

Agenda item 5

For decision – Taking forward Participatory Budgeting via The People’s Budget: Events and The People’s Budget: Town vote into 2021/2022

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Summary

Continuing to engage the community in democracy and to help support active citizens is a tacit thread running through our work. 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 and looking to another People Budget: Town Vote

Background

Building community engagement and participation is an important underlying principle of this council. The People’s Budget is 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 supported events and projects. The proposal for 2021 is to continue to build on the success of the People’s Budget in previous years to deliver both a People’s Budget: Events and a People’s Budget: Town Vote.

PB: Events

Last year £25k was made available for PB: Events with no event costing more than £10k

In addition:

- Applications were robustly shortlisted ensuring that each event being benefits the town and falls within our strategic objectives
- Budget information was included in the voting
- Organisations were asked to produce a short one minute film to explain their project.
- Voting included both offline and online elements, thereby opening up voting to the whole town.

The videos where 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. It has turned out to be an odd year for events and so, as we started the vote, we changed our communication channels to focus more on Covid-19. We had a very low voting turn out with only 295 people participating. Some of the winning organisations have postponed events until next year and others, such as Window Wanderland, are in the planning stage. As a result, we find ourselves in the unusual position of talking about next year while still waiting for this year’s events to occur.

However, as in previous years, all year eight pupils from Oakfield, Selwood Critchill and the

Steiner School took part in the voting. The annual Make It Happen Youth Conference was delivered the week prior to the PB: Events. This represented an excellent opportunity for young people to engage with a real democratic process with real outcomes. The year 8s had excellent discussions and they engaged fully in the process. Their vote was weighted and represented 30% of the overall vote.

Last year, our young people and the public generally prioritised the same three events. It is interesting to see this pattern repeat.

There are a number of elements that we found were popular. These included the films, which were of a high standard and gave the projects a good opportunity to showcase themselves. It was good to have an element of questioning in the PB Platform. However, this year being an extraordinary year we saw lower levels of voting in the past and the delivered outcomes were varying due to conditions around events.

The proposal is to hold another PB: Event project in March 2021. There is a chance that the Make it Happen conference may not run in the same way as in previous years. We will, however, ensure that our year 8's will have an input electronically via IT lessons.

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 for PB: Events was £25k. Given the success and popularity of this project I propose to retain this amount for 2021/22. If approved, we propose to open the application window for the PB: Events asap with a view to closing it in late January.

PB: Town vote

This year we didn't have a budget for a PB: Town Vote and have taken the time to review how it works.

Next year we are proposing the same £10k budget as in previous years. The difference is that we will ask for bids for projects of up to £1k from street level communities. The projects must be deliverable in the financial year of 2021-2022, have a costed budget, be focussed on a street or place, and be bought forward by residents or communities groups who are happy to work with our neighbourhood networks co-ordinator to support projects and to bring others from the area on board. The projects don't all have to be different; it could be the same project delivered across different areas, but they do have to be identifiable as location based. Clearly, this PB: Town Vote proposal is designed to complement the ongoing work we are doing in developing community networks and thereby building community resilience.

We will promote the initiative and resulting projects will be posted for discussion on our *Your Priorities* platform. So long as our criteria are met, we will put them forward to a Town vote. The voting criteria will be defined along the basis of feasibility, impact and equality and it is hoped that this will produce some interesting, inventive, and beneficial outcomes.

For the delivery of both the PB: Events and the PB: Town Vote we propose to use an electronic voting mechanism improved through the observational work that Public Square did with us around PB last year. We will of course continue to run an offline promotional campaign in the newspaper, noticeboards and at the Town Hall to ensure maximum engagement.

Recommendations

1. Delegate authority to the Marketing and Comms Manager to progress both the PB: Events and PB: Town Vote as described in the report
2. Allocate in the 2020/21 budget, £25k for PB: Events and £10k for PB: Town vote at least £10k in the 2020/21 budget