WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 19 MARCH 2009

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/ DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FUND AND PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING (PB) PILOTS IN AREA FORUMS – EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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1.   Executive Summary

1.1.   This report is a review of the pilot process for allocating CIF funds via participatory budgeting. The pilots took place for Oxton Prenton and Bidston Claughton area forums. Findings indicate that this process is a viable way of allocating funding and it is recommended that, with some modifications and improvements, the pilot is extended and this method is rolled out to other forum areas, with the option for forums to adopt different models of operation appropriate to the area.

2.   Overview

2.1.   As reported to and agreed at Cabinet 9 July 2008, Wirral is one of twelve second round pilot areas announced in December 2007 that is trialling approaches to participatory budgeting. As a pilot, Wirral is at the forefront of exploring approaches to this new area of community engagement and actively helping to bring local communities closer to the decision making on public budgets.

2.2.   It was agreed that two pilot areas allocate their CIF funding through a participatory budgeting process whereby community groups applying for money assessed and voted on each other's projects to determine who received funding.

2.3.   The process for applying for funding remained the same as set out in the existing Area Forum Funding Terms and Conditions. The major change to the process was that consideration of the applications and decision on who will get CIF funding for Bidston and Claughton and Oxton and Prenton area forums was conducted at a 'participatory budgeting' session. Councillors were invited to attend this session as observers, but were not eligible to vote on projects.

2.4.   Applicants were requested to attend the participatory budgeting session held at Wallasey Town Hall on 12 July and give a short talk of no longer than 2-3 minutes on why they should be funded. Attendance at this session by the applicant or a representative was a condition of funding.

2.5.   A key element of this pilot process was to ensure that proper evaluation was undertaken to determine the success of the process itself, as well as assess the impact it has had on people's sense of involvement in their communities to use these findings as the basis for determining whether it should be continued or expanded in future years.

2.6.   The primary source for this evaluation is the feedback of people who participated in the process.

3.   Duty to involve

3.1.   One of the challenges of the new local government act is the duty to involve local people. The local area will need to demonstrate not just consultation, but involvement of communities in decision making. In addition, the white paper *Communities in Control* (July 2008) lays down proposals to extend this duty to involve people in developing and commissioning local services to additional agencies. Participatory budgeting supports the implementation of the 'duty to involve'. Participatory budgeting enables councils to comply with the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 in providing a process of citizen engagement.

3.2.   Participatory budgeting is, supported and endorsed by CLG who has stated the ambition for all local authorities to take this approach by 2012. Participatory budgeting allows local people to participate in spending decisions through public meetings and votes to set local priorities and fund projects and services. The participatory budgeting pilot for CIF also included PCT small grant funding for those areas taking part in the pilot, further illustrating how Wirral is at the forefront in implementing new requirements around partner involvement for the new duty to involve

4.   Comprehensive Area Assessment

4.1.   In addition to the duty to involve, the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) inspection and assessment regime will have a strong focus on our understanding of local needs and aspirations and will be looking to see whether this knowledge has been used in the development of local priorities. Audit Commission will be judging how citizens, from all parts of the community, are encouraged and supported to feed their views into priority-setting, decision making, service development and evaluation within and across the partnership organisations and whether they know what has changed as a result of their input.

4.2.   Allocating CIF via participatory budgeting provides strong evidence that the community is actively involved in decision making about funding which directly influences services provided in their area

5.   Wider benefits of Participatory Budgeting

5.1.   Participatory budgeting encourages community cohesion by bringing together people from different sections of the community that would not ordinarily meet each other to make decisions about their neighbourhoods. This provides an opportunity for everyone to meet and discuss the needs and aspirations of the community as a whole.

6.   Links with area forum development.

6.1.   The area forums are leading the way with innovative ways to involve communities in decision making about spending. In addition to the CIF participatory budgeting pilot, council allocated £20,000 per area forum (in 2008-09) for additional council services to be allocated through participatory budgeting methods. As well as empowering the community, these methods give in depth information to councillors and officers about what the priorities are for local communities.

6.2.   As an example, the top five scoring projects in both area forums that trialled the CIF participatory budgeting method were for funding to support different types of support and activities for young people. This information helps to build consensus about what the priorities are for each of our area forum communities. Combined with this level of input over spending decisions, this potentially opens the way for area forums to be more directly involved in determining the provision of services at an area level.

7.   Evaluation

7.1.   **Information and support**
   * In terms of the information and support provided on the day, the community engagement team was commended in feedback as being very helpful with the right approach to answering questions and providing a clear and transparent explanation of how the process was going to work.
   * The overarching view from participants was the 'approval' of peer voting as a way of involving and empowering the community. This participatory method of allocating funding was preferred to the traditional funding panel method.

- Feedback highlighted that better information needs to be provided on the applicants/ organisations and bids in order to make better decisions. This could be improved by creating a 'delegate list' that also contains a short précis of each group and improving the voting sheets to include better information on the actual applications.
- Clearer guidance can be provided to presenters about what to expect on the day and what content should be included in their presentations.

7.2. Timing

- Feedback showed that three minutes to present an application may not be long enough to convey or understand each bid. This could be mitigated by providing better information to participants in packs as above (section 7.1) and with greater elected member involvement in, and facilitation of the events (see below).
- Feedback suggests that the length of the event was a major issue for participants and may have affected concentration and fairness. If the pilot is extended to other areas, it will be possible for forums to experiment with the format of the event to establish whether it would be more effective to hold one event per forum (shorter sessions, but requiring multiple forum applicants to attend several sessions and increasing the workload of the community engagement team), or to continue to hold dual forum events (longer, but fewer, sessions).
- Feedback shows that participants wanted more time to evaluate presentations to give a considered score (presentations were back to back with just one break for refreshments). This could be improved by having blocks of (e.g.) five presentations followed by a short break for scoring to take place, then the next five presentations and so on. This would also help to establish a fairer process as some feedback indicated that it was difficult to score presenters that went early (nothing for to compare against) or late (concentration waning).
- Some participants wanted time allowed for questions in order to clarify certain points and inform decision making. The introduction of question and answer sessions would increase the length of the event. If the pilot is extended to other areas, it will be possible for forums to experiment with the format of the event to establish whether it would be more effective for councillors to facilitate the sessions, using their expertise and experience to explain the impact of different options or decisions and helping to clarify any issues.

7.3. Scoring

- Scoring and part funding. Participants advocated a range of alternative scoring system such as 'yes - funding should be awarded' or 'no - funding should not be awarded' or part funding should be allocated (0%/ 20%/ 40%/ 60%/ 80%/ 100%). This part funding model could be considered for trial at any future CIF participatory budgeting events.
- It was further suggested that scoring could be against a range of criteria however this would make the process more complicated for participants. In terms of helping to ensure that funding is able to benefit the community in the most effective way, the option to part fund projects was preferred over setting a funding limit on applications.

7.4. Networking and capacity building

- Networking is a key benefit of participatory methods and additional time for networking needs to be allocated during any future events.

7.5. Branding

- In order to increase take up of CIF and maximise its benefit to our communities, the participatory budgeting process would benefit from a recognisable 'brand name'. It is proposed that this be 'Funds For You'.

8.   Feedback from elected members

8.1.   Two councillors attended the participatory budgeting event and applauded the positive contribution that the event had for community development.

8.2.   Other councillors have indicated that they would like to have a greater level of involvement in the process in the future. The recent CLG publication, *'Giving More People a Say in Local Spending, Participatory Budgeting: a national strategy'* states that participatory budgeting must complement democratic institutions.

8.3.   It goes on to say that local councillors can play a big part in approving and supporting participatory budgeting, by chairing or helping facilitate events, using their expertise and experience to explain the impact of different options or decisions, and through monitoring and scrutiny. Activities such as participatory budgeting offer additional opportunities for councillors and other area forum members to connect with their ward communities, helping raise their profile and that of the council.

8.4.   The independent Councillors Commission report, *Representing the Future*, recognises the importance of the modern councillor being a vital part of participatory as well as representative democracy. One of its recommendations (number 4) is that councillors should be given the tools to engage with new participatory activity in their unique position as the interface between council services and the local community.

9.   Alternative models for consideration

9.1.   It is recommended that the Area Forum Chairs Group roll out the CIF participatory budgeting process and pilot it in other areas that want to trial it. There are a number of different models that could be adopted. The key elements are as follows but should be part of an open discussion at Chairs Group:

Size of events:
- Single PB events for each participating forum
- Joint / neighbouring forum events (this may be considered for any areas where the CIF application volume is low)

Voting model:
- Applicant voting (applicants vote on each other's projects)
- Public voting (anyone in the community can attend and vote
- Different scoring models/ part funding allowed e.g. applicants scored 0-10
- Applicants scored yes/no
- Applicants scored in percentages e.g. 0%/ 20%/ 40%/ 60%/ 80%/ 100%

Event lead:
- Sessions led and facilitated by area co-ordinators
- Sessions led and facilitated by elected members
- Sessions led and facilitated by both area co-ordinators and elected members

Event format:
- Questions to presenters not allowed
- Questions allowed from the floor
- Questions allowed from facilitator

10.   Financial implications

10.1.   There are no additional financial implications arising from this report. However, the decision making process for how money is allocated to CIF applicants is amended so that Cabinet will be considering the recommendations of community groups who have voted on each others projects, rather than the recommendations of a funding panel.

11.   Staffing implications

11.1.   There are additional staffing implications for corporate policy in that workloads are already substantial and demanding and area coordinators are currently expected to deliver this programme within existing staff resources.

12.   Equal Opportunities implications

12.1.   Following equality impact assessment of the area forums, a risk has been identified that some sections of the community are not being engaged or are attending the forums. Extra communications will need to take place with these communities to ensure that all resident's have an equal chance to participate.

13.   Community Safety implications

13.1.   There are potentially positive impacts for community safety as forums have the option to fund community safety related activities if bids are submitted.

14.   Local Agenda 21

14.1.   There are potentially positive impacts for the environment as forums have the option to fund environment related activities if bids are submitted.

15.   Planning implications

15.1.   There are no planning implications arising from this report.

16.   Anti-poverty implications

16.1.   There are no anti-poverty implications arising from this report.

17.   Social inclusion implications

17.1.   There are potentially positive impacts for social inclusion as forums have the option to fund social inclusion related activities if bids are submitted.

18.   Local Member Support implications

18.1.   The impact of this programme will be felt across the whole borough and communication with members will need to take place to ensure a full understanding of the process.

19.   Background Papers

19.1.   This report has arisen from the minutes of the council budget meeting of 21st February http://www.wirral.gov.uk/minute/viewmins.asp?mtg=2273#523 .

19.2.   Further background information on participatory budgeting can be found on the Participatory Budgeting Unit website http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/

20.   Recommendations

That

(1)   the pilot for running participatory budgeting pilots for determining CIF be extended to additional area forums, with the additional participating forums to be agreed by the forums Chairs Group; and

(2)   the participatory budgeting method of allocating CIF be branded as 'Funds For You'

21.   Further Information

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