

**Date: August 2009**

**Subject: Lofthouse 'Bright Ideas' Participatory Budgeting Initiative**

## **Evaluation Report**

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### **Executive Summary**

The Area Management Team delivered a Participatory Budgeting Initiative beginning on Tuesday 21 April 2009, with a presentation to Lofthouse Tenants and Resident's Association, concluding with 'Decision Day', a public event on Saturday 27 June 2009 at Christ Church, Lofthouse.

£15,000 was allocated by Aire Valley Homes for community focused projects. Local people were asked to take control of decision-making in their community by providing 'Bright Ideas' as part of consultation which defined project priorities. Organisations were invited to present their project proposals at 'Decision Day', where local residents voted to decide which projects would receive an allocation of public money to target local priorities.

Following 'Decision Day' three organisations have been offered funding to deliver their community focused projects.

### **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the Lofthouse 'Bright Ideas' initiative. By documenting planning, delivery and feedback from all parties we hope to learn from the experience. Participatory Budgeting is part of a suite of engagement activities used by The Area Management Team to involve residents in local decision making and to promote the work of the Area Committee. As a new concept being trialed and interpreted across the country, it is imperative to learn from experiences in each locality to inform future delivery.

### **Background**

Participatory Budgeting places local people at the very heart of decision-making in their community. The process asks them to decide how to spend public money in their area on community focused projects. Building on the positive experience of the Participatory Budgeting (PB) 'Big Spender' project in Drighlington last year, 'Lofthouse Bright Ideas' was allocated a total budget of £15,000 for community focused projects, funding coming from Aire Valley Homes Area Panel and Leeds City Council Outer South Area Committee.

### **Steering Group**

The Steering Group membership consisted of:

- Two Elected Members from Ardsley and Robin Hood Ward (in their role of 'Community Champions')
- Two Local Residents who were drawn from a meeting of the Lofthouse Tenants and Residents Association – TARA
- One Officer from Outer South Area Management Team – AMT (who led the initiative)
- One Aire Valley Homes Officer – AVH

Two further elected officers from the Lofthouse Tenants and Residents Association (TARA) were invited to join the Steering Group but did not attend the meetings. This group was responsible for overseeing the management and monitoring of the project.

Other partners were not represented at the Steering Group, (apart from an invitation to members of Lofthouse TARA). This assisted the process by reinforcing the leadership role of Ward Members and residents working together with support from AMT & AVH staff. The focus was to remove possible conflict because of the likelihood that partners and agencies would be invited to support and/or bid into the delivery of projects with community groups, when the 'Bright Ideas' priorities had been defined by the community.

## Appendix 3

Representatives from the Steering Group were largely satisfied with the role and composition of group, which was able to function effectively as a team, being focussed wholly on the process. The group met on four occasions. This was an appropriate frequency, considering the project timeframe of three months.

It was felt that given the lack of formal representation from Tenants & Residents that the Steering Group would have been strengthened if an established, active and recognised 'voice' could have been recruited from the Tenants and Residents Group who would have 'legitimised' the project more and perhaps galvanised support from the community.

### **Project Process**

'Bright Ideas' was launched on Tuesday 21 April with a presentation to Lofthouse Tenants and Resident's Association. A leaflet drop in the area was conducted the week prior, inviting members of the public from the area to attend. Over the project's timeframe, there were four advertised public sessions delivered to raise the profile of the initiative, to gain public feedback and to update on project progress.

The boundary area for Lofthouse 'Bright Ideas' included the residents of Ramsgate, Ramsgate Close, Fentons Gate, Robertsgate, an Eastern section of Long Thorpe Lane, a section of Leeds Road (A61), Carlton Lane, the Western section of Jumbles Lane, the Southern section of Cemetery Lane.

Consultation began on Thursday 23 April. Freepost Reply Cards were delivered to 300 homes in the area to collect the communities 'Bright Ideas'. 10 promotional posters were posted at local venues. 34 'Bright Ideas' were received and considered by the Steering Group. Some ideas were signposted to appropriate agencies because they didn't fit the initiative's scope. The remaining 'Bright Ideas' formed the following broad priority areas, Environment, Activities for Children and Young People and Improved Local Facilities.

20 community, voluntary, faith organisations and public agencies were invited to develop proposals for funding which addressed the priority areas. Following further scrutiny 4 projects were invited to deliver a presentation at 'Decision Day'.

'Bright Ideas' concluded with 'Decision Day', a public event on Saturday 27 June. Residents from the area in attendance, voted for the projects they wanted delivered. Considering the amount of publicity and associated work by partners to generate interest, the attendance was lower than had been expected. 300 flyers were hand delivered prior to the event and 20 A3 laminated Posters placed in strategic locations on the estate, including the Pharmacy, Library and Ramsgate Community Centre. Area Management Team had conducted a door to door knocking exercise on the Thursday before the event to generate further interest. On the day 10 members of the public were eligible to vote.

In terms of the organisation and delivery of 'Decision Day', The Area Management Team with support from Steering Group Members was commended on the running of a well planned and executed process. 'Bright Ideas' project branding and publicity was developed using a colour 'light bulb' logo and this was acknowledged as a positive and recognisable brand.

### **Community Projects Supported**

The project funding awards are as follows:

- Carlton Scouts awarded £5,000 towards 'The Graveyard Shift' which will involve local volunteers in the restoration of a neglected part of Lofthouse Parish Cemetery.
- Lofthouse 2000 Brass Band awarded £7,891 towards 'On the Slide' which will involve the purchase of new trombones and the formation of a new group of young people from the area in regular music tuition, and recruitment to the main Brass Band.
- Groundwork Leeds have been offered £2,109 as a contribution towards 'Lofthouse Greenspace Improvements' which will provide new public facilities such as benches and plan towards the upgrade an underused piece of land on the Ramsgate Estate.

**Budget**

Item	Cost
Bright Ideas' Projects	15,000.00
Catering	165.00
Refreshments	6.75
Venue Hire	90.00
Publicity	56.00
Freepost Reply Plus	3.31
Other Postage	1.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,323.05</b>

**Conclusions**

Residents who responded to consultations, events and at 'Decision Day' were appreciative of what was seen as a clear and transparent process. The projects developed by partner organisations will provide a real impact, in terms of addressing those priorities highlighted by the community.

PB is an excellent tool which can be used as part of a suite of engagement activities, to involve residents in local decision making. Participatory Budgeting provides a very practical way of allowing Ward Member's to connect with local people as 'Community Champions', to understand issues via targeted consultation, allowing them to help refine priorities and target responses at a local level. This approach therefore allows a two-way flow of information between the local and strategic level, contributing to building a wider understanding and involvement in the work of the Area Committee.

Ward Members, AMT and AVH recognise that the Lofthouse TARA is currently in a fragile state. All community groups are susceptible to fluctuations in their capacity, but with initiatives like this, management committees require high levels of direct support. However, by implication the level of support will be restricted during the delivery of such a resource intensive initiative. As a result of this the TARA lacked the capacity to support this PB project to the extent that was required, so making the interest from the wider community weak. This reinforces conclusions from previous initiatives; that PB is most effective in areas with good levels of community capacity. PB provides the opportunity to develop the capacity already present, promote Ward Councillors as Community Champions and empower residents to feel they can influence local decision making.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are presented for consideration.

1. PB Steering Group's should include an established and active 'voice' from the community who can legitimise the project and galvanise support from the wider community.
2. 'Terms of Reference' need to be clear to ensure roles and responsibilities of the Steering Group are understood and reinforced during the process.
3. The target area needs clear definition and the reasons for selection require clear explanation.
4. A concise local profile document which highlights local issues, Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and other relevant statistics should be available at the start of the process.
5. On 'Decision Day' a clear explanation of the Voting Card and general scoring of projects should be presented.