

COMMITTEE: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT BOARD

DATE: THURSDAY 12TH JULY 21012

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENT OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

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IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL

COMMUNITY SAFETY

EQUALITIES

ENVIRONMENT

FINANCIAL

CONSULTATIONS

STAFFING

OTHER

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE

To consider improvements to the Neighbourhood Governance (NG) Participatory Budgeting (PB) process and its integration with Area Board grants

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

CIB is recommended to consider options for developing and improving the NG PB process and its integration with the Area Board Grants programme

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Since the initiation of the NG pilot in 2009, 19 PB events have been delivered across three Areas as part of the “Your Say Your Way” (YSYW) programme. These have involved more than 1000 local people in helping to decide which projects should get funding in their wards and supporting the community leadership role of Councillors in championing local involvement and community groups in their areas.

- 3.2 PB has succeeded in providing clear incentives to widening involvement. The numbers, range and diversity of local people taking part in these events has been generally positive and representative of local populations (4 events involving more than 90 people and 1 more than 160) , and the overall picture compares very favourably with involvement achieved by other means of public involvement with respect to each neighbourhood.
- 3.3 More than 90% of all participants have given the following evaluation feedback: that they either very much enjoyed or enjoyed the events, that they either strongly feel or feel they are a good way to influence decisions, that they either strongly feel or feel that the PB process is a good way to spend public money.
- 3.4 Outcomes have been equally positive, with 126 community based projects supported to date across the 10 wards involved so far, with approximately 1000+ direct beneficiaries, and many more benefitting indirectly . Projects cover a range of responses to local community priorities with significant impacts and outcomes across key partnership themes.
- 3.5 Equally important has been the contribution that PB events and the follow up programme have made to community cohesion and networking, with groups and individuals learning about each others' work to improve the local neighbourhood and gaining the opportunity to support each other.
- 3.6 PB has enjoyed widespread partnership support and has provided the opportunity for the Council to pool budgets from a range of services to achieve joint goals relates to key priorities, and to lever funding to match against contributions from the Area Committee/Board and other service budgets. Running PB Decision Days as learning events and offering learning support projects and groups has enabled Luton ACL to support the programme directly.
- 3.7 So far over the 3 years that the programme has developed, levered external funds have totalled £92K (a 44 % leverage ratio against Council Budgets) from a range of partnership sources including through Luton Adult and Community Learning (LACL), Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation, NHS Luton, Bedfordshire Police, Circle Anglia Housing and London Luton Airport.

REPORT

1. Process

- 1.1 The process of delivering PB in Luton has evolved in the course of the pilot to reduce the requirements on Members and officers. The current model deployed and led by the Community Development Service (CDS) is as follows:
- Focussed pre-development of community projects to meet local priorities
 - Widespread advertising of the opportunity to apply
 - Pre-assessment of bids for eligibility by funders

- Pre-assessment of bids for eligibility by Ward Councillors and volunteers
- Learning support to applicants on making applications, and presentation and communication skills (delivered by LACL and CDS)
- Widespread invitation for public involvement
- PB Decision Days held as learning events with all applicants delivering a 3 minute presentation to local citizens
- Contracting meeting held with successful projects (CDS and LACL)
- Follow up development support offered to unsuccessful projects (CDS and LACL)
- Monitoring and ongoing support provided to projects (CDS and LACL)
- Projects required to feedback to ward forums
- Final evaluation provided by groups as condition of contract and funding release

2. Improvement Issues:

2.1 Evaluation and feedback of the PB process outlined above has identified a number of areas for clarification, development and improvement. These are set out for Members' consideration below:

2.2 Funding:

Securing an initial funding commitment to PB from the Council at the start of the financial year has proven the means to unlock partnership contributions. Members could consider allocating a portion of the Area Board budget to the PB funding pool on an annual basis at the beginning of the year. CIB in consultation with Area Board chairs may wish to recommend a range for this contribution e.g. 33% - 50%.

2.3 Partnership working with Beds and Luton Community Foundation has presented the opportunity for the Council to promote PB as an opportunity for local businesses to invest in their local community. Donors can benefit from gift aid in this way, and their support acknowledged through programme publicity.

2.4 Integration with Area Board grants:

Running two apparently different grant schemes at ward level has led to some confusion. In addition there is a recognition that PB cannot deliver as well as Area grants in some cases e.g. when a project needs to be delivered out of the timeframe of the PB process, and when a project may not be in a position to generate sufficient support from local residents but Members identify it as of being importance to the ward.

2.5 Developing a common application form, eligibility criteria and process would certainly reduce confusion and stream-line the offer from Area Boards to community groups. With Area Boards meeting three times a year, applications at the time of the Board closest to the PB event for the ward/Area can be automatically directed to the PB process.

2.6 Groups are already required to present to Area Boards, and the participation of the public can be encouraged by Chairs through questions and feedback. Support to Area Board projects from CDS and LACL can be offered as per the PB process outlined above to ensure accountability and improved monitoring and evaluation.

2.7 Improving the PB process:

Concerns have been raised following a minority of PB events regarding the opportunity groups have to enlist larger numbers of supporters to attend and thereby affect the voting in their favour. On a small number of occasions, despite a strong emphasis from facilitators to participants requesting them to adopt fair and considerate voting based on clear criteria and merit, patterns of apparently biased voting have been identified which may to some degree have affected the final allocation of funding.

2.8 In addition, poor attendance at some events from local residents not immediately involved with particular projects has from some perspectives served to reduce the legitimacy of the feedback of those attending. Finally, there has to date been an assumption that participants qualify to vote by their attendance (either living, working or volunteering regularly in the ward) and no checks beyond a simple yes/no question has been run on this if they haven't pre-registered for the event..

2.9 Whilst considering options for improvement of PB, it should be recognised that the primary aims of PB are wider involvement and community empowerment, and any measures taken should not have unforeseen negative impacts on these aims. Voting, as in elections, is a free and open process, and part of this is the mobilisation of support by interested parties. Similarly with PB, it will be impossible to produce an open and democratic system that is entirely immune from drawbacks or the dilemma of low turnouts or self-interest.

2.10 Improving the overall Council and partner communications to residents of its overall offer and the opportunities to get involved and influence decisions is a key means to improving and widening participation across the NG and Area Board programme, and will be the subject of future reports to CIB.

2.11 Following discussion with officers and partners, and assessment of good practice in other authorities, potential workable options for piloting to assess their potential for improvement of the PB process itself have been identified as follows:

2.11.1 Not accepting more than one bid from each group applying, unless agreed by the panel of Councillors and funders (for instance where there are insufficient bids from local groups coming forward as has been the case in some neighbourhoods). Groups would also not be eligible to bid for the same activity year on year.

2.11.2 Balancing the scoring from voting by participants at the PB decision days with feedback obtained from the wider community by asking them to register their preferences against written outlines of each project. This opportunity could be promoted at community centres and other local venues such as schools, and possibly online, prior to the PB events. The results of this process could for

instance comprise 25% of the overall scoring. This would also serve to publicise the events more widely and attract people if they knew that the final decision would still be made by voting on the day.

2.11.3 At Decision Days, ensuring participants give an eligible address located on a ward map, or an explanation of their work in the neighbourhood, on registration and in exchange for a voting token

2.11.4 Balancing the scoring from voting by participants at the PB decision days with a score from a panel made up of Councillors and/or funders (either prior to or at the Decision Day). The results of this process could for instance comprise 25% of the overall scoring.

2.11.5 At Decision Days, adjusting the voting scale (currently 0 – 10) to reduce the differential between top and bottom scores i.e. using a scale of 1 – 5. This would reduce the possible effects of tactical voting and biased self-interest that ignored the voting criteria.

2.11.6 At Decision Days, explaining that the Council reserves the right not to accept voting from participants where there is clear evidence that requests have been ignored to score fairly using the criteria explained by facilitators. The methods and technology used at the events enable officers to identify this with Councillors as arbitrators. It is anticipated that this check on the process would function more as an additional incentive for participants to consider their voting more clearly against the assessment criteria.

2.12. Area North Pilot:

As part of the roll out of the NG programme in Area North, an Area approach to PB will be trialled this year. It is hoped that this will involve a wider group of residents in the process and offer ways to improve efficiency in coming years.

APPENDIX

None

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D**

None