

## **Item: 9.**

**Policy and Resources Committee: 18 June 2019.**

**Orkney Public Consultation Group – Orkney Opinions.**

**Report by Executive Director of Corporate Services.**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To review progress made during the second year of the pilot of the Orkney public consultation group, Orkney Opinions, note the findings of surveys conducted during this year, and consider the future of the group.

### **2. Recommendations**

The Committee is invited to note:

#### **2.1.**

That, in July 2018, the Council agreed that Orkney Opinions, the Orkney public consultation group, be continued for a further year, to 31 March 2019, following which the Executive Director of Corporate Services should submit a further report, to the Policy and Resources Committee.

#### **2.2.**

That the second year of Orkney Opinions has been evaluated, as detailed in section 4 of this report.

#### **2.3.**

That resources could be made available within Corporate Services to continue operation of Orkney Opinions for a further year to 31 March 2020.

**It is recommended:**

#### **2.4.**

That Orkney Opinions be continued for a further year to 31 March 2020.

#### **2.5.**

That, subject to sufficient staffing resource being available to support the public consultation group, as informed by the budget setting process for 2020 onwards, Orkney Opinions should thereafter continue beyond 31 March 2020.

## **3. Introduction**

### **3.1.**

At its meeting held on 19 June 2018, the Policy and Resources Committee noted:

#### **3.1.1.**

That, in October 2016, the Council agreed to pilot an Orkney public consultation group, for an initial period of one year, following which the pilot should be evaluated.

#### **3.1.2.**

That the Orkney public consultation group, named Orkney Opinions, was available to all Council services to help inform their service developments.

#### **3.1.3.**

That the pilot year ran from March 2017 to March 2018, a total of 151 members were recruited to join the group and three surveys had taken place, with the survey findings noted in Appendices 2 to 4 to the report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services.

#### **3.1.4.**

That senior officers and managers had been consulted as to the utility of Orkney Opinions and wished the pilot to be continued, subject to continued availability of staff resources.

### **3.2.**

The Committee recommended that Orkney Opinions be continued for a further year, to 31 March 2019, following which the Executive Director of Corporate Services should submit a further report, to the Policy and Resources Committee.

## **4. Evaluation**

### **4.1.**

Five surveys (numbered four to eight) were conducted during the second year, as outlined below.

#### **4.1.1.**

Survey 4 consulted the group on the draft Community Learning and Development Partners Plan 2018 to 2021. 40 responses were received and 90% of respondents agreed with the proposed priorities in the draft plan. Only 40% of respondents were aware of the previous Community Learning and Development Plan, and some helpful suggestions were made as to how to improve community ownership of the new plan and disseminate information on community learning opportunities. A copy of the final approved plan was sent on request to respondents.

#### **4.1.2.**

Survey 5 asked for views on three service areas: the Council closure over Christmas and New Year and on other public holidays, the Orkney Community Justice Partnership and Orkney Health and Care priorities. This survey generated 78 responses. There was little demand for changes to the Council's current closure arrangements, and no evident preference for any of the alternative options proposed. Those who responded who used services were satisfied that these were available over this period as required. Regarding questions on the Orkney Community Justice Partnership, various suggestions were made for local priority actions for this partnership, including specific types of support for offenders, help for those who have family going through the justice system and counselling for victims. The ranking of priorities for Orkney Health and Care resulted in a close balance between many of the items listed, with the top priority for most being timely access to GP services.

#### **4.1.3.**

Survey 6 sought feedback on plans to increase or bring in new charges for a number of services provided by the Council, also released for public consultation. The Budget Simulator exercise carried out in 2016 indicated a willingness among the public to see fees and charges go up if this helped to prevent cuts to frontline services. This survey generated 57 responses which were generally in favour of new or increased charges with two main caveats arising in comments. These were firstly that the charges should be easy to administer and collect, and that they should not be so high as to trigger unwanted behaviours such as fly tipping. Secondly, there was concern over the potentially disproportionate socio-economic impact of high charges for certain services, for example impounding lost dogs. Following the survey, some of the charges proposed are now being implemented, for example charging for the use of electric vehicle charging points.

#### **4.1.4.**

Survey 7 asked for comments on a draft Community Consultation and Engagement Policy for the Council. 38 responses were received. 82% of respondents thought the proposed aim of the Council ("An accessible council which is well informed about the issues that matter to Orkney's individuals and communities, including those seldom heard") was clear, but only 20% thought that the Council was achieving it at present. A clear majority preferred the term "seldom heard" for people who can be difficult to make contact with, and some helpful suggestions were made for future engagement. The policy was approved and adopted by the Council in March 2019.

#### **4.1.5.**

Survey 8 sought views on two service areas: the draft Orkney Carers Strategy (which was also released for public consultation) and the Orkney Native Wildlife Project. 39 respondents commented on the Orkney Carers Strategy and 49 on the Orkney Native Wildlife Project. 82% of respondents agreed that the Carers Strategy was focusing on the right key statements, and some insightful comments were added by those who were, or had been, carers themselves. There was broad support for the Orkney Native Wildlife Project although a significant minority of respondents questioned the value for money of the project in light of competing priorities for public spending.

## **4.2.**

Following the second year of the pilot, a straw poll was conducted among members of the Corporate Management Team who were asked the following questions:

- Has your service used Orkney Opinions?
- Do you expect to use Orkney Opinions in future?
- Subject to the availability of resourcing, would you like to see Orkney Opinions continue?

### **4.2.1.**

The nine responses received were overwhelmingly positive, with all services wishing to see Orkney Opinions continue, whether or not they had used it yet. Orkney Health and Care, which has made most use of Orkney Opinions to date, commented:

“The quantitative and qualitative commentary and feedback that we have received from this resource has been invaluable in informing the development of OHAC projects and initiatives; we would have no hesitation in recommending that Orkney Opinions continues”.

### **4.2.2.**

Demand by service managers has increased markedly during the second year of operation. Survey results have now been used to inform policy and practice in many mainstream service areas. There are more consultations waiting in the pipeline should Orkney Opinions continue in operation.

## **4.3.**

The second year of operation of Orkney Opinions was evaluated by the Consultation and Engagement Officers' Group at their meeting of 22 May 2019.

### **4.3.1.**

Members of the Group agreed that Orkney Opinions was a useful tool which added another dimension to the range of resources available. The membership was consistent and always provided a good response. Evidence from Orkney Opinions added weight to a proposal, and the results could be used for triangulation with other consultation sources. It was noted that in response to the recent consultation on the community Consultation and Engagement Policy, only a quarter of the respondents said they had taken part in any other type of community consultation activity, so most of the participants were different voices to those more often heard.

### **4.3.2.**

The Consultation and Engagement Officers Group recommended that Orkney Opinions should continue in operation and that its resourcing should ideally be established permanently within a mainstream revenue budget.

## **5. Corporate Governance**

This report relates to governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

## **6. Financial Implications**

Funding for Orkney Opinions has to date been achieved through the reassignment of existing resources within Corporate Services, and this option is presently available for the financial year 2019 to 2020 and future years.

## **7. Legal Aspects**

Orkney Opinions is a community engagement tool, the use of which can contribute to the Council's compliance with its legal duty to consult in appropriate cases.

## **8. Contact Officers**

Gillian Morrison, Executive Director of Corporate Services, extension 2103, Email [gillian.morrison@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:gillian.morrison@orkney.gov.uk).

Anna Whelan, Strategy Manager, extension 2160, Email [anna.whelan@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:anna.whelan@orkney.gov.uk).