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Participatory Budgeting Evaluation

1.0 Purpose of the Report

This report outlines developments and learning's so far from the Participatory Budgeting pilots in the Oakwells and Fairfax, Drighlington (South) and Broadleas (West) areas.

2.0 Summary

- This first stage evaluation outlines the process, lessons learnt and recommendations from the two PB pilots operating in quite different areas of Leeds. It also aims to highlight wider implications for the rolling out of the PB approach in other parts of Leeds.
- The process was instigated by the Narrowing the Gap Group and supported by each of the Area Committees chosen as pilot areas.
- The pilots aimed to involve partner agencies in development and delivery of the schemes
- A steering group was established to oversee the pilots consisting of Area Management staff (South & West), Aire Valley Homes, Chief Executives, Regeneration, Corporate Services and a lead member from the Narrowing the Gap Group.
- The Narrowing the Gap Group provided each pilot with £10,000 to allocate to projects and £1,000 to support the process. In addition, South were able to draw in a further £20,000 funding (£10,000 each from Aire Valley Homes and the Area Committee). West obtained clearance to utilise £5,000 from Area Committee funding for this purpose. West also had an agreement with Highways to access a further £5,000 if any of the projects coming forward had a direct link to Highways works.
- Support sessions were held in each case to assist local people in developing ideas and establishing key priorities.
- Publicity and promotion was targeted in each case on a house to house basis through door knocking and discussion to promote interest.
- Decision Days were held in locations central to each target area in West and South where participants were able to hear presentations and vote on schemes that they wished to receive funds.
- This report can only comment on the process up until Decision Days – the next stages involve setting up of funding agreements and delivery of projects which can not be effectively evaluated until after completion.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Narrowing the Gap Group established that one pilot should target a neighbourhood with little community capacity (Broadleas) and the other target an area with a level of community capacity and that allowed residents from more and less deprived areas to mix.

Other key objectives were to:

- To build on the capacity and confidence of local residents to take action to improve their area through a transparent process that is open and simple to access.
- To build upon and enhance existing neighbourhood working.

- To test the Participatory Budgeting approach.
- To improve community cohesion through effective engagement and participation.
- To build trust in local services / council by giving people experience of key decision making.
- To bring forward new people to engage as citizens.
- To develop the community leadership roles of ward members.

3.2 Both pilots effectively got underway in December 2007 with an initial focus on getting Area Committee approval of the areas selected and establishing the process structures. Partners were engaged, support sessions held and target dates set for submission of applications culminating in the Decision Days which were held on the 10th (South) and 17th May (West) 2008. (See Appendix 1)

3.3 Projects Approved:

In South:

Morley 10 th Scouts (Flooring)	£2,584
Morley 10 th Scouts (Outdoor improvements)	£4,053.75
Drighlington Senior Citizens Trips and Transport	£3,000
NPT Police Bikes	£2,400
Drighlington Parish Council Quiet Garden	£4,500
Youth Service Activities for Young People	£2,200
Drighlington ARLFC IT Club / Summer activities	£11,262.25

In West

Broadlea Street / Tce informal play area	£5,000
Broadlea Hill roundabout / environmental improvements	£5,000
Bluebell Woods Improvements / Friends group devt	£1,000
Broadleas Youth Steering Group env. Improvements	£5,000

3.4 The next stage of the process is the confirmation of grants agreed, setting up of funding / monitoring arrangements and delivery of the projects prior to a final evaluation.

4. Key Learnings / Recommendations

4.1 Funding Levels

Both pilots demonstrated that monies available were sufficient to run the schemes in the target areas. South benefited from having a partner that provided match funding and supported the delivery of the project. West utilised warden support from other parts of the area to carry out door to door knock and drop activity. The South does not have a warden resource, consequently the pilot had high postage costs in order to get the promotional materials out door to door.

- Excellent community engagement and good projects could be achieved with fairly limited pots of funding.
- Minimum funding pot of £10,000.
- Funding promoted to community is for projects only and a separate budget is used for delivery e.g. printing, venue hire, catering.

- Future projects to explore sponsorship and other matched funding to potentially draw in business support and raise local profiles further. Match funders also have an investment to make the scheme a success.
- Future initiatives to carry out cost benefit analysis of postage to number of households against staff time spent door knocking.
- Confirm partners support of staff time being utilised to target the identified area.
- It is the engagement that is crucial in more disadvantaged areas and PB schemes will not work without this key element rather than due to not enough funds.

Project workers involved felt the process itself was key and that potentially such a scheme could operate at a number of different funding levels.

Level of Community Capacity	Minimum Level of Funding	Minimum Time to Implement	Minimum Size of Area (Number of Households)	Minimum Number of Support Sessions
High	£20,000	4 Months	3000	4
Medium	£15,000	5 Months		4
Low	£10,000	6 Months		6

4.2 Partnership Engagement

In any local area selected, a partnership approach is key to a successful PB process. This is not only in terms of maximising potential funds available but to deliver the scheme and having expert support mechanisms in place to help local people develop their idea.

The South pilot benefited from two strong partners, Aire Valley Homes (AVH) and Drighlington Parish Council. Aire Valley Homes were a significant partner in the South pilot project. In addition to their important financial contribution, they also held a stall on Decision Day promoting their work and supported the general running of the day. AVH also helped develop a scheme in conjunction with Groundwork Leeds which, whilst not ultimately successful, will continue to be a focus for those two groups to develop. Aire Valley Homes recognised that their tenants would benefit from the projects funded and saw the potential of being part of a pilot process that assisted them in engaging with their tenants. The Parish Council provided key support on Decision Day and throughout the pilot as promoters and champions of the initiative.

In West the project was developed through an inter-agency partnership on Broadleas, the Broadleas Improvement Group (BIG). Whilst interest and support levels were initially high a number of staff from agencies involved subsequently moved to other jobs due to restructuring and any real involvement of partners in development effectively disappeared. BIG is still being utilised as a sounding board however as new workers come on board and resident involvement in that group has returned as a result of the Priority Budget pilot experience. Those agencies are also now working jointly to build up the residents association on the estate.

The Primary Care Trust (PCT) and a number of other agencies have expressed interest in developing their own PB approaches and it would be useful to develop co-ordinated approaches in a given area rather than run a number of small pilot type operations without linkage.

- Engage and confirm support of partners as both funders, promoters, applicants and community supporters.

- A Coordinated approach needs to be developed by all agencies who are interested in developing their own PB approaches.

4.3 Publicity and Promotion

South mailed fliers to 2,500 households in their target area whilst Neighbourhood wardens in West delivered publicity to 600 properties, making up the Broadleas estate and utilising information provided by West North West Homes. Both pilot areas were predominantly White British in demographic profile and whilst offers were made to provide publicity in other forms and languages there was no take up. This might be an added expense in another area delivering a PB scheme. Local press, school post and suggestion boxes in local libraries were also used as a means of promoting PB and collating consultation forms on priorities and projects that residents wanted to see tackled. In addition South attended Parish Council meetings and sought to ensure that they were engaged in the process. Morley Advertising Observer were an excellent partner in promoting the South pilot. Regular articles were published promoting support sessions, the consultation process and Decision Day. Door knocking was carried out by Neighbourhood wardens, and the Inner Area Assistant on the Broadleas estate, and the Priority Neighbourhood Development worker and members of the South Area Management targeted door knocking on the estate of Oakwells and Fairfaxes. The project teams led by Area Management staff in both pilots delivered support sessions aimed at helping residents to understand the process, how to complete applications and preparation for Decision Day. Both pilots identified that support sessions were crucial in an area of limited community capacity, further sessions might be needed. The use of mentors and perhaps Slivers of Time could also be utilised in future projects to maximise support time available to local people.

- Planned and targeted publicity and promotion is a key aspect to the success of PB.
- All promotion costs need to be budgeted and recognition given to the levels of staff time needed to successfully promote and develop the scheme.
- Materials must be available in a range of formats.
- Mailouts to targeted area, local press coverage, door knocking, consultation boxes in key community venues and postal comments are key consultation and promotional activities required to achieve a successful initiative.

4.4 Public Engagement

Both pilots were highly successful in engaging and supporting local residents in becoming active in the community. Residents welcomed the show of confidence from the local authority in allowing them to make decisions on their community.

In South 52 people attended support sessions resulting in 11 bids from a range of community groups and organisations as diverse as local pensioner and scouting groups to the Neighbourhood Policing team. Residents attending the support sessions were shown the Bradford pilot on DVD to illustrate what Decision Day meant. 120 people attended the Decision Day event with 72 completing voting scoring cards (limit of one vote per household). The level of enthusiasm and good will amongst the residents on the day was fantastic and created a real buzz in the meeting hall. This success was reported the following

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week in the local press, the Parish Council magazine and will be used to continue to build relations and capacity amongst the residents.

In West a different method was used and following the support sessions 11 bids were also submitted. Participants at the West Decision Day was limited to representatives of bids coming to make presentations with a vote going to each group. Projects were not allowed to vote for themselves and a minimum vote was set under which no schemes would be funded even if funding was available. Of the 11 bidders only 4 attended the actual day one advised of absence as they had managed to obtain support from the project from West North West ALMO but at this stage no explanation has been given by the other applicants. It was clear that local people were nervous about making presentations which it was felt might have affected numbers.

DVDs of the day are currently in preparation and provide a good indication of involvement and contributions on the day.

Clearly there are different ways of setting up the day that will depend upon confidence levels of participants, capacity for involving wider community, space available at Decision Day venue and what the prime objectives of the process are.

The Oakwells Fairfax estate was much more difficult to galvanise in South resulting in five residents attending the support sessions and one attending the Decision Day, despite targeting door knocking and leafleting. However, all of the projects approved would have a direct impact on improving the environment and services of residents on the estate. On Broadleas whilst only 8 people attended Decision Day 6 of these were new to any such activity and their presentations and involvement on the day were excellent. This has already had an impact on support for the Residents Association which had been down to 3 in membership but is now doing a major recruitment drive and have already identified 5 new people for the next meeting.

In reality both pilots struggled to get involvement in the more deprived areas despite broad ranging publicity and door knocking. The level of neighbourhood working and partnership work that can be utilised is critical in this respect. It is vital that effort is put into maximising contact with residents to build up trust. Participatory Budgeting is an excellent means to engage with local people but without the funding, partnerships support and capacity to support and work with the community is likely to be most effective in an area with existing community activity rather than in the most disadvantaged areas. In terms of public perception the general response was very positive to the notion of letting local people decide and if projects now develop successfully it will do much to influence local perceptions of council service providers. Once engaged in the process there were very clear outcomes in terms of confidence levels and awareness of priorities that make it a very useful tool in looking at local needs and raising community spirit and aspirations.

What came across clearly was that groups developing bids were very realistic in what could be achieved and did not aim for the impossible but instead were looking for small schemes that could be quickly achieved and bring about change in a short timescale.

- Support sessions vital to train residents in PB, consult on priority issues and develop community capacity.
- Offer support in presentation skills.
- Videoing the process captured the enthusiasm and passion of the residents towards their community and the decision making.

- Show previous pilots videos to residents of new PB area to demonstrate principle in practice.
- All residents from the targeted area invited to Decision Day.
- Confident that, when asked, residents will make an informed decision.
- Improved public opinion of local authority and increased residents understanding of budget constraints.
- Developed community capacity to apply for funding and identify service provider to solve local issues,
- Ensure consultation is carried out to prioritise issues in area and ensure projects applying for funding meet these needs.
- PB process allows for better engagement with local people and it offers great potential for working at face to face level in deprived neighbourhoods and challenging negative perceptions of members and council services.

4.5 **Ward Member Involvement.**

The Drighlington 'Big Spender' Scheme promoted Ward Councillors in their roles as community champions. Ward Councillors played a central role in the promotion of PB and had a prominent role on Decision Day. On Decision Day in Drighlington Councillor Finnigan delivered opening and closing speeches and Councillor Leadley attended. Ward Councillors were fully briefed on the process and invited to the support sessions. A member of the Narrowing the Gap Group (Cllr Golton) was fully involved and attended the steering groups meetings on a regular basis. In West a Councillor was nominated to be lead member, Cllr Taggart, and attended BIG meetings where the scheme was developed although was unable to attend the Decision day itself. Useful discussion took place at each Area Committee where the selected areas were confirmed in West's case with a desire that we consider a similar scheme for the Wyther estate at some stage in the future.

- Ensure Ward Members are sufficiently briefed on PB schemes in their area.
- Identify key roles within the process for Ward Councillors at the beginning of the scheme.

4.6 **Voting**

Residents were energised by the concept of voting for schemes that directly affected their estate. The pilots had similar scoring systems that asked the residents to score each project out of 10 on value for money, achievability and benefit to the community. These three scores were added up to create a total for the project. In South it was a crucial and time consuming task on Decision Day, to verify and input the scores into an excel spreadsheet from all 72 voting cards. Those with the highest scores received funding.

Both pilots had problems explaining the scoring system to residents. Specific to the West were the concepts of not being able to vote for their own projects and a minimum voting level to have a scheme approved. Some residents struggled with both of these rules. An issue to be resolved is how to balance making the occasion as undaunting for those making presentations whilst potentially wanting to maximise attendance and who can vote. Both pilots had a diverse age range of participants. The PB exercise aims to encourage local people to take part in a democratic process that directly affects their community and supporting residents in capacity building both in confidence and skills. Voting could actually be divisive rather than encourage community cohesion as there

were instances of attempts at tactical voting and frictions when the voting stage was reached. Residents questioned whether proxy voting / postal voting was permitted.

- No Proxy Voting allowed as voting based on presentations.
- Residents had to attend the whole of Decision Day to vote
- Residents must attend the whole event otherwise score card is void.
- Keep scoring to its simplest form but ensure that the process will provide you with a ranking to allocate funding to.
- No time allowed for residents to question projects, based on presentations but officer leading event can ask questions if feels key elements have been missed.

4.7 Checks and Balances

In each case a key part of the PB process is to ensure sufficient checks and balances are in place. Where brand new groups and individuals come forward it may be necessary to seek the support of other voluntary organisations and community groups who might be responsible for monies allocated for projects in the absence of a formal constitution and bank account. We cannot follow the usual rules of only giving to constituted bodies if we are genuinely seeking to develop capacity at a grass roots level in priority neighbourhoods.

7.0 Conclusion

It is clear that both staff teams involved in pilots found the Participatory Budgeting process to offer great potential as a means of building local capacity and enhancing relationships between residents, elected members and council service providers. Capacity building included increasing confidence and skills levels but it also allows the community to set priorities and challenge assumptions on issues or needs that may exist.

It need not necessarily involve large amounts of funding to engage local people but it does require committed partners and officer time.

When identifying target areas for future schemes, the following need to be considered; community capacity, number of households, size of budget, local venue for Decision Day and support of partners. Significantly, the lower the level of community capacity, the higher the level of partner support needed.

In its current format PB should only be used for dedicated funding pots. Future developments could see local decision making on how and where mainstream services are delivered rather than deciding on mainstream budgets.

Each scheme could target specific themes e.g. crime and attract funding from relevant partners.

In a local area the process could be rotated around wards and develop a 'PB' branding. This would generate interest in the concept amongst residents and partners.

Ultimately the innovative process provides a funding source to local residents and asks them to decide how it is spent. This level of community engagement results in projects targeting local issues identified by the residents, developing their capacity to create better neighbourhoods and improves opinions of service providers.

Appendix 1

Participatory Budgeting Timeline

Set Up Steering Group	5 th December
Officer Training view best practise and recommendations on process, criteria and consultation.	December- January
Pilot Area and Process Agreed by Steering Group and Area Committees. Application Forms, criteria and scoring matrix outlined	January
Launch of Initiative	11 th February
Support Sessions and Consultation with the Community Training on PB process PNDW engage community in consultation events to identify local priorities. Training on LCC departments and current support networks and funding streams. Update given on process so far, feedback from consultation. How to apply for funding and questions answered on application form. Ideas unable to be supported through PB process passed to relevant LCC department or agency. Training on Presentation Skills	26 th and 28 th February 3 rd and 4 th April 25 th April
Application Forms and Guidance Notes circulated to Community Groups and Agencies	End of February
Project Application Deadline	17 th April
Applications appraised and those meeting criteria invited to attend Decision Day to present project idea	Mid April
Promotion of Decision Day	April 20 th – 10 th May
Decision Day	10 th May
Funding Agreements with Projects	May
Evaluation of Process All evaluation reports will be referred to the Narrowing the Gap Group in the first instance and then shared with other stakeholders including	May

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Area Committees as appropriate. Following comment from Area Committees and the Narrowing the Gap Group a full report on the feasibility of wider application of PB will be prepared for consideration by CLT.	
Projects Delivered Projects implemented by winning applicants, PNDW to support project winners based in community	
Monitored Officers at council and community groups	
Evaluation of Projects	March 2009