

Make a difference and get involved in the new Leeds Citizens' Panel

We all want to make the right decisions to help Leeds become the best city in the UK. We make better decisions when we ask each other the right questions, and understand what other people think, feel and need.

Lots of things are changing in Leeds, and it's important that the council, the NHS and other organisations that provide the services you use locally understand what that means for the people of Leeds. We call that process 'consultation and engagement'.

That's why we need your help, and a little bit of your time, by offering to be part of the new Citizens' Panel for Leeds. In this document we've tried to answer the questions you may have about the panel and what's in it for you. If we haven't covered your question, email citizenspanel@leeds.gov.uk or leave us a message on 0113 247 4610 and we'll be in touch.

What is a Citizens' Panel?

A Citizens' Panel is just one of the ways we find out what people think and need. It is a large group of residents that give a small amount of time to take part in surveys and discussions about local services and issues that affect where they live.

Panels usually have a few thousand people on them, and are set up in lots of areas of the country, often by local authorities.

What's the plan in Leeds?

Leeds City Council, NHS Leeds (the primary care trust in Leeds) and other public sector partners want to set up a large new Citizens' Panel of about 6000 people. In Autumn 2011 we are inviting people to tell us if they're interested in becoming members.

The Citizens' Panel will be run by Leeds City Council. NHS Leeds, the fire and rescue service, police, the arms-length housing organisations and other parts of the NHS in Leeds may also ask panel members questions.

We're aiming to ask the first set of questions to the panel either just before the end of 2011, or just after, depending how quickly people join up.

We want as many of the new Citizens' Panel members as possible to take part in online surveys. This will save time and money. As we know not everyone can or wants to go online, we'll make sure those that find postal surveys convenient can still get involved.

Who can join and how?

If you are at least 18 years old and live in the Leeds City Council area, we're interested in hearing from you. Let us know you're interested by filling in the form attached.

As they're already very involved in decision-making, elected members of Leeds City Council won't be invited to join the Citizens' Panel.

If I send you my details, does that mean I'm on the Citizens' Panel straight away?

We want to make sure the Citizens' Panel has the right balance of people of different ages, backgrounds and from different places in Leeds. If we get too many people of the same background wanting to take part, we'll select people at random to join straight away.

We will ask the rest if it's okay to keep their details on a waiting list for up to two years, ready to replace people that might leave the panel. If you don't want to do this, just let us know.

What's involved if I'm selected for the Citizens' Panel?

Panel members will be asked to complete a number of surveys a year either online or, if preferred, on paper. Panel members may also be invited to attend occasional group discussions and workshops to discuss their views.

We expect to send out between four and eight surveys to the panel each year, and about the same number of invitations to take part in discussions or events. Surveys should take no more than 20 minutes, and will always be free to return – no stamps required. Discussion groups might be 90 minutes, or sometimes a bit longer. Discussions might be online, others an opportunity for panel members to get together in one place.

You don't have to take part every time you are invited. However, we'd like as many people to take part as possible each time, but we understand if you can't always do that.

How long will I be a Citizens' Panel member?

We hope that people will stay on the panel for at least a year but if for any reason you wish to leave just let us know and we'll stop contacting you about the Citizens' Panel.

We will be updating the membership of the Citizens' Panel every year or so, so, therefore, if you've been on the panel for a while we might ask you to step down and give others a chance to get involved.

What happens to the personal information I give you?

We will treat all your information confidentially and keep it secure in line with the Data Protection Act and only use it to send you information about the Panel and others ways to get involved. Your contact details will be held securely by Leeds City Council and will not be shared with any other organisations.

When you join the Citizens' Panel we ask questions such as your age, ethnic background, whether you have a disability or not, and information like whether you are in employment or not, or have a family. We use this information to make sure that there is the right balance of people of different ages, backgrounds and from different places in Leeds.

When we analyse the results of the surveys you take part in, we also use this information to see if different groups of people have different views and experiences.

By asking for this information once, when you offer to join, you save time and we save public money by not having to ask the same things each time we consult the panel.

When you leave the Citizens' Panel, we securely remove your personal information from the database.

Will I find out the results of Citizens' Panel consultations?

We promise we will always give feedback. Results get passed back to the decision makers who can make changes depending on the options available at the time.

Panel members will be sent a newsletter updating you about the results and what actions might be taken as a result. We will be open and transparent with panel members – there may be times when we can't do everything people suggest, and we will explain why.

What's in it for me?

Joining the Citizens' Panel will give you the chance to contribute to making Leeds a better place to live. It will allow you to give your thoughts about issues in your local community and we will also have regular prize draws to thank you for taking part.

For more information:

Visit www.leeds.gov.uk/citizenspanel, email citizenspanel@leeds.gov.uk or leave us a message on 0113 247 4610 and we'll be in touch.