

Highland Community Planning Partnership

Chief Officers Group - 21st April 2016

Agenda Item	5iv.
Report No	COG 08/16

Participatory Budgeting Update

Report by Acting Head of Policy

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. Partners are asked to comment on progress and consider how they may contribute to 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).
- 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, which of their decisions are affected and who should be able to participate in them. This guidance is expected by summer 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.
- 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, the benefits are that 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. To date it has been used in:

1. Lochaber for a youth discretionary fund (£10k) – an online participatory budgeting approach, it generated applications from 42 organisations and attracted 1200 people engaging in the voting process. A report on this approach went to the Highland Council Communities and Partnership Committee on the 10th December 2016
http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/69433/item_15b_b_l_lochaber_participatory_budgeting_experiment
2. 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. Feedback from this event was considered at the same committee above and included::
 - 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;

A presentation was made to this Committee on the feedback and the webcast can be viewed at http://www.highland.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/162731

3. 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. 29 bids presented to 124 members of the public.

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

- Highland Council Ward Manager
- Third Sector Organisations e.g. Youth, Sport, Access and Community Support Organisations
- A Local Elected 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. 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, initial indication suggest that bids focused on areas of deprivation will be prioritised.

4. Recommendation

4.1 Partners 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.

4.2 Partners are asked to comment on progress so far noting the arrangements for rolling out PB across Highland.

4.3 Partners are asked to consider how they may contribute to the process.

Designation: Community and Democratic Engagement Manager

Date: 12/04/16

Author: Pablo Mascarenhas