

**YOU DECIDE – EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. This report is a review of the pilot process for allocating You Decide funds via a form of participatory budgeting. The pilots took place across all the area forums. Findings indicate that this process benefits the community by enabling additional services to be delivered in local communities, by involving residents in decision making and by enabling residents to have a greater understanding of the costs of services and associated choices. It has also provided departments with an additional intelligence source to help understand local needs and deliver services accordingly.
- 1.2. At Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009 it was agreed for the funding to be maintained at £260,000 which is £20,000 per Area Forum with the continuation of an additional £20,000 each for the Youth Parliament and the Older Peoples Parliament.

**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. The 2008-09 Council budget agreed a policy option to allocate £260,000 for the 'You Decide' initiative using a form of participatory budgeting. This initiative set out to deliver more choice for local people through the allocation of £20K for additional council services for each area forum area. The range of services offered were identified from existing documents and sources such as the area forums, resident's surveys, area plans and Sustainable Community Strategy. A further £260,000 has been agreed at Budget Council to continue the 'You Decide' initiative.
- 2.3. During September 2008 and the weeks leading up to the October 2008 round of area forums the community engagement team canvassed all wards of Wirral giving out leaflets and questionnaires to publicise You Decide. The consultation methods used were: on street interviews, postal questionnaires and an online questionnaire. 2118 people responded in total to the questionnaire.
- 2.4. Meetings were established to review the results from the consultation process. These meetings were attended by local councillors and community representatives who were provided with a clear set of results from the consultation. These results set out a ranked list of services for each forum highlighting the most selected suggestions at the top of each list. All forums selected services that demonstrated value for money and represented the maximum benefit to the community. (see Appendix 1)

### **3. Duty to involve**

- 3.1. One of the challenges for Local Government 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 is part of the implementation of the 'duty to involve'. Participatory budgeting enables councils to provide 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.

### **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. The views and experiences of local people will be key sources of evidence for CAA and the joint inspectorate 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. It will assess the effectiveness of local partners in coordinating community engagement and communicating the impact on their decisions. CAA will also consider how local partners feedback and make changes as a result of engagement and inform residents of these changes.
- 4.2 Allocating You Decide funds via a form of 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. It has also provided departments with an additional intelligence source to help understand local needs and deliver services accordingly

### **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. 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. 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 will help us to assess how area forums may become even more involved in local service provision.

## 7. Evaluation

7.1. We evaluated the You Decide initiative by convening a number of focus groups that considered the process we had used.

### 7.2. Timetable and communication

- Participants were unsure of the 'timeline' for the project and when they could expect to see chosen services delivered. Some services (such as benches) will be installed with a plaque to identify that service as being delivered through 'You Decide'
- Participants were unsure what will happen with this initiative in future years or if it was a 'one off'. This is a result of funding being a policy option with uncertainty over future year's funding.
- Further activity is needed to report back to the participants and other residents to communicate the results and additional services that will now be delivered as a result of You Decide.
- There was insufficient knowledge or understanding of what the area forums are. Information about the forums can be disseminated in follow up communication about You Decide.

### 7.3. Process comments

- There was no involvement of under 16s in the questionnaire. This was a result of time constraints arising from the need for parental consent to take part for participants under 16 (in adherence with market research society codes of conduct). It is intended to explore the possibility of involving young people through school participation if funding is continued in future years.
- Participants reported that they wanted more involvement in the process with the questionnaire seen only as the first phase.
- A significant proportion of participants want to see more community involvement in discussion not just about *what* services but also about *where* these services should be located. Focus group participants saw discussion groups/ deliberative events as the next phase (following the initial consultation about what services).
- Participants felt that £20K is not enough money to make an impact on the facilities and improvements needed

### 7.4. Level of involvement in decision making

- Resident involvement in deciding local priorities was seen as very positive. However, some participants were unsure whether the council would really listen to the consultation results. The consultation process may have been complicated by the meetings held to review the results from the consultation process. These meetings were attended by local councillors and community representatives who were provided with a clear set of results from the consultation. However, the broader community were not involved in this part of the process.
- Participants described the You Decide process as 'teamwork' between residents and the council to effect targeted funding:
  - *"Well local people know the local issues rather than someone in an office somewhere"*
- There were reports of increased 'community spirit', sense of involvement and influence over decisions. This strongly suggests that You Decide (and other similar types of

activity) may have a positive impact on National Indicator 4, the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.

- There was evidence of complex decision making in relation to fiscal choices, with participants weighing up the pros and cons of selecting particular services based on the cost:
  - *“I altered my opinion because you look at the [option to buy] CCTV and think that would be quite good... but then saw the price of how much we’ve got to spend and I thought I would rather choose some other little bits”*
- There was evidence of complex decision making in relation to choice of services with cause and effect reasoning that selecting particular services would effect an overall change in the area, for example, that better lighting and levels of cleanliness may lead to a decrease in crime:
  - *“You see at the end of the day when we’re all living in the community, we want it nice”*
  - *“We don’t want to live in a scruffy place and a dark place where crime is, you know... we want nice areas”*
- You Decide was perceived as a large scale and wide reaching consultation process. Over 2100 people responded to the questionnaire.

## **8. Feedback from elected members**

- 8.1. Many councillors took part. In ward canvassing to publicise the You Decide consultation and took the opportunity to interact with constituents and deal with ad hoc issues.
- 8.2. 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. Overall Community benefit of You Decide**

- 9.1. Additional services are being delivered in local communities according to the views expressed during the process. Residents have been involved in the decision making about which services are being delivered. The benefits for residents include a greater understanding of the costs of services. The council now has additional intelligence source to understand local need for further use in service planning and design.
- 9.2. Evaluation shows that there is likely to be a positive impact on community cohesion from involving people in making decisions about their neighbourhoods and providing an opportunity for everyone to discuss the needs and aspirations of the community as a whole. This effect could be strengthened if people from different sections of the community

that would not ordinarily meet were brought together to discuss the needs and aspirations of the community as a whole (see section 10 below).

## 10. Alternative models for consideration

10.1. It is recommended that the Area Forum Chairs Group consider best practice for the operation for You Decide participatory budgeting. There are a number of different models that could be adopted. The evaluation process has shown that participants want a greater level of involvement in the decision making process so this should be considered when developing the process for operation.

### 10.2. How 'You Decide' worked in 2008:

- Departments identified services that could be offered 'for sale'
- Residents consulted via (quantitative) questionnaire survey on which services would be preferred
- Results considered forum pre-meetings by councillors and area forum community representatives and services to be provided decided.
- Liaison with departments to deliver selected services in each forum

### 10.3. Possible Alternative Models:

As shown in the 2008 model above, there are four main components to the process for allocation of the £20K per forum on additional council services. Alternative models can be created by choosing options from each of the components below:

#### 1: Options for how the 'services for sale' could be identified

- a) Departments provide list of services that can be offered 'for sale' based on what is possible each year
- b) Use (edited/ revised) list from 2008
- c) Ask community for services they want – open suggestion scheme (not recommended as would raise expectation of delivery where none is possible)

#### 2: Options for how the 'services for sale' could be prioritised

- a) Use quantitative questionnaire as in 2008 to include locations and postcodes of where services are requested.(costs in region of £15K)
- b) Use 2008 results and bypass fresh consultation exercise
- c) Conduct community meetings to reach consensus on priorities through discussion
- d) Series of service 'bundles' offered to residents to chose from to the value of £20k
- e) Departments and councillors decide priorities based on data/intelligence (this is not a participatory method)

#### 3: Options for how the final choice of services could be decided

- a) Closed meeting of councillors and community representatives
- b) Ensure community involvement in discussion by conducting community meetings to reach consensus on final choices (as 2<sup>nd</sup> stage to 2a or 2c)
- c) Ensure community involvement in discussion by conducting community voting events (as 2<sup>nd</sup> stage to 2a or 2c)

#### 4: Options for deciding where the chosen services will be located/ delivered to

- a) Departments decide based on hotspot data or service requests
- b) Ensure community involvement in discussion by conducting community meetings to reach consensus on service locations through discussion (as 3<sup>rd</sup> stage to 3b or 3c)
- c) Public partners involved in providing the services e.g. fire service working with young people

#### For example:

1. Departments identify services that can be offered 'for sale' based on what is possible each year

2. Use quantitative questionnaire as in 2008 to include locations and postcodes of where services are requested.
3. Decide services to be provided by conducting community voting events
4. Decide location of chosen services by liaising with departments using information from questionnaire to deliver selected services in each forum

## **11. Financial implications**

- 11.1. Budget Cabinet 09-10 agreed for provision to be maintained at £260,000 which is £20,000 per area forum with the continuation of an additional £20,000 each for the Youth Parliament and the Older People's Parliament.

## **12. Staffing implications**

- 12.1. 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.

## **13. Equal Opportunities implications**

- 13.1. 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.

## **14. Community Safety implications**

- 14.1. There are potentially positive impacts for community safety as forums have the option to fund community safety related services.

## **15. Local Agenda 21**

- 15.1. There are potentially positive impacts for the environment as forums have the option to fund environment related services.

## **16. Planning implications**

- 16.1. There are no planning implications arising from this report.

## **17. Anti-poverty implications**

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

## **18. Social inclusion implications**

- 18.1. There are potentially positive impacts for social inclusion as forums have the option to fund social inclusion related services.

## Local Member Support implications

- 18.2. 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 21<sup>st</sup> February 2008 <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/minute/viewmins.asp?mtg=2273#523> and the cabinet report of 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008 [http://www.wirral.gov.uk/minute/public/cabcs080709rep1\\_27634.pdf](http://www.wirral.gov.uk/minute/public/cabcs080709rep1_27634.pdf) .
- 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) departments identify services that can be offered 'for sale' based on what is possible each year.
- Use quantitative questionnaire as in 2008 to include locations and postcodes of where services are requested.
  - Decide location of chosen services using information from questionnaire by liaising with departments to deliver selected services in each forum
- (2) the Area Forum Chairs Group consider best practice for the operation for You Decide participatory budgeting. There are a number of different models that could be adopted. The evaluation process has shown that participants want a greater level of involvement in the decision making process so this should be considered when developing the process for operation.

**J. WILKIE**

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

This report was prepared by:  
Abi Davey, who can be contacted on 8027  
Tracey Smith, who can be contacted on 8026

## Appendix 1

Area Forums	Sports and Youth Activity	Cleanliness	Safety	Environment	Road Signs	Education
Oxton and Prenton	£10,000.00	£5,000.00		£5,000.00		
Bebington and Clatterbridge	£7,500.00	£4,000.00	£4,550.00	£1,400.00	£2, 520.00	
Liscard and Seacombe	£11,500.00	£3,700.00	£1,500.00		£2800.00	£500.00
Greasby Frankby Irby Upton	£8,000.00	£6,000.00	£6,000.00			
Bromborough and Eastham	£12,000.00	£8,000.00				
Heswall Pensby and Thingwall	£12,000.00	£5,000.00				£3,000.00
Leasowe Moreton and Saughall Massie	£11,000.00	£2,000.00		£3,500.00	£3,500.00	
New Brighton and Wallasey	£4,000.00	£10,000.00	£6,000.00			
Birkenhead and Tranmere/Rock Ferry	£10,500.00	£5,000.00	£4,500.00			
West Wirral	£12,000.00	£3,000.00			£5,000.00	
Bidston and Claughton	£6,500.00	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	£1,000.00		