

# Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date</b>	June 2023
<b>Briefing paper to</b>	All Members of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
<b>Purpose</b>	To inform Members about Medway's Citizen's Panel including its history, representativeness, sample sizes and recruitment plans.

---

## Background

Medway Council has run a Citizens' Panel since 2009. The Citizens' Panel is designed as a representative sample of local residents who have volunteered to participate regularly in local consultation and are contacted approximately four times a year via online surveys promoted via email. The panel relies on residents signing up and participating to maintain the representative sample.

There are around 345 residents who are currently members of the panel; the Council are always actively trying to recruit more residents to the panel.

The Council ask general satisfaction questions about services in every survey e.g. satisfaction with parks and open spaces. Some of which are used as performance measures in the Council Plan e.g. satisfaction with parks and open spaces. There are also other themed questions that are asked e.g. on air quality, social isolation, town centres etc. This information has been used to develop strategy, policy, procedure or evidence for funding bids.

As well as completing online surveys members of the Citizens Panel have been invited to give their feedback by

- attending focus groups or workshops e.g. Highways & Transport Workshop to discuss the results from the National Highways & Transport Survey.
- testing digital services to obtain feedback on the design before the service has gone live e.g. parking permits and season tickets and events in Medway

## Panel Representativeness

When the panel was first created, panel members were recruited in an initial doorstep face to face recruitment campaign, with follow-up face-to-face recruitment in 2011 and 2014 to increase and refresh the panel membership. Recruitment to the panel was based on a demographic profile so that the panel was representative of Medway based upon age, gender, ethnicity and area.

Following the changes in data protection laws in May 2018 it was decided to ask the existing panel members to give their consent to be part of the panel again; at the same time there was a change to make the panel primarily online and, given the

expense and high initial dropout rate after face-to-face recruitment exercises, move to a basis where the panel is self-selecting i.e., individuals choosing to sign up.

To understand how representative our panel is we use the Census 2011 to compare our panel profile to our resident profile. Census 2011 data is used for the profile as it is the only source of comparative data about residents' sex, age, ethnicity, disability and location. More recent data has some, but not all these demographic and spatial comparators. The comparison profile will be updated using Census 2021 data; Census 2021 data is being released now with the information required for the panel profile being expected to be available during Summer 2023.

The profile of the current panel shows a good geographic spread of members across Medway; every ward has residents signed up to take part. There is an average of 1 citizens' panel member per 700 Medway residents (aged 16+). Some wards such as Fort Horsted, Fort Pitt and Gillingham North have higher levels of representation than the average, whereas All Saints, Rainham South East and Strood West have lower levels of representation than the average.

There would be insufficient numbers of panel members to provide statistically significant results for any question with the surveys at a ward level. To achieve statistically significant results for each ward there would need to be an increase in resources to recruit and sustain a membership of around 17,000 residents on the panel.

The overall panel has an underrepresentation amongst younger participants (18 to 44) and those from black, Asian, mixed or other ethnic communities.

Even with a panel that is recruited to be representative of an area, the representativeness of individual surveys will vary depending on which panel members choose to participate. Any analysis of results will highlight this when considering sub-groups e.g. responses by age.

### **Recruitment to the Citizens' Panel**

Any Medway resident can become a member of the Citizens' Panel, there are some minor restrictions. Panel members cannot be an employee of Medway Council, a Medway Councillor, or aged under 18.

Panel members are recruited through several different ongoing and ad hoc ways:

- Dedicated section on the council website; [www.medway.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.medway.gov.uk/haveyoursay)
- Signposting those who complete other council surveys to [www.medway.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.medway.gov.uk/haveyoursay)
- Promotion using the Council's social media channels
- Articles in Medway Matters, printed and email
- Promotion via Councillors

## **Sample Size**

A sample survey uses the results from a small proportion of the population to estimate the responses of the entire population. Sample surveys are the main kind of survey used in research and consultation exercises as they provide a cost effective and reliable method of establishing community views.

Surveys normally quote a level of confidence that we can apply to the results, with the industry standard being 95% with a margin of error of +/-5%. This simply means that if 47% of a sample picks an answer you can be 'sure', that if the entire population had been asked, that between 42% (-5%) and 52% (+5%) would have also picked that answer.

You would need to receive responses from 384 people to achieve a +/-5% margin of error for a population the size of Medway's (approximately 280,000). The sample size required will vary by survey based on the potential respondent and can vary between different groups of respondents.

The results from the panel are all presented with the relevant margin of error, this is to help identify significant changes in responses.