

Participatory Budgeting (PB) in East Ayrshire



Frequently Asked Questions



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Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a fairly new concept within East Ayrshire, but early in 2016 Vibrant Communities secured funding from the Scottish Government and the East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership to pilot the PB format in 2 communities that have Community Led Action Plans.

As more money has recently become available for PB activities, this opportunity is being offered to remaining communities with established Community Action Plans.

The FAQ's has been put together to help you gain a little more insight on PB and the questions that came up in the pilots. It does not cover everything in detail but will hopefully give you a little more understanding of PB.

What is Participatory Budgeting?

The official definition of PB is:-

“PB directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending priorities for a defined public budget. This means engaging residents and community groups, representative of all parts of the community, to discuss spending priorities, make spending proposals and vote on them.”

Put simply, PB empowers local people to play a key role in deciding how public money is spent on projects and services in their communities. PB can be used to support community and voluntary groups to provide projects that are important to the local community or it can be used to involve residents to shape what and how mainstream services are delivered in their areas. At present, in East Ayrshire PB is being used to support to community and voluntary groups delivering local projects in line with the priorities contained in the CLAP and East Ayrshire Health and Social care partnership priorities.

For Participatory Budgeting to work, there has to be a degree of competition, allowing local people to choose which project they want to support, it is not a system of making grants, decided by a small number of people.

Where does PB come from?

PB as a term has been around for 30+ years. It originated in Brazil in the 1980s but has spread rapidly around the world. Examples include social housing budgets in Toronto, Canada; schools budgets in Poitou-Charentes, France; in Ghana and India to reduce corruption and increase government transparency; in Berlin which has adopted methods that include PB online; and it's now spreading in the UK.

For more information on PB around the world you might like to look at the following links
www.scdc.org.uk
www.pbnetwork.org.uk

How does PB operate?

The key to PB is the participation of local people deciding funding is allocated to projects and services.

To enable this, public events are organised and the local community are invited along to have their say.

There are a number of different types of community event used for PB, such as

- Groups making a short presentation to audience, with audience deciding which projects to support.
- Market place, where groups have displays of project and people read the displays and decide which projects to support.
- Online decision, where project information is made available and people vote on their own computer/tablet. (at this time, the systems required to allow this are not in place within East Ayrshire)

In all of these options, the community is invited to make the decisions.

Is this another form of consultation?

Many communities have been consulted on a variety of issues and it is important that PB is not seen as “yet another consultation”.

As local people are being asked for their views, PB could be seen as a form of consultation. In this situation PB is about decisions being made by local people on activities they want to see in their communities.

Do we have to take part?

This is not something that communities will be forced to take part in. The whether or not they want to get involved will initially be up to the Community Action Plan steering group, but this is an opportunity to bring funding into your community to support the work of local groups to meet your action plan and the health and social care priorities.

Communities deciding to take up this opportunity will be supported through every stage of the process by Vibrant Communities staff.

If we decide to take part, what happens next?

PB works best when it is led by local people, so linking initially with the Community Action Plan steering group, a PB steering group will be set up to lead on this process.

There are a few things within PB that are set, these include

- the priorities projects must meet (set by Action Plan and Health and Social Partnership)
- the time by which the money must be allocated for projects – set for 31 March 2017
- funding must be allocated through a PB event

but the steering group will make a number of local decisions including

- who can vote,
- who can apply,
- type of event,
- dates/locations
- amount projects can apply for (upper/lower limits)
- can organisations apply for more than 1 project

Steering groups will be fully supported by Vibrant Communities staff who will be able to assist the group with any decisions they need to make.

Who can apply?

The PB steering groups will have the final say on who can apply, but within the pilots, it was agreed that the following could apply for funding

- organisation based in the community (i.e. local youth group or church)
- organisations not based in the area but offering a service to the community (i.e. national organisations such as Barnardo's who are looking to run a project in the community)
- individuals with an idea for the community, but need some money to get started.
- Schools groups, but not school core funding

The process must be fully open and transparent and comply with equalities legislation.

Does a group need to be based in the area to apply?

For example, if a national organisation based in Glasgow wanted to run a project in your community which meets your action plan priorities, would they be allowed to apply?

This is a decision that will be made by each PB steering group. In the 2 previous events in East Ayrshire, groups not based in the community, but offering a project in the community were allowed to apply. Project proposals from these organisations were dealt with in exactly the same way as any other project.

Does a group need to have a constitution and bank account in order to be able to apply?

Normally groups who do not have a bank account/constitution would not be allowed to apply for funding. PB as a process aims to make funding as accessible as possible, so with that in mind, during the pilot it was decided that groups/individuals did not need to have a bank account/constitution. This would allow for small groups starting up or individuals with a great idea for the community to access this money.

As long as any project proposal fitted in with the Community Action Plan/Health and Social Care priorities, these applications were dealt with in the same way as any other.

People might be nervous about making a presentation. Will groups be offered any support?

Not all Participatory Budgeting events require groups/ individuals to make presentations, others could include a display of photographs/information, or a written description of the project.

No matter the type of event, Vibrant Communities staff will work with the PB steering groups to hold information sessions for all shortlisted projects prior to the event taking place. These sessions will give the opportunity for applicants to get more specific support if needed.

How can local people lead this when we don't know much about it?

The strength of PB is the empowerment of local communities to make decisions about services/projects in your own area. As much of the decision making as possible will be undertaken by the local steering group and wider community at the public event.

Vibrant Communities staff will provide information/training sessions for each community taking part and will attend the meetings of the local steering group to support the decision making and organisation of the events.

Only local people in the action plan area will be allowed to have a say in deciding which projects will be supported.

How will I know that an event is taking place in my area?

The steering group will determine the best way to engage with their community. This may include posters displayed in the area, social media, school bag drops etc. Application forms will be available from a central point in the community.

Vibrant Communities will also support the steering group to advertise the event through the press and social media.

How do we vote?

This depends on the type of event the local group decide to hold.

You might be invited to attend a community decision day where you will listen to projects making a short presentation, or read information in boards and then vote on which projects should be supported. The actual method of voting might differ from event to event as well. You might have to tick boxes on a form, or you might have to put counters into boxes, or stickers onto posters, the options are really wide.

Can any one group within a community hijack the process for their own good?

This is always a possibility, for example if one group in the community has a large number of members who can all vote, could they have more chance of securing money available over any other group?

As long as appropriate checks and balances are built into the selection and voting processes, this should not be an issue. These checks and balances must be explained to all parties before voting begins.

In the 2 previous initiatives in East Ayrshire, people voting were required to vote for every project giving a score of 1-3 in Mauchline or 1-5 in Newmilns/Darvel. In both initiatives, no one group could secure the full funding available, so it was noted that people did not just give one project their highest score but gave the range of projects a range of scores.

If any project was not scored, the ballot paper was removed and not included in the count.

What happens if an application is unsuccessful?

Following each event every group with an unsuccessful bid, whether shortlisted or not, will be invited to a funding surgery organised by the Community Investment Team, Vibrant Communities, where members of the team will be able to discuss possible alternative sources of funding for the project.

How will you know money has been spent properly?

As this is public money, there will be the expectation that projects will provide details of expenditure, with full receipts.

How will you know if the projects have done what they said?

Every project will be expected to complete a short evaluation, detailing exactly what they did and what difference that has had in the community. From each event, a small number of projects will be selected for a visit by members of the local steering group.

For further information please contact the Community Investment Team on 01563 553935