



Participatory Budgeting project Dereham area

Evaluation report, March 2015

Rachel Leggett, independent coordinator

Evaluation report for Breckland Council

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Author: Rachel Leggett, independent coordinator

1. Introduction

This report is written as a way of recording the process undertaken and some learning points for future participatory budgeting projects.

Breckland Council had an allocation of funding from their Pride budget to run participatory budgeting events across the district, to enable groups to easily access public funding and kick-start local grass roots projects.

Rachel Leggett, independent coordinator, was appointed to run the process in the Dereham area, recommended by Dereham Town Council.

The following definition of Participatory budgeting (PB) was used: *a different way to manage public money, and to engage people in government. It is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It enables taxpayers to work with government to make the budget decisions that affect their lives.* (Source: Participatory Budgeting Project www.participatorybudgeting.org)

£10,000 was allocated to the Dereham area (town and parishes around) for community projects, with a further £2000 to cover the cost of administration, Rachel Leggett's time and all the expenses of running the project. Breckland Council stipulated the criteria for the applications. It was expected that the decision on how funding was allocated was made at a local level by the public via a voting system. How that voting operated, was down to a local working group of people to decide. Rachel Leggett ran the timescales and management of the project.

2. The process and learning points

This section outlines the process undertaken to deliver the project. Applicants were also given a feedback form during the Participatory Budgeting event, and members of the working group had a final meeting to record learning points.

STAGE 1: SET UP OF THE PROJECT

Work involved

- Appoint Rachel Leggett, independent coordinator.
- Establish a local working group

- Find contact details for local organisations. 172 found through about 10 hours of internet searching.
- Poster produced and sent to email addresses, posted on StreetLife and Facebook groups.
- Ask for volunteers to join working group. 7 volunteers came forward:
 - Gordon Bambridge, Member for Eynsford Ward
 - Emily Fox, Member of Youth Parliament for Mid Norfolk and Secretary for Dereham Youth Forum
 - Tim Birt, Dereham Town Councillor and Mayor
 - Susan Martin, Yaxham Woodlands group
 - Peter Smith, Big Lunch in Yaxham
 - Jon Beardon, Wellspring Family Church Dereham
 - Andrew Frere-Smith, Dereham Community Support
- *First working group meeting*: to give the PB process a name, agree priorities, outline promotion ideas and confirm a project plan with timescales.
- Name of the project changed from Participatory Budgeting, to 'interACTIVE funding'.

What worked well?

- Good range of working group members, including a young person. Successful recruitment through email, phone calls, Facebook and StreetLife.
- Good size of working group.
- Warm welcome reported.
- Dereham Town Council offices used for meetings, which was a good location.

Learning points

- Breckland Council to invest in the establishing of a database of community groups, charities and other local organisations to enable communication from the outset. A large amount of project coordinator time was used to establish a database from scratch.
- Breckland Council to establish a terms of reference for the working group, so that parameters for influence over the process are clear from the outset. The working group were frustrated at the first meeting that they couldn't change the application form.
- Short timescales, with a start close to Christmas, driven by a need to allocate funding by the end of the financial year.
- Feedback from previous Participatory Budgeting projects would have been a useful starting point.

STAGE 2: THE APPLICATIONS

Work involved

- Promotion of funding and invite applications, through emails, phone calls, Town and Parish Councils, StreetLife, Facebook and a press release.
- *Second Working Group meeting*: to plan voting event.

- Liaison with applicants.
- Receive applications on email and delivered to Dereham Town Council.
- *Third Working Group meeting*: to read applications, and allocate tasks for the voting event. Note, at this stage the working group discounted four of the applications.

What worked well?

- 18 applications were received, 14 of which were invited to the voting event.
- Timescales were fine if applicants knew and understood the process from the beginning.
- Attracted a range of applicants.
- Applicants heard about the opportunity to apply through a range of channels, Breckland Council, StreetLife, Norfolk Rural Community Council, email, Dereham Town Council, Facebook, The Dereham and Fakenham Times, word of mouth and through the Parish Council.

Learning points

- The application form was overly complicated. All that was needed was contact details and a description of the project. Dereham Town Council run a grant scheme with an application form of just two sides, which was felt would have been sufficient.
- The application form could not be completed electronically. Breckland Council need to invest in the ability for applications to be written on-line.
- On going publicity was required to get applications in, including phoning round groups to encourage applications.
- The process needed to be clearer from the beginning with an explanation of what the Pride Board is.
- Breckland Council needed to take the lead on what was expected of a safeguarding policy.
- The guidelines needed to be clear whether a project was allowed to have started before applying for funding.

STAGE 3: TEXT VOTING EXPERIMENT

Work involved

- An experiment to see whether text messaging would be of interest to the community as a way of voting.
- Set up blog with outline of each project:
<https://interactivefunding.wordpress.com>.
- Set up a text voting number, mobile phone to receive messages and app to read the text messages onto an Excel spreadsheet.

What worked well?

- Text voting was far more popular than initially envisaged, with a total of 379

votes received.

- Quick, easy and simple to vote, which brought a new dimension to the project.
- Possibly attracted people that wouldn't turn up to an event.
- Other forms of social media (Facebook and StreetLife enabled the word to be spread about the texting).
- The blog outlining the projects and the mobile phone number was easy and free to set up.

Learning points

- Text voting had already opened before the working group made the decision to discount four of the applications. Therefore a small number of votes were wasted.
- Ideally the text messaging would have been communicated from the beginning.
- Text messaging could be open to rigging. The blog site needed a statement about fraud.
- There was no way of knowing where the text messaging had come from. It is possible that not all votes came from the Dereham area.

STAGE 4: THE VOTING EVENT

- Poster produced and sent to email addresses, posted on StreetLife and Facebook groups.
- Article in the Dereham and Fakenham Times and a feature on BBC Radio Norfolk.
- Liaison with projects by email and telephone.
- Preparation of materials for the event, plus refreshments (free tea, coffee, squash and cakes).
- Running the event. Gave out 5 sticky dots to attendees to vote with, plus stamped their hand as they came in.
- Applicants each had a stand at the event to display their project.
- Working group members fully involved in running the event.
- Successful projects announcement made at the end of the event.
- Liaison with projects handed over to Breckland Council.
- *Fourth Working Group meeting*: to reflect on the process and inform the evaluation report.

What worked well?

- Over 100 people attended the event to vote.
- Excellent venue at Dereham Memorial Hall.
- Well organised and positive event with a friendly atmosphere.
- A drop-in worked well for a morning event. There was a steady flow of people coming in through.
- The results of the voting were given 5 minutes after the event finished, which

was appreciated by applicants.

- Having the Mayor of Dereham announce the results gave a sense of occasion to the event.
- Good community atmosphere and free refreshment.
- Good networking opportunities with other community groups.
- Decision not to ask applicants to do a presentation was right.

Learning points:

- Breckland Council could have had a stand explaining some of their services and other grant opportunities.
- More advertising may have attracted more people into the event.
- Could have had Norfolk Community Foundation or Voluntary Norfolk with a stand at the event.
- Some groups felt they should have been better prepared for the event. The more visual the stands, the better reception applicants felt they received.

3. Final thoughts

There is a lot of good practice around Participatory Budgeting, which this project attempted to draw upon through developing the process. Should the Breckland Pride Board invest time and money in this process again, a clearly defined brief should be developed with an inception meeting with the working group. Also, parameters for how those delivering the project can influence the process would make the whole project a more participatory one all-round.

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in this project.



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