

## Agenda item 8

For decision: The People's Budget Town Vote 2019

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### Summary

To find new ways to engage people further in democracy has been a thread running through the previous two councils, and one of the ways that we enable residents to engage is through Participatory Budgeting. This report gives an overview of the proposed mechanism to deliver the Town Vote 2019. It reflects on lessons learnt and summarises the work we've been doing with Public Square - a project set up to examine ways in which democracy can be enhanced throughout the country.

### Background

Increasing community and residents' engagement has been an important underlying principle of Frome Town Council. Please see [Appendix 8.1](#) for a history of this work. Participatory Budgeting, (PB) rebranded in Frome as The People's Budget, has been one means of delivering this, by giving residents meaningful choices about how a portion of the FTC budget is spent. The People's Budget Town Vote seeks to find a project which must be delivered in its entirety within the budget of £10k, meet the strategic aims of FTC and be deliverable within a year of the vote.

Although the outcome from the people's Budget Town Vote last year, the Community Orchard, was very positive, there was an initial backlash in the choice of projects to vote for as it was not clear to most residents where the ideas had originated and they were seen by some as frivolous. With hindsight, we had moved away from one of the key principles of participatory budgeting: that ideas/solutions should come from the community even though the process had lots of people talking and engaged including some who might not have partaken in a less controversial vote.

### Who are Public Square?

Public Square is a two-year action research programme that is investigating what is needed to improve participation as a system. It is a partnership between mySociety and the Democracy Society with funding from Luminata. In its first year, Public Square is working with a small number of councils to develop and pilot innovative approaches to citizen participation in decision making and Frome is the only council that they are working with at parish level. They come with their own funding and can support our aims of greater engagement with the community and they have particular digital expertise. For example, we have used proprietary software such as Mail Chimp before as a mechanism to deliver votes, but they will be able to advise, prototype and support, ensuring a much smoother interface.

The primary purpose of Public Square's involvement with The People's Budget is to explore ways to improve citizen participation in decision making at the local level in Frome, using the idea generation phase of the People's Budget: Town Vote as a focus.

- They will look to help prototype and support the council in prototyping ways that Frome residents can more actively participate in generating the ideas to be voted on in the Town Vote, focusing on quick wins and signposting longer term solutions.
- Evaluate those prototype approaches from the point of view of residents and council stakeholders, with a few simple and specific target outcomes.

MySociety will then document and share their research work, findings, prototypes and other outputs openly in order to gather wider input and feedback so that others, including us, can learn from this work.

### Town Vote 2019

What will we be working on? We are looking to deliver a town vote where the criteria for the vote remain as last year; each project must cost no more than £10k, meet the strategic aims of FTC, and must be deliverable within a year of the vote; but this year the ideas must demonstrably come from within the community.

To ensure this element we will likely have a three-tiered process: idea generation, resulting from a combination of events which we will take as a road show into the community, and also an online forum. We will work with Public Square on a co-design of this element of the project and include the community. Second, we will narrow down the ideas through use of a working group facilitated by Public Square. Third, the vote itself, which will be in September.

Whilst the workload will increase in the short term, the effort will be offset by the potential from getting the process right - genuine increased participation as opposed to a lip service version. This in turn will ensure that we have a process piloted for garnering ideas around other areas of both the work programme and potentially the budget and a more robust template for further embedding engagement and democracy into our work.

Read more about Public Square here: <https://www.thepublicsquare.org.uk>

#### Recommendation

Take forward PB Town Vote by developing a prototype and evaluation system with Public Square