raise ethical issues and the use of incentives conflicts with the notion of civic duty and may be perceived to be a waste of local authority resources.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the Summer Survey, 2007, Autumn Survey, 2007, Spring Survey 2008



With respect to building engagement with panellists, there is more evidence from the case study panel in this regard although it is mixed. As discussed previously, it is unclear as to whether panellists become more satisfied with the council as a result of being on the panel. In terms of generating knowledge and understanding, the panel seems to have achieved some success - it is delivering reasonably well with respect to 'I know more about what is going on in [the area]' and in terms of the exit survey mentioned previously, 92.1% of respondents felt that their understanding of the local authority has improved at least to some extent. With regard to issues of capacity building, 45.6% of respondents to the exit survey felt that they have developed new skills/and or confidence as a result of being on the panel. Feedback to more participatory consultation activities is positive, evidenced through satisfaction questionnaires at the budget consultation workshops for example and more informal feedback at discussion groups. This is less so however at events such as the State of the City Debate where audience participation was prohibited in 2007.

The survey with panellists revealed that experiences are not as positive with respect to the council listening to views, influencing decision making and being able to make a contribution to service provision and a significant minority disagree that the citizens' panel delivers on these issues. This reflects the difficulty of demonstrating the impact consultation with the panel has had and balancing the needs of panel users and panellists. Some of the causes perhaps typify the wider cultural issues at the council such as lack of planning and co-ordination, reluctance to devolve power and lack of

awareness and understanding regarding consultation. These are coupled with difficulties such as consultations where the effects are less tangible, where the outcomes will take a long time to be seen and reluctance or difficulty on the part of some officers to provide good quality feedback. Nevertheless, the survey revealed that the vast majority of respondents were positive about the panel overall and in terms of questionnaires and feedback they receive. It also revealed however, that the extent to which panellists feel informed and believe they are being listened to and making a contribution are important influences on satisfaction with the panel. This again supports the wider literature and underlines the importance of demonstrating to panellists that they are being listened to by explaining how the council is acting on their views. Central to this is what types of consultation the panellists are invited to take part in and this will be considered in the next chapter.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude this section, it is useful to consider how the case study panel has performed against the initial expectations of citizens' panels, drawing on the evidence collected. Table 30 considers in broad terms how the panel has performed. The table and above discussion demonstrate that although the panel does not on its own deliver representative survey data, its strengths lie in getting a large group of people more involved in local government. It also suggests potential, to get a sub group of panellists more involved, to strengthen the impact the panel has and communicate that impact, to strengthen partnership working and to achieve some of the benefits expected of public participation. When we consider this in the national policy context, it

suggests potential to help achieve the new duty to involve. The new duty will require that local authorities consider how to appropriately involve local people in the exercise of their functions in terms of providing information, consultation and more interactive involvement (HM Government, 2008). It would seem that the citizens' panel is in a unique position to deliver at all three levels with respect to local resident input, although with recognition that it may need to be complemented by other mechanisms. Whether and how this potential can be realised will be the focus of the next chapter.

<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Success?</b>	<b>Comments</b>
A cost effective and quick method of conducting survey research with a representative sample of residents and an anticipated high response	To some extent	Can deliver broad brush data from a cross-section of the population cost effectively. Was perceived to be a benefit in council officer interviews.
To track changes in views over time	No	Cannot be used to reflect changes in the general population and has not been used so far to measure changes on an individual basis
BVPI User Satisfaction General Survey	No	Did not meet requirements
A cost effective and quick means of recruiting people to take part in more qualitative or deliberative research and consultation events	Yes	Panellists invited to State of the City Debate, Budget Consultation and ad-hoc discussion groups. Departments are charged at cost. Seems to be cost effective in comparison to market research costs but does depend on attendance on the day which is sometimes disappointing.
The ability to target groups of people with particular characteristics for research	Yes but not used to a great extent	Used for bulky collection service users, parents with children, for example
To form closer relationships with a large group of people	Yes	On the whole it seems to be doing this but there is room for improvement
As a symbol of a local authority's commitment to consultation	Part	The authority has provided consistent support and finance for the panel through a dedicated team. The panel is acknowledged in inspection reports although issues regarding organisational culture.
To get local people more involved, more informed about and potentially more positive towards local government and the local area	Part	It appears to fulfil the first two obligations but evidence regarding the latter is mixed.

To help improve co-ordination of consultation activity within local authorities and with their partner organisations	To some extent	Partners and council departments are involved as appropriate and kept informed of the core programme but it is not a partnership panel
To encourage partnership working	To some extent	As above
To improve services and decision making	Partly	Issues of limited impact in some instances but good practice in others
An easy way of ticking the consultation box	Part	Some services think like this

This chapter has discussed how a citizens' panel has been implemented and developed at a local level in the context of the LGMA and wider consultation arrangements at the council. It has shown that in common with some other local authority panels, although the panel was unable to achieve some of the initial expectations and suffers from some of the wider difficulties experienced by public participation, it has found a role for itself and that there is potential to build on this and in doing so help to deliver on the emerging national policy agenda and help better achieve panellist expectations. There are however some unresolved issues with respect to the public participation agenda that will have a significant effect on the ability of the panel to deliver. From a national policy perspective, this includes the extent to which other government policies and regulation will allow local authorities to respond to the new agenda and the fact that the new legislation leaves the decision about when and how to involve local people at the discretion of local authorities. From the case study local authority perspective, it includes organisational culture and the propensity for local people to get involved, although the latter could be influenced by the former by better enabling the demonstration that the council is listening to panellist's views.

# Chapter eight - Conclusions

## Introduction

This study has added to existing literature on citizens' panels by reflecting on the implementation and development of a panel at a local level in the context of national policy and local circumstances and considering what future role the panel might have to play in view of emerging requirements from central government and the needs of panellists and council officers. The purpose of this chapter is to formulate practical recommendations for how to better meet the needs and expectations of stakeholders and improve the panel.

The study has established that there is still a role for the panel and potentially for other local authority panels with appropriate resources and organisational support. In particular there is a potential role in supporting local authorities in terms of the new duty to involve as panels are a unique offering in that they provide the opportunity for local people to be involved at a range of levels.

There is however a number of issues to address if the local panel is to meet the needs of its stakeholders including the extent to which central government and the local authority create an environment in which the benefits of public participation can truly be met and the extent to which local people respond to this. The next section identifies a range of possible improvements to the panel which take account of the opportunities and challenges identified.

## **Recommendations**

### **1 Extend and improve the range of participatory opportunities available to panellists and provide capacity building opportunities.**

The majority of panellists take part in surveys during their panel membership but only 17%<sup>1</sup> of current panellists have taken part in other activities as well as surveys. More participatory activities are believed to be better at engaging with and empowering people and evidence from the local panel and other panels is that they are well received. In addition the evaluation of Camden's panel found such activities to have a good impact on service delivery (Camden Council, 2006).

The first recommendation in this regard therefore is to extend and improve the opportunities available to get more panellists involved at a greater level and help improve the impact of panel activity. This can be tackled in two ways, one of which would be to find out from panellists why they currently do not attend discussion groups and events and what can be done to encourage participation. There were indications from the panel survey that the accessibility of such events may be an area to address and this needs to be further explored. The second aspect is to broaden the range of participatory activities available. The new duty to involve highlights the need to provide more interactive forms of engagement such as mystery shopping, citizen juries, co-designing of policies and services and co-producing of services (HM Government, 2008). Panel officers also saw a role for the panel in this regard and other local authorities are starting to use their panels in this way.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on analysis in July 2008 of 1603 panel members with membership ranging from just under 1 year to just under 3 years.

The panel survey indicated that new panellists are less satisfied than the general population with their local area and the council and the evaluation of the panel showed that panellists often use the panel as a complaints mechanism. In addition the survey showed that surveys with a local area focus and relating to services that panellists use would be most likely to encourage them to take part in surveys. This perhaps provides an opportunity to capitalise on. Programmes such as mystery shopping and panellists becoming the 'eyes and ears' of the council could be two initial ways to engage panellists more and also address their dissatisfaction and demonstrate that the council is listening to their views. It is however crucial to ensure that there is a clear means of following up on issues raised to ensure impact on services and decision making. Meetings will be organised with appropriate officers across the council to discuss taking this forward and other local authorities will be contacted to see how their programmes work.

Two further areas of potential in this regard are the Business Improvement Programme and Overview and Scrutiny. The Business Improvement Programme has been developed in relation to the government's service transformation agenda and aims to improve the way in which public services are delivered so that they better meet the needs of citizens and business and in terms of cost effectiveness (Varney, 2006). This could provide an opportunity for panellists to be involved in service re-design and has a real opportunity to result in tangible outcomes. The council is currently reviewing Overview and Scrutiny in order to strengthen arrangements and it is recommended that the possibility of involving the panel in future is

investigated as part of this review. This again assumes that the strengthened arrangements will mean that the committees have a real influence over decisions and services. Examples of how panellists could be more involved could be for example:

- in developing the annual work programme
- as co-optees on to committees for particular reviews
- as mystery shoppers,
- as part of a citizens jury.

Other opportunities to consider are the involvement of panellists in relation to participatory budgeting, which the government wants every local authority to develop and involvement in citizens' juries, both of which require a greater level of engagement and yield greater impact. Such opportunities could be promoted to panellists as they arise.

A further issue to consider is with regard to strengthening panel member's capacity to participate and ideally social capital, one of central governments objectives of public participation. In acknowledging the value of usual suspects, May (2007:72) highlights that strengthening capacity 'is not just altruistic .... it will make it far easier to find citizens who are both willing and able to engage with them in a meaningful way'. It is recommended that panellists are offered training in for example community participation, contributing in meetings, using the internet etc. The voluntary and community sector, Personnel Department and partner organisations should be contacted to investigate how this training might be provided.



## **2 Continue with the survey programme to enable those panellists who do not wish to become more involved, take part.**

It should however be recognised that there will still be many panellists who do not wish to be involved in more participatory activities beyond taking part in surveys and there is a need to engage with these people at the level to which they wish to engage. It is therefore still recommended that the panel is used for a regular programme of surveys. Feedback from panellists on the questionnaires themselves was positive so there is not an intention to change the operational side of things and officers valued using the panel for the budget consultation survey. Demonstrating impact will however be particularly crucial for these panellists since they will not experience the benefits of more participatory activity. Further consideration therefore needs to be given to the issues consulted on through surveys and likely impact, as will be addressed next.

## **3 Map out council and partner consultation activity for the year ahead and align the citizens' panel programme to maximise impact**

As part of the wider consultation / engagement arrangements it is recommended that a template is implemented for council departments and partners to complete as part of the strategic planning process which maps out their consultation / engagement needs for the year ahead linked to organisational and LSP strategic priorities. This could be translated into a consultation calendar and would encourage greater planning, co-ordination and partnership working in addition to permitting wider public involvement. From the panel perspective it could mean that the survey programme can be

aligned with appropriate activities that would have greater potential to influence service provision and decision making. This would also perhaps avoid some of the last minute consultation requests. In addition to this further consideration needs to be given to how the panel can align more closely to the activities of the LSP and this will be increasingly important in terms of central government aspirations for greater collaboration and co-ordination of consultation activity across the council and with partners (HM Government, 2007:2.4,2.25). Improved partnership working and the need for a more planned approach were also identified by officers during the interviews. The calendar would need to be widely publicised amongst officers, partners, Members and the voluntary and community sector.

#### **4 Compel panel users to clarify their consultation objectives and likely impact at the outset and feedback to panellists.**

A further recommendation in terms of improving impact and in relation to more ad-hoc requests to use the panel is to implement a simple outcome based template that officers must complete to use the panel, where officers must clearly outline the objectives of their consultation, how the information will influence services and decision making, how they will feedback and incorporates an evaluation to be completed at the conclusion of a consultation exercise. Again this will help to facilitate feedback on the impact consultation has had by encouraging officers to think about these issues at the outset and follows on from suggestions raised by some officers.

There is a recognition that the impact of some more strategic consultations will not always be immediate or tangible but it is perhaps about being clearer about this at the outset and ensuring that there is a mix of other panel activity where the outcomes will be more tangible.

### **5 Devise, publish and promote panel aims and guidelines**

It became clear through this study that there was not a common understanding of the panel's aims and this is crucial in terms of meeting expectations. Therefore the next recommendation is to establish a set of aims that take into account the expectations of all stakeholders. The following aims are proposed:

- 1 To provide a cross section of residents with the opportunity to get involved in decisions and services at the level to which they choose.
- 2 To develop and build engagement with a large group of residents.
- 3 To provide the council and partner organisations with a means of informing, consulting and involving a cross-section of local residents in services and decision-making.
- 4 To promote collaborative working and sharing of information across the council and partner organisations.
- 5 To help improve services, policies and decisions and for panellists to feel like their involvement has influenced them.
- 6 To improve knowledge, understanding and perceptions of the council and the local area amongst panellists.
- 7 To empower panellists.

In order for these aims to be effectively realised and in recognising some of the issues identified around organisational culture it recommended that they are supported by guidelines for panel use (Appendix 16). These should be promoted to officers via the council employee magazine, intranet, Corporate Consultation Group and other appropriate mechanisms. They could also be promoted through awareness raising sessions with senior management teams aimed at encouraging better use of the panel.

#### **6 Allow self-selection amongst harder to reach groups and promote the panel to them in the most appropriate ways.**

Representativeness is difficult to achieve and maintain in a panel and in common with other panels the local panel is not demographically representative and neither is participation in panel surveys or workshops. In taking on board the views of council officers and experiences at the local panel and other authorities, it is suggested that this is tackled in three ways. The first is to permit self-selection amongst harder to reach groups such as young people and people from BME backgrounds and actively promote the panel to these groups by liaising with other council departments, partners and the voluntary and community sector to determine the best way to do this. This can also be promoted through existing panellists. Simmons and Birchall (2005) highlight a number of authors who state that recruitment through social networks can play an important role in encouraging people to participate. It is also suggested that respondents who have indicated that they wish to be more involved through the Annual Resident's survey and new Place Survey and are from harder-to-reach groups are sent a direct invitation to join the

panel. Evidence suggests that personal invitations can be effective, particularly for hard-to-reach groups (Lowndes et al, 2001b; Rogers, 2004).

## **7 Explore using complementary approaches to engage harder to reach groups**

Some critics argue that a citizens' panel is simply not an appropriate means of engaging certain groups of people (e.g. QA Research, 2005; RBA Research, 2001) and others argue that rather than trying to push people into existing structures which will only ever be taken up by a small group of people, complement them with more informal participation through existing networks (Skidmore, Bound and Lownsborough, 2006; Gavelin, 2008<sup>2</sup>). It is therefore recommended that representativeness is also tackled from another angle by complementing panel surveys with other approaches. If surveys with panellists are part of a more planned approach, tied into an overall programme then there should be more time and resources to complement them with other means of gaining the views of under-represented groups, rather than getting these people to join the panel. It is recommended that other means are initially explored with the voluntary and community sector, engaging people through informal social networks and through the possible development of an e-panel. Initial indications suggest that e-panels can be effective in reaching young people (Hayward, 2005). This can potentially be picked up as part of the council's e-consultation solution. A further mechanism is to explore the potential to consult with council staff, as residents of the city as a complementary mechanism.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.involve.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=main.viewBlogEntry&intMTEEntryID=3134>

## **8 Wider and better promotion of the panel and its impact to residents and panel users**

The above can be supported by wider promotion of the panel, through for example the council's resident's magazine, including up-to-date, tangible examples of where the panel has influenced decision-making. Such examples can also be included in invitation literature to potentially encourage more people to join. Better promotion should also extend across the council, LSP and with Members to encourage better use of the panel, greater involvement and better use of findings. A panel leaflet could be produced to convey the main aims of the panel and provide real examples of where decisions have been influenced and what panellists think of the experience in support of this.

## **9 Explore further the impact of prize draws, donations to charity and reminders on survey response rates and representativeness.**

A further means of potentially improving representativeness is to consider the use of some of the interventions proposed in the panel survey. Issues of topic saliency can be picked up by ensuring that there is a good balance of issues consulted on and will also be addressed by activities such as mystery shopping and reporting on local issues. There also needs to be further consideration given to the extent to which panellists can set the agenda although issues around devolving power to local people at the council will need to be addressed. The team can easily ensure that there is space on questionnaires for additional comments and already provide opportunities for influencing the content of the Summer Survey and can look to build on this approach with other questionnaires.

In terms of donations to charity and prize draws, the survey showed that some of the harder to reach groups are more receptive whilst the wider literature suggests that these are not effective ways of encouraging response rates but that the use of financial incentives can be effective with harder to reach groups. It is felt at this stage that the use of financial incentives (targeted or not) is not used with the panel due to ethical issues and conflict with building engagement but that this policy is reviewed, depending on how the other recommendations work and it may be that incentives operate outside of the panel when it is important to ensure the involvement of particular groups. It is also recommended that this is further explored with other local authorities, for example Gloucestershire County Council are offering a £5 supermarket voucher to people who join the panel (Gloucestershire County Council, 2007) – it would be useful to know how this impacts on the people who join and their contribution. Finally it is recommended that the team experiment with prize draws and donations to charity where appropriate to see what impact this has. For example, the Summer Survey 2008 is about the future of adult social care, perhaps donations to Age Concern could be offered for completed questionnaires and responses compared to previous surveys to see if they differ.

In terms of reminders to questionnaires, as outlined in the previous chapter, this has been used successfully since Summer 2007 with an average increase in response rate of 9% although the overall demographic profile of respondents has remained the same as previous surveys. It would be useful to investigate further the profile of those who respond to the reminder

questionnaire and if the reminder is simply increasing the proportion of respondents who already reply, then perhaps it would be more effective to target reminders to those who are under-represented which could potentially reduce costs and improve representativeness.

## **10 Weight panel survey data**

The final means of addressing representativeness is to weight panel data by key demographic factors to correct for demographic bias in responses.

## **11 Continue to retire panel members after three years but promote ongoing engagement**

The panel is currently refreshed on annual basis via random recruitment and panellists retired from the panel on a triennial basis. It is recommended that this policy continue since it offers panellists enough time to find their feet and experience a range of activity but it also limits the possible effects of conditioning and keeps the panel fresh. In addition it means that the panel experience can be offered to more residents by inviting a new sample of people to join each year. That said however, in recognition of their contribution and to further harness their enthusiasm and interest and to provide them with the opportunity to continue to develop knowledge, skills and confidence, there are two recommendations to promote ongoing engagement:

- Produce a directory of opportunities available to local people to get involved in decision-making and provide this to panellists when they are retired from the panel.



- Implement a 'Friends of the Panel' scheme where retired panellists can be invited to take part in non-exclusive citizens' panel consultations and events and are also sent copies of the panel newsletter. Offer panellists this opportunity when they are retired from the panel. As detailed previously there may be also opportunities for these panellists with respect to any area mechanisms that are established.

## **12 Evaluate success of the panel through panellist indicators and evaluations and from panel user feedback.**

In order to ascertain whether or not the panel is achieving its aims, it is recommended that a range of panellist perspective indicators are implemented. Proposed indicators based on the panel survey and panel aims are detailed in Table 31. It is suggested that a number of approaches are used to collect this information. The first is continue to undertake a general health check of the panel, by asking questions on some key indicators on an annual basis. It is recommended that this take place as part of the Summer Survey which allows new panellists enough time to settle into the panel from the previous September and takes place before panellists are retired from the panel in September. The second recommendation is to ask questions on some key outcomes when panellists join the panel and again when they leave the panel to see if their perceptions have changed on an individual basis, and if so how. Some of these measures are part of the National Indicator Set and will be collected through the Place Survey, therefore comparisons can also be made between panellists and the general public. This would be in addition to

evaluations as part of key events such as the budget consultation workshops and State of the City Debate.

<b>Table 31</b>	
<b>Proposed panellists indicators</b>	
<b>Measure</b>	<b>Aim</b>
<b>Annual Health Check</b>	
I feel like the council is asking my views	1
I feel like the council is listening to my views	2,5
I know out more about what is going on in [the area]	2,6
I know more about the council	2,6
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the area]	1,2,5
I can influence decision making	1,2,5
I can help to improve my local area	1,2,5
Extent to which they feel informed about the consultation exercises they have taken part in	2, 5
Satisfaction with [the panel]	1,5
<b>Joining and exit survey</b>	
Satisfaction with the council	6
Satisfaction with local area	6
How well informed they feel about the council	6
Extent to which they can influence decision making	2,7
Extent to which they trust the council	6
<b>Exit survey only</b>	
Enjoyed being a panel member	6
If they feel they have developed new skills and confidence	7

A further recommendation is to invite feedback from panel users as part of the user template (targeted around objectives 3, 4 and 5).

## **Reflections, strengths and weaknesses**

This study provides a timely contribution to existing literature on citizens' panels by examining in detail the implementation and development of a citizens' panel at a local level and considering the future role with respect to emerging government policy. Whilst the case study is not generalizable to all local authorities, it still has relevance and significance to them since the majority of local authorities have citizens' panels (71% - Birch, 2002; 79% - QA Research, 2005) and all local authorities operate in the national policy context and will need to respond to the new requirements coming from central

government with respect to community engagement. In addition the literature review revealed that many of the challenges raised in the implementation of the public participation agenda in general and citizens' panel are common across local government. The extent of the study's relevance will of course depend on local circumstances.

In undertaking the study as a practitioner-researcher I had a good knowledge and understanding of the local context, various stakeholders involved and the citizens' panel, and had full flexibility and access to the panel and council officers. This played a crucial role in terms of identifying the study and was particularly beneficial in establishing the research questions and designing and undertaking the research and complemented the literature review.

In addition to the benefits of occupying an 'insider' role however, Robson (2002) also describes 'insider' limitations. Two such issues are my potential subjectivity and pre-existing relationships I had with other officers and the possible impact this may have had during the interviews, knowing that I was responsible for developing the citizens' panel. This was minimised by adopting a reflexive approach to the study and being self-aware of my influence on the study and building this into my approach. One means of doing this was to employ a range of approaches and sources of evidence to collect data for the study including analysis of existing data and documents, officer interviews, direct observations in my day-to-day work, the panellist survey and including subsequent questions on panel surveys thus permitting triangulation. Yin (2003:98) highlights that 'any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on

several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode'. A further means was to draw on my research methodology knowledge, skills and experience and research methods texts to ensure that I was using the correct methods and maintaining high professional standards and verifying my thinking and approach with my supervisor and manager. Since I was responsible for all coding, transcription and analysis undertaken, the final means of addressing this was to run draft conclusions and recommendations past officers at the council including those who participated in the interviews and also test out support for some recommendations with panellists via a panel survey.

One difficulty experienced as practitioner-research was with respect to the time available to undertake the dual role. Some time was made available in the initial 10 months of the study in the work context to undertake the panel survey and officer interviews and in terms of clerical support with regard to data entry of the panel questionnaires but the subsequent analysis and remaining research and writing was restricted to evenings and weekends. It is not felt that this compromised the quality of research undertaken but it certainly took longer than anticipated.

There were also some limitations in terms of undertaking the panellist survey. Firstly it was undertaken before a full literature review could be carried out and ideally the survey would have taken place after the review and possibly some qualitative work with panellists. Practicalities however were felt to outweigh this drawback and the benefit of being a researcher-practitioner,

drawing on existing data and utilising the literature collected at that point helped to minimise negative effects. A further limitation of the survey was that the current panellist survey only achieved a response rate of 51.1% and there were some differences in the demographic profile of respondents to current panellists overall. Lower than expected response rates were believed to have been caused by underperformance of the market research company which meant that some respondents were not contacted to take part, the increased length of the questionnaire and low response rates amongst respondents who were recruited via street interviews during 2006 (only 19% of this group responded). The new panellist survey fared better, however at 76.7% and the profile was closer to that of the new panellists. In addition, a mixed-mode method was adopted to undertake the survey to ensure that it was as inclusive as possible but this did result in differences in responses in some instances and telephone respondents were more positive than postal respondents to questions regarding satisfaction with the panel, the council and local area, supporting similar mode differences reported by Dillman (2000). In such instances however, this was acknowledged in the results and additional analysis undertaken where possible. Finally if there had been more space and time it would have been better to present and discuss non-significant results as well as statistically significant results when considering associations between variables. This would have provided a more comprehensive picture of the findings and enabled a fuller exploration of the research questions.

## Conclusions

This study has examined in detail the implementation and development of a citizens' panel at a local level and in the context of evolving national policy to determine what future role it might best serve. It has identified a wide range of actors in this process, all of whom have different roles to play, different needs and expectations and different levels of influence. Only by examining a citizens panel at this level of detail is it possible to gain a detailed understanding of these inter-relationships. The study concludes that it is simply not enough to provide resources to run a citizens panel or indeed to have an enthusiastic panel manager who is committed to success. A successful panel and indeed successful public participation is dependent on the support of central government, local government and its partners and local people.

The study illustrates the importance of central government and the extent to which it is committed to enabling public participation to flourish through the coherence of its policies and actions as well as rhetoric. The new government agenda offers possibilities for citizens' panels and public participation but success will be dependent on this ongoing commitment. The study has also underlined the importance of the local context and in particular organisational culture. Success is dependent on an organisational wide and indeed partnership wide understanding and commitment to well planned, co-ordinated and high quality engagement. If central government intend to address this through CAA then this may be a key driver for this change, indeed it is currently proposed that CAA will include an evaluation of the

quality of public engagement (CLG, 2008). Finally citizens' panels and public participation are dependent on local people and the extent to which they want to engage. There is a need to be pragmatic in that the majority of people might not wish to engage at the highest levels but they may wish to be involved in some way and their most important criteria is that they are listened to and that their involvement makes a difference. If this is a possibility then local people may be more inclined to engage in the first place.

The study provides a range of recommendations to address issues around representativeness, improving impact and promoting engagement by taking into account the needs and expectations of the different stakeholders and challenges presented but these should be seen as building blocks and the panel can only truly be a success with commitment from all other actors involved.

# GLOSSARY

## **Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs)**

A set of national performance indicators and standards against which authorities were required to set targets and monitor their performance.

Introduced in April 2000.

## **Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) User Satisfaction Surveys**

The BVPI User Satisfaction Surveys were introduced in 2000 as a means of measuring user satisfaction with services. Five large-scale statutory surveys were to be conducted on a triennial basis - General, Tenants, Benefits, Planning and Libraries surveys, the first of which took place in 2000/01.

Further surveys were conducted in 2003/04 and 2006/07. They were replaced in 2008 by the 'Place Survey'.

## **Community Strategy**

The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to produce a Community Strategy. A Community Strategy sets out the long term vision and priorities for the economic, social and environmental well being of an area.

## **Compact**

A compact is an agreement between the public and voluntary and community sector to improve relationships for mutual advantage and community benefit.



### **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)**

CAA will replace CPA in April 2009. It will look at how well local services are working together to improve the quality of life for local people. Seven partner inspectorates will provide a joint assessment of outcomes for people in an area and a forward look at prospects for sustainable improvement (Audit Commission, 2008 - <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/whatiscaa.asp>)

### **Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)**

CPA was introduced in 2002 and aims to provide an overall assessment of how local authorities are delivering services for local people. Assessments are administered by the Audit Commission and include assessments of key council services, how the council uses its resources, how well the council leads the local community (Corporate Assessment) and the progress the council is making (Audit Commission, 2007 - <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/guide/guidewhatiscpa.asp>). Those local authorities categorised as high-performing receive additional freedoms and flexibilities with 'more local discretion to encourage civil renewal' (DTLR, 2001b:3.6). This is to be replaced in 2009 by CAA.

### **DCLG/CLG**

Department for Communities and Local Government/Communities and Local Government.

### **DETR**

Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions.

**DTLR**

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

**Duty to Involve**

The duty seeks to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their say and to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment in local authorities. The duty requires that local authorities take steps where appropriate to involve local people (including the most marginalised and vulnerable) in the exercise of their functions in terms of providing information, consultation and more interactive involvement. The duty is scheduled to come into effect on 1 April 2009 (HM Government, 2008).

**Equality Assessment Template (INRA)**

A template to help equality check a service, function or significant project. The law requires that such checks are carried out in order to identify any potential inequalities or barriers for different kinds of people.

**I&DeA**

Improvement and Development Agency.

### **Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)**

The IMD combines a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social and housing issues, into a single deprivation score for each small area in England. This allows each area to be ranked relative to one another according to their level of deprivation.

(<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/deprivation/deprivation07/>).

### **JRF**

Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

### **LARIA**

Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association.

### **LGA**

Local Government Association.

### **LGIU**

Local Government Information Unit.

### **Local Area Agreements (LAAs)**

LAAs are agreements between local authorities (with the co-operation of their partners) and central government that set out targets for improvement, tailored to local needs.

### **Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA)**

A range of policies arising from the 1998 and 2001 White Papers, to modernise local government.

### **Local Involvement Networks (LINKs)**

LINKs were to be established by April 2008 to provide local people, organisations and groups with a means of having their say about Health and Social Care services. The LINK has powers to can make recommendations and request information that the people who provide, commission and scrutinise services have a legal responsibility to act on.

### **Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs)**

LPSAs are challenging service improvement targets negotiated between local authorities and central government to achieve performance above and beyond normal expectations in return for financial assistance and new freedoms. They were extended to Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

### **Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)**

Cross-sectoral umbrella partnerships bringing together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to provide a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other, more specific partnerships can work (DTLR, 2001a: footnote 6).

**Mosaic**

Mosaic is Experian's lifestyle classification system that categorises households and postcodes into 61 types aggregated into 11 groups. Classification is based on a wide variety of data including census data, consumer credit activity, lifestyle data, house price and council tax information and Office of National Statistics (ONS) local area statistics, and is updated annually (Experian, 2003, 2004).

**ODPM**

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the ODPM transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

**ONS**

Office for National Statistics, formerly the Office of Population and Censuses and Surveys (OPCS).

**Place Survey**

The Place Survey replaced the BVPI User Satisfaction Surveys in Autumn 2008. It is a large scale statutory survey to be conducted biannually and will collect 18 citizen perspective performance indicators from the new nation set of indicators. The survey is to focus on improving outcomes for local people and places rather than individual services and agencies.

## Appendix One - Current panellist questions

In the last section we would like to find out a little more about your perceptions of [the citizens' panel].

Q3

Firstly why did you accept the invitation to join [the citizens' panel]?  
(Please write in and explain fully)

Q4

And as a member of [the citizens' panel], to what extent have your expectations been met? (Cross one box only)

Fully

Partly

Not at all

Q5

Why is this? (Please write in and explain fully)

With the next 2 questions we would like to explore your expectations of being a panel member against your actual experience.

Q6

Firstly thinking about your expectations when you joined [the citizens panel], to what extent do you agree or disagree that you expected .....?  
(Cross one box only on each line)

I expected:	Strongly Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The Council to ask my views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Council to listen to my views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the area]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To find out more about what is going on in [the area]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To have a say in local issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To influence decision making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q7

Now thinking about your actual experience as a member of [the citizens' panel], to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? *(Cross one box only on each line)*

	Strongly Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I feel like the Council is asking for my views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel like the Council is listening to my views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the area]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know more about what is going on in [the area]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can have a say in local issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can influence decision making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

We would now like to find out what you think of the surveys we send out and how they can be developed.

Q8

Overall thinking about the questionnaires you have received in the last year, do you think: *(Cross one box only on each line)*

The questionnaires were:	Very easy to complete <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly easy to complete <input type="checkbox"/>	Difficult to complete <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
The questions were:	Difficult to understand <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly easy to understand <input type="checkbox"/>	Very easy to understand <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
The questionnaires covered topics that were:	Very important to me <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly important to me <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important to me <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
The questionnaires covered topics in:	Too little detail <input type="checkbox"/>	The right amount of detail <input type="checkbox"/>	Too much detail <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
The number of questionnaires sent to you was:	Too many <input type="checkbox"/>	About right <input type="checkbox"/>	Too few <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
The questionnaires were:	Too short <input type="checkbox"/>	About right <input type="checkbox"/>	Too long <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>

Q9

Please indicate whether or not each of the following would encourage you take part in surveys? *(Cross one box only on each line)*

	Yes definitely	Yes probably	No probably not	No definitely not	Don't know
If a survey asks about Council services I use / benefit from	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If a survey covers issues specific to my local area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If a survey covers broad issues that affect most people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Space on the questionnaire to write in additional comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
An opportunity to influence the content of questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reminders to take part	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To be entered into a prize draw	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Donations to charity for each questionnaire returned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

We would now like to find out your opinions on the feedback you receive.

Firstly Q10 and Q11 ask about the newsletters (the colour leaflet called xxxxxx) you have received in the last year.

Q10

Overall do you think the newsletters were..? *(Cross one box only on each line)*

Very easy to read <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly easy to read <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly difficult to read <input type="checkbox"/>	Very difficult to read <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all informative <input type="checkbox"/>	Not very informative <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly informative <input type="checkbox"/>	Very informative <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
Very visually appealing <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly visually appealing <input type="checkbox"/>	Not very visually appealing <input type="checkbox"/>	Not at all visually appealing <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>

Q11

And do you think the newsletters were worthwhile or not? *(Cross one box only)*

Yes definitely <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes to some extent <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------	----------------------------------------



Q12 and Q13 ask about the survey reports (the booklets containing the survey findings) you have received in the last year.

**Q12** Overall how clearly do you think they...? *(Cross one box only on each line)*

	Very clearly	Fairly clearly	Not very clearly	Not at all clearly	Don't know
Explained the results from surveys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Explained how the results from surveys have been used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q13** And do you think the survey reports were worthwhile or not?  
*(Cross one box only)*

Yes definitely	Yes to some extent	No	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q14** Overall, how well informed do you feel about the consultation exercises you have taken part in? *(Cross one box only)*

Very well informed	Fairly well informed	Not very well informed	Not at all informed	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q15** And finally overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with [the citizens' panel]? *(Cross one box only)*

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q16** Do you have any further comments or suggestions for improvement to [the citizens' panel]? *(Please write in)*

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return in the free post envelope provided by Friday 17 November.

# Appendix One - New panellist questions

In the last section we would like to find out a little more about your perceptions of [the citizens' panel] so far.

**Q5**

Firstly why did you accept the invitation to join [the citizens' panel]?  
*(Please write in and explain fully)*

**Q6**

How well informed do you feel about what your membership of [the citizens' panel] will involve? *(Cross one box only)*

Very well informed

Fairly well informed

Not very well informed

Not at all informed

Don't know

**Q7**

What do you think being a member of [the citizens' panel] will involve?  
*(Please write in)*

**Q8**

Now thinking about your expectations of [the citizens' panel], to what extent do you agree or disagree that you expect .....?  
*(Cross one box only on each line)*

I expect:	Strongly Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The Council to ask my views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Council to listen to my views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the area]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To find out more about what is going on in [the area]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To have a say in local issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To influence decision making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Now thinking about the [the citizens' panel] Members' Pack.

Q9

Did you receive your [the citizens' panel] Members' Pack?  
(Cross one box only)

Yes  Continue to Q10

No  Go to Q14

Q10

And have you read .... ? (Cross one box only)

All of it

Most of it

Some of it

None of it

If you have not read any of the Members pack, please go to Q12. Otherwise please continue to Q11.

Q11

Thinking about the Members' Pack you have received, do you think it was .....? (Cross one box only on each line)

Very easy  
to read

Fairly easy  
to read

Fairly difficult  
to read

Very difficult  
to read

Don't  
know

Not at all  
interesting

Not very  
interesting

Fairly  
interesting

Very  
interesting

Don't  
know

Very  
useful

Fairly  
useful

Not very  
useful

Not at all  
useful

Don't  
know

Q12

Do you have any comments or suggestions for improvement to the Members' Pack? (Please write in)

Q13

How important do you think it is for new panel members to receive a Members' Pack? (Cross one box only)

Very  
important

Fairly  
important

Not very  
important

Not at all  
important

Don't  
know



Now thinking about the surveys we will be asking you to take part in:

**Q14**

Please indicate whether or not each of the following would encourage you take part in surveys? *(Cross one box only on each line)*

	Yes definitely	Yes probably	No probably not	No definitely not	Don't know
If a survey asks about Council services I use / benefit from	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If a survey covers issues specific to my local area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If a survey covers broad issues that affect most people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Space on the questionnaire to write in additional comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
An opportunity to influence the content of questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reminders to take part	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To be entered into a prize draw	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Donations to charity for each questionnaire returned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q15**

Do you have any further comments or suggestions for improvement to [the citizens' panel]? *(Please write in)*

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return in the free post envelope provided by Friday November 17th.



## Appendix 2

### Panellist research - pre-test and pilot

The pre-tests revealed that the main challenge was to reduce the questionnaire length. Once the final pre-tests were complete and after much rationalisation the questionnaire was ready to pilot.

The interviewers who were to conduct the main survey carried out the pilot and were asked to report back on the flow of the questionnaire, whether there were any questions that respondents seemed to misunderstand, poor wording/phrasing, if any questions were too long and if any questions caused any problems. Respondents were asked if they enjoyed the survey, whether the questions made sense, about the length of the questions containing statements, the number of open questions and for any additional comments.

Twenty-five full pilot interviews were completed and the feedback received was that the questionnaire was still taking an average of 14 minutes 54 seconds but other than this there were no problems with the questionnaire. In terms of respondents, two reported that there were too many statements on some questions and one highlighted that it would be useful to receive a recent newsletter and survey report in advance of answering (this would be happening prior to the main survey anyway). In addition there were too many questions to fit into the questionnaire booklet for self-completion respondents. Changes were made on the basis of questionnaire length and analysis of the pilot data.

## Appendix 2

Below is a brief explanation of the final set of questions included and an indication of where concessions had to be made. It should be considered alongside Table 1, page 8.

### Attitudes towards case study council and the local area

Q1 and Q2 on both questionnaires and Q3 and 4 on the new panel members' questionnaire were replicated from the Annual Residents' Survey and permission was sought from Ipsos-MORI to do so. As previously described, this was to make comparisons between new and current panel members and with the general population.

### Motivations for joining and expectations of the citizens panel

Q3 and 5 (current) and Q5 and Q7 (new) were open-ended questions designed to obtain this information in respondents' own words. Q6 (current)/ Q8 (new) asked about expectations in local government terms and ranged from information giving at one end of the scale to influencing decision making at the other. They were designed to correspond with the categories in Q7 (current) to allow comparison between expectations and perceptions for current panel members. The first 4 statements in Q7 were replicated from previous surveys with panel members in April 2003, February 2004 and February 2005. It was important to include them this time in the same format to see whether there have been any changes in perceptions. Therefore Q8 (new) was designed to correspond with Q6 (current) to permit investigation of any differences between the two groups of respondents. However this time

## Appendix 2

additional statements were added to expand on what panel members expect from and feel they are getting out of the panel. There were originally an additional 8 statements which reduced to 2 after pre-testing and piloting. Decisions on what to remove centred around validity issues thrown up in the pilot and an assessment of what was most important.

### Perceptions of the panel

Q8 (current) and Q10-14 (current) focused on the two main elements of the panel – questionnaires and feedback to find out what respondents thought of them. Each section was to be initially followed up with an open question so that respondents could elaborate on any responses given to the closed questions or comment on something that had not been asked about.

Time/space constraints, however, meant that this was not possible and a general open question at the end of the questionnaire was included instead.

Much consideration and testing had gone into the formatting of these questions prior to the pilot but analysis of pilot data suggested what many authors (e.g. Foddy, 1993; Schuman and Presser, 1996) describe as 'acquiescence response bias' problems. Another problem related to interpretation of one of the measures – did disagreement with 'covered topics in enough detail' mean they were too detailed or not detailed enough? These sections also needed to be rationalised given the time/space limitations.

Therefore changes were made accordingly.

## Appendix 2

So far information had not been collected on the Members Pack since 2002 when some brief information was obtained and this was a good opportunity to find out what new panel members thought of it, having just received it (q9-13 new).

Q15 (current) was included to provide an overall measure of how satisfied respondents were with the panel. This would also be a useful question to cross-tabulate with other responses to see if there were any associations with other variables.

### Factors influencing response to surveys

Q9 (current) and Q14 (new) were included to explore what would encourage more people to respond to surveys. Options were specifically geared to what developments could be made to the panel and qualitative suggestions from a previous survey.

### Demographic information

A combination of questions was considered as an indicator (cars in household, work status and educational attainment) but given the time and space constraints with this survey and concerns that respondents would not see the relevance of such questions, it was decided to code respondents using Experian's Mosaic categories, which was readily accessible at the council. Mosaic provides distinct lifestyle classifications at postcode and individual household level. Classification is based on a wide variety of data



## Appendix 2

including census data, consumer credit activity, lifestyle data, house price and council tax information and Office of National Statistics (ONS) local area statistics, and is updated annually (Experian, 2004). Mosaic is updated annually in March each year so there was an appreciation that it might not be fully accurate by November and critics highlight the problems of ecological fallacy which is the mistaken assumption that an individual shares the general population characteristics of her or his neighbourhood and its population (Harris, Slight, Webber, 2005). Nevertheless it was felt that this would provide a good indication of education and affluence.

## Appendix 3

### Panellist research – Timetables

<b>Table 1</b> <b>Panellist research – Data collection, processing and analysis timetable</b>	
<b>Questionnaire Development</b>	
Pre-test Questions	2 - 6 October 2006
Pilot	13 - 16 October 2006
Revise and finalise telephone & paper versions	17 – 27 October 2006
<b>Telephone Survey</b>	
Advance letter & information posted out to telephone respondents	23 October 2006
Interviewer briefing	30 October 2006
Telephone Interviews	30 October – 24 November (extended to 1 December) 2006
<b>Self Completion Survey</b>	
Letter, information and questionnaire posted out to postal respondents	27 October 2006
Online version of questionnaires made available	27 October 2006
Postal questionnaires sent to those who requested this when contacted by telephone or whose telephone numbers were not working	30 October – 20 November (extended to 27 November) 2006
Reminder to postal respondents who have not replied	14 November 2006
Deadline for postal surveys	17 November (extended to 24 November for non-respondents and then 1 December) 2006
<b>Data processing and analysis</b>	
Data processing and quality checking	December 2006
Analysis	January – February, September – December 2007

<b>Table 2</b> <b>Research at Case Study Authority – timetable</b>	
<b>Documentary Analysis</b>	Ongoing
<b>Own experiences and observations</b>	Ongoing
<b>Research with council officers</b>	
Drafting questions, including pilot	7 May – 8 June 2007
Organising interviews	14 May -18 May 2007
Conducting interviews	19 June – 10 July 2007
Writing up interview notes	19-June – end July 2007
Analysis	End July –end August 2007

# Appendix Four

## Panellist research - telephone letter – new panellists

Name

Address line 1

Address line 2

Address Line 3

Address Line 4

Postcode

Date: 23rd October 2006

Our ref: Newmemb

Dear panel member

### Autumn Survey 2006

The Autumn Survey 2006 asks about the Council's spending priorities for 2007/08 and your expectations of [the citizens panel] as a new panel member. The survey will be conducted over the telephone which means that interviewers will be contacting you during the next month to take part. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

**I very much hope you can take part in the survey** – your views on spending priorities will be used to help inform the proposals for the Council's Revenue Budget for 2007/08. We would also very much like to hear your views on [the citizens panel] so that we can continue to develop the panel to meet panel members' expectations. Your responses will be treated in the strictest of confidence. They will not be attributed to individuals and will only be reported in aggregate form. **Please also note that if you do take part you will be eligible for our annual prize draw!**

Please find included the Budget Outlook for 2007/08 for you to read in advance of the telephone interview. It would be useful to have this to hand during the interview. Also find enclosed the booklet 'Working Out The Council's Budget' which provides background to how the Council determines the amount we spend and the amount of income we need from Council Tax.

If we experience problems in reaching you by phone, we will send the questionnaire out by post. In the meantime if you have any queries about the survey please do not hesitate to contact the [citizens panel] team on FREEPHONE xxxxxxxxxxxxxx or email xxxxxxxxxxxx.

Yours faithfully

# Appendix Four

## Panellist research - telephone letter – current panellists

Name  
Address line 1  
Address line 2  
Address Line 3  
Address Line 4  
Postcode

Date: 23rd October 2006  
Our ref: Newmemb

Dear panel member

### Autumn Survey 2006

The Autumn Survey 2006 asks about the Council's spending priorities for 2007/08 and your views on being a member of [the citizens panel]. The survey will be conducted over the telephone which means that interviewers will be contacting you during the next month to take part. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

**I very much hope you can take part in the survey** – your views on spending priorities will be used to help inform the proposals for the Council's Revenue Budget for 2007/08. We would also very much like to hear your views on [the citizens panel] so that we can continue to develop the panel to meet panel members' expectations. Your responses will be treated in the strictest of confidence. They will not be attributed to individuals and will only be reported in aggregate form.

Please find included the Budget Outlook for 2007/08 for you to read in advance of the telephone interview. It would be useful to have this to hand during the interview. Also find enclosed the booklet 'Working Out The Council's Budget' which provides background to how the Council determines the amount we spend and the amount of income we need from Council Tax.

Please also find enclosed Issue 10 Of Listening To You and a report from the Priority Issues Survey carried out in March this year.

If we experience problems in reaching you by phone, we will send the questionnaire out by post. In the meantime if you have any queries about the survey or newsletter please do not hesitate to contact the [citizens panel] team on FREEPHONE xxxxxxxx or email xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Yours faithfully

# Appendix Four

## Panellist research - postal letter – new panellists

Name  
Address line 1  
Address line 2  
Address Line 3  
Address Line 4  
Postcode

Date: 27th October 2006  
Our ref: Newmemb

Dear panel member

### Autumn Survey 2006

I am pleased to enclose the Autumn Survey 2006 which asks about the Council's spending priorities for 2007/08 and your expectations of [the citizens panel] as a new panel member.

The survey is accompanied by the Budget Outlook for 2007/08 which you will need to read before completing the questionnaire. Also find enclosed the booklet 'Working Out The Council's Budget' which provides background to how the Council determines the amount we spend and the amount of income we need from Council Tax.

**I very much hope you can take part in the survey** (which should take about 20 minutes). Your views on spending priorities will be used to help inform the proposals for the Council's Revenue Budget for 2007/08. Your views on [the citizens panel] will be used to help us continue to develop the panel. Your responses will be treated in the strictest of confidence. They will not be attributed to individuals and will only be reported in aggregate form. When you have completed the questionnaire, please return in the enclosed FREEPOST envelope by **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November**. **Please also note that if you do take part you will be eligible for our annual prize draw!**

If you have access to the internet, you can complete the survey on-line by visiting the [citizens panel] web pages xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx and then 'Autumn Survey 2006 – New Panel Member'.

If you have any queries about the survey please do not hesitate to contact the [citizens panel] team on FREEPHONE xxxxxxxxxxxxxx or email xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Yours faithfully

# Appendix Four

## Panellist research - postal letter – current panellists

Name  
Address line 1  
Address line 2  
Address Line 3  
Address Line 4  
Postcode

Date: 27th October 2006  
Our ref: Newmemb

Dear panel member

### Autumn Survey 2006

I am pleased to enclose the Autumn Survey 2006 which asks about the Council's spending priorities for 2007/08 and your views on being a member of [the citizens panel].

The survey is accompanied by the Budget Outlook for 2007/08 which you will need to read before completing the questionnaire. Also find enclosed the booklet 'Working Out The Council's Budget' which provides background to how the Council determines the amount we spend and the amount of income we need from Council Tax.

**I very much hope you can take part in the survey** (which should take about 20 minutes). Your views on spending priorities will be used to help inform the proposals for the Council's Revenue Budget for 2007/08. Your views on [the citizens panel] will be used to help us continue to develop the panel. Your responses will be treated in the strictest of confidence. They will not be attributed to individuals and will only be reported in aggregate form. When you have completed the questionnaire, please return in the enclosed FREEPOST envelope by **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November**.

If you have access to the internet, you can complete the survey on-line by visiting the [citizens panel] web pages xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx and then 'Autumn Survey 2006 – Existing Panel Member'.

Finally, please also find enclosed Issue 10 Of Listening To You and a report from the Priority Issues Survey carried out in March this year.

If you have any queries about the survey or newsletter please do not hesitate to contact the [the citizens panel] team on FREEPHONE xxxxxxxxxxxx or email xxxxxxxxxxxx.

Yours faithfully

## Appendix 5

### Local authority research - council officer question guide

The citizens' panel has been in operation now for 5 years and we are conducting a review to see if it is still relevant and if so how it can be used to best meet the needs of the council over the next 5 years.

**First of all, thinking about consultation in general what are the main challenges your department/service faces in conducting consultation activity at the moment?**

Possible prompts:

Amount of consultation – right amount, too much, too little

Does it pose any difficulties in terms of resources (financial, skills, time)

Extent to which consultation feeds into decision-making – impact (financial, legal, national policy, political, resistance to devolving power, to ratify existing policies, tick the consultation box)

Feeding back consultation results

Conflict with meeting service improvement objectives and engagement

Meeting statutory consultation requirements

Co-ordination of consultation activity, consultation overload

Lack of participation and fatigue, hard to reach groups

**How do you think the requirements for consultation will change over the next 5 years in your department/service area (thinking about specific developments coming from central govt and within the council)?**

Possible prompts:

Impact of the white paper (Strong and Prosperous Communities)

INRAs.

**And what implications will this have on the challenges discussed above?**

## Appendix 5

**Thinking now specifically about the citizens' panel. We currently carry out 3 planned surveys with the panel each year (priority issues, themed and budget (themed - cover issues such as LDF, public transport, clean streets) in addition to inviting panel members to other consultation events (eg SOCD, budget event) and adhoc focus groups.**

**Having used the panel and/or used the results from panel consultations, what do you think the benefits the panel are?**

**And what are the drawbacks?**

**One of the difficulties in managing the panel is a lack of understanding from some officers about how the panel can be used. Do you have any suggestions on how we could address this?**

Specifically:

Officers wanting to use the panel for 'tick box' consultation exercises rather than consultations that will inform decisions  
Lack of planning and officers wanting to use the panel at very short notice  
Officers not providing feedback on how consultation results have been used

**Another related challenge in running the panel is in meeting both the needs of panel members and also panel users such as yourself. How do you think that this can be achieved?**

Panel members:

We need to demonstrate that we are listening to and acting on the views of panel members and report back in a timely fashion, we need to focus on issues that concern them, we also need to be sure that we do not overburden them with requests and avoid holiday times.

Officers:

We need to meet the needs of panel users in terms of providing them with the information they require (often for statutory requirements or funding bids) to meet their timescales.

**One of the challenges with panel research is obtain results from a representative sample of the population.**

Attrition and non-response often mean that respondents to surveys and attendees at events are biased towards older age groups, despite increasing the number of younger people on the panel.



## Appendix 5

It would however be costly and time consuming to ensure this kind of representativeness rather than a good cross-section of views. **What are your views on this?**

'Conditioning' can also make a panel less representative which is the idea that the more informed and involved panel members become the less representative they are of the general population but if we do not feed back and get them involved, they may be less inclined to take part. **What are your views on this?**

**Do you think that the panel still has a role to play in consultation at the council over the next 5 years?**

**If no, why not? What would the alternative be?**

**If yes, why? what role do you think it should play?**

Possible prompts:

Surveys

Qual research - to look in more detail at issues arising from quantitative exercises

More participatory exercises such as mystery shopping

Planned surveys/adhoc surveys

**If the panel / panel data was not available, what would effect would that have on your service?**

**Have you any suggestions for how the panel can be improved upon?**

## Appendix 6

### Policies, guidance and initiatives following the 2006 Local Government White Paper

Initiative/Guidance etc	Overview	Date
The Community Development Challenge	Examines the current state of Community Development and recommends how it can be developed	CLG, December 2006 (2006)
Making Assets work: The Quirk Review of community management and ownership of assets	An independent review looking at how to overcome the barriers to community ownership and management of assets	Quirk, May 2007 (2007)
Opening the transfer window: The government's response to the Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets	Sets out how the government will implement the Quirk proposals	DCLG, May 2007 (2007b)
An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success	Outlines 23 initiatives aimed at giving residents and communities a greater say in how facilities and services are provided in their local area.	CLG, October 2007 (2007)
The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007	Outlines legislative measures principally arising from the Local Government White Paper (DCLG, 2006)	Great Britain, October 2007 (2007a)
Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory guidance: Draft for consultation	Provides draft statutory guidance in relation to the above Act. Contains guidance on governance and engagement including partnership working and the duty to involve.	HM Government, November 2007 (2007)
The 'Governance of Britain': The green paper on constitutional reform	Details proposals for constitutional reform including reinvigorating democracy which includes increasing public participation in local government and services.	Ministry of Justice, July 2007 (2007)
Sustainable Communities Act 2007	The Act aims to promote the sustainability of local communities. It provides a means for local communities and local authorities to make suggestions for government action in this regard.	Great Britain, October 2007 (2007)
Local Petitions and Calls for Action Consultation	To seek views on the strengthening of local petitions and Councillors Call for Action	DCLG, December 2007 (2007c)
'Planning for a Sustainable Future' white paper	Set out a range of proposals for improving the planning system including better consultation and engagement	CLG, Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department of Trade and Industry Department for Transport, May 2007 (2007)
How to develop a local charter: A guide for local authorities	A guide to designing charters that meets local needs	DCLG, January 2008 (2008a)

## Appendix 6

<b>Initiative/Guidance etc</b>	<b>Overview</b>	<b>Published</b>
Sustainable Communities Act 2007: A Guide	A guide to implementing the Sustainable Communities Act.	DCLG, February 2008 (2008b)
Participatory budgeting: A draft national strategy: Giving more people a say in local spending	To seek views on the draft Participatory Budgeting Strategy	DCLG, March 2008 (2008c)
Place Survey 2008-09 Manual	To replace the BVPI surveys and be conducted on a bi-annual basis (commencing Autumn 2008) to collect 18 of the 25 new citizen perspective national indicators.	DCLG, July 2008 (2008d)
Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory guidance	Provides statutory guidance in relation to The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Contains guidance on governance and engagement including partnership working and the duty to involve.	HM Government, July 2008
Communities in control: Real people, real power	Sets out plans to give citizens and communities more rights and powers. This includes a new duty to respond to petitions, a new duty to promote democracy, extending the duty to involve to other bodies, regular public hearings by local public bodies, placing more local facilities and services in the hands of the public, a community empowerment fund and participatory budgeting.	CLG, July 2008

## Appendix 7

### Problems in achieving representativeness with quota samples

- The process is subjective since interviewers select respondents; this means that there may be conscious or unconscious biases introduced, for example, selecting the most easily accessible people, ruling out certain people based on appearance etc. A possible consequence of this is a lack of representativeness within quotas (Moser & Kalton, 1971:133), for example an 18-24 year old group comprising mainly of 23 and 24 year olds. Advocates of quota sampling argue that such problems can be limited by interviewer training, quota controls and instructions. There is however, a trade-off in terms of controlling for all relevant characteristics and making the quota too complex or difficult to achieve.
- Sampling errors cannot be measured with quota sampling since 'there is no way of evaluating the reliability of estimates based on samples constructed by arbitrary selection' (Ferber cited in Chisnall, 1997:100). Some researchers argue that this can be calculated as with random sampling (Chisnall, 1997) and others contend that the errors are so small compared with other errors that it does not matter too much (Moser and Kalton, 1971:133).
- Critics suggest that quota sampling can lead to the over and under representation of certain groups. For example, they can over-represent better educated people, women in households with children and people from larger households. Whilst they can under-represent people in lower social strata, who work in the private sector and manufacturing and at extremes of income (Chisnall, 1997; Churchill, 2001; Bryman, 2004).

# Appendix 8

## Dillman's Tailored Design Method (TDM)

- Respondent friendly questionnaire (e.g. clear, understandable questions, good questionnaire layout, questionnaire length, use of pre-testing and piloting)
- Up to five contacts with the questionnaire recipient (including advance notification and reminders in a range of formats, timed effectively)
- Inclusion of stamped return envelopes (using real stamps rather than business reply envelopes)
- Personalised correspondence (providing the look and feel of being from a real person, the named individual aspect was discussed previously)
- A token financial incentive that is sent with the survey request (as discussed previously)

Dillman, 2000:150-153

## **Appendix 9**

### **Community Consultation Strategy 2007-2012 - Objectives**

- To ensure there is a clear understanding of, and commitment to, community consultation throughout the staff and members of the authority.
- To ensure there is a co-ordinated approach to community consultation both within the Council and with partner agencies.
- To ensure community consultation involves all sections of the community, including hard to reach groups and meets the Council's equal opportunities policy and requirements with regard to the Equality Standard
- To ensure the results of community consultation are fed into the decision making processes of the Council and used to inform decisions, particularly with the increasing importance of understanding and addressing the different needs of geographical and communities of interest
- To ensure the results of community consultation are accessible and reported to consultees, members, the public and other stakeholders.
- To ensure that community consultation is carried out competently, to a high standard and that systems are in place to monitor and evaluate consultation
- To ensure community consultation is appropriately resourced, and to make the best use of resources, including ICT

(Case Study Authority, 2006a:13)

# Appendix 10

## Mosaic

Mosaic is Experian's lifestyle classification system that categorises households and postcodes into 61 types aggregated into 11 groups. It is based on a range of data and is updated annually (see Experian 2003, 2004 for a description of categories). Two categories that are referenced in the report are as follows:

*Municipal Dependency* mostly contains families on lower incomes who live on large municipal council estates where few of the tenants have exercised their right to buy. Often isolated in the outer suburbs of large provincial cities, *Municipal Dependency* is characterised as much by low aspirations as by low incomes. Here people watch a lot of television and buy trusted mainstream brands from shops that focus on price rather than range or service (Experian, 2003:138).

*Suburban Comfort* comprises people who have successfully established themselves and their families in comfortable homes in mature suburbs. Children are becoming more independent, work is becoming less of a challenge and interest payments on homes and other loans are becoming less burdensome. With more time and money on their hands, people can relax and focus on activities that they find intrinsically rewarding (Experian, 2003:46).

# Appendix 11

## Profile of respondents compared to panel profile

<b>Table 1</b>		
<b>Current panellist survey - Profile of respondents compared to current panellist profile</b>		
<b>Demographic Group</b>	<b>Current Panellist Profile % (November 2006 after attrition from Survey)</b>	<b>Respondent Profile %</b>
Base:	1469	751
18-24	11.5	2.8
25-34	14.7	8.4
35-44	15.6	14
45-54	21.2	25.3
55-64	20.7	27.2
65-74	11.6	16
75 and over	4.4	6.1
Male	42.0	47.0
Female	57.0	52.9
Joined 2004	55.2	63.0
Joined 2005	25.1	29.4
Joined 2006	19.7	7.5
Symbols of Success	4.9	5.9
Happy Families	12.1	12.9
Suburban Comfort	16.0	20.8
Ties of the Community	22.4	22.9
Urban Intelligence	2.0	0.8
Welfare Borderline	4.7	2.9
Municipal Dependency	22.2	17.7
Blue Collar Enterprise	10.2	9.6
Twilight Subsistence	2.0	2.8
Grey Perspectives	1.8	2.0
Rural Isolation	0.8	1.1
North	20.9	19.6
East	16.7	16.2
South	11.5	11.7
West	17.7	16.0
Suburb 1	18.4	20.9
Suburb 2	14.8	15.4
Disability –yes	13.4	16.2



# Appendix 11

<b>Table 2</b>		
<b>New panellist survey - Profile of respondents compared to new panellist profile</b>		
<b>Demographic Group</b>	<b>New Panellist Profile % (November 2006 after attrition from Survey)</b>	<b>Respondent Profile %</b>
Base:	553	424
18-24	7.1	5.2
25-34	11.4	9.0
35-44	17.9	17.5
45-54	20.6	21.7
55-64	25.1	27.6
65-74	11.4	13.0
75 and over	6.5	6.1
Male	47.7	48.8
Female	52.3	51.2
Symbols of Success	4.5	5.4
Happy Families	13.2	14.2
Suburban Comfort	17.0	17.2
Ties of the Community	24.8	23.3
Urban Intelligence	0.9	1.2
Welfare Borderline	3.4	2.8
Municipal Dependency	19.5	19.6
Blue Collar Enterprise	9.9	10.4
Twilight Subsistence	3.1	1.9
Grey Perspectives	2.4	2.8
Rural Isolation	0.4	0.5
Unknown	0.9	0.7
North	19.0	18.6
East	16.3	16.5
South	11.6	12.0
West	14.8	13.7
Suburb 1	21.0	21.2
Suburb 2	17.4	17.9
Disability – yes	17.4	18.4

# Appendix 12

## Re-categorising age and Mosaic

### Age

In order to determine a reasonable basis for combining age groups, responses to questions relating to satisfaction with the council and the local area were compared across the age groups to see if there were any breaks in the pattern of data. These questions were chosen since they were the same in both questionnaires and could be combined and because there was variation in overall responses given. The results for new and current panellists for each age group were combined and net satisfaction scores calculated. Scores for 17-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds for both questions were close and it was felt that these categories could be combined for further analysis. The responses from 75+ year olds differed from all others in terms of satisfaction by area and were closest to the youngest age groups in terms of satisfaction with the council so they were omitted from analysis by age. In addition they accounted for a small proportion of respondents (6.1% in both surveys).

### MOSAIC

The literature (Experian, undated) provides details on the key features of the eleven groups and factors such as household income, car ownership, council tax band, qualifications and occupation were taken into account. The Mosaic groups allocated to each individual were then cross referenced in the panel database with the least and most deprived wards. This enabled eight of the eleven groups to be categorised in to Affluent, Mid, Not Affluent categories. It

## Appendix 12

was more difficult to categorise Grey Perspectives, Urban Intelligence and Rural Isolation in this way and rather than leave them out altogether they were considered at a more detailed level of Mosaic type. This resulted in 'High Spending Elders' within grey perspectives being allocated to the Affluent group. Table 1 details how the groups were re-categorised.

	<b>Mosaic Grouping</b>	<b>New panellists</b>	<b>Current Panellists</b>
<b>Affluent</b>		158	301
	Symbols of success	23	44
	Happy families	60	97
	Suburban comfort	73	156
	Grey perspectives – High Spending Elders	2	4
<b>Mid</b>		143	244
	Ties of community	99	172
	Blue collar enterprise	44	72
<b>Not affluent</b>		103	176
	Welfare Borderline	12	22
	Municipal Dependency	83	133
	Twilight Subsistence	8	21

The remainder were however excluded from analysis by affluence but they did only account for a small number of respondents, as shown in Table 2.

<b>Mosaic Grouping</b>	<b>New panellists</b>		<b>Current Panellists</b>	
Grey perspectives	10	2.4%	11	1.5%
Rural Isolation	2	0.5%	8	1.1%
Urban Intelligence	5	1.2%	6	0.8%

The approach used to categorise the Mosaic groups was verified with someone from Experian who felt that this was a reasonable basis on which to group the categories.

# Appendix 13

## Respondent profile by mode of response

<b>Table 1</b>		
<b>Comparison of demographic profile of telephone and postal respondents - new panellist survey</b>		
<b>Demographic Group</b>	<b>New Panellists Telephone</b>	<b>New Panellists Post</b>
Base:	250	174
18-24	6.0	4.0
25-34	7.2	11.5
35-44	17.2	17.8
45-54	20.8	23.0
55-64	29.2	25.3
65-74	14.8	10.3
75 and over	4.8	8.0
Male	46.0	52.9
Female	54.0	47.1
Symbols of Success	6.9	4.4
Happy Families	11.5	16.0
Suburban Comfort	16.1	18.0
Ties of the Community	22.4	24.0
Urban Intelligence	0	2.0
Welfare Borderline	5.2	1.2
Municipal Dependency	17.8	20.8
Blue Collar Enterprise	13.3	8.4
Twilight Subsistence	1.1	2.4
Grey Perspectives	4.0	2.0
Rural Isolation	0.6	0.4
Unknown	1.1	0.4
North	18.4	19.0
East	16.4	16.7
South	13.6	9.8
West	13.6	13.8
Suburb 1	19.2	24.1
Suburb 2	18.8	16.7
Disability - yes	19.2	17.2

## Appendix 14

### Comparisons of expectations and experiences on six outcomes

	Respondents who strongly agree they expected outcome	Extent to which outcome was experienced		
	Base	% Strongly agree	% Tend to agree	% Disagree
I feel like the council is asking my views	433 <sup>1</sup>	59.8	30.7	9.5
I feel like the council is listening to my views	372	32.0	41.9	26.1
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]	307	33.9	47.2	18.9
I know out more about what is going on in [the city]	406	53.5	35.5	11.6
I can have a say in local issues	322	44.7	38.2	17.1
I can influence decision making	207	30.4	33.8	35.7

	Respondents who tend to agree they expected outcome	Extent to which outcome was experienced		
	Base	% Strongly agree	% Tend to agree	% Disagree
I feel like the council is asking my views	271	21.4	67.2	11.4
I feel like the council is listening to my views	285	12.6	63.9	23.5
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]	333	12.0	65.5	22.5
I know out more about what is going on in [the city]	273	25.6	57.9	16.5
I can have a say in local issues	307	14.0	68.1	17.9
I can influence decision making	312	5.1	59.3	35.6

<sup>1</sup> For example, of the 433 respondents who strongly agreed that they expected the council to ask their views, 59.8% strongly agree that they experienced this, 30.7% tend to agree and 9.5% disagree.

## Appendix 15

### Variables considered for inclusion in logistical regression to predict satisfaction

<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>Response categories</b>
Satisfaction with the citizens panel	Satisfied / Dissatisfied
<b>Independent variables considered</b>	<b>Response categories</b>
Extent to which panellists feel informed about the consultation exercises they have taken part in	Informed / Not informed
I can make a contribution to the way in which services are provided in [the city]	Agree / Disagree
I can influence decision making	Agree / Disagree
I can have a say in local issues	Agree / Disagree
I feel like the council is asking my views	Agree / Disagree
I feel like the council is listening to my views	Agree / Disagree
I know out more about what is going on in [the city]	Agree / Disagree
Respondents from East	East / Not East
Satisfaction with the council	Satisfied / Dissatisfied
Satisfaction with the local area	Satisfied / Dissatisfied

# Appendix 16

## Guidelines for panel use

- The core panel programme will comprise three planned surveys per year, one of which is the budget consultation survey in November
- All requests to consult or involve panellists must come through the RCCT who will advise as to whether the panel can be used.
- Consultation and involvement of panellists must be well planned, part of an integrated approach and must have an influence on services, policies or decisions.
- Using the panel does not guarantee demographic representativeness but can provide a cross-section of views and can be complemented by other consultation mechanisms
- A panel user template must be completed outlining consultation objectives, how the information will influence services and/or decision making, how they will feedback and incorporates an evaluation.
- Unless a consultation is part of the core panel programme, all costs will be re-charged
- Panel users must take account of accessibility and comply with good practice guidelines in terms of the engagement methods used
- Panel users must provide high quality feedback to demonstrate to panellists how their involvement has influenced services, policies or decisions. This will require written feedback and on occasion feedback meetings.

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