

Agenda item 4

For decision - Taking Participatory Budgeting, The People's Budget: Events into 2020/2021
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Summary

Continuing to engage the community in democracy has been a thread running through the previous council and there is an indication that this council will continue to do so in future. One of the ways that we enable this is through Participatory Budgeting. This paper looks forward to next year with a view to announcing the opening of The People's Budget: Events.

Background

Community engagement is an important underlying principle of this council. The People's Budget: Events has been one means of delivering this. It gives residents meaningful choices about how a proportion of the budget is spent whilst also gaining the positive effect of well engaged community events.

PB Events

Last year £25k was made available in total with each project asking for no more than £10k. Based on the feedback from 2018 various tweaks were made to the process in 2019:

- Applications are shortlisted in a more robust manner
- Budget information was included in the voting
- Organisations were asked to produce a short 1 min film to explain their project.
- Voting was widened to include both offline and online element to voting, thereby opening up voting to the whole town.

The videos were placed online along with the event budget and a description and the public were given an opportunity to ask questions and to rate each project from 0-5. 792 people participated and there were clear winners.

As in previous years, all year eight pupils from Oakfield, Selwood Critchill and the Steiner School also voted. The Make It Happen Youth Conference, delivered the week prior to the PB: Events closing, 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.

We were delighted, but not surprised, by the quality of their discussions and they engaged fully in the process. Like last year, our young people and the public generally prioritised the same four priority projects. It is interesting to see this pattern repeat and again this is a process that we would also like to continue in in March 2020.

Four projects were successful: a town firework display; Children's Festival activities; an Active and In Touch Thanksgiving project and Big Red Bus Housing Project.

An issue around the road closure has meant that we are organising the fireworks event inhouse. The Big Red Bus was successfully delivered within a few weeks of the vote; Children's Festival took place with its usual aplomb and the Thanksgiving event takes place next weekend on 13 October. The event organisers will report back at the Annual Council meeting in May 2020.

There are a number of points to consider for next year around the logistics. First, the films where popular, were of a high standard and gave the projects a good opportunity to showcase themselves. Second, it was good to have an element of questioning involved and certainly opened out the vote to many more people. Third, the vote was complicated and the mechanism slightly clunky which did result in a high proportion of voters not finishing the process. This can be improved upon next year.

The proposal for 2020 is to continue to build on the success of the PB: Events again.

This project always straddles the new financial year. The project is launched when the application window opens in the winter while the grants for the winning events are awarded in the 2020/21 financial year. As a result, Cllrs are asked to allocate a budget now for the next financial year.

This year's budget was £25k. Given the success and popularity of this type of, what is effectually, a grant I propose to allocate a further £5k to this project. However, Cllrs don't necessarily need to decide that increase now as it can contribute to the wider budget discussions for 2020/21 in the coming months.

If approved, we propose to open the application window asap with a view to closing it in late January. We also propose to use an electronic voting mechanism improved through the observational work that Public Square has done around PB with us this year. Lastly, we would run an offline campaign in the newspaper, noticeboards and at the Town Hall to ensure maximum engagement.

Recommendation

Take forward PB Events for 2020-2021 to enable a vote in March 2019 and allocate at least £25k in the 2020/21 budget