

# Cabinet

8 October 2020

## Establishment of a Residents' Panels

### Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. approves the proposal to develop a standing Warwickshire Residents' Panel to inform the Council's policy making, in order to deliver the action set out in the Customer Experience Strategy;
2. authorises the Strategic Director for Resources to finalise the procurement strategy and any associated procurement and award the contract, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation;
3. notes that costs will be managed through the existing Change Fund where additional spend is required; and
4. agrees, having regard to the resolution of Full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, to the establishment of a separate Residents' Panel for specific engagement on local government reform proposals for Warwickshire, and notes that the Leader has invited the District and Borough Councils to commission this jointly with the County Council.

### 1. Background and context

- 1.1. There is a recognised national drive to provide residents with better opportunities to share their views and participate in local democracy. *The Community Paradigm* is a highly impactful publication by the New Local Government Network, which sets out the opportunities and benefits of empowering and engaging with local communities.
- 1.2. During COVID-19, we have seen exceptional community engagement and participation from voluntary groups, mutual aid groups and local Town and Parish Councils. This has accelerated progress delivering the Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy, approved by Cabinet on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019. This strategy set out a vision that communities and people in Warwickshire would be strong, self-supported, connected and resilient, with a particular focus on community engagement and social action.
- 1.3. The Council Plan and Recovery Plan both emphasise the importance of the Council becoming a more evidence, data-driven and innovative organisation.

Creating increased public engagement is a key enabler of these wider objectives and ambitions of this Council.

- 1.4. Building on recent, high levels of public engagement in developing the Council Plan 2025, we have seen recent examples of the effective use of Residents' Panels, such as the West Midlands Recovery Coordination Group Residents' Panel, where residents have been invited to share their views on specific strategic themes. This demonstrates an explicit emphasis on engagement rather than formal consultation.
- 1.5. Residents' Panels typically engage with a representative body of residents with participants recruited through random sampling of the electoral roll or postcode address file. Recruitment is through a range of channels, with additional provisions to ensure representation of socially excluded, hard to reach or special interest groups such as young people.
- 1.6. Warwickshire is also on a transformation journey and as part of that has developed a Customer Experience Strategy previously approved by Cabinet in December 2019, within which is a commitment to establish a Residents' Panel to enhance our customer focus and engagement. Aligned to this, work is currently in progress to refresh the Consultation and Engagement Framework and provide overall guidance on consultation and engagement activities across the Council, and an external, expert review of scrutiny is being finalised.
- 1.7. This paper proposes the establishment of an 'all purposes' Residents' Panel to inform the Council's policy making on an ongoing basis.
- 1.8. On 22nd September 2020 Full Council expressed its support for the establishment of a Residents Panel and for an invitation to be extended to the District and Borough Councils to do so jointly with the County Council, to seek the views of Warwickshire residents on the issue of local government reform (LGR). The Leader has made this invitation and our expectation is that a specific residents' panel on LGR will be commissioned and delivered by an independent body.

## **2. County Council Residents' Panel**

- 2.1. A standing 'all purposes' County Council Residents' Panel will be developed to deliver key objectives and results over a period aligned to the Council Plan 2025 and Customer Experience Strategy timelines.
- 2.2. It will be set up to engage a representative sample of residents to assist the County Council in addressing key policy questions and other matters that would benefit from deep engagement.

- 2.3. Recruitment to the panel will be conducted by an independent organisation commissioned to recruit participants to provide assurance that invitation to join the panel is representative and fair.
- 2.4. This will utilise a ‘blended and mixed methods’ model based on existing internal expertise and current functionality. It is expected to combine a large panel able to answer specific ‘polling’ type questions, plus a smaller sub-panel able to meet and help shape complex, cross-cutting policy issues and questions.
- 2.5. The detailed design will be worked up and designed with the following principles in mind:
- to establish the mix of methods to be used to engage residents in addressing key policy questions through a Residents’ Panel based on existing internal expertise and current functionality;
  - to ensure the Residents’ Panel is coherent with wider strategic partnership initiatives including with Public Health and the Health and Wellbeing Partnership;
  - to inform the ongoing change portfolio and shape improved performance;
  - to shape the council approach to big questions such as:
    - refreshing the Council Plan;
    - informing the Medium-Term Financial Strategy; and
    - progressing the Covid-19 Recovery Plan.
  - to shape Council activities around residents’ needs and aspirations;
  - to encourage greater participation in the activities of the Council;
  - to measure residents’ satisfaction with the council and specific Council services, and inform the work of Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
  - to access new perspectives, new information, ideas and suggestions; and
  - to improve strategy, planning, policy and decision making.
- 2.6. The Residents’ Panel would complement the Council’s Customer Experience Strategy which commits to developing further the quality, depth and range of engagement undertaken by the Council. It would not replace other methods of engagement routinely used by the Council such as ‘Ask Warwickshire’, the online engagement and consultation hub, or routine use of focus groups and engagement sessions with stakeholders.
- 2.7. The Appendix provides additional detail on how this work will be progressed and associated timescales.

### **3. Key Considerations**

- 3.1. The Residents’ Panel will be designed to complement and be coherent with other long standing Council engagement and consultation initiatives, such as

the Youth Parliament, essentially ensuring we have a consistent family of best practice methods available. It will be one of many mechanisms to better engage residents and other key stakeholders to inform policy, track performance and progress and ensure decisions are backed-up with an additional source of reliable insight, evidence and data.

- 3.2. Initial priorities for the panel may include, but are not limited to, the refresh of the Council Plan, tackling inequalities, themes relating to Covid-19 recovery, and climate change.

#### **4. Financial implications**

- 4.1. The proposal for the standing Residents' Panel will be developed into a full business case and the resource implications will be addressed through existing internal resources alignment and budgeting.
- 4.2. The costs of development and ongoing delivery will be more fully scoped and developed with choices made on scale and frequency and aligned to a prioritised work programme. This work will also consider the delivery model, which we expect to combine internal resources supplemented by externally-commissioned expertise.
- 4.3. Costs of this initiative will be managed within existing resources and from one-off funding from the existing Change Fund. There may be some offsetting savings in time by a consequential reduction in commissions for external consultative support.

#### **5. Environmental implications**

- 5.1. No implications, other than the Residents' Panel is expected to play a key role in shaping the Council's Climate Change Programmes.

#### **6. Equalities implications**

- 6.1. The Residents' Panel will be designed as a representative sample and additional consideration in respect of protected characteristics will be included in assembling that sample representation.
- 6.2. A Residents' Panel will provide an additional mechanism for assessing equalities impacts of key strategic and policy issues and providing insights about the effect of inequalities on residents, helping the Council take the most effective actions against its Council Plan and Recovery Plan commitments around inequalities, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

## Background papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): None

Other members: None

## Residents' Panels Mobilisation Summary Plan

Deliverable	Milestones	Target Dates	Notes
<b>Develop Warwickshire's ongoing Residents' Panel</b>	Identify key policy questions to be explored over the next 24 months	Commence November 2020	This will potentially include strategic partnership-based enquiries e.g. health and wellbeing, Council Plan refresh, climate change, tackling inequalities etc.
	Identify size of panel and any subgroup considerations	November 2020	
	Scope resource requirements and identify in-house solutions and any necessary external solutions	November 2020	
	Appoint independent supplier to recruit to Panel	December 2020	Key that panel membership is recruited through an independent party
	Develop a schedule of panel activities to address key policy questions	January 2021	Likely to combine rapid 'polling' questions to inform policy and 'workshop/focus group' type activity for more complex questions
	Configure and deliver panel activities	Ongoing	