



SUBJECT: Participatory Budgeting for Community Recovery from COVID-19

Report submitted by: Dr Sarah Aitken, Executive Director of Public Health & Strategic Partnerships, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Author: Gemma Burrows, Principal Public Health Practitioner and Will Beer, Consultant in Public Health, Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team

1	Areas Affected
1.1	Gwent – all local authority areas.
2	Purpose of Report
2.1	To seek agreement on future arrangements for participatory budgeting (PB) across Gwent following the creation of a single Gwent PSB
2.2	<p>For the PSB to note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authorities have continued being the funding recipients on behalf of PSB partners during 2022/23 <p>To seek agreement from the Gwent PSB for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwent PSB to maintain governance and oversight for PB during 2022/23, but to devolve authority for decision making and oversight of the process to Local Well-being Partnerships • Partners to consider what funding or in-kind resource can be made available to support delivery of the programmes • The GSWAG group to support future decision-making around PB in Gwent by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agreeing an evaluation commission to be implemented during 2022/23 ○ Considering how a greater level of consistency across Gwent and reduced reliance on external agencies can be achieved, if evaluation indicates PB is an effective approach
3	Background
3.1	<p>Participatory budgeting is a democratic process that enables local people to have direct decision-making power over how public budgets are spent. The overarching aims of PB are to increase community participation in decisions affecting their lives and enable spending decisions that better reflect local needs and address inequity.</p> <p>There is a growing international movement towards empowering communities through vehicles such as PB. For example the Scottish Government are aiming to ensure at least 1% of local government budgets are subject to PB. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has recommended public bodies explore the use of PB approaches in line with the well-being goals to create cohesive and prosperous communities.</p>

	<p>There is evidence that empowering people to take control over their lives and influence public decision-making has benefits relating to improved health, social connectedness and community cohesion, a priority of the PSB. Evidence from reviews and studies of PB in the UK^{1,2,3} indicates a range of related outcomes including: bringing people from different backgrounds together to pool knowledge and experience to tackle local concerns, increasing intergenerational understanding, increasing volunteering, community group membership and wider civic engagement, creating new channels of communication with community members previously not civically active and improving the knowledge and confidence of individuals to tackle neighbourhood issues and work with public sector organisations.</p>
3.2	<p>In Gwent, Participatory Budgets were created under the governance of Public Service Boards (PSBs) with the purpose of enabling community-led developments that promote well-being and community recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>To date, participatory budgets have been created through contributions from Public Service Board (PSB) partners in Newport, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, including an allocation from the 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 ABUHB Early Years and Prevention (EYP) funding. Delivery of PB has been linked to the Integrated Well-being Networks programme, supporting the identification and development of community well-being assets.</p>
3.3	<p>To date there has been varying progress in each of the areas trialling participatory budgeting with differing models being utilised and much learning to be shared:</p> <p>Blaenau Gwent</p> <p>One complete round of PB has been undertaken with the support of an external facilitator, Mutual Gain. 72 applications were received and 40 projects were received funding, with around 270 residents participating in the public voting events. Monitoring and evaluation of successful projects is underway.</p> <p>For 2022/23 it has been agreed that the implementation of participatory budgeting will be managed between local partners, external agencies will not be commissioned to manage the process. Project applications will have to demonstrate how they will increase individual/community participation or support communities to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and will contribute towards at least one of the well-being objectives from the '<i>Blaenau Gwent We Want</i>' Well-being Plan 2018-23:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Best Start in Life for Everyone e.g. ensuring children are healthy, happy and free from harm in their early years ii. Safe and Friendly Communities e.g. creating age-friendly communities where people of all ages feel safe and can have good social connections, free from loneliness and social isolation iii. Look After and Protect our Natural Environments e.g. encouraging local people to make the most of our vibrant natural environment in a fair and sustainable way iv. Forge New Pathways to Prosperity e.g. enabling the local economy to thrive through employment and lifelong learning opportunities v. Encourage and Enable People to Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices e.g. creating healthy communities where people have access to local health and well-being services and healthy food options <p>Voting events will be held in September 2022 and will be face to face events.</p> <p>Caerphilly</p> <p>In Caerphilly, the steering group comprising members of the HB, CCBC, GAVO and others has been exploring delivery of the PB programme in conjunction with CoPro</p>

<p>Wales and have recently received a proposal from them, which is currently under consideration.</p> <p>Monmouthshire</p> <p>A PB approach has been trialled in Monmouthshire during 2021/22 using Welsh Government funding, and evaluation is being undertaken by Cardiff University. This work will be built on in 2022/23 with the additional Early Years & Prevention funding, and the Monmouthshire Local Development Group are currently approving plans.</p> <p>Newport</p> <p>Two complete rounds of PB have been undertaken with the support of Mutual Gain. In the first round, 81 applications were received and 24 projects received funding, with around 380 residents participating in the voting events.</p> <p>In the second round Newport City Council allocated £250k in addition to the £165k funding from ABUHB. Over 450 people participated in voting events, 113 projects were presented to voters, 80 projects secured funding, covering a diverse range of activities and audiences. Feedback was very positive from voters and the organisations seeking funding.</p> <p>The Council have a further £250k allocation for 2022/23 with a further £66k from ABUHB. The focus and approach are currently being decided</p> <p>Torfaen</p> <p>Since January 2022 two phases of PB have been undertaken, led by Blaenavon Town Council using the Vocaleyes online platform. It sits alongside the wider “Your Blaenavon, Your Voice” community conversations led by the Healthy Blaenavon Network</p> <p>Locally based organisations are invited to submit a project proposal either via Vocal Eyes directly or with the support of a member of Blaenavon Town Council. They are then supported to ensure the project is eligible, they have the right governance structures in place or to put them in touch with relevant groups who can help them progress their idea. The projects are voted on by members of the community and a steering group of partners meets to review them before final approval is granted by the Town Council. Note that the role of the steering group and Town Council is not to override the community vote but to provide additional advice, support and networks to ensure the project is successful.</p> <p>The projects must contribute to one of the following themes within the overarching objective of improving health and wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing loneliness and isolation • Improving community spaces • Improving access to the countryside • Improving transport in Blaenavon • Starting community conversations • Encouraging sporting activity • Developing new clubs or societies or supporting existing • Providing activities for young people • Providing community support during and after Coronavirus • Supporting community events <p>To date, £47,146 has been approved across 11 organisations with the maximum grant capped at £5,000. The number of people registered to vote on Vocal Eyes is 190 with 154 of these engaged. Across the projects 299 ratings / votes have been made.</p>
--

	<p>A number of other project ideas have been submitted but require further development to be fully eligible for the grant. The Town Council and partners are providing advice and support to facilitate this development.</p> <p>It has been agreed that learning to date will be reviewed prior to the next phase being launched. This will include a review of the voting process and the challenges that use of Vocal Eyes has presented. An evaluation framework is not yet in place but the Town Council and partners are keen to increase participation more broadly as part of this process.</p> <p>A second PB project is currently being scoped with Pontypool and Cwmbran Community Councils with the intention of delivering PB in Trevechin and Thornhill.</p> <p>Summary overview</p> <p>In the areas where PB processes have been fully implemented the feedback from residents involved has been positive and there is evidence of new connections and relationships building. There is much learning to be gained about how to ensure PB is fully inclusive particularly where events have had to be held online due to COVID. There are opportunities to be developed to ensure new community groups and projects emerging are enabled to network and support each other through the Torfaen Voluntary Alliance and Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations and the Integrated Well-being Networks particularly through the place based well-being collaboratives. The different models of delivery will provide rich learning about what supports and hinders community participation.</p>
4	Future plans for Participatory Budgeting
4.1	Given the potential of PB to empower communities and improve a range of outcomes, as well as the positive benefits realised to date, we consider that there is merit in continuing to trial implementation and gather learning to inform how PB should develop in the longer term.
4.2	A further allocation for each local authority area has been made from the ABUHB Early Years and Prevention (EYP) budget to enable continuation of PB in 2022/23. The EYP funding must be used to fund community groups to deliver projects that support well-being and community recovery from COVID-19 and must be distributed using a PB process.
4.3	<p>There is benefit in considering a joined-up approach to delivery of PB at regional level in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A learning network to share and develop the PB approach across Gwent, increase consistency and reduce reliance on external delivery support - A shared evaluation framework with some common indicators that will allow the Gwent PSB partners to make future decisions around PB. A budget for evaluation has been ringfenced from the Early Years & Prevention funding. <p>It is suggested that the GSWAG officer group take up this discussion, supported by the Integrated Well-being Network Leads.</p>
5	Funding and Governance
5.2	We propose that Gwent PSB maintain governance and oversight for PB and devolve authority for decision making to local Well-being Partnerships who can ensure the PB programme fits with local priorities and existing structures.
5.3	To note that Local Authorities have continued being the funding recipients on behalf of PSB partners in 2022/23

5.4	Following discussion with Local Authority partners leading PB on behalf of the previous local PSB groups, we recognise there are additional management / administrative resources required to ensure the PB process works effectively. Therefore areas can use up to 10% of the overall allocation for this purpose. It is likely that further funding or in-kind resources will be needed to supplement this going forward and PSB partners are asked to consider what they could contribute.
6	Recommendations to the PSB
6.1	Participatory budgeting is continued across Gwent in 2022/23 using funding allocations made by or to the local authorities
6.2	Gwent PSB to maintain governance and oversight for PB but to devolve authority for decision making and oversight of the process to Local Well-being Partnerships
6.4	Partners to consider what funding or in-kind resource can be made available to support delivery of the programmes
6.5	The GSWAG group to support future decision-making around PB in Gwent by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agreeing an evaluation commission to be implemented during 2022/23 ○ Considering how a greater level of consistency across Gwent and reduced reliance on external agencies can be achieved, if evaluation indicates PB is an effective approach

References

1. Department for Communities and Local Government. *Communities in the driving seat: a study of Participatory Budgeting in England*. DCLG Publications; 2011. Available at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/19932231.pdf (Accessed 24.2.22)
2. Participatory Budgeting Unit. *Community Wellbeing Champions Initiative Programme Level Evaluation Report*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government; 2011. Available at: [SCSN website- Community Wellbeing Champions Initiative- Programme Level Evaluation Report 2011 EIR 55. UoG \(safercommunitiesscotland.org\)](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Information/Statistics/2011/01/Community-Wellbeing-Champions-Initiative-Programme-Level-Evaluation-Report-2011-EIR-55) (Accessed 24.2.22)
3. Harkins C, Egan J. *The role of participatory budgeting in promoting localism and mobilising community assets. But where next for Participatory Budgeting in Scotland? Learning from the Govanhill Equally Well test site*. Glasgow: GCPH; 2012. Available at: https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/3145/GCPH_Participatory_Budgeting_FINAL.pdf (Accessed 24.2.22)