



# Shaping Budgeting

Evaluation of process by PB partners



**Shaping  
Aberdeen**



## Introduction

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This joint evaluation has been undertaken by Aberdeen City Council and PB Partners and an independent social enterprise commissioned by the Scottish Government to provide PB support in Scotland.

## Executive Summary

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Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process whereby residents in communities vote directly on how resources are allocated, rather than a more traditional consultation mechanism. (PB) started in Brazil in 1989 and has now spread to over 1,500 localities across the globe with around 2,700 processes taking place. PB is a new mechanism which can deliver on increased participation in decision making a key feature of the Community Empowerment Act Scotland (2005)

In June 2015 Aberdeen City Council allocated £100k of identified underspend to Youth Work and Under 12s activities in regeneration area in the city: Northfield, Torry, Tillydrone, Seaton and Woodside.

- Funds were allocated using the PB model with the process in Northfield managed by Northfield total place and by the Communities and Partnerships team in the other areas
- 59 bids were received totalling £440,000. 15 events were held between November 2015 and January 2016, with 3755 young people voting on their preferred project (one of the highest in Scotland). 28 bids were successful in gaining funding.



**15 events** were held between November 2015 and January 2016



**3755 young people** voted



**28 bids** were successful in gaining funding.

- Several positives were noted on the process, these included: this was a genuine PB process; ACC demonstrated significant investment in developing innovative community engagement methods and responding to the Community Empowerment Act Scotland (2005); the process was delivered efficiently within given timescales supported by a well organised workforce; a wide range of bids were received; media coverage was impressive and created a positive profile of the regeneration areas.
- Future PB projects would benefit from considering the following: longer lead in times for event planning; stronger involvement of communities and stakeholders in the initial criteria setting and delivery decisions; factored time for deliberation in the voting process; planned evaluative methodology with stronger feedback from voters; a review of how technology is utilized in the process; increased focus on the sustainability of projects or an annual commitment to a PB process; access to training for facilitators of the process.
- Aberdeen City Council is committed to the further development of Participatory Budgeting with partners and communities in the city. A series of training and awareness events is being organised to support staff who will be involved in the future delivery of PB events and a PB process is being planned with the use of the Housing Revenue Account.

## Background

In June 2015, The Finance, Policy and Resources Committee of Aberdeen City Council identified an underspend of £100k: the decision was taken by Committee to allocate this resource to youth work and under 12's activities in regeneration areas.

During September 2015 Finance Policy & Resources committed to allocating the under-spend through a Participatory Budgeting (PB) approach. According to a recent survey carried out by the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Unit found that there have been over 20 cases of PB in Scotland to date and interest in this approach is increasing with new PB processes being planned. This puts Aberdeen City Council at the forefront in implementing this approach in Scotland.

Primary and Secondary school age pupils would vote on proposals from service providers to deliver interventions aimed at improving youth provision in the designated areas. The following areas were selected (and sums of money allocated) on the basis of population and disadvantage:

1.	Northfield	50k
2.	Torry	20k
3.	Tillydrone	10k
4.	Seaton	10k
5.	Woodside	10k



**60%** of the funds  
available for **over  
12's youth work**







## Methodology

The Northfield Total Place team managed the PB process in Northfield and the Communities & Partnership Team managed the PB process across the rest of the regeneration areas.

The bidding application form and guidance was developed by the two teams and distributed to potential youth work providers via a number of community networks and included ACVO and Fairer Fund Aberdeen. Groups did not need to be formally constituted to apply for the funding. The process was also advertised on social media.

Northfield Total Place required video submissions for all bid submissions which was also latterly adopted by the rest of the regeneration areas. Additional support to develop the videos was provided by the Capacity Building Officers for the areas out-with Total Northfield Place



There were **59 bids voted**  
on across all the areas  
totalling **£440,000**

A total of 15 PB events were held across all areas between November 2015 and January 2016 with 3755 young people voting. This represents one of the highest votes of PB across Scotland.

Northfield Total Place delivered 8 PB events (7 primary schools and 1 Secondary school) on Friday 20th of November and the rest of the Regeneration areas delivered 7 events (5 primary schools and 2 secondary schools) during January 2016.

The PB events were introduced by key members of staff and teachers and the bids were presented by video clips in the schools to groups of pupils, giving them an opportunity to vote immediately at the end of the session.

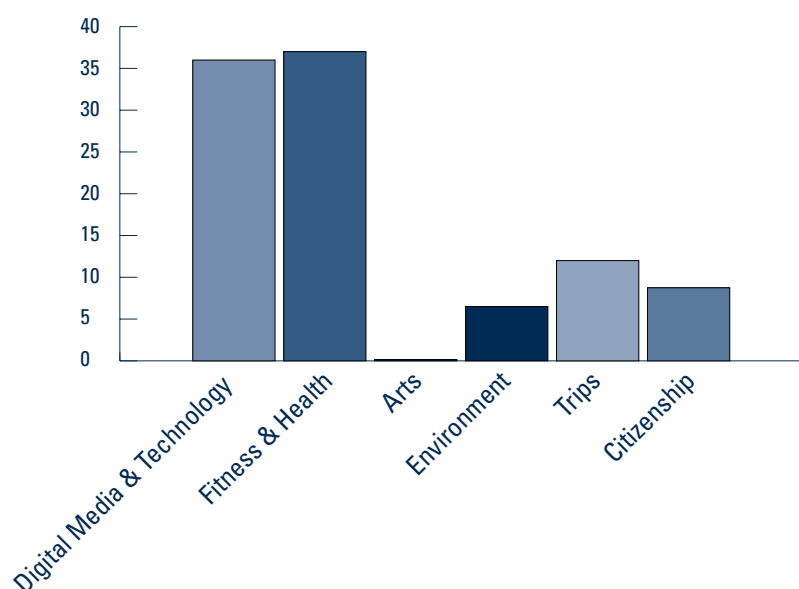
The voting methodology at Northfield Total Place used an electronic system via ipads and the rest of the regeneration areas used traditional voting methods via manual ballots.

<sup>1</sup> Harkins C, Escobar, O. Participatory budgeting in Scotland: An overview of strategic design choices and principles for effective delivery, Glasgow: GCHP, WWS, 2015



## The Winning Bids

There were 28 winning bids across all the areas categorised as follows:



Digital Media & Technology	12	43%	£36,000
Fitness & Health	6	21%	£37,000
Arts	1	4%	£165
Environment	3	11%	£6,500
Trips	4	14%	£12,000
Citizenship	2	7%	£8,750

Additional funding was allocated via CLD budgets for the small budget over-run and additional projects identified through the process benefited from alternative mainstream budgets.



#### Detailed breakdown of winning bids:

Area	Project Name	Organisation	Requested	Awarded
Seaton - Over 12	Young People Call the Shots	SHMU	£2,000.00	£100.00
	Football/Fun Tea	Aberdeen FC Community Trust	£5,900.00	£5,900.00
Seaton - Under 12	Awesome Tech Stuff	GRA Design	£3,835.00	£3,853.00
	After School Drama	Seaton Primary School	£2,500	£165.00
				£10,018.00
Tillydrone - Over 12	Awesome Tech Stuff	GRA Design	£3,835.00	£2,657.00
	Senior Youth Club Activities	Aberdeen Lads Club - Senior Youth Club	£3,342.99	£3,343.00
Tillydrone - Under 12	Under 12s Junior Youth Club	Aberdeen Lads Club Under 12s	£3,493.80	£3,494.00
	"Getting Active" at Riverbank PS	Active Schools (St Machar ASG)	£1,709.90	£506.00
				£10,000.00
Woodside - Over 12	Random Acts of Kindness Programme (RAK)	Printfield Community Centre	£3,000.00	£3,000.00
	Awesome Tech Stuff	GRA Design	£3,835.00	£1,178.00
	Young People Call the Shots	SHMU	£2,000.00	£400.00
	Youth Trip of a Lifetime to the Lecht	Fersands and Fountain Community Project	£1,512.40	£1,512.40
Woodside - Under 12	Woodside Juniors Group Away Days	Woodside Juniors Group	£4,000.00	£4,000.00
				£10,090.40
Torry - Over 12	Awesome Tech Stuff	GRA Design	£3,835.00	£3,835.00
	Football/Fun Tea	Aberdeen FC Community Trust	£5,900.00	£5,900.00
	Young People Call the Shots	SHMU	£4,000.00	£2,265.00
Torry - Under 12	Awesome Tech Stuff	GRA Design	£3,835.00	£3,835.00
	Football/Fun Tea	Aberdeen FC Community Trust	£5,900.00	£4,165.00
				£20,000.00
Northfield - Under 12	School of Football	AFC Community Trust	£16,060.00	£16,060.00
	Young People Call the Shots	SHMU	£7,500.00	£7,000.00
	Litter Reduction & Clean Up	Police Scotland	£4,000.00	£2,000.00
	Fitness Classes	Byron Boxing Club	£5,000.00	£5,000.00
Northfield - Over 12	Awesome Tech Stuff	GRA Design	£4,470.00	£4,470.00
	iPad Project	Middlefield Community Project	£280.00	£280.00
	Litter Reduction & Clean Up	Police Scotland	£4,000.00	£2,000.00
	The Kids of Northfield	Northfield CLA	£20,000.00	£5,750.00
	Fitness Classes	Byron Boxing Club	£5,000.00	£5,000.00
	Cummings Park Garden Project	Bramble Brae Primary School	£2,500.00	£2,500.00
				£50,060.00



## Media Coverage

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The PB Process has attracted a large amount of coverage and positive area profiling through a range of outlets including a range of social media sites, the council website, evening express, press and journal, PB network website, SHMU radio and local community magazines. Follow Up press is still be targeted.

## Methodology Evaluation:

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### General:

1. This was a genuine PB process, where a relevant 'local constituency' of voters, in this case local pupils, voted directly on project proposals which would benefit them and their locality.
2. The decision to allocate a £100k underspend through use of a PB process demonstrates a significant investment from Aberdeen City Council to develop innovative community engagement methods and respond to the Community Empowerment Act Scotland (2005).

Aberdeen City is one of 20 (out of 32) Local Authorities in Scotland who have requested support in developing PB from the Scottish Government so this programme represents a substantial first instance in Aberdeen City of resource allocation through PB. It demonstrates an ability to spot opportunities 'through a PB lens' as it were, an attitude that has proved crucial in the successful development of PB elsewhere. It also bodes well for developing PB further in the Aberdeen City area – practical examples are of great value when developing policy and process.

3. The underspend was allocated to a PB process relatively late in the financial year, and thus delivery timescales were tight, the project has been delivered efficiently and within the relevant time frame, demonstrating a grasp of the 'PB idea' and impressive organisational skills on the part of the workers involved. There was obviously a lot of effort put into identifying and communicating with bidding organisations as each 'pot' was over-subscribed, resulting in a genuine 'PB contest' at each event.
4. The decision to work with and through the schools meant that the short time scale was less problematic than might otherwise have been the case – venues (i.e. the schools themselves) were already in place, and a ready-made voting audience (the pupils) was available. One of the main issues with PB projects generally can be lack of lead-in time to ensure these organisational issues are addressed in good time.
5. A wide range of bids were received, ranging from interactive IT opportunities, to sports and drama courses. The use of video presentations meant that pupils had identical information about the various bids, so could make decisions based on the same information.
6. The level of Media Coverage was very impressive which has created positive profiling for the areas. Northfield total Place also provided badges to primary school children to encourage families to ask about the event which subsequently drove volume and participation through the facebook page





### Event Feedback:

1. The project was managed and delivered by workers from Northfield Total Place and the Council's Communities & partnership Team, in partnership with the relevant local schools.
2. The officers involved were supportive of the basic ideas behind the process – felt it 'was a good process to take part in' and 'a very worthwhile thing to do' and the 'young people voted on projects that we as officers maybe would not have funded'.
3. One officer was also struck by the altruistic nature of the voting e.g. children voted for a project which involved support for the elderly, rather than for projects which provided more direct benefit to the children themselves.
4. There was also recognition that projects received funding that wouldn't have otherwise, so drawing on local knowledge and end beneficiary insight was beneficial in this regard. Projects also benefited from wider visibility and were in some cases picked up by mainstream budgets.
5. The delivery staff/teams did, however, highlight the difficulty in working to such tight time scales, and also felt that - possibly as a result of the quick turnaround required – there was a lack of clarity in terms of process and desired outcomes, so that the 'goalposts were being shifted' from above, as it were.
6. They also felt that more upfront knowledge and training of PB would have been useful.
7. There was also concern expressed that whilst the video presentations offered uniformity in terms of voters' access to information, different bidding organisations had varying levels of competence and experience in making videos, so some were more effective than others, and there was, in some cases, the need for a lot of resource to go into supporting the production of the videos. The videos for Northfield were created first and where organisations bid for work in other areas, the same videos were used mentioning Northfield as being the beneficiaries.
8. The bidders weren't actually in the room with the voters so there was no scope for Question and Answers of the bidding groups.
9. There was a sense of a potential conflict of interest among the delivery staff, as they were expected to offer support to particular bidding groups but also act as 'objective' organisers of the events.
10. There needs to be a focus on sustainability of the projects put forward for voting to ensure they are not very short term or a commitment could be made for an ongoing annual PB process.
11. The PB approach was seen as innovative, but would need, in future, to be more integrated into an overall work plan and could be leveraged to create additional community engagement in areas where there is low participation.
12. One of the bid winners "Awesome Tech" won multiple bids and are now planning to develop their project on a national basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition taken from [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)





## Recommendations:

### 1. Longer Lead in Times for Event Planning

Time constraints were unavoidable given the nature of the resource available (an identified underspend)

### 2. Stronger Involvement of communities and stakeholders in the initial criteria setting and delivery decisions

The time constraints resulted in a 'streamlined' approach to delivery of the project, where the work, and as importantly, decisions relating to delivery (geography, criteria for bidding organisations, percentage of sums allocated per age group, event format) were undertaken at Committee level and/or by the workers on the ground. This meant that one of the traditional strengths of PB, that is, ownership of process by participants/partners wasn't viable, for essentially practical reasons.

Whilst this project was untypical in some ways (ie delivered exclusively through schools and with a young voting demographic), for PB to embed itself at community level, best practice would involve the creation of a steering/planning group, comprising resident/community voices, elected members, and partner organisations, (particularly from the third sector). This approach has proved very effective elsewhere, in terms of:

- Ensuring practical planning decisions are based on input from all relevant stakeholders:
- Fostering a genuine sense of ownership of process, rather than participants' involvement being restricted to voting at the events.
- Developing trust within the wider community in the integrity of the overall process – decisions are taken in a transparent way, based on the input of all the key players. (NB this planning group should be seen as somewhat fluid in membership, and certainly not a 'closed shop'. Anyone unhappy with process decisions can then be invited in to improve things going forward.)
- Fostering improved relations both 'vertically' and 'horizontally', between officers, elected members and residents/community groups, and also across different partner organisations.

This approach can be painstaking to set up/facilitate, but the benefits outlined above have been demonstrably real in other areas which are using a PB approach, and are absolutely in keeping with the broader ethos of PB, beyond the simple principle of voting on resource allocation.



### 3. Factored time for deliberation in the voting process

Best 'PB practice' is seen as deliberative, rather than simply ticking a voting box. One of the pupils interviewed at Seaton Primary said, 'it would have been good to have more time to decide'. Even with a young voting group, if time/resource allows, it's useful to build in a space for 'peer discussion' of the projects and/or Q and A of the bidding organisations. (Although the latter wasn't an option in this instance as the bids were presented via video).

### 4. Planned evaluation methodology, with stronger feedback from voters

In terms of evaluation, it's always useful to try and incorporate some 'vox pop' opportunities (how participants experienced the event) as well as providing a simple evaluation form for participants to complete. A high percentage of positive responses to questions such as 'I thought the money was allocated fairly' and 'I would do this again' can be immensely valuable in making the case for taking PB forward.

### 5. Increased focus on the sustainability of Projects or an annual commitment to a PB process

### 6. Access to training for staff facilitating the process

## Conclusions:

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This was a well-planned, publicised, and executed PB process, which managed the constraints imposed by the short time scales involved effectively and efficiently. The various stakeholder groups – bidding organisations, pupils/voters and the schools have responded positively to the process. It represents an important ‘building block’ in terms of further developing Participatory Budgeting in Aberdeen City.

Going forward, (proposals are being considered to develop PB in a housing context, and also possibly through further ‘small grants’ programmes) it would be more in keeping with the overall aims and ethos of PB to involve stakeholder groups more fully in the planning process, and also ‘design in’ more structured feedback mechanisms in order to effectively capture peoples’ experience of the process, and inform the future development of PB in the Aberdeen City Council area.

Training and awareness raising events are being held with staff who may in the future deliver PB events.



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