

## Agenda item 7

For decision - Taking Participatory Budgeting and The People's Budget into 2019/2020

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### Summary

To find new ways to engage people further in democracy has been a thread running through this council and one of the ways we enabled residents to engage is through Participatory Budgeting. This paper gives an overview of the mechanisms used in 2018, the results from last time and recommendations on moving for 2019/20.

### Background

Increasing community and residents' engagement has been an important underlying principle of this council. Participatory Budgeting (PB), rebranded in Frome as The People's Budget, has been one means of delivering this: giving residents meaningful choices about how a portion of the budget is spent.

### PB Events

In 2017 we ran PB Events and £25k was made available with an upper limit of £10k for each event.

Based on the feedback from 2017, the following tweaks were made to the process in 2018:

- applications were shortlisted in a more robust manner
- budget information was included in the booklet for voters
- organisations were asked to produce a short, 1 min, film to explain their project.
- more time was made available for questions on voting day
- the day was shortened to a half day, with lunch at the end

Over 120 people registered to vote at the voting day on 17 March and there were seven projects on which to vote. During the build-up one of the projects withdrew and, on the day, there was a significant snow storm. This hindered the turnout and 71 residents attended to vote. In a significant departure from the previous year, 300 year eight pupils also voted. The Make It Happen Youth Conference, delivered the week prior to the PB Events voting day, represented an excellent opportunity for young people to engage with a real democratic process with real outcomes. The young people's vote was weighted and represented 30% of the overall vote. Young people engaged fully in the process and asked well thought out questions and generated much discussion. Reassuringly, whilst the order differed slightly, the young people's top four projects were the same as the residents' subsequent vote on the 17th March. (This was a positive development for both PB and the conference and one that we propose to repeat in March 2019.)

Four projects were successful: a town firework display; lantern building workshops and procession ahead of the Christmas light switch on; the Windowanderland project and comic exercise classes. Because of the timing of most of these events, and an issue with the outside licensing for one of them, none of these events has yet taken place. The four events will report back at the Annual Council meeting in May 2019.

There are several points to consider: first, a self-selected group of individuals doesn't necessarily provide a representative cross section of the community. It is also a costly and time-consuming exercise when done in this way. The films worked well, and it was good to have an element of questioning involved. The proposal for 2019 is to run PB events again and to allocate a budget of £25k. If approved, we propose to use an electronic system for voting and thereby broadening out the voting base.

### **PB Town Vote**

Councillors agreed three projects to put forward for the town vote in 2018. These were projects that as a council we 'would like to do' but that didn't have a budget allocated. Each project was costed at £10k, met the strategic aims of FTC, and had to be deliverable within a year of the vote. The three options in 2018 were:

- A Town Orchard - where scrumping would be encouraged
- A Giant Waterslide - a one-day event where 200 residents would be chosen to participate
- A Dog Poo powered light - to be installed in a local park.

Votes were both online and in person and 767 residents' votes were verified and counted, and the Town Orchard was the clear winner with 81% of the votes. A further bonus was that following the vote a local landscape architect came forward to offer design skills. The proposed designs have now been consulted widely on and a competition to name the orchard is currently underway.

The orchard was planted in mid-October and followed up with an Apple Day celebration on 21 October. The residents who attended on the day, although worried about potential vandalism, were delighted with the space. It remains a work in progress with soft fruits and benches yet to be added but from voting to delivery has taken just 5 months.

Although the PB Town Vote outcome has been very positive, some residents were concerned about the choices leading to accusations of randomness and spending money for money's sake. Whilst all projects had been discussed and all met the strategic aims of the Council, it was not clear to most residents where the ideas had originated, and they were seen by some as frivolous. This is a lesson learned, as we had moved away from one of the key principles of participatory budgeting: that ideas/solutions should come from the community. Although the process got lots of people engaged, including some who might not have partaken in a less controversial vote, it is proposed to have choices in future derived from the community.

It is proposed that there should be a PB Town Vote in 2019, a budget of £10k is allocated and that we look at three options around a subject important to the town. For example, to address litter, with ideas coming from the council's recent Rubbish Meeting.

#### PB Town Vote Tower View & Packsaddle 2017

FTC wanted the residents near our newly acquired parks at Tower View and Packsaddle to vote on how to spend £15k (£7.5k each) on improvements. Residents local to the parks have been given a choice of:

- Option 1: £7,500 on new play equipment
- Option 2: £5,000 on new play equipment and £2,500 on play workers
- Option 3: £2,500 on new play equipment and £5,000 on play workers

Originally due to be part of the 2017 PB project, Tower View and Packsaddle did not come into FTC's ownership until August 2018 and the vote is only now underway with the results expected in mid-November. The lesson from this was that projects must be achievable and deliverable within in a timely framework.

#### Recommendations

- Take forward PB Events for 2019-2020 to enable a vote in March 2019 and allocate £25k in the 2019/20 budget
- Take forward PB Town Vote around a single community led theme and allocate £10k in the 2019/20 budget.