

The Highland Council

Sutherland County Committee – 9th February 2016

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	SCC/07/16

Participatory Budgeting

Report by Head of Policy and Reform

Summary

This report highlights progress in the development of participatory budgeting (PB) in Highland. It sets PB in the context of the requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 particularly the requirements to develop local democratic structures and involve communities in decision-making around resources. It asks members to consider how PB might be piloted in Sutherland and offers options for doing this. It asks Members to agree to utilise Scottish Government funding of £15K and consider adding Ward Discretionary funding to this amount to develop the process.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Community Empowerment Act 2015 puts in place a range of provisions to support communities to make change happen by having more power and influence over what matters to them. It requires public sector partners to support the development of local action through enabling them to take control of assets, and supporting them to participate in decision-making (including that regarding resources). It is likely that the guidance produced to support the Act will highlight participatory budgeting as a key way to engage communities in decision-making

2. Participatory Budgeting

- 2.1 Participatory budgeting (PB) involves communities in allocating public funding. The PB process initially runs a public event where communities vote on which projects/services to support. However in bringing the disparate sections of a community together it-
- creates networks
 - improves knowledge and awareness of community activity
 - promotes a discussion about issues and priorities
 - builds capacity
 - improves engagement with excluded groups
 - supports wider democratic participation
 - shifts agencies and communities focus and provision to meet need
 - prepares communities and agencies for discussions regarding more substantial mainstream budgets

- 2.2 Our experience of PB in Highland has been very positive having used it:
1. in Lochaber for a youth discretionary fund (£10k) –a report on it went to the last Communities and Partnership Committee http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/69433/item_15b_b_l_ochaber_participatory_budgeting_experiment
 2. in Caithness – £30k of Ward Discretionary funding was allocated in November 2015. There was high turnout at the event – around 200 with 145 eligible to vote. This was reported at the same committee above and the web cast might be of interest (it was a presentation rather than written report), but the minutes from the meeting records the issues raised by Members as:
 - a. the event in Wick had been very well attended and this was welcomed;
 - b. a number of the projects which had been voted for by the public were perhaps not what Local Members would have initially supported and this was interesting and had given the opportunity to listen to what communities wanted;
 - c. the event had inspired discussion, new friendships and access to valuable advice across local communities in the area;
 - d. other areas across Highland should be encouraged to take forward similar schemes through their own Ward Discretionary budgets;
 - e. community groups were now continuing to share advice and provide assistance to each other and this was very positive for the future; and

3 How could it be trialled in Sutherland?

- 3.1 Members have previously discussed utilising PB in Sutherland. They are clear that it is a key tool for engaging more effectively with communities as described in 2.1.
- 3.2 If Members wished to trial the approach in Sutherland officers could support one event in Spring 2016. This would involve bringing together a partnership group that would involve-
- Ward Manager
 - Third Sector Organisations
 - A Local Member
 - Specialist support from The Scottish Government
- The make-up of this group would take cognisance of both the geographical and interest groups in the County
- 3.3 Members could choose to hold a pan-Sutherland process. This would allow the wider Sutherland community to discuss priorities across the area and stimulate a broader awareness of the points discussed in 2.1. Alternatively a smaller more local event could utilise one of the Ward boundaries to conduct a process.

4. Funding

4.1 Reflecting the importance of driving forward PB across Highland and embedding it in our practice, with a view toward it being applied to some mainstream budgets the Scottish Government has allocated additional funding to support its development across Highland. The funding available (£60k) has been considered first for those areas where Member's expressed some interest in trying PB. It is to be used so far in Caithness, Skye, and Nairn. £15k is available for Sutherland if Members wish to proceed. Members may also wish to consider allocating some of their Ward Discretionary budget to the process, either carried forward from this financial year or from next year's budget.

4. Implications

4.1 Resource: Scottish Government funding and potentially the Ward Discretionary Budget could be utilised for this event.

Legal: This will assist us in meeting the requirements of the Community Empowerment Act

Equalities: The organising group would consider how best to ensure that people with protected characteristics are included in the process.

Climate Change, Gaelic and Rural implications: none are identified, although rural areas are pressing ahead with PB.

Risk: The organising group is considering the risks involved to PB and is making arrangements for the event to be successful.

5 Recommendation

5.1 Members are asked to consider how PB might be piloted in Sutherland and agree an option for doing this. Members are asked to agree to utilise Scottish Government funding of £15K and consider adding Ward Discretionary funding to this amount to develop the process.

Designation: Head of Policy and Reform

Date: 01/02/16

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Background Papers: