

The Highland Council

Communities and Partnerships Committee 23 March 2016

Agenda Item	11 (d)
Report No	CP/09/16

Participatory Budgeting Update

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. Members are asked to comment on progress and how the process may develop.

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).
- 1.2 Part 10 of the Act is about participation in public decision-making. It aims to promote and enable participation of people in the decisions about public services including the allocation of financial and other resources. It seeks to support capacity building in communities with a view that this will help to identify local needs and priorities better and for budgets to be targeted more effectively. Guidance or regulations are expected on which public bodies are included and which of their decisions are affected and who should be able to participate in them. This guidance is expected by September 2016.
- 1.3 It is very likely that the statutory guidance or regulation will highlight participatory budgeting as a key way to engage communities in decision-making. Local authorities are being targeted with support and are very likely to be listed bodies for this Part of the Act.
- 1.4 The Council has commitments to trial participatory budgeting in several locations by March 2017 as part of its Highland First Programme.

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;
3. in Nairn -£25k of mainly Ward Discretionary funding attracted 29 bids from community groups .A successful event was organised by local community based staff from the Council and Partners with elected Member input. The event held on 12/3/16 attracted approximately 120 members of the public to debate which bids should be funded.

2.3 The approach in all three areas has been to form a partnership steering group comprising-

- Ward Manager
- Third Sector Organisations
- A Local Member
- Specialist support from the Scottish Government

The make-up of the group is designed to reflect the geography and the interest groups in the area which helps develop the partnership which will be required

for future developments and stimulates a wide range of applications.

3. Next steps

- 3.1 Planning for further events in Caithness, Sutherland, Skye and Inverness West is underway. These will take place in May and June 2016. This roll out has been supported by Scottish Government funding.
- 3.2 In developing the guidance to support the implementation of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 the Scottish Government has run a number of consultative events with Councils and other stakeholders. These events have made clear that they see PB as a key tool in developing a new relationship between communities and public sector organisations. They are keen to see PB processes begin to impact on mainstream budget processes.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government has announced that it will make available £2 million of funding to develop PB in the next financial year through a Community Choices Fund. Although the application process has not yet been finalised, press statements make it clear that bids that focus on areas of deprivation will be prioritised.

4 Implications

- 4.1 **Resource:** Participatory budgeting requires officer and partner time as well as resources to allocate. Currently the Council has applied the approach to discretionary funding, but there is scope to develop the technique for communities to prioritise some aspects of mainstream budgets. The Council has been able to draw down £60k of funding to support PB from the Scottish Government and there is scope to bid further from the new Fund, although the fund application process is not yet known.

Legal: Trialling PB in Highland will assist us in meeting the requirements of the Community Empowerment Act, although the statutory guidance is awaited.

Equalities: The process would consider how best to ensure that people with protected characteristics are supported to be involved.

Climate Change, Gaelic and Rural implications: no new implications are identified, although rural areas are pressing ahead with PB.

Risk: The organising groups are considering the risks involved to PB and are making arrangements for the events to be successful. They also consider the feedback received from the events to inform learning for future events planned.

5. Recommendation

5.1 Members are asked to note the statutory requirement for public participation in decision-making, including resource allocation and that statutory guidance on this Part of the Act is awaited.

5.2 Members are asked to comment on progress so far noting the arrangements for rolling out PB across Highland to date and to express an interest for their Ward if PB has not yet started there.

5.3 Members are reminded that they are invited to attend a PB Masterclass following the Committee meeting.

5.4 Members are asked to agree that the Council bids for funding from the Scottish Government's Community Choices Funding when the application process and criteria are known.

Designation: Community and Democratic Engagement Manager

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