

Community Choices 1% Framework agreement

COSLA and Scottish Government have worked together to develop and agree a framework that at least 1% of local government budgets will be subject to participatory budgeting by the end of 2021.

The framework defines Community Choices as the term used in Scotland for Participatory Budgeting and sets PB as the enabler for active participation of citizens in local decision making. It establishes a shared expectation that elected members, senior officers, civil society and local communities will use PB to go beyond the current arrangements for consultation and engagement. The framework sets out that, done well, and using key principles, the longer term strategic aim of public sector reform can be achieved by applying spend to the greatest areas of need, where social cohesion can be developed or maintained.

It is recognised that actively involving local people can make them less passive consumers of public services and more supportive of new models of delivery. It is clear that how councils approach mainstreaming PB is for them to decide at a local level.

<p style="text-align: center;">Community Choices Budgeting Framework for the operation of the 1% target for Local Authorities</p>

1. Introduction

The Scottish Government and Local Government have a shared vision for communities to have greater participation in decision making. One way in which to do this is to involve people and communities in funding decisions which should ultimately achieve better outcomes. Included in the 2016/17 programme for government was a commitment from Scottish Government to work in partnership with local government, to have at least 1% of local authority budgets subject to Community Choices budgeting.

Community Choices budgeting, better known worldwide as participatory budgeting, is recognised internationally as a way for local people to have a direct say in how public funds can be used to address local needs. It is one method which can be used alongside other models of community engagement and empowerment as part of a wider strategic approach to advancing participatory democracy.

This Framework Document has been drawn up collaboratively by the Scottish Government and COSLA to provide a high level guidance for local authorities on how to deliver the target set out in the programme for government.

2. Definition of Community Choices Budgeting

Community Choices budgeting is the term used in Scotland for participatory budgeting which enables the active participation of community voices in local financial decision making. Community Choices is defined as:

‘Community Choices budgeting supports a democratic and engaged citizenship by enabling local people to have a direct say in how a defined public budget can be used to address their priorities. It is one method of community engagement that can be used alongside other models of empowerment as part of a wider approach to advancing participatory democracy.’

3. What is Community Choices Budgeting?

Successful Community Choices budgeting requires political will, buy-in from senior management, interest from civil society and the local community, a defined budget, clarity of purpose and a clear definition of the rules. It goes beyond traditional consultation or including community representation on a decision making panel. The essence is about community cohesion, raising awareness, making connections and having a participative role in financial decision making that is deliberative and binding. As a consequence, its impact can be significantly greater and in particular if it is linked strategically to local action plans. As Community Choices budgeting can take many shapes and forms and covers a range of mechanisms, different Community Choices budgeting models exist. Therefore flexibility of approach is left to individual local authorities. As a starting point two Guides are recommended for further reference.

The first is the *Grant Making through Participatory Budgeting – A ‘How to’ Guide for Community Led Organisations and community engagement workers* (September 2016). It provides a step by step guide and a number of supporting templates to run a small projects process. The Guide is available at: [Grant Making - How to Guide](#)

The second is the *Mainstreaming Participatory Budgeting - Ideas for Delivering Participatory Budgeting at Scale* (October 2016). The Guide is designed to help better understand the issues of mainstreaming and to develop Community Choices models that work within each unique context. It includes an indication of the commissioning cycle, a budget matrix, the advantages and challenges of a number of approaches, a key set of principles and useful links to further information. The Guide is available at: [Mainstreaming Ideas Guide](#)

4. Budget

The Community Choices budgeting target is not necessarily about local authorities identifying a separate and/or additional resource. It is principally about involving communities in decisions regarding existing resources. The 1% is the minimum target set and can be made up of revenue and capital expenditure. It is for local authorities to decide how to take forward Community Choices budgeting at a local level to reach

the target. To ensure a shared understanding of the 1% target, this is defined as 'total estimated expenditure for revenue, as per the local government finance circular, less assumed council tax intake. It is considered reasonable to exclude council tax as it is a local tax and therefore already directly and locally accountable.

5. Costs

There are financial costs associated with running meaningful and sustainable Community Choices budgeting but these vary from initiative to initiative. As a guide, costs could include staff, venue, promotion and evaluation. Local government is well placed to support this with its network of facilities and communication channels. There is also the possibility of increased costs associated with the outcome chosen by Communities for the benefit of the community. For example without clear parameters on available resources, a Community may design a more complicated contract or other aspect that requires additional on-going officer support from the council. With clear parameters, communities can help in the redesign and specification of services within available resources.

There are also a number of wider benefits to local democracy associated with running Community Choices budgeting. It can help improve the democratic process by widening participation and re-invigorating the role of local authorities, local councillors and civil society. It can contribute to the effectiveness of public spending by improving the way money is invested by increasing the knowledge available to the local authority when undertaking service planning. It also has the potential to strengthen the community and voluntary sectors by increasing the number of people taking part in local democratic processes. More information about the benefits of Community Choices budgeting can be found on the PB Scotland website www.pbscotland.scot.

6. Timescale

The 2016/17 Programme for Government commitment does not set a timescale. The expectation from the Scottish Government is that the target of having at least 1% of local authority budgets subject to Community Choices budgeting should be reached by the end of this session of the Scottish Parliament, that is the end of the financial year 2020/21. While it is recognised that many councils are already engaged in

Community Choices budgeting, the planning and design of how councils will meet the target should be started at the earliest opportunity.

7. Reporting

For appropriate monitoring local authorities will complete a high-level pro-forma and return it to COSLA on an annual basis. COSLA will collate the information and report a global figure for local government to the Scottish Government on an annual basis.