

The Highland Council

Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee – 31 May 2016

Agenda Item	11
Report No	BSAC/11/16

Participatory Budgeting

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. It asks Members to consider how PB might be piloted in Badenoch and Strathspey. It also asks Members to consider using Ward Discretionary funding 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 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 the youth discretionary fund (£10k) – an online process was used, this was reported to the December Communities and Partnership Committee
http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/69433/item_15b_b_lochaber_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).
 3. and in Nairn where £25k of mainly Ward Discretionary funding attracted 29 bids from a broad range of community groups. A successful event was organised by a community based partnership group involving the Ward Manager and with elected Member input. The event which was held in March attracted around 120 members of the public.

3 How could it be trialled in Badenoch & Strathspey?

- 3.1 Members have previously discussed utilising PB in Badenoch and Strathspey. 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 Badenoch and Strathspey, officers could support one event in Autumn 2016. This would involve bringing together a partnership group that would involve :-
- Ward Manager
 - Third Sector Organisations
 - A Local Member
 - Specialist support from the Council's Policy Unit
- The makeup of this group would take cognisance of both the geographical and interest groups in the Ward.
- 3.3 Consideration could be given to running either a single face to face event, or to look at using an online process such as that successfully trialled in Lochaber.

4. Funding

- 4.1 Members may wish to consider allocating some of their Ward Discretionary budget to the process. There may be opportunity to bid for further Scottish Government funding which may supplement the process

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resource: Ward Discretionary Budget could be utilised for this event.

Legal: This will assist us in meeting the requirements of Part 10 of the Community Empowerment Act which requires public bodies to enable communities to participate in public decision-making.

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.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. Consider and agree how PB might be piloted in Badenoch and Strathspey
2. Consider using Ward Discretionary funding to develop the process.

Designation: Acting Head of Policy

Date: 19/05/16

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