

STRATEGIC SENIOR OFFICER GROUP

31 OCTOBER 2007

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

REPORT OF THE TASK GROUP

Purpose of Report

1. To consider proposals from the task group set up to examine arrangements for participatory budgeting.

Background

2. At its last meeting SSOG agreed to set up a task group to consider whether participatory budgeting should be undertaken in Leicestershire. The Group consisted of Mike Goodwin, Brian Hayes, Chris Tambini and Andy Robinson. It met on the 27th September.
3. At its simplest definition, participatory budgeting is a method of community engagement that gives ordinary people an opportunity to influence the priorities of the local public budget.
4. Participatory budgeting is strongly supported by the Communities and Local Government Secretary Hazel Blears who said:
'Giving people direct and transparent choice about how funds are allocated in their local area not only makes sure their priorities are being met, its a way of making them able to say "this is my street, my estate and I'm proud of it"'
5. However she also recognises that this must sit alongside representative democracy by for example ensuring that elected representatives have a role in reconciling what will probably be a range of views on how budgets should be allocated.
6. Ten pilot areas are currently testing approaches. There are various questions to be answered including:
 - Community or authority level?
 - Communities of place, interest, background, concern?
 - Community level/authority level inter-relationship?
 - How much resource allocated to the community level?
 - What mechanisms should be used? (Methods such as Citizens Juries or Citizens panels are being promoted by Government.)

Proposals

7. Taking into account the uncertainties surrounding participatory budgeting at this time, the task group recommends a step by step approach should be taken that builds on existing activity. It therefore proposes:
 - (a) Using Community Forums to advise and influence the use of area based funding such as the County Council's Shire Grants, Charnwood Borough Council's Charnwood Grants and the Police Basic Command Unit fund.
 - (b) Involving Community Forums in discussion about the delivery of SCS/LAA priorities for their areas and providing funding from the Area Based Grant for each Community Forum area (say £10k) that can be used to help achieve actions related to LAA outcomes. The Forums could not themselves decide but could influence and recommend and the allocation of any funding will need to be considered alongside other competing demands for Area Based Grant.
 - (c) A budget consultation process that involves a number of service providers. It is suggested that this is undertaken in Charnwood Borough as a pilot and involves the County Council, Police and other agencies that wish to take part.
 - (d) Continuing to involve communities of interest (e.g. the Older Persons network and CYCLLe) in discussion about SCS/LAA priorities and delivery arrangements.

8. The Participatory Budget Unit has asked whether Leicestershire would like to take part in one of the next round of pilots.

Recommendation

9. It is recommended that SSOG consider the proposals of the Task Group, requests the Group to develop further those measures that wishes to take forward and decides whether it wishes to take part in the CLG pilot programme.

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