



The Experience of Participatory Budgeting in Rural England

Your village, your money, your choice



Content

- Background to this project
- Examples of Participatory Budgeting (PB) approaches in rural England
- Lessons and recommendations



What is Participatory Budgeting (PB)?

- It is a method by which local people decide how to allocate part of a public budget.
- It directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget.
- It can be applied very flexibly. Typically it works with (mainstream) local annual revenue budgets or supplementary revenue streams or regeneration budgets.



What is the CRC and what is the PBU?

- The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) is a public body with three roles: listening to and representing the views of rural communities; giving independent and expert advice to Government and others; and acting as an independent watchdog.
- The Participatory Budgeting Unit (PBU) is a charity project, partially funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to support the implementation of PB in England.



CRC's Participation Inquiry (2008)*

Recommendations included:

- We encourage all local authorities to allocate neighbourhood budgets to local councillors.
- We encourage parish and town councils to involve their local residents more directly in spending decisions.
- We recommend that these approaches should be managed through PB principles, allowing local people a direct say in how some of their tax resources are spent within their neighbourhoods.
- * See <http://bit.ly/4VHmlU>



PB can create benefits for local people

- PB can bring communities together.
- It can encourage local people to stand for election as local councillors.
- PB can help to raise people's understanding of the complexities of public budget setting and deciding between competing priorities.
- It can lead to improvements in the way local people and elected councillors and council officials work together.
- Under PB services can be better tailored to local circumstances, and improved resident satisfaction with them is likely to result.



PB benefits for Councils & other service providers ...

- Better decisions: local decisions based on local knowledge & needs
- Helps meet Local Area Agreement targets – e.g. For National Indicator 4 (% of people feeling they can influence local decisions)
- Helps local people understand the complexities, compromises and trade offs involved in local authority decision making
- Provides a strong community leadership role for councillors.



Piloting PB in rural England

- Until recently there was very limited experience of PB in rural England.
- CRC and PBU – with the support of CLG and others - agreed a project to address this.
- We sought to see PB piloted as an approach for community empowerment and engagement in rural England with lessons learned and good practice shared.



What has happened so far?

- CRC and PBU, and its associates, promoted PB to rural communities and rural community leaders.
- Helped by others, especially the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE). And their networks in county associations of local (parish and town) councils and in rural community councils .
- PBU worked directly with several communities in rural England to develop and pilot PB. In Norfolk, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Nottinghamshire, Herefordshire, Isle of Wight.
- The following examples include several of the areas where the PBU team helped and advised.



Highlight examples

East Devon

- East Devon District Council is channelling Section 106 planning gain finance through PB for community benefit. (See: <http://bit.ly/8jtx06>)
- This district wide scheme involves parish councils and councillors. It supports local needs as identified in local community led plans (such as Parish Plans).
- Cllr Jill Elson: “This scheme offers communities an unprecedented level of involvement in shaping their future facilities”.
- This can be as simple, and as important, as local people choosing to have a play ground and then designing it and choosing what play equipment to install.



Herefordshire

- Hampton Bishop Parish Council in Herefordshire is using PB to prioritise between parish precept funded proposals (including improving footpaths; provision of litter bins; and extending the Parish Lengthsman scheme).
- Proposals are being circulated via newsletters to involve more elderly people and the housebound and carers. Open meetings also being used.
- The 134 parish councils in Herefordshire are watching with interest. 4 others adopting PB, with Leominster allocating £10,000. Other parish councils may now test PB in their areas.



Northumberland

- PB methods are being used to involve different partners and the community in allocating resources for community safety services. This means that the services provided are those that the community values the most.
- Early outcomes have included positive activities for young people and a significant reduction in youth disorder.
- Northumbria Police Authority won an Association of Police Authorities award for this approach.



Isle of Wight

- The UP2U project on the Isle of Wight is aiming to help young people in Freshwater and Totland enjoy healthy lifestyles.
- UP2U is inviting young people to apply for a share in £20,000 (from the Isle of Wight Council and the NHS Isle of Wight).
- Young people are bidding for a share of this money to do something that will help young people to eat healthily and take exercise every day. The Isle of Wight Rural Community Council is involved in advising young people on their bids.
- Decisions will be made by the audience at an awards event in early 2010. The project is ongoing (<http://bit.ly/6qvUIO>)



Somerset

- South Somerset District Council has allocated £40,000 per annum to its 4 sub district areas and uses a PB approach to allocations, enhancing existing services or commissioning new ones.
- Outcomes include: parental support; community justice; augmenting street cleaning; parish paths; older people's information and drop in sessions.
- Building on long history of devolved area based working (see: <http://bit.ly/6jZ143>)



Somerset

- The Exmoor market town of Dulverton (in West Somerset) is building in a PB approach as part of the planned launch of their Parish Plan early in 2010.
- Over £10,000 of new money has been committed from all three tiers of local government as well as the National Park Authority, the police and the NHS.
- Consideration is also being given to adding S.106 resources from developers and also local county councillor discretionary funding to the Parish Plan delivery fund for use through PB methods.



Norfolk

- Norfolk County & district councils have distributed £200,000 of 2nd homes council tax resources through PB methods. They were awarded a green flag by the Audit Commission in the Comprehensive Area Assessment, recognising exceptional performance that others can learn from (see: <http://bit.ly/58t30r>).
- Local partners agreed to focus on areas most needing support, such as providing mental health support or special advice services into rural communities. Local groups made bids. These were sorted to see which ones were going to make a real difference and were likely to keep going in the future. The Norfolk citizen's panel steered the process. And local residents voted on the proposals.
- Inc. Grow Norfolk: providing free gardening to vulnerable people whilst providing work experience, qualifications, and mentoring to people finding it hard to get a job.
- Local partners are continuing with PB and looking for other ways of using PB in the county. They have also prepared a 'tool kit' to help others run similar projects in their own local communities under the 'Your Norfolk, Your Decision' brand. (See <http://bit.ly/8qTEgl>)
- See short video : (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIX6wjag8sY>)



Norfolk

- Norfolk County & district councils are now using PB approaches at a more local level. Again, using 2nd homes council tax resources.
- Including supporting the Norfolk Association of Local Councils running a parish based PB approach. This Association is planning to hold a masterclass session for parish councils to encourage more parish councils to take on PB themselves.
- Great Yarmouth Borough Council are also piloting three initiatives, one of which is exploring PB within a parish/village.
- Breckland LSP is exploring PB in 5 neighbourhood areas clustered around market towns.
- West Norfolk Partnership is exploring a PB approach in Downham Market.



Cornwall

- Cornwall Council and its partners want to build on PB approaches tried in the county, under the 'U-Choose for Cornwall' banner. (See: <http://bit.ly/6ZxoeI>)
- PB approaches piloted in Cornwall involving small grants delivered' in Pengegon, Parc an Tansys; Gwelmor; and Redruth North; and Treneere.
- Intention is to expand the PB approach to influencing the way spending on mainstream public services is delivered in local places.



Other local examples ...

- And there are many other local examples of PB being tried out in rural England. At various stages of develop these include:
- Bassetlaw in **Nottinghamshire** and its parish councils using PB for various rural initiatives.
- Thorpe St Andrew in **Norfolk** using PB on community safety projects with support from Norfolk Constabulary.
- **Cheshire** West and Chester are exploring using PB with its parish and town councils.
- Alston Moor in **Cumbria** is hosting a European Union supported pilot in using an electronic PB method to allow local people a direct say in local funding decisions. This approach gives local people sufficient information and more time to deliberate. (See: www.cybermoor.org)



Lessons and recommendations (1)

- Please try PB!
- There is now a lot of PB happening in rural England. This is because PB works and works especially well in smaller and defined communities. It gives local people a real say and leads to good decisions being made.
- PB works at all levels of local government — from use of the Parish Council precept up to the county level and including small funding pots available to local councillors.
- PB can give local people a say over local services that otherwise are distantly managed e.g. at the county hall.
- PB can support, rather than undermine, the representative role of local councillors.



Lessons and recommendations (2)

- Community Led Plans, such as Parish Plans and Market Town Plans, are also a valuable way of involving local people in decision making about the future of their communities. For more information on these see, from Action With Communities in Rural England: <http://bit.ly/7p37lw>
- The support of local councillors and local groups (such as Rural Community Councils and County Associations of Local Councils) helps to deliver the benefits of PB.
- PB in smaller rural places with their complex local governance structures is time-consuming – but still worth it.
- Whilst the recession and the new public sector austerity are challenging, PB is still a valid approach to helping decide how public money is spent - efficiently and effectively - locally.



Lessons and recommendations (3)

- PB leaders and groups do need to live, work or otherwise 'belong' to the community using PB methods.
- PB can help produce candidates for representative roles locally, such as parish or other councillor, school governor and so on.
- Other benefits of PB – and sources of advice - can be explored on the PBU website at: www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk
- And for the evidence base see SQW's evaluation of PB in England, for the CLG, at: <http://bit.ly/4UXo9n>
- And for more information on rural policy, rural evidence and good practice in rural England see the CRC's website: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk