



CRC 04/10

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Rural watchdog urges councils to involve communities in public spending decisions

Trials of a new way of involving local people in public spending decisions have been so successful that the Government's rural watchdog, the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC), now wants more rural local authorities to adopt participatory budgeting.

The Participatory Budgeting Unit (PBU), supported by the CRC, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), has been working directly with several communities in rural England to develop and pilot participatory budgeting.

The pilot schemes stemmed from a CRC inquiry, held in 2008, to explore why rural people often feel unheard and excluded, and what redress was possible. Among the issues pinpointed by the inquiry were that some rural people feel they have less influence on public spending decisions than their urban neighbours and that their priorities are, therefore, overlooked.

Crispin Moor, Executive Director at the CRC says: "The pilots have proved highly successful, so much so we are now recommending the approach to other councils serving rural areas. Participatory budgeting offers rural people their own say in local community investments. We now have practical examples of people deciding local priorities and allocating resources across a wide range of services including community safety schemes, health awareness campaigns, parish footpaths and much more. This approach can bring communities together, help people understand the complexities of public budget-setting and deliver public services which better meet local needs."

Phil Teece of the PBU says: "I believe that participatory budgeting has huge potential in the local (parish and town) council sector and I expect its use to continue growing in the next couple of years. It can bring communities together and strengthen the voice of local people and councillors in shaping how money is spent on the services they receive."

Councillor Michael Chater, Chairman of the NALC, comments: "As the tier of government closest to the people, local councils are well placed to adopt approaches such as participatory budgeting to involve local people in spending decisions. It is starting to be used as a tool for positive participation and community engagement and can support the representative role of our local councillors."

"That is why we have been pleased to support the project piloting participatory budgeting in rural areas, including by local councils. The results are encouraging and show the helpful contribution of participatory budgeting to informed decision making based on local knowledge. We look forward to working with the CRC and PBU to help share learning from the project among our network of local councils and county associations and to encourage more use of participatory budgeting."

ENDS

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Notes for editors:

1 Participatory budgeting pilots have been running in Cornwall, East Devon, Herefordshire, the

Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Northumberland and Somerset. The findings of the pilots can be found at: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/experienceofparticipatorybudgeting.pdf

2 The NALC is holding a promotional seminar on parish councils using participatory budgeting on Friday 26 February. For further details please contact justin.griggs@nalc.gov.uk

3 Details of the CRC's 'Participation Inquiry: Strengthening the Role of Local Councillors' can be found at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/participationinquiry/overview

4 Information about the work of the Participatory Budgeting Unit can be found at: www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/

5 The Commission for Rural Communities acts as the advocate for England's rural communities, as an expert adviser to government, and as a watchdog to ensure that government actions, policies and programmes recognise and respond effectively to rural needs, with a particular focus on disadvantage.

It has three key functions:

Rural advocate:
the voice for rural people, businesses and communities

Expert adviser:
giving evidence-based, objective advice to government and others

Independent watchdog:
monitoring, reporting on and seeking to mainstream rural into the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk