



Participatory Budgeting Evaluation Report 3.

Tackling Poverty Budget 2018/19 –
'Making Ends Meet'

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING
EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Background

The Communities Committee in June 2018 agreed the feedback and recommendations from the Evaluation of the first PB Exercise which was £250k of the Tackling Poverty Budget 2017/18 which was to address the Findings of the Mapping Project.

Implementation of the recommendations would ensure that the next PB Exercise for Tackling Poverty Budget would deliver improvements to the process of effectively distributing £250,000 to groups and communities who could demonstrate a positive contribution to the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan. Delivering these improvements would also enhance participation rates and experiences.

The criteria and outline for the third PB Exercise was agreed by the Communities Committee at its meeting of 6 September 2018.

It was agreed that there should be an area approach and that the formula for the allocation of funding to each Area Committee used in the first Exercise should again be used, updated to reflect changes in the Ward boundaries and SIMD data. The formulas used are:

Area	Percentage	=	Fund
Annandale & Eskdale	25.71%	=	£64,275
Nithsdale	39.69%	=	£99,225
Stewartry	15.4%	=	£38,500
Wigtown	19.2%	=	£48,000
Total	100.00%	=	£250,000

2. Evaluation

This Evaluation Report details the results of feedback carried out by the Steering Group at the voting events; feedback from Elected Members and participants; the results of the Impact Assessment; and further describes and evaluates learning from each of the elements of the process including:

- Calls for project applications
- Arrangements for voting – in-person & online
- Voting venues
- Voter participation experience
- Scoring / ranking mechanism
- Communications
- Support to applicants
- Impact assessment
- Outcomes
- Operation of the Steering Group
- Partnership working

It builds on established evaluation approaches, particularly the inspection “How Good is my...”.

The identified improvements drawn from the evaluation of the first PB Exercise were:

Access & Inclusion

- Provision of an online voting system
- Neutral voting locations and venues

The majority of residents who participated online did so relatively seamlessly. However, feedback has been received which suggested that some people found the voting website complicated and difficult to navigate through. This will have contributed to 748 of the 2830 registrations not resulting in votes being cast. Within the 748 will be a number of votes which are ‘incomplete’. Incomplete votes are where the voter did not use all 5 of the required votes; for example, only voting for their favourite project and not voting for 4 others.

The provision of neutral venues was welcomed. However, for those who could not vote online, transport still remains a challenge.

Communication

- More regular and more frequent updates
- Involve Community Groups in distributing communication updates

Communication from the Council to Groups has been specifically mentioned as an area of improvement. Groups welcomed the frequency, clarity and conciseness of direct email updates.

The Groups involved, in general, were able and willing to share the overall PB opportunity across their social and digital networks. With some Groups promoting all Groups who they were participating with and against.

Transparency

- Publicise the learning and recommendations from the first PB exercise
- Make available to Community Groups more and clearer process related information at the outset of the process

Groups would welcome further transparency around the learning and improvements being made around the PB process. However, they did feel satisfied that improvements had been made around pre-application information.

Clarity of Outcomes

- Ensure that the poverty related outcomes to be improved by the PB process are clear and understandable.

The 'Making Ends Meet' brand provided an identity to the process which made it relatable and relevant.

The final element of the evaluation focussed on listening to the Community in focus, i.e. those linked to, those impacted by and those who tackle the causes and effects of poverty. Groups were asked to put forward their views on what they felt should be the focus for the third round of Tackling Poverty PB which is to be delivered in 2019/20.

3. How Good was our call for projects?

A call for Tackling Poverty project proposals was made on 23 November 2018 and closed on 11 January 2019. There was a simple form groups completed which was promoted on line, in person and by email to encourage applications. There was a set of simple criteria for applications.

This original call attracted 51 project proposals:

- Annandale & Eskdale – 9
- Nithsdale – 23
- Stewartry – 5
- Wigton – 14

Of the 51 project proposals received, 1 withdrew as they could not fulfil the commitments required by the process and 10 were rejected for having little or no demonstrable links to the outcomes identified.

In the Annandale & Eskdale (A&E) area, 4 of the original 9 project proposals were rejected. This meant the overall monetary value of the projects was less than the total fund available in the A&E area so the 'PB' approach, where choices are made between projects, could not be happen. Therefore, to ensure that PB was used to effectively distribute the funding in A&E, a second call was placed which resulted in a further 9 proposals being received, of which 8 could progress to the public vote.

Projects Progressing by Area

- Annandale & Eskdale – 13
- Nithsdale - 18
- Stewartry - 4
- Wigton -13
- Total -48

The Call for Projects for the first PB Exercise lasted 8 weeks. Feedback from groups involved in the first Exercise indicated that a longer Call would allow for groups to work together and collaborate on project proposals. In total 16 collaborative project proposals were received, of which 13 progressed to the public vote. 7 collaborative projects received a sufficient number of public votes to be funded; 28% of the total number of projects voted on.

Of the 48 projects that progressed to the public voting stage, 25 were successfully awarded funding. 25% up on the number of projects funded in round one.

4. How Good were our arrangements for voting?

For the first PB Exercise, the Steering Group determined that the marketplace in person type voting events was the most appropriate and would give people an opportunity to engage directly with groups proposing projects. This approach was repeated for the in-person voting element of the third Exercise.

The Steering Group also addressed feedback from the first Exercise and the rurality of our region and so agreed to add online voting.

Voting methodology took into account the needs of diverse groups in our region and in particular take regard of Protected Characteristics as by having a choice of voting options, and the availability of posting back a vote after the in-person events, no-one would be disadvantaged due to faith or disability.

The Steering Group was aware that a proportion of the general public do not have email addresses, but these were required to participate on-line. However, groups were pro-active in supporting members of the public to create email accounts and addresses which then enabled them to participate in the PB process. Council Customer Service Centres were also able to assist.

The Steering Group agreed that there should be an 'independent' adjudicator present to oversee the voting on the day and Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway were present at each event in that capacity. Informal feedback has suggested that this role was welcomed, but perhaps not required as there was a high degree of transparency and trust in the arrangements in place.

5. How Good were our voting venues?

An event was held in each of the four Area Committee areas.

Locations for each of the four voting events were considered by the Steering Group, and agreed as being:

- Castle Kennedy Primary School , 9th March
- Kirkcudbright Academy, 16th March
- Wallace Hall School, 23rd March
- Lochmaben Primary School, 27th April

The locations and venues were seen by the Steering Group to be neutral, as no project proposals were received from these settlements. Therefore, no group or community could be perceived to be advantaged or disadvantaged by geography or transport.

The facilities themselves were one level, spacious and fully accessible. However, the lack of catering facilities was negatively commented on by some participants, as was the slightly 'out of town centre' location of the voting venues.

Feedback tells us that there are lessons to learn regarding inclusion and maximising access. Travel is a consistent issue within a rural region like Dumfries and Galloway.

6. How Good were our arrangements for voting dates?

In person

The four events were held between 9 March and 27 April 2019, so the likelihood of bad weather was minimal.

All the events were held on a Saturday daytime as it was believed that this was the most an accessible time for local people to be able to attend.

The Impact Assessment had identified that some religious groups cannot cast a vote on a Saturday; and that some people with a disability might not be able to cast their vote at the event. Arrangements were therefore made for people to collect their vote at the event but to be able to post it back or hand it in at a later date. There was no take up of this option at any of the four events.

Online

The online voting aspect was available over a two week period, enabling local residents to choose when they wanted to participate. Feedback has indicated that this was a sufficient period of time.

7. How Good was our voter participation?

1,616 local residents successfully voted on-line with a further 107 voting in-person. The number of people who successfully participated in the public vote was 1,723. An increase of 221% from the first PB Exercise which attracted 777 voters.

In person

Each voting event was designed to follow the same format and timings, and a total of 109 people attending the in-person votes. Attendance at each voting event is as follows:

- Annandale & Eskdale – 39
- Nithsdale – 26
- Stewartry – 11
- Wigtown – 33

By analysing the postcodes of each of the registered voters attending the events, it has been established that 100% of all voters originated from the geographic area in which the vote was taking place.

Although the Council's Equality Monitoring forms were available at the events, none were completed, and it is therefore not possible to provide an assessment of the profile of voters.

Online

100% of vote cast online were received from the relevant area-based postcodes.

The online voting element generated 2,830 registration attempts of which 168 (6%) were rejected for various reasons. Only registrations which adhered to the required criteria and inputs were able to vote.

Of the 2,662 successful registrations a total of 1,616 successfully cast their votes:

Area	Successful Registration	Successful Votes	Attrition Rate
Annandale & Eskdale	689	353	51%
Nithsdale	1,302	886	68%
Stewartry	322	84	26%
Wigtown	517	293	57%
Totals	2,830	1,616	57%

Not all registered participants used the required 5 votes. In such cases the incomplete votes are invalid and did not contribute to the outcome of the vote. The total number of invalid votes stands at 298.

Some feedback suggests that the on-line registration process was challenging and too long. However, only a limited amount of personal information was required to complete the registration process: email address, date of birth, postcode and username. By limiting the amount of information required the registration process was fairly simple and no General Data Protection Regulations concerns were encountered.

8 How Good was our Scoring Mechanism?

It was anticipated that some members of the public attending voting events would do so with a level of pre-determination in relation to preferred project proposals. However, by requiring members of the public to go beyond personal preference and select 5 projects which they then subsequently scored, it ensured that voting was as equitable as possible and no one project dominated the outcome of the vote. In addition, it was also recognised that the general public consistently across all four voting events displayed a genuine interest in all the projects proposed, not simply their personal preference. Members of the voting public also acknowledged that thinking beyond personal preference was a welcome challenge when deciding on which projects to vote for.

There may be an opportunity moving forward to update the scoring method to include non-weighted / ranked scoring. As PB becomes more accessible and more popular it becomes even more important to apply a voting system that does not allow one group to dominate unfairly due to reach and popularity.

9. How Good was our communication?

A Communications Plan was created which covered:

- Branding of the PB Exercise - 'Making Ends Meet'
- Web information on our Council's website, Partners' websites and the online voting platform.
- Local media, print, tv and radio
- Use of social media
- Posters
- Direct Email messaging
- Accessibility (venues and information) e.g. language translation posters on display

The implementation of the Communication Plan was very much improved from the first PB Exercise as there was more frequent postings and dates were adhered to.

It is felt that there was a good level of shared ownership around communications, with groups beginning to own the collective promotional message.

Support from Third Sector Dumfries & Galloway helped raise awareness amongst communities and community groups.

10. How Good was our support to applicants?

Groups applying for the funding received support from Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway. Learning from the first Exercise was implemented and pre-process awareness raising took place in the form of specific forums for groups to attend, collaborate and ask questions.

Officer support was also made available through local Ward Officers and Community Planning Partners such as at the NHSD&G and Third Sector Dumfries & Galloway.

The people supporting the PB events and importantly counting the votes were not associated with any of the groups applying for funding; and had been trained and well briefed about their role on the day.

The practical organisation of the events was a strength with applicants and attendees commenting that events were well organised and run.

11. How Good are our outcomes?

A total of 25 projects were awarded funding, which is an increase of 5 (25%) from the first PB Exercise.

- Wigtown – 6
- Stewartry – 3
- Nithsdale – 10
- Annandale & Eskdale – 6

Aspects of poverty to be tackled through the funded projects are as follows, all of which contribute to 'Making Ends Meet' with particular reference to Child Poverty:

- **Low income & financial poverty**
 - Provision of emergency power payments, sanitary products & essential toiletries
 - Provision of equipment to enable young people from low-income families to fully participate in educational and developmental activities.
- **Food poverty**
 - Provision of emergency food parcels & additional pop-up distribution points
 - Provision of school holiday breakfast and lunch clubs for low income families
- **Fuel poverty, rurality and isolation**
 - Provision of transport and training in order to access and provide services and activities.
- **Access to information and educational activities / opportunities.**
 - Training of volunteers to provide advice of money management and food growing and sharing.
 - Provision of finance mentoring opportunities and facilities for young people with additional support needs
 - Provision of ICT learning activities for those who require to access benefits and who are seeking employment.
 - Food buying and cooking for low income families and very limited budgets.

The funded projects meet the criteria and outcomes set by the Steering Group. The evidence is that as we have reduced barriers to participation, increased our communication and encouraged and set conditions for a wider range of people to participate in decision making, our outcomes will be met.

12. How Good was the operation of our Steering Group?

The PB events were designed, developed and delivered by the PB Steering Group.

The Steering Group had training at the start of their work including poverty and diversity awareness and Impact Assessment.

This Steering Group comprises volunteers with lived experience of poverty (drawn from the Tackling Poverty Reference Group) and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities Committee. The seven volunteers developed their skills in leadership, negotiation, communications, planning and event delivery.

Over 400 volunteer hours have been invested by the volunteer members of the Steering Group and this will contribute to them achieving the SQA Preparing to Volunteers Award – level 3.

Throughout the development and delivery of the PB process the volunteers have enhanced their negotiating skills and abilities when working with groups. It was noted that the levels of confidence individually and collectively amongst the volunteers has significantly increased.

There are learning points in relation to the composition of and support to the Steering Group:

- Representation must be secured on an equal basis from all areas of the region to be fully representative
- Support is needed to enable, where required, quicker and more remote working and contribution. For example, where short notice meetings and communications are required.
- It has also been proposed by the Steering Group that they have an opportunity to review and analyse the monitoring information produced by each funded project. In doing so the Steering Group will then have an opportunity to understand the success and impact of funded projects and use this intelligence when designing future PB exercises.

13. How Good was the partnership working?

Some of the community groups involved in the PB Exercise have started to shift their approach towards communicating and networking within the sector; with some groups actively requesting future opportunities to work more closely with other groups and our Council.

Groups have specifically remarked on the level of energy created through the PB Exercise and would welcome opportunities to maintain this level of energy.

The process has also generated opportunities for groups to collaborate post PB Exercise. An example of this has been created in the Wigtown area where 5 of the 13 Groups are now exploring collaborative work around tackling food poverty and providing school holiday activities in a more co-ordinated way.

14. Impact Assessment

As part of planning for the PB methodology, an Impact Assessment (IA) was undertaken to identify any impacts and where there were negative impacts, to ensure that any barriers to involvement were mitigated.

The results of the IA were:

Total Positive Impacts = 12

Total No Impacts = 1

Total (Low) Negative Impacts = 3

The mitigation to address the negative impacts was as follows:

Impact Area	Explanation and action to be taken
General understanding of the PB process	FAQ on the Council's website and also posters on display at the venues
disability	All venues are accessible and familiar to people with disabilities; staff attending are briefed on supporting people; if there is any reason why someone can't vote on the day for physical or learning disability reasons, there is provision for them to be issued with a vote for completion and submission a few days later.

	The availability of online voting provides an alternative opportunity to participate.
race	<p>the telephone translation service is available at each venue; and the language line posters are on display at each venue.</p> <p>If there is any reason why someone can't vote on the day for language or cultural reasons, there is provision for them to be issued with a vote for completion and submission a few days later.</p>
religion or belief	<p>If there is any reason why someone can't vote on the day for reasons of their faith or cultural tradition, there is provision for them to be issued with a vote for completion and submission a few days later.</p> <p>The availability of online voting provides an alternative opportunity to participate.</p>

15 Budget

Costs associated with delivering the PB events across the four areas were minimal and limited to some room hire, volunteer expenses and some minor printing costs.

The on-line voting platform was funded from remainder of the Scottish Government Community Choices Grant received in 2017/18. The one-year software license for the provision of the on-line voting cost £5,000.

16. Conclusions and Improvement Actions

Access and inclusion:

- The opportunity for public influence over the spending of public money has been widened through the provision of an online voting platform. This provision along with the continuation of in-person voting on a geographic basis added a second method of voting and makes grant-making PB more accessible and reduces geography and transport as barriers to participation.
- As PB develops the provision of online as well as other methods of voting should be explored to reach the particular stakeholders relevant to the subject matter.
- The provision of online voting has significantly impacted upon the attendance at the in-person voting events. However, online does not, as it currently stands, provide the ability for more in-depth and direct engagement between the public and project proposers.
- By reducing the maximum amount that can be applied for, the number of projects awarded funding has increased. However, the overall number of projects being proposed has reduced, and in one area required a second Call to be made to ensure that a sufficient number of projects was generated to enable PB to take place.

Communications:

- Greater involvement of the Council's Communications Unit has improved the level and frequency of press releases and communications.
- The 'Making Ends Meet' branding made the process more recognisable and relevant and therefore an identity for each PB Exercise is recommended.
- The Council has a responsibility to lead the communications messages to ensure there is independence, clarity and consistency with third sector organisations assisting to promote the opportunity/engender support.
- A greater level and spirit of shared responsibility was evident across all partners and stakeholders, ultimately contributing to improved communications.
- More direct and targeted promotions to schools, Parent Councils and Community Councils will increase awareness in the community setting.

Transparency:

- There is confidence and trust in the process built by involving and working in partnership with local people on the design and delivery of PB Exercises.
- Undertaking the counting of the votes in a public arena increases levels of trust and transparency.
- Publicising and promoting the learning from PB Exercises will demonstrate our commitment to continuous improvement.

Clarity of outcome:

- Improvements to the clarity of outcomes has been made. Each PB Exercise must be explicit about the link to the particular Strategy/Plan/outcomes that the Council is seeking to achieve.
- Improvements have been made to the assessment of project proposals. However, consideration should be given to creating a two-stage assessment process before projects are progressed to the public voting stage. This additional stage would be used to test in-depth project links to the particular Strategy/Plan.

On-line & Digital:

- The provision of a digital / on-line element has significantly improved participation in the PB process.
- Simplifying the on-line process must be explored and tested for future processes to ensure a greater attrition rate is achieved.