

CABINET

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING 3RD JUNE 2008

Report of the Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report, together with a short presentation, is to inform members of the recent Participatory Budgeting exercise carried out in Poulton and to make recommendations for the development of Participatory Budgeting based on the project and its evaluation.

Key Decision

X

Non-Key Decision

Referral from Cabinet
Member

Date Included in Forward Plan

5th May 2008

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Cabinet agree in principle to take forward Participatory Budgeting as a way of assisting in the determination of the spending of appropriate grant aid funding.
- (2) That Cabinet agree to open a dialogue with the District Local Strategic Partnership and Lancashire County Council to ascertain whether they might wish to engage in delivering Participatory Budgeting in partnership with Lancaster City Council.
- (3) That subject to the above being agreed, a further report detailing progress in relation to dialogue with our partners and setting out the full implications is brought back to a later Cabinet meeting to consider before Participatory Budgeting is implemented.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Participatory Budgeting has its roots in Porto Allegro in Brazil and is an innovative way of constructing a democratic process whereby local people can vote for how they wish to see public money spent. There is a national Participatory Budgeting Unit which disseminates information and provides support to public organisations wishing to pilot this way of working. The Department of Communities and Local Government is encouraging the development of Participatory Budgeting and a number of local authorities have already run successful pilots.

1.2 Poulton Neighbourhood Management staged a Participatory Budgeting event at the Platform in Morecambe on the 16th February 2008 where local people were asked to decide how to spend an allocation of £20,000. This was the culmination of more than three months of intensive preparatory work. One hundred and twenty five people attended and applications were presented by people representing twenty six local groups. Members of the audience listened to these presentations and then voted for those projects they thought would make Poulton a stronger community. Each organisation could bid for up to £2,000.

1.3 Below is a table taken from the evaluation of the event

		Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Agree	Agree Strongly
1	The event was well organised		1	6	41	52
2	The event was well publicised	1	9	15	43	32
3	There was a good range of projects			3	53	44
4	The process was clear	1	9	7	45	38
5	I feel I have contributed to an improvement in my neighbourhood			10	47	43
6	I have discovered groups that I did not know existed			3	44	53
7	I would take part in an event like this in the future			8	47	45
8	I found the afternoon entertaining			14	45	41

1.4 As is evident from the evaluation, most people enjoyed the event and felt that it had made a significant contribution to improving Poulton.

1.5 Below are listed those local groups who were successful on the day and the projects they can now take forward.

St John's Ambulance - £2000 - Community Training Project - taking First Aid into schools, Children's Centres etc

Rainbow Centre - £2000 - Health and Well Being - Purchasing evacuation wheelchairs and First Aid training for volunteers.

Poulton Residents Association - £168 - Even Greener - Plant 14 hanging baskets on 2 heritage buildings in Poulton

Poulton Community Gardens - £2000 - Friends of Morecambe Cemetery - to create a group to care for and tidy Morecambe Cemetery

Morecambe War Memorial Hall - £1600 - Light up the Hall - to install security lighting around the building

Morecambe Parish Church Uniformed Groups - £1669.97 - Renew Camping Equipment - upgrade equipment for Scouts and Guides

Morecambe Parish Church - £1055 - Garden of Remembrance - to provide a quiet restful area

Morecambe Community High School PTA - £2000 - Citizen of the Year project - to offer a bursary or sponsorship to pupils willing to engage with the community in a positive way.

Morecambe Brass Academy - £2000 - to encourage young people to learn a musical instrument

Morecambe Bay School Pupils - £2000 - Playground Equipment Project - allowing children to play more creatively together

Limelight Productions - £1961.24 - Community Events by Limelight - purchase sound equipment to develop performing skills and provide professional performances

Chatterbox - £750 - the World Around Us - Further understanding of the world we live in for pre-school children.

TOTAL £19,809.47

- 1.6 Poulton Neighbourhood Management has run a 'Quick Response Fund' since it began in 2002 for the allocation of small grants of up to £2,000. The Participatory Budgeting scheme utilises the same checks and balances required for public accountability and audit purposes as have already been approved for that scheme. The only significant difference is in the process of deciding which organisations receive a grant. For 'Quick Response' the decision is taken by an appraisal panel and for Participatory Budgeting the decision is taken at a public event, as described above, by local people.
- 1.7 The experience of running a Participatory Budgeting exercise has demonstrated enhanced community engagement in the decision making process. This experience could be built upon by the City Council and its partners. It is considered that a reasonable starting point would be to use the process to engage local communities more fully in decisions by the Council in respect of grants. There is also an opportunity to bring together the grant giving programmes of the Districts LSP and those of the County Council should there be support for such an approach.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 It is proposed to take forward Participatory Budgeting in partnership with the District LSP, Lancashire County Council and any other interested public bodies that currently operate grant regimes within the district.
- 2.2 Participatory Budgeting should be considered alongside the development of Neighbourhood Management. It is part of the Community Cohesion agenda and is most effective when delivered at a neighbourhood level.
- 2.3 There are, at this stage, many unanswered questions which will need to be tackled before officers can present a fully developed model for Participatory Budgeting in Lancaster District. In particular, identifying staffing resources, appropriate budgets, or parts of budgets and securing the enthusiastic co-operation of partners.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 An intensive consultation exercise was carried out on the 16th February 2008 (see 1.3 above). Of one hundred evaluation sheets distributed, ninety three were returned completed. These formed the basis of the scheme's evaluation report.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

- 4.1 1 To identify appropriate un-committed grant funds available from relevant public bodies and plan a series of neighbourhood based Participatory Budgeting exercises.

The significant risk is in not having adequate planning and preparation for such exercises. Our experience of the Poulton pilot is that this method of determining grant spending is labour intensive and requires careful and effective planning as well as relatively sophisticated event management on the day itself.

- 2 The 'do nothing' option whereby grants continue to be determined using the current system(s).

The risk is that Lancaster City Council, and its partners, misses a significant opportunity to engage with neighbourhoods and to develop its community cohesion agenda.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 5.1 Option 1 is the preferred option and provides an opportunity for more direct engagement with the District's communities and a transparent method for the distribution of grant aid.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Members are asked to approve the report and to instruct officers to identify appropriate grant budgets and to develop a rolling programme of Participatory Budgeting across the District which will be presented to a future Cabinet meeting for final approval.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The introduction of Participatory Budgeting would have complimentary implications for the Council's priority for rolling out Neighbourhood Management.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Participatory Budgeting, if developed more widely, will have implications for the Council's current system of disbursement of grant aid and will support and reinforce Lancaster City Council's commitment to the community cohesion agenda.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial Services have been consulted and confirm that resources for the event staged on the 16th February 2008 were met from external LAA grant funding. There are no immediate financial implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report, other than staff time which can be met from within existing resources. However, if Participatory Budgeting is seen as something the Council wishes to develop more widely in the future then as indicated within the report relevant budgets would need to be identified and appropriate consultation carried out with Financial Services.

Members are reminded that should they resolve that Officers identify appropriate budgets and continue to develop a rolling programme of Participatory Budgeting then a further more detailed report will need to be brought back to a later Cabinet meeting for them to agree before implementation can take place. As part of this Neighbourhood Management officers will need to work with Financial Services to ensure that appropriate processes are in place regarding the allocation of and accountability for funds awarded.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Deputy Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Poulton Neighbourhood Management
Evaluation Report, February 2008

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