

## Agenda item 5

### For decision: Participatory Budgeting

Author: Kate Hellard, Community Projects Officer

#### Summary

This report provides a progress report on the three Participatory Budgeting projects being carried out in this financial year (2017/18).

The report proposes that FTC delivers another PB Events project in 2018/2019, with a voting day in spring 2018 and another town-wide vote for one of three £10k projects later in the year.

#### Background

The essence of Participatory Budgeting (PB) is increasing public engagement in budget setting and allowing greater participation in democratic decision making. There are many successful models around the world that manage the process in very different ways, from engaging residents in designing the process through to a single vote. Participation and engagement is essential to Frome Town Council.

Three PB projects were planned for this year. This report includes a review of these projects.

#### Review

##### 1. Play Frome

A total spend of £15k was to be decided by PB projects at the Tower View and Packsaddle play areas with residents deciding on how £7,500 is spent on play, sports & recreation in both communities.

In planning both PB projects, the Play element would be delivered early on, but this was dependent on the formal transfer of both spaces from Mendip District Council to FTC. At the time of writing this report, the transfers are expected imminently.

Following the transfer of these two spaces to FTC, residents will be asked to choose whether to invest in (fixed) play equipment; in organised play & sport development workers; or a combination of the two. The PB events will be organised in both communities and votes will be cast on the day. Voting slips will be circulated in the local areas so people can vote if they can't attend the voting day.

##### 2. Events

Following a town wide invitation, a panel of 64 residents came together at the football club in March. Their task was to allocate £30k to community groups, local enterprises and others to deliver events in Frome. A total of 17 proposals were pitched to the panel. All proposals were evaluated and scored by panel and the following events were funded

School Travel Challenge	£500	Complete
Fair Housing for Frome	£1,300	Mid series of events
Cycle Powered Cinema	£2,200	November
Big Disability Diversity Day	£6,000	October
Word Up!	£9,550	Mid series of events
FromeFM Party in the Park	£4,813	Complete
Lantern Procession	£4,986	November / December
<b>Total</b>	<b>£29,349.00</b>	

It is proposed that these projects are asked to give a short presentation at the Annual Town Meeting in May 2018.

Comprehensive feedback was gathered from the participants after the event:

- Participants felt they contributed positively to decision making.
- The day was well organised but could have been shorter.
- Printed information provided was useful.
- More detailed budget information would be good.
- Asking questions directly to those pitching was important. Sometimes difficult when sat next to them.
- The 'Give Back' section did not work well (this is where successful projects donate some of their grant to less successful ones to enable them to proceed)
- Mixed response to the voting mechanism. Some appreciated the simplicity.
- A greater demographic spread would have been appreciated.

FTC staff and councillors have also reviewed the project and concurred that:

- The event was reasonably well attended given this was the first year of the project.
- The geographic representation of participants on the voting day was good across the town.
- It would be of benefit to shortlist applications more rigorously in future years.
- There should be no more than 10 presentations on the day. Guidelines for presenters should be shared with voting participants.
- Detailed budget breakdowns to be included in voting packs.
- The day should start not earlier than 10am.

### 3. The public toilets in Victoria Park

This was a choice about how to better spend the £20k budget for cleaning and looking after the public toilets in Victoria Park. Anyone living in Frome over the age of 10 was eligible to vote.

Residents were first asked if they wanted public toilets in the park. People answering 'Yes' to this question were then asked to choose one of three options for providing better toilets. Results were as follows:

- Over 1,000 residents voted
- 99% voted to say that they want toilets in the park
- 22% voted for Option 1: refurbishing the existing toilets
- 14% voted for Option 2: brand new toilets
- 64% voted for Option 3: a new or extended café incorporating (better) toilets

Votes from people living outside of the Frome parish boundary; and votes which came in without name and address details; and/or where people had ticked multiple options rather than choosing one were discounted.

Work is underway on the preferred option - Option 3 - and staff are exploring the detail of whether to extend and improve the existing café or whether to look at a new building that incorporates a café and new toilets. As detailed at the time of the vote, this project is a long-term one; it is also too early to offer an accurate timeframe for the voted-for option.

The PB vote in the park was perhaps the most complicated - and based on comments from the public, the information provided was too little for some people and too much for others. The vote also proved divisive in its essence: where some people welcomed the chance to vote on something so significant and important to the town, others commented that 'the Council shouldn't be asking the public about this'.

Over 1,000 residents voting is encouraging and notable; and the results were equally clear. And lots of people felt that they were given all of the relevant information (in sufficient) detail to make an informed decision. Nevertheless, there were people who were left unsure about the vote - confirming that providing clear information is an essential part of PB.

### Summary of lessons learnt

This year's PB initiative has had mixed success for many reasons, described above. We did however engage over 1,000 local people in making decisions about how the FTC budgets are spent, providing a baseline and platform upon which to build future projects. Future projects should consider:

- Planning and delivery of any project must be possible within the given timescale.
- Information is always crucial but must not be excessive.
- It must be easy to participate - keep the effort and investment required to a minimum.
- FTC to make more effort to get those who might not be the first to participate involved.
- Choices need to be simple and easy to understand.

### Proposals

First, it is proposed that FTC continues to deliver PB Events on an annual basis. We will build on year one with a more rigorous application process and stringent shortlisting.

We will aim to engage a wider demographic which will be easier each year as residents become more familiar with the project. Reflecting the feedback received, there will be changes to the voting day. We also plan to look at new ways of engaging young people in the vote, perhaps using the youth conference as a platform. It is proposed that the PB events budget is £25k in 2018/19.

Second, in order to develop further the principle of PB it is proposed to conduct one town-wide vote in 2018/19. FTC would identify three areas of public interest following consultation. The Comms team would design and manage this process.

FTC will design three tangible projects that will cost £10k each and it is proposed to allocate this amount in next year's budget. Each project will be designed to deliver one aspect of the public's areas of interest. Council will approve the three projects at the Annual Council meeting in May before going to a public vote in June 2018.

#### Recommendations

1. PB Events to become an annual project, with an allocation of £25k in 2018/19. A further £2500k to be allocated for promotion and administration.
2. Hold a town wide vote for one of three projects with an allocation of £10k in 2018/19. The report explains the process to be followed.