
Community Choices – Participatory Budgeting

Report by Director, Resilient Communities

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

22 FEBRUARY 2022

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY:

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Council’s approach to Participatory Budgeting (PB) approach, including the national position, and outlines the next steps to building on the current mainstreaming objective.**
- 1.2 On 29 October 2017, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) announced that Council Leaders had agreed that at least 1% of local government budgets would be subject to Participatory Budgeting by the end of the financial year (2020/21) with the aim of giving communities more influence over decisions on how funding is spent in their local area.
- 1.3 Nationally, whilst some work on PB has continued, the majority of local PB activity (planning or delivery) had stopped whilst in response to the ongoing pandemic. As a result, CoSLA and Scottish Government have recognised the exceptional circumstances brought about by the pandemic and have revised the Framework Agreement timescales and ambition accordingly to give further flexibility to Local Authorities who are yet to achieve the 1% target.
- 1.4 At the same time, council officers working alongside colleagues in CoSLA, have been developing the Council’s mainstreaming approach to Participatory Budgeting as detailed within section 5 of this report, and progress to date in relation to achieving the 1% is given within section 6.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 I recommend that Scottish Borders Council:-

- (a) Notes the progress to date in achieving the current 1% target;**
- (b) Endorses the mainstreaming approach being taken to Participatory Budgeting and the next steps outlined in section 7 in this report.**
- (c) Agrees to receive an update report each year in line with the financial planning process from the Director of Resilient Communities on Participatory Budgeting activity within Scottish Borders Council and meeting the targets agreed by CoSLA.**

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 On 29 October 2017, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) announced that Council Leaders had agreed that at least 1% of local government budgets would be subject to Participatory Budgeting (PB) by the end of 2020/21 with the aim of giving communities more influence over decisions on how funding is spent in their local area.

3.2 CoSLA and Scottish Government worked together to develop and agree a framework (The Community Choices Framework) which would be used to develop approaches to PB. It defines Community Choices as the term used in Scotland for Participatory Budgeting and sets PB as the enabler for active participation of citizens in local decision making. The agreement, which has now been superseded, can be found here:

https://www.cosla.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/18501/communitychoices-frameworkagreement.pdf.

3.3 The 1% target is defined in the Framework Agreement as 'total estimated expenditure for revenue, as per the local government finance circular, less assumed council tax intake. It is considered reasonable to exclude council tax as it is a local tax and therefore already directly and locally accountable.' (CoSLA/Scottish Government 2017). PB requires to:

- enable active participation of citizens in local decision making;
- establish a shared expectation that elected members, senior officers, civil society and local communities will use PB to go beyond the current arrangements for consultation and engagement;
- support the longer term strategic aim of public sector reform that can be achieved by applying spend to the greatest areas of need, where social cohesion can be developed or maintained;
- deliver a partnership approach to PB whereby mainstream funding is identified across a partnership for mainstream services with an aim to shaping how services are delivered in the area; and
- actively involve local people with the intention of making them "less passive consumers of public services and more supportive of new models of delivery".

3.4 Following the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, community empowerment, through participatory democracy, has become an established hallmark of Scotland's national and local policy landscape. Empowerment and participation are embedded as key CoSLA principles and reflected in the National Performance Framework. PB and other participatory processes, enhance local democracy by bringing together those who have traditionally held operational decision-making with people living in communities impacted by those decisions.

4 NATIONAL POSITION IN A COVID-19 RECOVERY CONTEXT

- 4.1 Nationally, whilst some work on PB continued during 2020, the majority of local PB activity (planning or delivery) stopped in response to the pandemic. As a result CoSLA and Scottish Government have recognised the exceptional circumstances brought about by the ongoing pandemic, and the impact this has had on the ability of local authorities to meet the 1% Framework Agreement by the end of March 2022.
- 4.2 Scottish Government and CoSLA Leaders have renewed their commitment to meeting the 1% target and the Framework Agreement has now been revised to allow a degree of flexibility in meeting the deadline, alongside the importance of embedding social renewal within future mainstream PB activity. The revised Framework Agreement is included at Appendix 1. It is also available here [COSLA-SG-Participatory-Budgeting-Framework-Agreement-June-2021.pdf](#)

5 MAINSTREAM PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING APPROACH

- 5.1 Taking into account the Council's challenging current financial position, the PB target is not about identifying a separate and/or additional resource. It is principally about involving communities in decisions regarding existing resources. The 1% is the minimum target set and can be made up of revenue and capital expenditure. It is for local authorities to decide how to take forward PB budgeting at a local level to reach the target.
- 5.2 A variety of approaches have been considered in order for Scottish Borders Council to achieve the 1% target outlined above. A strategic group, chaired by the Director, Resilient Communities, with appropriate Directors, Service Managers and the Financial Services Manager is now established and driving forward the PB planning and delivery on a corporate basis. This group consider and identify in scope budget allocations and authorise the allocation of staffing resources across services, as required, to support the delivery process. Whilst the Communities & Partnership team are the corporate lead for PB delivery, they are working with and supporting individual services to engage with communities, and manage and develop the delivery of PB in respect of their budgets, following direction from the strategic group.
- 5.3 Discussions have also taken place with Area Partnerships and key stakeholders on how communities can best be involved in the decisions relating to budget and spending priorities. It was recognised that training both for officers and communities (including Area Assessment Panels), would be beneficial and raise awareness of local democracy, enhance community engagement, participation and empowerment and further develop the investment strategies linked to place.
- 5.4 Training workshops have been provided to Council officers, Elected Members and Community Partners through Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC). Scottish Community Development Centre offered four training sessions, commencing on 10 November 2021 and took place on a weekly basis. Sessions covered a variety of topics associated with PB, including: what is PB, where did it come from and what are the benefits to communities; what is community empowerment, what are the

barriers and opportunities; and community engagement. Following these sessions it was recognised that ongoing training and engagement was required.

6 PROGRESS TO DATE

- 6.1 The Council is currently forecasting to spend £3.970m on Participatory Budgeting activity, as summarised in the table below, for the financial year 2021/22 with a minimum target of £2.332m required.

Budget	Project	Forecast £'000's
Revenue	Community Fund	372
Revenue	Build Back a Better Borders Fund	443
Revenue	Foodbanks/FareShare Support	127
Capital	Play Parks	78
Capital	Hawick Flood Scheme Active Travel Network	2,950
	Total Forecast 2021/22	3,970

- 6.2 A quarterly conversation is being held with officers and local Foodbanks, FareShare outlets and other food networks across the Borders. Utilising the Financial Hardship Fund, we have been able to hear directly from these groups in relation to lived experience, and also asked them what type of financial support would be most useful to them in reducing food insecurity across the Borders with dignity and respect.
- 6.3 Engagement has taken place with community groups in the Hawick area throughout the Hawick Flood Scheme project and the outcomes of these discussions have resulted in direct changes to the design of the Scheme and budget spend including the inclusion of the Hawick Active Travel Network.
- 6.4 Newtown Primary School have been involved in the design of the pattern of the wet pour safety surface of Newtown St Boswells Play Park, and is a good example of how we can involve communities in making choices.
- 6.5 Pupils from Peebles High Schools have been awarded funding from both the Tweeddale Community Fund and The Democratic Society and will be running their own PB project in relation to making improvements within the school environment. The young people involved are very keen to share their PB experience with others and have already engaged with nutritionists, the school Senior Management Team and Tweeddale Elected Members.

7 NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Whilst there was an initial delay in the delivery of the 1% CoSLA commitment to mainstream Participatory Budgeting due to resources being deployed in responding to the pandemic, significant progress has now been made to achieving the target for this year and in the future.
- 7.2 Following SCDC training completed with Council Officers; Elected members and Community Partners, further training and engagement will be required across all groups to enable the Council to continue to reach the minimum target of 1%. Moving forward, a webinar is currently being developed for Council Officers, covering specific outcomes including: what is PB; why PB is important to the Council and our communities and what is the Council's responsibility with regards to PB. The webinar will also facilitate discussions for Council Officers as to how PB works in practice, including methods that can be adopted and how this can be implemented across services. The first webinar is proposed to take place on 16 February 2022. An E-Learning module will also be developed with the same aims/outcomes as the webinar training and will include a "test your knowledge" exercise upon completion. The aims and objectives of the training are further detailed at Appendix 2.
- 7.3 CoSLA have recently launched an Elected Members briefing for PB, which is live on the Improvement Service Website. Officers are also engaging in direct conversations with community groups to support them to both fund and deliver their own PB projects similar to the one currently underway in Peebles High School.
- 7.4 National Guidance is currently being developed in relation to Participatory Budgeting, and once this is issued, will be considered and incorporated into the approach currently being undertaken.
- 7.5 Additional areas being considered in relation to a PB approach for 2022/23 include the Place Based Investment Programme, community food growing, skate parks, pupil voice in relation to school meals, climate change & net zero, period poverty and demand led transport. Work will also progress on a pilot approach within one of our localities focussing on budget areas across Neighbourhood Services and Roads.
- 7.5 The approach being taken is to embed PB as a way in which the Council does its business and therefore will be evolutionary. It will be delivered via mainstreaming routes rather than the small grant or one off budgets that have previously been the focus but will take time to develop and refine as we learn what works best for our communities. To successfully achieve this it is critically important that we train and develop key officers across the organisation to consider PB in their service and spending plans.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial

- a) The Council is currently forecasting to exceed the PB target for 2021/22 with spend of £3.970m on Participatory Budgeting activity against a minimum target of £2.332m.
- b) The 1% target for 2022/23 is £2.430m and it is anticipated the Council will exceed this target through the continuation of a Participatory Budgeting approach to Community Funds, Play Parks and the Hawick Flood Scheme Active Travel Network.
- c) Further opportunities from within existing revenue and capital budgets are being considered for 2022/23 and beyond including Place Based Investment Programme, period poverty, skate parks and climate change and net zero activities.

8.2 Risk and Mitigations

There is a reputational risk to the Council if progress in relation to delivering the 1% target set by CoSLA is not achieved.

Further to this, and as set out in Section 6.1, it is worth re-iterating that the Council expects to exceed the minimum target of 1% for the financial year of 2021/22 which should have a positive bearing on the Council's reputation and will help to highlight that the Council is going above and beyond the minimum threshold outlined in the framework. This will be further enhanced if targets continue to be exceeded in 2022/2023 as anticipated in section 8.1.

In addition to this, Council Officers have identified, recorded and continue to manage several risks at both a Corporate and Service level which focus on community and stakeholder engagement and Community Empowerment. As the key aim of participatory budgeting is to give communities more influence over decisions on how funding is spent in their local area, it serves to have a positive bearing on these risks by actively seeking engagement, encouraging input and empowering local residents to participate in relation to what is important to them.

There is one additional risk on which mainstreaming participatory budgeting will have a positive bearing. This risk focuses on the delivery of actions committed to following the Best Value Audit in 2019. The specific action (action 13) within the improvement plan states: "Use the experience of the budget consultation process 2020/21 to develop the approach to mainstreaming participatory budgeting. Work with communities to identify priority areas within current budgets...", as such endorsement for the mainstreaming of participatory budgeting as set out in the proposal will help to ensure that this action is achieved, help to negate reputational damage that may materialise should the action not be met, and ensure that we are fulfilling our obligations to achieve Best Value.

8.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

An Integrated Impact Assessment will be carried out on future proposals for mainstreaming Participatory Budgeting, however, the premise of the approach is to ensure that everyone within a particular community has the opportunity to participate. Every effort will be made to support disadvantaged individuals within the protected characteristic groups. As a result, it is anticipated that there will be no negative impacts under either the Equality Duty or the Fairer Scotland Duty

8.4 Acting Sustainably

It is anticipated that through Participatory Budgeting there will be a positive effect on the following community and participation outcomes:

- a) Involve the community in developing and implementing the project
- b) Take into account under-represented or excluded groups
- c) Take into account equal opportunities
- d) Improve community quality of life
- e) Improve community capacity
- f) Encourage local action and decision making

There is already evidence at this early stage that this approach is having a positive effect on community and participation outcomes.

8.5 Climate Change

There are no anticipated effects on carbon emissions as a result of the recommendations made in this report. The most recent participatory survey in relation to the Council Budget included as part of its list of priorities, options relating to climate change and improving bio-diversity. Thus serving to facilitate the potential for a positive impact on climate change by giving local residents the opportunity to influence how funding is prioritised towards these specific areas.

8.6 Rural Proofing

This report contains no implications that will compromise the Council's rural proofing policy. Mainstreaming Participatory Budgeting will apply across the Borders.

8.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications are being consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig
Director - Resilient Communities

Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Jenni Craig	Director, Resilient Communities
Shona Smith	Communities & Partnership Manager
Hayley Megson	HR Business Partner

Previous Minute Reference: Council 19 03 2021

Note – You can get this document on audio CD, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Shona Smith can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at: Shona Smith, Scottish Borders Council, Council HQ, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose TD6 0SA. Tel: 01835 826626 Email: ssmith@scotborders.gov.uk